

# Constructing identity with L2: Pronunciation and attitudes among Norwegian learners of English<sup>1</sup>

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This study investigates L2 pronunciation and evaluation of American and British varieties of English among Norwegian adolescent learners. By integrating quantitative sociolinguistics and L2 acquisition, the article investigates stylistic practice in an L2 context. Results from an auditory analysis of four phonological variables and a matched-guise test are interpreted with reference to speaker commentary. Learners' self-expressed accent aims correlate significantly with accent use, but American English is the dominant pronunciation. Results show that both L1 and L2 speakers of English varieties are socially evaluated by the learners; British English is considered the most prestigious model of pronunciation, while American English is associated with informality. These evaluations seem to motivate learners' pronunciation choices. The data indicate blended use of the English varieties. Learners seem to exploit linguistic resources from English, and reshape and adapt the social meaning of the variables to a local construction of identity.

**KEYWORDS:** Identity, L2 acquisition, phonology, attitudes, stylistic practice, English accents

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the social sciences in general, and in linguistic research in particular, there has been increased interest in identity as a subject for investigation (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Omoniyi and White 2006). Research on the negotiation of social meaning using linguistic resources below the discursive level has predominantly been reserved for L1 contexts. However, the increased status of English in Norway, following the growth and spread of English as a world language, renders possible a correlation between Norwegian learners' use of English pronunciation and how they wish to present themselves to others. This possible correlation between L2 and identity calls for investigations of attitudes and identity issues in language learning contexts. If such a correlation in fact exists, research results concerning L2 identity would give teachers of English important information

about the language learner (see e.g. Dörnyei 2005). By applying the research techniques used in sociolinguistic studies of language variation and change, the study reported in this article examines patterns of linguistic usage by young Norwegian learners of English.

In Norway, as in many other countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language, learners of English are presented with two co-existing L2 models, namely British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). This article provides an analysis of the use of AmE and BrE phonological variants, as well as evaluations of the English varieties, in a Norwegian upper-secondary-school class. The learners' language choices are then assessed relative to their self-reported attitudes and identities. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What is the dominant L2 pronunciation among the Norwegian participants, and to what extent is there variation in L2 use across different formality situations?
2. To what degree does L2 speech correlate with desired pronunciation?
3. What social evaluations do the learners make of the available varieties of English?
4. How, and to what extent, are English linguistic resources used by Norwegian learners to signal style and identity?

Questions 1–3 are answered in section 3, where the main quantitative results are presented. The final, more general question is discussed in section 4, where I argue that Norwegian learners use English in a socially meaningful way.

### ***1.1 The language situation in Norway***

The L1 situation in Norway is a rather special case (Røyneland 2009). There is no officially-recognized spoken standard variety of Norwegian, but there are two competing written standards, namely *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk*. The latter was established on the basis of the Norwegian dialects. Due to this language situation, dialects have a relatively high status, and dialect diversity is considerable. There might consequently be a stronger public sense of variation and the social meanings of variation in Norway than in countries without this established L1 diversity.

English is a compulsory subject in Norwegian schools in both primary and secondary education. As part of the school subject, pupils are introduced to culture, history and literature in the English-speaking world, with focus on Great Britain and the U.S.A. (KUF 1994, 1996). There is no formal pronunciation norm in English as a school subject, but the majority of university-educated teachers are likely to use a standard British English variety due to limited course availability: in the phonetics and intonation course which is part of English teacher training at the University of Oslo (the largest teacher-education institution in the country), six of the seven groups are taught the phonetics of Received Pronunciation (RP), while one single group is taught General

American (GA) (University of Oslo 2009). Outside school, young people have substantial exposure to English language films, television series, computer games and music. Norway does not dub English-language programmes or films, and considering American global cultural hegemony (Crystal 2003; Pennycook 1994), American English is likely to be the most frequently heard variety through the media.<sup>2</sup>

### *1.2 Language attitudes*

Language attitudes have been the focus of a great deal of research within language variation and change. RP has traditionally been evaluated as the most prestigious variety of English among both L1 and L2 speakers of English (Coupland and Bishop 2007; Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006). Among L1 speakers, RP has typically been associated with more competence and status, and less social attractiveness, than non-standard varieties of English (e.g. Ball 1983; Coupland and Bishop 2007; Giles 1970). Speakers of standard American English have been considered moderately prestigious and not very socially attractive. However, Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam (2001) argue that standard AmE is replacing the dominance previously held by RP, and attribute this attitude shift to American global hegemony. A causal link between global broadcast media and attitudinal patterns is difficult to establish, and Bayard et al. suggest research in L2 contexts to explore the impact of American spoken media.

Bradac and Giles (1991) speculate whether Swedish students might consider RP higher on status and competence dimensions than standard AmE, but lower on solidarity and attractiveness. They argue that the latter dimensions might be more important for language learning motivation, and that Swedish students, therefore, might prefer standard AmE as a model of pronunciation. Attitude studies in Denmark (Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006) and Holland (van der Haagen 1998), countries that could be assumed to have common ground with both Sweden and Norway, are not supportive of this hypothesis, however. The Dutch learners do, in fact, evaluate standard American and British varieties of English equally high on status dimensions, supporting the suggestion of attitudinal shift in Bayard et al. (2001), but RP is still considered the most attractive model of pronunciation in both Holland and Denmark. The Danish learners associated RP with higher status than AmE, and speakers of AmE were found to be more dynamic and socially attractive than speakers of BrE by both Danish and Dutch learners. The present study draws on Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) and van der Haagen (1998), but develops the investigation by relating English accent use and attitudes to identity.

### *1.3 Identity and style*

During the last decades, the view of identity has shifted from relatively static to more dynamic approaches (Coupland 2007), where social interaction is central to understanding the individual (argued by e.g. Giddens 1991; Mead

1934). Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of, for instance, Bakhtin (1981), Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue for a linguistic approach that views identity as emergent in local discourse rather than as a stable structure within the individual mind. Furthermore, in this approach, as well as in this article, identity is viewed as broader than a collection of macro-level demographic categories, as was common in, for instance, early variationist sociolinguistics (e.g. Labov 1966).

Early criticism of traditional variationist sociolinguistics can be found in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), who perceive language choices as 'acts of identity' reflecting and projecting groups with which the speaker at any time wants to be either associated or distinguished from. In Eckert's (2005) third wave of variation studies, identity is not reflected or projected, but rather constructed and negotiated. The approach to identity in Bucholtz and Hall (2005), as well as in this article, encompasses both the more local, cultural and temporary positions, in addition to the broader social categories.

Because of this non-fixed and negotiated view, identity emerges as a problematic and complex concept (see Bendle 2002 for a discussion). In the attempt to show how resources from English are used to construct identity in an L2 context, this article uses the mechanism of indexicality (Ochs 1992; Silverstein 1985), linking linguistic features to social meanings. The sociolinguistics of *style* makes explicit the ways in which linguistic structures below the discursive level can index social meanings. Style will here follow Eckert's (2001: 123) definition as 'a clustering of linguistic resources, and an association of that clustering with social meaning', and not the traditional view where focus has been on a continuum of casual-formal and stigma-prestige. Style, like language, is a practice – stylistic practice is the activity of creating social meaning, where speakers create and reshape the meanings associated with linguistic resources.

The great majority of research in the field of language, identity and style has focussed on the choices made by speakers in their native languages (see e.g. Bucholtz 1998; Eckert 1989, 2000; Johnstone and Bean 1997; Podesva, Roberts and Campbell-Kibler 2002; Quist 2005; Røyneland 2005). Second-language identities have also been investigated (see e.g. Block 2007; Norton 1997), but research on stylistic practice has predominantly been reserved for L1 contexts, (although exceptions are found, e.g. Sharma 2005). The present study investigates L2 speakers' use of non-native linguistic resources in stylistic practice.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 *Participants*

The participants in the present study were a class of 23 students aged 17 to 18 years old, who had studied English for seven years.<sup>3</sup> They shared the same Norwegian spoken variety as L1, namely Urban East Norwegian

**Table 1:** The variables with the standard British (RP) and American (GenAm) variants and examples

Variable	RP	GenAm	Examples
(r)	Ø	[ɹ]	<i>sister, winner, farm</i>
(t)	[t]	[ɾ]	<i>whatever, little, atom</i>
(GOAT)	[əʊ]	[oʊ]	<i>boat, code, only</i>
(LOT)	[ɒ]	[ɑ:]	<i>job, possible, not</i>

(UEN), which is by some considered ‘an unofficial standard spoken Norwegian’ (Kristoffersen 2000: 7). All the participants had learned English in Norwegian schools, and at the time of the study they had chosen English as a school subject.

## 2.2 The phonological variables

From the descriptions of General American (GenAm) and RP compared in Wells (1982), Nilsen (1996) and van der Haagen (1998), four phonological variables were chosen to be included in this study, namely (r), (t), (LOT) and (GOAT) (see Table 1). The GenAm and RP variants of these variables can be easily distinguished, and L2 pronunciation could therefore be attributed to either GenAm source or RP source.

The variables are circumscribed following Wells (1982). Vowel variables are referred to by capitalized keywords that characterize the lexical sets of English.

- Variable (r) refers to postvocalic /r/. GenAm is rhotic, i.e. /r/ is realized phonotactically in all contexts. By contrast, RP has a zero variant in postvocalic contexts. In UEN, postvocalic /r/ is always pronounced; therefore any zero variant of this variable is probably an attempt to use a BrE variant. In the analysis of (r), tokens in a neutralizing context, i.e. r-final tokens followed by r-initial words (e.g. your room), as well as linking-r tokens, were omitted.
- Variable (t) refers to intervocalic /t/ and is pronounced with an alveolar tap [ɾ] in GenAm. Tapping is rarer in RP; intervocalic /t/ is typically pronounced as a voiceless [t]. The tapped variant does in fact occur in British varieties as well, but much less frequently than in North American English (Tollfree 1999). Intervocalic /t/ in UEN is never voiced, and frequent use of tapping by learners can therefore best be attributed to AmE influence.
- In the lexical set GOAT, the RP variant [əʊ] starts mid central as unrounded and ends backer and closer as rounded, while the GenAm vowel can be realized as either a rounded back half-close monophthong [o], or a narrow closing diphthong [oʊ]. Since the L1 inventory only has front-closing diphthongs, the back-closing RP variant might be difficult for Norwegian learners, and an attempt to use this diphthong can be interpreted as a motivation to use a BrE variety.

- The words in the lexical set LOT are pronounced with a short, back, nearly open and rounded vowel in RP, while the GenAm variant is longer, more central, fully open, and unrounded. The RP and GenAm variants both have corresponding L1 vowels; /ɒ/ and /ɑː/ both exist in the UEN phoneme inventory (Kristoffersen 2000: 13). Therefore both variants should be equally available to the participants, and vowel choice could thus possibly correlate with choice of accent. In the analysis, tokens with unstressed vowels were omitted, since these often are realized as schwa in both RP and GenAm. Due to the neutralizing context, tokens were excluded where a labio-velar approximant preceded the vowel.

### 2.3 *The production tests*

The participants were recorded reading a wordlist with the relevant phonological variables, and in paired conversational dyads with a classmate of their choice. Twenty-seven variables in the word list included 11 tokens of the (r) variable, eight (t) tokens, three tokens of (GOAT) and five (LOT) tokens (Appendix 2). The participant pairs were recorded for approximately 10–12 minutes each, resulting in a total of two and a half hours of speech. The participants were asked to have casual conversations, and a list of informal topics (e.g. holiday plans, TV shows, and school work) was provided if required.

### 2.4 *The attitude test*

The matched-guise technique (Lambert et al. 1960) is an indirect evaluation method designed to evoke attitudes towards accents and social groups, and it is widely used within language attitude research (Ball 1983; Giles 1970; Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006; van der Haagen 1998). The subjects in a matched-guise test (MGT) evaluate the same speaker producing two or more varieties, but have the impression of hearing several different speakers. Two male speakers were evaluated by the subjects in this investigation. Speaker A is a native speaker of an American variety of English, and speaker B is a native speaker of a British variety of English. They are both professional linguists of similar age, and both produced a General American and an RP guise each. They were recorded in a studio while reading the same word list as the participants. The recordings were assessed and edited for accent authenticity by native speakers of both varieties.

The guises were played to the participants collectively in their classroom in an order where they function as buffer recordings for each other (Speaker A in RP, Speaker B in GenAm, Speaker A in GenAm, Speaker B in RP). After each recording, the participants were asked to fill out evaluation forms with 17 semantically labelled scales (dimensions) and to evaluate the speakers on a scale from 1 to 5, reporting their first impression. The dimensions were pre-categorized into three semantic categories (as in Ladegaard 1998), listed in Table 2.

**Table 2:** The dimensions in their respective semantic categories

STATUS AND COMPETENCE	SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS	LINGUISTIC QUALITY
<i>intelligence</i>	<i>reliability</i>	<i>intelligibility</i>
<i>education</i>	<i>likeability</i>	<i>aesthetic quality</i>
<i>ambition</i>	<i>generosity</i>	<i>model of pronunciation</i>
<i>leadership skills</i>	<i>sense of humour</i>	
<i>self-confidence</i>	<i>popularity</i>	
<i>social status</i>	<i>attractiveness</i>	
<i>formality</i>		
<i>politeness</i>		

### 2.5 Questionnaire and interviews

Following the production and attitude tests, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire concerning background, interests and experience with the English language (Appendix 3).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, they were asked which accent they aimed towards when speaking English, and why they had chosen this variety as their accent of preference. Five participants were chosen to participate in interviews in order to explore accent attitudes and choices further. The interviewees were chosen because they represented both variety aims, and because they emerged as thoughtful and communicative learners in the questionnaires and production tests.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Pronunciation

Although L2 pronunciations of AmE and BrE variants rarely sounded entirely native-like, the produced L2 variants were categorized as either American English or British English following an auditory analysis. Henceforth the terms American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) will not only refer to the standard L1 accents that the participants are exposed to, but also acquired variants and varieties (see Appendix 1 for an overview of terms). Table 3 gives the mean percentages of AmE and BrE variants for all four investigated variables.

**Table 3:** Mean percentages of American English and British English variants for the four phonological variables

Variable	AmE	BrE	N
(r)	71.7%	28.3%	1470
(t)	49.8%	49.1%	582
(GOAT)	81.5%	17.7%	869
(LOT)	51.7%	48.3%	565
All variables	67.2%	32.4%	3488

The Norwegian learners pronounced more than two thirds of the analysed tokens with an American-like pronunciation. All four phonological variables were pronounced with a majority of AmE variants, but the degree of AmE use varied across variables.

In the questionnaire (Appendix 3, question 15), the participants were asked which variant they aimed for when they spoke English. Eight participants answered that they aimed for American English, 11 aimed towards a British English accent, two participants did not aim at any particular variety, and two participants were absent when the questionnaire was administered.<sup>5</sup> Production results were statistically tested using ANOVA (Univariate Analysis of Variance) in SPSS. The linguistic variant was set as dependent variable, and formality degree and accent aim were set as fixed factors. Gender as a social constraint was not considered essential with such a limited speaker sample. The production results of the four speakers who had not stated AmE or BrE as accent aim were included in the presentation of results, but omitted from the ANOVA analysis, since this was meant to test correlations between variant use and variant aim. Tokens which could not be categorized as either AmE or BrE were also excluded from the ANOVA analysis. In order to not confuse variety aim with variety use, the terms 'US aimers' and 'GB aimers' will refer to Norwegian learners who aim towards an American English accent or a British English accent, respectively (cf. Appendix 1).

Despite the overall high use of American English variants, speakers used the variety they aimed towards; ANOVA showed a highly significant effect for participants' accent aim on variant usage for all four phonological variables (Table 4). This means that not only did learners make choices about desired English pronunciation; they also more or less abided by these choices.

The high percentage of AmE variant use could, in some instances, to a certain extent be explained by L1 conditions. A possible explanation for the high [ɹ] percentage of (r) is L1/orthographic influence: since orthographic *r* is always realized in UEN, learners of English might be unaccustomed to zero

**Table 4:** Mean variable usage by US and GB aimers. ANOVA shows effect for reported accent aim on variant usage

Variable	Accent aim	AmE (%)	BrE (%)	ANOVA Aim & Use
(r)	US aim	96.4	3.4	F(1,1182) = 257.522, p < 0.0001
	GB aim	56.5	43.5	
(t)	US aim	72.4	27.0	F(1,454) = 92.69, p < 0.0001
	GB aim	28.8	68.2	
(GOAT)	US aim	92.7	6.4	F(1,668) = 23.733, p < 0.0001
	GB aim	71.8	27.3	
(LOT)	US aim	72.3	27.7	F(1,444) = 66.189, p < 0.001
	GB aim	32.0	68.0	

**Table 5:** Mean variable usage in two speech situations by US and GB aimers

Variable	Accent aim	Formal		Casual	
		AmE (%)	BrE (%)	AmE (%)	BrE (%)
(r)	US aim	97.7	2.3	96.0	3.7
	GB aim	58.3	41.7	56.1	43.9
(t)	US aim	64.1	34.4	76.5	23.5
	GB aim	11.4	86.4	37.4	59.2
(GOAT)	US aim	95.8	0.0	92.4	7.1
	GB aim	48.5	42.4	73.7	26.0
(LOT)	US aim	77.5	22.5	70.9	29.1
	GB aim	36.4	63.6	30.8	69.2

pronunciation. In the case of (GOAT), AmE variant use was greater than for all other variables; more than half of the participants used more than 95 percent [ou], and only two (GB) speakers had an [ou] percentage below 50 percent. L1 has only front-closing diphthongs; the BrE back-closing diphthong with a mid-central starting position is difficult for Norwegian learners, and could in part explain the high frequency of AmE realizations.

A correlation between pronunciation and different speech situations was found in the production of two variables, (t) and (GOAT) (Table 5). In the analysis of variable (t), ANOVA showed a significant effect for formality degree:  $F(1,454) = 4.78$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Sixty-five percent of the (t) tokens in formal speech were realized as [t], while only 42 percent of (t) tokens in casual speech had this realization. The formality shift could be due to L1/orthographic influence: /t/ is always pronounced as a voiceless stop in UEN, and [t] could have been used more in formal speech because speakers were influenced by the word-list orthography. The decrease of [t] from formal to casual speech was greater among the GB aimers (27.2%) than among the US aimers (10.9%). The difference in formality variation in the production of variable (t) is increased in the realizations of variable (GOAT). In the analysis of (GOAT), ANOVA showed a significant effect for the interaction between factors *formality degree* and *accent aim*:  $F(1,668) = 6.76$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . While the participants who aimed towards British English produced significantly more [əu] in formal speech (42.4%) than in casual speech (26%), there was no such formality variation among the US aimers.

### 3.2 Attitudes

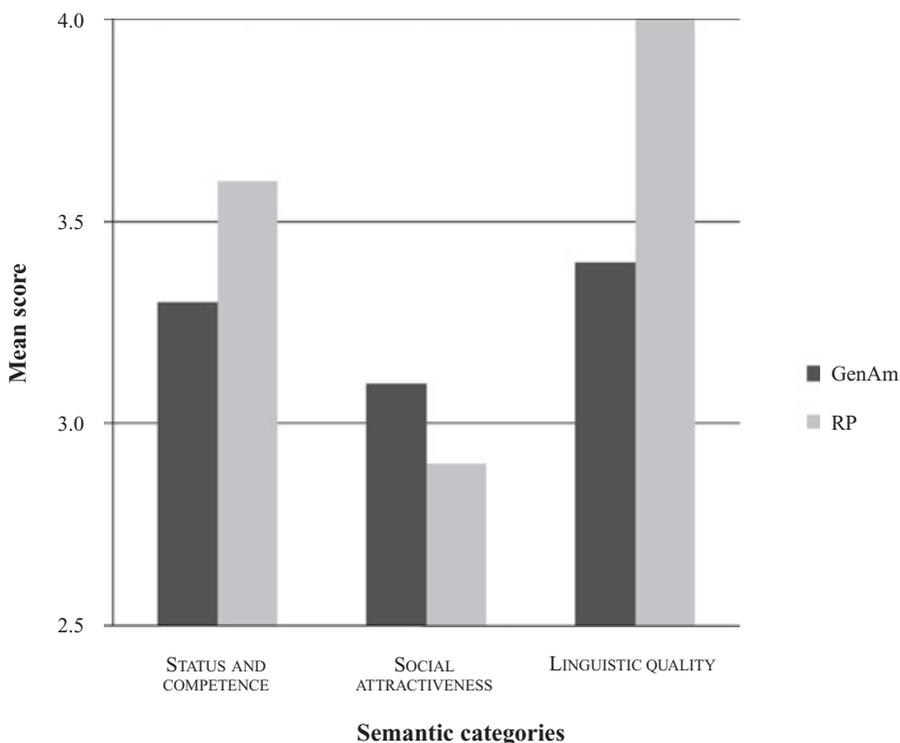
Table 6 shows the mean dimension scores for RP and GenAm guises combined and separately, in addition to the results from the t-tests. T-tests were performed on all the individual semantic dimensions in the matched-guise test (MGT), in order to test the significance between the evaluations of the American and British varieties of English.

**Table 6:** Mean dimension scores for the RP and GenAm guises and t-test probability values between the guises. Speakers A and B combined and separately. (Significance values: \* = <0.05; \*\* = <0.01; \*\*\* = <0.001; (\*) = <0.1)

Dimensions	Both speakers			Speaker A			Speaker B		
	RP	GenAm	P	RP	GenAm	P	RP	GenAm	P
<i>formality</i>	4.1	2.9	***	4.1	2.9	**	4.1	2.9	**
<i>intelligence</i>	4.1	3.3	**	3.9	3.2	*	4.2	3.4	*
<i>model of pronunciation</i>	4.1	3.3	**	3.9	2.9	*	4.3	3.7	(*)
<i>education</i>	3.9	3.2	**	3.6	2.9		4.2	3.4	**
<i>aesthetic quality</i>	3.6	2.9	**	3.1	2.7		4.3	3.2	**
<i>politeness</i>	4.0	3.4	*	3.9	3.3	(*)	4.1	3.6	
<i>intelligibility</i>	4.3	4.1		4.3	3.7		4.4	4.4	
<i>reliability</i>	3.7	3.4		3.8	3.5		3.6	3.4	
<i>social status</i>	3.4	3.1		3.2	2.9		3.6	3.3	
<i>generosity</i>	3.5	3.3		3.5	3.5		3.5	3.2	
<i>ambition</i>	3.2	3.1		2.7	3.1		3.8	3.2	
<i>attractiveness</i>	2.9	2.9		2.4	2.6		3.4	3.3	
<i>self-confidence</i>	3.6	3.8		3.3	3.4		3.9	4.1	
<i>humour</i>	2.2	2.6		1.7	2.7		2.6	2.4	
<i>likeability</i>	2.8	3.2		2.4	2.9		3.2	3.4	
<i>leadership skills</i>	2.8	3.2		2.4	2.8		3.3	3.7	
<i>popularity</i>	2.6	3.4	**	2.4	2.9	**	2.8	3.9	***

The RP guises received the most favourable evaluation overall for the first 11 dimensions in Table 6, while the remaining six dimensions are GenAm-favoured. The dimensions in the table are sorted according to p-value for Speakers A and B combined, so that they form a continuum where the qualities which are regarded as 'most RP' are at the top and 'most GenAm' at the bottom. Evaluations of seven semantic scales were significantly different between the varieties. RP scores were significantly higher than GenAm scores for *formality*, *intelligence*, *education* and *politeness*, as well as for *model of pronunciation* and *aesthetic quality*. Only one GenAm dimension was rated significantly higher than its RP counterpart, namely *popularity*. The results suggest that personal judgements change when speakers modify their accent, and that British and American varieties of English are in fact evaluated by Norwegian learners.

As explained in section 2.4, the dimensions were pre-grouped into three semantic categories STATUS AND COMPETENCE, SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS and LINGUISTIC QUALITY, and the mean scores given to the RP and GenAm guises in the MGT were calculated for each category (Figure 1). RP was favoured on most of the dimensions in the STATUS AND COMPETENCE category, and the average RP score (3.6) was significantly higher than the GenAm score (3.3) ( $t = 4.1893$ ,  $df = 606$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Furthermore, RP was regarded as superior on all dimensions



**Figure 1:** Mean category scores for the GenAm and RP guises. (Scores: 1 = very negative; 5 = highly positive)

in the LINGUISTIC QUALITY category ( $t = 3.8943$ ,  $df = 226$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ). The RP guises received a mean score of 4.0, while GenAm scored 3.4. Finally, the GenAm guises received the most favourable evaluation on most of the dimensions in the SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS category. The difference between the GenAm score (3.1) and the RP score (2.9) was slightly smaller in this category, but still close to significant ( $t = 1.7851$ ,  $df = 454$ ,  $p = 0.075$ ).

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 *Constructing identity*

The quantitative results presented above are here discussed with reference to comments from the participants, in order to incorporate local manifestations of language and identity.<sup>6</sup> The learners attended a prestigious school in Oslo, where academic results and consequently the number of applicants were among the highest in the area. The pupils generally came from middle-class homes and did well in school. Probably because of this relatively homogeneous sample, the

results from the questionnaire did not reveal any significant correlations between choice or use of English pronunciation and socially-grounded factors such as grades, time spent on homework, memberships in networks, or quantity and quality of media consumption (as in e.g. Eckert 1989, 2000). The questionnaire results presented here are therefore limited to experience with the English language (questions 2–4, 14), English accent choices (question 15), and reasons for these choices (questions 16–17).

#### 4.2 *Motivation for accent choices*

The attitudes that emerged from the matched-guise results were supported by the participants' comments about accent choices. In line with the high scores RP was given for LINGUISTIC QUALITY in the MGT, several GB aimers gave aesthetic reasons for their accent choice:

- S6 I think [British English] is more beautiful
- S5 I think that the British accent is better and prettier

As in previous studies among L2 speakers (Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006; van der Haagen 1998), RP was the most prestigious model of pronunciation among the participants. The L2 speakers in the present study did not prefer American English as a model of pronunciation, as speculated by Bradac and Giles (1991). Not only was RP regarded as superior on all dimensions of LINGUISTIC QUALITY in the MGT, but the majority of the participants reported aiming towards a British accent when speaking English.

Furthermore, contrary to findings in Bayard et al. (2001) and van der Haagen (1998), GenAm was not evaluated equally high or higher than RP on status dimensions. Rather, the Norwegian participants seemed to be reproducing the more traditional evaluation of RP as the variety with highest status. GB aimers gave STATUS AND COMPETENCE reasons for choosing British English as their accent aim:

- S19 I associate [British] English with sincerity, high education and general politeness (. . .) British is more classy
- S23 American (. . .) is less formal
- S18 [American] sounds unintelligent

Similarly to how status and formality was given as a reason to speak BrE, these dimensions were also given as reasons *not* to speak BrE, by US aimers:

- S1 [British English] is posh, and I prefer the more relaxed, plainer American
- S12 I find British English (. . .) more formal

These comments suggest that US and GB aimers share attitudes towards American and British varieties of English, but disagree about whether the evaluations are positive or negative, and consequently make opposing language choices. Furthermore, the participant comments also suggest that learners

evaluate other members of the school class on account of their choice of English accent. Learners who attempted to speak British English, for instance, were associated with formality and orientation towards school:

S19 In our class there are many people who take school very seriously, and these people speak British

S21 I think you are perceived as (. . .) a clever pupil if you speak British

These comments indicate that peers notice other learners' L2 pronunciation and associate them with the qualities related to their chosen English variety. L2 use of English can thus index meanings, for instance attitudes towards school authority, as with the following US aim:

S21 I have always been a fan of American, maybe because all the teachers I ever had have spoken British English, and I haven't really been very fond of them

Speaker 21 felt that there was too much focus on BrE in school, and this was one of the reasons why he had chosen AmE as his accent aim – as an orientation away from the school institution. In line with the MGT, these participant comments suggest that use of AmE and BrE is associated with more or less formality and opposing school orientations, and that L2 speakers might choose a variety of English to express attitudes and qualities.

### 4.3 *Media influence on L2 pronunciation?*

Although significant correlations were found between variant use and accent aim (cf. section 3.1), the majority of variables were pronounced with AmE variants, even though British English was the most popular accent aim. The Norwegian learners used 68.8 percent AmE variants in casual speech, considerably more than the Dutch learners a decade ago, who realized 39.1 percent with an American English pronunciation (van der Haagen 1998). Several GB aimers in the present study consistently realized 60 percent or more of the variables as AmE variants. This is contrary to the findings in Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006), where the learners who aimed towards BrE were successful in achieving their aim, while the majority of learners with AmE as accent aim were in fact judged to be speaking with a British English accent. The AmE-variant majority among the Norwegian speakers could, in part, be a consequence of L1 conditions; L1 pronunciation facilitates the use of AmE variants of (r) and (GOAT) more than BrE variants (cf. section 3.1). However, the L1 conditions are opposite for variable (t), and L1 alone cannot explain the substantial AmE use.

According to the learners, the dominant AmE pronunciation was caused by influence from spoken media:

S7 I believe American English is easier to pronounce. Maybe because this is the accent we are most used to because this is the most usual on TV, films etc.

- S18 British is worse to learn because we hear American everywhere, and it's really hard not to be influenced by it

Although most sociolinguists, regardless of popular conviction, have been reluctant to accept that the spoken media could affect the way people speak (see e.g. Chambers 1998), it is difficult to completely dismiss media influence in teenage L2 speech in Norway. When asked which accent, in their opinion, is favoured when teaching English in Norwegian schools, 12 participants answered 'British', seven answered 'American and British', and only two answered 'American'. This was as expected, since the majority of university-educated teachers in this area have been trained in the phonetics of RP (cf. section 1.1). Regardless of this prevailing British English school model, AmE pronunciation was still dominant among both US and GB aimers. None of the participants reported to have lived in an English-speaking country, and none reported any close relation to native speakers of English. With AmE as the dominant variety of English in the spoken media in Norway, it is difficult not to infer that media exposure is at least a participating factor in the learners' dominant AmE pronunciation. With an impression of a British English variety as model of pronunciation in school, and substantial exposure to American English outside school, Norwegian teenagers feel caught between L2 norms, as the participant comment below illustrates.

- S21 The Norwegian school tries to teach everyone British English from the beginning, but it's so much easier for the students to learn American, because there's much more American TV and stuff like that

#### 4.4 Competence

Some learners do not have the capacity to choose freely from varieties of English: some of the participants reported using the variants that were easiest for them to pronounce. Three speakers out of a total of eight US aimers had chosen AmE as accent aim because they found BrE unattainable:

- S22 I stuck with American English because it comes more easily than British English

Speaker 22 in fact reported identifying with the evaluations associated with BrE, but found the variety too demanding, in her opinion because of media exposure:

- S22 I like England better, I would rather go there than to the U.S. It is more the language that is easier for me, and not the culture (. . .). I guess I have been more exposed to American than British.

Her solution was to choose the AmE variety which she considered the most standard in the U.S.:

- S22 One can be at least as educated as one perceives the Brits and still speak the American accent I have chosen, which is more North East

However, the speaker's comments indicate an awareness of the evaluations associated with English accents among her peers, and which emerged in the MGT, where American English was associated with less status and more social attractiveness than British English. She reported that lack of competence forced her to compromise between intelligibility and consistency on the one hand and a desired image on the other. This may have resulted in her choice of a globally existing meaning of AmE as prestigious (e.g. Crystal 2003; Pennycook 1994), although this meaning was not locally prevalent.

#### 4.5 *Stylistic practice*

Although both the guises in the attitude test were standard varieties, the meanings that emerged from the test and speaker commentary, and the different routes of access in and out of school, suggest that British English and American English are allocated formal and informal functions, respectively. These functions are supported by the formality shift across language situations, where the use of AmE variants increased from formal to casual speech (cf. section 3.1). The participants, especially those who aimed towards British English (and perhaps therefore those who were more concerned with formality), used more AmE variants in conversations with peers, than when reading a word list. This indicates blended use of American and British varieties among Norwegian learners of English.

The formal/informal functions and blended use of varieties is illustrated by the following comment from a participant who described how the two varieties would serve different purposes if her level of language competence had been sufficiently high:

- S19 I would use American with adolescents and British with grown-ups. (...) When we hang out with friends (...) we don't want to use the British English we try to learn at school, we would rather do what we think is cool

Speaker 19 expressed a desire to use BrE in a situation which requires a certain degree of formality, and to use AmE in peer interactions, indexing less formality and more 'coolness'. The formal and informal functions of the two otherwise standard varieties of English could possibly lead to a non-standard-like status for American English, as suggested by van der Haagen (1998). American English was in fact associated with social-attractiveness qualities in the MGT, and thus evaluated by L2 speakers similarly to how L1 speakers traditionally have evaluated non-standard varieties of English (cf. section 1.2). However, as discussed above in relation to Speaker 22's choice of American English, the meanings associated with the English varieties are not unambiguous, and the learners' attitudes and use of English suggest an L2 situation that moves beyond a standard/non-standard dichotomy. Rather, the learners seem to be choosing from two available varieties of English and assigning meaning to variants in

a local L2 context. The following participant comment illustrates this stylistic practice:

- S6 [British English] is perceived as more posh (. . .) more upper class (. . .) to speak British one must have a certain attitude that can be interpreted as superior (. . .) but if that means superior as in educated, I don't mind

Speaker 6 identifies with the *STATUS AND COMPETENCE* qualities associated with the British English accent, even though these qualities may also have negative associations. The speaker adjusts the meaning associated with the English variety to something she wants to project; the BrE variants she uses in the Norwegian classroom index 'educated superiority'.

The participant comments in combination with results from the auditory analysis and MGT show that there are in fact learners of English who use their L2 to present themselves to others. The excerpts discussed suggest that learners create social meaning through stylistic practice by choosing from the English linguistic resources available. In accordance with the identity approach in this paper, where identity is viewed as projected, constructed and negotiated (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Eckert 2005; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), it can be argued that the participants in this study use English in the construction of identity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that Norwegian learners might be able to adapt English variants from different English varieties to have local meaning in and outside the Norwegian classroom. Learners did not only evaluate accents of English, but also their Norwegian peers based on which English accent they attempted to use. L2 use of English could therefore index attitudes and qualities, and learners reported that choice of English pronunciation relied on how speakers wished to present themselves to others. Furthermore, allocation of formal/informal functions for the two varieties might have led to blended use of AmE and BrE variants within this L2 speech community. Further research should take into consideration that Norwegian L2 use and choice of English might extend beyond the AmE/BrE dichotomy.

In a framework where identity is dynamic and negotiated in context, these findings give strong indications that the learners make use of L2 in their construction of identity. However, some of the findings presented in this article are based on *reported* L2 behaviour, and although reported use is supported by production and attitude results, more robust evidence of stylistic practice might require ethnographic investigations.

The findings give an account of the status and vitality of BrE and AmE in present-day Norway. Contrary to findings and suggestions in Bayard et al. (2001), British English still has higher status than American English, and is the preferred model of pronunciation. However, American cultural hegemony

can still be argued to have impact on the L2 situation in Norway by contributing to the allocation of formal/informal functions for the varieties; BrE is the variety most associated with school, while AmE is more informal and oriented away from school. Without any official English pronunciation norms in the Norwegian school, there is a need for teachers and teacher educators to be aware of perceived norms and learner attitudes towards the English language. Such attributes could be of importance for learner motivation, pronunciation skills and language insight. Although BrE is the chosen model by the majority of participants, American English is the dominant pronunciation. It is difficult to avoid the impression that learners' pronunciation is influenced by spoken media, seeing as there is limited access to AmE elsewhere. More research is needed to investigate this suggested link between spoken media and L2 pronunciation.

This one analysis cannot alone describe or explain such a complex concept as identity among L2 users of English. Rather, it is an attempt to contribute to the range of research that constitutes the field of language and identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). The findings in this study encourage further research into sociolinguistic factors in L2 use of English.

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## NOTES

1. My thanks to Paul Foulkes, Andreas Lund and Unn Røynealand for insightful comments on, and discussion of previous drafts of this paper. I am also grateful for constructive and valuable comments from Allan Bell, Lionel Wee, Trish Brothers and two anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.
2. The television programming on Thursday 21 January 2010 might illustrate this: from 5pm to 1am the eight most general national Norwegian television channels showed 40 American series (drama/reality/comedy/talkshows), six British series, two Australian series, two American films, two American documentaries, one British documentary, and one Australian documentary. The rest of the programmes were Norwegian.
3. There were initially 28 pupils in the school class, but five were omitted from the analysis because their L2 production varied greatly from the other participants: two exchange students, one student who had recently immigrated to Norway, and two participants who had resided and acquired a variety of English in native environments.
4. The questionnaire has been edited; only questions that are relevant for this article have been included.
5. A great limitation in the methodology of this study is the omission of response alternatives such as 'Norwegian', 'general' or 'mixed' for question 15 in the questionnaire. When the methodology was developed, these were not considered as likely accent aims. Instead, the alternative 'other' was included to register any accent aim beyond the expected AmE or BrE. Of the two participants who did not give AmE or BrE as desired accent aim, one answered 'don't care' and did not elaborate in the questionnaire, while the other answered 'other' and explained that she thought it 'phoney to swot up on a way of speech' and that she would rather have no particular accent. (This latter participant pronounced almost 90 percent of her tokens as AmE variants.) The results in this article (cf. section 4) suggest that choice and use of

- English variants by Norwegian learners extends beyond the AmE and BrE dichotomy, and this will be taken into consideration in future studies.
6. Quotes are taken from the questionnaire and the interviews explained in section 2.5. Quote number refers to a random listing of the participants. Interview quotes have been translated by the author, since these were held in the L1 for the participants' ease.
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### APPENDIX 1: Glossary

AmE	American English. Standard L1 accent and acquired variety/variant
BrE	British English. Standard L1 accent and acquired variety/variant
UEN	Urban East Norwegian
RP	Received Pronunciation. Used when circumscribing variables and when referring to MGT guises
GenAm	General American. Used when circumscribing variables and when referring to MGT guises
MGT	Matched-guise test
GB aimer	Participant who aims towards a British English accent
US aimer	Participant who aims towards an American English accent

APPENDIX 2: *Wordlist*

- |               |               |                 |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. lemon      | 15. top       | 29. possible    |
| 2. college    | 16. laugh     | 30. dictionary  |
| 3. bottom     | 17. atom      | 31. due         |
| 4. water      | 18. little    | 32. past        |
| 5. sister     | 19. boat      | 33. cigarette   |
| 6. bath       | 20. research  | 34. code        |
| 7. new        | 21. fatal     | 35. controversy |
| 8. cemetery   | 22. kilometre | 36. ice cream   |
| 9. dance      | 23. whatever  | 37. corn        |
| 10. winner    | 24. zebra     | 38. Wednesday   |
| 11. leave     | 25. better    | 39. meal        |
| 12. predatory | 26. tuna      | 40. time        |
| 13. goat      | 27. pasta     |                 |
| 14. winter    | 28. herb      |                 |
- 

APPENDIX 3: *Questionnaire*

1. Apart from English, what other subjects have you chosen for this school year?
2. Where did you grow up? (If you grew up in Oslo, please specify which part of town.)
3. Have you ever visited or lived in an English-speaking country? If yes, where? For how long?
4. Does your father or mother have English as a native language? Please explain.
5. What do you plan to do after upper secondary school?
6. Which profession would you like to have?
7. What is your last average term grade?
8. How many hours a week do you spend on homework?
9. Are you a member of an organization or society in your school? If yes, which?
10. Please explain your 'style': What clothes, shoes, accessories, etc. do you normally wear?

Circle one alternative for the following questions:

11. If you had to choose, where would you rather move?  
the U.S.    Great Britain
12. Which accent/pronunciation did your English teacher **last year** have?  
American    British    Norwegian    other

13. Which accent/pronunciation have most of your teachers had in primary and lower secondary school?

American    British    American and British    Norwegian    other

14. In your opinion, which accent/pronunciation is favoured when teaching English in Norwegian schools?

American    British    American and British    Norwegian    other

15. Which accent/pronunciation are **you** aiming at when you speak English?

American    English    British English    other    don't care

16. If you answered American English or British English on the previous question, why do you not aim at **the other** accent?

17. Is one of the accents more difficult to speak than the other? Please explain.

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