



Making room for identity and prospective non-native teachers' voices in second language (L2) pronunciation teaching

Adriana F.C. Millán

University of Seville

Abstract

In the context of second language (L2) teaching and learning, native speakerism has long influenced both student and teacher perceptions of effective instruction [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. This study focuses on the voices of prospective non-native teachers of English as a foreign language to learn their preferences, opinions, and knowledge of L2 pronunciation in relation to their teaching identity. Through the lens of sociocultural theory, it uses a mixed methods explanatory design, where pretest and posttest surveys will be administered to undergraduate students majoring in Primary Education and English at several universities of Southern Spain, to examine the extent to which L2 phonological awareness contributes to the development of new personal and social identities. It further examines whether individuals with a strong emotional and cultural affect to their first language (L1) are less likely to undergo such identity changes. This research will resource to R software to carry out the statistical analysis of survey data in search of possible correlations and patterns worth further exploring in semi-structured interviews which, by means of thematic content analysis, will help us deepen our understanding of the participants' responses and attitudes towards L2 pronunciation teaching. Positive results will confirm a strong correlation between phonological awareness and L2 identity expansion, fortifying an increasing body of literature that fosters conversations of identity in L2 pronunciation teacher training and development. Admittedly, such outcome would inform better pedagogical decision making for teachers to find a fine target between the desire of intelligibility and individuality [7].

Keywords: Language Teacher Identity (LTI), Teacher Professional Development, L2 Pronunciation, Accent, Sociocultural Theory, Metaphorical Analysis.

1. Introduction and theoretical framework

In the field of EFL or SLA, the idealized notion of native speakers as the most legitimate teaching models has long lived in the minds of both teachers and students (Timmis, 2002; Alghazo & Zidan, 2019). This core belief of native speakerism has also served as a professional and economic gatekeeper for those speaking with stereotyped accents or non-standard language varieties that differ from the privileged ones, namely American English or British English in the case of English (Harrison, 2014). Not surprisingly, when tasked to teach L2 pronunciation, non-native teachers have been reported to feel a sense of inadequacy (Bernat, 2008), a lack of confidence (Couper, 2017; Buss 2016; Tsang 2021) or dissatisfaction towards their own accent (Walker, 1999). Despite native teachers' reporting equally important pedagogical limitations when it comes to the teaching of L2 pronunciation such as lacking phonological knowledge (Foote, Holtby, Derwing, 2011), native-speakerism has long privileged nativeness among language teachers.

Nonetheless, "there is consensus among professional language teaching organizations that there is no justification to privilege native speaker identity... in any context of language teaching" (Levis, 2022). As a matter of fact, accumulated and most recent literature has contested some of the shortcomings of native speakerism, showing that teaching efficacy does not depend on teachers' ethnic and linguistic background (Levis, 2022). Other factors, such as teacher preparation (Burri & Baker, 2021), increased pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge (Cochran et al., 1991; Gordon and Barrantes-Elizondo, 2024) and specific learning experiences (Zhang & Faez, 2024) emerge as key components that realistically seem to make a difference in teachers' cognition and, especially, in the teaching of L2 pronunciation for all teachers across the board, regardless of the native or non-native identity of the teacher.

Yet, that is not to say that identity factors should be of secondary order, at least, not to the current research study nor to those concerned with sociocultural education. Specifically, we align with the sociocultural perspective on language and literacy learning as conceptualized by scholar J.P. Gee, who claims that languages are learned primarily at the social level to enact specific socially-situated identities for specific socially-situated activities or purposes (Gee, 2015).



In the same lines, language teacher identity (LTI) is fundamental to our research. From a collective understanding of LTI through the perspective of numerous experienced scholars, Barkhuizen et al. (2017) defined it as a dynamic entity of a multilayered multifaceted nature (well beyond simplistic labels like native vs. non-native), which is constantly evolving within various sociocultural and professional contexts. As regards methodological approaches, Sadegui and A. Bahari (2022) have documented an emerging trend in current research on L2 teacher identity moving away from using essentializing binaries in the construction of an individual's professional identity. Significantly, their findings highlight the part emotional factors play in L2 teacher identity development.

Hence, this study echoes their recommendations and focuses on:

- developing prospective teachers' self-knowledge (Richards & Nunan, 1990, p.136) "to capitalize on the candidate's prior experiences as a student and use this experience as a starting point for examining beliefs";
- proposing an innovative methodology that can capture the influence of emotions and lived experiences in a quantitative manner.

In doing so, we hope to answer three research questions:

- How does it feel to speak your L2?
- How does my L2 accent feel?
- What would my L2 pronunciation instruction look like?

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the L2 felt identity of undergraduate students of English for primary education. The methodology was structured into three key areas: the participants, the research instrument, and the process of data analysis.

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 71 undergraduate students enrolled in a primary education degree program with a specialization in English as a foreign language. All participants were non-native speakers of English and completed the survey on a voluntary basis.

2.2 Instrument

The primary data collection tool was the L2 Felt Identity Instrument, a custom-designed survey developed to capture the nuanced self-perceptions of L2 speakers. The instrument was written in Spanish and it contained 10 items comprising three distinct types of questions:

1. Semantic Differential Scales: The core of the instrument consisted of 7-point semantic differential scales anchored by opposing adjectives or metaphorical phrases. These scales were designed to measure key constructs such as Ownership, Confidence, Limiting, and beliefs about language, and sociocultural awareness. For instance, to measure the degree to which speakers felt their L2 pronunciation was an integrated part of themselves, a scale named 'Ownership' was used. It was anchored by 'An imitation' (1) and 'A part of me' (7). Then, to measure the speaker's perceived freedom of expression, a semantic differential scale termed 'Limiting' was employed. The scale was anchored by the opposing concepts of 'Liberating' (1) and 'Limiting' (7), with higher scores indicating a greater sense of constraint when speaking the L2. Alternatively, to capture the speaker's perception of their accent as a social marker (coded as L2 Accent Perception), a metaphorical scale named '**Accent Experience**' was included. The poles were 'Like wearing a passport on your forehead' (1), signifying a feeling of being marked as a foreigner, and 'Like carrying a passport with multiple stamps' (7), signifying a sense of pride in one's worldly experience."
2. Categorical Metaphor Items: To explore the multifaceted nature of L2 identity, the survey included multiple-choice items requiring participants to select one or two metaphors that best described their experience. These items were designed to measure complex variables such as the L2 Speaker Persona. This categorical variable, named 'L2 Speaker Persona', included options ranging from authentic self-perception (e.g., 'at home') to performance-based identities (e.g., 'an actor on a stage' or 'a chameleon'). Additionally, to capture participants' views on learning L2 pronunciation, a selection of metaphors was presented (e.g., 'metaphor Olympics training', 'a piece of cake' or 'discovery of new sounds').



3. Binary Choice Items: A binary forced-choice item was used to measure the construct of Identity Shift. This item required respondents to choose between a statement representing a stable self ('I am the same person') and one representing a changing self ('I behave and think differently when I speak my L2'). The stable-self option was coded as 0, and the shifting-self option was coded as 1.

Regarding its validation, prior to its final administration, the instrument underwent the following validation process to ensure its clarity and relevance.

1. Peer Review: The initial draft of the survey was reviewed by two experienced English teachers with a keen interest in phonology. Their feedback was used to refine the wording and ensure the items were relevant to the pedagogical context.
2. Pilot Study: The revised instrument was then piloted with a small group of three language teachers who had also learned a second language. This step served to check the clarity of the instructions and the intuitive feel of the metaphorical scales from a respondent's perspective.
3. Expert Review: Finally, the instrument was submitted for review to an expert in the design of language exam scales. This expert consultation focused on the structural pertinence of the semantic differential items and the overall coherence of the instrument in measuring the intended psychological constructs.

2.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using Statgraphics v.18 instead of R software as initially planned. The analysis was conducted in two stages.

First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the data. For all semantic differential scales (treated as numeric/interval data), the mean, median, and standard deviation were computed. For all categorical variables (e.g., L2 Speaker Persona, Identity Shift), frequency counts and percentages were calculated to determine the distribution of responses.

Second, inferential statistics were used to explore the relationships between variables. Pearson product-moment correlations were run to assess the strength and direction of linear relationships between all numeric scale variables. Further, independent samples t-tests were planned to compare the mean scores on key scales based on the binary Identity Shift variable. The alpha level for determining statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

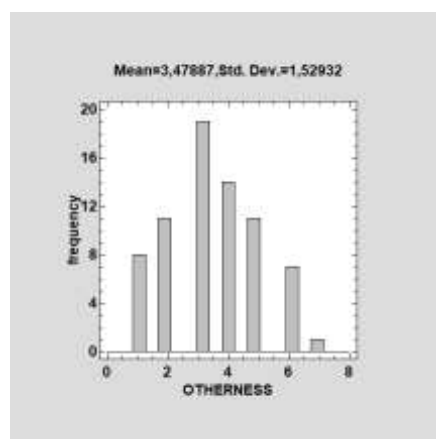
3. Findings

Our initial analysis focused on verifying the normal distribution for key scales. As an example, results for the Limiting scale are described as follows:

- Average (Mean) = 3.52: The average score is very close to the midpoint (4.0) of the 1-7 scale. It leans slightly towards the "Liberating" pole (1) rather than the "Limiting" pole (7). This suggests that the group of participants does not feel heavily constrained when speaking their L2.
- Standard Deviation = 1.11: This confirmed a moderate spread of opinions.
- Range (1.0 to 6.0): There was a wide range of experiences, from someone who felt very liberated (a score of 1) to someone who felt quite limited (a score of 6). However, no one chose the most extreme "Limiting" option (7).
- Skewness and Kurtosis (both between -2 and +2): Our data were confirmed to follow a normal distribution, that is, a classic bell curve. Consequently, correlations and t-tests were run safely.

A sense of alienation was also measured as shown in Figure 1. The histogram for the Otherness scale showed a mean of 3.48, and the previously analyzed data for the LIMITING scale showed a mean of 3.52. In both cases, the average scores for the group clustered near the center of the 7-point scale, suggesting that as a whole, the participants did not feel strongly limited or like an "other."

Fig. 1. Histogram Otherness scale.



Part of our inferential findings are shown in Figure 2, as we extracted a correlations matrix. From our interpretation, we relate briefly the positive correlations that were found relevant to our research:

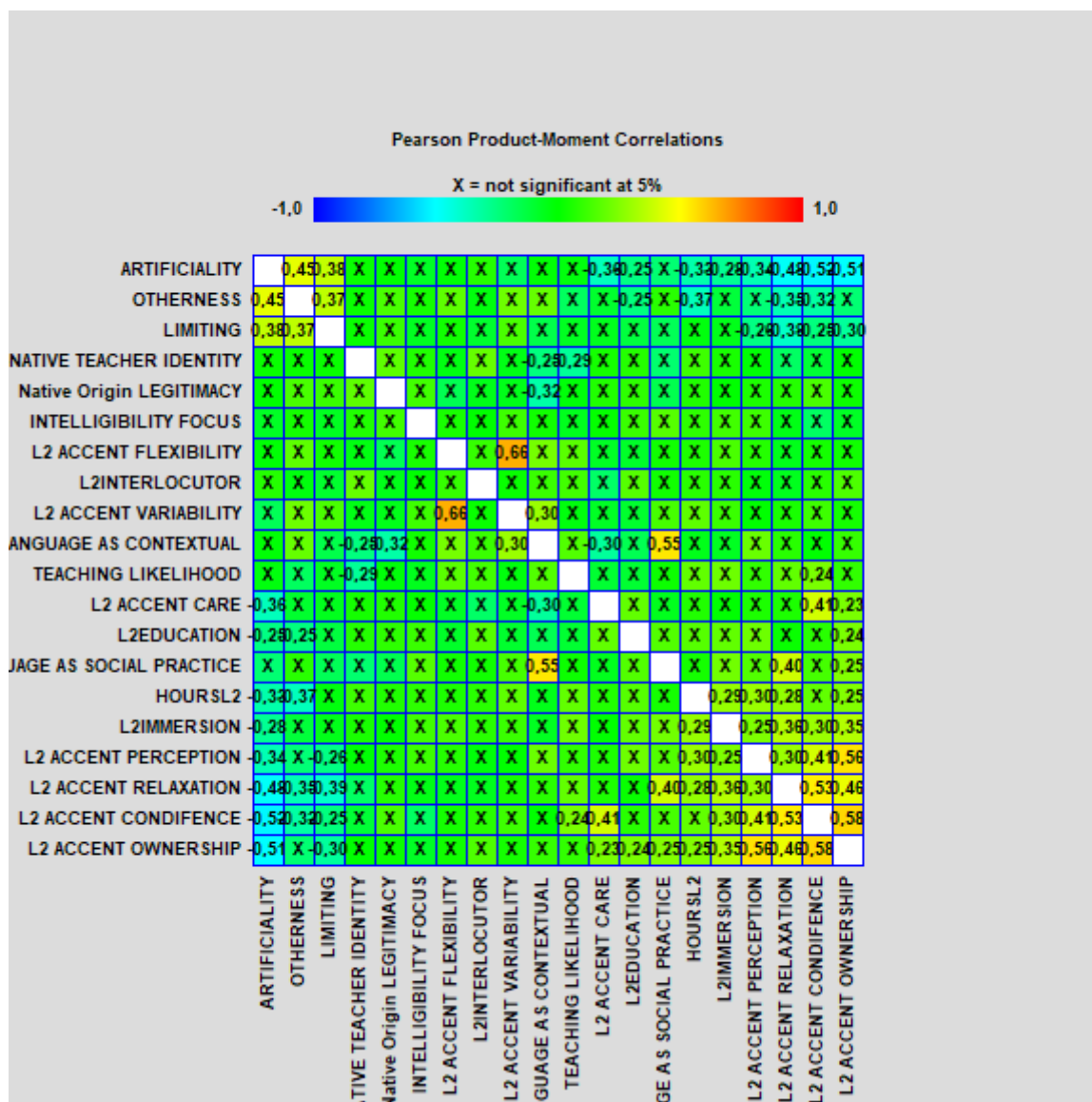
1. **Confidence** related significantly to L2 accent care, L2 accent relaxation, L2 accent ownership, L2 accent perception and the sense of pride involved in it; 2. **L2 Immersion** as it related to L2 Accent relaxation; 3. **L2 accent ownership**, those saying that their accent was part of them, related to L2 accent relaxation, L2 accent perception, L2 accent confidence; 4. **Otherness**, those saying that they felt like a different self, other person, and how this related to limiting, artificiality; 5. **L2 Accent perception**, and those who ranked high there with a sense of pride involved in it, ranked also positive in HoursL2, immersion, relaxation, confidence and ownership. 6. As it regards sociocultural awareness, the scale language as contextual correlated positively with language as social practice. 7 **L2 accent variability** correlated positively to L2 accent flexibility and language as contextual.

This suggests the existence of a confident speaker profile, where the psychological acceptance of one's accent as part of the self is linked to both higher confidence and a more physically relaxed state during speech.

In terms of the relevant negative correlations, feeling like another person (Otherness) is significantly correlated with feeling that your speech is Artificial ($r = .45$) and Limiting ($r = .37$). Therefore, there is a significant link between feelings of inauthenticity. It is worth mentioning that: 1. Those ranking high in Artificial scale ranked low in L2 accent relaxation, confidence and ownership. 2. HoursL2 correlated negatively to Otherness, meaning that more exposure to the L2, would mean a lesser feeling of otherness. 3 Those ranking their pronunciation as **limiting** ranked low in L2 Accent perception, meaning they feel more self-aware about their accent, they also ranked low in relaxation, confidence and ownership. This evokes that the feeling of being constraint is tied to lacking confidence and feeling physical tension.

The fact that negative feelings about identity are tightly clustered together suggests that speakers who felt their L2 self was an 'other' were also significantly more likely to perceive their speech as artificial and limiting, creating a consistent profile of alienation from their L2 identity.

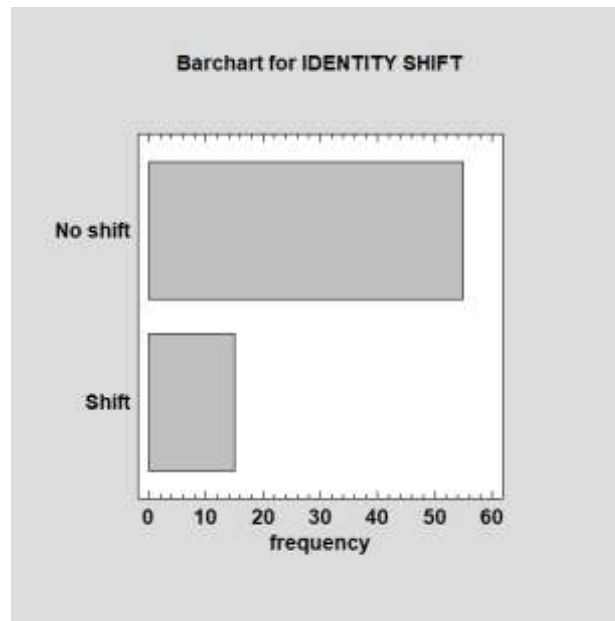
Fig. 2. Correlation Matrix.



Finally, HoursL2 and L2Immersion correlate with positive outcomes. More hours in the L2 significantly reduces the feeling of Otherness ($r = -.37$) and Artificiality ($r = -.33$), while increasing Ownership ($r = .25$) and Relaxation ($r = .28$). This confirms experience plays a crucial role in mitigating feelings of alienation. Increased hours of L2 use and immersion were significantly associated with a reduced sense of otherness and a greater feeling of accent ownership, suggesting that time and exposure are key factors in integrating the L2 self.

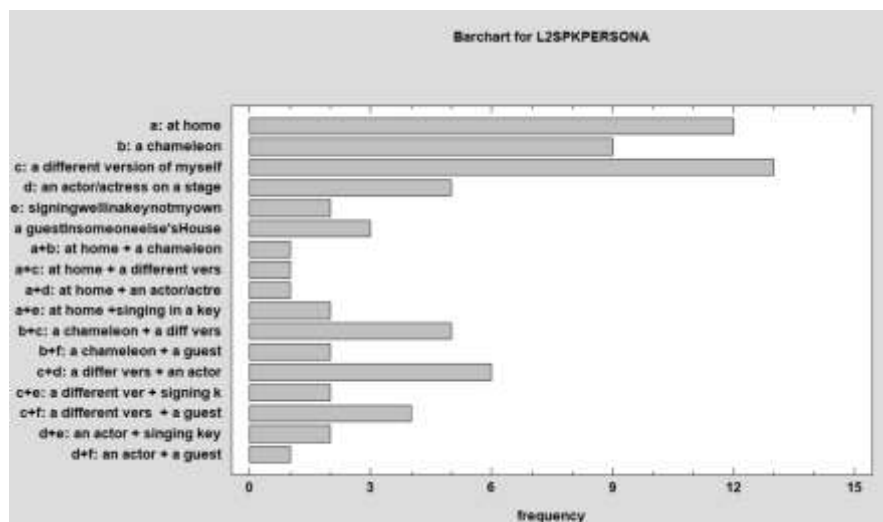
The results of the binary choice item provided a foundational finding, which is illustrated in the bar chart for the IDENTITY SHIFT variable (Figure 3). The vast majority of participants (approximately 79%) reported a stable sense of self, selecting "No shift." This indicates a predominant belief in identity continuity across languages.

Fig. 3. Barchart IDENTITY SHIFT.



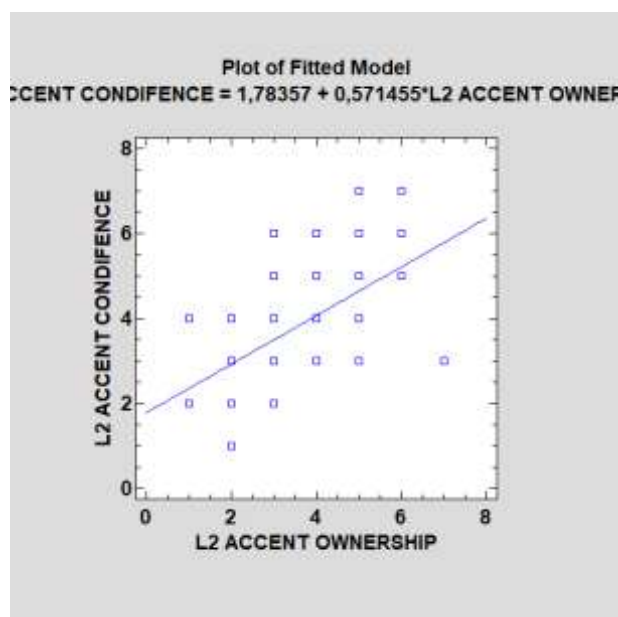
In contrast, the frequency analysis of the L2SPKPERSONA variable revealed a more complex, multilayered experience. As shown in the Figure 4, while "a different version of myself" and "at home" were the most popular single choices, a significant number of participants chose a combination of two metaphors to describe their persona. The most frequent combinations included layering the "different version" persona with feelings of performance ("an actor") or social adaptation ("a chameleon").

Fig. 4. Barchart L2 Speaker Persona



Finally, to further investigate the connection between ownership and confidence, a simple linear regression was conducted. The results, shown in the regression plot (Figure 5), confirm that L2 Accent Ownership is a significant positive predictor of L2 Accent Confidence. The fitted model indicates that for each one-point increase in the feeling of ownership, a speaker's confidence is predicted to increase by 0.57 points. This finding statistically reinforces the central role that authentic identity plays in fostering speaker confidence.

Fig. 5. Linear Regression relating L2 Accent Confidence and L2 Accent Ownership



4. Discussion and conclusion

Since an overwhelming majority of our participants (79%) felt they are the same person when speaking their L2, one would assume the foundational belief of these learners is one of identity continuity. Therefore, as teacher educators are encouraged to promote conversations of identity in L2 pronunciation teacher training and development, pedagogical approaches should integrate L2 socially-situated and socially developed new identities within the larger self and not in opposition to the existing L1 self.

As a matter of fact, the most prevalent persona identified was that of 'a different version of myself'. It is not a different person, just a different *version*. Then, the fact that almost 40% of our participants needed to combine two metaphors to describe their experience demonstrates that a single identity was not enough. These data confirm the multifaceted and, incidentally, contradictory nature of speaking and teaching a second language. If the L2 speaker persona is not monolithic, but a composite of different feelings, experiences and strategies, why should we, as teacher educators, continue using useless binaries in the construction of an individual's professional identity?

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