

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center- Mila**



**Institute of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Section: English**

**A Study on how Students' Self-perceived Accent Reflects on
their Grammar Competence**

The Case of First Year EFL Learners at the University Center of Mila

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the Master Degree in
Didactics of Foreign Languages

Presented by:

- 1) Zineb Ouichaoui
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Supervisor:

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Chairman: Dr. Fahima Nouichi
Supervisor: Dr. Nihad Laouar
Examiner: Prof. Leila Bellour

Academic year : 2022-2023

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Dedication I

*“First and foremost, I would like to thank God Almighty for guiding me
And giving me strength to accomplish this dissertation”*

I dedicate this work which is a fruit of arduous sacrifices to:

My parents for their unconditional love and support

Those who believed in me and taught me that it is never late to achieve my dreams

Zineb

Dedication II

First and foremost, I praise Almighty Allah for answering my prayers and giving me the tenacity to accomplish this work.

I hereby dedicate this dissertation to my beloved Mum whom my heart truly aches for, and my dear precious Padre who has supported me through every step of the way and provided for me within and beyond all of his capabilities. I, ultimately, dedicate this to my younger self.

Manar

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Abstract

The current study seeks to investigate students' self-perceived accent and how it influences their grammar competence. This study targets first-year EFL students at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University Centre. It aims to determine how the English accent is perceived by learners, in addition to investigating whether the way in which an accent is perceived affects learners' grammar competence. Accordingly, three research questions are raised. The first question is how EFL students at the University Center of Mila perceive their accent. The second question inquires if the way students perceive their accent influences their grammar competence. The final question looks at the reasons behind students' preference to focus on accent rather than grammar in EFL learning, and the implications of this choice on English language acquisition. In response to these questions, a descriptive method is opted for. Hence, a questionnaire was administered to seventy first year EFL students at the Department of Foreign Languages at the University Centre of Mila to obtain the necessary data. The findings reveal that the majority of first year students negatively perceive their accents which leads them to prioritize the acquirement of a native-like accent, and accidentally neglecting the importance of mastering grammar in EFL learning. Eventually, the research study provides a variety of recommendations for future research to add further insights to the present study.

Key words: self-perceived accent, grammar competence, first year EFL students, native accent, non-native accent.

List of Abbreviations and Symbols

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

Etc: Et Cetera (and others)

ESL: English as a Second Language

ELA: English language acquisition

GC: Grammar competence

L1: First language (mother tongue)

L2: Second language

FL: Foreign language

N.d: No date

NNS: Non-native speaker

NSs: Native Speakers

NS: Native speaker

Q: Question

SL: Second language

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Résumé

General Introduction

1. Literature Review

The current study concerns itself with exploring whether the way students perceive their accents hinders mastering major language aspects such as establishing their grammar competence; which, consequently, may negatively influence the proper process of mastering the English language. In this literature review, we are going to provide a comprehensive summary of certain previous studies that have a linear relationship to the topic being discussed at hand.

Shibata (2021) carried out a study to investigate whether or not speakers of English as a second language from Europe and Asia have a negative attitude towards their English accents as Japanese learners of English do. In this study, 260 college students from different nationalities were asked to rate their own English pronunciation by answering 10 statements. The responses were compared, and it was discovered that Japanese students perceive their English accent most negatively. “Based on the results, I claim that individual socio-contextual settings could have a critical impact on developing distinct attitudes toward one’s own accent among EFL speakers” (Shibata, 2021, p. 126). Nonetheless, a more comprehensive study would address or take into account how this negative attitude and perception towards learners’ own accents might affect or influence the process of learning English as a second language. Additionally, the number of participants from each country is not equally selected. That is to say that the research is not inclusive; it only included certain countries from Asia and Europe. Henceforth, our research is dedicated to add further insights and specifically unravel how first year Algerian students’ attitude towards their accents could have an adverse effect on their English language acquisition.

In the same vein, a study done by Norman (2017) examined whether Swedish students' communicative competence and speaking confidence is negatively or positively affected by the way they view their own English accent. For the sake of this investigation, a web-based survey was utilized to collect data and it was answered by 80 respondents from the second and third grade in an upper-secondary school. After interpreting the data, it was deduced that students believe that communicating effectively is far more crucial than having a native-like accent. According to Norman (2017) "It is somewhat conclusive that most of the students value communication over perceived accent, and many of them say that they do not care how they sound as long as what they say is conveyed" (p23). Whereas the author covered that learners' communication skills might be diminished due to their own perceptions towards their English accents, little attention has been paid to the different educational backgrounds of the chosen sample, since the participants were from separate grades, and how this could differently contribute to the results. Nevertheless, the present paper is related to our study in the sense that it tackles the effect of students' self-perceived English accent on their grammar competence, and the participating subjects are selected from the same level, namely first year.

Esteki and Rezazadeh (2009) investigate the phenomenon of how foreign users of English, who preserve the accent of their mother language, perceive their own accent while speaking, and the consequences of speaking with such an unconventional accent. In this regard, both the gender and proficiency level of the students were accounted for. Accordingly, thirty participants, taking an advanced level of proficiency course in a language institute of Khomeiny Shahr, undertook an interview along with a questionnaire in order to gather data from. As a result, female students were found to be more likely to acquire a native-like proficiency than males. Esteki and Rezazadeh (2009) stated that, "The findings of this research have direct

implications for the pronunciation classroom. This means that, “teachers need the knowledge and skills to provide pronunciation instruction that will be effective” (p.142). A major weakness of the study is that the authors offer no explanation of the consequences of speaking with that accent as they claimed, nor how they think it affects other aspects of learning English as a second language. Thus, the aim of our researchers is to look at the concept of self-perceived accent from a different perspective; which is how the perception of one’s own accent may affect their grammar competence.

An additional research paper conducted by Kias (2021), investigates the relationship between second language learners’ Willingness to communicate and their self-perceived accent at Mohammed Seddik Benyahia University of Jijel. A total of 70 participants were involved to answer the students’ questionnaire. The results showed that there is no relation between learners’ self-perceived accent and their second language willingness to communicate. Students appear to give more attention to accuracy rather than sounding like native speakers. Hence, students’ willingness to communicate using English is not restrained by how they perceive their accent (Kias, 2021). The study conducted in our present thesis is dissimilar to the previously mentioned one in the sense that it discusses the association between self-perceived accent and grammar competence, instead of its relation with second language learners’ willingness to communicate. A further element that makes the current study different from Kias’ study is the selection of the participants involved in the investigation; in which first year EFL learners are participating in our study instead of third year students.

Furthermore, another study was carried out by Phomprasert and Grace (2020) on the effect of accent on freshmen student’s ability to understand spoken English at Phetchabun Rajabhat University. In this matter, students were tested and the final results revealed that when

teachers switch their accents, the rate of learners' correct answers changes. In other words, students' listening ability changes depending on the accent they are taught with (Phomprasert & Grace, 2020). Accordingly, the previous findings can be functional to boost the strategies used to enhance students' English listening abilities for both an effective and productive teaching and learning process. However, the above mentioned study can only be considered as a first step towards a more profound understanding of the correlation between accent and learning English as an L2 which is discussed from another standpoint in the research paper at hand.

An interesting study with significant results done by Butler (2007) examined the impact of non-native English teachers' accents on students' listening comprehension at a Korean elementary school. Despite the fact that the widely known belief appears to suppose that nonnative accented English would negatively affect learners' oral skills, the results confirmed that student performance in terms of comprehension is completely uninfluenced by their perception towards their teachers' accent (Butler, 2007). This study focuses on a different skill, yet it remains significant to our research in the way that affects grammar in the same manner it affects listening. Moreover, the unexpected findings signal the need for additional studies to understand more about the implausibility of a real effect between accent and the English language learning process.

A further paper by Dong et al (2021) investigates the link between Chinese teenagers' awareness of their accents and their oral English speaking skills. This paper touched on the significance of language confidence, which strongly urges students not to be ashamed of their accents. Thus, it helps learners acquire their second language more effectively (Dong et al., 2021). One major drawback of this work is that it is specific to the Chinese English learners. Consequently, the present study may not be generalized to speakers of other countries. In other

words, people of different backgrounds may focus on different components of language. For instance, learners of a country that pay more attention to accent may assess their accent differently in comparison to learners of another country that focus more on grammar.

In the context of the current study, Behrens and Neemen (2004) conducted a research in which they provided data about how college students assessed and judged other students' personality based solely on their accent. The research discussed how both teachers and peers should not let their biased or predetermined idea about a speaker interfere with their judgment. It also asserted that "Peer acceptance or lack of it can have a real influence on learning" (Behrens & Neemen, 2004, Conclusion section, para. 1). However, in this research, the focus falls upon the way EFL students' self-regard their own accents, and how the presence or absence of self-acceptance could impact learning the language. Hence, students might end up with a burden of perfecting their English accent which might affect the proper process of learning English as a second language, as they are likely to neglect learning more essential aspects such as grammar.

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, these studies highlight the need for further exploration regarding this area of research. That is to say that future research could focus on other aspects of language such as grammar; more precisely, EFL students' grammar competence. Furthermore, this investigation looks more deeply into some factors that influence language acquisition; and as one of the influential factors, accent should be placed at the top of the list. As this study will show, the core of this research is to investigate the impact of learners' self-perceived accent on their grammar competence.

2. Statement of the Problem

According to Newby (2000), Learning a second or foreign language has traditionally emphasized the study of the grammar of that language; in order for the learner to construct a solid competence in grammar and be able to produce grammatically correct utterances. However, in recent times, the focus seems to have shifted to learning a language merely for communication and social interaction purposes, which may lead students to pay more attention to their accents and the way they speak.

Despite the fact that a growing number of individuals are starting to learn a second language, acquiring a proper non-native accent is an unavoidable situation that everybody would come across. As a matter of fact, the anxiety that students experience when learning a new language could lead to a lack of self-confidence. The latter may incredibly influence the process of second language acquisition (Dong et al., 2021). This means that learners are conscious of how their accents sound when speaking using a new language. Furthermore, the non-native accent obtained during the learning of a second language may interfere negatively by causing a deceleration in L2 mastery.

Furthermore, generating a positive or negative attitude towards one's own accent might have some influences on the speaker. This implies that EFL learners who would like to reach perfection when it comes to pronunciation, may start to prioritize improving their accents at expense of other language aspects; specifically grammar. Supposedly, EFL students, especially beginners, may encounter several different obstacles in terms of what to focus on when learning the language; whether to give more importance to the accent they speak or to the correctness of the grammar they produce. Hence, the crux of the problem which the current study revolves around, is to determine whether students' attitudes towards their accents' quality affects their grammar competence in the process of acquiring English as a second language.

3. Aim of the Study

This research attempts to bring to the surface the relationship between EFL students' self-perceived accent and their grammar competence. This implies that our study sets out to investigate whether the level of importance that learners attach to accent would indirectly influence the process of learning language items, specifically grammar. Moreover, the current study explores the reasons behind students' interests in accent while giving no significant importance to grammar, which serves as the backbone of English language learning. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to draw attention to the lack of research inquiring the connection between self-perceived accent and grammar competence in English language acquisition.

4. Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study stems from its being concerned with the concept of accent which is a key constituent of any language that has gained a vital role in EFL teaching and learning. Moreover, this research attains its importance from the fact that it takes heed of grammar as one variable to be thoroughly examined. Presumably, much emphasis is paid to investigating the influence of students' accents on various language aspects; yet, little work has focused on the impact of learners' accents on their grammar competence. This happens to be the main focus of the study at hand, so as to expand our understanding of the topic. This research also sheds light on the reasons behind learners' preferences to concentrate on accent rather than grammar. By highlighting the causes, this study is likely to facilitate addressing such issues, and in turn, enhance the learning process. Overall, this thesis is designed to raise educational and pedagogical awareness on the part of students towards setting their priorities in regard to accent and grammar in EFL learning.

5. Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do EFL students at Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila perceive their accent?
- How does the way students perceive their accent influence their grammar competence?
- What are the reasons behind students' preference to focus on accent rather than grammar in EFL learning, and what are the implications of this choice on ELA?

6. Means of the Research

In order to reach the research aims and answer the research questions, the study opts for a quantitative research method by utilizing a questionnaire as a means of research. The questionnaire contains both close-ended and open-ended question, and it is addressed to students

The students' questionnaire is administered to first year EFL students, at the Department of Foreign Languages, Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila who constitute the population being examined. The questionnaire was distributed face to face in the form of hard copies, and online through Google forms, in order to obtain the data required for the completion of this work. The sample with which the questionnaire is concerned consists of 70 first year subjects representing a target population of 197 students in total. It is designed with the aim of determining whether students' perceptions toward their accents' quality affect their grammar competence while acquiring English as a second or foreign language.

7. Structure of the dissertation

The current dissertation comprises two chapters. The first chapter is entitled “The Theoretical Part”, it consists of two sections. The first section, “EFL Learners’ self-perceived Accent” provides theoretical insights into the first variable of this study. First, it introduces the definition of accent, referring to its types and the developments of different accents. It also touches on the definition of self-perceived accent and differentiates it from dialect and pronunciation, as well as comparing between nativeness and intelligibility, in addition to the main factors affecting accent acquisition. Moreover, the present chapter deals with the factors affecting foreign accent acquisition, the effect of accent on interaction and accent discrimination. The second section “Grammar Competence” is devoted to discuss general aspects about grammar, starting with a variety of its definitions and its two types (written and spoken grammar), as well as the definition of grammar competence. Further to this, it addresses the features of the formation of grammar competence; then, it accounts for the importance of GC in learning a foreign language. It also exposes the different approaches (explicit and implicit) and methods of teaching grammar. Lastly, it introduces the types of grammar instruction and a brief comparison between accuracy and fluency.

The second chapter is dedicated to provide a description of the field work of the present research. It sets out to answer the raised research questions in an attempt to achieve the aims of the current study. Then, the research methodology provides a thorough description of the students’ questionnaire. In the same vein, a major consideration is paid to the analysis and interpretation of the main findings. This chapter concludes with presenting some of the main limitations of the study, along with various pedagogical recommendations for future research.

Chapter One: Self-perceived Accent and Grammar Competence in EFL Learning

Introduction

In linguistics, language is a highly complex, flexible, and structured system of words or signs used for human interaction. It allows humans to express thoughts, feelings, and also to share information and needs in the form of spoken or written symbols. Every language has its own grammar that enables its interlocutors to create and produce correct utterances. Grammar plays a vital part in language learning; thus, when acquiring a second or foreign language, it is fundamental that learners acquire its grammar because it is regarded as a primary component to attain proficiency, and without the suitable knowledge of grammar competence learners cannot appropriately use the language. Batstone (1994) states that language would be chaotic without grammar. Hence, the mastery of grammatical competence is essential for the success of learners in acquiring a language.

Along with learning English as a foreign language, many students aim to perfect a native-like accent from the various resources at their disposal. Along with their teachers, who they initially mimic in class, they also try to emulate their accents by watching films, videos, and listening to music. However, these students occasionally run into numerous issues and challenges during the process of accent acquisition which lead them to acquire a foreign accent. Learners' native-like or non-native accent may influence their EFL learning process on many levels.

1.1. Section One: EFL Learners' self-perceived Accent

Introduction

This section introduces the definition of accent, referring to its types and the developments of different accents. It also touches on what is meant by “self-perceived accent” and differentiates it from dialect and pronunciation, as well as comparing between nativeness and intelligibility, in addition to the main factors affecting accent acquisition. Moreover, the present chapter deals with the factors affecting foreign accent acquisition, the effect of accent on interaction and accent discrimination.

1.1.1. Defining Accent

Although the term “accent” is of a common use, accents and attitudes about them prove to be a complex element of spoken language which cannot be illustrated easily. A large number of definitions can be associated with it depending on the context in which it is used. However, what is commonly agreed upon is the etymology of this term. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, accent is of a Latin origin, derived from “accentus” which means in English is “the intonation of singing” (n.d.). As Crystal puts it, an accent refers to “features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regionally or socially” (2008, p. 30). It is similarly defined in Britannica Dictionary indicating that accent is a way of pronouncing words that occurs among the people in a particular region or country (n.d.). This denotes the fact that the term accent is associated with pronunciation only; tied at most to phonology. However, it has a lot to uncover about where a person is from, his social class, social identity, and whether he is native or non-native speaker.

In line with this, Becker provides another definition; for him, “an accent is the part of a persons’ language that serves to identify the speaker’s regional origin or national ethnic identity no matter what language the person is speaking.”(1995, p. 37). To put it differently, humans, by nature, seek to distinguish themselves by various means including language as a crucial one.

Since accent is a vital feature of the language, it functions as a tool to identify speakers as either native or foreign, belonging to distinguishable social classes, or coming from different regional and cultural backgrounds (Giles, 1979). In this manner, an accent assumes the role of a badge for social identity as well as a feature that can indicate the similarities and differences between speakers' speech.

In accordance with the previously mentioned definitions, the term accent can be illustrated in two distinguishable ways. Accent is defined broadly by Crystal, as it is mentioned above. However, Scovel explained it in the narrower sense as “phonological cues...which identify the speaker as a non-native user of the language.” (1969, p. 38). Everyone with a basic understanding of languages should be able to see the logic behind the broad definition, while it is significant to note that the narrow meaning is considerably more frequently utilized. The broad definition by Crystal demonstrates that anyone has an accent no matter what language they speak. Following the second definition by Scovel, determined by the language in question, some speakers of a language have accents while others do not (Mickinney, 2022).

All in all, an accent is a sort of a language pronunciation. Hence, speaking without an accent is inconceivable. Despite the fact that many people may believe that they are accentless, each person has an accent which arises from how, where and when they acquired the language in use. Furthermore, speaking without revealing something through accent is out of the question; an accent may disclose several facts about the speaker including some clues about a person's native country such as speaking English with a French accent or English with an Indian accent.

1.1.2. Languages' Development of Different Accents

By nature, humans tend to behave in a variety of ways similar to those with whom they associate. This imitation appears in all aspects of life such as the type of food, the style of

clothing, including the language in use. Further to this, whenever social groups change, their ways of speaking follow the same pattern. This occurs socially and geographically, but is easiest to explain through geographical differences. Once a single group separates into two, their accents will vary over generations in different ways. Remaining apart for centuries may give rise to considerable variations in the groups' accents for centuries, leading to believe that they are speaking two different languages. ("Ask a Linguist FAQ: Accents", n.d.). In addition, Accent variation is a result of many independent factors. Starting with the first generation of children of a particular language, they grew up together developing the same accent which represents their own identity. In fact, this generations' accent is inspired from the adults around them causing the creation of their own accent. ("Ask a Linguist FAQ: Accents", n.d.).

In the same vein, if the same social group moves to a new region as English speakers did to America, Australia and New Zealand, that group often acquires various accents in an unconscious manner. The children will fabricate their own accent out of the combination of accents that they hear. For instance, the arrival of a huge percentage of the early English-speaking settlers of New Zealand from Australia gave rise to a resemblance in terms of accents between New Zealand and Australia. In other words, the mixture found in the speech of the settlers of a new place determines the type of accent that their children will generate. However, the first generation born in the new place will not keep the diversity of their parents' generation -- they will adopt identical accents to the others of their age group. as an example, if man from New York (US) marries woman from Glasgow (Scotland, UK), and this couple raise an infant in Leeds (England, UK), the infant will acquire the accent of his mates at school which varies from his parents' accents. ("Ask a Linguist FAQ: Accents", n.d.).

In a nutshell, no language is spoken with one accent; there are various accents for each language. English is nothing out of the ordinary. This means that people that belong to the same region do not necessarily have the same accent. As time passes, languages are exposed to many changes in terms of grammar, vocabulary and even accent.

1.1.3. Types of Accents

In the context of the present study, accent is defined, according to Betty Birner, as the way a person sounds when speaking. Accents are divided into two main types (1999, p. 3). The first type is known as a 'foreign' accent which appears when applying few rules and sounds of a language to speak another one. For instance, when second language learners face difficulties in some sounds' pronunciation, they may replace these sounds with similar ones that belong to their first language. For the language's native speakers, this seems incorrect, or 'foreign'(Birner, 1999). The second type of accent refers to the way in which a group of people pronounce their native language which is controlled by the place of residence and whose social groupings they are a part of (Birner, 1999). This implies that individuals who belong to the same group sharing the same living area tend to develop the same accent which helps them to detect different accents from theirs. This leads us to deduce that everyone has an accent according to someone else's viewpoint.

1.1.4. Accent in Second Language Acquisition

1.1.4.1. Self-perceived-Accent. According to the Britannica Dictionary, self-perception is the way a person judges himself which is usually dissimilar from other peoples' perception toward him (n.d.).The APA Dictionary of Psychology provides another identical definition indicating that it is “a person's view of his or herself or any of the mental or physical attributes

that constitute the self. Such a view may involve genuine self-knowledge or varying degrees of distortion” (n.d.). In other words, a person tends to scan every feature about themselves in the same way they do to the people they are surrounded by. As a result, one's ideas about their own accent as L2 learners might be regarded as their own self-perception of their accent. As a result, one's ideas about their own accent as L2 learners might be regarded as their own self-perception of their accent.

As a matter of fact, the various views people hold about themselves regarding their competencies, aptitudes, and their strengths and flaws have a strong impact on the quality of performance, level of effort, and the readiness degree to involve in any piece of work in the future (Shapka & Khan, 2018). As such, the present study examines the way in which second language learners perceive their English accent and its influence on the quality of their grammar competence

1.1.4.2. Accent vs. Dialect. Learners of foreign languages tend to misinterpret the terms "accent" and "dialect," employing them synonymously despite the fact that these two terms have very different connotations. In order to demonstrate to learners how to use both words appropriately, it is crucial to make a clear distinction between these two terms. Dialect is “a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language” (n.d.). It is also defined as “the way someone pronounces the words of a language, showing which country they come from ” (n.d.). Therefore, Accent is only dependent on pronunciation, whereas a specific dialect is identified by its phonological sounds, variations in grammar and lexicon, and pronunciation differences (Skibdahl & Svensäter, 2012, p. 11). Briefly, dialects are far more closely related to the idea of language than accent.

1.1.4.3. Accent vs. Pronunciation. Developing oral skills requires a strong emphasis on pronunciation. As stated in Collins English Dictionary, pronunciation is “the act or manner of pronouncing syllables, words, and phrases with regard to the production of sounds and the placing of stress, intonation, etc.” (“Pronunciation Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary,” 2023). It is also defined in Oxford Learners Dictionaries as “the way in which a language or a particular word or sound is pronounced” (n.d.). In this regard, the fundamental objective of learning pronunciation is to enable the learner to pronounce foreign words and sentences accurately in order to ensure their conversation partners can comprehend them. This means that if the learner can pronounce a language correctly and accurately, others will be able to understand him.

Accent is entirely distinct from pronunciation because the goal of accent acquisition for language learners is to speak a foreign language exactly like native speakers. Additionally, no non-native speaker can learn a native accent; only those who are exposed to a native accent as a young child may do so (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2009). In other words, the only way for a non-native EFL learner to acquire a native accent is if they were exposed to one in their early stages of life; it is not possible for others to achieve this.

1.1.4.4. Nativeness vs. Intelligibility. The notions of nativeness of language and intelligibility have been continuously integrated into different studies on pronunciation. In fact, the concept of "nativeness" is deeply connected to language learners' urge to develop a foreign language accent. Before 1960, this was the prevalent theory in pronunciation instruction. Later on, when studies revealed that native pronunciation biologically emerged before childhood, this perspective lost significance because striving for nativeness became an unreasonable demand for learners as well

as teachers. This produced a profound effect on the intended goals of teaching foreign languages (Levis, 2005).

Intelligibility, on the other hand, is defined as the degree to which a speaker can be understood and whether the words they employ can successfully be decoded (What Is Intelligibility | IGI Global, n.d.). As a result, intelligibility is seen as the primary goal of pronunciation teaching as the learner will be easier to comprehend by others if his or her pronunciation is more precise. Moreover, Skibdahl and Svensäter (2012) declared that accents and comprehension do not necessarily correlate with one another. However, Moyer (1999) stated that the nativeness concept continues to have an impact on pronunciation instruction in classrooms, where students strive to influence and change their non-native accents. (as cited in Skibdahl & Svensäter, 2012, p. 19). In this regard, numerous teachers view speakers who have attained a native-like accent as the ideal. Others make a concerted effort to increase their students' intelligibility levels assuming that doing so will suffice to ensure that the student speaks clearly and precisely.

1.1.4.5. Factors Affecting Foreign Accent Acquisition. In the field of Second Language Acquisition, it is a matter of fact that accent is a crucial element that has been put under investigation in order to embrace it totally in terms of nature, significance, and impact. Within the boundaries of language learning, one main target of some learning methods, like audio-lingualism, is to reach a similar accent to that of native speakers. However, this ambition is left out of reach for L2 speakers (Moyer, 2004, p. 502). This means that tremendous challenges are likely to face learners in order to reach such a goal.

In line with the idea of the difficulties faced by learners in foreign accent acquisition, Birner (1999,) points out that “People have trouble with sounds that don't exist in the language (or languages) that they first learned as a young child” (P3). This claim refers to the fact that humans are born with the ability to create and recognize every sound used in every human language. However, this ability vanishes as the baby starts to learn which sounds in his or her language are significant in order to ignore the rest. When the baby turns a year old, they figure out how to overlook the majority of differences among sounds that are unimportant in his native tongue (Birner, 1999). Indeed, learning the sounds of a foreign language becomes more challenging as a person matures. The same author offered a clearly detailed explanation of this phenomenon by including examples about German people. He denotes that

German speakers learning English, for example, are likely to have trouble with the sounds found at the beginning of the words wish and this, because those sounds don't exist in German. So they may pronounce them instead as v and z similar sounds that do occur in German. (1999, p. 3)

In this regard, Mickinney (2022) stresses the differences between childhood and adult acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and many other aspects of language, addressing it as the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). This theory suggests that there is a sensitive period for learning the phonology of a second language. During this period, a child involved in a new linguistic environment will typically sound unrecognizable from native speakers in a fairly brief time frame, whereas adults acquiring a new language are likely to sound divergent, irrespective of the degree of exposure they have (Mickinney, 2022). Probably the most significant conclusion that can be drawn from this is the fact that it is typical and expected for grownups who are learning a second language to sound different from native speakers.

In the same line, Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009) note that total native likeness does not arise in late learners. In other words, it is unattainable for an adult language learner to sound exactly like someone who learned the same language at an early age. Additionally, numerous case studies of native-sounding adult language learners did not actually conduct an in-depth research and slip up on noteworthy childhood exposure (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam , 2009). This highlights how crucial it is to convey that accents are typical and acceptable for people who are acquiring a new tongue. In fact, it is unrealistic for L2 learners to seek a flawless native accent. Precisely, it is almost infeasible to obtain an accent that resembles a native one excluding a few distinct situations where learners are supplied, purposefully or accidentally, with perfect circumstances to achieve that goal (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Furthermore, Long (1990) notes, concerning the critical period hypothesis, that some of these circumstances are not totally controlled and unavailable for all L2 learners, such as age and the length of the residual period in a native country (p. 266-274).

In regard to second language learning, non-native speakers tend to face different obstacles in the production of some sounds, especially with those that do not occur in the speaker's native language. Birnner (1999) served a clearly detailed explanation of this phenomenon by including an example about German people. He denotes that "German speakers learning English, for example, are likely to have trouble with the sounds found at the beginning of the words wish and this, because those sounds don't exist in German. So they may pronounce them instead as v and z similar sounds that do occur in German" (1999, p. 3). Indistinguishable obstacles are faced by many foreign language learners of variant backgrounds all around the world.

1.1.4.6. The Effect of Accent on Interaction. Speaking with a non-native accent does not necessarily inhibit communication; many non-native speakers communicate in a more effective way than native speakers. Of note, Non-natives who are excellent communicators in their new language are all around, despite the fact that non-native adults who speak exactly like natives are hardly ever encountered (Mickinney, 2022). Likewise, Munro and Derwing (1995) contend that non-native speech can be analyzed according to the interaction between three core elements: accentedness, intelligibility, and comprehensibility. With regard to this perspective, "accentedness" describes how someone sounds distinctively, "intelligibility" depicts our capacity for understanding, and "comprehensibility" reflects how simple it is for us to comprehend. Munro and Derwing were successful in proving that there is no clear link between accentedness and intelligibility through this three-way split. This means that speakers can be totally understood despite their non-native accent, displaying that accent does not influence the process of exchanging thoughts, while by definition, intelligibility does. Munro and Derwing also developed the concept of "comprehensibility" to demonstrate that ease of understanding plays a part in a listener's capacity to concentrate on a speaker's message. Therefore, the widely held belief that the accent of a foreign speaker affects the extent of understanding of the listener is baseless and cannot be relied upon.

1.1.4.7. Accent Discrimination. Regarding this study, it is needed to illustrate a specific key concept which is known as "accent strength". This element is defined by Munro and Derwing (2001) as the degree of difference, in terms of phonetics, between utterances produced by L2 learners and those produced by native speakers (p. 454). This phenomenon appears due to the interference of the sound system of L1 on the speech production of L2. Needless to say, Accent strength serves as an indicator that the speaker is non-native. It also determines how L2

speakers are perceived and how they communicate with others (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Moreover, L2 learners often find themselves facing discrimination, rejection and judgments due to speaking with a nonnative accent. Briefly, an accent can serve as a bridge for further interactions or lead a person to experience being unheard, misunderstood, or discriminated against (Moyer, 2013, p. 15).

As a matter of fact, all people of different linguistic backgrounds have an accent. Still, accented speech is not preferred for them (Derwing, 2003, p. 548). This implies that accented speech is negatively perceived by native speakers of a language. Several studies have been conducted concerning the way NNSs' accent is perceived, such as the studies of Brennan and Brennan (1981), Nesdale and Rooney (1996), and Ryan and Carranza (1975). The results were matched, indicating that NNSs were viewed by native speakers as unintelligent, incompetent, poor, slow-minded and less qualified. Another study reported that the listener's attitudes toward the speaker are significantly determined by the latter's non-native accent; the more the mother language affects the L2 speech output, the less desirable the attitude is with which the speaker is met (Beinhoff, 2014). This evidences the idea that SL learners are inclined to face significant obstacles due to their non-native accent.

It is noteworthy that not only non-native speakers are subject to the neglect of what goes against the grain or the norm. Discrimination occurs even with native speakers who have distinctive dialects and accents (Derwing, 2003, p. 549). These data support the assertion that it is only ordinary for such social stereotypes of hostility against anything outside the norm, whether native or non-native, to be repeated in the outer circle and more remarkably in the expanding circle (Kachru, 1990).

Undoubtedly, everyone has an accent, and, presumably, no accent is inherently superior to any other (Derwing & Munro, 2008, p. 476). Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated that departing from what is seen as elite or standard can have serious repercussions. People make snap judgments about others based on their accents, which frequently leads to immediate, automatic, and perhaps unconscious social categorization (Hogenboom, 2018). This denotes that accent is a core element that leads to assuming the speaker's characteristics and identity. However, aiming for a native accent is no longer a valid goal, especially with the increasing number of NNSs. Unfortunately, this belief is faced by vicious and baseless deviance; nativism still imposing its dominance over English-speaking communities (Jenkins, 2007, p. 10). The question raised is whether accent still matters within the instant state of world globalization and the ever-increasing number of L2 learners (Kachru & Nelson, 1995). In responding to some experts who believe that ideal of the standard is no longer existent, Moyer reported that “the salience of accent is both immediate and real, it is the means by which we make ourselves understood, and the yardstick by which others judge us whether we like it or not” (2013, p. 8). In other words, no matter what aspects of language an EFL learner is fully aware of, a native accent is and will remain the scale by which foreign speakers are rated.

In the EFL setting, where teaching and learning materials predominate over books, English learning programs, the web, the media, etc., Standard British and General American accents comprise the most probable varieties to be characterized as the supreme, correct, and prominent ideal (Butler, 2007, p. 5; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck, & Smit, 1997; Lippi-Green, 1997; Moyer, 2013, p. 8). Theoretically, L2 learners are not compelled to sound like native speakers, only language’ clarity and correctness is demanded. L2 learners are expected to be able to convey messages clearly and correctly; both teachers and scholars deem this to be an

equitable requirement for their students (Moyer, 2013, p. 6). In the same line of thought, Jenkins (2000) indicated that there is “nothing intrinsically wrong with L2 pronunciation that does not conform to a NS [native speaker] accent but varies in the direction of the speaker’s own L1” (p, 206). The grim reality, though, clearly depicts that this may not be the case; learners still struggle reaching a native like accent in order to be ranked on line with native speakers (NSs).

In the same vein, accent has proven to be one of the main contributors to miscommunication, prejudice, and racism. It has been referred to as a sort of disease that necessitates being treated (Derwing & Munro, 2008). Further to this, the listener's impression of the non-native speakers' socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, degree, cultural background, etc. are one of the main influences for bias towards a specific accent. In addition, NNSs around the world are evaluated for their accents instead of getting recognized for the issues at hand they have to discuss (Moyer, 2013, p. 2). As such, it is merely logical to infer that the combination of the previously mentioned factors drove L2 speakers to look for ways to adjust their accent in order to lessen the pressure that is associated with possessing a foreign accent.

It is of no surprise that these negative perceptions of accented English, coupled with the persistent effort of non-native speakers to be recognized as competent members of the target language, the desire to prevent linguistic discrimination, the never-ending struggle against accent negative stereotypes, and so many other mental, socioeconomic, and cultural aspects at play, have caused L2 learners to dive into a big-picture of drawing comparisons with native speakers. Thus, NNSs continue to assess their own speech production using this conceptual framework (Kachru & Nelson, 1996, p. 80). In this regard, such a comparison diverts L2 learners' spotlight away from emphasizing their identity as foreign language speakers. Moreover, it can be a pointless endeavor to attempt to sound like someone who is socially and culturally irrelevant to

the context of EFL learning, rather than increasing other linguistic qualities such as fluency and grammar competence. As such, the NNSs linguistic insecurity, which is a threatening attitude in learning any language, may have an indirect impact on the learning process in general and grammar competence in particular.

Conclusion

An English native-like accent is the aim that any specialized learner in EFL wants to achieve but not all learners succeed in acquiring one. Thus, a significant number of students end-up with having a foreign accent which is either slightly or highly different from the one that is spoken by natives. In fact, learners' native-like or non-native accent may influence their EFL learning process on many levels.

1.2. Section Two: Grammar Competence

Introduction

This section is devoted to discuss general aspects about grammar, starting with a variety of its definitions and its two types (written and spoken grammar), as well as the definition of grammar competence. In addition, it addresses the features of the formation of grammar competence, and then it accounts for the importance of GC in learning a foreign language. It also exposes the different approaches (explicit and implicit) as well as methods of teaching grammar. Lastly, it introduces the types of grammar instruction and a brief comparison between accuracy and fluency.

1.2.1. Definition of Grammar

The concept of grammar has been the topic of several studies since it is considered as one of the most controversial aspects of language learning and teaching. Hence, many definitions and views have been given by different scholars. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, Grammar originated from the Greek word “Grammatikḗ” which resulted from the combination of two words; “Gram” meaning written, and “tikḗ” meaning art. Therefore, grammar indicates the art of writing. It is deemed as a vague notion since it comprises numerous concepts that are hard to detain in one definition.

Oxford English Dictionary defines grammar as “the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics” (Oxford Reference, n.d.). Likewise, Clark (2008) in his own definition points out that grammar is the system of language that holds a mixture of the different aspects of a language; phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexicon, that are required for the formation and comprehension of sentences. This is also ratified by Radford (2009) who states that grammar is conventionally subdivided into two different but correlated areas of study which are morphology and syntax. On the one hand, morphology is the study of construction of words and their relationship to other words. On the other hand, syntax is depicted as the system of rules that curb the way to create meaningful sentences.

Moreover, Richards and Schmidt (2010) said that grammar is "a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language" (p. 251). Similarly, Ur (1988) referred to grammar as the way words are put together to make correct sentences; it is also a set of rules that control how words can be combined to form meaningful units within a language. She then added

that “we may say that a learner who ‘knows grammar’ is one who has mastered and can apply these rules to express him or herself in what would be acceptable language forms” (p.4). Both of these definitions show that grammar portrays a crucial part in putting together units of language to create sentences, and these sentences can be grammatically acceptable if they follow the rules of grammar. Accordingly, Thornbury (1999) on his part regards grammar as “the study of what forms (or structures) are possible in a language (...) Thus a grammar is a description of the rules that govern how a language’s sentences are formed” (p.1) Hence, grammar is connected to a wide set of rules that manage and regulate a language. Besides, it does not only concern itself with the study of sounds, words, sentences, texts, but also the study of the meaning that these grammar forms convey.

Furthermore, Thornbury (2005) amplifies his previous definition by including the functional dimension and perceiving grammar as a process for making communication clear when contextual knowledge is absent. Additionally, Newby (2008) points out that “Grammar is a speaker’s knowledge of all the contrasts of meaning that it is possible to make within one sentence and his/her ability to use this knowledge in contexts” (p. 3). This means that grammar is both a competence; the knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language, and a performance; the aptitude or capacity to use this knowledge in real contexts when communicating.

In regard to grammar teaching and learning, Ellis (2006) states that many EFL students believe that learning grammar helps them acquire an academic understanding of the language; thus, making them confident and at ease when using the language. According to him, teaching grammar

Teaching grammar involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it. (p. 84)

Likewise, Singh (2008) emphasizes that grammar instruction is the teaching of grammar rules as a part of language education. Another definition by Larsen-Freeman (1991) explains the teaching of grammar as "enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately" (p. 280). Therefore, it can be seen that grammar and language teaching underline the appropriate, meaningful, and accurate implementation of linguistic forms.

To sum up, grammar is defined and comprehended differently from the perspectives of many scholars. However, it can be briefly described as a collection of rules that governs and guides the use and application of language to form meaningful sentences and communicate effectively.

1.2.2. Written and Spoken Grammar

Grammar can be found in both written and spoken language and discourse. There are various definitions of written and spoken grammar; accordingly, Harmer (2001), and Horowitz and Samuels (1987) explained briefly, and set a distinction between the two concepts.

1.2.2.1. Written Grammar. Written grammar depicts the way to generate written language. It is well recognized and common for written texts to contain grammatical sentences, which in return comprise subjects and verbs in most cases. Usually, these two components require an object, a complement, or an adverbial phrase in order to accomplish a complete sentence (Harmer, 2001). Further to this, Horowitz and Samuels (1987) added that written

grammar is generally associated with written language which is described as formal, academic, and planned, and it is generally found in books and prose that are found in schools.

1.2.2.2. Spoken Grammar. Spoken grammar is defined by Paterson (2011) as “a set of grammatical items restricted to or particularly common in spoken English and some types of writing that mimic the spoken style” (p.1). Moreover, the absence of grammatical rules can be observed during informal situations as Harmer (2001) stated, “What is perhaps more interesting is that certain grammatical rules seem to be completely ignored” (p.14). He then added that spoken grammar varies in terms of its own principles and discourse markers such as interjections (oh, wow, ah...), hesitation forms (er, umm...), response forms (yeah, nah...) and so on. Thanh (2015) asserted that,

It should be recognized that normally, when people speak, they often do not pay much attention to the words, sentences, structures or conjunctions. As a result, grammar in spoken language is usually not strict; it is less rigid and more flexible than in writing. (p.142)

To put it differently, in spoken language, the interlocutors tend to speak spontaneously without giving much thought to the structure of their speech. This could imply that EFL learners speak English freely since they are not restricted by grammar rules which can cause a decline in the process of learning grammar.

1.2.3. Definition of Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence, also known as linguistic competence, was introduced by Noam Chomsky (1965) as the theoretical and empirical knowledge of grammatical regulations. Having this knowledge qualifies for the production of an immense number of correct utterances.

Following Chomsky's linguistic competence, Canal and Swain (1980, 1981) described grammatical competence as understanding and being aware of the linguistic codes of a language including its vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, word formation, and also the capacity to correctly and accurately handle and operate its patterns and structures. Also, Barman (2014) says that grammatical competence is the ability to fathom the diverse grammatical instructions. Back to Canal and Swain (1980), they added that grammatical competence comprises "knowledge of lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology" (p. 29). This implies that grammatical competence is the ability to have the proper knowledge about language, and to be able to produce well-constructed utterances and sentences that correspond with a collection of grammatical rules that govern a language.

In the context of acquiring a foreign language, it can be suggested that grammatical competence is a series of theoretical knowledge, or rules, and language skills that are imperative for learners to produce accurate sentences, in order to grasp them, observe grammar mistakes, decide whether linguistic structures are right or wrong, and lastly, to perform language testing tasks. Furthermore, Barman (2014) states that grammatical competence is "the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication (...) the knowledge of how words of English are arranged into meaningful sequences" (p.5). According to Barman (2014) grammatical competence is a part of communicative competence, and it comprises phonological competence, lexical competence and discourse competence along with grammatical competence. Each of these genres has different features, yet all of them contain components that are necessary to form cohesive texts and other components necessary to make important points prominent. Although this competence relates to other competences, it especially connects with lexical and phonological competence.

1.2.4. Formation of Grammatical Competence

In the most general form, grammar competence refers to learners' ability to use their grammar knowledge and skills of a language to construct and produce an unlimited number of meaningful and accurate sentences in the process of communicating effectively in that same language. Mukhtarov (2020) explained the process of the formation of grammar competence as the following; in order for this grammar competence to be acquired and developed, three of its major elements should be formed:

The ability to understand and formalize certain semantic units in the form of statements constructed according to the rules of the foreign language being studied; Formed knowledge of grammatical rules, according to which the sequence of lexical units of a foreign language is transformed into a meaningful utterance; Formed skills and abilities that allow the speaker to adequately use the grammatical phenomena of the language being studied in accordance with the communication situation and the communicative tasks of the given language speech act. (p. 121-122)

Hence, the formation of grammar competence requires learners to be aware of, comprehend, and produce meaningful entities. These entities should correspond to the grammar rules, the lexical pattern, and the communication context of the language in question.

In this light, it can be observed that there are certain mechanisms that help in the success of the formation of grammar competence. On the one hand, there are communicative mechanisms. This type includes using directly the grammatical instructions of the language when speaking, while considering the communication circumstances and communication tasks. These

mechanisms can be developed in learners with the aid of specific teaching methods and techniques. On the other hand, there are what is called cognitive mechanisms. This kind of mechanism is associated with intellectual processes that students effectuate or carry out when formulating grammatically adequate sentences. In addition, the cognitive mechanisms of grammatical competence are concerned with assisting learners in developing their grammar skills. ,

1.2.4.1. Grammar Skills. A skill is defined by Richards and Schmidt (2010) as cited in Rhalmi (2019) as “an acquired ability to perform an activity well, usually one that is made of a number of coordinated processes” (p.532). Therefore, grammar skills indicate the learner’s ability to use his or her knowledge of grammatical rules to conduct an activity correctly. Skill formation can be recognized from the quality of the performance.

1.2.4.1.1. Stages of the Development of Grammar Skills. According to Li (2018), the development of grammar skills goes through five main stages namely; preparatory, elementary, integrating, systematizing communication, and concluding stage.

1.2.4.1.1.1. Preparatory Stage. It indicates previously attained knowledge of grammar instruction. When learning new grammar materials, students prepare psychologically to welcome new information related to a specific event. Throughout this stage, teachers’ mission is to emphasize the goal of the lesson, which is studying a new grammatical form, by prompting learners’ interest and attracting their attention to it (Ross & Ma, 2017). Consequently, learners recall their prior acquired knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and merge it with the new information.

1.2.4.1.1.2. Elementary Stage. This stage is designed to understand the meaning of grammar formation and memorizing the patterns that constitute grammar forms. So, mechanical exercises are used during this stage (Chivilenko et al., 2019).

1.2.4.1.1.3. Integrating Stage. In the third stage, new grammar knowledge is learnt through the use of other grammar constructions. As a result, students become dependent and creative users of the grammar form being practiced. Transformative exercises are used during this stage.

1.2.4.1.1.4. Systematizing Communication. The aim of this stage is to comprehensively elaborate and develop the active grammar skills. It is intended as well to aid in teaching the skills of grammar constructions when dealing with different texts. Thus, Reproductive exercises are used during this stage (Chivilenko et al., 2019).

1.2.4.1.1.5. Concluding Stage. Through this stage of grammar skill formation, learners employ and reproduce grammar constructions in their speech activities (Chin, Gong, & Tay, 2018).

1.2.5. The Importance of Grammar Competence

Since grammar is regarded as a crucial element in language instruction, it indeed plays a considerable part in the mastery of languages. Larsen-Freeman (2014) points out that grammar is what forms mean, and when and why these forms are used. Likewise, Azar (2007) indicates that the role of grammar is to “help students discover the nature of language” (p.3). According to Azar (2007), without grammar there are only individual and isolated words, sounds, and sentences left. This means that grammar provides students with the knowledge to differentiate the patterns that govern language components and how to use this knowledge to communicate and produce meaningful and well-structured sentences. This indicates, the more learners are conscious about the structures and rules of a language, the easier they can comprehend and use

that language. Thus, it can be said that grammar helps in the learning process rather than just being a broad set of information and knowledge specific to a course or a subject being taught.

Moreover, Grammar is also necessary for the development of all the four language skills; speaking, writing, reading, and listening. These language skills cannot be improved unless a deep knowledge of grammar is installed in the learner (Canale & Swain, 1980). This means that if students do not concentrate on their grammar and fully enhance their language skills, they cannot communicate effectively in real life situations. Therefore, a reasonable knowledge of grammar can facilitate the process for language users to interact and convey their thoughts successfully (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Furthermore, an adequate comprehension of grammatical rules allows the learner to manipulate and combine a set of basic sentence structures. Accordingly, several scholars, based on their findings, stated their point of views about the importance of grammar in learning a language. Thornbury (1999), for instance, asserted that, above all, grammar encompasses the regularities of a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides students with the ability to yield a limitless number of original sentences. Further, Saaristo (2015) stated that grammar is the major aspect in general linguistic theory. In his latest work, he found that more than half of the students (62%) believed that grammar has an important role in learning a language. Another study by Jean and Simard (2011) revealed that both educators and learners consider studying grammar imperative when learning a language.

In this respect, it can be deduced that grammar is an instrumental tool and a key component in mastering languages, because of its universal implementation in all probable aspects of the language. It allows the students to generate a large variation of correct utterances,

and provide them with the necessary knowledge to use and operate these sentences to suit their needs.

1.2.6. Approaches of Grammar Instruction

In regards to grammar instruction, it has often been debatable over the right method that instructors should use in teaching grammar in EFL or ESL. Thus, two approaches were proposed; either explicitly by introducing formal language, or implicitly through exposing students to natural language.

1.2.6.1. Explicit Grammar Instruction. Explicit grammar teaching is associated with the employment of methods and techniques that prioritize learning the form rather than meaning. Harmer (1987) explains that in the explicit grammar instruction, grammatical rules are visibly presented. This means that tutors who use explicit grammar instruction follow the traditional teacher-centered approach, in which they straightforwardly explain the rules to their learners (Rhalmi, 2009). Thus, students are required to focus on memorizing and gaining theoretical knowledge of the grammatical rules, and are also expected to use them accurately (Ling, 2015). Further to this, Thornbury (1999) clarifies that, for instance, grammar is taught explicitly in the Grammar-Translation method where the use of the native language (L1) is required to interpret and evoke the meaning of the target language's (L2) forms.

Explicit grammar instruction is significant in the language learning process since it aids the learners to comprehend the grammar structures of that language, and consequently, improve their learning by building explicit knowledge of the various forms of grammar. Added to this, Schmidt (1990) argues that teaching grammar explicitly increases awareness, conscious learning, and observation. However, the drawback of this approach is that students barely have the chance

to practice what they have learnt in the target language (Thornbury, 1996). This leads to the inappropriate use of the language in real situations.

Scott (1990) argues that: "An explicit approach to teaching grammar insists upon the value of deliberate study of grammar rules, either by declarative analysis or inductive analogy, in order to recognize linguistic elements efficiently and accurately." (p. 779). To put it differently, in this type of instruction, grammar forms can be taught either deductively; they are presented first, or inductively; they are discovered at the end of the lesson.

1.2.6.1.1. The Deductive Approach (Rule-Driven Learning). Deductive grammar approach, also called rule-driven learning, is a teacher-centered instruction that follows the traditional way of teaching; through which the language is presented from the general to the specific. Crystal (2003) defines deductive grammar teaching as "top-down, direct and explicit ways of making students aware of grammatical structure" (p.191). Additionally, Thornbury (1999) states that, "deductive approach to grammar teaching (...) starts with presentation of rules and is followed with examples" (p. 29). Similarly, Larsen-Freeman (2000) points out that in the deductive approach, teachers present the rules first, and then proceed by providing examples so that students can understand and apply those rules during the lesson. This means that the input is given in a systematic way, through which grammatical terminology is employed (Golling, 1998). In other words, students initially learn and understand the grammar rules and structures, then they observe the examples that contain those rules, and finally they become able to produce what they have acquired. This approach also emphasizes error correction.

Thornbury (1999) stated the advantages of the deductive approach. According to him, it acknowledges learners' intelligence and the importance of the cognitive processes in language

acquisition. It is also a time saver since grammar items are directly described. Another positive aspect is that the teacher is prepared to handle any occurring complications related to the lesson. Widodo (2006) adds that learners are in charge during practice and are less anxious about making incorrect conclusions related to how the target language works.

Nevertheless, deductive grammar instruction may not always be favorable or productive. One of its negative points is that learners may become passive recipients since they only depend on their teachers as they are the only source of information. Another point is initiating the lecture with grammatical presentations, which can cause demotivation or confusion for some learners; namely younger ones. In the same vein, Widodo (2006) presents some limitations of the deductive approach, as he explains that students may get a wrong idea thinking that learning and knowing the rules is the only way to acquire a language.

1.2.6.1.2. The Inductive Approach (Rule-Discovered Learning). The inductive grammar approach, also known as discovery-learning approach, adopts the bottom-up technique in which the teacher begins by presenting some examples, and students attempt to deduce or discover the grammatical structures autonomously. Felder and Henriques (1995) explain that the inductive technique is “a reasoning progression that proceeds from particulars (observations, measurements, data) to generalities (rules, laws, theories)” (p.26). Besides, Thornbury (1999) states that “an inductive approach starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred” (p. 29). Indeed, when using induction, learners observe a set of examples containing grammar forms, and then they are expected to extract the rules from those examples independently using their reasoning. Furthermore, students apply the inferred rules in several activities of different contexts in order to grasp how they work and how to use them in the language. This means that students shift from the specific to the general under the supervision of their teachers. As a result,

learners become active in the learning process and can develop their critical thinking and intellectual abilities.

The inductive technique has both positive and negative aspects. According to Thornbury (1999), the inductive grammar approach shows that learners could obtain the rules that correspond to their academic level which in turn makes the rules easily understood, remembered, and used. Moreover, it encourages collaborative learning which gives students the chance for extra practice that allows them to become attentive, motivated, and actively engaged in the learning process. However, the inductive approach might not always be beneficial. It may cause the learners to form an incorrect idea of the rules. Also, it is very time and energy-consuming for teachers and students alike.

1.2.6.2. Implicit Grammar Instruction. In the implicit grammar instruction or skill-oriented instruction, teachers regard the language as a means of communicating thoughts and ideas (Rutherford, 1988). Thus, this approach necessitates exposing the learner to grammatical items naturally through interaction (Ling, 2015).

According to Ellis (2009), “In the case of implicit learning, learners remain unaware of the learning that has taken place, although it is evident in the behavioral responses they make” (p. 3). In other words, teachers present their learners with meaningful communicative tasks through which they acquire grammar unconsciously and indirectly without explicitly explaining the rules. Furthermore, when tutors teach grammar this way, they prioritize the semantic and communicative elements of the language rather than its rule-governed syntactic nature (Ellis 2009).

To sum up, implicit grammar instruction enhances learners' communicative skills because it emphasizes communication. This way, they can interact with their teachers and peers and negotiate meaning, which in turn, helps them to implicitly develop their grammatical competence and become fluent speakers (Ellis, 1997). Lastly, Thornbury (1999) declares that implicit grammar instruction is vital because it offers the learners opportunities to be active, focused, and motivated, and to be a part of the learning process.

1.2.7. Types of Grammar Instructions:

In regards to grammar teaching, there are three types of instructions that are available for teachers.

1.2.7.1. Focus-on-Forms (Accuracy). Focus-on-forms is the traditional grammar-based teaching which relates to the PPP; presentation, practice and production, model of language teaching. In this type of instruction, the lessons comprise linguistic items that students were required to learn one at a time through a deductive rule-based approach (Rutherford, 1987). Added to this, Ellis (1997) explains that learners use the target structure in controlled practice first, and then in free practice. Further, Focus-on- forms gave little if any importance to the communicative use of the target language, and it also emphasized accuracy over fluency. This denotes that the emphasis was on grammar competence rather than grammar performance.

One of the reasons that researchers criticized focus-on-forms instruction is being a one-size-fits-all approach; in other words, it did not account for students' individual differences, communicative needs, or learning styles. Another reason is ignoring the role of students and not allowing meaningful communication which may result in the decrease of learners' motivation and attention (Long, 1998).

1.2.7.2. Focus-on-Meaning (Fluency). Focus-on-meaning fully rejected any direct grammar instruction or explicit error correction, as second language acquisition is claimed to be naturally and implicitly learnt through properly exposing learners to language or comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982; 1985). According to Ellis (1997), "the goal of meaning-focused instruction is communicative effectiveness" (p. 41). As such, lessons provided in this type of instruction are entirely communicative, and students assimilate the grammatical rules of the target language from exposure to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987; Long, 1998). Although comprehensible input is necessary, it does not sufficiently help learners become grammatically competent (Long, 1998), since not providing grammar instruction at all leads students to produce grammatical errors which in turn leads to fossilization (Skehan, 1996; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

1.2.7.3. Focus-on-Form (Accuracy and Fluency). Long (1998) presented focus-on-form to consolidate both forms and meaning. According to Doughty (2001), in focus-on-form, the attention is placed on the form with no reference to traditional grammar-based teaching. In addition, Long (1998) also states that "Focus on form (...) involves briefly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements (...) as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication" (p. 40). In the same vein, Ellis (2006) explains that "focus on form implies no separate grammar lessons but rather integrated into a curriculum consisting of communicative tasks" (p. 101). In a nutshell, this approach allows students to engage in communication without ignoring grammatical forms of the language, and this helps them to develop both fluency and accuracy. At last, the positive aspect of this type of instruction is that it is learner-centered and accounts for learner's needs.

1.2.8. Accuracy VS Fluency

On one hand, fluency is the main feature of a speaker's performance. Hedge (2000) states that "The term fluency relates to language production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation" (p. 54). In other words, It is the learners ability to properly link words and sentences in order to speak coherently and express their thoughts effectively, without hesitation and at normal rate of continuity, speed, and effort; so that communication does not break down. Thornbury (2005) also argued that speed is a vital characteristic in fluency, but pausing as well.

On the other hand, Accuracy is the learner's ability to use grammar correctly. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) describe it as, "how well the target language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language" (p.139). That is to say that accuracy is the extent to which proper grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are used. Otherwise, students will construct incorrect and erroneous sentences which lead to misunderstandings. Larsen-Freeman (2001) also states that EFL learners find difficulties in applying correct grammar when speaking.

Fluency entails that the speaker concentrates on the prosodic Features (stress, intonation, and rhyme) and linking words, instead of paying attention to grammatical mistakes or contemplating relevant vocabulary in a particular context. Whereas accuracy necessitates that learners are aware of the linguistic norms and use them appropriately in order to produce grammatically correct utterances and communicate their ideas, and to not commit errors that can negatively affect the semantic, syntactic, and phonological, or discourse aspects of the language.

Conclusion

Language has always been a matter of consideration, and today several studies agree that language is a rule-governed behavior and not a matter of habit formation. Learning the grammar of a language is acquiring the ability to produce grammatically correct utterances in order to communicate effectively in that language. Henceforth, even some recent approaches which emphasize the communicative aspects of language teaching do not undermine the significance of grammar. It should be perceived as a vastly important matter to be taught to students; even learners themselves need to well-construct and ameliorate their grammar competence, and master the different grammatical instructions in order to reach the desired proficiency level in the process of English language learning.

Chapter Two: Practical Part

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have dealt with the theoretical knowledge surrounding our subject that focuses on students' perceptions towards their self-perceived accent and its influence on their grammar competence. We have also provided the literature review of the subject. This chapter aims at discussing the practical part and the field work that was carried out to collect the necessary data in order to answer the questions and fulfill the aims of the research at hand. Accordingly, the chapter starts off by reintroducing the aims of the study, the research questions, the participants, and the data collection instruments. Moreover, this chapter provides a thorough description of the students' questionnaire, and most evidently; it presents the analysis and discussion of the findings. Lastly, this chapter concludes by introducing the pedagogical implications and limitations of the current study, as well as some recommendations for further research.

2.1. Aims of the Research

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly investigate EFL students' self-perceived accent and its impact on their grammar competence. It is devoted to unravel how students regard their own English accents, in addition to how this self-view affects the proper attainment of grammatical items and the construction of grammar competence. It also looks at the causes behind students' desires to prioritize accent over grammar.

2.2. The Research Questions

As previously stated, this study sets out to answer these questions:

1. How do EFL students perceive their accents?
2. How does the way students perceive the accents influence their grammar competence?
3. What are the reasons behind students' preference to focus on accent rather than grammar in EFL learning, and what are the implications of this choice on ELA?

2.3. The Participants

The present study takes place at the Department of Foreign languages at Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila. The sample that participated in answering the questionnaire of this research comprises 70 first-year students of English who are randomly chosen from a whole population that consists of 197 students administered to seven (7) different groups. The selection of this sample is based on the account that first year learners are more likely to not have their priorities set correctly in terms of EFL learning, since they are yet to be familiar with the crucial and key aspects of the English language that need to be acquired first in order to reach proficiency. In addition, they are presumably influenced by the accent of native speakers, and also by the proper accent of certain teachers or classmates. This might, indeed, lead them to devote their efforts to prioritizing the attainment of a prestigious accent at the expense of learning more significant language elements such as grammar.

2.4. Data Collection Tools

In pursuit of gathering information and reaching the research aims, a questionnaire is designed for first year students as a tool to collect data.

2.5. The Students' Questionnaire

2.5.1. Description of the Students' Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire aims at investigating EFL students' self-perceived accent and its impact on their grammar competence at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University Center. It also discusses the causes behind students' desires to prioritize accent over grammar. The participants are informed about the importance of their responses in the progress of the research, and that their answers are intended to be utilized for study purposes only. Needless to mention that

students are also informed that filling in the questionnaire, through ticking the appropriate box, remains anonymous in order for them to express themselves freely and provide sincere answers. The questionnaire is divided into four main sections with a total of twenty-four questions. It is noteworthy that both close-ended questions and open-ended questions are included.

The first part is devoted to gathering background information about the participants. It is composed of two questions about the way English language was acquired by students and students' English level.

Subsequently, the second section includes eleven questions, under the title "Self-perceived Accent". It attempts to shed light on students' viewpoints towards their accent and its significance in their EFL learning process. The first question shows students' ratings of their own English accent. The second one seeks to determine whether students aim to speak with an accent when learning English. The third one is meant to elicit students' feelings towards their accent when speaking; then, how often students think of how their accent sounds, is questioned in the fourth question. The fifth question is designed to unravel whether students have faced any sort of judgments based on their accents' nature. The following four questions (sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth) aim to bring into play students' viewpoints about the importance of having a native-like accent and where it stands in the EFL learning process. Finally, this section concludes with the tenth and eleventh questions which are concerned with the major impact of having a non-native accent on the EFL learning process.

The third section, entitled "grammar competence", sets the ground to discuss the second variable of the current study. This part consists of five questions in which the first question seeks to determine what students' think of their grammar level. The second one reveals the approaches they use to learn grammar. Then, the frequency of student's attention to grammatical rules is

interrogated. The fifth item investigates whether learners consider grammar as an important aspect or not; and lastly, the reasons for why they do not perceive it as an important factor of the language.

The last section is made up of six questions about both variables which are self-perceived accent and grammar competence. As for the first question, students are asked about the importance of accuracy while speaking. The second question aims at exploring which language aspect students focus on the most, grammar or accent. Next, the third question seeks to determine whether or not the focus on accent leads to the unintentional negligence of grammar by students. In the fourth question, the respondents are asked about their personal preference in terms of learning language, whether to sound like natives with some grammatical mistakes or to produce grammatically correct utterances with a non-native accent. Then, the fifth question aims at discovering students' viewpoints on how others would understand them better when they speak. Bringing the third section into the close, the sixth question aims at investigating students' opinions on why a native accent is more important than grammar.

2.5.2. Administration of the Students' Questionnaire

In order to gather the necessary data, the students' questionnaire was administered using two ways: hard copies and Google Forms. The process of collecting data from first year students has taken about three weeks to reach the required sample number which is 70 students.

2.5.3. Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire

2.5.3.1. Background Information

Q1. How did you acquire your English language?

Table 2.1

The way English language is acquired by students

Option	Number	Percentage
Reading	20	28.6%
Listening to music/ watching movies	42	60%
Interacting with native speakers	8	11.4%
Total	70	100%

This introductory question attempts to shed light on the various sources through which students acquired their English language. Out of seventy, twenty respondents (28.6%) asserted that they acquired their English language through reading books, novels...etc. Forty-two students (60%) stated that their English background is based on listening to music and watching videos. Further to this, eight students (11.4%) declared that the major source of English knowledge is the interaction with native speakers. These results indicate that this sample of students is exposed to various English learning sources.

Q2. How do you rate your English level?

Table 2.2

Students' English Level

Options	Number	Percentage
Excellent	2	2,9%
Good	27	38,6%
Average	38	54,3%
Intermediate	3	4,3%
Total	70	100%

In order to have an understanding of students' English level, learners were asked to evaluate their own English level. Table 2.2 shows that the majority of students (54.3%) rated their level as average, a total of (38.6%) learners selected good, three subjects (4,3%) evaluated it as intermediate, and a tiny sample of (2,9%) stated that their level of English is excellent. It can be presumed that most first year students (58.6%) do not perceive themselves as proficient in the English language.

2.5.3.2. Self-perceived Accent

Q3. How do you perceive your own English accent?

Table 2.3

Students' ratings of their English accent

Option	Number	Percentage
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Good (Native-like)	13	18.6%
Acceptable (Approximately native)	46	65.7%
Poor (Non-native)	11	15.7%
Total	70	100%

The data displayed in table 2.3 shows that thirteen students (18.6%) considered that their accent is native-like. Conversely, forty-six students (46%) revealed that they have an approximately native accent. The third option, which suggests that students have a non-native accent, is selected eleven times (15.7%). According to the previously mentioned results, eighty percent of the informants do not have a native accent which may lead them to search for ways to perfect their accent.

Q4. When you speak English, do you aim to speak with an accent?

Table 2.4

Learners' aim when speaking English

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes, British	12	17.1%

Yes, American	26	37.1%
Yes, Algerian	8	11.4%
No, I mix American and British English	21	30%
No, I do not aim to sound a certain way	3	4.3%
Others	0	0%
Total	70	100%

When asked about whether students aim to speak with an accent, twelve respondents (17.1%) reported that they try to speak with a British accent. However, a majority of twenty-six students (37.1%) opted for speaking with an American accent while eight other subjects (11.4%) opted for an Algerian accent. The fourth option about mixing American and British accents was selected by twenty-one respondents (30%). As for the option of not aiming to sound in a certain way, it was selected by only three students (4.3%). To conclude with the final option as an open ended answer which was not selected by any student (0%). The results help us assume that the overwhelming majority of the students (95.7%) give significant attention to the accent and that, in fact, these students pay a good attention to the accent and they aim to have a certain English accent based on their preference.

Q5. How do you feel about your accent when speaking English?

Table 2.5

Students' feelings towards their accent

Option	Number	Percentage
Pleased	8	11.4%
Neutral	3	4.2%
Not satisfied	45	64.1%
Embarrassed	14	20%
Total	70	100%

This item is devised to highlight students' feelings towards their accents. Eleven point four percent of informants opted for being pleased about their accent when (4.2%) agreed that their feelings are neutral. The highest percentage of respondents (64.1%) showed their dissatisfaction towards their accent while the residue of the subjects (20%) report that they experienced embarrassment when speaking. This indicates that the major part of EFL learners (84.1%) do not feel secure about their accent which shows their awareness about how their accent sounds and how it should be like. These results may also lead to the assumption that students would like to put more effort on enhancing their English accent.

Q6. When speaking English, how often do you think about how your accent sounds?

Table 2.6

Students' frequency of thinking about accent

Option	Number	Percentage
Always	47	67.1%

Sometimes	22	31.4%
Never	1	1.4%
Total	70	100%

This question attempted to investigate the frequency of learners' thinking about how their accent sounds when speaking, forty-seven students (67.1%) selected the option "always". Thirty-two students reported that they "sometimes" reflect on their accent. In contrast, only one student indicated that he/she never thinks about his/her accent when speaking. To sum up, the majority of the participants (98.6%) claimed that they consistently care about how they sound which indicates that students view accent, when speaking, as a priority.

Q7. Have you ever been judged for your accent when speaking?

Table 2.7

Judgments about accent

Option	Number	Percentage
Always	42	60%
Sometimes	21	30%
Never	7	10%
Total	70	100%

This question targets informants' experience with judgments in relation to their accent. It is indicated that forty-two students (60%) have *always* been experiencing judgments. Twenty-

one student (30%) chose *sometimes*. The remaining seven learners (10%) said that they have no experience with being judged. The results denote that a huge percentage of participants (90%) have dealt with criticism about their accent which might affect their sense of prioritizing language skills in EFL learning. In other words, learners' exposure to criticism about their accent may drive them to devote more efforts to developing their accent, believing that it is what matters the most in English learning.

Q8. Do you think that people would understand you better if you speak with a native accent?

Table 2.8

The clarity of accent

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	61	87.1%
No	9	12.8%
Total	70	100%

The data shown in table 2.8 are concerned with the students' views regarding the clarity of their accent; whether or not owning a native accent would increase the understandability of the speakers' speech. Based on the given analysis, sixty-one students, an overwhelming majority of (87.1%) opted for "yes". The rest, (12.1%) of the whole sample of students, opted for "no". The data gathered signify that the majority of participants perceive that a non-native accent may not be sufficient to convey a clear understandable speech as a native accent does. Thus, it can be

assumed that first year learners mistakenly associate speaking with a native accent and producing a clear pronunciation. This assumption leads EFL learners to overvalue having a native-like accent over other language aspects.

Q9. Is it important to have a native like accent?

Table 2.9

The importance of having a native accent

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	62	88.5%
No	8	11.4%
Others	0	0%
Total	70	100%

In this question, students are asked to determine whether or not having a native-like accent is important. The overwhelming majority of informants (88.5%) described owning a native accent as an important aspect of learning the English language. Twelve of them (11.4%) opted for “no” while no one (0%) selected the last option “others” that allowed them to offer a free answer. From the results, it seems that almost all the students believe that having a native-like accent is of great importance.

Q10. When learning English, do you think that acquiring a good (native-like) English accent is equally important as any other language aspects such as grammar, vocabulary...etc?

Table 2.10

The importance of a native accent in comparison to other language aspects

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	64	91.4%
No	6	8.5%
Total	70	100%

This question seeks to find out whether or not acquiring a native-like accent is as important as any other language aspects. As presented in the table, most respondents (91.4%) chose “yes”, while fifteen students (8.5%) do not see having a native-like accent as significant. Accordingly, it can be deduced from these findings that almost all first year participants believe in the importance of having a native-like accent.

Q11. Where does the importance of having a good accent stand in EFL learning?

This question is open-ended which students have answered in different ways. It is intended to collect students’ suggestions about the importance of having a good accent in EFL learning. It is reported that some students think that having a native like accent will allow them to get good marks because teachers are always impressed by students with native like accents and pay more attention to them. Other students believe that sounding like native speakers gives them the

advantage of being perceived as intelligent and competent EFL learners while some say that it helps them avoid discrimination of teachers and peers that result from having a non-native accent. Few participants claim that having a native-like accent increases their level of self-esteem and helps them to become more confident about their current English level and being better understood when speaking. According to the respondents' suggestions, the whole sample tends to believe that sounding like natives is of a great significance in the EFL learning process. Additionally, they all seem to be influenced by their peers and teachers' points of view towards their accent which led them to overvalue the goal of reaching a native-like accent.

Q12. Have you ever doubted your ability to develop your English level because of your poor (non-native) accent?

Table 2.11

The impact of having a nonnative accent on self-confidence

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	59	84.2%
No	11	15.7%
Total	70	100%

The table above 2.12 reveals that most of the informants (84.2%) claim that they indeed doubt their ability to develop their English level because of their non-native accent. The remaining subjects, a minority of (15.7%), disagree and opt for “no”. The findings suggest that

having a non-native accent creates a low self-esteem which may motivate the learners to work hard in order to perfect their English accent.

Q13. In your opinion, how does having a nonnative accent reflect on your EFL learning process?

This open ended question is concerned with the impact of having a non-native accent on the EFL learning process. Students' perceptions are various but still revolve around common points of view. Some students affirm that having a non-native accent causes them to lose interest and become unmotivated to learn more about the English language while others think that it creates dissatisfaction by thinking that no matter how much effort they put in learning the English language, they will not reach the required level. A major percentage of students declared that they avoid participation even when having the right answer because of the fear of being judged for their accent. Moreover, few respondents claimed that they experienced feelings of inferiority due to the constant comparison between their accent and their peers' good (native-like) accent which led them to devote all their effort and time to enhance their English accent. From the above collection of students' perceptions, it can be assumed that having a non-native accent reflects negatively on first year students' EFL learning process.

2.5.3.3. Grammar Competence

Q14. Do you think your level in grammar is:

Table 2.12

How students view their Grammar level

Options	Number	Percentage
Excellent	4	5,7%
Good	18	30%
Average	38	50%
Poor	10	14,3%
Total	70	100%

This question aims to uncover how students perceive their grammar level. As shown in table 2.12, thirty eight participants (50%) representing half of the population think that their level in grammar is average, whereas (30%) opted for good, ten participants (14,3%) seem to regard their level as poor, and a minority of (5,7%) asserted that their grammar level is excellent. Supposedly, (64.3%) of learners are not competent in grammar which is not surprising, given their notable interest in acquiring a native-like accent, according to the previously deduced results, which can hinder their grammar learning process.

Q15. What is your approach to learning grammar?

Table 2.13

Students' approaches to learning grammar

Options	Number	Percentage
By memorizing rules	17	24,3%
By analyzing examples to discover grammar rules	16	22,9%
Through meaningful communicative tasks	29	41,4%
Using grammar textbooks	8	11,4%
Total	70	100%

The purpose of this question is to discover the approaches that students' follow to learn grammar. Table 2.13 displays that a total of (41.4%) respondents acquire grammar implicitly through meaningful communicative tasks, in which they focus mainly on meaning and communication. On the other hand, seventeen participants (24.3%) learn it by memorizing grammar rules, and another small group of (11.4%) participants use grammar textbooks; which indicates that they learn grammar explicitly and deductively by gaining theoretical knowledge and placing their attention on the form of grammar structures. Lastly, (22.9%) said that they analyze examples to discover grammar rules; hence, they follow the inductive approach. From the above results, it can be deduced that students rely on different methods when it comes to learning grammar.

Q16. How often do you pay attention to grammatical rules when speaking or writing?

Table 2.14

Student's attention to grammatical rules

Options	Numbers	Percentage
Always	5	7,1%
Sometimes	51	72,9%
Never	14	20%
Total	70	100%

To have a deeper look at students' grammar competence, the participants were asked how often they pay attention to grammatical rules when producing oral and written language. The overwhelming majority of students (72.9%) opted for "sometimes", five subjects (7.1%) chose "always", while the remaining fourteen learners (20%) declared that they never pay attention to grammar rules when speaking or writing. According to these findings, it can be assumed that nearly all students are not consistent when it comes to applying grammar structures, and barely pay attention to them when using the English language.

Q17. When learning the English language, do you think that learning grammar is:**Table 2.15**

Students viewpoints whether grammar is important or less important

Options	Numbers	Percentage
Important	34	48,6%
Less important	36	51,4%
Total	70	100%

This question attempts to unravel first year learners' opinions about the importance of grammar as a part of learning the English language. It can be noticed from Table 2.15 that the results are roughly close. However, a bigger part of the population (51,4%) voted that grammar is of less importance as a language aspect, whereas (48,6%) of the informants disagreed and affirmed that grammar is indeed important in the learning process. Thus, It can be presumed that first year learners do not fully acknowledge the importance of grammar in EFL learning.

Q18. If you consider it less important, why?

This follow up question is an open-ended statement designed to highlight the explanations of the thirty six students who opted for the "less important" option in the previous question. It is intended for students to give reasons which support their choice. Certain participants stated that when interacting, they tend to speak spontaneously and only focus their attention on delivering the message they want to convey and communicating their ideas, and not on applying correct grammatical rules. Thus, they end up disregarding grammar. In the same vein, the rest of the respondents have another view in which they claimed that they can communicate effectively without mastering grammar regulations. These answers imply that First year students believe that communication without the use of grammar is effective and successful,

which is a misconception since mastering grammar rules and learning how to use them correctly is vital to reach proficiency and accuracy in EFL.

2.5.3.4. Self-perceived Accent and Grammar Competence

Q19. In your opinion, accuracy while speaking English is:

Table 2.16

Students' views about accuracy while speaking English

Options	Numbers	Percentage
Not important	45	64,3%
Very important	25	35,7%
Total	70	100%

This question sets out to determine whether students think that accuracy is important or not. The outcomes presented in Table 2.16 reveal that a larger part of the respondents (64.3%) perceive accuracy as not important. Nonetheless, twenty five students (35.7%) considered accuracy very important when speaking in English. As such, it can be assumed that the majority of learners do not give much importance to the accurate and precise utilization of the language.

Q20. When learning English, which language aspect do you focus on the most?

Table 2.17

Determining whether students focus on grammar or accent.

Options	Numbers	Percentage
Accent	49	70%
Grammar	21	30%
Total	70	100%

The aim of this question is to figure out what aspect of language students prefer to focus on more when learning English. It can be observed from the data in Table 2.17 that forty nine participants (70%), who represent the vast majority of the sample, pointed out that they tend to pay more attention to the accent. Contrarily, the rest of the students (30%) declared that they focus on grammar instead. Thus, it can be concluded that students prioritize acquiring a native accent rather than establishing grammatical knowledge.

Q21. When you focus on accent, do you sometimes accidentally neglect grammar?*

Table 2.18

Investigating whether students overlook grammar

Options	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	53	75,7%
No	17	24,3%
Total	70	100%

The purpose of this inquiry is to investigate whether the respondents accidentally overlook learning grammar as a result of focusing on perfecting their accents. The findings from the above table confirm that a great part of students (75.7%) selected “yes”; indicating that they do, in fact, neglect grammar. Whereas the remaining (24.3%) of learners opposed this notion and opted for “No”. These results suggest that students with poor accents devote their time and effort in seeking and developing a good native-like accent while forgetting to constitute a solid grammar competence.

Q22. What is your personal preference in terms of learning language?

Table 2.19

Students’ preference when learning English

Options	Numbers	Percentage
To sound like a native speaker, but sometimes make some grammatical mistakes	49	70
To produce grammatically correct utterances, but to not have a native-like accent	21	30
Total	70	100%

As far as students’ preferences are concerned, the results in Table 2.19 demonstrate that the majority of them (70%) asserted that they rather speak with a good native-like accent yet make some grammatical mistakes; which explains why they prioritize accent. Nevertheless, (30%) of learners prefer to produce grammatically correct sentences but to not sound like native

speakers. This implies that students believe acquiring an English accent matters more than learning the grammar of the language.

Q23. According to you, others would understand you better if you speak with:

Table 2.20

Students' viewpoints on how others would understand them better when they speak

Options	Numbers	Percentage
A native accent with few grammatical errors	46	65,7%
A non-native accent but without grammar mistakes.	24	34,3%
Total	70	100%

The following question discloses students' views on how others would understand them better when they speak. According to the statistics seen in table 2.20, it appears that forty six subjects (65.7%) said that people would comprehend them more if they speak with a native accent, even if they commit few grammar errors. However, the remaining (34.3%) disagreed and stated that they would be better understood by the listener if they commit no grammatical mistakes at all regardless of their non-native accent. These views explain why the majority of first year students tend to focus on attaining a sophisticated English accent instead of learning grammar rules.

Q24. In your opinion, why would a native accent be more important than grammar in EFL learning?

To conclude the questionnaire, learners were given an open-ended question in which they were requested to share their perspectives and opinions about why they would value a native-like accent over grammar. Most of the participants suggested that a native accent is more significant than grammar because it is the most recognizable factor that the listeners notice about them when they speak. This leads them to pursue acquiring a proper native-like English accent. The rest of the students asserted that having a good native-like accent reflects their English level in general and gives the impression that they are smart and competent learners.

2.5.4. Discussion of the Main Findings of the Students' Questionnaire

Based on the analyses of the students' questionnaire, some interesting truths are revealed about learners' self-perceived accent in relation with their grammar competence. The analyses show that most of the students acquired their English language through auditory materials which seems to be their preferable and enjoyable method of learning. This signifies their constant exposure to various English accents since the beginning of their acquaintance with this language. Also, the majority of participants seem to have an average level of English which is an unsurprising result since the sample that participated in answering the questionnaire comprises first-year students who are believed to be unfamiliar with all of the language aspects as well as their importance that could help them enhance their level of English.

The students' questionnaire was an effective method that allowed reaching significant findings on how EFL learners perceive their accent, demonstrating that the overwhelming majority of students aim to speak with an English accent different from the native accent.. Moreover, students' findings differ in terms of the impressions generated towards their accent and the frequency of being judged based on it. However, they still agree on being too self-

conscious about accent when speaking, assuming that they would be better understood when speaking with a native accent. Furthermore, participants' answers indicate that the majority of learners believe in the necessity of having a native-like accent which is no less important than any other language aspects. To shed more light on the previous point, students were asked about where the importance of having a native accent stands in EFL learning. The answers indicate that students assume that having a native accent is the key to obtaining good marks, being perceived as competent learners, avoiding accent discrimination, increasing self-esteem and being better understood. Additionally, the majority of first year students affirm that having a non-native accent negatively affects their learning process in terms of losing interest in learning, creating dissatisfaction, avoiding participation, generating inferiority and devoting all effort to acquire a native-like accent.

According to the second section of the questionnaire, it is clearly noticeable that the overwhelming majority of first year EFL students do not always pay attention to grammar rules when using the English language which explains their affirmation about having an average grammar level. Besides, half of the students consider grammar as a less important aspect of language, asserting that for the message to be conveyed and communication to be effective, there is no need for a full focus on grammatical rules.

When analyzing the findings, a larger number of participants state that their focus is mainly directed to the accent which leads them to unconsciously neglect grammar rules. Furthermore, students' answers pave the way to a clear understanding of their priorities in learning. The major number of students prefers to sound like native speakers regardless of the grammatical mistakes committed, supposing that listeners would understand them better in this manner. Besides, the greater number of informants proclaims that accent is the most

recognizable aspect of language, and they agree that accent reflects their English level in general. This implies that learners at this level are not fully aware of the importance of grammar in the EFL learning process.

2.6. Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

2.6.1. Implications of the Study

Considering the main findings obtained from the questionnaire administered to students, it can be affirmed that the current research brings about some significant implications. The results of the present study reveal the remarkable impact of EFL learners' self-perceived accent on their grammar competence.

As the data from the students' questionnaire indicate, EFL learners tend to perceive the accent as a significant language aspect that should take a major part of their attention during the learning process. This is due to students' assumptions about the advantages of having a native accent which are already discussed. As a result, students tend to neglect grammar rules, preferring to sound like natives regardless of the grammatical mistakes committed which negatively affects the quality of their grammar competence. This implies that learners at this level are not fully aware of the importance of grammar in the EFL learning process.

The current research can help EFL teachers detect the reasons behind learners' preference to focus on accent rather than grammar in order to help them reset their priorities in EFL learning and achieve academic success.

2.6.2. Limitations of the Study

Upon conducting this study, several obstacles have arisen on various levels; whether on the theoretical or the practical part. These obstacles are seen as limitations in implementing the findings of the research in the academic context. The order of these limitations is as follow:

* When conducting this research, it can be noticed that there is not much information about the impact of self-perceived accent on grammar competence in particular because it seems that little has been said about this subject.

* Some students did not seriously respond to the questionnaire that was given to them; some of them skipped a number of questions, and others claimed that they are not familiar with some of the concepts in the questionnaire.

* The answers obtained from open-ended questions were too short and not clearly stated which created difficulties in understanding the participants' viewpoints. This led the questionnaire to be repeatedly distributed to collect new necessary explanations.

* A large sample did not reply to the questionnaires sent to them via Facebook chat groups which led to the distribution of the questionnaires using the traditional method (paper-based). However, collecting information using the traditional approach consumed more time as learners were not physically available on a weekly basis at MUC, especially during Ramadan.

* Time shortage might affect the quality of this investigation which would have been better reinforced using a secondary qualitative method of research.

2.6.3. Recommendations for Learners, Teachers, and Further Research

Based on the previously discussed data which are obtained through the students' questionnaire involved in this study, a set of recommendations can be drawn that may contribute

to enriching future research on the same topic. This is meant to enable EFL students to reset their priorities in the learning process by eliminating their misleading belief about accent being more important than grammar. Additionally, it can contribute effectively to future research conducted on the same topic.

When discussing the present case of study, one might presume that the responsibility largely falls upon the teachers' shoulders since the issue revolves around first year inexperienced EFL students, and while that is partially true, students also play an important role. Teachers are usually required to guide first year students in deducing that grammar is the language aspect that should be focused on more than accent in the EFL learning by giving them the appropriate feedback, yet learners can also contribute in this process.

Students are required to recognize and show their linguistic abilities, perspectives and interests in order to give their teachers some clues that would help them identify their learners' strengths and weaknesses based on which they would design their lessons and give feedback. Added to this, students should work on controlling their feelings of inferiority towards having a non-native accent, trying to focus on producing correct grammar and pronunciation instead. Thus, learners should mainly rely on themselves in setting their priorities in EFL learning, which may constitute an essential factor in their academic success.

It is also necessary for EFL teachers at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University Center to develop a positive attitude towards learners with non-native accents, by trying to avoid any sort of criticism that may lead first year learners to assume that the accent they produce represents their proficiency level. In other words, teachers should be more willing to accept and accommodate learners' variety of accents, instead of adopting an exclusive attitude. Furthermore, teachers are recommended to draw the attention towards the crucial impact of the students'

feelings of inferiority towards their accents in order to help them get rid of these negative emotions.

The current study is conducted as a descriptive and exploratory investigation of the influence that first year learners' self-perceived accent has on their grammar competence in the Department of Foreign Languages at Mila University Centre. Consequently, future researchers dealing with the same topic may use it as a reference in their research, conducting it based on a larger sample, which will undoubtedly yield more representative, reliable, and insightful findings. They may also analyse the results in order to reach new conclusions. Given enough time, future research can prove more informative if the investigation is made using another qualitative data collection method such as interviews, as well as covering teachers' perspectives concerning the currently discussed issue.

Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to discuss the practical part of this study, which deals with investigating students' self-perceived accents and their grammar competence. It is mainly concerned with describing, analyzing, and discussing the data retrieved from the students' questionnaire. The findings reveal that first year students have a negative attitude towards their accents; which leads them to prioritize acquiring a native-like accent, and indirectly neglecting the importance of mastering grammar in EFL learning.

General Conclusion

Along the course of the present study, it is vividly emphasized that the focal basis of this research revolves around unveiling EFL students' perceptions towards their self-perceived accents and grammar, in addition to how the nature of their attitudes influences the proper attainment of grammatical competence in the English language learning process. The current work constituted two chapters. The first chapter was concerned with the theoretical framework which thoroughly covered EFL learners' self-perceived accent and grammar competence, while the second one was dedicated to the description of the research tools and the participants, as well as the analysis and discussion of the findings.

In the pursuit of reaching the research aims, a questionnaire was utilized for gathering data. It was administered to seventy first-year students of English at the Department of Foreign Languages, University Center of Mila.

According to the main results obtained from the distribution of the questionnaire and the analysis of the gathered data, it is revealed that learners exhibit a negative attitude towards their English accents, since they regard them as poor and non-native-like. Further to this, EFL learners tend to give more importance to achieving fluency by acquiring a native-like accent, rather than mastering the grammar rules and paying attention to the accuracy of the discourse they produce. This suggests that students at this level do not fully recognise the importance of grammar, which may negatively affect the process of reaching proficiency in EFL learning.

As a final point, it is worth mentioning that the present investigation is of limited scope, and its findings are open for discussion and critique. Albeit, this work may assist to draw

attention to this specific area of study and pave the way for upcoming researchers to examine this topic on a larger scale, which is very likely to result in more reliable and crucial outcomes.

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Appendix

The Students' Questionnaire

First year students are kindly asked to answer the following questions which will help us conduct our research. This questionnaire seeks to investigate the correlation between students' self-perceived accent and their grammar competence. We would appreciate providing us with your valuable answers as they are of a great importance for the validity of our study. Your answers are confidential and will only serve the purpose of this research. Please put a tick (✓) for the chosen answer, and note that more than one answer is possible in some questions.

Section one: Background information

1. How did you acquire your English language?

- Reading (books, novels, stories, comic books)
- Listening to music and watching (movies, videos...)
- Interaction with native speakers

2. How do you rate your English level?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Intermediate

Section two: Self-perceived Accent

3. How do you perceive your own English accent?

- Good (Native-like)
- Acceptable (approximately native)
- Poor (Non-native)

4. When you speak English, do you aim to speak with an accent?

- Yes, British
- Yes, American
- Yes, Algerian
- No, I mix American and British English
- No, I do not aim to sound a certain way
- Other, please specify.....

5. How do you feel about your accent when speaking English?

- Pleased
- Neutral
- Not satisfied
- Embarrassed

6. When speaking English, how often do you think about how your accent sounds?

- Always
- Sometimes

Never

7. Have you ever been judged for your non-native accent when speaking?

Many times

Sometimes

Never

8. Do you think that people would understand you better if you speak with a native accent?

Yes

No

9. Is it important to have a native-like accent?

Yes

No

Others, please specify.....

10. When learning English, do you think that acquiring a good (native-like) English accent is equally important as any other language aspect such as grammar, vocabulary...etc?

Yes

No

11. Where does the importance of having a good accent stand in EFL learning?

.....

12. Have you ever doubted your ability to develop your English level because of your poor (non-native) accent?

Yes

No

13. In your opinion, how does having a non-native accent reflect on your EFL learning process?

.....

Section three: Grammar Competence

14. Do you think your level in grammar is:

Excellent

Good

Average

Poor

15. What is your method of learning grammar?

By memorizing rules

By analyzing examples to discover grammar rules

Through meaningful communicative tasks (interaction with teachers and native speakers)

Using grammar textbooks

16. How often do you pay attention to grammatical rules when speaking or writing?

Always

Sometimes

Never

17. When learning the English language, do you think that learning grammar is:

Important

Less important

18. If you consider it less important, why?

I tend to speak spontaneously and only focus my attention on the message I want to convey, and not the grammatical rules.

I can communicate effectively without mastering grammar rules.

Others,

Section four: Self-perceived Accent and Grammar Competence

19. In your opinion, accuracy while speaking English is:

Very important

Not important

20. When learning English, which language aspect do you focus on the most?

Grammar

Accent

21. When you focus on accent, do you sometimes accidentally neglect grammar?

Yes

No

22. What is your personal preference in terms of learning language?

- To sound like a native speaker, but sometimes make some grammatical mistakes.
- To produce grammatically correct utterances, but to not have a native-like accent.

23. According to you, people would understand you better if you speaking with:

- A native accent with few grammatical errors.
- A non-native accent but without grammar mistakes.

24. In your opinion, why would a native accent be more important than grammar in EFL learning?

- Accent is the most recognizable thing when someone is speaking.
- Accent reflects the learners' English level in general and grammar competence in

particular

ملخص

تسعى الدراسة الحالية للتحقيق في نظرة الطلاب حول لكتنهم الانجليزية وكيفية تأثيرها على كفاءتهم في القواعد و النحو . تستهدف هذه الدراسة طلاب السنة أولى لغة إنجليزية في المركز الجامعي عبدالحفيظ بوصوف ميله .تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الطريقة التي ينظر بها الطلاب إلى اللكنة الانجليزية، بالإضافة إلى التحقق مما إذا كانت الطريقة التي تُدرك بها اللكنة تؤثر على الكفاءة النحوية للمتعلمين .وفقا لذلك، تم طرح ثلاثة أسئلة بحثية .السؤال الأول هو كيف ينظر طلاب السنة أولى لغة إنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المركز الجامعي عبدالحفيظ بوصوف ميله إلى لكتنهم .يستفسر السؤال الثاني عما إذا كانت الطريقة التي ينظر بها الطلاب إلى لكتنهم تؤثر على كفاءتهم في القواعد .يبحث السؤال الأخير في الأسباب الكامنة وراء تفضيل الطلاب للتركيز على اللكنة بدلاً من القواعد و النحو عند تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، والآثار المترتبة عن هذا الاختيار على اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية .للحصول على البيانات اللازمة و في محاولة للإجابة على الاسئلة السابقة تم اللجوء إلى المنهج الوصفي حيث تم توزيع استبيان على سبعين طالبا من طلاب السنة أولى لغة إنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بالمركز الجامعي ميله .أهم ما كشفت عنه نتائج البحث أن غالبية طلاب السنة الأولى لديهم موقف سلبي تجاه لهجاتهم مما يدفعهم إلى إعطاء الأولوية لاكتساب لكنة تشبه اللغة الأم ، وإهمالهم غير المقصود لأهمية إتقان القواعد في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية .في النهاية، تقدم الدراسة البحثية مجموعة متنوعة من التوصيات للبحوث المستقبلية لإضافة المزيد من الأفكار إلى الدراسة الحالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللكنة الذاتية ، كفاءة القواعد و النحو، طلاب السنة الأولى لغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اللهجة الأم ، اللهجة غير الأم.

Résumé

La présente étude cherche à étudier l'accent auto-perçu des élèves et comment il influence leur compétence en grammaire. Cette étude s'adresse aux étudiants de première année langue Anglaise au Centre Universitaire Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila. Il vise à déterminer comment l'accent anglais est perçu par les étudiants, en plus d'examiner si la façon dont un accent est perçu affecte la compétence grammaticale des apprenants. En conséquence, trois questions de recherche sont soulevées. La première question est comment les étudiants d'Anglais au Centre universitaire de Mila perçoivent leur accent. La deuxième question demande si la façon dont les étudiants perçoivent leur accent influence leur compétence grammaticale. La dernière question porte sur les raisons pour lesquelles les élèves préfèrent se concentrer sur l'accent plutôt que sur la grammaire dans l'apprentissage d'Anglais comme langue étrangère, et sur les répercussions de ce choix sur l'acquisition de la langue Anglaise. En réponse à ces questions, une méthode descriptive est choisie. Par conséquent, un questionnaire a été administré à soixante-dix étudiants de première année langue Anglaise au Département des langues étrangères du Centre Universitaire de Mila pour obtenir les données nécessaires. Les résultats révèlent que la majorité des étudiants de première année ont une attitude négative envers leurs accents, ce qui les conduit à privilégier l'acquisition d'un accent natif, et accidentellement négliger l'importance de la grammaire dans l'apprentissage d'Anglais comme langue étrangère. Finalement, l'étude de recherche fournit une variété de recommandations pour la recherche future afin d'ajouter d'autres idées à la présente étude.

Mots-clés : Accent auto-perçu, compétence grammaticale, étudiants de première année langue Anglaise, accent natif, accent non natif.