

Impact of Accented English on Listener Attitude Towards Speakers' Credibility

- Learning Pronunciation and Its Economic Rationality -

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Abstract This study investigates how speakers' accent impact their credibility, specifically the effects of Japanese accented English on the attitudes of listeners with different language backgrounds. A total of 30 participants comprised from three different language groups (native speakers of English, ESL, and EFL) listened to the recordings of three presenters speaking in English with different levels of Japanese accent: light, middle and heavy. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in perceived credibility given to different levels of accentedness according to the language group. All participants found the least accented speech the most credible, and the most heavily-accented English was rated as having the lowest credibility. Implications for pronunciation teaching are discussed.

Key words accent, accented English, listener attitude, credibility, pronunciation instruction.

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概要 本実験では日本人の英語が外国人からどのような評価をされているのか調査することを目的とした。特に日本語訛りの英語が聞き手（被験者）が話者に対して感じる *credibility* に与える影響について考察する。日本語訛りの度合いが異なる（強・中・弱）1分程度の同じ内容の3つの英語のセールストークを *language background* の異なる被験者に聞かせ、それぞれのセールストークについて被験者が感じた *credibility* について調査した。被験者は日本語を母語としない1) ネイティブ13人、2) 英語圏での英語 (ESL) 学習者9人、3) 英語圏以外での英語 (EFL) 学習者8人で構成し現実に近い環境とした。結果は被験者の *language background* に関わらず、日本語訛りの度合いが弱い（ネイティブの発音に近い）発音のセールストークの方が、訛りが中程度及び強いセールストークよりも、聞き手が話し手に対して抱く *credibility* が高いことが示唆された。

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the problem

It is undeniable that English has become a global language of business [1]. The development of communications technology such as the Internet has enabled business people to deal with the others in any geographical locations worldwide. In this increasingly globalised business world, English is becoming more important than ever as it is often a prominent and only communication tool not only between native and

non-native speakers but also among those non-English native speakers who use different languages as their mother tongues.

Faced with the increasing number of prospective ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) speakers in the international markets, businesspersons have come to wonder if some English accents have more acceptability than other accents. Which accent is likely to have the most amount of credibility when one communicates with customers and clients

around the world [2] [3]? Knowing which accent will be perceived as the most credible will give businesspersons advantage over their rivals as knowledge of people's reactions to the varied accents they may encounter on a day to day basis might facilitate their preference of products and purchase decisions.

However, according to Tsalikis, DeShields, and LaTour [4], there have been relatively few studies on the credibility of a salesperson as perceived by his or her potential client on the basis of the former's accent. In fact, while many studies have attempted to measure subjects' attitudes towards varied accented English in the field of language attitude studies and sociolinguistics, such investigation seems to have been overlooked in the business literature. Moreover, these language attitude studies mostly examined English native speakers' attitude towards accented English, but there appear to be few studies which investigate attitude towards non-native speaker's English.

1.2. Purpose of the study

In light of the current situation in which many Japanese have an urgent need to acquire English in order to survive this increasingly globalised and competitive business world, it seems highly useful to investigate how the Japanese people's English is perceived by the rest of the world. On these grounds, I attempt in this study to evaluate reactions of people with various language backgrounds towards Japanese accented English, specifically focusing on how speaker's accent impacts their credibility.

1.3. Definition of terms

Accent

According to Powesland and Giles [5], an accent is a manner of pronouncing words that differs from the standard speech of culture, with the grammar and syntax being consistent with the standard. Derwing et al. [6] refer to a foreign accent in the context of English-speaking countries as the ways in which the speech differs from the standard English and the impact such differences have on speakers and listeners. Both definitions indicate that an accent is different from the standard but only in terms of pronunciation. An accent is often mistaken with the term dialect and they tend to be used interchangeably. However, a dialect differs from the standard both in terms of vocabulary and grammar in addition to the pronunciation [7].

Accentedness

The construct definition of accentedness which is adopted here in the present thesis follows Munro and Derwing's work on L2 speech perception and production [8] [9]. They define accentedness as "the degree to which the pronunciation of utterance sounds different from an expected production pattern" [10: p.112]. The term is used in this study to indicate how much the pronunciation differs from that of standard in order to show the heaviness of the accent that speaker possesses.

Credibility

Investigating credibility of the accented speech has received attention only recently [4], but the term credibility has been extensively studied in social psychology and sociology [11]. Delia [12] defines credibility as attributions concerning a communicator who is the basis for the acceptance or rejection of his/her assertions. It has been also widely accepted that credibility has two major dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness after Hovland and Weiss [13] initiated empirical investigation on credibility. For their experiment which tests whether trivia statements are perceived differently according to the level of speakers' accentedness, Lev-Ari and Keysar [3] interpreted constructs of credibility following the above conception as 'believability' and 'truthfulness' as a measure to determine how speakers' accent impacts their credibility.

As my study attempts to measure similar aspects of credibility with above investigations, I employed the term 'trustworthiness' and 'believability' to evaluate the impact of accented speech on credibility. In addition, as the study by Tsalikis, DeShields, and LaTour [4] suggests that 'willingness to recommend (the speaker)' is a good indicator of credibility, I also used this aspect to measure the credibility of accented English speakers.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Perceptions of native English speakers towards varieties of English

One of the earliest attempts to assess the impact of non-native accented speeches on listeners' perceptions is called "matched guise technique", developed by Lambert in the late 1950s [14]. The procedure involves participants who listen to a series of single speakers who read out the same prepared passage. The texts are different from each other in only one aspect; they are read in a number of accents. Before the task, participants are

told that they will listen to a variety of different speakers, when in fact, it is read by the same speaker in a number of different guises. Participants are required to listen to each recorded passage and to evaluate the speaker, most often on a bipolar scale, in relation to a number of personality traits such as intelligent/ unintelligent, or honest/dishonest. The listeners' ratings on the scale are therefore considered to represent their impressions about varieties of accents. Two of their earliest research [14] [15] showed that unaccented speech received more favourable reactions than accented speech by the listeners who were unaware of the fact that they were hearing the same speaker both times.

These original studies of Lambert et al. [14] [15] have generated a number of similar studies and have added to the understanding of native and non-native speaker attitudes towards language varieties. Studies conducted by Giles [16] utilising this technique also showed that speakers using the standard, i.e. received pronunciation (RP) were rated as more competent, confident, and educated than speakers using a non-standard accent. In another study conducted by Brown, Giles, & Thakerar, [17] participants who listened to the recordings of a bi-dialectal speaker using both Welsh and RP rated the RP speaker to be more intelligent, happy, active, ambitious, and even good-looking than the Welsh accented speaker. These studies illustrate that listeners judge speakers more on accent than contents of the passages.

2.2 Perceptions of non-native English speakers towards varieties of English

As greater varieties of accented English came to attention, a "verbal-guise technique" [18], a modified version of a matched-guise technique began to be used. A verbal-guise technique uses recordings made not by one and the same speaker but by several speakers in order to represent different degree of accentedness. Although this variant sacrifices external validities such as pause, intonation and speed, it allows more varieties of accented English tested, and there is one important advantage over the original one that "it precludes the possibility of listeners recognizing that the voices on the various taped recordings belong to one and the same speaker" [19].

Dalton-Puffer et al. [20] employed the verbal-guise technique in order to examine the attitudes of English learners in Austria. The participants were asked to evaluate two Austrian non-native accents of English and three native English accents. The results showed that two

non-native accents received low status evaluation and the overall preference for the three native accents.

This technique was also employed to investigate the attitudes of non-native speakers towards varieties of English. Results of these studies indicated that the perceptions of non-native English speakers towards accented English are quite similar to that of native speakers. Eisenstein [21] investigated the attitudes of English language learners in New York towards three varieties of General American English, Black American English (now more referred as African American English) and New York accent English (a non-standard variety of English which is spoken in city areas of New York). The results indicated that even during the early stages of language learning, adult ESL students were able to recognise dialect differences in English speech, and it was also discovered that as the learners become more proficient in English, their preference became similar to those of native speakers, that means, they become more favourable for the General American English.

Munro, Derwing and Morton [10] investigated the perception of non-native speakers on the other non-native speakers' accented English. In their study, listeners from native Cantonese, Japanese, Mandarin and English language backgrounds evaluated the same set of foreign-accented English utterances from native speakers of Cantonese, Japanese, Polish, and Spanish who learn English as their second language. Results revealed that regardless of native language background, the listener groups showed moderate to high correlations on intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness scores. There were high degree of similarities in the ways in which Cantonese, Japanese, mandarin, and native English listeners responded to utterances from intermediate-level ESL speakers from linguistic backgrounds similar to and different from their own.

2.3 Perceptions of accented speech: credibility

Attention to the studies of listeners' reactions to accented English in the business field specifically came from the firms that operate in overseas markets. They had to decide whether to adapt their marketing strategies for each country market or their marketing activities across world markets, especially on their advertising activities [22]. Tsalkis, DeShields, and LaTour [4] conducted a study in the personal selling context that compared the effectiveness and credibility of the salespersons who speak English with Greek accent to those who speak with

standard American English accent. After listening to each speaker, the judges were asked to rate the speaker on fifteen bipolar adjectives scales (e.g. intelligent/ not intelligent, professional/ not professional, convincing/ not convincing). A six-point scale was utilised for their experiment. As a result, the salespersons with the standard American accent were rated more favourably across all fifteen adjectives than those who spoke with the Greek accent. A replication of the study by Tsalikis, Ortiz-Buonafina, and LaTour in Guatemala [23], also revealed that speakers with the standard accent were evaluated more favourably across all fifteen adjectives than the foreign-accented speakers. These results indicated that the salespersons with standard (American) English were perceived more effective and credible than the salespersons with a foreign accent.

This emergence of the concept “credibility” in research on the relation between accents and success in business activities has triggered more general research recently.

Lev-Ari and Keysar [3] investigated the impact of accented speech on truth judgements of the trivia statements. In their study, participants (American students) were asked to judge the truthfulness of trivia statements by native or non-native speakers of English, such as “Ants don’t sleep”. In order to avoid prejudice affecting ratings of truthfulness, participants were informed prior to the experiment that the statements were prepared for the speakers, and were not based on the speakers’ own knowledge. Although the participants knew that the speakers were simply reciting from a prepared script, they judged as less truthful the statements read by the people with foreign accents.

In the following experiment, Lev-Ari and Keysar tested whether the awareness reduces the impact of accent on participants’ judgement of truthfulness. They told the participants that they were being tested to see if accents have any negative impacts on credibility. The experiment was conducted with identical recorded trivia statements, asking listeners to rate the difficulty of understanding the speaker on a continuous scale. The result turned out that while participants rated statements with mild accent just as truthful as statements by native speakers, they rated heavily accented statements as less truthful, indicating that listeners were unable to undo the impact of heavy accent even when informed. The results of above two experiments suggest that the amount of credibility decreases with the severity of the accent.

2.4 How Japanese accented English is evaluated

Previous studies have shown that accented English tend to be seen as less favourable and even less credible than standard English. Then, how about Japanese-accented English? The number of research which investigate people’s perception of Japanese English is very limited, however, the study conducted by Scott et al. [1] show some implications how Japanese accented English is perceived. The purpose of their study was to determine the English-language accent preferences of businesspersons from around the world. The study was conducted to meet the demand of business people to know which accent can give them an advantage over those who speak other accents [24] [25]. The researchers conducted meta-analysis on four empirically based studies which investigated the English-language accent preferences of prospective and practicing businesspersons from around the world [26] [27] [28]. These four studies represented the accent preferences of prospective and practicing business persons from the United States, the Pacific Rim, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. Outcome showed that except for the tie between General American English and Received Pronunciation (British) English, which were the two most preferred accents, participants preferred the studied representative accents in this descending order: Australian English, Estuary English, Indian English, and Japanese English. The result showed that Japanese accented English as the least preferred accent. The researchers concluded it was not clear why Japanese accented English was least preferred but suggested the possibility that it may have been due to the participants’ unfamiliarity with Japanese accent.

This outcome, as well as previous research into people’s perception of foreign accented English, is intriguing in the way it raises a question as to how the English spoken in Japan is perceived by those in other parts of the world. As has been mentioned above, previous research which examined the impact of accented English on people’s perception mainly compared utterances of native and non-native English speakers, but not focused on how the different levels of accentedness of non-native speakers’ English affect listeners’ perception, let alone how Japanese accented English affect listeners’ perception. However, such research seems highly required as it is quite clear in the near future that more Japanese people will become compelled to interact with people from various kinds of language backgrounds.

2.5 Research Question

In light of such pressing requirement, it seems worth investigating how the Japanese learners of English are evaluated by the people from different language backgrounds especially in terms of credibility. The main objective of the present study is to investigate whether Japanese accented English affects listener attitudes towards speakers' credibility.

Research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Does accented English affect listener attitudes towards speakers' credibility?

RQ2: Does the listeners' language background affect their assessment of the credibility of speakers of accented English?

3 Method

3.1 Subjects

A total of thirty people participated in this study. Of which, thirteen are native speakers of English. These native speakers enrolled in the undergraduate exchange programs between their local and Japanese universities. The duration of the program is approximately six months, and eight of them had never studied Japanese language before joining this program. On the other hand, the rest of five students had studied Japanese for one or two years prior to this program. The level of their Japanese was lower intermediate according to the Japanese teacher who was teaching them at the time of data collection.

Nine students are those who use English as their second language (ESL). They are born and raised in the countries where English "holds special status as a medium of communication" [7:p.108]. In this study, students from Singapore, Malaysia, and Philippines participated. Other eight participants are from countries where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) and is used for international communication, such as in business, diplomacy and tourism. Four Chinese, three Koreans, one German, and one Spanish participated in this research. All of their English were at the level of above 80 scores in TOFEL iBT.

3.3 Materials

A hypothetical sales presentation (see Appendix A) was prepared in three different levels of Japanese-accented English; light, middle and heavy. The commodity promoted in this presentation is a water right with which the buyer will be entitled to the ownership of water

resource located in Hokkaido if the listener agreed on paying at least 1,000 dollars. This topic was chosen to measure the credibility because the participants are likely unfamiliar with the product and therefore they have to rely on the speakers for their decision of purchase. The presentation could sound quite fictitious as the product is not tangible. The fact that the commodity was not tangible was one of the important reasons of this choice since if the product was such entities as a car, the listeners would be able to judge the credibility of the speech based on their knowledge of the products.

Seven male Japanese recorded a scripted presentation with an effort to deliver the message in a natural and realistic flow. Each recording lasts approximately 60 seconds. The level of accentedness of each speaker was classified according to the judgements of two professional English teachers; one is a trained Japanese phonetician of English with over three decades of teaching experience, and another one is an English native speaker specialising in teaching English communication skills with seven years of experience in Japan.

The judges listened to all seven presentations and ranked them in order of the level of accentedness, considering the features relevant to pronunciation such as segment and prosody. As their rankings matched, those presentations judged to be with the lightest, median, and the heaviest accents were selected for this study as samples of light, middle and heavy accented English. All speakers are in their middle twenties and have relatively similar voice qualities.

3.4 Procedures and rating scale

Participants enrolled in this study were told that three sales presentations would be given by Japanese men in English, and the contents of the speeches were identical. This was done to make listeners concentrate on listening to the presentation, avoiding the situation in which the participants come to wonder which nationality, or what kind of person the speaker is. The order of the three presenters was two patterns: half of the participants listened to the recording in order of middle, light and heavy accent whereas the rest heard them in middle, heavy and light order. Only two patterns were used as the number of the participants was small, and middle accent speech was given first in order to give a standard level of accent.

After listening to each speaker, the participants were asked to rate the speaker based on their impressions on

5-likert scales in addition to one open question (see Appendix B). Subjects were instructed not to take much time on each question but answer them with their first impressions. However, they were given as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire.

At the end of the questionnaire, there are some additional questions measuring their mother tongue, exposure to Japanese-accented English, and the duration of their stay in Japan.

3.5 Questionnaire design

Questionnaire consists of five 5-likert scale questions and one open question was used to measure the credibility given to different degrees of accentedness. The participants were asked to rate the speaker on five scales in which the larger number indicates higher credibility or purchase incentive.

The sum of Q3, Q4 and Q5 represents how much credibility each speaker gained from the participants. Each question examines one of the constructs of credibility: the amount of trustworthiness, believability, and whether he can be recommended as a good salesperson. Thus, the sum of all items well indicates the credibility of an each speaker.

Q1 and Q2 were used to determine whether it was a type of the product or quality of the speech listeners positively/ negatively reacted. Purpose of setting Q1 and Q2 were to ask participants his/her impression on the product and quality of the salestalk separately so as to collect the data purely related with the credibility of the salesperson.

4. Results

A major research question posed in this study is to investigate how speakers' accent impacts their credibility: RQ1: "Does accented English affect listener attitude towards speakers' credibility?" Another question was also examined whether there is a difference in language attitudes of 1) native speaker of English, 2) ESL speakers, and 3) EFL speakers towards Japanese-accented English: RQ2: "Does the listeners' language background affect their assessment of the credibility of speakers of accented English?"

The repeated-measures two-way ANOVA was used to analyse above two questions as this study has more than two independent variables (language group and accentedness) and tests the same people more than once: the participants listen to the same salestalk in three

different levels of Japanese-accented English. This design investigates one statistical interaction and two main effects so as to investigate how much influence those factors have on the credibility of the speaker, that is, 1) interaction effect between accentedness and language group, and 2) main effects of accentedness and language group respectively.

The repeated-measures two-way ANOVA showed that the effect of interaction between accentedness and language group was found not significant, $F(4,54) = 1.282; p < .289$. It also indicated that the main effect of language group was not statistical, $F(2,27) = .503; p < .610$. However, it was found that the level of accentedness has statistically significant effect on the credibility, $F(2,27) = 51.738; p < .000$. This model also suggests that $R^2 = 66\%$ of the variance in credibility scores can be explained by accentedness. According to Mauchly's test of sphericity, there is no problem with sphericity as the p value is greater than .05.

The descriptive statistics of this design are shown in Table 4.1, along with the detailed result of this statistical test in Table 4.2. The result presented in Table 4.2 is visualised in Figure 4.1 which shows rather strong similarities in the ways in which all three language groups responded to speeches with three levels of accentedness respectively. Figure 4.2 shows estimated marginal means of the credibility scores to give a simpler view of the result.

Table 4.1
Descriptive statistics of credibility scores given to each level of accented presentations by three language groups

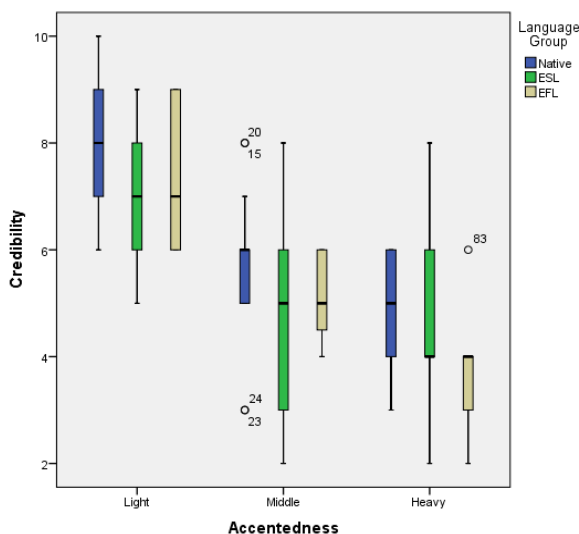
Descriptive Statistics				
Credibility scores given to	Language Group	Mean	SD	N
Light accent	Native	11.23	2.587	13
	ESL	10.89	1.691	9
	EFL	11.00	1.852	8
	Total	11.07	2.100	30
Middle accent	Native	7.85	2.115	13
	ESL	7.22	2.728	9
	EFL	7.50	1.309	8
	Total	7.57	2.096	30
Heavy accent	Native	6.62	1.609	13
	ESL	7.44	2.698	9
	EFL	5.25	1.669	8
	Total	6.50	2.113	30

Table 4.2
Results of repeated-measures ANOVA of the role of accent on the credibility

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between-subjects Effects					
Language Group	6.992	2	3.496	0.503	0.61
Error	187.497	27	6.944		
Within-subjects Effects					
Accentedness	332.934	2	166.467	51.738	.000*
Accentedness * Language Group	16.498	4	4.125	1.282	0.289
Error(Accentedness)	173.746	54	3.218		

* $p < .05$

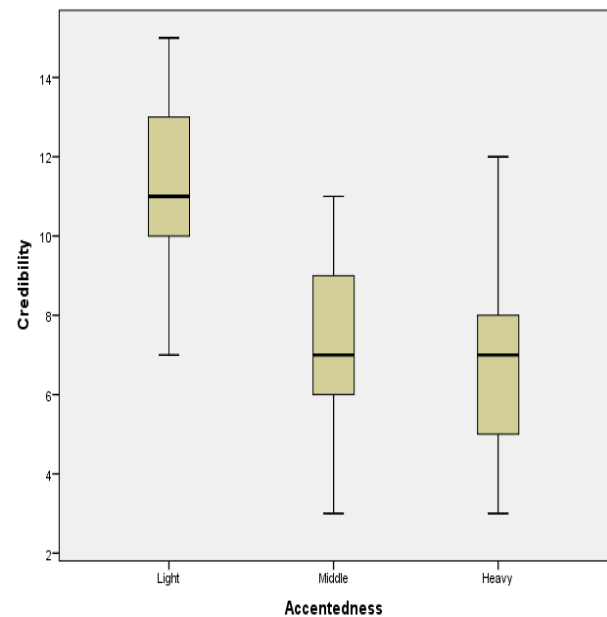
Figure 4.1
The distribution of credibility scores given to each accent by three language groups



The results indicated that regardless of which language group the participants belong to, they all reacted in the same manner towards the Japanese-accented English, and found the least accented English to be more credible than middle and heavy accents.

A further Post-Hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that significant difference can be found only between light and heavy, and light and middle accents but not between middle and heavy accents ($p < .05$). Although the median of credibility scores of each accent are different, a boxplot shows that the score distribution of middle and heavy accents are quite similar (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2
The distribution of credibility scores according to speakers' level of accentedness.



5. DISCUSSION

5.1 RQ1

The results shown in the previous section suggest a number of possible interpretations. For RQ1: “Does accented English affect the listener attitude towards speakers’ credibility?” findings indicate that a speaker’s accent affects listeners’ perception of credibility. The listeners found the light accent was more credible than middle and heavy accents. This outcome supports previous research that indicated accented speech reduces the credibility of the speaker [3] [4] [24]. The result also agrees with widely demonstrated research in which speakers of standard varieties of English tend to be rated most positively in terms of competence (traits such as intelligence and confidence). Considering that the light accent used in this study was near native English speaker’s pronunciation, and a trait of credibility can be considered as a part of competence [4], the result of present study may well be argued that it supports the above previous research.

There could be several possible reasons why the significant differences were only found between credibility scores given to light and heavy, and light and middle accents but not between middle and heavy accents. This may have occurred due to a small number of participants. However, apart from such a technical reason, there may be a case for saying that only a native-like

pronunciation is good enough to raise one's credibility.

Lev-Ari and Keysar's experiment [3] showed the similar result in which participants perceived recorded trivia statements by speakers with mild and heavy accent as less true than those by native speakers, but there was no significant difference between mild and heavy accents. They argue based on their outcome that people perceive information as less truthful when the speaker has an accent, because they tend to misattribute the difficulty of understanding the speech to the truthfulness of the statement. On the basis of the above, it could be argued that both middle and heavy accents in the present study were difficult to understand for the participants, and hence they attributed the difficulty of understanding the presentation to a reduced credibility. If this is a case, only a native-like, or a light accents are free from the possibility of disturbing the "processing fluency" [3: p.3] of the listeners, but both middle and heavy accents were equally perceived as difficult and therefore less credible.

Another possibility is that heaviness of accent might have caused listeners to get a preconceived idea that listening to the speech would be difficult, and led them to give generous scores to the one with heavy accent because of their sympathy towards the speaker who tries hard to speak an unfamiliar language. This might have raised the credibility scores given to heavily accented speech, and pushed them up closer to that of middle accent.

5.2 RQ2

For RQ2: "Does the listeners' language background affect their assessment of the credibility of speakers of accented English?" the results indicate that regardless of which language group the participants belong to, they all reacted in the same manner toward the Japanese-accented English, and found the light-accented English more credible than that with middle and heavy accents.

I raised the possibility that ESL and EFL speakers might be more sympathetic to the accented English than native English speakers and thus, give higher scores for middle and heavy accents than do native speakers. However, it turned out that was not the case. Even though the finding was unlike what I had hypothesised, the result of the present study is consistent with the widely accepted notion in the field of speech perception that standard varieties of English tend to be evaluated as more favourable than non-native varieties of English. This appears to be the case both when the judges are speakers

of standard varieties and when the judges speak non-standard varieties of English [29]. In fact, a study conducted by Eisenstein [21] revealed that non-native speakers were able to recognise accents as good as native speakers. He investigated the attitudes of English language learners in New York towards three varieties of US English: General American English, African American English and New York accent (a non-standard variety of English which is spoken in the city areas of New York). The results indicated that even novice adult ESL students were able to identify the accent differences in the utterances.

A research conducted by Munro, Derwing, and Morton [10] and Rossiter [30] also indicated that there were salient similarities in the ways in which native and non-native English speakers responded to utterances from native and non-native speakers. Results of these two studies suggest that non-native English speakers can identify foreign-accented English almost as good as native speakers, and tend to evaluate the accented speech in the same way as do the native speakers. These findings seem to give supportive reasons why there was no significant inter-group difference in the credibility scores in the present study.

Another possible interpretation of the result concerns the current English education in non-native English countries. Whether listeners are EFL or ESL, people tend to have learned English using native speakers' pronunciation as their models since they first encountered English. Consciously or unconsciously, this English education may have led the participants to choose only the native-like pronunciation as more credible. The result may imply that whether ESL or EFL, learners of English tend to look towards standard varieties of native English for "notions of correctness" [31: p.151].

6. CONCLUSIONS, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS, and LIMITATIONS

The results of the present study indicate that regardless of the language backgrounds, listeners evaluate the light accented speech as more credible than middle and heavy accents when listening to the English spoken by Japanese learners of English. This finding is consistent with studies in social psychology and global marketing literature that noted presenters speaking in standard varieties of English evoke more favourable judgements of credibility than presenters speaking a nonstandard or foreign-accented English.

The investigation also showed significant differences only between credibility scores given to light and heavy, and light and middle accents but not between middle and heavy accents. This finding is notable because it may suggest that only speakers with native-like and light accents are free from the possibility of reduced credibility. Furthermore, it was also found that this result applies to all the judges from different language backgrounds: 1) native speakers of English, 2) ESL and 3) EFL speakers. Despite their different levels of exposure to the English language, the three groups were unanimous in evaluating only the light accented English as highly credible.

These findings seem to suggest that only a native-like, or light accent can raise the credibility of the speaker and imply that if speakers are to raise their credibility only by pronunciation, they need to attain native-like pronunciation. In fact, several researches have overtly shown that General American English and Received Pronunciation are widely accepted and preferred by purchasers around the world [4] [22] [24] and present a very straight forward recommendation that "Prospective and practicing businesspersons who desire high levels of English-language accent acceptability around the world should develop either a General American English or a Received Pronunciation English accent for business purposes since these two accents are the most preferred accents for conducting business around the world." [1: 10].

However, aiming to improve students' English pronunciation to the level of the native standard seems neither realistic nor appropriate when teaching English at school in Japan. There are limited number of English classes, in which many other aspects of English other than pronunciation have to be taught as well, and thus teachers do not have adequate time to focus on teaching pronunciation at such a high level, not to mention that there are very few teachers who have actually learnt pronunciation instruction to those who learn English as a foreign language.

There is also a concern that teaching only native varieties of English as a goal might give an impression to the students that nonstandard, or foreign-accented English are not correct.

With the above concerns taken into consideration, however, it still seems to be fair to the students 1) to inform them that accents of English may be linked to the credibility that speakers can win from their interlocutors and 2) to teach both segmental and prosodic features of

English to raise students' awareness of their own pronunciation. Because the English language is ultimately a tool for communication and students will most likely have to use English once they join the global business community.

There are several limitations to this study. One problem may have resulted from using different speakers for each level of accentedness, rather than using a matched guise technique traditionally employed in the previous language attitude studies. As previously mentioned, the verbal guise technique utilised in this study does not control for paralinguistic differences in the speeches of different speakers. Small number of recorded business presentations also could have compromised the result. Participants could listen to only one speech for each of the three levels of accentedness. The number of recorded utterances was limited as it was felt that listener fatigue might compromise the validity of the data collected if more than three speech recordings of the required length were used. These limitations ought to be overcome in any future work.

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Appendix A.

Hypothetical Sales Presentation

Selling Water Reserve Land

Hi. I am Taka. Do you have time now? Well, let me talk to you for just a few minutes...

I would like to tell you about a really good investment. It's an investment in water rights. Well, it's not just ordinary water, but water full of good minerals, calcium and etcetera, etcetera.

Our company, TOKYO GOODWATER COMPANY owns massive land with water resources in Hokkaido. Hokkaido is located in the northernmost part of Japan, and 70% of its land is covered with forest. The land is full of nature and so does have good-quality of water.

It's not known to many people yet, but actually, many famous athletes, especially baseball players, drink this water. You know Ichiro, right? He drinks it, too!

Well, we are raising money for further development now, so that we can extract more water, and sell it to more people. You can be a shareholder of our company, and be an owner of this wonderful water!

You can start from buying just one share, you know. One share costs you just 1,000 dollars. It's a promising investment! Please think about it!

Appendix B.

Questionnaire

Based on the message you have just heard; give us your opinion of the speaker (salesperson) by circling the appropriate number.

1. If you had enough money, would you buy the product he is selling?

5 4 3 2 1
Yes Probably Yes Not sure Probably No No

2. Would you recommend this product to your friend?

5 4 3 2 1
Yes Probably Yes Not sure Probably No No

3. Would you recommend this salesperson to your friend?

5 4 3 2 1
Yes Probably Yes Not sure Probably No No

4. To what extent do you think this person can be seen as a trustworthy salesperson by his client?

Trustworthy 5 4 3 2 1 not trustworthy

5. How much credibility do you think there is in this person's talk? How willing are you to believe him?

Believable 5 4 3 2 1 not believable

6. In evaluating this salesperson, which of the following characteristics of his voice influenced you the most?

1. Intonation (ups and downs of the voice)
2. Speed
3. Accent
4. Don't know

7. Could you write down any comments on the speech? How was his salestalk? In what way can he improve the way he talks?