‘Neutral, native-like or authentic’: Investigating attitudes and beliefs of expanding circle speakers of English

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The status of English as the language of international communication is by now well-established. However, in the past 16 years, research has tried to emphasize the fact that the English spoken in international contact situations and between people with other first languages than English has different needs than the English spoken locally amongst native speakers, resulting in the emergence of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as a scholarly field. However, the impact of findings in ELF has so far only led to a moderate shift in English language teaching. Especially in expanding circle countries, where ELF should have the biggest impact, change is only gradually becoming palpable.

Accent and pronunciation, as one of the biggest factors on both identity and mutual intelligibility (Jenkins 2000; 2007) are at the root of discussion. The scope of this study is therefore to examine accent choices and the extent to which native speaker ideology informs the preferences of ten speakers of ELF and 27 German natives with experience in international communication. Both ethnographical and sociolinguistic methods, as well as auditory analysis have been applied and conducted. The auditory analysis of six variables in the recorded speech production of the ten speakers suggests that there is no significant preference of one norm-giving variety over the other. Rather, speakers tend to mix-and-match General American- and Standard Southern British English-like features in their pronunciation. When reporting their accent ideals, the idea of a ‘neutral’ English accent is mentioned by four participants. Neutral accents seem to have been understood as ‘unmarked accents’. Expressed beliefs on their own English pronunciation show a comparatively high level of reflection on and confidence in their own production. Results from a rating task and a survey given to 27 German participants reveal attitudes that are more negatively stacked. While Germans reported openness towards NNS (non-native speaker) accents and showed awareness of the priority of intelligibility over accent choice in both their own and others’ pronunciation, they still largely reported NS accent preference. The ratings of the production from ten ELF speakers confirmed this and showed that ‘neutral’ is equated with native-like. In the light of these findings, issues are discussed that ultimately relate to the influence of NS Englishes, identity and the development of English as an international language.

**Keywords**

accent, expanding circle, language attitude, varieties of English, sociolinguistics, ELF, language ideology, identity, Germany.
1. Introduction

“The future of EIL [English as an international language] is inextricably bound up with its pronunciation, both L1 and L2, and with the attitudes of speakers of L1 and L2 varieties of English to their own and one another’s accents.” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 233)

As Jenkins already noted in 2000, effective communication in English between its multitudes of users depends on the comprehension of others’ English and requires a willingness to accept differences in English - and especially differences in English accents. Nevertheless, billions of students in expanding circle countries (Kachru, 1985) still learn the English language with the linguistic yardstick of the native speaker (NS) in mind and as uniformly as possible, which does not exactly foster acceptance of differences. Even more so, regardless of the fact that purely based on numbers the students of today are most likely encountering English on the global stage in all its variations, students are being underprepared for communication with other non-native speakers (NNSs) of English (Kaur, 2014; Fang, 2016; Wang, 2016). Considering the special position accent takes in relation to language attitudes and identity construction, many studies have attempted to measure the attitudes of NS respondents towards NNS and NS Englishes (e.g. Munro & Derwing, 1995; Derwing & Munroe, 1997; Hahn, 2004; Murray, 2003; Hannam, 2004; Field, 2005), and even more studies focussed on NNS responses to NS and NNS English (e.g. Shim, 2002; Matsuda, 2003; Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2003; Decke-Cornill, 2003; Grau, 2005; Adolphs, 2005; Zacharias, 2005; Kaur, 2014), although not always from the same framework. All the aforementioned studies have in common that they focus on student, teacher and learner attitudes on English. Attitude studies on already accomplished international users of English, who are possibly seeing English in a different light are, however, neglected in comparison, which is the reason the study at hand wishes to put these users in the center of investigation instead.

A brief literary review of studies conducted from 2007 onwards, which highlights the most important findings of attitudinal research on NNSs towards NNS accents need be presented in short in order to frame the incentives for the paper at hand. One study, that inspired many other attitude studies, is Jenkins, 2007 which clearly states that it is anchored in English as a lingua franca (ELF), a growing research field I will elaborate on in point 2.2. Jenkins conducted both qualitative interviews and questionnaires with rating items on language beliefs among expanding circle teachers of English. She found overwhelming evidence for an adherence to NS norms and a rejection of L1 identity in the L2. Even though attitude research is conducted all over the world, Asian attitudes towards English accents have especially been given attention in recent years. Kaur, 2014 for example, used similar methods to Jenkins and found that her Malaysian teacher respondents likewise strongly favoured NS accents. Asian English accents were described the most pejoratively; all other accents included in the study (Spanish, German, Brazilian and Swedish English accents) did not receive commentary similarly as harsh. Sung, 2014 took a purely qualitative look at speaker attitudes, when reporting from interviews that his Hong Kong L2 learners of English desire to construct
‘global identities’ and differed in their understanding of what this would constitute: some agreed that they simultaneously wish to keep their Hong Kong identities via accent features, others did not want to reveal their L1 identity ties in their accent. They were however agreeing on not wanting to sound exactly like NSs in order to construct said global identity. A convoluted image of NNS wishes, to say the least. Fang, 2016 concludes, that when it comes to accents, his Chinese university student participants exhibit a very entrenched NS-oriented language ideology in both questionnaire answers and qualitative interviews. Only few showed resistance against the included standard Englishes. Even when briefly reviewing these four examples of literature, a red thread becomes visible: There seems to be a strong remaining allegiance towards Standard English norms in NNSs across the board and only a subtle, growing pride in whatever personal brand of English one might speak. NNSs seem to have very individual and very different wishes on how to be perceived and which accents they prefer. In light of these findings, a statement made in Sung, citing Jenkins, 2007, Li, 2009 and Modiano, 2009, that “much of ELF research seems to make the assumption that L2 learners of English wish to retain their distinct L2 accents in order to preserve their identities” (2014, p. 33), appears extra curious. There clearly is a need for further empirical examination of ELF and NNS speaker attitudes in order to put said assumption to the test.

Rindal and Piercy, 2013 served as an inspiration for the second notion the present study aims to investigate. They attempted to not only measure the variety Norwegian learners of English were mostly orienting on via phonetic analysis, but in their qualitative interviews found that there is a large minority among their participants who reported that they wanted to sound ‘neutral’ when speaking English. The notion of wanting to sound neutral is not necessarily new or restricted to learners of English, since it also appears in Erling’s doctoral thesis on the sociolinguistic profile of German university students of English from 2004. Her participants defined ‘speaking neutrally’ as non-native like, “more open” or “flexible”, as well as “more easily understood” and “more authentic” (pp. 195-196). In Rindal and Piercy, participants who reported that they aim towards a ‘neutral’ English accent described said neutral accent as “natural” and explained that speaking neutrally means “pronouncing it [English] based on how it sounds in your head, not that you change it to sound more British or more American.” (p. 221). Based on their results, Rindal and Piercy therefore conclude that speaking neutrally, to their Norwegian learners of English, means trying to avoid NS associations and the freedom to mix and match varieties, although there was also a slight trend to perceiving General American (GenAm) features as more neutral and ‘unmarked’. Neutrality, they conclude, thus means that one tries to avoid speaking with one distinct NS accent. Combining the results of both studies, it seems that different ideas are attached to the notion of neutrality, which is why it seems worthwhile to further investigate the concept of ‘neutral accents’ and observe the reaction of both sets of participants in this study towards ‘neutrality’.

By employing a different mix of methods than is traditional for attitude studies, I want to render as close to a 360 degree image as possible of the attitudes of expanding circle speakers of English. One such traditional method is to have participants list their beliefs or rate accents from memory (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Kaur, 2014; Fang, 2016), as is common in folk linguistics. That means, researchers do not have participants listen to sound samples but instead have them judge accents based on whatever
conception they may have of a certain accent only - likely due to time-constraints. In effect, people do not judge the real-life versions of accents, but rather their stereotypes. (One exception from that trend of method being e.g. the Jensen, Denver, Mees and Werther (2013) study on Danish lecturers’ English accents or Rindal, 2014.) Another shortcoming in the literature is the fact that many attitude studies do not distinguish in their description between language attitudes and language beliefs – beliefs being opinions held that can be overtly stated, whereas attitudes are covert in nature and can thus only be read between the lines of stated beliefs. As Jenkins writes, what people say and what people do and how they do it are different things, making a distinction between beliefs and attitudes necessary (2007, p. 110), which is why this study will adhere to her use of the two terms.

In the present study, four different methods have been applied. In a questionnaire-type rating task, participants were supposed to judge accents purely based on ‘blind’ sound samples of ten informants (both NSs and NNSs). These sound samples have been subjected to an investigative, short phonetic analysis, modelled after Rindal and Piercy, 2013. The accent sample speakers themselves are given space in this study to express their beliefs and language stances on English as a means of communication and identity in international discourse in short, qualitative interviews. The phonetic analysis lends support to their statements, and provided the means to contrast language ideals with actual language realizations. Finally, I have administered surveys to gather language beliefs and habits from a NNS focus group, consisting of 27 German participants, who judged the speech samples. The questions that guide my research and demanded such a large catalogue of methods were as follows:

- Which norm-giving variety of English are international speakers of English leaning more towards?
- What are the attitudes and beliefs held by expanding circle speakers of English about other users of ELF and their own accents?
- How does the influence of NS language ideologies manifest itself in the attitudes and beliefs of expanding circle speakers of English?
- What constitutes a ‘neutral’ accent according to different speakers?

2. Standardness, nativeness and ownership

Before going into the original research conducted here, a few concepts this study works with need to be explained. All of these concepts are related to the highly-debated issues of language standardness, the native speaker and language ownership. In conclusion of this section, the situation of English in Germany, as the native background of 27 participants in this study, is highlighted.

2.1 Encircled Englishes & Standard English

When diving into the issue of categorizing speakers of English, Kachru’s three circles of English (1985) need to be mentioned as an established model in use in Variety Linguistics. In this model, the English-speaking world is divided into three realms, based
on “the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts” (p. 356). The inner circle is reserved for “the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English” (ibid.), i.e. the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and represents the norm-providing countries (endonormative). The outer circle contains nations with a postcolonial past and where English is used as an official second language, such as India, Singapore, Kenya, Nigeria and Bangladesh, to name a few. Especially research conducted under the name of World Englishes has pointed out that these nations are no longer purely exonormative, but are creating norms of English of their own and as such their own varieties. The expanding circle, of particular interest to this study, is made up of all countries that use English as a foreign language, such as Russia, China, Brazil and France and are norm-receiving (exonormative). Clearly, Kachru used the official statuses of English in a country and time as means of classification and justification for his model. To pick up the example of the inner circle, the US, Canada, Australia have not always been norm-providing countries, let alone monolingual. Only the fact that throughout the centuries English has evolved to be the most popular language in those countries and established norms of its own lends weight to the notion of “traditional bases of English” – if we were purist, then the only real “linguistic base” of English is England – and what makes a distinction between a country such as South Africa and New Zealand possible.

The pitfall of this model can be pointed out in the same breath. Time leads to changes and the increased mobility of speakers and access to English creates new realities. The model has therefore been subjected to substantial criticism since its inception, mostly for its simplification of the sociolinguistic reality of speakers from all circles (cf. Bruthiaux, 2003; Canagarajah, 2006; Sharifian, 2009, p. 3). Its terms and system of classification will still be employed here, mainly for ease of reference. No model is able to fully capture the diverse sociolinguistic realities of the different speakers of English and, being aware of this, the circles remain useful as a scaffold. The terms nativeness, native-like and native speaker will likewise be used as conceptualized by Kachru (1985) and in reference to speakers from the inner circle of Englishes, fully aware of the fact that “the native speaker” is a concept that exists only on a psycholinguistic or socio-political level (Domange, 2011, p. 10).

Standardness, or ‘Standard English’ is similarly understood as norms set by inner circle countries. Auer lists criteria such as level of codification and supra-regional validity as markers of standardness (2005), but it is arguably the temporary collective perception and acceptance of a variety as ‘correct’ and ‘ideal’ that most defines whether it is considered standard or not by a certain set of people. It bears repeating that similarly to the concept of ‘the native speaker’, standardness can be deconstructed, most notably so by Crowley, 2003. He argues that standardness as a stable benchmark is an illusion. What is considered standard has always been in flux, even when scholars have chosen to treat it as something stable and identifiable at times. This study in particular will treat SSBE (Southern Standard British English) and GenAm (General American) as current varieties that are considered ‘Standard English’, in accordance with Rindal, 2013.

### 2.2 ELF, EIL and identity

One major incentive for the creation of this study is the phenomenon of ELF and its capacity to influence (or not influence) the identity of its speakers. ELF as a scholarly
field is interested in English as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages (Jenkins, 2009) and emerged due to a growing interest in the many techniques speakers of English in international contact situations make use of in order to successfully communicate (cf. Jenkins, 2000; 2007; Planken, 2005; Mauranen, 2006; Bjørge, 2010; Kaur, 2011; Matsumoto, 2011; Björkman, 2013; 2014). Initially, the earlier occurring term EIL (English as an international language) and ELF were not used synonymously. In 2000, Jenkins already suggested the term ELF (Jenkins, 2000), but still filed her findings under EIL. In contrast, researchers such as Sharifian (2009) still use the term EIL in 2009, although by the time essentially describing EIL’s tenets as the same as ELF’s. The rejection of the term ELF might stem from the fact that research in ELF is not always conducted with the exact same tenets in mind. ELF has been accused of monocentrically describing one specific variety of English and excluding native speakers. There is also often caution about ELF’s political implications, which might explain why researchers shy away from using the term. In defence of these accusations the following arguments can be presented. Since ELF is not based in one singular speech community, it cannot evolve into a distinct variety – the postulation of a singular ‘ELF-variety’ never having been an aim of ELF research to begin with. It has, however, been argued, that ELF is monocentrical in the way most studies of ELF (and, in fact, so does this study) favour to look at the speech patterns and techniques of ‘advanced’ and ‘educated’ speakers of ELF, leading to a potential class divide in the English under scrutiny in ELF from other forms of contact English that are spoken in the world (Park & Wee, 2013, pp. 59-61). The latter idea, of ELF excluding native speakers, has been rejected by Seidlhofer as early as in 2004 (Seidlhofer, 2004), a rejection that is reinforced by Jenkins (2007), arguing that ELF interactions often also include interlocutors from inner and outer circle countries. While NSs do present the danger of having the power-relations shift in ELF communications and their presence is therefore restricted in ELF corpus projects such as VOICE, native speakers are not by default excluded in ELF. Other corpora, such as ELFA, include NSs up to a certain percentage (5%). Indeed, one of the sub-aims of this study is to show that even the two native speakers with a British and US-American background included in the first section of the study, may similarly struggle with the loaded anticipations towards NSs in international contexts and have to adapt their speech in international communication. The advantage of the term ELF, and thus the reason why it is preferred in this study over EIL, is the fact that it already by name alludes to the necessary reconceptualization of the English spoken in international contexts. The term lingua franca stands in the tradition of being a contact language - a means of communicating that is free from ownership. With this, the term ELF clearly signals that the English used for international purposes is not synonymous with any specific variety of English. Ownership and hegemony are thereby negated – an ideological aim inherent in the work of many ELF scholars.

The interesting question then is, whether ELF, as an ‘ownerless’, “functional tool” (House, 2003) still provides room for expression of first language identity, and if so, to what extent. While an early study by House (2003) claims that ELF has “no identity-formatting potential”, recent studies from all different users of English in international contexts have shown that while ELF is not a variety in itself and thus cannot render unto its speakers one uniform sociolinguistic identity, speakers still bring their conceptions of what it means to communicate in English and their expectations
towards other speakers onto the table (Pölzl, 2003; Pölzl & Seidlhofer, 2006; Meierkord, 2002). This is a basic sociolinguistic process, as Pölzl writes: “Speakers use language in both ways, to communicate and to assert their group membership or more generally put, to define themselves in relationship to their co-participants.” (2003, p. 6). It is no surprise then, that Pölzl (2003), as well as Matsumoto (2011), Park (2012), Gu, Patkin and Kirkpatrick (2014) and Sung (2014) all find some evidence of, or expression of the wish of keeping cultural customs and traits from native cultural backgrounds when speaking English by the outer and expanding circle users of English included in their respective study.

As one of the biggest factors on both identity and mutual intelligibility (Jenkins 2000; 2007; Sharifian, 2009, p.8), accent and pronunciation are at the root of discussion. Especially in expanding circle countries knowledge of English and the type of English you speak is often a marker of prestige, since English is being associated with globalization, business communication and internationalization (Akynova, Zharkynbekova, Agamanova, Aimoldina & Dalbergenova, 2014; Cavallero, Chin Ng & Fifer, 2014). The choice of accent therefore walks the thin line of being a choice at all, due to exonormative pressures, and being an indicator of social attitudes towards native Englishes. ELF in the vein of Jenkins and Seidlhofer is treated purely as “a landscape ideology that deems transfer of referential information as central to communication” (Park & Wee, 2013, p. 63), which is fully in accordance with the ‘lingua franca idea’: the conveyance of information is prioritized. A central concern with this assumption is the question whether this really is a priority to all international speakers of English. As Park and Wee point out, when treating language in such an isolated way, ELF pretends that language can be “detached from its social context of use” and consequently ignores “the complex work of social positioning and negotiation that participants carry out through interaction” (p. 63). This is what leads them to conclude that ELF is currently giving too little attention to the entire process of identity work inevitably involved in ELF interactions and to an underestimation of the ideological forces all NNSs are subject to – forces that are not necessarily lifted when the interaction takes place among NNSs, as they note.

2.3 English in Germany

Germany is amongst the many nations where English has the official status of a foreign language, making Germany an expanding circle nation. More importantly though, Germany is a nation where English has not played a historical or governmental role as a language of intra-communication. It is therefore mainly used for international purposes, but, as I would argue, is becoming more and more important internally as well. Additional language skills in English, for example, have been shown to be attractive to potential employers and result in higher wages on average for both migrants and non-migrants in Germany (Stöhr, 2015) and are a marker of prestige (Dodd, 2015). English is usually learned as the first foreign language in school: In the year 2014/2015 the majority of German pupils (71,61%) learned English and only 15,12% French (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland 2016). In a Forsa survey from 2012, 82% of 1000 people surveyed said that they prioritize English and think it is the most important foreign language to learn (Forsa, 2012).
There is then one distinct social realm where the importance of an English-speaking identity is particularly gaining ground, which will be under scrutiny in the research at hand, i.e. among young Germans who received higher education and who use English not only internally in Germany, but also at sites abroad. An acute knowledge of English is no longer restricted to its use in many different disciplines at German universities (Ammon, 2001; Ammon & McConnell, 2002, Erling, 2004). Germany is among the nations who send out the most students per year in international exchange programs (for example 36,257 students in the academic year 13/14 with the European exchange program Erasmus and 139,000 studying abroad via the DAAD exchange programs in 2014 (DAAD, 2014; EC, 2014). This creates a social stratum of young people actively using ELF and who are internationally active long after their stays abroad.

Adding to the influence of English is the fact that English media is becoming more and more easily available and popular: Whether it is online platforms such as Youtube with most of its content in English, online news websites or television series produced in English. While not reaching an audience as broad as in the Scandinavian countries (Rindal & Piercy, 2013; Josephson, 2014), taking into account that German media by and large is still dubbing English language productions (Hilgendorf, 2013, p. 175), young and educated Germans are used to and do use English media in their everyday life. As a result, many young Germans rely heavier on the English language as a means of communication than generations before them – the influence of the English language on global relationships is thus certainly also palpable in Germany, despite its official status.

Having grown up with teaching materials that were classically native speaker norm-oriented, i.e. the Englishes to be learned were either American or British varieties, young German natives are situated directly at the cross-roads between the normed paradigms they have encountered throughout their education and what they experience in contact with other NSs and NNSs of English. Studies such as Syrbe & Rose (2016) show, that to this day English textbooks and teaching materials produced for the German market undervalue global Englishes and ELF and underprepare students for the relevant communicative situations with NNSs they are likely to encounter later in their life. With said educational baggage in mind, German speakers of English may be expected to show bias towards native-like accents in their attitudes towards English accents. Whether the real-life experience with ELF and international Englishes makes a visible difference in said attitudes remains to be investigated in this study.

3. Methodology

For this study a mixed-methods approach was adopted. The language ideologies and pronunciation of the focus group in the first part, consisting of ten advanced speakers of English with experience in ELF communication, was protocolled by applying sociolinguistic methods and auditory analysis. Speakers’ production was measured against NS norm paradigms, in order to contextualize their own statements on accent attitudes and beliefs from short qualitative interviews. The methods used for this first part are described from 3.1 to 3.3 and a closer description of the ELF speakers can be found in paragraph 3.4.
For the second part, a focus group of 27 Germans, is used to highlight expanding circle attitudes towards international English accents. A rating task (3.5) and a short survey (3.5 to 3.6) were administered. The rating task asked participants to rate the anonymous speech recordings from the former focus group, based on neutrality and pleasantness, as well as to guess a speaker’s mother tongue. The survey was used to collect language beliefs and speaker background information.

3.1 Phonetic analysis: Word list task

In order to elicit the different accents, two stimulus tasks were chosen: A word list and a text reading task. The word list consists of 38 words (Appendix A). 24 of them were chosen in order to elicit pronunciation of three vowels and three consonants. The rest of the words were fillers, so that participants would not be aware which variables would become relevant for analysis. All of the variables chosen in the phonetic analysis were adapted from Rindal and Piercy’s acoustic analysis of Norwegian learners of English (2013, pp. 215-216). Their fourth choice of consonant, the continuant [θ], was however not included, since testing non-native-like pronunciation was not an aim of this study. The argument behind choosing these variables was, that they are salient in differentiating SSBE from GenAm (Shockey, 1984; Trudgill, 1986; Tottie, 2002; Altendorf & Watt, 2008; Upton, 2008b; Kretzschmar, 2008; Schneider, 2008; Roach, Setter & Estling, 2011), with the exception of post-coronal /j/, which Roach et al. (2011) and Tottie (2002) describe as able to distinguish between GenAm and SSBE, but not as salient in doing so. Thus, the so-called BATH, LOT and GOAT vowels and for consonants, non-prevocalic /r/, intervocalic /t/ and post-coronal /j/ were of interest. Details that were considered during analysis of each variable were as follows:

- BATH: Variants were coded as either front [æ] or back [ɑ], reflecting SSBE or GenAm orientation. After careful listening, two more categories were coded for: Open, fronted [a] and [u]. No differentiation between vowel lengths was made. Open fronted [a] appears for the BATH vowel in e.g. Northern British dialects (Beal, 2008; Stuart-Smith, 2008; Hickey, 2008; Melchers, 2008; Williams & Escudero 2014), Welsh English (Penhallurick, 2008), as a variation of RP (Upton, 2008a), British Creole (Patrick, 2008), Caribbean English (Youssef & James, 2008; Blake, 2008; Devonish & Otelemate 2008) and Canadian English (Boberg, 2008) and as such is a common inner and outer circle variant for the BATH vowel. ‘Northern British’ was used as a denominator for description of [a] in the analysis. In contrast, [u] does not seem to be an established codification for English varieties, but may appear due to first language transfer. It can be speculated that both [æ] and [ɑ] are perceived as very markedly American or British pronunciations and are therefore substituted for [a]. The vowel was not coded for length.

- LOT: For the LOT vowel only SSBE [ɒ] and GenAm [ɑ] were coded for. No significant other realization was observed.

- GOAT: Here, the quality of the first element of the vowel was of interest. A clear SSBE pronunciation, with [ə] marking said first element was very uncommon, whereas [o] marked a GenAm oriented pronunciation of the diphthong.
- Non-prevocalic /r/: Rhoticity was checked for in stressed and unstressed, as well as word-final and word-internal environments. Only [r] (GenAm) and [∅] (SSBE) were coded for.
- Intervocalic /t/: Only instances of /t/ between vowels were of interest. The variants observed were [t] (SSBE), [d] and [ɾ] (GenAm).
- Post-coronal /j/: [j] (SSBE) and [∅] (GenAm) were coded for.

All included variables had to appear in at least three different words and preferably in different environments. In contrast to Rindal and Piercy, the analysis of accent was to form the starting point for the attitude study to follow in the second step of research and not supposed to give a narrow description of the included speakers’ individual accents, which would be highly disadvised when looking at the number of token samples set as low as in this study (Milroy & Gordon, 2003, p. 164). Variables in all tasks were therefore analysed auditorally and in a non-statistically significant number. Orienting myself on the norm-giving varieties of British and American accents that are commonly taught in most ESL-speaking countries, I coded for SSBE and GenAm, but also coded variations outside of these norms if pronunciation clearly did not tend towards any of the set categories, such as was the case with the BATH vowel. If and when speakers varied within the pronunciation of a variable, the form they used predominantly was listed for one turn of reading. After two turns of reading were coded, the variable that was used predominantly was the indicator of accent preference.

Researchers such as Jenkins (2007, p. 112) reject the idea of evaluating ELF discourse (and subsequently international English accents) against the yardstick of NS English norms in research, since she claims this reveals researchers’ opposition to ELF, however, the choice to include said yardstick is justified here. The listeners in step two can be expected to be influenced by notions of native speaker correctness and in order to put their judgements in context, it is necessary to take a NS-norm oriented look at the pronunciation in the samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Word list tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BATH</td>
<td>dance, fast, glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOT</td>
<td>college, top, bottom, possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOAT</td>
<td>code, moment goat, boat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-prevocalic /r/</td>
<td>army, sister, whatever, fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervocalic /t/</td>
<td>whatever, bottom, mighty, atom, fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-coronal /j/</td>
<td>student, new, stupid, Tuesday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word list task was supposed to give an indication of speakers’ accent preferences: Whether they were leaning more towards British or American norms of pronunciation (and thus prescriptive norms), or mixing and matching from both varieties, as well as to later on help contrast reported accent ideals with actual pronunciation. In the second step of research the results were used to indicate whether listeners were ranking speaker’s accent neutrality and pleasantness based on closeness to NS accents. The task
was recorded two times by each speaker, which was to control whether speakers pronounced items identically or not. Six of the recordings were produced with the researcher present, the other four participants received clear instructions on how to proceed and recorded the tasks without supervision. While this influences the comparability of the recordings to a degree, the comparison of results from the phonetic task paired with the self-reported language ideals supported the argument that this difference in method did not have a significant impact on the results.

### 3.2 Phonetic analysis: Reading task

The reading task consisted of a text that was created with five of the variables from the word task in mind and served as a speech sample for the accent discrimination task (Appendix B). In contrast to the word list task, speakers were instructed to record the text as often as they like, up to the point that they were happy with the recording and felt comfortable with other people listening to it. At the same time they were also informed that there is no emphasis on any kind of ‘correctness’, in order to minimize their efforts to sound as ‘professional’ or ‘perfect’ as possible – fully realising that the medium and type of task, as well as the observer’s paradox may still have influenced the recording and speech thereon. All of the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that their recordings would be heard and judged by a different group of people later on and gave their consent.

A verbal-guise reading task was chosen in an effort to eliminate some of the not measured variables listeners might come to judge a speaker on. By using a reading task, grammatical mistakes or choice of words could not interfere with a listener’s perception of a speaker, since they were supposed to judge the accents only. It bears repeating that this was only a way of mitigating the influence of other factors. Factors such as employment of vocal fry or speed of reading, for example, may still have influenced ratings. The downside of eliminating freely spoken speech was, that speakers might not have exhibited accents they would otherwise, when engaged in realistic ELF communication. Reading out loud, especially for the NNSs, might be associated with reading exercises from school and could have led to a more formal choice of accent than what participants possibly would have exhibited in free speech. However, the combined facts that all participants included in the first part of the study were currently using English exclusively in ELF situations in their every-day life, that six participants recorded the task directly after having engaged in ELF conversation (with the researcher) and the fact that speakers’ reported accent aims and measured accents overlap (4.1) were taken as sufficient indications that participants were not significantly diverging from their average choice of accent for the purpose of the reading task.

### 3.3 Interviews

Additionally to the recording tasks, the participants were asked to give their opinions on matters of accent choice and accent preferences when speaking English in international contexts via a short written prompt or semi-structured interview (Dörnyei, 2007). Questions included in the prompt and interview were:
• When speaking English in international contexts: What/how would you like to sound like?
• What do you think you sound like?
• Do you think you are adapting your accent/pronunciation based on context and speech partners?
• How do you judge other people’s accents?
• Do you mind when people can identify your mother tongue background when you speak English?

Some of these questions were more suitable for the NSs than NNSs and vice versa. The interviews with participants situated in Sweden took place in the form of an open dialogue, which helps the interviewee to feel like she is having a conversation where her opinions are not under direct scrutiny (Bernard, 1995). The style of the written answers tended to be in a similarly loose and relaxed format, with some participants choosing an essay-type approach to answer the questions. In some cases, follow-up and clarification questions were sent, with the written questions and answers still resembling an open dialogue. This ensured the comparability between spoken and written interviews. Written answers given in German were translated by the author.

3.4 Speaker backgrounds & sampling method

All participants, speakers and listeners, in this study were chosen based on judgement sampling and are previous contacts of mine. This follows Chambers definition of judgment sampling as having the researcher as an “insider” pre-determine subjects for a study from a certain social class, age, gender or with any other social attribute they have in common (2009, p. 43). Although the research questions in this study are sociolinguistically motivated, these criteria were not used as to identify reasons for differences in attitudes. Judgment sampling is deemed a reliable alternative to the more common random-sampling method, especially in ethnographically motivated studies. Due to the efforts involved in random sampling and the comparatively limited advantages gained, both Chambers (2009, p. 45) and Milroy and Gordon (2003, p. 30) stress the benefits of what the latter in the vein of Labov call “quota sampling” - as long as the researcher is “able to demonstrate that his or her judgment [of quota] is rational and well-motivated” (Milroy & Gordon, p. 30). The decision for this type of sampling was therefore made in order to have control over the parameters involved, such as educational background or the habit of using ELF. The choice of method proved very helpful, even though it contained the danger of having personal relationships influence participants’ answers. The amount of my personal influence on participants’ answers should be considerably low, never having discussed issues of ELF or English in international contexts with the participants before and prompting attitudes in the interviews purely from a researcher’s point of view. Discussion of my personal views were only given, if asked for, after the conclusion of the qualitative interviews. Another advantage of judgment sampling was, that knowing the participants and their social environment beforehand allowed me to assess the level of communicative competence, i.e. that participants were indeed able to successfully communicate in ELF situations, even before the start of the study.

All of the included speakers currently reside in Germany, France or Sweden (table 2) and, while learning to speak the respective countries’ native language, negotiate the majority of everyday interactions in English. The respective country of residency can
be expected to influence the speakers’ individual attitudes and beliefs, however, a closer investigation of the participants’ socio-cultural backgrounds and living situation had to be left out in this study. The ten speakers chosen were, at the time of recording, between the ages of 24-29 (which results in a median age of 26), female, had been living abroad in at least one country in university contexts and been in close contact with different Englishes as well as other European languages and could thus be described as internationally active and involved. Additionally, all of them use English as a lingua franca on a daily basis, which explains the high fluency in and comfort with speaking English. Among the participants were two English native speakers: One British native from England’s North-West and one native US-American from the Mid-West.

Most discriminations in speaker choice, such as age, education and time abroad, were made in order to ensure a minimum amount of unity and comparability between participants, others, such as the participation of females only, in order to avoid potential gender biases listeners could exhibit in the second step of the research (female voices are processed differently by the human brain and in turn judged differently than mens’: cf. Junger, Pauly, Bröhr, Birkholz, Neuschäfer-Rube, Kohler, Schneider, Derntl, & Habel, 2013). There was no distinct reason in choice of mother tongue backgrounds, apart from the inclusion of more than one German and the two NSs, than that these were accents the participants in step two of the research could have been familiar with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Coded as</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 1</td>
<td>SE1</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 2</td>
<td>DE2</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 3</td>
<td>UK3</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 4</td>
<td>DE4</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 5</td>
<td>IT5</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 6</td>
<td>FIN6</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 7</td>
<td>DE7</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 8</td>
<td>US8</td>
<td>US-American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 9</td>
<td>BR9</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKER 10</td>
<td>FR10</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Rating discrimination task

For the aforementioned second step in the research, firstly, the speaker-recordings were made available on a private link on the audio platform Soundcloud\(^1\). 27 people were given

\(^1\) https://soundcloud.com/bianca-mel-46663331/sets/reading-task-1-1/s-IiUj7
the task of listening to the text reading recordings, all of them German natives between the ages of 23-32. There was no instruction on how often participants were expected to listen to each speaker, however, Soundcloud counts the plays of each file separately and the numbers ranged from a 123 count for DE2 to a 66 count for FR10. On average, each speaker was listened to 3 times.

The participants first received a questionnaire (Appendix D) that asked them to rate the speakers on neutrality and pleasantness, with two two-unit scales discriminating from 1 to 4 from unpleasant to pleasant and not neutral at all to neutral. Expecting participants to refrain from heavily weighted answers, a four-point semantic differential scale was chosen in order to leave no room for a middle answer. Additionally, participants were asked to guess the speakers’ nationality and/or mother tongue. After they sent these questionnaires in, a short follow-up attitudinal and behavioural survey was administered separately (Appendix D), on which three items were employed to elicit the participants’ beliefs towards others’ and their own English accent, as well as three items to give an idea about their general exposure to English. By sending the survey after the rating task, participants’ ratings were not influenced by their reflected beliefs in the survey. This part of the survey was sent out in identical form in both English and German; German answers were translated for the purpose of this study.

3.6 Description of German listeners’ backgrounds

As mentioned before, the German listening participants are all in a similar age range and belong to a similar social stratum and do not come from the same regions in Germany. There is a female bias amongst the participants, with 20 women participating and seven men, this, however, is not part of the parameters under scrutiny. They all had to have studied abroad or worked abroad for at least half a year in order to be included in the study. Most of them have lived in more than one non-German country in the past 5 years (cf. table 3). Double-entries were possible in cases where participants listed they had been abroad equally as long in two countries. 16 of the participants were also currently living abroad during the time of the study, with three participants living in the UK (cf. table 3). In the strict sense, their current communicative situation can thus not be considered an ELF one, since these participants may be orienting more on NS norms due to their living environment. In their qualitative answers this can be interpreted as partially confirmed, since two of them listed that they currently or in general prefer British accents and wish to sound like that as well, and one participant listed that he prefers “moderate American accents” and also aims to sound like that himself. In general, the German participants’ social situation has to be treated less uniformly than the ELF speaker one. Therefore, their answers will only be treated from a framework of expanding circle speaker attitudes.

| Table 3 Countries of longest stay abroad and current stay abroad of German listeners |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Country            | No. of Participants | Currently abroad |
| UK                | 4                 | 3               |
| US                 | 4                 |                 |
| France             | 3                 | 3               |

13
Denmark & 2 & 2 \\
Netherlands & 2 & 1 \\
Australia & 2 & 1 \\
Norway & 1 & 1 \\
Finland & 1 & 1 \\
Sweden & 1 & 1 \\
Turkey & 1 & 2 \\
Greece & 1 & 1 \\
Rwanda & 1 & 1 \\
Jordan & 1 & 1 \\
South Africa & 1 & 1 \\
New Zealand & 1 & 1 \\
Mexico & 1 & 1 \\
China & 1 & 1 \\
Belgium & 1 & 1 \\
Tanzania & 1 & 1 \\
Sum & 29 & 16 \\

Item 6 on the survey (In which country have you spent the most time abroad so far?, table 3) showed that the most common countries for time spent abroad amongst the participants were the UK and the USA. Overall, the most common countries for longer stays abroad were expanding circle countries (16 mentions), closely followed by inner circle nations (11) and only three participants stayed the longest in outer circle countries. Item 6 was included in order to give an overview over the language environments and attitudes that participants have probably been the most influenced by, outside of the German education system.

Item 4 and 5 on the survey were supposed to help illustrate the 27 German participants’ habits and current exposure to English.

**Table 4 Item 4: How often do you speak English currently in your everyday life?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A couple of times a month</th>
<th>1-2 times a week</th>
<th>More than 2 times a week</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of speakers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows, that 20 of the participants are currently speaking English at least one to two times a week, with three of them more than two times a week and nine participants
speaking English daily. The receptive exposure to English amongst the participants was even greater (cf. table 5). 18 of the participants reported that they currently listen to English daily, whether via media or in personal communication. Six listened to English more than two times a week and only three participants reported a comparatively low exposure to English of only one to two times a week. The claims made in point 2.3, of a growing usage of and exposure to English observable in German society are thereby confirmed for the participants in this study.

Table 5 Item 5: How often do you listen to English currently in your everyday life? (Including media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of speakers</th>
<th>1-2 times a week</th>
<th>More than 2 times a week</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Results

In the following section, the results from the phonetic analyses and the qualitative interviews of the international speakers of English will be presented. This is directly followed by the results of the rating task performed by the German listeners, as well as their statements concerning language beliefs taken from the surveys.

4.1 Phonetic speaker analysis

The phonetic analysis rendered viable results, even though only comparatively few variables were examined in this investigative analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6 Summarized results from phonetic analysis Word List Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BATH</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: red = GenAm, blue = SSBE, green = 'Northern British', violet = possible L1 influence

As table 3 shows, only one speaker pronounced features in a stringently GenAm fashion, speaker US8, and only one pronounced variables stringently SSBE: DE2, who even pronounced the GOAT vowel markedly SSBE. All other speakers varied in their closeness to SSBE or GenAm to different degrees. SE1 leaned strongly towards a GenAm pronunciation with only one variable appearing as in SSBE: Postcoronal /ɾ/. BR9, similarly to speaker 1, leaned strongly towards GenAm, but even more noticeably so, since pronunciation of postcoronal /j/ varied between deletion and [j]. DE4 used SSBE-like pronunciation for the majority of her variables - similarly to DE2 - but pronounced the GOAT-vowel as in GenAm. The British speaker, coming from the North-West, did not exclusively orient on SSBE either, pronouncing the BATH-vowel as [a]. Variation does not stop here, since the GOAT vowel and prevocalic /t/ were pronounced as in GenAm. Pronunciation of postcoronal /j/ varied in different words, thus switching between being SSBE- or GenAm-like.

Speakers 5, 6, 7 and 10 mixed and matched varieties in their speech in a similar way: All of them pronounced the BATH vowel as [a] or varied between [a] and [æ] (DE7), or [ʊ] (FR10). The LOT vowel was pronounced as [ʊ] or varied between [ʊ] and [a] (IT5). The GOAT vowel and prevocalic /t/ were uniformly preferred in the GenAm version of [ʊʊ] and [ɾ] by these four speakers, with only one speaker (FR10) deleting prevocalic /t/ and varying between [ʊʊ] and [ʊʊ]. Intervocalic /t/ was preferred...
as the SSBE [t], with only FIN6 varying between GenAm [r] and SSBE [t]. Postcoronal /j/ appeared as in SSBE for all of these four speakers.

4.1.1 Phonetic speaker analysis: Reading task

Upon careful listening, it became evident that in the text-reading task some speakers diverged in their pronunciation of variables in comparison to the word list task. This seems to be a common phenomenon. Rindal and Piercy (2013) also found that their English learners were exhibiting diverging pronunciation on variables between word list and conversations, however only statistically significant so for prevocalic /t/, intervocalic /t/ and the LOT-vowel. Since the recordings, and thus the pronunciation on it, were what listeners based their judgment of accent on, I found it necessary to point out these differences. After analysing the five variables again in the reading task (the GOAT vowel was not included in the text-reading task) based upon the words given in brackets, the following results emerged.

Table 7 Diverging results: Phonetic analysis of reading task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BATH</th>
<th>LOT</th>
<th>GOAT</th>
<th>Prevocalic /r/</th>
<th>Intervocalic /t/</th>
<th>Postcoronal /j/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(fast)</td>
<td>(job, lot)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(perks, world, top)</td>
<td>(floated, cotton, morning, dorm)</td>
<td>(Tuesday, new, better, later)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[j]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[æ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[j]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[t] – [r]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Half of the speakers pronounced some variable differently from the word list task, although all of them varied on one variable each only. With regards to vowels, only the BATH vowel was prone to fluctuation. It has to be kept in mind that this vowel was only cross-checked with occurrence in one word (<fast>), thus the results are again merely indicative, not representative in any shape or form. In connected speech IT5 pronounced <fast> with the GenAm [æ], whereas US8 used the Northern British pronunciation of the BATH vowel: [a]. Pronunciation of intervocalic /t/ turned more unstable in FR10 only, who in connected speech flapped /t/. In the case of postcoronal /j/, only speakers who already varied between [j] and deleting [j] in the first place (UK3 and BR9) now stably pronounced [j].

The results show that fluctuation does exist, but within boundaries. That is to say, no speaker switched from a markedly SSBE pronunciation only to a markedly GenAm pronunciation only within one variable. Neither was fluctuation across tasks a NNS phenomenon, since both the British as well as the American speaker were among the five speakers who varied in their pronunciation from task to task. The picture that emerges from the combined analysis of the word list and reading task is, that there is no
majority of preference for one variety or the other across the board. SE1, US8 and BR9 had a tendency of pronouncing variables as in GenAm, whereas DE2 and DE4 leaned towards SSBE. The British speaker had a mixture of SSBE, Northern British and GenAm pronunciation, just as IT5, FIN6, DE7 and FR10. However, there was a tendency visible within certain variables. The GOAT-vowel was preferred by all but one speaker in the GenAm version (- DE2. FR10 varied between GenAm and SSBE), whereas postcoronal /j/ was generally preferred as in SSBE, considering the results from the pronunciation in connected speech.

Cross-checking the self-reported accent ideals and aims from the qualitative interviews with the results from the word list and phonological analysis, it became clear that, while only indicative, the analysis confirmed that for the most part speakers’ accent ideals and their accent production overlapped.

Table 8 Comparison of reported aims and results from phonetic analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What would you like to sound like? / What do you think you sound like?</th>
<th>Which variety were variables resembling?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE1</td>
<td>“I’m leaning towards American in my ‘natural’ accent, but my Swedish lurks underneath.” Mostly GenAm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE2</td>
<td>“My ideal would definitely be British English.” All SSBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK3</td>
<td>“I sound like me - I’m simply speaking English.” Half GenAm, half SSBE. BATH vowel ‘Northern British’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE4</td>
<td>“In international contexts I try to sound neither British nor American, but neutral. But I used to make an effort to sound British.” Mostly SSBE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT5</td>
<td>“I sound more American than British, but I do not feel the necessity to sound either British or American.” Half GenAm, half SSBE. BATH vowel ‘Northern British’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN6</td>
<td>“I usually try to speak with a somewhat neutral accent and if I try to articulate more clearly, it usually goes more towards the British, but also sometimes the American accent.” Half GenAm, half SSBE. BATH vowel ‘Northern British’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE7</td>
<td>“I try to sound as neutral and ‘un-German’ as possible in the presence of NS. But since I stayed in the US for some time I think I orient the most on northern AmE accents.” Half GenAm, half SSBE. BATH vowel ‘Northern British’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US8</td>
<td>“I think I sound very American. At least that’s the feedback I get from NNSs. A lot of non-Americans think I am from Texas because of my strong accent.” All GenAm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR9</td>
<td>“I think I would like to sound like a native English speaker with just a little bit of Brazilian accent. But I’ve been to the US during high school, so I definitely sound more American than British.” Mostly GenAm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR10</td>
<td>“Definitely not French, but I don’t want to sound British or US-American either. I like Canadian English.” Mostly SSBE. BATH vowel [r].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18
4.2 Qualitative interviews

When prompted to elaborate on their language beliefs concerning English and English in international contexts, the majority of informants reported relaxed attitudes towards other peoples’ accents and slightly less relaxed attitudes towards their own accents. With regards to context and adaptation of accent, especially in ELF-type communicative situations, many stated that they are aware of linguistic hurdles. As the interviews showed, these hurdles exist for both NNSs and NSs:

DE4: “I definitely change my accent. Especially when there is someone present who has less command of English than I do or whose ‘word pool’ isn’t as strong, I adapt. The other way round, when someone speaks better English than I do, I’ll try to hide the accent more and pay attention to how the other person is constructing sentences, uses vocabulary and pronounces words.”

UK3: “I don’t necessarily change my accent, but my speed of talking maybe. In international contexts it’s mostly speed and vocabulary that changes. If I use regional terms then people become too confused.”

US8: “In these [ELF] situations, I think I adapt my speech. Not necessarily my accent or pronunciation, but definitely vocabulary, word choice, and syntax very much to fit the expectations of my interlocutor. I do not often notice this in Germany, but I noticed it to a very high extent in Indonesia.”

When discussing how accent in particular plays into international communication, two German speakers reported that they prioritize mutual intelligibility over any sort of specific choice of accent:

DE4: “To me, the sound [accent] has taken a backseat in comparison to practicability now. Especially in contexts like at university [in Sweden], the conveyance of messages is at stake, much more than the what-do-I-sound-like-right-now.”

DE7: “If it’s a mixed group of people [of NNS] then I don’t mind as much about the accent, because usually everybody has some sort of small give-away. It’s more the act of communicating itself that is in focus in those contexts. [...] I definitely change my accent.”

Turning towards beliefs expressed on their own accents in English in connection with identity, the same two informants, however, express dualistic views. The Brazilian speaker 9 mirrors their sentiments:

BR9: “I think I would like to sound like a native English speaker with just a little bit of a Brazilian accent. “A little bit” because I like being Brazilian, but I don’t like the Brazilian English accent, because I think you can’t really understand some words, since Portuguese and English are very different. So when people say that I don’t sound like a Brazilian I feel very proud of it.

2 Cursive passages reflect emphases of the author.
DE7: “My German accent is unavoidable and will always be detectable […]. But I try to hide it insofar, as to that it does not immediately become clear that I am from Germany, but rather from Europe.”

DE4: “When international people perceive me as German, that’s at the same time okay and not okay. Because German has this weird reputation. And Germans and their English pronunciation an even worse one. However, in the end I am aware that sometimes I have a more and sometimes a less German pronunciation and I embrace that. I embrace that subtly though (laughs).”

What is apparent in the first comment, is a bias against L1 influenced accents. ‘Brazilian English accents’ by default are lacking, because of the mother tongue distance to English and even though the participant is pro her nationality, she does not want to sound Brazilian. DE7 reported, that while she accepts the fact that her L1 identity shines through, she still tries “to hide it” and aims to be perceived as European. DE4 did not either feel fully comfortable with being perceived as German in international contexts, mostly due to the stereotypes associated with German English or German nationalism. In the end she expressed that she does not aim to sound particularly British, which she had done throughout her school years in Germany “in order to stand out”, now having come to the conclusion that it is not necessary in order to make herself understood on the international scene. Nevertheless, embracing her sometimes more German pronunciation in English is something she does only reluctantly. The reason for that was formulated by the interviewee herself as:

“I feel more comfortable when my accent isn’t directly printed on my forehead. So maybe my choice of accent is less for reasons of being understood, but in the end identity. I want to be perceived as a ‘globetrotter’, not as a German. This might be due to my lack of patriotism.”

Equally negative feelings towards her native countries’ accents were expressed by FR10. When asked about what she would like to sound like when speaking English the response was:

“Not French, definitely not. I mind when people can identify me as a French native via my accent. French people don’t speak good English, or let me put it like this: France is not known for its good English. This is what we are known for abroad. […] This is pretty much similar for all people though, isn’t it [that one does not want to sound like a NNS of English]?”

Again, the participant’s attitudes are coloured by stereotypes about the reputation of her home country. Stereotypical French English is bad and thus needs to be avoided. The same participant voiced positive NS-accent beliefs, although in her case Canadian English was the ideal accent of choice. However, language attitudes can prove to not only be problematic for NNSs, as is visible in the statement made by the American speaker 8:

“[…] many (non-Americans) for example say they think I am from Texas because of my strong accent. I don't particularly like associating myself with the United States, and especially not the South, so I don't really like this very much, but it doesn't keep me up at night or anything.”

Slightly more positive is the response of IT5 with regards to her expectations for her own accent, as well as SE1’s, who points out the advantage of being recognized as a non-native when abroad:
IT5: “The truth is that I do not feel the necessity to sound either British or American, my pronunciation is the unique outcome of my experiences and I’m proud of how I sound.”

SE1: “I don’t mind being identified as a Swede when abroad, almost the other way round. When I stayed in the US it sometimes caused difficulties when people would assume that I was American, based on my pronunciation, because not everything is obvious even though American and Swedish culture are approaching each other.”

Supporting the right for sounding non-native like in one’s English accent is speaker BR3. When asked about her attitude towards NNSs speaking with heavily regionally inflected accents, the native British speaker voices astonishment:

UK3: “It’s curious to think that people think that’s desirable. To try to have a London accent when they’re not from there, as opposed to speaking in their ‘own voice’ by taking on this different accent. As a native speaker, I don’t understand why people think that’s important. I think it’s nice to hear people’s ‘own voice’. Maybe that [voice] disappears when you try to teach yourself an accent, though. I feel it is more important to be fluent, proficient and understood, so why put your energy into teaching yourself a specific accent? If you really know a language then you can speak it and sound capable without having one specific accent!”

DE2 expresses similar thoughts on language and specifically on the danger of sounding ‘fake’, when she admits that having a distinct accent may stir negative feelings in her compatriots:

“With people who do not speak English as a mother tongue I dial the accent back quite a bit. Mainly because I have the feeling that in those contexts that comes across as an affectation, especially when there are other Germans around.”

DE4’s statement seems to confirm DE2’s suspicion that too native-like accents can be perceived negatively, touching upon the topic of exchange students throughout her high school years:

“Let’s be honest: Especially in school there were the ones who came back from a year abroad in America and then they believed they had to keep the American spirit in their pronunciation alive.”

What is being implied here, is that during her high school years the common praxis of spending a year abroad led to many a student coming back to Germany, with new experiences and to others a perceivable ‘American identity’ and American accent. The tone of voice accompanying the statement here suggested that DE4 had ambivalent feelings about this practice. SE1 similarly brings up the idea of ‘natural accents’ and the possibility of sounding fake:

“[Many] think British English sounds both better and smarter, including me. But at least for me, an American accent just comes more naturally, the American sounds are easier to form for my mouth… and whenever I do try to have a British accent I have to make an effort. So it feels fake.”

Whether one sounds fake or not seems to be connected to the idea of neutrality, ‘authenticity’ and ‘naturalness’ and seems to be either judged based on ‘truthfulness
to your own voice’, i.e. your L1, or on speaking an accent that is perceived as ‘unmarked’. This perception, however, seems to vary quite a bit between speakers of ELF. Similar then to the statements made by participants in studies by Rindal & Piercy, 2013 and Erlich, 2004, participants mentioned that they do sound or would like to sound ‘neutral’ when speaking English:

DE7: “When speaking English in international contexts I try to sound as neutral and ‘un-German’ as possible, as long as native speakers are present.”

FIN6: “I usually think that I try to speak with a somewhat neutral accent.”

SE1: “Because of TV, and maybe pop culture in general, I would say my "natural" English accent is leaning toward an American pronunciation. But that gets evened out to a less easily placed accent, I think, because of how the others in class speak. So in that sense it [my accent] becomes more ‘neutral’ because of the many different surrounding accents.”

DE4: “Especially in international contexts I try to sound neither particularly English (British), nor American, but neutral, without drifting into any accents (including a German one).”

Among the four speakers, FIN6 and DE4 were the only ones who gave an explicit explanation on how they understand the term neutral in this context. DE4 explains that:

DE4: “Neutral to me means to not have a specific accent, that is, an accent that is bound to no distinct region. There is a multitude of options of English accents and you just mix-and-match whichever options you like.”

FIN6: “With ‘speaking neutrally’ I mean that I try to avoid a heavy Finnish accent because I myself don't like it, while I also don't try to speak with a specific accent. But anyways, I prefer the British to the American [accent].”

When asked about neutrality and neutral accents from a NS point of view, UK3 is the only one who expresses scepticism:

“I don’t understand this concept of a neutral accent. I don’t think that you could have a neutral accent. Everyone has some kind of accent, but maybe it’s more or less marked.”

### 4.3 Rating Task

The rating task was administered in order to see how a relatively uniform group of young, educated Germans reacts to different outer circle English accents in comparison to NS accents. The attitudes elicited from this investigative rating compared with the beliefs stated in the surveys should help to elucidate the Germans’ stances towards English accents. Several steps were used to highlight attitudinal behaviour. Having the listeners guess on a speaker’s origin was supposed to show how familiar participants were with different NS and NNS accents, as well as to give an indication of how many easily identifiable remnants of L1 influence on the pronunciation of English a speaker was exhibiting.
Table 9 Guesses on nationality/mother tongue, listed in order of correct guesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Correct Guesses</th>
<th>Guessed as NS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DE4</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US8</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE7</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR10</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE2</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK3</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE1</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT5</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR9</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN6</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 shows that out of 27 participants, 22 were able to correctly identify speaker 4 as a German mother tongue speaker. The other German natives, DE7 and DE2 were also identified correctly by 16 and ten participants respectively, proving that the German listeners were fine-tuned to German English accent features, considering that all three German speakers exhibited very different accent preferences in the six variables tested in 4.1. Whereas speakers DE4 and DE7 were mistaken for a NS by one person each, DE2 left the impression of being a NS on five participants, which is understandable put in context with 4.1: All of her variables were leaning towards SSBE pronunciation.

The second easiest accent to identify was US8’s: 19 participants correctly identified her accent as a US-American one and almost all participants, i.e. 24, were sure that they were listening to a native English speaker in general, but could not necessarily identify from which mother tongue background. The amount of people who correctly identified the American native speaker stands in contrast to the results on the British English speaker. Here, only eight participants identified a British accent and only nine were suspecting a NS overall. Again, the phonetic analysis can help explain this result. UK3 showed mixed features in her accent, only producing SSBE-like variants in three variables. Therefore, the German listeners might not have perceived her accent as stereotypically British.

When it comes to native-like sounding accents, the Swedish speaker’s accent was judged native-like by five participants and was guessed to be a Swedish native speaker by seven participants. The number of correct guesses rises to eight, if the broader guess “Scandinavian” is also taken into account. The (mis-)judgement can again be supported by the phonetic analysis: All but one variable leaned towards GenAm patterns of pronunciation.

The only other NNS, besides the Germans, participants were able to identify with relative ease was the French speaker. 13 participants guessed correctly on FR10’s mother tongue. IT5, in contrast, was identified correctly as an Italian native speaker by only four participants: 15 thought they were listening to a French or Spanish native speaker instead.

The accents that presented the hardest challenge were the ones of the Brazilian and Finnish native speakers. Nobody was able to correctly guess the first language background: Answers ranged from a surprising twelve-count vote for
“something Asian” in the case of BR9 and answers all over the place for FIN6, suggesting that people were either the least familiar with accents from that background, or that the speakers were not presenting the stereotypical ideals of accents from speakers with that mother tongue background the listeners would have anticipated. The fact that participants had such difficulties correctly identifying a speaker’s L1 background adds to the impression that speakers were advanced speakers of English and confirms that without visual cues it is very difficult to make out a person’s mother tongue. The only NNSs who were confused for NSs were either Swedish (SE1) or German (DE2, DE4 and DE7).

Overall, the results suggest that Germans have the least trouble pinpointing mother tongue background when it comes to their own, German English, accents. Even though the three included German speakers have very different variations of pronunciation in their English and are leaning towards different norm-giving varieties, there must be enough remnants of characteristically German pronunciation in their pronunciation for the listeners to correctly identify them.

4.3.1 Ratings: Neutrality and Pleasantness

The ratings of neutrality and pleasantness of a speaker show a clear general preference for native and native-like accents. US8 received the highest rating on both neutrality and pleasantness, closely followed by SE1 and DE2. All of these speakers ranked higher than 2.5. Apart from UK3, these were all speakers who had strong leanings towards one singular variety in their pronunciation of variables in 4.1: US8 and SE1 leaned towards GenAm and DE2 towards SSBE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Neutrality</th>
<th>Pleasantness</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK3</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>UK3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE1</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>SE1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE2</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>DE2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE7</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>IT5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN6</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>FIN6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE4</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>BR9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR10</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>DE7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR9</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>DE4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT5</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>FR10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower than 2.5, and thus indicating the slope towards accents perceived as less neutral and less pleasant were speaker DE7, FIN6, DE4, FR10, BR9 and IT5. Here it becomes interesting to see, that in contrast to the first four speakers ranked, scores for neutrality and pleasantness were diverging. IT5 has a comparatively high score of 2.26 on pleasantness, but the lowest score of 1.7 on neutrality. Even though it could be inferred that the German listeners thus rated IT5’s speech as marked or strongly accented, this does not seem to be the reason why, since only four were able to pinpoint IT5’s accent as specifically Italian. Thus, if IT5 indeed has a lot of marked features in her speech, then they do not seem to be caused by stereotypical L1 influence. The phonetic analysis of her
variables is too narrow in order to help explain these findings, since L1 influence was not tested. Other speakers (FR10, BR9 and DE7) all mixed varieties in their variables as well, and while they were all ranked below 2,5 on pleasantness, so was speaker DE4, who had mostly consistent SSBE-like pronunciation in said variables. Therefore it again needs to be stressed that the phonetic analysis is too narrow in scope and that there are variables outside of what has been measured and included in the study that influenced the ratings. Similarly to IT5, DE7’s relatively neutral score of 2,33 stands in opposition to the low pleasantness score of 2,04. DE4 ranks right after DE7 on pleasantness, with a score of 1,93, but her speech is still ranked more neutral than FR10, BR9 and IT5. The least pleasant accent, as rated by the German listeners, was FR10’s, although FR10 was perceived as more neutral than BR9 and IT5. Overall, the results on the perceived pleasantness of the German English accents are similar to Kaur and Raman’s (2014, p. 257) and Jenkins’ (2007) ratings on the German English accent, showing that German English accents are consistently rated as very unpleasant by other NNSs.

Combining these results with the ones from the guessing task, one trend in particular could be observed. The easier it was for people to correctly identify a speaker as German, the lower was their rating on pleasantness. Whereas DE2 with the most and most consistently British features ranked fourth in pleasantness, DE7, who was more easily identifiable as a German native ranked third to last. Even though two of the German speakers (DE4 and DE8) were rated comparably lower on pleasantness, people seemed to agree that even though unpleasant, the neutrality of a German English accent is higher than other accents included. This again reflects Jenkins (2007), who also found that the international outer circle participants listed German English accents consistently as unpleasant but high on neutrality. For the German participants in this study, this can be interpreted in the way that German is technically acceptable, but not on a personal level – an attitude which remains to be investigated in the survey answers.

The exhibited attitudes towards neutrality are clouded here and proved difficult to interpret. The discrepancies could possibly be explained by differences in perception of the term neutrality, which was indeed reported by some of the German participants while filling in the rating task. We could tentatively say that neutrality as a concept must have been understood by the participants as a mixture between ‘unmarked’ and ‘close to SSBE/GenAm’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Neutrality</th>
<th>Pleasantness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE 1</td>
<td>2,85</td>
<td>2,89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE 2</td>
<td>2,67</td>
<td>2,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK 3</td>
<td>2,89</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE 4</td>
<td>2,11</td>
<td>1,93</td>
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<td>IT 5</td>
<td>1,7</td>
<td>2,26</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIN 6</td>
<td>2,15</td>
<td>2,11</td>
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<tr>
<td>DE 7</td>
<td>2,33</td>
<td>2,04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US 8</td>
<td>3,19</td>
<td>3,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR 9</td>
<td>1,85</td>
<td>2,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR 10</td>
<td>1,89</td>
<td>1,89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As table 10 and figure 1 show, the German focus group did show a preference for neutral accents overall, since neutrality was rated similarly to pleasantness. A Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficient test was applied to the 20 means of the pleasantness and neutrality ratings in order to test a possible correlation of the two variables. Spearman’s Rho expresses the likelihood of correlations via a result between -1 and +1. For the limited number of variables measured, the test resulted in an R-value of 0.57, thus the association between pleasantness and neutrality would be considered statistically relevant.

Figure 1 Averaged neutrality and pleasantness ratings plotted
4.4 Survey answers

Concerning the first question, what an “ideal English accent” in general sounds like, the results showed a clear image, which was to be expected based on previous research: The majority of German participants favoured NS accents. Some variation of a ‘British’ or ‘American’ accent was listed in 22 of 27 answers. Often the type of British or American accent was not specified, but rather circumscribed. Answers that were given were for example:

“The British or American accent from movies”
“A ‘soft’ version of British”
“A weak version of British”
“A ‘moderate’ American accent”
“American English without a dialect”
“A native English that isn’t strongly recognizable”
“‘Subtly’ British or American”
“American English without a dialect”
“Received pronunciation”

Thus, most of the participants did not specify closely which American or British accent in particular they favoured, but their descriptions still showed a trend towards non-regionally marked American or British accents. Regional, but still similarly, answers like “American East Coast English” or “American North East Coast English” displayed a preference for accents that are socially unmarked and overlap in large parts with the description of GenAm. However, the complete opposite of non-regionally marked NS accents also occurred in the answers. Participants listed Australian English, Glaswegian, Norfolk/Norwich accents, Cockney, Canadian English and Irish English as ideal. The way participants formulated it, those were accents that were likeable and therefore might be personally preferred, but not necessarily accents most suited for international communication and mutual intelligibility. Apart from the attachment to NS accents as ideal, another trend could be observed. The most commonly used terms to describe the ‘ideal English’ in general were independent of region, clear, unobstructed, articulate, intelligible and fluent. Interestingly, there was also a minority that already in question one named NNS accents as ideal reference accents. Three different participants listed Scandinavian accents, such as Swedish and Danish as ideal English accents. Two of these people had stayed abroad in Scandinavian countries themselves. This positive image of ‘Scandinavian/Northern European accents’ continued in question two, where people were supposed to name what they would like to sound like when they speak English. Two participants said that they would like to sound “like a Scandinavian person speaking English”, one specifying “like the Swedes who speak English well”. In Germany (and not only in Germany, see Jenkins 2007, pp. 171-172), Scandinavian or Swedish English has the reputation of sounding very acceptable and close to ‘neutral’ when it comes to NNS English accents, which in this research is confirmed by the blind rating task, where the Swedish speaker received the highest NNS score on pleasantness (2.85).

Even though neutrality was an item in task I, most participants did not use that term when describing ideals and preferences. One participant wrote that she would like to sound “neutral” when speaking English and that she preferred “neutral accents, like Oxford English” when listening to English. Another used the term neutral when
describing American English. Clearly, the idea of what constitutes a ‘neutral accent’ diverges. Questions of authenticity surfaced for the listeners as well, with two participants expressing negative views on people who “try to imitate native speaker accents” or are “faking being a native speaker”. One male participant expressed it in the following way:

“As a non-native speaker [I do] not [want to sound] like a native speaker. I want to be easily understood, but not need to pretend that I am a native speaker.”

Another participant wrote that she would like to sound “authentic”, but did not elaborate further on what this would translate to in praxis and yet another that “coherency” is important, i.e. that an accent needs to follow one pattern and one pattern only in order to be ideal.

Unsurprisingly, based on question one, the majority expressed a preference for NS accents in their own pronunciation. 14 wished to sound “like a native speaker”, with six mentions of an unspecified American accent, one vote for Glaswegian and five mentions of an unspecified British accent. Again, people remained vague on the exact type of British or American accent, but overall emphasis was put on intelligibility and ease of communication. Among the reasons listed pro an American accent were personal closeness, as well as the fact that American English accents dominate media discourses. British English received points for ‘quirkiness’ and sounding “cute” as well as “educated”, and one person opined that British English is “the easiest to understand for people from all backgrounds”; more people (four) however expressed the opposite, i.e., that British English can be harder to understand, which is why it supposedly does not serve well for international communication. Curiously, American English, while being very popular with the majority of participants, which is mirrored by the attitudes towards US8’s accent in the rating task, which was considered the most neutral-sounding one of the varieties included in the study, received the same critique when discussing ideal accents:

“In my opinion there is no ideal accent, since this is specifically what is so charming about each person: the individual accent. I find it refreshing when everybody has their own accent and way of pronouncing words. However, in most cases I struggle to understand US-Americans. The US-American accents I have been confronted with so far have therefore never been to my liking.”

On a related note, participants already expressed disdain for their own native language English accent in question two, even though beliefs on this were only explicitly asked for in question three. Four different participants answered “not like a German” when asked about their preference for their own accent. Question three then (Do you mind when people can identify you as a German native when speaking English in international contexts or abroad?) gave a broader picture on the status of German English accents: 17 out of 21 claimed that they minded, with ten saying that they only “mind slightly” and seven minding “very much”. The other two options given, which were positively stacked towards German English accents with Not at all, that doesn’t matter/Not at all I don’t care (German translation) received four ticks and the even more pro-national-identity choice No, that is the way it’s supposed to be only was chosen by two persons. One of these two participants noted next to her answer:
“I don’t mind at all. I love my country and the fact that I was born in Germany. [...] Language is what creates us as human beings and is a huge part of our life and our origins. This is nothing to be ashamed about. That’s why I think it is perfectly acceptable when you can identify a person’s origin based on their pronunciation. I don’t think that this is something embarrassing.”

Although both participants listed that they welcome being identified as German natives when speaking English in international contexts, they still both reported to orient on British English accents when it comes to what they personally would like to sound like and American English when they were asked for the ideal English accent.

For further in depth insights into the attitude patterns of the German participants, a cluster analysis of sociolinguistic background and experiences of a participant paired with the results from the rating task and survey answers should be of use to further examine the patterns in participants’ answers, but had to be left out in this study.

5. Discussion and conclusion

There is little to no difference visible in the attitudes of learners of English listed in the literature and international, active users of English under investigation in the study at hand. That is to say, while there is a minority that expresses openness to NNS accents and reports to not aim for NS accents in their own production, a large majority still orients on NS accents and judges other people’s accents based on NS ideologies. Which NS variety is preferred depends purely on a speaker’s preferences: No single variety was preferred by the majority of ELF speakers – most of the NNS ELF speakers tended towards a hybridized accent. The ten speakers of ELF expressed the most confidence in their personal accents outside of NS norms, even though the majority of them distanced themselves from versions of their native tongue’s ‘typical’ English – among them even one of the NSs, US8. This distancing was clearly informed by national and linguistic stereotypes. However, there were also mentions of wanting to have or accepting to have linguistic markers of L1 identity in ones’ speech from the NNSs (BR8, SE1, IT5, DE7). The German focus group was even more cautious when it came to their own Englishes: The majority rejected the idea of purposefully letting their German accent shine through in international conversations. The reason again seems to be stereotyping, which DE4 summarized in a concise way. When claiming that German and Germany has a “weird reputation”, she refers to the fact that German English has often been subjected to ridicule since World War Two, especially in British media (Monty Python, ‘Allo ‘Allo and Fawlty Towers are just some of the classic TV series come to mind here); the perceived ‘harshness’ of the accent (Jenkins, 2007, pp. 170-171) adding to the stereotype of the ‘overly correct’ German. The participants in this study seem to be hyper-aware of these stereotypes and therefore, understandably, express negative beliefs towards it. Stereotyping would also help explain the answers of the ELF speakers: A stronger affiliation with nationality (nationality, according to Virkkula & Nikula (2010), seemingly playing a distinct role as marker of identity when spending time abroad) might be connected to the willingness of accepting ones’ L1 influenced English accent – this
was however not tested in this study. In the rating task, the German focus group showed a strong bias towards native and native-like accents, rating speakers with consistently native-accent orientation and low L1 influence (inferred from the guessing task) higher on both pleasantness and neutrality. A large majority reported low acceptance for German English accents in their own speech and similarly, when rating other German natives’ Englishes. Only the French speaker of English received a worse rating than the two German speakers DE4 and DE7 on pleasantness. The third speaker of German (DE2), however, received a comparatively higher score, probably due to less L1 influence and a pronunciation that is close to SSBE standards.

While grossly overestimating current attitudes in ELF, the initial assumption under scrutiny, that speakers within ELF wish to retain their L2 accent, can therefore be reformulated, true to the results, in a much more cautious version. Some speakers of ELF do wish to retain aspects of their L2 accent, such as cultural habits and customs for example, as already suggested in the literature in paragraph 2.2. At least in the study at hand, though, this wish counts less so for the choice of accent. Overall, the results indicate that the ELF paradigm and the idea of expressing ones’ L1 identity in ones’ English accent still has to find its way into expanding circle NNS speaker’s language ideologies. Even though Jenkins warns that “no conclusive causal links can be made between the attitudes expressed in the observed/elicited data and standard NS ideology, with its deficit view of ELF, except in cases where the research participants themselves make the link” (2007, p. 110), I would argue that NS ideology is still the most likely reason for beliefs held, even when the link is not made by the participants themselves (it, however, often is). The biases exhibited in the German listener focus group may thus very well stem from a combination of the fact that German education is still over-emphasizing NS accents and NS ideology, as well as from a negative self-image. The slight difference in opinion and confidence in ones’ own brand of English between the German focus group and true ELF speakers may also be explained by the current social situations of the participants included. The ten speakers in the first part of the study are currently true speakers of ELF, whereas 14 of the 27 German participants are currently not experiencing English in exclusively ELF communicative environments. This would lend weight to the theory that the more experienced in and exposed to ELF communication a NNS becomes, the less s/he worries about traditional notions of language correctness. Kaypak and Ortaçtepe’s research (2014) would support said suspicion, finding that stays abroad of about five months were not sufficient to change their exchange students’ NS norm-oriented English language beliefs.³

Neutrality then, seems to have been understood differently by the majority of the German focus group and the five speakers of ELF who mentioned the concept. In the ratings neutral sounding accents are essentially equated with native-like sounding accents and also possibly with having the least amount of L1 influence on an accent. This

³ When comparing the rating averages of the German participants currently abroad against the rating averages of German participants currently living in Germany on both pleasantness and neutrality, however, this did not seem to be a significant factor influencing ratings. Indeed, all but two speakers were rated slightly more pleasant and neutral by the Germans abroad, but the maximum differences between speaker ratings ranged from only 0.038-0.385 on neutrality (sum average of 0.19) and from 0.011-0.342 (sum average of 0.2) on pleasantness. This suggests, that the German participants rated rather uniformly and educational background plus stereotypes represents the biggest influence on attitude.
was reflected by statements made in the survey data, where both Oxford English and American English were described as neutral. The results of Rindal and Piercy (2013) and Erling (2004) with regards to neutrality are in line with some comments made by the speakers of ELF included in this study, who described sounding neutral as being able to mix-and-match accents and not let one particular accent shine through, resulting in hybrid accents similar to the Norwegian learners of English. Blending accents again did not uniformly mean that speakers were ok with throwing their L1 in the mix. DE4, FIN6, DE7 and FR10 expressly said that when they are aiming for neutral, they try to avoid their L1 accent patterns. Healthy scepticism towards the idea of ‘neutral accents’ was applied not only by the UK3 speaker in her qualitative interview, but also by a few German participants when filling in the rating task. One essential reason for why ‘sounding neutral’ sounds like an understandable wish but cannot work, is the theory of Linguistic Stereotyping. Coined as long ago as 56 years by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960), it states that “[…] speech always provides information about the social groups to which a speaker belongs (or avows membership). [A]tributions of group membership may evoke linguistic stereotypes and biased expectations about who is speaking.” (Kang & Rubin, 2014, p. 240). Varieties, dialects and accents can therefore sound more or less neutral to a certain ingroup, but can never not say anything at all about a speaker and his/her wishes on how to be perceived (Park & Wee, 2013, pp. 64-65). It is unlikely that one single variety can be isolated as neutral – being perceived as neutral always depends on both speaker and listener attitudes and background. GenAm and SSBE, for example, currently seem to have the potential to sound the most neutral to expanding circle users of English, such as the German focus group in this study included, for its usage in a wide variety of accessible media and public education. Though, as has been shown, very few participants even consider ‘neutral’ a good signpost to model their speech on and there are stark personal differences between how British Englishes and American Englishes are treated even within a fairly mono-cultural group of people, such as the Germans included here.

Summing up, all attitudes exhibited in this study clearly go beyond what has been postulated by researchers such as House (2003). ELF is not only used as a tool, or an empty vessel: It is not a communication channel wherein people leave their conceptions about themselves and others at the door. Rather, the answers show a high awareness of personal self- and other-perception. No matter in which constellation of people with different linguistic backgrounds, everybody brings their pre-conceptions of communication and identity to the table, which can cause complications and difficulties when using ELF and this most likely has a larger influence on the future of English in the world than the ELF paradigm currently lets on. As Matsumoto (2011) already notes in a footnote, the success of ELF communication very much relies on factors such as “education, social status, race, ethnicity and the sense of trust between interlocutors” (p.111), and, as I would add, preconceptions, which Park and Wee support (2013, pp. 63-65). Additionally, Park and Wee (2011) rightfully bring Bourdieu into the discussion, when arguing that “the logic of capital conversion within and across linguistic markets” (p. 367) plays a larger role than currently considered. When discussing the attitudes and beliefs of people who use English internationally, we cannot ignore the power monopoly native Englishes have in the world as a whole. Even though the type of prestige attributed to a certain accent may vary and attitudes are slowly opening up as has been shown in
this study: As long as the stakeholders, and with that I mean people in charge of distributing capital, have learners of English believe that they can achieve most by speaking native-like, people will have no incentive to prioritize the expression of their native identity in their English pronunciation. What I therefore consider vital for the impact of ELF on expanding circle nations such as Germany is, that in order to see a change of attitude towards NNS accents, not only is there a need for the implication of a wider range of English varieties in schools, but also and especially to open up the discussion about the type of English asked for in stakeholder positions.


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Appendix A: Word List Task

Word list task adapted from Rindal & Piercy (2013)

lemon  drink  glass
college  new  knowledge
student  sister  paint
dance  alright  Wednesday
army  fatal  time
twenty  boat  atom
fire  code  eight
bottom  wanted  ice
moment  light  goat
possible  whatever  mighty
invented  stupid  corn
fast  leave  Tuesday
top  plenty

Appendix B: Reading Task

It was a lazy Tuesday morning and I wasn’t ready to put my new top on anytime soon. The perks of being a student.
The cotton-candy music of a radio floated by and reminded me of a world outside my dorm room.
I better get out of here fast. Even though this would mean I would arrive at my job a lot later than I had originally planned.
Appendix C: Rating Task

Please rate the individual speaker’s accent on how neutral and pleasant it sounds to you. Please also guess where a speaker is from or his mother tongue. Feel free to leave comments or give more thoughts on a speaker’s pronunciation, for example what made you guess the way you did!

Use the scale given below.

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<td>Not neutral at all</td>
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Appendix D: Survey

Please answer the following questions. If there are options available, mark your answer by putting ‘X’ or similar – the important part is that your answer is recognizable. Feel free to also go into more detail and in depth for items 3 – 5.

1. What would an ideal English accent sound like to you?

2. What would you most like to sound like when you speak English?

3. Do you mind when people can identify you as a German native when speaking English in international contexts or abroad? Please mark:
   - Not at all, that does not matter
   - Not at all, that’s the way it should be like
   - Slightly
   - Very

4. How often do you speak English currently in your everyday life on average?
   - Not at all
   - 1-2 times a week
   - More than 2 times a week, but not daily
   - Daily

5. How often do you listen to English currently in your everyday life? (Including media)
   - Not at all
   - 1-2 times a week
   - More than 2 times a week, but not daily
   - Daily

6. In which country did you spend the longest time abroad so far (also cumulative)?