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# *Learners' Ethnic Group Affiliation and L2 Pronunciation Accuracy: A Sociolinguistic Investigation*

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This article examines the relationship between ethnic group affiliation (one's sense of belonging to a primary ethnic group) and second-language (L2) pronunciation accuracy defined here as native-like, nonaccented L2 speech or L2 speech that contains no first language (L1) influences. The study addressed these questions: (a) Is there a relationship between learners' L2 accent and ethnic group affiliation as perceived by fellow learners? (b) If such a relationship exists, what are its behavioural consequences? The studies reported in this article involved L2 learners from two ethnic groups (Francophone and Chinese in Quebec) in two different sociopolitical contexts (conflictual and nonconflictual) listening to fellow learners speak an L2 and estimating these learners' degree of ethnic group affiliation. Results revealed a relationship between learners' L2 accent and perceived affiliation to their home ethnic group, suggesting that learners treat their peers' L2 accent as an indicator of these peers' degree of ethnic affiliation. Results also revealed behavioural consequences of this relationship, suggesting that L2 learning entails choices between the reward of being efficient and the cost of not marking identity. Overall, the findings highlight the need to consider group-engendered factors in understanding the acquisition of accuracy in L2 pronunciation. Implications of these findings for L2 pronunciation development, classroom L2 pronunciation teaching, and negotiation of L2 learners' language identity are discussed.

A survey of the research literature on the promotion of pronunciation fluency and accuracy in an L2 reveals two foci. One addresses learner variables influencing the acquisition of pronunciation fluency and accuracy (Leather & James, 1996); the other addresses the effectiveness of instruction in promoting this acquisition (e.g., Bradlow, Pisoni, Akahane-Yamada, & Tohkura, 1997; Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998). Situated in the context of investigating what factors affect L2 pronunciation learning, this article examines the influence on L2 pronunciation accuracy of one relatively unexplored learner variable: ethnic group affiliation.

Several learner factors have been investigated for their effect on L2 pronunciation learning. One is age, a variable that has received perhaps the most attention in the literature (e.g., Flege, Yeni-Komshian, & Liu, 1999). Other factors include individual differences such as intelligence and aptitude (for a summary, see Segalowitz, 1997) and socially oriented variables such as learner attitudes toward the target-language group and motivations based on the perceived rewards of L2 learning (Clement, 1980; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Originally investigated for their effects on general L2 proficiency, these factors have recently been studied in the context of L2 pronunciation learning (Moyer, 1999, 2004). Personality variables such as empathy have been linked to L2 pronunciation as well. Guiora, Brannon, and Dull (1972), for example, found that learners of Japanese who were more empathic (i.e., saw more changes in facial expressions in a film clip) sounded more authentically Japanese than those who were less empathic. Later, Guiora and his associates (Guiora, 1992; Guiora, Beit-Hallalami, Brannon, Dull, & Scovel, 1972) discussed language ego states and ego permeability as important variables affecting L2 pronunciation achievement.

Striking in this literature, however, is the scarcity of research investigating factors contributed by learners' primary reference group—that is, the *ethnic group* they were born into—and the target language group. These groups shape their members' behaviour by imposing norms that are difficult to ignore. For instance, Italian Canadians experience various pressures to constantly adjust their language to avoid being ascribed stereotypical judgments about being Italian in some contexts and being wrongly perceived as non-Italian in others (Giampapa, 2004). These group-engendered forces (GEFs) differ from the socially oriented attitudinal and motivational learner variables mentioned earlier in that they emanate from social groups and not from individuals.

Although some studies have examined the role of GEFs in L2 acquisition (e.g., fear of a threat to the group's identity or adherence to group-held beliefs and myths; see Hinenoya & Gatbonton, 2000; Taylor, Meynard, & Rhéault, 1977), these are few and far between. But even when GEFs are addressed, they are often correlated only with general L2

proficiency (e.g., Taylor et al., 1977; Taylor & Simard, 1975); seldom, if at all, are they correlated with L2 pronunciation accuracy.

This lack of attention to the role of GEFs in promoting L2 pronunciation accuracy is surprising considering that accent (the most “visible” aspect of pronunciation) has been documented to elicit various stereotypical judgments of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and personality (Lambert, 1977, 1980, 1987; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960). Even pupils’ scholastic ability is judged on the basis of their L2 accents (e.g., Seligman, Tucker, & Lambert, 1972). L2 accents have also been used to indicate distinctiveness. For example, a group of Welsh language learners broadened their Welsh accents in English to distance themselves from a British speaker who challenged their desire to resurrect Welsh as a native language (Bourhis & Giles, 1977; for a similar phenomenon with Belgian French, see Bourhis, Giles, Leyens, & Tajfel, 1979). More recent studies have shown that speech can be used in negotiating identities. For example, black Dominican American teenagers manipulate their speech to emphasize their blackness in one instance and their Latin origins in another, thereby expressing the identity that fetches the better social rewards from their interlocutors (Bailey, 2000). These examples cast language as a powerful commodity that can be exploited by those in power, as well as those who are not, to exclude some and include others (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), creating consequences for the job market (Heller, 1982) and education (Miller, 2004). Although these recent studies do not single out accent, examples from past studies clearly show that it can invite the most stereotypical reactions. Speech, in fact, has been shown to be a stronger cue than physical features or abilities in inviting evaluative judgments (Seligman et al., 1972).

The manipulability of accents for social purposes suggests that its development may be shaped by GEFs. Taylor, Meynard, and Rhéault (1977) were the first to examine this idea. They suggested that a perceived threat to an ethnic group’s stability might be a barrier to L2 learning, ranging from limiting the level attained to preventing learning altogether. They found that Quebec Francophone learners who felt a greater threat to their group were significantly less proficient in English than those who felt a lesser threat. In fact, contact and threat to identity were related to L2 proficiency more significantly than was instrumental or integrative motivation (Taylor et al., 1977). In addition, Japanese learners’ stronger adherence to cultural beliefs and language-learning myths (such as the fact that only Japanese minds are suited for learning Japanese) have been associated with lower proficiency and less extensive overall English use (Hinenoya & Gatbonton, 2001). These findings suggest that, besides instructional and learner characteristics, GEFs must be taken into account in understanding L2 proficiency development.

Although the GEFs examined in these studies are strong candidates for influencing the direction and nature of L2 achievement, they represent a very small portion of possible factors and do not focus on pronunciation accuracy as part of L2 achievement. Moreover, these factors also have a limited range of applicability. Not all groups learning an L2 are in conflict situations where threat is a factor. In addition, although all societies have myths, most of them do not have themes that are as focused on language learning as are the Japanese myths.

Wider in applicability to many L2 learning contexts, *ethnic group affiliation*, that is, a sense of belonging to one's ethnolinguistic group, is a GEF worth investigating. Virtually everybody has this sense of belonging, socially constructed as individuals grow up amid families and friends (Aboud & Skerry, 1984; Hamers & Blanc, 1992). From this socialization, they develop a sense of pride in being part of a particular group, sharing its worldview, and adopting its behavioural norms.

Normally, ethnic group affiliation exists quietly, acknowledged by all, but not subjected to much discussion or questioning. But when people come into contact with other groups—when they move to new settings in search of better social, educational, and economic opportunities, or as others move to their country for similar reasons—their contact with other groups foregrounds group identity and affiliation issues. In these instances, individuals first weigh the rewards and costs of identifying with or differentiating themselves from a group and then adopt a behaviour reflecting this decision (Frasure-Smith, Lambert, & Taylor, 1975). If they belong to ethnic groups for whom language is a symbol of identity, they use language to reflect, reaffirm, renegotiate, or reconstruct these identities.

Language learning is a case in point. Language learners are typically subject to social forces arising from both the target- and home-language groups, pressuring them to constantly renegotiate their identities as members of both groups. In doing so, learners may either enhance or suppress one of their two identities by manipulating their language, in particular, their pronunciation of both languages. It is in this sense that one can hypothesize that ethnic group affiliation may affect the acquisition of L2 pronunciation. This issue is addressed in our research.

Two studies are presented that examined the relationship between ethnic group affiliation and L2 pronunciation accuracy. *Pronunciation accuracy* (henceforth, *accent*) was defined as the degree to which learners' speech is free of segmental and suprasegmental features characteristic of their native language. The two studies were conducted 30 or so years apart and involved L2 learners from two ethnic groups in two different sociopolitical contexts (a conflictual and a nonconflictual setting) listening to fellow learners speak an L2 and estimating these learners' degree

of ethnic group affiliation on the basis of this L2 speech. The questions addressed were (a) Is there a relationship between learners' L2 accent and their ethnic group affiliation as perceived by their fellow learners? and (b) If such a relationship exists, what behavioural consequences are associated with it?

## STUDY 1

This study (conducted in the 1970s, but previously unpublished; Gatbonton, 1975) examined the attitudes of native Francophone learners toward their peers learning English in Quebec when Québécois nationalism was intense. It was hypothesised that if language is a symbol of ethnic identity, there would be an intimate relationship between language and ethnic group affiliation and it would be strongest for groups in conflict—that is, when individuals are compelled to renegotiate their identity. Examined in this study was the issue of whether Quebec Francophone learners' pronunciation of English would be used by their peers to gauge their degree of affiliation to the Francophone ethnic group.

### Participants

The participants (henceforth, *listeners*) were 24 Francophone learners of English from Montréal selected from two intact English classes ( $N = 44$ ) at a local junior college who were asked to listen and react to the taped voices of Francophones speaking both English and French. The listeners were all native speakers of French, had been residents in Montréal since birth, and had varying degrees of loyalty to Francophone Quebecers as measured by a self-rated ethnic group affiliation questionnaire. The listeners were assigned to three groups of 8 listeners: (a) nationalistic listeners (those who rated themselves high on measures of pro-Francophone and low on measures of pro-Anglophone Canadian sentiments), (b) non-nationalistic listeners (those whose self-ratings showed the reverse pattern), and (c) liberal listeners (those who scored high on both sets of measures).

### Materials

The materials included two stimulus tapes and a set of questionnaires.

### *Stimulus Tapes*

Twenty-seven male Francophones between the ages of 19–30 ( $M = 22$ ; henceforth, *speakers*) were first recorded reading an English passage and its French translation. The French and English readings of 6 of these 27 speakers were selected based on two criteria: They had been judged by 10 other native French speakers to have similar personalities on 10 personality traits (e.g., intelligent, sympathetic) and had been judged by 10 native English speakers to have varying levels of accentedness in English, with 2 speakers considered nonaccented, 2 moderately accented, and 2 heavily accented.

The selected recordings were organized onto two stimulus tapes for a matched-guise presentation (Lambert et al., 1960). Each tape contained the French and English readings of one nonaccented, one moderately accented, and one heavily accented speaker. The French and English readings were presented sometimes singly, that is, in French only (French guise), English only (English guise), or sometimes together (Double guise). The Double guise was included to contrast monolingual and bilingual presentation conditions. This contrast is not of immediate concern for this article, so only the data from the monolingual conditions (French only and English only) are discussed. The French and English readings of the 6 target speakers were mixed with 3 distracter readings from nontargeted speakers and then presented as though they came from 12 different speakers instead of only 3. The presentation order of the readings was randomized on each tape.

### *Questionnaires*

Three questionnaires were used. The biographical data questionnaire sought demographic information about the listeners and their language-learning history. The ethnic group affiliation questionnaire assessed the listeners' degree of ethnic group affiliation. This questionnaire contained 7-point scales eliciting the listeners' responses to four pro-Francophone and four pro-Anglophone statements. These statements were chosen from a pool of 14 statements per language by a different panel of 14 native French and 14 native English judges, respectively. The ethnic group affiliation questionnaire had a self-rating and a speaker-rating version, used to rate the listeners' own and the speakers' ethnic group affiliation, respectively. Four behavioural scales measured the listeners' willingness to choose the speakers as leaders or members of a group collaborating on projects involving only Francophones (intra-group situation) or both Anglophones and Francophones (extragroup situation).



## Procedure

The listeners were assembled in their classrooms by a French-speaking research assistant accompanied by the researcher. The listeners were informed that they would hear several speakers read a passage sometimes singly (only in French or only in English) and sometimes consecutively (in both languages). After hearing each speaker, they completed the speaker version of the ethnic group affiliation questionnaire and the behavioural scales. At the end of the 30-minute session, they completed the biographical data questionnaire and the self-rating version of the ethnic group affiliation scales.

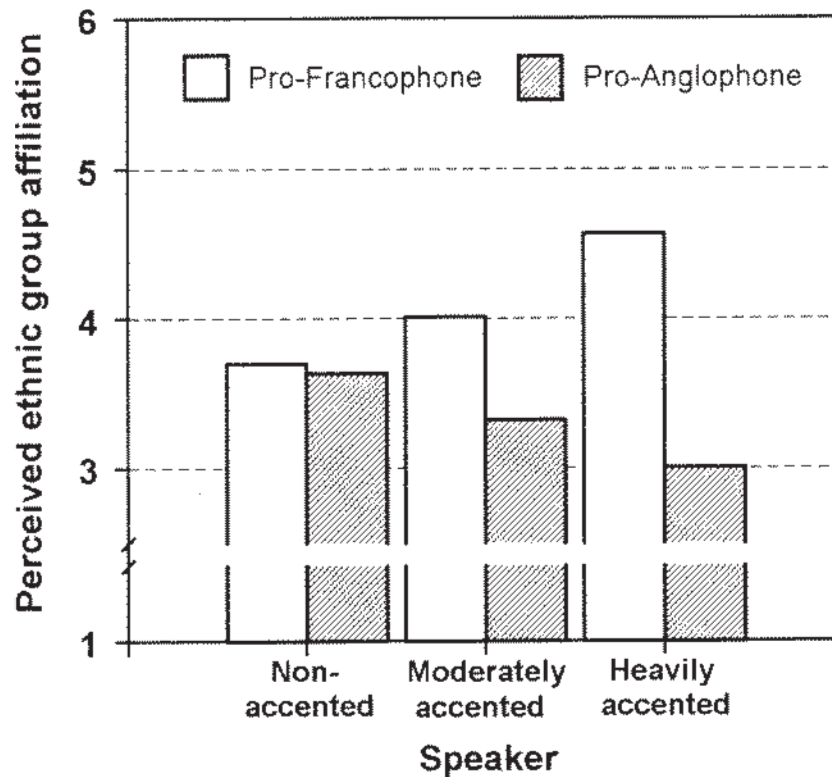
## Results

To determine the relationship between the listeners' L2 accent and their perceived ethnic group affiliation, their responses on each of the four pro-Anglophone and four pro-Francophone scales were submitted to several three-way repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with group (nationalistic, nonnationalistic, liberal) as between-subjects factors and guise (French, English, Double) and accent (nonaccented, moderately accented, heavily accented) as within-subjects factors. In no case was there a significant main effect of group, indicating that the listeners' self-rated ethnic affiliation on each scale did not influence their rating of the speakers' affiliation. However, the analyses yielded significant main effects of guise on all the scales,  $F_s(2, 21) > 5.10$ ,  $ps < .05$ , and accent,  $F_s(2, 21) > 4.66$ ,  $ps < .05$ , with no significant interactions involving these factors.

Follow-up comparisons exploring the accent effect (i.e., the effect that is most relevant to the question addressed in this article) indicated that the listeners responded differently to the different accents of the speakers. In particular, when compared on the four pro-Anglophone and the four pro-Francophone scales, the nonaccented speakers (and in most cases, the moderately accented speakers as well) were judged to be significantly more pro-Anglophone and less pro-Francophone than the heavily accented speakers. These findings are summarized in Figure 1.

To determine the behavioural consequences of the perceived relationship between L2 accent and ethnic group affiliation, the responses on the four membership and leadership behavioural scales were submitted separately to three-way ANOVAs with group (nationalistic, nonnationalistic, liberal) as between-subjects factors and guise (French, English, Double) and accent (nonaccented, moderately accented, heavily accented) as within-subjects factors. These analyses yielded a significant

FIGURE 1  
Native Francophone Learners' Responses on the  
Pro-Anglophone and Pro-Francophone Scales



guise effect only on the membership intragroup scale,  $F(2, 42) = 4.16$ ,  $p < .05$ , a significant accent effect on the leadership extragroup,  $F(2, 42) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .05$ , and membership extragroup scales,  $F(2, 42) > 6.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a significant group  $\times$  accent interaction on the leadership intragroup,  $F(4, 84) = 4.19$ ,  $p < .01$ , and membership extragroup scales  $F(4, 84) > 3.07$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Follow-up comparisons of the leadership responses revealed the following findings. In the extragroup situation (when Francophones work with Anglophones), all listeners, regardless of their own ethnic group affiliation, significantly preferred as leaders the nonaccented speakers to the moderately accented and the heavily accented speakers. In the intragroup situation (when only Francophones are involved), however, the listeners' choices depended on their own ethnic group affiliation. The nationalistic listeners were less willing than the liberal and the nonnationalistic listeners to take the nonaccented speakers as leaders, preferring instead both the moderately accented and the heavily



accented speakers. The nonnationalistic listeners preferred the non-accented over the moderately and heavily accented speakers.

Similar follow-up comparisons of the membership responses revealed that in the extragroup situation, the listeners' choices depended on their ethnic group affiliation. The nonnationalistic and the liberal listeners chose the nonaccented speakers over the moderately and heavily accented speakers whereas the nationalistic listeners did the opposite. In the intragroup situation, the participants did not seem to differ in their choice of group members; they saw all speakers as equally suitable.

## Discussion

Results of this study revealed that L2 learners treated their peers' L2 accent as an indicator of these peers' degree of ethnic affiliation, suggesting a relationship between the two. Moreover, the listeners ascribed these judgments regardless of their own degree of ethnic group affiliation—the less accented their peers' L2 speech was, the less group affiliation they ascribed to them. Results also revealed that this relationship had certain behavioural consequences, most notably in the listeners' choice of peers as leaders. When choosing leaders in biethnic situations, all preferred the unaccented and the moderately accented speakers to the heavily accented speakers, suggesting that these listeners likely considered ethnic identification to be less important than efficiency in the L2. However, when choosing leaders in monoethnic situations, the nationalistic listeners preferred the moderately accented and the heavily accented speakers as leaders, perhaps weighting ethnic identification more than efficiency.

Taken together, the findings of this study established a link between the degree of accentedness of learner speech and the way others perceive their ethnic group affiliation. This link is perhaps most obvious in contexts where there is a perceived threat to ethnic group identity, with the possible consequence that peer pressures compel learners to either identify themselves with or distance themselves from one of the groups in contact. The context of this study was one in which there was a threat to the existence of French in Quebec. However, in the years since this study, French has become the only official language of the province and the threat to the existence of French is no longer as intense as before. More importantly, the context in which there is an apparent threat to ethnic group identity is not typical of all L2 learning situations (e.g., Northover & Donnelly, 1996). Therefore, one question that was asked in the second study was whether the relationship between learners' L2 accent and their ethnic group affiliation would emerge if the groups examined were not in conflict. This question was addressed in Study 2.

## STUDY 2

Not all L2 learning situations involve groups in conflict or language competition. For example, French American students in Louisiana are comfortable with their two languages (Lambert, Giles, & Picard, 1975; Landry, Allard, & Henry, 1996). Similarly, although the Irish in Northern Ireland are engaged in political conflict with the English, the Irish language does not seem to be an integral core value so their sense of being Irish is not defined by their mastery of Irish (Northover & Donnelly, 1996). Pak, K. L. Dion, and K. K. Dion (1985) also document the case of the Chinese in Toronto who felt no tension in speaking both Chinese and English. In fact, even those who expressed greater confidence with their English than their Chinese had high self-esteem and felt a great sense of control over their lives.

The question raised in this study is whether in groups such as the Chinese, who see no apparent conflict between their two languages, the relationship between accent and perceived ethnic group affiliation would still obtain. This study examined the attitudes of native Chinese learners of English in Montréal toward their peers learning English to determine if a relationship between L2 accent and ethnic group affiliation exists when language groups involved are not in conflict and, if it does, whether it would have behavioural consequences. This study also investigated whether demographic variables (e.g., age), motivation, and perception of the role of language in identity affect this relationship and the possible behavioural consequences ensuing from it. Similar demographic variables were collected for the listeners and speakers in Study 1 but because that study was part of a larger investigation on linguistic variability, we did not examine the influence of these variables on the relationship between accent and perceived L2 ethnic group affiliation. Study 2, focusing on the relationship between pronunciation accuracy and ethnic group affiliation, provided an opportunity to look more specifically into the roles of these variables than could be done in Study 1.

### Participants and Materials

The listeners were 84 adult Chinese learners of English at two Montréal universities. All were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, born in Mainland China, and enrolled in degree programs in which English was the medium of instruction. As in Study 1, the materials included two stimulus tapes and a set of questionnaires.

### *Stimulus Tapes*

Thirty native Chinese learners of English drawn from the same participant pool were first recorded reading a passage in English and the same passage in Chinese. The Chinese and English readings of 6 of these 30 speakers were selected based on two criteria: First, they had been rated by 10 native Chinese judges to have similar personalities on 10 personality traits (e.g., intelligent, friendly) and second, they had been rated by 10 native English judges to have varying levels of accentedness in English, with two speakers considered nonaccented, two moderately accented, and two heavily accented.

The selected recordings were organized onto six stimulus tapes. The first three (Set 1) represented three randomized orders of the recordings spoken by 3 of the 6 speakers, one nonaccented, one moderately accented, and one heavily accented. The remaining three (Set 2) contained the recording by the other 3 speakers. In each set, the Chinese and English readings were again presented with 3 distracter voices so that the voices seemed to come from 12 different speakers, instead of only 3. In each set, the English only (English guise), Chinese only (Chinese guise), and bilingual (Double guise) readings were presented in a counterbalanced order.

### *Questionnaires*

Six questionnaires were used, each translated into Chinese. The listeners completed the translated version. The biographical questionnaire sought information about the listeners and their language-learning history. The ethnic group affiliation questionnaire assessed the listeners' degree of ethnic group affiliation. This questionnaire contained ten 7-point scales eliciting the listeners' responses to loyalty statements, constructed around five recurrent themes (two statements per theme): pride in being Chinese, defending the honour of the Chinese, participating in Chinese community affairs, supporting Chinese culture, and entrusting their personal problems to a Chinese. These statements were based on responses obtained from a group of 17 Chinese university students in Shanghai (similar in age and gender to the listeners in Study 2) who were asked to characterize a true and loyal Chinese person. As in Study 1, the ethnic group affiliation questionnaire had self-rating and speaker-rating versions.

The behavioural questionnaire measured the listeners' willingness to choose the speakers as leaders or members of a group engaged in group projects with only Chinese (intragroup situation) or both Chinese and Anglophones (extragroup situation) working together. An accidental

misprinting of the wording of one of the membership scales invalidated it so only the data on the two leadership scales were analysed. Three other questionnaires were also used: (a) a speaker accentedness scale asking the listeners to estimate each speaker's level of English accentedness, (b) a motivation scale containing eight questions examining the listeners' motivations (four integrative and four instrumental), and (c) a language and identity scale seeking the listeners' view concerning the role of Chinese in expressing Chinese culture and identity.

## Procedure

The listeners were tested in groups of 10, with 52 listening to Set 1 tapes and 32 listening to Set 2 tapes. The listeners first completed the biographical data questionnaire, rated themselves on the scales for motivation and for language and identity, and completed the self-rating version of the ethnic group affiliation questionnaire. They then listened to the voices of male speakers reading a passage sometimes in English or in Chinese and sometimes in both languages. After hearing each speaker, they rated the speaker's English accent (in the English guise) and personality and completed the speaker version of the ethnic group affiliation questionnaire and the behavioural questionnaire. The testing session lasted approximately 60 minutes.

## Results

Although all the speakers used in Set 1 and Set 2 tapes were previously judged by native English speakers to represent three different levels of proficiency, the listeners' ratings of the speakers' English accent in Set 2 did not represent the expected three levels of accentedness, but those in Set 1 did. In other words, only in Set 1 were the 3 speakers rated as significantly different from one another in terms of accentedness ( $p < .025$ ). Thus, all subsequent analyses used only the data from Set 1 ( $N = 52$ ).

The first set of analyses examined the relationship between L2 accent and perceived ethnic group affiliation, as a function of the listeners' perception of their own ethnic group identity. The listeners' five sets of ratings of their own ethnic group affiliation were first subjected to a Cronbach test of interrater reliability. This analysis yielded relatively high indexes (range .63–.77), indicating a high degree of internal consistency among the five ratings. These ratings were, then, averaged to derive one measure of ethnic group affiliation per rater. The listeners with a rating above the median of 5 were considered high in ethnic group affiliation, whereas those with a rating below 5 were considered low.

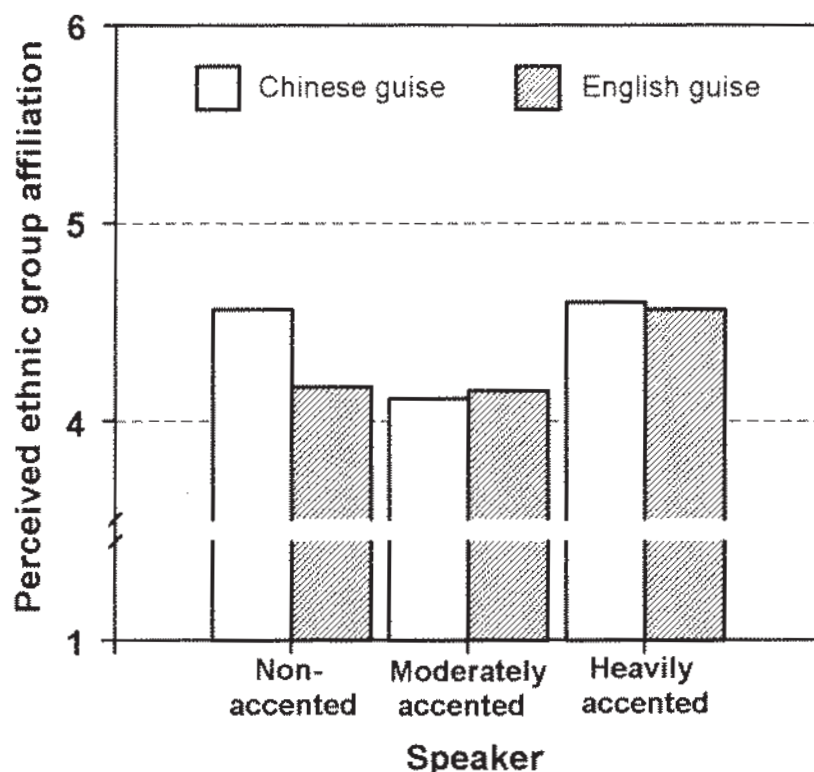
The listeners' responses on the speaker-rating version of the ethnic group affiliation questionnaire were then submitted to a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA with the listeners' self-rated ethnic group affiliation (high, low) as between-subjects factors and guise (Chinese, English, Double) and accent (nonaccented, moderately accented, heavily accented) as within-subjects factors. This analysis yielded a significant main effect of guise,  $F(2, 102) = 18.06, p < .001$ , and accent,  $F(2, 102) = 6.80, p < .01$ , and a significant guise  $\times$  accent interaction,  $F(4, 204) = 3.58, p < .01$ , but no significant effects involving ethnic group affiliation.

Follow-up comparisons indicated that the listeners responded differently to the 3 speakers when these were presented in different guises. In particular, when the listeners heard the speakers in English only, they attributed greater ethnic group affiliation to the heavily accented than to the moderately accented and the nonaccented speaker. However, when the listeners heard the same speakers in Chinese, they attributed significantly lower ethnic group affiliation to the moderately accented than to the nonaccented and the heavily accented speaker. This latter result was surprising. Because the speakers were all heard in Chinese (their native language), it was not expected that any would be ascribed greater ethnic group affiliation than the others. Examination of the original speaker ratings showed that the moderately accented speaker spoke a nonstandard dialect of Chinese, which likely caused his low ratings in Chinese. These ratings were not considered further. Figure 2 presents these findings.

The second set of analyses examined whether age, gender, instrumental and integrative motivations, and attitudinal (perceived role of language in identity) variables affected the relationship between L2 accent and ethnic group affiliation. To examine effects of each demographic variable, the listeners were divided into males and females, and younger (19–27) and older listeners (28–40). To examine effects of the instrumental and integrative motivation as well as of the role of language in identity, one score was first derived for each rater by averaging this person's ratings on each measure. Then the listeners were divided into two groups—those who scored above or below the median rating for each of the three variables examined: instrumental motivation (median 6), integrative motivation (6), and language in identity (4.5).

The listeners' ethnic group affiliation ratings were then submitted to a series of three-way repeated-measures ANOVAs with age (younger, older), gender (male, female), instrumental motivation (high, low), integrative motivation (high, low), or language in identity (high, low) as between-subjects factors and guise (Chinese, English, Double) and accent (nonaccented, moderately accented, heavily accented) as within-subjects factors. The analyses by age, motivation, and language in identity yielded no significant effects involving these factors. This finding

**FIGURE 2**  
Native Chinese Learners' Responses on the Ethnic Group Affiliation Scales  
in the Chinese and English Guises



suggests that the listeners' own degree of instrumental or integrative motivation, their age, or the role they ascribe to language in shaping their identity did not affect their ratings of the speakers. The analysis by gender yielded only a significant gender  $\times$  accent interaction. Follow-up comparisons revealed the female listeners to be significantly more willing than the male listeners to ascribe higher ethnic group affiliation ratings to the speakers ( $p < .02$ ).

The final set of analyses examined the behavioural consequences of the relationship between L2 accent and ethnic group affiliation. The listeners' choices of the speakers as leaders in the English guise were submitted to a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA, with the listeners' self-rated ethnic group affiliation (high, low) as between-subjects factors and accent (non-accented, moderately accented, heavily accented) and situation (intragroup, extragroup) as within-subjects factors. This ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of accent,  $F(2, 102) = 70.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , a significant situation  $\times$  accent interaction,  $F(2, 102) = 4.15$ ,  $p < .025$ , but no significant main effect of ethnic group affiliation. Follow-up



comparisons revealed that the nonaccented speaker was preferred as a leader over the other two speakers in both the intra- and extragroup situations. This finding did not depend on the listeners' own ethnic group affiliation.

## Discussion

Results revealed once again a relationship between L2 learners' accent and their affiliation to their home ethnic group. More importantly, this relationship was obtained in a situation that offered no apparent threat to the learners' ethnic group identity, suggesting that this link is a stable one and may be found in a variety of L2 learning contexts. As in Study 1, the relationship between the learners' L2 accent and their perceived group affiliation held regardless of their own allegiance to the group—that is, whether or not they considered themselves more or less loyal to their ethnic group. The finding that L2 learners' motivation, their perception of the role of language in defining identity, and their age had no significant effect on the relationship studied suggests that ethnic group affiliation represents a construct separable from motivational and attitudinal variables. The only significant influence on ethnic group affiliation ratings obtained in this study—that of gender—is perhaps traceable to differences in socialization of Chinese boys and girls (Kyratzis & Guo, 1996). Brought up in a largely male-dominated society, Chinese women may tend to ascribe positive traits, including loyalty, to Chinese men, especially to those who may be perceived as being bilingual.

Results of this study also reveal that the relationship between L2 learners' accent and their ethnic group affiliation has certain behavioural consequences. When choosing peers as leaders in mono- and biethnic situations, the learners preferred the nonaccented speaker to the moderately accented and heavily accented speakers. These findings contrasted with those obtained in Study 1. In that study, whenever ethnic identification was important (for nationalistic listeners in a monoethnic situation), the learners compromised the authenticity of English accent, choosing the moderately and the heavily accented speakers as their leaders. For the Chinese in this study, efficiency in the L2 was apparently important regardless of the situation in which they were called to participate and of their own degree of ethnic group affiliation. This difference in behavioural consequences is likely traceable to differences in learning contexts—a learning context in which there was a threat to ethnic group identity (Study 1) and one in which there was none (Study 2). Because the Chinese likely do not feel threatened by Anglophones and are not in conflict with them, they do not have as strong a need as

the Francophones in Quebec (Taylor, Bassili, & Aboud, 1973) or the Welsh (Bourhis & Giles, 1977) to represent their ethnic identity through accent. A visible minority in Canada, the Chinese may not need the added ethnic identification by accent to indicate their membership in the Chinese community.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

A proposal was presented earlier to include GEFs among the factors important to consider in understanding L2 pronunciation learning. The studies reported earlier support this proposal by documenting the use of L2 accents in estimating ethnic group affiliation. The more learners sound like the speakers of their target language, the less they are perceived by their peers to be loyal to their home group. This finding was robust, cutting across ethnic groups and sociopolitical contexts. The studies also revealed behavioural consequences of the association between ethnic group affiliation and L2 accent. Learners would sometimes pick as leaders or coworkers those who sounded more like the speakers of their target language over those who did not, but the choice was sometimes affected by learners' own feelings of affiliation.

What is interesting about these findings is that learners' behavioural intentions did not necessarily match their beliefs. Both the Chinese and the Francophone learners of English indicated that speakers with higher levels of L2 pronunciation accuracy were less loyal to their home group. Nevertheless, when probed about their behaviour, some (the nonnationalistic Francophone learners in Study 1 and the Chinese learners in Study 2) chose these same speakers in contexts where loyalty was an issue. This finding suggests that L2 learning entails choices, in this case, perhaps between the reward of being efficient in the L2 (indicating the need for language ability best suited for communicative success) and the cost of not marking the right identity (implying a risk of being labelled disloyal).

### **Ethnic Group Affiliation and L2 Pronunciation Accuracy**

Given the role of L2 accent in characterizing learners' ethnic group affiliation, the question that arises is how the association between accent and affiliation might affect the acquisition of L2 pronunciation accuracy. To answer this question, the role of ethnic group affiliation should be discussed in the context of language socialization and the demands imposed on learners by social groups in contact.

People are typically socialized into membership in at least one social

group—usually their ethnic group—for which they develop loyalties. If they maintain contact with only this group, they are seldom, if ever, faced with questions about group affiliation. As a result, the identities they negotiate in their day-to-day interactions are limited to those of a more personal nature (identities as men or women, employers, employees, wives, husbands, parents, etc.). If, however, they learn an L2, they automatically come into contact with another group in which they have potential membership. Faced with two groups, learners inevitably have to negotiate their identities, creating a new one with the new group or reaffirming their existing identity with the home group. These negotiations may be straightforward. When required to express an affiliation with the target group, learners use the target language, and when negotiating their identity with their own group, they use their home language.

However, the inner workings of social groups in contact are typically not this clear cut. Ethnic groups tend to be ethnocentric, seeing themselves as more important or superior to others, their existence to be defended and guarded at all cost. From this vantage point, home groups may see their members learning another language and gaining entry into another group as a threat to their existence. As a result, the home group may be very negative toward their own members learning the other group's language. Depending on the intensity of the threat, pressures imposed on learners can range from mildly suspecting learners' loyalty, to labelling them as people who "sold out" (Taylor, 1977), to actually trying to block their L2 learning. The target language group, too, can have attitudes and perceptions that affect its members' behaviour toward the learners. If they support the learners' entry into their group, they may provide them with opportunities to grow and prosper. Alternatively, the target group may disapprove of the learners' entry and attempt to hinder their progress. Caught between the tug and pull of their two reference groups, the learners' best option is to examine the costs and rewards of choosing to ally with one or the other group (Frassure-Smith et al., 1975).

These costs and rewards have consequences for language learning, in particular for learning pronunciation. First, learners may see and value the rewards of L2 learning (e.g., gaining access to resources only the target group can provide) and strive to attain the highest possible level of L2 mastery (e.g., native or near-native L2 pronunciation accuracy). Second, and opposite to the first, learners may aim for a lower level of L2 pronunciation accuracy (e.g., by maintaining an accent to continue to sound like members of their home group), recognizing the need to maintain identification with the home group and being aware of the social costs of not doing so. The curtailing need not be done intentionally. Learners may simply feel it futile to aim for higher levels of accuracy

because the only reward for doing so is aspersions on their group loyalty. Consequently, they lose all incentive to strive harder and eventually give up, failing to attain the levels expected of them.

The third possibility represents an intermediate position. Learners see that the rewards and costs of L2 learning can balance out. They strive for the highest level attainable but nevertheless retain ways of manipulating their pronunciation to clearly signal where their loyalties lie. In fact, they need not manipulate pronunciation across the whole language but simply selected aspects that serve as markers—for example, deleting final consonants in words like *reading* or *floor* to indicate social class (Fischer, 1958) or centralising vowel sounds to mark identity (Labov, 1972).

These three possibilities (among others) result from learners' recognition of their peers' negative judgments about their loyalty, judgments they have been socialized to expect. It is in this sense that ethnic group affiliation as a GEF may shape the direction and ultimate level of L2 pronunciation accuracy that learners attain.

## **Pedagogical Implication**

The most important pedagogical implication of our findings concerns the need for teachers to become aware of the possible role of GEFs in the acquisition of L2 pronunciation accuracy. First, teachers should not readily interpret some learners' inability to achieve certain levels of L2 pronunciation accuracy as reflecting a lack of ability or interest. The possibility exists that heavily accented L2 pronunciation may represent a learner's way of coping with social pressures from their home communities. Second, teachers should recognize the fact that these pressures can also exist in the classroom. Some learners' efforts to sound like the target-language speakers may be looked down on by their peers, resulting in tension in the classroom that, in turn, affects the dynamics of important classroom activities such as group work and peer feedback (Morris & Tarone, 2003). Knowing that ethnic group affiliation could affect these dynamics, teachers should create an atmosphere where its positive effects could be enhanced and negative aspects diminished. Finally, although the goal of teaching is to assist learners in attaining the highest level of pronunciation accuracy possible, the drive to do so should not give the message that accented speech is inferior; tolerance toward such speech should be practised in the classroom (Derwing, Rossiter, & Munro, 2002).

## **FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS OF ETHNIC GROUP AFFILIATION**

The studies reported in this article have documented an association between ethnic group affiliation and L2 accent. Its impact on the actual levels of L2 pronunciation accuracy that learners attain needs further investigation. In future investigations, the following questions could be asked. First, are those who make accent-based judgments of people's loyalties themselves perceived to have a high level of ethnic group affiliation and low level of L2 pronunciation accuracy? Second, are those who have attained high levels of L2 pronunciation accuracy aware of their peers' judgments about their group affiliation and has this awareness influenced their pronunciation learning? Finally, do judgments of ethnic group affiliation based on accent have any effect on the overall levels of pronunciation accuracy attained or only on specific features of speech, such as the pronunciation of individual sounds?

Recent studies on identity (Cerullo, 1997), including gender, race, and ethnicity, suggest that people construct and display multiple identities. The underlying assumption in these studies is that identities are not fixed entities but that they are negotiable, with language being manipulated to express the identities that reap the best social rewards from moment to moment (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). It would be interesting to study how learners behave when faced with the choice between rewards for being an efficient communicator versus the comfort that comes from being loyal. What happens when these two conflict? Which options do learners choose? In the studies reported in this article, some of the learners faced with these alternatives took a position contrary to their beliefs. That is, although they believed that nonaccented speakers were less loyal, they nevertheless chose them for leaders or members. However, compromise positions are possible. For example, moderately accented speakers could be chosen because they could meet both efficiency and identity requirements. Finding answers to this question may require manipulating the interaction between efficiency and identity experimentally by creating situations where compromise is not possible. Finally, the relative importance of ethnic group affiliation as a factor influencing L2 pronunciation learning should be evaluated against other social factors such as aptitude, attitudes, motivation, threat to identity, culturally held beliefs and myths, and ethnolinguistic vitality.

Other factors, which are the focus of much current research on identities, are those that arise from the uneven value of language as currency in the linguistic marketplace. Influenced by poststructuralist thinkers (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991), language scholars have recently begun to view language in these economic terms, suggesting, for example, that

“those who are not speakers of the official languages or standard variety are subject to symbolic domination” (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 15). For these underprivileged speakers, learning the language of power in their community may be their only means of escaping domination. But what happens in situations when these speakers’ sense of ethnic group affiliation comes head to head against the need to learn the language? What adjustment do they make to their L2 pronunciation to accommodate their need for ethnic group affiliation? Can they separate their desire for ethnic group affiliation from their desire to overcome linguistic handicap in these contexts? With globalization, increasing numbers of groups of people are placed in minority situations as they move around the planet in search of economic, educational, and political opportunities. Studying the interplay of social forces in these people acquiring the languages imposed on them by perceived gains would contribute to a better understanding of how to teach such languages effectively while helping people adjust to their new worlds.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of ethnic group affiliation and its influence on L2 pronunciation learning can be conceptualized within a broader framework of L2 development. In this framework, based on sociocultural approaches to L2 acquisition (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000), language learning is viewed not just as a matter of accumulating knowledge of discrete language elements but as a process in which learners participate in a community of users. Our findings underscore the role of social variables, especially those emanating from learners’ own reference groups, in the construction of the language needed to make this participation possible.

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