'She Has an Accent' - When Pronunciation Overrides Appearance in Determining Whether Someone Is a Native English Speaker

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Abstract

Studies on nativeness affirm that being judged/perceived as a native/non-native English speaker is determined by social factors such as nationality, variety spoken and ethnicity. This study investigated how listeners from seven different countries judged speakers who were audio and video recorded as native or non-native English speakers by comparing whether having access to the videos made listeners change their ratings. Nine speakers from different linguistic backgrounds were audio and video recorded. Thirty-two listeners listened and watched the recordings and judged speakers as native/non-native English speakers. Listeners' judgements were compared and analyzed as well as their comments for each speaker. The results show that though a few listeners considered appearance when rating the speakers, only a minority of them, in a minority of cases, changed their judgements when they saw the videos, and of those, few referred explicitly to appearance or geographical origin as information they used in making their judgement. Instead pronunciation emerged as the most commonly cited and consistent factor influencing listeners' perceptions of nativeness.

Keywords: native speaker, native English speaker, language and identity, appearance

1. Introduction

Studies on the nativeness paradigm span various fields, including (applied) linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. These studies typically classify individuals into a binary distinction: native and non-native speakers. In linguistics, nativeness has been extensively analyzed (Kachru, 1982; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990; Davies, 1991 and 1995; Griffer & Samimy, 2001; Doerr, 2009; Kubota, 2009) and, more recently, by Faez (2011), Yi et al. (2013), Babel & Russell (2015), Zheng & Samuel (2017), and D'Onofrio (2019).

Some scholars have positioned the native speaker as the primary linguistic model, considering them the only reliable source of language knowledge. However, others have criticized the lack of a solid foundation for defining what constitutes a native speaker. These critiques have led to discussions about moving beyond the native/non-native dichotomy, particularly in a globalized world where English functions as a global language (Rampton, 1990; Phillipson, 1992; Davies, 1991, 1995; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Faez, 2011a). For instance, Davies (1995, p. 157) states, "although the native speaker concept is accepted as a model, goal, and inspiration, nativeness is a myth."

Some studies suggest that nativeness is negotiated and (co)constructed in social contexts (Davies, 1995; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Faez, 2011b; Zheng & Samuel, 2017, among others). In other words, native/non-native identity is a social construct that can shift depending on context and time. Furthermore, this construct can shape individuals' identities, influencing their sense of belonging, professional opportunities, and perceived competence.

The aim of this study is to investigate whether appearance influences judgments of nativeness in English speakers. Specifically, I examine whether being perceived as a native English speaker is determined more by physical appearance than by speech characteristics.

The following sections provide an overview of studies on nativeness in sociolinguistics, an articulation of the research questions, and a discussion of the methodology, including participants, tasks, and procedures. The results are then presented, followed by an analysis, discussion, and conclusion, which includes study limitations and directions for future research.

2. The Nativeness Paradigm

Nativeness, i.e. being a native or non-native speaker of a certain language, has been described through different perspectives in language studies. Many of these studies have addressed social factors as the main foundation for the native and non-native speaker idea. Some authors criticize the native/non-native dichotomy and offer new terms to assess people's language proficiency; others have also criticized the binary approach to the concept and conducted interviews and experiments to show how people self-identify and are identified by others linguistically.

Early studies reveal that a perceived ethnicity and high level of accentedness in non-native teaching assistants were related to poor teaching skills when judged by undergraduate students (Rubin and Smith, 1990 and Rubin, 1992). A recorded classroom lecture was played to a group of undergraduate students while a picture of either an Asian or European instructor was displayed on the computer screen. Students

were asked to complete, while listening to the lecture, a cloze test, a background survey and a homophily test which included questions regarding attitudes, values and appearance. The results show that factors like ethnicity and lecture topic tended to be more dominant determinants than accentedness in ratings of the effectiveness of the instructors. However, when students perceived a high level of accentedness, they judged the instructors to be poor teachers. Rubin (1992) explains this result by saying that students relied on homophily; i.e., the tendency people have to relate favourably to people who are similar to themselves. Thus, when students rate their instructors, they rely on homophily and are more likely to say that instructors who are more similar to themselves have better teaching skills. Besides these experimental studies, a study by Rampton (1990) suggests a new terminology to identify speakers when it comes to their linguistic identities. The author claims that the terms 'native speaker' and 'mother tongue' are often criticized in academia; however, there were no other alternative terms, and he argues, therefore, that the term native speaker should be avoided. He offers three alternative terms: language expertise, language inheritance and language affiliation.

In the early 2000's, some studies on nativeness affirm that a person's identity as a native or non-native speaker is socially constructed rather than based on linguistic categories (Brutt-Griffer and Samimy, 2001; Davies, 2003 and Doerr, 2009). Brutt-Griffer and Samimy (2001) investigate, using questionnaires completed and submitted by email, the experiences of four English speakers who were born in a country where English is not the mother tongue of the majority. The results suggest that the concept of the native speaker depends on social factors such as nationality (a person being considered a native speaker if they are born in an English-speaking country). Conversely, Davies (2003) states that there are three types of grammar: the grammar of the individual's idiolect, the grammar that we share with other speakers, and a third type of grammar that looks into the human faculty of language. The second type of grammar describes the native speaker concept as a result of social factors, as Davies affirms: "[t]he native speaker is a social construct, a choice of identity and a membership determined as much by attitude and symbolically as by language ability and knowledge." (Davies, 2003, p.11). Doerr (2009) stated that the native speaker concept is also related to speaking the standard variety of a certain language. In her discussion, the author affirms that the nation-state link, the assumption of a homogenous linguistic group and the idea that a native speaker has a complete competence in their native language are the three ideological premises of the native speaker concept. These premises illustrate that the ideology behind being a native or non-native speaker is based on social factors which are judged by people from within and outside a community. Therefore, people's judgement may shape their perception of the identity of speakers based on social factors rather than on linguistic factors such as pronunciation.

More recent publications offer new terminologies as well as analyze people's perceptions of (non)native speakers through cloze tests, videos and interviews (Faez, 2011a; Faez, 2011b; Yi et. al, 2013; Babel and Russell, 2015; Zheng and Samuel, 2017 and D'Onofrio, 2019). Using questionnaires, Faez (2011a) investigated teacher candidates' perception and description of their linguistic identity and compared them with the judgments of their instructors and a teacher educator who did not know the participants. The results show that the native/non-native speaker dichotomy is too limited to categorize speakers' language identities, and that the participants' linguistic identities are instead multiple, dynamic, dialogic, situated, and negotiated. Most participants were resistant to the binary native/non-native speaker classification, for they could not identify themselves as either native or non-native. This was due to a number of factors including being bilingual, having multiple cultures, being perceived as a (non)native speaker, and making judgments based on language ideologies.

Another study by Faez (2011b) also reveals that the native/non-native dichotomy created discomfort to participants, and they seemed to be unsure to which category they belonged. The author proposes new terms to be used when rating speakers' linguistic identities: *1. Bilingual* – equally proficient in two languages; *2. English as a first language speaker* – English is the first and dominant language and knowledge of other languages is gained after a full grasp of English is obtained; *3. Second-generation English speaker*: born in an English-speaking country to non-English-speaking parents and learned English after or in addition to a mother tongue; *4. English dominant* – born and raised in a non-English speaking country, but after a long time residing in an English-speaking country, English became the dominant and the most comfortable language for the speaker; *5. L1 dominant* - English is not the dominant language nor is it the most comfortable language for the speaker; *6. English-variety speaker* – speaks a variety of English used in countries colonized by Great Britain.

In Yi, Phelps, Smiljanic, and Chandrasekaran's (2013) study, listeners were presented to audio recordings only and then videos of a White and an Asian speaker. The results show that the videos played an important role when the speakers were judged as native/non-native speakers: The listeners rated the Asian speaker as more accented than if they heard that speaker's voice with no visual cue. However, the White speaker was rated as less accented when the listeners had access to the videos.

Many recent studies that offer an analysis of nativeness judgments use cloze tests[1] in their methodology (Babel and Russell, 2015; Zheng and Samuel, 2017 and D'Onofrio, 2019). In Babel and Russell's (2015) study listeners listened to Chinese Canadian and White Canadian speakers' voices only and then they listened to the speakers' voices paired with speaker's photographs. The results show a drop in the intelligibility for Chinese Canadian voices when paired with their photographs; however, for White Canadians there was a decrease in perceived accentedness when listeners had access to both the voices and the photographs of the speakers. Conversely, Zheng and Samuel (2017) also found that having a picture of an Asian person increased the accentedness in the ratings compared to when listeners were presented with a White face. However, when listeners were presented with videos of the speakers the accented ratings largely disappeared; therefore, the authors claim that the visual cues can affect the interpretation but not the perception of accented levels. D'Onofrio (2019) questions what studies using photographs have actually been testing because listeners' ratings may be influenced by how the person looks, dresses, and poses in the photograph rather than being influenced by speakers' ethnicity. In D'Onofrio (2019) study listeners were presented

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[1] Cloze tests usually include listeners matching pictures/photographs of people of different ethnic backgrounds with audio recordings.

the same person with different clothing, facial expressions and hairstyles and the results reveal that the same listener elicited different expectations about that person's nativeness. The results also indicate the potential influence that listeners' perceived personalities may have on their ratings.

Due to the fact that the binary native/non-native speaker classification does not account for the various linguistic identities speakers have, some of these authors have suggested new terminologies to describe speakers' language proficiency (Rampton, 1990 and Faez 2011b). Others have investigated the linguistic identity of speakers including how they self-identify and are identified by other speakers as native/non-native English speakers (Rubin and Smith, 1990; Rubin, 1992; Brutt-Griffer and Samimy, 2001; Davies, 2003; Doerr, 2009; Faez, 2011a; Yi et. al, 2013; Babel and Russell, 2015; Zheng and Samuel, 2017 and D'Onofrio, 2019). As for the latter studies, the results reviewed in this section reveal that being a native/non-native English speaker is a social negotiation and a co-construction rather than a static concept. They also reveal that being perceived as a native/non-native speaker is determined by more than linguistic factors such as pronunciation, and mostly by social factors such as ethnicity, nationality, race and speaking a certain English variety and even personality.

The methodology in these studies is very similar: Most of them analyze the ratings given to speakers based on their accent and appearance, and the speakers are usually either White or Asians and listeners are requested to match pre-selected pictures to audios, except for the listeners in Yi, Phelps, Smiljanic, and Chandrasekaran (2013) study where video is used. Considering that, I investigate how people judge native/non-native speakers as such, comparing judgments of audio and video recordings of speakers of three main linguistic backgrounds: First language English speakers born in Canada, first language English speakers born in an English-speaking country outside Canada, and Second Language English speakers born in countries where English is not the language of the majority, and from a more diverse ethnic background: White, Asian, Black and Middle-Eastern people.

In my analysis, I attempt to answer the following question: How does having access to the way people look influence the judgment of nativeness? This research question guides my study by offering a more consistent and concrete claim regarding the way people look as a determining factor over the way they sound. Based on the methodology I have adopted, if the listeners judge the same speaker differently when listening to the recordings from watching the videos, it will show that the way people look influences people's judgments on nativeness.

3. Methodology

Nine speakers with different language, nationality and ethnicity backgrounds were video and audio recorded, and listeners from around the world listened to those recordings and judged the speakers as native or non-native speakers. In this section, I present the two groups of participants, as well as the tasks and procedures for data collection and analysis.

3.1 Participants

3.1.1 Speakers

The nine speakers in this study were undergraduate and graduate students from a university located in a multilingual city in Ontario - Canada, except for one who had already graduated from the same university. Some professors agreed to share a slide inviting participants for the study, and those who were interested in participating either told me in person or sent me an email stating they were interested in being a participant. Then, the participants and I met in an office on campus where they answered a sociolinguistic questionnaire and were audio and video recorded. The recordings were done in March and April 2019 in an office at the university, and video recordings were all made using the same background to avoid any influence of visual factors on ratings. I divided the speakers into three groups according to where they were born as shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1. L1 English speakers born in Canada, residing in Ontario

Name[1]	Age	Profession	Ethnicity[2]	English Language Proficiency
Samantha	26	Teacher	Black	Native
Amy	19	Undergraduate student	White	Native
Anna	20	Undergraduate student	Asian	Native

"Table 1 includes participant demographics: Age, Profession, Ethnicity, and English Language Proficiency for the group of L1 English speakers born in Canada, residing in Ontario."

Samantha – Samantha was born in Ontario, Canada. She considers English to be her native language because that is the language that her parents, who immigrated to Canada from Jamaica, spoke with her since birth. Samantha also speaks French which she learned in school. She self-identifies as Black. She believes someone who is born and raised with consistent exposure to the language and is able to communicate effectively is a native speaker. She reported that when she started school, her teacher placed her in the English as a Second Language class because, according to the teacher, Samantha had an accent. She also mentioned in the questionnaire that she believes because she is Black, people frequently assume she is an immigrant as she often gets asked where she comes from.

Amy – Amy was born in Ontario, Canada. She only knows English which she considers to be her native language. Amy identifies as White, and she affirmed that people always judge her as a native speaker of English. For her, the first language acquired from birth and that a person

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[1] These are pseudonyms.

[2] Both ethnicity and language proficiency were based on how participants self-identified/assessed in the questionnaires.

continued to use throughout life is their native language.

Anna – Anna was born in Ontario, Canada, and she identifies as East Asian. She reported that when she was a child her father spoke English to her and her mother spoke Korean, but she said she did not learn to speak Korean. In the questionnaire, she said that besides English she knows French and Spanish. Anna considers herself a native English speaker and, for her, being a native speaker is based on a person's proficiency in the language and ability to make judgements about it. She also claimed the language a person learns first is their native language. Anna reported that once a lady asked her at the bus stop in which program she was at university, and that when she told the woman she was studying Linguistics, the woman said with tone of surprise "Wow, that is why your English is so good!" assuming that she was not a native English speaker.

Table 2. L1 English speakers born in an English-speaking country outside Canada, who are currently living in Ontario

Name	Age	Profession	Ethnicity	English Language Proficiency	Country of Birth
Shadha	20	Undergraduate student	Middle Eastern	Native	United States
Carol	25	Graduate Student	White	Native	United States
Cara	43	Graduate Student	Black	Native	Tobago

"Table 2 includes participant demographics: Age, Profession, Ethnicity, and English Language Proficiency for the group of L1 English speakers born an English-speaking country outside Canada, who are currently living in Ontario."

Shadha – Shadha was born in the United States of America and she moved to Canada at the age of eight. Shadha self-identifies as Middle Eastern. Her family spoke Arabic to her when she was a child, but she considers English to be her native language because it is the language in which she feels most comfortable expressing herself, and she also mentioned that often Arabic speakers comment that her Arabic is tinged with an English accent. For Shadha, a native speaker is someone who can comfortably express themself using proper grammar and appropriate phonemic distributions. She stated that a lot of people, after talking to her, say that her English is really good, assuming that she is not a native English speaker.

Carol – Carol was born in the United States of America, and she had lived in Canada for two years by the time of the data collection. She identifies as White and considers English to be her native language, as she only learned Spanish after the age of ten. Carol affirmed that she is generally judged as a native English speaker.

Cara – Cara was born in Trinidad and Tobago and she had moved to Canada eight years before the data collection. She considers English to be her native language because it is the language she mostly uses, and it is the official language of Trinidad and Tobago. Cara self-identifies as Black, and she mentioned in the questionnaire that she speaks Standard English and Tobago English Creole. For her, a native speaker is someone who is able to speak and think in the language and is aware of all pragmatics in the language and knows how to use it appropriately. Cara stated that people tend to think that she is not a native English speaker because, according to her, they think North American English is the only indication of what a native English speaker should sound like.

Table 3. L2 English speakers who immigrated to Canada with a high proficiency level in English who reside in Ontario

Name	Age	Profession	Ethnicity	English Language Proficiency	Country of Birth
Chao	26	Graduate student	Asian	Advanced	China
Louis	34	Graduate student	Black	Advanced	Ivory Coast
Martina	27	Graduate student	White	Advanced/Native	Colombia

"Table 3 includes participant demographics: Age, Profession, Ethnicity, and English Language Proficiency for the group of L2 English speakers who immigrated to Canada with a high proficiency level in English who reside in Ontario."

Chao – Chao was born in China and he had been living in Canada for six years by the time of the data collection. He identifies as East Asian/Chinese and, for him, a native speaker is someone who acquires a language before the age of seven. Because he started learning English at the age of fourteen, he does not consider himself a native speaker of English. He mentioned that people normally do not assume he is a native speaker, and he also said that usually when he travels by plane, even though he speaks English with the flight attendants, they try and find someone who can speak Chinese with him.

Louis – Louis was born in Ivory Coast and he had been living in Canada for three years when the data was collected. Louis identifies as Black. His first language is French, and he does not consider English to be his native language. For Louis, a native speaker is someone who is born in an English-speaking country and uses English as a primary tool of communication. He did not report any experiences when people judged him as a native or non-native English speaker.

Martina – Martina was born in Colombia and moved to Canada at the age of twelve. She self-identifies as White Hispanic and does not consider herself a native speaker of English because, for her, a native speaker is someone who learns a language before the age of eight and she learned it after arriving in Canada. She also mentions that she typically makes mistakes that native English speakers do not make. However, she mentions that most people judge her a native or native-like speaker.

3.1.2 Listeners

The audio and video recordings were incorporated into a survey, administered using the Qualtrics software package that asked listeners to rate the speakers as native or non-native speakers and to give reasons for their ratings. More information about this online survey is provided

in section 3.2 below. Listeners from around the world were recruited via social media to complete the survey. A total of 104 listeners began the survey, but only 32 of them completed the entire survey. Many listeners skipped the sociolinguistic background questionnaire, but only responses from listeners who completed the entire survey were included in the data for this study. The listeners ranged in age from 18 to 75 years old, with almost 53% of them being between 18 to 30 years old. Eighty per cent of the listeners held either an undergraduate or graduate degree. Out of 32 respondents, 13 were male and 19 were female, and the participants' countries of birth included Canada, the United States, Brazil, Italy, England, China and Australia. The listeners also completed the same sociolinguistic background questionnaire that the speakers had completed. All listeners from the United States, England, and Australia self-identified as native English speakers and all listeners from Brazil, Italy and China self-identified as non-native speakers.

3.2 Tasks and Procedures

Considering that, as many authors claim, judgements of nativeness may depend on social factors such as how a native speaker sounds and looks, I conducted a task in which listeners judged speakers' productions as native or non-native speakers by listening to audio and video recordings.

Each speaker was recorded introducing themselves. They read two cloze scripts which they completed with their information. I tried to make sure the topics did not reveal their identity, for example, names and place of origin. Each recording had a duration of approximately 10 seconds. These are the two scripts:

> A) *Hi, I am _____ years old, I live in [NAME OF CITY] Ontario with my roommates/family/....I go to [NAME OF UNIVERSITY] where I study ....../ I work as a ..... at a [café/library/etc.] in the city.*
>
> B) *I like to go for walks/play sports/ .... Go to the movies with my friends/boyfriend/girlfriend... in my free time. I also love to ... when I am not studying/working/busy....*

This generated a total of 36 recordings, 18 to be administered with video and audio, and 18 to be administered with audio only. All the videos were converted into audio files, so the listeners listened to the same oral productions from each speaker, the only difference between the two versions of the recording being the visual cue. Later all these audios and videos were added to Qualtrics. After listening to the audio recordings, the listeners then watched a video recording in which the same speakers introduced themselves again, but in a different order than they appeared in the audio recordings. The listeners were recruited through an advertisement on an online social media platform. To participate, people had to click on a link and accept the letter of consent which also explained the study, then answer a sociolinguistic questionnaire. Afterwards, listeners listened to the recordings on a computer and rated each one as being of a native or a non-native speaker. Participants were given the opportunity to add comments on their judgments in a textbox that followed each question.

The speakers were recorded between March and April 2019, and the listeners participated from April until May 2019. The results of the 32 respondents (listeners) were extracted from Qualtrics and imported into an Excel spreadsheet.

4. Results

This study investigated how listeners from seven different countries (Canada, the United States, Brazil, Italy, England, China and Australia) judged speakers who were audio and video recorded as native or non-native English speakers by comparing whether having access to the videos made listeners change their ratings or not. In this section, I offer a summary of the results including some of the comments some listeners added to their ratings.

4.1 L1 English Speakers Born in Canada

The charts below show the results of how listeners judged speakers in the first group. The Group 1 chart includes the judgments of the listerners that self-identified as native English speakers, whereas the Group 2 chart includes the judgments of the listeners that self-identified as non-native English speakers.

Figure 1. L1 English Speakers born in Canada

Group	Speakers	Native Speaker	Non-Native Speaker	Changes in Video **Native – Nonnative**	Changes in Video **Nonnative – Native**
	Amy (White)	15	--	xx	xx
	Anna (Asian)	12	3	xx	3
	Samantha (Black)	12	3	xx	3

Group	Speakers	Native Speaker	Non-Native Speaker	Changes in Video **Native – Nonnative**	Changes in Video **Nonnative – Native**
	Amy (White)	15	2	1	1
	Anna (Asian)	3	14	4	6
	Samantha (Black)	8	9	8	xx

"Figure1 includes listeners' judgments as native or non-native for the three L1 English speakers born in Canada, who self-identified as White (Amy), Asian (Anna) and Black (Samantha)."

As figure 1 shows, listeners' judgments for the three L1 English speakers born in Canada were different. The White speaker (Amy) was judged to be a native speaker of English by all listeners in group 1 in both recordings and in both conditions, and by 15/17 of the listeners in

group 2. One non-native listener changed their judgment from native to non-native in the video condition, and one changed it from non-native to native. The Asian speaker (Anna), however, was judged a native speaker by 12/15 listeners in both conditions and in both recordings by listeners in group 1 whereas only 3/17 listeners in group 2 consistently judged her as native. Interestingly, while there were a few cases of listeners changing their assessment to non-native when they saw the video (4 non-native listeners), a greater number changed their assessment to native when they saw the video (3 native listeners and 6 non-native listeners). Finally, the Black speaker (Samantha) was judged native by 12/15 of the listeners in group 1, but by only 8/17 of the listeners in group 2, in both recordings and in both conditions. Furthermore, for Samantha there were a total of 11 cases of assessments (3 by the listeners in group 1 and 8 by the listeners in group 2) 8 changing from native to non-native in the video condition, and three changing in the other direction.

These results show that although a few listeners changed their judgements after watching the videos, 27% in this group, considered appearance to change their judgment from native to non-native speaker. Thus, having access to the speakers' appearances did not seem to be the most influential factor when judging speakers as native or non-native, except for Samantha who was judged non-native speaker by most of the listeners in group 2.

4.2 L1 English Speakers Born in an English-Speaking Country Outside Canada

Figure 2 (below) includes two charts showing the results of how listeners judged speakers born in an English-speaking country outside Canada. The Group 1 chart includes the judgements of speakers who self-identified as native/non-native whereas the Group 2 chart shows the changes listeners who self-identified as non-native speakers made.

Figure 2. L1 English Speakers Born in an English-Speaking Country Outside Canada

	Speakers	Native Speaker	Non-Native Speaker	Changes in Video **Native – Nonnative**	Changes in Video **Nonnative – Native**
Group 1	Carol (White)	14	1	xx	1
	Shadha (Middle Eastern)	11	4	xx	4
	Cara (Black)	3	12	1	1

	Speakers	Native Speaker	Non-Native Speaker	Changes in Video **Native – Nonnative**	Changes in Video **Nonnative – Native**
Group 2	Carol (White)	11	6	xx	6
	Shadha (Middle Eastern)	12	5	1	xx
	Cara (Black)	0	17	0	3

"Figure 2 includes listeners' judgments as native or non-native for the three L1 English speakers born in an English-speaking country, who self-identified as White (Carol), Middle Eastern (Shadha) and Black (Cara)."

Figure 2 shows the judgments made of the L1 English speakers born in an English-speaking country outside of Canada also varied among the listeners. The White speaker (Carol) was judged to be a native English speaker by 14/15 native English listeners in both recordings and in both conditions. For recording 1, one listener changed their assessment from non-native to native in the video condition, whereas for recording 2, there are no changes in assessment in the video condition. 11 out of 17 listeners in group 2 judged Carol as a native speaker in the audio condition, and all listeners in this group changed their judgment from non-native to native after watching the video. Shadha, the Middle Eastern speaker, was judged native by 11/15 listeners in both conditions for both recordings by the listeners in group 1. For recording 1, 1 listener changed from non-native to native in the video condition, and for recording 2, 3 listeners changed from non-native to native in the video condition. The listeners in group 2 judged Shadha native 12 times out of 17 in both conditions for both recordings. For recording 1, 1 listener changed from native to non-native in the video condition. Cara, the Black speaker in this group, was judged native by only 3/15 in by listeners in group 1 in both conditions for both recordings. For recording 1, 1 listener changed from native to non-native in the video condition; and 1 listener changed from non-native to native. As for the ratings by listeners in group 2, Cara was judged native by 0/17 listeners in both conditions for both recordings. A total of 3 listeners changed their judgment from non-native to native.

Similar to the first group of speakers, listeners did not change their judgements significantly based on the appearance of the speakers. Appearance (making changes after watching the videos) seemed to be a factor in 18% of cases.

4.3 L2 English Speakers who Immigrated to Canada with A High Proficiency Level in English

This last figure (figure 3), shows two charts showing the results of how listeners judged speakers who immigrated to Canada with a high proficency level in English. The Group 1 chart includes the judgements of listeners who self-identified as native speakers whereas the Group 2 chart shows the changes listeners who self-identified as non-native speakers made.

Figure 3. L2 English Speakers who Immigrated to Canada with A High Proficiency Level in English

	Speakers	Native Speaker	Non-Native Speaker	Changes in Video **Native – Nonnative**	Changes in Video **Nonnative – Native**
Group 1	Martina (White)	6	9	6	1
	Chao (Asian)	x	15	xx	2

	Louis (Black)	1	14	xx	xx

	Speakers	Native Speaker	Non-Native Speaker	Changes in Video **Native – Nonnative**	Changes in Video **Nonnative – Native**
Group 2	Martina (White)	9	8	5	7
	Chao (Asian)	3	14	3	1
	Louis (Black)	1	16	xx	xx

"Figure 3 includes listeners' judgments as native or non-native for the three L2 English Speakers with a high proficiency level in English, who self-identified as White (Martina), Asian (Chao) and Black (Louis)."

In conjunction with the two groups previously mentioned in 4.1 and 4.2, figure 3 shows that the results for the English speakers who immigrated to Canada with a high proficiency level in English also varied. Martina (White speaker) was judged to be a native speaker by 6/15 listeners in group 1in both conditions for both recordings. A total of 6 listeners changed their ratings from native to non-native, and one listener changed from non-native to native. As for the ratings by listeners in group 2, Martina was judged native by 9/17 listeners in audio condition for both recordings. For recording 1, 2 listeners changed their ratings from native to non-native, and 4 listeners changed from non-native to native speaker. Yet, for recording 2, 3 listeners changed from native to non-native, and 3 from non-native to native speaker. On the other hand, Chao (the Asian speaker) was not judged native by any of the 15 listeners in group 1 in the audio condition for both recordings. There were no changes for recording 1, but for recording 2, 2 listeners changed their judgments from non-native to native speaker. Whereas among the listeners in group 2, Chao was judged native speaker by 3/17 listeners in the audio condition for both recordings. For recording 1, 3 listeners changed from native to non-native, and one listener changed from non-native to native after watching the video. The third speaker in this group, Louis who self-identified as Black, was judged to be a native speaker by one of the 15 listeners in group 1 in both conditions for both recordings. None of the listeners changed their judgements after watching the videos. Similarly, one of the 17 listeners in group 2 judged Louis as a native speaker, but as was the case for the native listeners, no one in this group of listeners changed their ratings after watching the videos.

For this third group of speakers, there was not a major change of judgments based on appearance, as listeners reported basing their judgments on appearance in 26% of cases.

5. Discussion

The prediction for this study was based on previous studies' findings which supported the claim that being a native/non-native speaker underlies one's ethnicity, nationality, language variety and race, more than linguistic factors (Davies, 1991; Davies, 1995; Brutt-Griffler and Samimy, 2001; Faez, 2011a; Faez 2011b; Yi et. al, 2013; Babel and Russell, 2015; Zheng and Samuel, 2017 and D'Onofrio, 2019). My hypothesis predicted that being perceived as a native speaker of English was directly related more to the way a person looks, i.e. to their appearance, than to the way they sound. Although a few listeners in this study did consider appearance when rating the speakers, the data shows that only a minority of them, in a minority of cases, changed their judgements when they saw the videos, and of those, few refer explicitly to appearance or geographical origin as information they used in making their judgement.

In a total of 384 judgements, 68 were changed after watching the videos, that is, 18%. Moreover, only six out of 32 listeners mentioned the speakers' appearance and ethnicities when explaining their judgments on nativeness.

It is important to mention that the listeners who changed their ratings after watching the videos – either changing from native to non-native or vice versa – added a total of 68 changes, and 46 changes were made by the non-native listeners, which means the non-native listeners were responsible for 67.6% of the changes made. The reason for the frequent changes is possibly related to listeners' expectations of what the native English speakers should both look (race) and sound like (variety spoken). Studies in the field of nativeness report that the variety spoken, and the race of speakers influence people's judgments, more specifically, White speakers are the ones usually rated as the ideal native English speaker (Doer 2009; Rivers and Ross, 2013; Kubota and Fujimoto, 2013; among many others). Kubota and Fujimoto (2013), for instance, state that race plays a crucial role in understanding people's beliefs about being a native speaker of English.

Moreover, the results in this study show that linguistic factors such as pronunciation seemed to be more relevant to listeners than appearance. For instance, Amy - who was judged as a native speaker in the majority of cases - was judged as a non-native speaker due to the way she pronounced the word "study". There were other occasions when other speakers were also judged as non-native speakers based on their pronunciation, for instance, Samantha and Cara. These were the comments the listeners added after watching the videos for Samantha related to her pronunciation: "*She has an accent*", "*English was not the first language she learned*", and "*Slightly broken English*". For Cara, they added "*I believe that she doesn't speak English as a first language. She also has a thick accent*", "*Strong accent of African origin.*" and "*She has a strong accent*".

Additionally, both Cara's and Samantha's narratives regarding often not being perceived as native English speakers support previous studies in which authors affirm that the native speaker concept is related to speaking the standard variety of the language. Cara maintained that people think North American English is the only indication of what a native English speaker should sound like, so that is why she is usually perceived as non-native English speaker. Even though Samantha grew up in an English monolingual environment, she was placed in an ESL class in her first year in elementary school because her teacher noticed an accent in her speech – that is, an accent different from the standard

variety expected by the teacher. Overall, 63% of the comments written by the listeners included pronunciation issues including variety spoken, accent and tone.

The judgements for Cara, for instance, do not seem to reveal that what made the majority of listeners decide on her nativeness was her blackness, but rather probably her Caribbean accent on which listeners based a determination of non-native. In fact, only one listener changed from native to non-native when they saw the video, and more went in the other direction.

In addition to the finding that appearance did not seem to play a major role when the listeners judged the speakers as native/non-native, two other interesting patterns were observed regarding the listeners' judgments: first, the comments that mentioned appearance were included by the same two listeners (listeners from the native listeners group); secondly, the non-native listeners tended to judge speakers as being non-native more often than native listeners did, especially the listeners from Brazil. Nine out of the 32 listeners were from Brazil, and they were responsible for most comments in this study. Most of the comments these participants wrote included aspects of pronunciation, nationality and appearance, and they were also the ones who more often changed ratings after watching the videos. That may be a result of the expectations these participants had regarding what a native English speaker should sound like and in some cases look like. The Brazilian listeners' ratings in this study supports Nascimento's (2019) claim that the majority of English teachers in Brazil are White, from middle class, which does not represent the racial profile in Brazil where more than half of the population is Black, and that non-White English teachers face racism because of students/society's expectations of what a native English speaker should sound and look like.

6. Conclusion

This study explored whether appearance influences listeners' perceptions of English nativeness—specifically, whether participants changed their judgement when hearing a voice alone versus hearing the same voice accompanied by video. The results only partially supported this hypothesis. While most participants did not appear to be swayed by visual cues, a notable minority did, suggesting that appearance can still play a role in shaping judgments.

However, based on listeners' comments, most judgments appear to be based on other factors which were not controlled in this study, such as pronunciation and nationality. In addition, in some other cases, listeners changed their judgements in an unexpected direction from the ones reported in previous studies such as in Rubin and Smith's (1990) and Rubin (1992), deciding, for example, that a White speaker was non-native when they saw the video or deciding that a racialized speaker was native when seeing the video.

One of the key contributions of this study lies in revealing just how deeply ingrained certain assumptions about nativeness can be. While many listeners based their decisions on pronunciation or perceived nationality, the impact of visual perception was still significant for some. As one participant insightfully commented, "I think this research really opened my eyes to how I look at people, how easy it is for me to judge by their look, how much that influences me." This kind of reflection highlights the value of examining native speaker judgments through a more critical and socially aware lens.

For future research, it would be worthwhile to analyze all listener comments in more depth, particularly those made by Brazilian participants, as they may reflect distinct sociolinguistic perspectives. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine how listeners from non-English-speaking countries judge speakers' nativeness and to compare perceptions of L1 speakers from diverse English-speaking regions. Finally, a detailed phonetic analysis using tools such as PRAAT could strengthen our understanding of how specific pronunciation features shape these judgments.

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