Good to Sound Bad:

A Study on Attitudes towards the RP British English Accent

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Abstract

A villain is not really a villain if they do not have an RP British English accent, according to many big budget films produced in Hollywood. It would therefore be expected that the universal target audience of those Hollywood films might perceive the RP accent as stereotypically evil or would at least be aware of this stereotype of the RP accent. This thesis aims to find out if this perception is indeed present by testing the attitudes of RP, GA and Standard Dutch participants towards the RP accent. Participants listened to audio clips from speakers with either an RP or GA accent and were asked to rate the speech on both *status traits* and *solidarity traits* on a Likert-type scale. Using a matched guise paradigm, stimuli came from four speakers, each able to speak with both a native-like RP and GA accent. Results show that the Standard Dutch participants rated the RP accent more favourably than both RP and GA speakers did. These findings imply that the stereotype of the RP accent does not always hold in non-native English-speaking countries.

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1. **Introduction and theoretical background**

From the golden age of Hollywood to the recent superhero films era, actors with RP accents are often cast as the villain. The RP accent is an accent heard in predominantly upper middle class settings in Southern England where it pairs with standard English (Strevens, 1981). The accent's most recognizable features are non-rhoticity and vowel realisations like the low back vowel /ɑː/ and the short open back rounded /ɒ/ (Bratteli, 2011). Big budget film companies operating out of Hollywood, and their American target audience, perceive the British RP accent as the embodiment of both elegance and evil (Dobrow & Gidney, 1998). In animation series, this is used to indicate the character's status as villain (p. 115). Likewise, in Disney films, there are significantly more villains with an RP accent compared to heroes (Sønnesyn, 2011). The same is true for video games, where characters with higher status as well as characters who were regarded as negative had an RP accent instead of a GA accent more often (Bratteli, 2011). Outside of films, TV and video games, speakers with an RP accent are perceived as having more status, being more (intellectually) competent but also being less friendly and reliable (Ladegaard, 1998). The RP accent being stereotyped as villainous is also evident in real-life situations, as a speaker with an RP accent was found to be more likely to be convicted of a white-collar crime, e.g., theft, than speakers with any other accent (Seggie, as cited in Dixon, Mahoney & Cocks, 2002). RP signifying a higher-class status is also perceived in the results of the study by Stewart, Ryan and Giles (1985) as their American participants perceived middle class RP speakers as having a higher status than their standard American counterparts. However, the RP speakers were perceived as having less *solidarity* (which is a measure indicating the trustworthiness, sincerity, kindness and friendliness of a person). These results extend to accent perception within the British Isles as well as an RP accent was rated higher, by students of an English university, on competence, intelligence and ambition than a Welsh accent (Brown, Giles & Thakerar, 1985). Giles (1971) found that listeners from various parts of the British Isles (e.g., Northern England and Scotland as well

as Southern England) ascribed confidence to Londoners but it is not clear if this was just to regional London speakers or to RP speakers.

Stereotyping of accents in general is due to accentuation: the combination of various perceptual salient phonetic features together, rather than just one, to form one linguistic stereotype (Kristiansen, 2001). This linguistic stereotype is then applied to everyone speaking in that accent through metonymy: the perception of a subcategory of speakers with an accent representing everyone speaking with that accent. Stereotyping is done by all humans (Lippmann, 1965, p. 60) and it is how we make sense of the world (p. 63).

Despite the persistent stereotypes of RP in the media (including Hollywood films, TV and video games), there is some debate about the position of the dominance of RP within the English-speaking world, which could have an influence on how the RP accent is seen in terms of power and status. Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois and Pittam (2001) found that RP's dominance in the New Zealand media (i.e., from films, television, radio and internet to even idioms used) was slowly giving way to North American English because of the global influence of American culture. The North American dominance was found in their results as both the New Zealand and Australian participants rated the American accent highly in power and solidarity compared to the New Zealand and Australian accents. The RP accent, however, was not tested.

This power dominance of North American English seems to not extend to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, as Danish learners of English, for instance, seem to prefer an RP accent for their own pronunciation over a GA accent despite downgrading RP in terms of personal integrity and social attractiveness (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). This preference for RP over American accents was also found for Dutch students (Broeders, 1981). The reason for this preference could be explained via Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner as cited in Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006), which entails that social identification derives from the groups we belong to and comparing these groups to outer groups. Social identity predicts that ingroup speakers should attract more positive evaluations than outgroup speakers

(Abrams & Hogg, 1987). The preference for RP by Danish EFL learners is then explained by the English being closer to them, both in cultural background and geography, in a global perspective, than the Americans (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). The influence of social identification is especially interesting to find among Danish participants as Denmark could, just like the Netherlands, be classified as a transnational state (Stephan, 2005). These transnational states are heavily influenced by mass culture and Americanization. The results of the study on the Danish attitude towards RP suggest that RP is still being stereotypically perceived as less socially attractive (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006) but how RP is perceived in terms of status depends on, among other factors, the influence of Americanization (Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois & Pittam, 2001; Stephan, 2005) and the influence of social identification by the tested speakers (Tajfel & Turner as cited in Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006).

According to Edwards (as cited in Ladegaard, 1998), stereotyping can only take place when the listener is familiar with an accent. Familiarity therefore plays a key role in how an accent is judged.

The main focus of this thesis will be to look at the contemporary attitude of native Dutch speakers towards RP. This is to test if Hollywood stereotype of the RP accent as villainous (e.g., as described in Dobrow and Gidney (1998)) is one that is held by Standard Dutch speakers at all. This stereotypical perception of the RP accent would be expected based on the reported influence of Americanization (Stephan, 2005) and the reported shift in dominance in the New Zealand media from Britain to America (Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois & Pittam, 2001). Alternatively, Dutch speakers might feel like they are part of the same social group as RP speakers and this social identification (Tajfel & Turner as cited in Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006) may influence native Dutch speakers to have a more favourable view of the RP accent. Not much research has been done recently on this subject (the study by Broeders (1981) being the most recent one). Furthermore, this thesis will look at the contemporary attitude of RP speakers towards the RP accent. Although there are several studies about the attitudes towards the RP accent from the perspective of speakers without an RP accent, barely

any research has been done on the attitudes towards the RP accent from the perspective of RP speakers or Britons themselves (exceptions are Brown, Giles & Thakerar, 1985; Giles, 1971; Abrams & Hogg, 1987). Finally, this thesis will look at the contemporary attitude of GA speakers towards the RP accent to see if through metonymy (Kristiansen, 2001) GA speakers still perceive the RP accent as portrayed by Hollywood films (e.g., as described in Dobrow and Gidney (1998)).

This thesis will aim to test the contemporary attitudes towards the RP accent. Keeping in mind Edwards' (as cited in Ladegaard, 1998) theory that stereotyping can only take place when the listener is familiar with the accent, this thesis will also test whether the different speakers are familiar with the RP accent, and the GA accent, beforehand.

2. Research question

What are the current attitudes from General American, RP and standard Dutch speakers towards the RP accent and are these attitudes in line with the stereotype of the RP accent as portrayed by big budget film companies operating out of Hollywood?

3. Hypotheses

The current attitude towards RP speakers from native Dutch speakers is likely to be more in line with the General American attitudes found in previous research (Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985) as American culture, and the accompanying stereotypes of villains with RP accents in films, are more present in Dutch society than British culture due to the Americanization of Europe (Stephan, 2005). However, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner as cited in Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006) would suggest that the Netherlands, like Denmark, is closer to England socio-culturally in a global perspective and views towards the RP accent may therefore be more favourable. This is even more likely as Dutch students have been shown to prefer RP over American accents (Broeders, 1981). This leads to the hypothesis that Dutch speakers' attitude towards the RP accent is indeed in line with the General American attitudes previously found but that the RP accent has a higher status for Dutch speakers, due to RP speakers being in the same social group as the Dutch speakers, than General American speakers.

The current attitude towards RP speakers from RP speakers themselves is likely to be less in line with the attitudes found in previous studies (e.g., Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985; Ladegaard, 1998). Although there is not much previous research to base these expectations on, a more favourable view on the RP accent is to be expected because people that form part of the RP speaking community are in general less likely to have stereotypical views about their own accent. This is because of social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1987): ingroup speakers should attract more positive evaluations than outgroup speakers.

The current attitude towards RP speakers by General American speakers is expected to be in line with the attitudes found in previous studies (e.g., Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985; Ladegaard, 1998) as villains in American films, series and games have an RP accent relatively more often than the heroes (Dobrow & Gidney, 1998; Sønnesyn, 2011; Bratteli, 2011) and through metonymy (Kristiansen, 2001) GA speakers are likely to generalize this stereotype to RP speakers in general. Furthermore, as stereotyping is commonly used to make sense of the

world (Lippmann, 1965), it is indeed expected to still be present in the attitudes of GA

speakers towards the RP accent.

4. Method

a. Questionnaire

In order to answer the research question, an online questionnaire using the matched guise paradigm (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960) was used (see Appendix). The matched guise paradigm asks participants to rate "recorded voices speaking first in one dialect or language, then in another [whereby] listeners do not know that the speech samples are from the same person" (Gaies & Beebe, 1991, p. 1). The participants were told that they would ascribe different personality traits to eight different speakers to prevent the participant from noticing that there were only four different speakers. The questionnaire contained eight short audio clips from various films, TV series and interviews (see Table 1). Participants were asked to rate the audio clips on a Likert scale. They were asked to rate the audio clips on various characteristics associated with the RP accent and the villain role in Hollywood films.

The online questionnaire was made using Qualtrics (*Qualtrics,* 2005). The questionnaire started by asking the participant's native language and familiarity with various accents of English (i.e., General American English, Scottish English, Canadian English, RP British English, Irish English and Indian English). Several reference accents other than RP and GA were included in this question to ensure that the participant did not find out which accents were being tested. The main audio clip questions of the survey ran as follows: *Listen to the audio of the following video and indicate how much you agree with the statements below. I think speaker #X sounds…*, with each question containing a different speaker from speaker 1 to 8. The question centred on the speaker, rather than the accent, to not draw specific attention to the speech or the accent. The characteristics the participants rated for each of the audio clips were chosen from a previous study on attitudes towards, among others, the RP accent by Stewart, Ryan and Giles (1985). This study used four (social) status traits (*intelligence*, *confidence*, *successfulness* and *ambition*) and four solidarity traits (*trustworthiness*, *sincerity*, *kindness* and *friendliness*). The status traits *intelligence*, *confidence* and *ambition* and the solidarity traits *trustworthiness*, *sincerity* and *kindness* were

also used in the online questionnaire here. Only six traits were chosen to keep the questionnaire more manageable for the participants. Both status traits and solidarity traits were used because both sets of traits are applicable to villainous characters, although status traits are positively applicable and solidarity traits negatively. All characteristics could be rated on a Likert-type scale from 0 to 5 as an answer to the question *I think speaker #X sounds…* with 0 being *Not at all* and 5 being *very.* This would mean that e.g., the characteristic *Intelligent* could be rated as 5, *very,* which would make the participant's answer *I think speaker #X sounds very intelligent.* As the Likert-type scale was a slide, there was also the option to choose somewhere between the numbers, e.g., to choose 2.5 instead of 2 or 3. The scale system was used to obtain more specific and detailed insight into the attitude of the participants towards both accents and to present the participant with a wider array of choices concerning their attitude towards the RP accent.

b. Participants

Initially, 10 native Dutch speakers, 10 RP speakers and 10 General American speakers were targeted as participants. In the end, 17 native Dutch speakers, 9 RP speakers and 8 GA speakers filled out the survey. The participants made the survey online and in their own time and space. They accessed the survey through an anonymous website link. All participants were approached using social media (incl. Facebook and Twitter) and personal networks.

c. Speakers

The matched guise setup was effectuated by using sound samples of dialogue from films and TV series with the same actors using both an RP and a GA accent, provided their accent was good enough to pass as native or near native. This was done to limit the influence of other speech features, such as voice quality, on the perception of the accent and speech. Both male and female speakers were used to eliminate the influence of gender on the perception. Both male speakers were native RP speakers and both female speakers were native GA speakers. Based on these requirements, the following audio clips were selected (Table 1).

Table 1

Information about the different speakers used in the audio clips

	Name	Clip from	Accent in clip	Nationality	Gender
Speaker #1	Renée Zellweger	*Bridget Jones's Diary* (film)	RP British	American	Female
Speaker #2	Hugh Laurie	*House, M.D.* (TV series)	General American	British	Male
Speaker #3	Meryl Streep	*The Hours* (film)	General American	American	Female
Speaker #4	Hugh Laurie	*The Night Manager* (TV series)	RP British	British	Male
Speaker #5	Benedict Cumberbatch	*Sherlock* (TV series)	RP British	British	Male
Speaker #6	Renée Zellweger	*Interview*	General American	American	Female
Speaker #7	Meryl Streep	*The French Lieutenant's Woman* (film)	RP British	American	Female
Speaker #8	Benedict Cumberbatch	*Doctor Strange* (film)	General American	British	Male

d. Procedure

The participants were allowed to choose where and when they made the survey due to the survey being online. They could take as much time as they needed because there was no timing on the questions. They were not allowed to go back and forth between the questions but they did have the possibility to listen to the audio clips multiple times.

5. Results

Table 2 gives an overview of the ratings by the participants of the native languages included (Standard Dutch, RP British English and General American English) towards both the RP accent and the GA accent on both *status traits* (*Intelligence, Confidence* and *Ambition*) and *solidarity traits* (*Trustworthiness, Kindness* and *Sincerity*).

Table 2

Attitudes of the participants per native language towards the RP accent and the GA accent

	Attitude towards the RP accent		Attitude towards the GA accent	
Participants	Status traits	Solidarity traits	Status traits	Solidarity traits
Standard Dutch				
Mean (SD)	3.5 (1.1)	3.0 (1.0)	3.0 (1.2)	2.7 (1.0)
Median	4	3	3	3
Mode	4	3	3	3
RP British English				
Mean (SD)	3.6 (1.0)	2.7 (1.0)	3.0 (1.2)	3.0 (1.1)
Median	4	3	3	3
Mode	4	3	3	3
General American English				
Mean (SD)	3.5 (1.0)	2.6 (1.1)	2.7 (1.1)	3.0 (1.0)
Median	3	2.5	3	3
Mode	3	2	3	3

The Standard Dutch participants showed a higher rating of the RP accent on *solidarity traits* than the General American English participants and an equally high rating as the RP British English participants. The *status traits* ratings by the Standard Dutch participants were equal to the ratings of the RP British English participants but higher than the rating of the General American English participants. The median and mode were the same for both Standard Dutch and RP British English participants for both *status* and *solidarity traits* and both higher than the median and mode of the General American English participants. All three groups of participants rated the RP accent higher in *status* than in *solidarity traits*. The Standard Dutch participants rated the RP accent highest on *Confidence* (M = 3.7; SD = 1.1) and lowest on *Kindness* (M = 2.9; SD = 1.0).

Furthermore, the Standard Dutch participants showed an equally high rating of the GA accent on *status traits* as both the RP British English participants and the General American English participants. The same was found in the ratings on *solidarity traits* as the Standard Dutch participants again showed an equally high rating as both RP British English and General American English participants. The median and mode were equally high across all three native languages for both *status* and *solidarity traits.*

Comparison between the attitudes of the Standard Dutch participants towards the RP accent and the GA accent shows that the participants rated the RP accent higher on both *status* and *solidarity traits,* although the difference on *solidarity traits* is only present in the mean and very small. The RP British English participants, on the other hand, rated the RP accent higher on *status traits* but the GA accent higher on *solidarity traits,* although the difference on *solidarity traits* is only present in the mean and very small. The General American participants showed a similar rating of the RP and GA accent as the RP British English participants but with a bigger difference.

Table 3

Attitudes of the Standard Dutch participants towards the RP and GA accents per gender of

the actor

	Status traits	Solidarity traits
Male RP accent		
Mean (SD)	4.0 (0.8)	2.9 (1.0)
Median	4	3
Mode	4	3
Female RP accent		
Mean (SD)	3.1 (1.1)	3.1 (1.0)
Median	3	3
Mode	4	3
Male GA accent		
Mean (SD)	3.3 (1.0)	2.5 (1.0)
Median	3	3
Mode	4	3
Female GA accent		
Mean (SD)	2.6 (1.3)	3.0 (1.0)
Median	3	3
Mode	2	3

Table 3 shows the attitude of the Standard Dutch participants towards both male and

female speakers of the RP and GA accents. The most prominent result is the high rating on

status traits of both the RP and GA accents when spoken by the male speaker compared to

when spoken by the female speaker. The same male speakers are attributed a lower or equal

rating on *solidarity traits* compared to the female speakers. The results of Standard Dutch

participants' ratings for native RP speakers and non-native RP speakers were the same as the

gender results because both male speakers were native RP speakers and both female speakers

were non-native.

6. Discussion

The study reported here was designed to test the attitudes of native speakers of Standard Dutch, RP British English and General American English towards the RP and GA accents. This was done to test if the Hollywood stereotype of the RP accent as villainous is one that is still held by GA and RP speakers and if it is held by Standard Dutch speakers at all. Also, this was done to test how non-native, in this study Dutch, speakers differ in their attitude towards both the RP and GA accents, from native RP and GA speakers. The study built on the procedure used by Stewart, Ryan and Giles (1985), using the same traits to test the speakers' attitude towards the RP accent.

Contrary to expectation, native Dutch speakers' attitudes towards the RP accent are not in line with the General American attitudes found in previous research (Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985) suggesting that between social identification and Americanization, social identification, as explained by the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner as cited in Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006), has a greater influence on the perception Dutch speakers have of the British RP accent, than Americanization (as explained by Stephan (2005)). Native Dutch speakers seem to prefer the RP accent over the GA accent (thereby mirroring the results found by Broeders (1981)) as they rated the RP accent higher on *status traits* and tended towards a higher rating on *solidarity traits*. This higher status of the RP accent among Dutch participants, however, was expected. Furthermore, the Standard Dutch speakers have in common with both RP British English and General American English speakers that they, within group, rated the RP accent higher in *status* than in *solidarity traits*. Standard Dutch speakers rated the RP accent higher in general on *solidarity traits* than General American English speakers did but equally high as RP British English speakers did. These results combined with the results of the Standard Dutch speakers' tendency towards rating the RP accent higher on *solidarity traits* than they did the GA accent, suggests they have a more favourable outlook on the RP accent in general. A possible explanation for Standard Dutch speakers' high social rating of the RP accent can be found in Social Identity Theory. Social

Identity Theory theorizes that "part of the self-concept is defined by our belonging to social groups" (Trepte, 2006, p. 255). The Netherlands and England might be, from the perspective of the Dutch speakers, in the same social group due to both being part of Europe. This could mean that Dutch speakers look more favourably towards the RP accent as it feels more "part of the self-concept" (Trepte, 2006, p. 255) than the GA accent. However, Dutch participants were also more familiar with the RP accent than with the GA accent as two Dutch participants reported to be completely unfamiliar with the GA accent opposed to none with the RP accent. This familiarity could be due to the same social identification, they are more familiar with an ingroup accent than an outgroup, or due to the RP accent being the most used English accent in Dutch secondary and tertiary education (Broeders, 1981). According to Edwards (as cited in Ladegaard, 1998), familiarity with an accent is a condition for stereotyping to take place but the opposite seems to occur when it comes to the attitude of native Dutch speakers towards the RP accent. Whether this is because of social identification or due other factors such as the prestige that might come with an accent when it is presented as a target accent in secondary and tertiary education (Broeders, 1981; Jenkins, 2002), is still unclear. However, this does seem to have an interesting implication for the stereotypical villain role of the RP accent as portrayed by Hollywood (e.g., as described in Dobrow and Gidney (1998)). Dutch speakers' more favourable outlook towards the RP accent would suggest that using the RP accent to mark that character as villainous in a Hollywood film or other media would not work for native Dutch speakers. This might even extend to other non-native English countries, as this was also found in Denmark (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006).

Native Dutch speakers rating the RP accent quite high on both traits parallel the results found by Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) where native Danish speakers preferred an RP British English accent. Both countries, the Netherlands and Denmark, have in common that they are both physically and culturally closer to England compared to America. However, where the Danish learners of English reported to still downgrade the RP accent in terms of

personal integrity and social attractiveness (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006), the native Dutch speakers did not.

Against expectation, the RP British English speakers attitude towards the RP accent was more in line with the attitudes found in previous studies (e.g., Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985; Ladegaard, 1998) and thereby with the more stereotypical view as presented by Hollywood films (e.g., as described in Dobrow and Gidney (1998)). There seems to be a trend towards a lower rating of the RP accent on *solidarity traits* by RP British English speakers compared to their rating of the GA accent. The RP British English speakers did rate the RP accent higher on *status traits*, but that is more in line with the RP accent stereotype as portrayed by Hollywood films (e.g., as described in Dobrow and Gidney (1998)). They also tended to rate the GA accent higher on *solidarity traits* and did rate the GA accent lower on *status traits* than their own RP accent, which is in line with the more stereotypical heroic view of the GA accent in American media (Sønnesyn, 2011; Bratteli, 2011). It would therefore seem that Americanization, and specifically the presence of Hollywood films in the British culture, has more influence on RP British English speakers than social identification (Abrams & Hogg, 1987) does. This explanation would be in line with the dominance shift from RP to North American English found by Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois and Pittam (2001), which would mean that Britain, just like other native English country New Zealand, would have more General American English in its media. However, another factor that can be of influence is the lack of prestige of the RP accent within secondary and tertiary education. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners are the only speakers still being taught to closely approximate an RP or GA accent (Jenkins, 2002). Furthermore, teachers with a regional English accent are not discouraged from teaching in their accent while teacher with non-native English accents are (p. 85). This means that EFL speakers, including Dutch native speakers, are more encouraged to approximate the RP accent in school and therefore may have a more favourable outlook on the accent (e.g., Broeders 1981) as they were taught this is the accent they should strive to have. RP native speakers, on the other hand, do not have this

encouragement because regional English accent speakers are not, or less, discouraged to drop their accent (Jenkins, 2002). Younger RP speakers are even said to incorporate regional features in their speech to have less of an RP accent ("Received Pronunciation", 2007). However, the RP accent is still present in British media and further research is needed to find out if a mere-exposure effect of RP English in the media has an influence on the attitude of RP speakers towards the accent.

The results found on the attitude of General American speakers towards the RP accent were as expected and in line with the attitude found in previous studies (e.g., Stewart, Ryan & Giles, 1985; Ladegaard, 1998). GA speaking participants rated the RP accent higher on *status traits* but lower on *solidarity traits* than their own GA accent. This was to be expected as villains portrayed in American films, series and games still have an RP accent relatively more often than the heroes (Dobrow & Gidney, 1998; Sønnesyn, 2011; Bratteli, 2011). The question remains, however, whether the stereotype of villains with an RP accent has spread through metonymy (Kristiansen, 2001) to generalize RP speakers in general or whether the RP accent stereotypes already existed within the General American English speaking community and is therefore applicable to villain roles. Even though this thesis cannot clarify this, General American English speakers' tendency to view the RP accent more in line with the stereotypical view as portrayed by Hollywood (e.g., as described in Dobrow and Gidney (1998)) does suggest that stereotyping in general is used to make sense of the world (Lippmann, 1965). Furthermore, their lower rating of the GA accent on *status traits* mirrors the results found by Stewart, Ryan and Giles (1985) where the American participants perceived middle class RP speakers as having a higher status than their standard American counterparts.

The General American English accent seems to have a higher status among RP British English speakers than among native Dutch speakers. The reason for this status might be the shift in dominance found in the New Zealand media, another English native country, from RP English to North American English (as found by Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois and Pittam

(2001)). This status, however, does not extend to Dutch native speakers as RP British English is the most used accent in Dutch secondary and tertiary education (Broeders, 1981), thereby maybe giving the RP accent more prestige. However, despite the still high status the RP accent seems to have in the Netherlands, there is also a hint of the stereotypical view of the RP accent as portrayed by Hollywood films in Dutch native speakers' attitude towards RP: they rate the RP accent higher on *status traits* than on *solidarity traits* and within these traits, they rate the RP accent highest on the trait *Confidence* and lowest on the trait *Kindness.* These results are in line with the RP accent as portrayed in the pre-dominantly American media (Dobrow & Gidney, 1998; Sønnesyn, 2011; Bratteli, 2011).

Besides the attitudes of the various native languages towards both the RP and GA accent, this thesis additionally looked at attitudes towards the different gender of the speakers by Standard Dutch speakers. This was done to ensure that the speakers' genders would not affect the participants' attitudes towards the speech and accents tested. The native Dutch participants rated the male RP speakers higher on *status traits* but tended towards a lower rating on *solidarity traits* than the female RP speakers. The results, however, seem to have more to do with existing gender stereotypes than with the RP accent. Men are thought to be more "aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive" (Heilman, 2001, p. 658) while women are thought to be more "kind, helpful, sympathetic, and concerned about others" (p. 658). These stereotypes are reflected in Standard Dutch speakers' rating of the two genders as the *status traits* are more in line with the male gender stereotypes described by Heilman (2001) and the *solidarity traits* more with the female stereotypes. This is backed up by the attitudes of the Standard Dutch speakers towards the GA accent. Just like with the RP accent speakers, the male GA speakers are rated higher in *status traits* but lower in *solidarity traits* than the female GA speakers. However, whether these results are solely due to the gender difference of the speakers is not clear because both male speakers were native RP speakers and both female speakers were non-native. It might be that native Dutch speakers noticed this and, because they seem to have a more favourable outlook on the RP accent than the GA accent,

tended to attribute a lower *status traits* rating to the female native GA speakers. This would, however, not explain the tendency towards a higher or equal rating of the female speakers on *solidarity traits* or the equal *status trait* rating of the male GA speaker compared to the female RP speaker. If the native Dutch speakers noticed the native-ness of the speakers, it would be expected that the RP male speakers would score higher on both *status* and *solidarity traits* mirroring the results found in the native Dutch speakers' attitude towards the RP accent in general. It would then also be expected that the female RP speaker would score higher on *status traits* than both GA speakers. As this is not the case, it is yet unknown whether the difference in attitude towards the different genders of the speakers was due to gender or due to their native accent.

a. Limitations

Despite the thesis' attempts to diminish the influence of external factors, there were still some limitations.

The thesis did not test the attitude of the respondents towards the nationality and country of origin of both the RP and GA accents. It was not tested, for example, whether the Dutch respondents feel closer to the British nationality and the United Kingdom compared to the American nationality and the United States of America. Therefore, it cannot be concluded whether the Dutch respondents' higher rating of the RP accent was due to social identification or due to other factors such as exposure in secondary and tertiary education, association or preferences. Future research could test Dutch speakers' social identification towards both countries to find out whether their ratings of the two accents is indeed due to social identification. The role of social identification in attitude towards different accents provides an interesting topic for further research.

Furthermore, this thesis did also not conclusively test whether it was gender or native accent that affected Dutch speakers' difference in their ratings of the male and female speakers. In the survey, the female speakers were both native GA speakers while the male speakers were both native RP speakers. It can therefore not be concluded whether the higher

rating of the RP male speakers on *status traits* was due to the speakers being male or due to the speakers having a native RP accent. For future research, native RP speakers of both genders might give more insight.

The recognition of some of speakers' voices by the participants, could have affected the participants' attitudes towards the speech of those speakers. If, for example, the participant recognised the RP male speaker as Benedict Cumberbatch in the series *Sherlock,* their opinion of the actor and the series could have affected how they rated his speech. Some of the participants indeed reported that they did recognize some of the speakers. For future research, it would indeed be better to use audio clips of less recognizable speakers while still ensuring that their RP and GA accents can pass for native or near native.

Lastly, this thesis only tested the attitude of a small group of participants which resulted in only small differences and mere tendencies found. For future research, a bigger participant group is recommended. This might result in bigger and clearer differences in results between the attitudes of the different native language groups.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has shown that native Dutch speakers prefer the RP accent over the GA accent as they rated the RP accent higher on *status traits* (*Intelligence, Confidence* and *Ambition*) and tended to rate the RP accent higher on *solidarity traits* (*Trustworthiness, Kindness* and *Sincerity*) than the GA accent. This was not in line with ratings of both RP British English and General American speakers on both accents. The current attitude of standard Dutch speakers thus differs from the current attitudes of RP and General American speakers. While both General American and RP speakers' current attitude mirrored the stereotypical view of the RP accent as portrayed by big budget film companies operating out of Hollywood, the standard Dutch speakers' current attitude did not. The standard Dutch speakers' current attitude towards the RP accent is more favourable than the stereotypical view of the accent. These findings seem to have an interesting implication for how the RP accent is used in Hollywood films. Even though the stereotypical view of the RP accent as villainous seems to work for an American audience and even for a British audience, it does not seem to work as much for a Dutch non-native audience. The Dutch audience seem to find the RP accent more sympathetic which might get in the way of the portrayal of the villain in films. Although the stereotype might work in the native film markets, it seems to do less so in the foreign film markets.

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Appendix

Layout of the questionnaire. The third question is an example; questions 3-10 had this setup.

1.
What is your native language?

⚪ General American English
⚪ RP British English
⚪ Standard Dutch
⚪ Other:
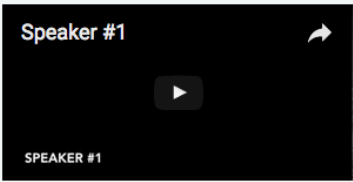[   ]

2.
Are you familiar with the following English accents? Select all the accents you are familiar with

☐ General American English
☐ Scottish English
☐ Canadian English
☐ RP British English
☐ Irish English
☐ Indian English

3.
✓ Q4 Listen to the audio of the following video and indicate how much you agree with the statements below.
      I think speaker #1 sounds...