# Second language learners' attitudes towards French varieties: The roles of learning

# experience and social networks

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## Abstract

People often believe that some language varieties are more prestigious than others, which can trigger speech-centered biases and inform social judgments of the speaker. However, it is largely unknown what types of language experience and exposure might mitigate language biases, especially for second language (L2) learners. The goal of this study was to investigate this issue by focusing on L2 French learners' attitudes toward European and Quebec varieties of French. L2 French learners in Montreal ($N = 106$) rated 2 audios recorded by native speakers from France in a listening comprehension task, with 1 of the 2 speakers introduced as a speaker of Quebec French. The learners described their language learning experience, filled out a French social network questionnaire, and completed a French proficiency test. Results revealed some evidence of reverse linguistic stereotyping, with learners preferring to speak like one speaker significantly more than the other, based on the speaker's assumed identity, not actual speech. Four of the 6 speaker ratings were also associated with participants' oral proficiency scores, social network density, and positive experiences in Quebec. Findings have implications for the use of speech models in L2 teaching and for the mitigation of language-centered biases in L2 classrooms.

*Keywords*: Quebec French; European French; reverse linguistic stereotyping; language attitudes; L2 French

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INTRODUCTION

Speakers of minority or stigmatized language varieties are often aware of the possibility of being judged based on their speech patterns or accent (Derwing, 2003; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Speech-based judgements are widespread, appearing in all aspects of life, from the workplace to educational settings, and can be triggered merely by a speech recording or even speech expectations based on visual cues (McKenzie, 2008; Rubin, 1992). Whether language-based attitudes develop from classroom or cultural experience, they likely emerge from an internalized hierarchy of languages and language varieties and affect both native speakers and second language (L2) learners. The existence of biases can be detrimental to different facets of people's personal and professional lives, resulting in social disadvantages, because biases promote linguistic stereotyping, for example, where speech samples from a low-prestige variety trigger negative attitudes towards individuals from that speech community (e.g., Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Hume et al., 1993).

For L2 speakers or speakers of regional varieties, evaluations tainted by language attitudes can have far-reaching consequences, impacting their education, housing, and employment opportunities (e.g., Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Davila et al., 1993; Giles et al., 1981; Hopper & Williams, 1973). For example, less favorable speech styles may negatively influence managers' views of job applicants or landlords' perceptions of potential tenants (Hyman, 2002; Munro, 2003). Speech-based biases are also harmful for non-native speaking teachers where discrimination against their accent may impact hiring decisions and perceptions of their teaching effectiveness (Munro, 2003; Williams, 1976). Clearly, language cues have the

power to influence social decisions in a variety of situations. Particularly relevant in educational settings, language-based attitudes can not only influence how teachers view their students' abilities and character (e.g., Choy & Dodd, 1976; Seligman et al., 1972), but can also affect how L2 speakers view their own speech variety. For instance, L2 learners judge speakers with native accents more positively than L2 speakers from their own language background (Chiba et al., 1995; Hu & Lindemann, 2009; Zhang, 2013).

Having language-based attitudes might have considerable consequences for the listener as well, such as when a native speaker fails to understand the intended message of the L2 interlocutor in native–non-native interaction. Even though blame for communication breakdowns is often placed on the perceived lack of proficiency of the L2 interlocutor, it is often the native speaker's negative attitudes that hinder a successful exchange, such that biases restrict the native speaker from putting full effort into understanding the L2 interlocutor (Lindemann, 2002). In fact, listeners' attitudes have been shown to affect their recall of words (Weener, 1967) and to limit their overall listening comprehension (e.g., Rubin, 1992). Assuming that attitudes impact language comprehension and recall, attitudes might be particularly detrimental in a classroom setting if during the lesson either the instructor or the audio learning materials used for activities exhibit non-standard speech. Therefore, what should be of most concern to language teachers are the educational consequences of L2 learners having biases against the target language, because these biases could affect learners' perception of the target language and subsequently their success in the classroom. In this study, we addressed this issue within an educational setting by investigating an underexplored question, namely, whether learners hold negative attitudes towards different *varieties* of the target language (such as European versus Quebec French) and whether various learner proficiency and exposure variables could explain their attitudes.

BACKGROUND

*Language Attitudes and Their Origins*

It is common knowledge that people believe certain languages or language varieties to be more prestigious than others, causing them to favor that perceived superior language or variety (e.g., Boulé, 2002; Kircher, 2012, 2014; Laur, 2008; Zhang & Hu, 2008). Individuals express language preference along the dimensions of status, which refers to the degree of utilitarian value language holds (e.g., how much it will increase employment opportunities), and solidarity, which refers to how much language elicits feelings of attachment to a community (e.g., how much language is an important aspect of one's personal identity). Language attitudes can also be measured indirectly based on judgements of a speaker's status (e.g., intelligence, leadership) and solidarity (e.g., likeability, sociability) traits, where downgrading a speaker's traits after listening to a speaker, relative to the ratings provided to the same or different speakers in another situation (e.g., in another language), would indicate linguistic stereotyping. For example, Kircher (2014) used Lambert et al.'s (1960) matched-guise technique to elicit attitudes, where bilingual speakers made two stimulus recordings, one in French and one in English, and were presented to listeners in a sequence as if the recordings belonged to separate individuals. Kircher found evidence consistent with linguistic stereotyping, where both anglophone and francophone listeners judged the speakers presented in the English guise to be better suited to society than those presented in the French guise, and rated English speakers more positively than French speakers on all status-related traits.

Certain languages might be inherently more aesthetically pleasing and more linguistically sophisticated, relegating other varieties to the substandard level. More likely, however, a language's value derives from cultural norms, based on the status of the social group speaking

that variety (Edwards, 1999; Giles et al., 1974). For instance, Giles et al. (1979) showed that adults in Wales who were unfamiliar with French did not perceive any variety of French heard in Quebec (European French, educated Canadian French, or working-class Canadian French) to carry more prestige over the other. However, when Welsh learners of French with some French experience evaluated these same varieties, they attributed the most prestige to European French. In essence, when individuals have no linguistic or cultural knowledge of a language, they demonstrate similar attitudes towards its varieties, but differences emerge as they become aware of the culturally charged stereotypes through their experience with the language.

Language attitudes might also stem from people's own-accent bias, where judgements are formed about the speech of other speakers due to people's inherent preference for their own way of speaking (Bestelmeyer et al., 2015). For example, individuals view speakers with accents similar to their own as being more understandable, more favorable as teachers (Gill, 1994), and more trustworthy (Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010) than dissimilarly accented speakers. Children as young as five prefer to be friends with children who share the same accent, even though they understand L2-speaking children equally well (Kinzler et al., 2007). Additionally, language attitudes might also reflect people's subjective experience with speech. For instance, Dragojevic and Giles (2016) asked participants to rate audios of American and Punjabi English mixed with white noise, thus making the processing of speech harder for them. Participants provided more positive ratings for the less noisy, more comprehensible audios, regardless of the variety spoken, which suggests that listeners' experience of processing difficulty might be associated with their negative attitudes towards the language and the speaker.

In other cases, language attitudes might be constructed from factors extraneous to language altogether—an effect known as reverse linguistic stereotyping (RLS). In essence,

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people's language-centered views often stem from preconceived ideas, expectations, or stereotypes of speaker characteristics, such as age (Hay et al., 2006), gender (Strand, 1999), region of origin (Niedzielski, 1999), or native/non-native status (Rubin, 1992), rather than from any properties of the speech itself. Using a matched-guise technique, Rubin (1992) was among the first to show that undergraduate students evaluating the same recorded speech sample paired with a different image of the speaker (one Caucasian, the other Asian) perceived the speech of the presumed Asian speaker as being accented and also performed worse on a comprehension test based on the lecture (see also Kang & Rubin, 2009). In this case, perceptions rather than reality appeared to underlie these listeners' attitudes and their linguistic performance.

*The Roles of Experience, Exposure, and Proficiency*

It remains unclear exactly what determines the degree to which one engages in RLS or what influences one's development of attitudes, but some patterns have emerged. For example, L2 learners tend to have more favorable views towards varieties they are familiar with (Ahn & Kang, 2017; Chiba et al., 1995; Zhang & Hu, 2008). Listeners with more exposure to an accent also tend to perceive that speech more accurately (e.g., McGowan, 2015). Lambert et al. (1960) posited that differences in attitudes between two varieties would be less pronounced for individuals with more experience with both linguistic groups. Similarly, results from Giles et al. (1974, 1979) suggested that learners at a higher level of L2 French proficiency attributed different levels of prestige to varieties of French, compared to learners with no French knowledge who held a comparable view of prestige across varieties. On the other hand, Kang and Rubin (2009) found that simply more exposure to L2 speech did not mitigate listeners' judgements of the Asian guise in a RLS study. However, listeners who had previous experience teaching English to L2 learners were more likely to rate the Asian guise speech more positively.

Therefore, perhaps a greater amount of exposure alone is insufficient to lessen speech-based biases, but meaningful interactions, such as those with students or close friends, might produce such an effect (Kang & Rubin, 2012; Kang et al., 2015). It may thus be that it is the type or quality of experience (e.g., dense social networks, positive interactions) rather than the quantity of exposure to the language (e.g., length of L2 study or residence in the L2 culture, L2 proficiency level) that determines the strength of (negative) attitudes, because "fostering quality social contacts stimulates positive feelings and helps to replace the negative perception of what is different" (Cortes-Colomé et al., 2016, p. 284).

*Language Attitudes and L2 Learners*

Regardless of their origins, language attitudes can have important consequences, for instance, by impacting L2 learners' performance in the classroom. For example, learner attitudes toward different languages or language varieties might hinder their language performance (Hu & Su, 2015; Rubin, 1992; Ryan & Sebastian, 1980). Using a listening comprehension task, Hu and Su (2015) showed that Cantonese L2 English learners who were told that the speaker was American outperformed those who thought that the speaker's background was Cantonese, even though both groups listened to the same American speaker. L2 learners' biases can also lead to distorted perception of speech. Knowing that Cantonese-accented English is characterized by word-final stops frequently being unreleased, Hu and Lindemann (2009) presented the same speaker as American and as Cantonese, to see if those labels would affect Cantonese L2 English listeners' perception of word-final stops. When listeners thought that the speaker was American, they were more likely to hear a full release, compared to when they thought that the speaker was Cantonese. These listeners likely stigmatized unreleased stops as imperfect speech, leading them to idealize American speech to the extent that they overlooked unreleased stops produced by an

American speaker, as they were not expecting them to occur.

As discussed previously, RLS appears to trigger distorted perceptions for native speakers evaluating various speech patterns belonging to regional dialects and native-speaker varieties (Hay et al., 2006; Niedzielski, 1999) and occurs among L2 learners when they are led to believe that they are exposed to L2 speech (Hu & Su, 2015). Yet what remains to be investigated is whether L2 learners engage in RLS, thus revealing preconceived attitudinal biases, when they listen to native-speaker varieties of the language they are learning. It appears that L2 learners do express explicit preferences for specific language varieties, which closely corresponds to native speakers' preferences for standard or prestige varieties over "substandard" ones (e.g., Brown et al., 1985; Kircher, 2012). For example, L2 English learners have been shown to rate British English systematically more favorably than American English (Jarvella et al., 2001), and both more favorably than Australian English (Zhang & Hu, 2008), revealing a prestige hierarchy. Similarly, when speakers of Standard European French, Quebec French, Ontario French, and English-accented French were presented as possible teachers to English Canadian students, the students evaluated the linguistic and professional competence of the teacher more favorably when she was speaking the European French variety and responded more positively for wanting her as their instructor (Hume et al., 1993). Because teachers often provide the main source of input for learners and act as their speech model, less favorable attitudes towards certain language varieties may lead to concerning implications, especially if learners' comprehension is impacted (e.g., Hu & Su, 2015; Rubin, 1992). For instance, as suggested by Hume et al. (1993), if learners enter a classroom with preconceived ideas of the target language and the teacher's accent evokes negative stereotypes, learners may view their teachers' competence negatively and might be less likely to identify with them and less inclined to learn from them. More research is needed,

however, to test such possible effects of preconceived biases on learners' motivation to learn and their learning outcomes.

THE CURRENT STUDY

In this study, we sought to extend the limited knowledge of how attitudes influence L2 learners' evaluations of speech by focusing on learners of French, a previously underexplored population. Instead of targeting learners' judgements towards their own group's L2 speech (e.g., Chiba et al., 1995; Zhang, 2013), we examined their perceptions of different French varieties spoken by native speakers (European French, Quebec French) as part of language teaching materials. We explored learners' attitudes towards these varieties in two ways: through speech ratings within the framework of RLS (on the assumption that biases might emerge based off a speaker's social attribution alone) and through learners' qualitative reactions to the speaker. With respect to RLS research, our study is novel as it extends prior RLS work (which to date has generally targeted listener attitudes towards presumed non-native speakers of English) by eliciting attitudes towards speakers presumed to speak two different regional varieties of French. The RLS framework (presentation of a European French speaker as a speaker of the Quebec French variety) was essential, in that it allowed us to capture L2 learners' preconceived attitudes about Quebec French based on presumed (regional) identity of the speaker, rather than the actual variation in the speaker's speech.

The study was conducted in Montreal, Quebec, which is historically characterized by negative attitudes towards speakers of Quebec French by various groups of language users, including L2 learners studying French outside Quebec (Hume et al., 1993), English-speaking residents and young immigrants in Quebec (Kircher, 2012), and even by Quebec French speakers themselves (D'Anglejan & Tucker, 1973; Kircher, 2012; Lambert et al., 1960). Although

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negative attitudes towards Quebec French appear to be less pronounced in recent reports (Evans, 2002; Piechowiak, 2009), European French is still seen as a preferred variety, especially by newcomers to Quebec (Kircher, 2012), likely because it remains the variety most commonly taught to L2 learners worldwide (Bourhis, 1997; Kircher, 2012). Whether university students currently studying French in Quebec share similar (largely negative) language attitudes towards the local French variety remains largely unknown.

In addition, because experience and exposure variables seem to be key factors underlying language attitudes (e.g., Lambert et al., 1960; Kang & Rubin, 2009), we also explored the role of learners' experience in relation to their attitudes towards the Quebec variety of French. Language attitudes are culturally formed, yet the question remains as to the amount and type of experience or the degree of language proficiency required for learners to overcome any stereotypical biases about the target language. The study addressed the following two research questions:

1. Do L2 French learners demonstrate any biases towards Quebec French through their ratings of speakers within the framework of RLS or through their qualitative responses (i.e., choice of adjectives to describe speakers, stated reasons for preferring one speaker over another)?

2. How are learners' French listening comprehension and speaking performance as well as exposure to and experience with Quebec French related to their attitudes towards this French variety?

METHOD

*Participants*

The participants were 106 adult residents of Montreal (65 females; $M_{age} = 27.43$ years, $SD = 6.96$, *range* = 18–67), who were learning L2 French at the time of the study. Participants

represented 30 different languages, the majority of which were English (24), Persian (21), and Spanish (14). Their educational background ranged from the BA level (38) to the MA (48) and PhD (10) levels, while 10 participants provided no information about their status. As learners at any French level were invited to participate, participants' amount of French study varied as well, where 46 participants (45.1%) had been studying French for less than one year, 36 participants (35.3%) had been studying the language for 1–5 years, and 20 (19.6%) had more than five years of French study. However, because proficiency level can vary, even among those who have had the same amount of French study, we obtained study-specific listening comprehension and speaking measures for all participants (see below) so that these measures could be used in subsequent analyses. When asked what variety of French they spoke, 38.2% of participants considered their own French variety to be closer to Quebec French, whereas 61.8% of participants reported speaking a variety closer to European French. The participants' length of Quebec residence varied between two weeks and 28 years ($M = 3.14$ years, $SD = 5.15$). They were students at English-medium universities or were taking French classes at a community center.

*Materials*

The materials included a listening task (audio recordings accompanied by speaker and listener versions of maps and rating scales), a language background questionnaire, a social network survey, a French comprehension test, and an oral proficiency rubric.

*Audio recordings.* Two 21-year-old female native French speakers from Metz, France, made a short audio recording each. Female speakers were chosen because women represent the majority of teachers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). The audio content was prompted by maps with marked routes (see Appendix S1), which the speakers used to give directions. Inspired

by McKenzie's (2008) map task, the maps were used to elicit natural but somewhat controlled speech. Each speaker made her recording using a different map, resulting in two audios, one per map/speaker (see Appendix S1 for transcripts), meaning that each speaker narrated a unique set of map directions. The two maps contained the same images so that the lexical content remained consistent, but the pictures were scrambled to allow the directions to differ.

The two target recordings were drawn from a set of 14 audios by the same speakers using different speech rates (faster vs. slower), subject pronouns (*tu* vs. *vous*), speaking styles (longer vs. shorter pauses between directions), and with different assignment of speakers to map versions. The target recordings were chosen through pilot testing, during which they (along with 12 additional audios) were evaluated by 10 native French speakers (six speakers of Quebec French, four speakers of European French) using 100-millimeter scales. The two target recordings, which were comparable in speech rate (112.12 and 115.7 words per minute) and length (35 and 46 seconds), received similar ratings for the four rated dimensions: naturalness ($M_{Speaker1} = 94$, $M_{Speaker2} = 82$), accentedness ($M_{Speaker1} = 99$, $M_{Speaker2} = 96$), comprehensibility ($M_{Speaker1} = 96$, $M_{Speaker2} = 93$), and French variety ($M_{Speaker1} = 91$, $M_{Speaker2} = 94$), where a rating of 100 meant 100% certainty that the speaker was from France. According to paired-samples $t$ tests, there were no significant differences between the ratings for the two recordings ($t$s $< 1.54$, $p$s $> .16$); additionally, due to the counterbalanced presentation (see below), it was not always the same recording presented as a Quebec French speaker, so each audio had an equal chance to elicit potentially harsher or more lenient reactions from participants. Therefore, it could be assumed that any difference in participants' reactions to the two recordings would be driven by their belief about the speaker's linguistic identity, not by the speaker's actual speech output.

*Listener maps and audio rating scales.* The listener maps were identical to the speaker

maps, but without the marked route. These were given to participants so they could attempt to follow the audio directions. Participants who self-identified as beginner-level learners (approximately 37) were given maps with labeled images. Having participants complete the maps promoted active listening and simulated a realistic listening activity appropriate for their level, which also increased the likelihood that the study's results might clarify how attitudes can arise in classrooms. The 37 participants who self-identified as beginner-level learners obtained lower speaking scores ($M = 19.97$, $SD = 1.99$, $range = 16.00–23.50$) and lower listening comprehension scores ($M = 8.24$, $SD = 3.29$, $range = 0–14.00$) based on study-specific measures (see Method), compared to the remaining 69 participants' speaking ($M = 27.20$, $SD = 2.89$, $range = 23.00–34.50$) and listening comprehension ($M = 12.69$, $SD = 3.02$, $range = 6.00–19.00$) scores. This implied that our decision to assist beginner-level learners with map task vocabulary was justifiable based on their self-reports.

To accompany the maps, participants received two sets of rating scales (one per audio), both consisting of the same 100-millimeter continuous scales (a line with labeled endpoints). The scales were used to rate the speaker's speech (for accentedness, comprehensibility), and also included ratings pertaining to the dimensions of status (intelligence, competence as a teacher) and solidarity (desire to have the speaker as a teacher, desire to speak like the speaker). All negative ratings were labeled on the left, and positive ratings were labeled on the right. The rated dimensions were selected from previous work on attitudes (Hume et al., 1993; Kircher, 2012, 2014; Lambert et al., 1960). The final scale, asking participants to place the speaker's French variety on a continuum between definitely Quebec French and definitely European French served as a critical measure to determine whether participants believed that the speaker was truly speaking the French variety that was announced to them prior to playing the audio. Comment

boxes were provided below each scale for participants to explain the reason for their rating.

The final question asked participants to circle any words from a word bank, consisting of 13 positive and 12 negative descriptors, to describe the speaker's speech. These adjectives were either chosen based off words used by participants to describe European and Quebec French in this study's pilot project (pure, international, nonstandard, standard, proper, the original, educated, sophisticated, unclear, normal), or were selected from Kircher's (2012) word bank used to describe Quebec French (bizarre, accented, unattractive, unsophisticated, uneducated, difficult, incorrect, annoying, unpleasant, not classy, easy, elegant, musical, clear, smooth). After listening to both speakers, participants circled their preferred speaker for the activity and (optionally) explained their choice.

*Background questionnaire.* This questionnaire elicited details about participants' age, gender, country of origin, language background, years of French study, length of stay in Quebec, and their attitudes towards Quebec French. There were also eleven 100-millimeter scales targeting participants' exposure to and familiarity with European and Quebec French, including in their previous French classes, their familiarity with Quebec French, and the perception of their own French variety on a continuum between European and Quebec French.

*Social network survey.* Adapted from a social network instrument by Doucerain et al. (2015), this survey collected information about the French speakers from each participant's social network (see Appendix S2). It allowed participants to record the French speakers (native or non-native) that they interacted with and whether or not those speakers knew one another. Each person's variety of French was noted, as well as participant's relationship to them, amount of interaction with them in French, and level of closeness (intimacy) to them (where 1 represented someone they did not know very well, and 5 represented someone who they shared a

close relationship with). The intimacy rating is an important measure because attitudes are related to both the frequency of social interactions and to the quality (intimacy levels) of exchanges (Cortes-Colomé et al., 2016; Kang & Rubin, 2009).

*Measures of L2 French listening comprehension and speaking.* To obtain a study-specific measure of participants' L2 listening, a listening comprehension test was administered based on the standardized Test for Evaluating French for Access to Quebec (TEFAQ), recognized by Quebec's Ministry for Immigration, Diversity, and Inclusion ("Les tutoriels pour se préparer au TEF," 2018) and available publicly (https://www.lefrancaisdesaffaires.fr/tests-diplomes/test-evaluation-francais-tef/tef-quebec-tefaq). To derive a study-specific measure of participants' L2 speaking (see below), digital recorders were also provided to pairs of participants, where they recorded themselves answering two open-ended questions related to their future plans and opinions about Montreal.

*Procedure*

To disguise the true purpose of the experiment, the project was presented to participants as a study investigating the effectiveness and quality of French listening comprehension activities. The procedure (summarized in Table 1) either took place during regular classroom instruction (with classes of 6–15 students) or during scheduled times outside class hours (in groups of 4–8 people), with participants completing the testing procedure individually. After signing the consent form, a practice exercise consisting of a sample scale and a simple listener map with different items was administered by the researcher in a live (i.e., not prerecorded) presentation. For classes of beginner-level learners (37), the vocabulary used in the activity was introduced prior to starting the task.

Table 1. *Data Collection Procedure*

| Data collection task | Description | Timing |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Consent | Introduction of study and consent form | 3 minutes |
| 2. Practice | Practice exercise with sample map and scale, administered by the researcher | 3 minutes |
| 3. Speaker introduction | The first speaker was introduced as a French teacher from Quebec (or from France), depending on counterbalanced order assignment | 1 minute |
| 4. Map task 1 | Participants followed the speaker's directions by drawing a line on their map accordingly | 1 minute |
| 5. Rating scales | Participants used scales to rate the speaker and optionally left comments regarding their ratings | 7 minutes |
| 6. Map task 2 | Steps 3–5 were repeated with the second speaker, who was introduced as a French teacher from France (or from Quebec), depending on counterbalanced order assignment | 9 minutes |
| 7. Questionnaires | Participants filled out the background questionnaire and social network survey | 10 minutes |
| 8. Listening comprehension | Participants completed the TEFAQ listening comprehension test (used to derive a listening comprehension measure) | 20 minutes |
| 9. Speaking activity | Participants recorded responses to two open-ended questions in French with a partner (used to derive a measure of L2 speaking) | 5 minutes |
| 10. Debrief | Participants were informed of the true purpose of the study and were told that both speakers were from France | 3 minutes |

The main research activities involved participants listening to two different recordings featuring separate map tasks, each recorded by a different speaker (see above). Using a modified matched-guise procedure (Lambert et al., 1960), the speaker narrating the task was introduced to participants under a different guise—as a French teacher from either France or Quebec (i.e., in the European or Quebec guise). Put differently, although both audios were recorded by European French speakers, one of the two was introduced as a speaker of European French (true identity) while the other was presented as a speaker of Quebec French (false identity), to see if the false attribution of linguistic identity alone would affect participants' ratings, just as the false Asian identity did for participants in RLS research (Kang & Rubin, 2009; Rubin, 1992). Participants followed the speaker's directions by drawing a line on their map. Beginner-level learners were only asked to connect the images in the order they heard them in the recording. The same audio was then played again after which participants filled out the rating scales for that audio. This procedure was repeated with the second map/second speaker (see Table 1). It was not feasible to have a distractor activity before the second map task because it would have extended the testing procedure beyond the limited classroom time we were given.

There were four counterbalanced lists in which the two map tasks were arranged, and each participant experienced one list only. Across the four lists, each map task appeared twice as the first and twice as the second in a sequence of two tasks; and each task was presented under the European guise twice and under the Quebec guise also twice. Participant assignment to each list was random, but we ensured that approximately an equal number of participants (out of 106) completed the study using each list. In the end, 22 participants completed the testing using List 1, 29 participants experienced the tasks using List 2, 26 participants performed the tasks using List 3, and 29 participants completed the tasks through List 4. Therefore, all participants experienced

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both tasks (i.e., heard each of the two speakers) but in different task orders and in different guises, such that the Quebec guise was not always associated with the same task (speaker) and did not always appear in the same order.

The background questionnaire and social network survey were introduced after participants completed the map tasks. Participants filled out the social network table, then drew lines to connect the people that knew one another within their social network. Next, the TEFAQ listening comprehension test was administered to the entire group, and participants marked their responses in a test booklet. Finally, audio recorders were distributed, and each pair of participants recorded their response to the following two questions: If you were to describe Montreal to someone from your hometown, what would you tell them? What are your plans for after you graduate? Learners who had only recently started learning French during the few weeks prior (9), all of whom were among the 37 participants who self-identified as beginner-level learners, were asked to simply present themselves and their interests. At the end of the session, participants were debriefed about the study's goals and were informed that both speakers used for the map tasks were in fact from France.

DATA ANALYSIS

*Audio Ratings*

The ratings were measured (in millimeters) from the left side of the scale to the cross marked by participants. The key measures were the six speaker ratings: her accentedness and comprehensibility, her intelligence and competence as a teacher, as well as participants' desire to have the speaker as a teacher and their desire to speak like her. Rating reliability (Cronbach's alpha) across all participants' assessments of these six dimensions in each guise exceeded .91 per dimension.

*Background Questionnaire*

The questionnaire ratings were coded the same way as the audio ratings. To reduce the

number of (potentially associated) variables, an exploratory Principal Component Analysis

(PCA) with Oblimin rotation was conducted to determine whether the 11 rated background

variables showed any underlying patterns. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (.643) exceeded the

required .60 for sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(55) = 226.02$, $p < .0001$,

indicated that correlations between variables were sufficiently large for PCA (Hutcheson &

Sofroniou, 1999). An initial analysis revealed four underlying factors with eigenvalues over

Kaiser's criterion of 1, accounting for 64.75% of the variance. After the first four components in

the scree plot, there was a clear discontinuity, revealing four underlying factors. Table 2 shows

the factor loadings for these four factors.

Table 2. *Factor Loadings from Principal Component Analysis of Background Questionnaire*

| Questionnaire items | Component | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Exposure to European French in class | –.77 | | | |
| Own French variety | –.77 | | | |
| Exposure to Quebec French in class | .76 | | | |
| Familiarity with Quebec French | .60 | | | |
| Quebec French as part of identity | | .85 | | |
| Usefulness of Quebec French | | .84 | | |
| Feel welcome in Quebec | | | .87 | |
| Experience with Quebec French speakers | | | .83 | |
| Perceived importance of French in Quebec | | | | .78 |
| Quebec French media exposure | | | | .64 |
| Speaking with Quebec French speakers | | | | .54 |
| Eigenvalue | 2.85 | 1.70 | 1.35 | 1.23 |
| Variance explained (%) | 25.86 | 15.42 | 12.28 | 11.18 |

Factor 1, labelled "Classroom exposure and familiarity with Quebec French" encompassed participants' familiarity with Quebec French, what they believed their own French variety to be, and their exposure to each variety in their French classes (with greater exposure to European French associated with less exposure to and familiarity with Quebec French). Factor 2, with questions targeting how much participants found Quebec French to be an integral part of their identity and their opinion of the overall usefulness of Quebec French compared to European French, was labeled "Personal relevance of Quebec French." Factor 3, labelled "Positive

experience in Quebec" captured how welcome the participants felt in Quebec and the extent to which they experienced positive interactions with Quebec French speakers. Factor 4, labeled "Quebec French use," dealt with participants' amount of exposure to Quebec French through media or native speakers, and with how important they perceived the use of French to be in Quebec. Four factor scores (one per component) were derived for further analyses using the Anderson-Rubin method for obtaining noncorrelated scores following PCA.

*Social Network Survey*

Following Doucerain et al. (2015), four measurements were calculated per participant: L2 network size (total number of French speakers in one's social network), L2 intimacy (average closeness rating across all people listed), L2 inclusiveness (number of non-isolated people divided by the L2 network size), and L2 density (number of links between the people divided by the number of possible links). Because we focused on attitudes towards Quebec French, further analyses only included the scores for Quebec French speakers in participant networks.

*Measures of L2 French Speaking and Listening Comprehension*

The TEFAQ comprehension test was graded out of 20 points, with the score used as a study-specific measure of French listening comprehension. To obtain a measure of participants' L2 speaking, their audio recordings were evaluated by two native French judges (one European French speaker, one Quebec French speaker) who both had 10 years of experience teaching French and were employed as evaluators for the TEFAQ exam (with one and six years of experience). To stay consistent with the grading of the TEFAQ, the standardized evaluation criteria for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) were used to rate participants' range in linguistic forms and vocabulary, their grammatical accuracy, speech flow, and coherence. The levels consisted of A0, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2 (where A0

corresponds to very limited knowledge of French, and C2 implies nativelike performance). For statistical analysis, each level was converted to a numerical value (where C2 was worth 10 points, as the highest level attainable, and A0 was worth 4 points). Therefore, a score corresponding to a level was assigned to each speaking component (range, accuracy, fluency, coherence), out of 40 possible points. The two raters demonstrated high consistency in their ratings (.90), so their overall scores for each participant were averaged to derive a single measure. The two tests thus yielded two separate measures: a L2 listening comprehension score, which was relevant to the target listening task, and a L2 speaking score, which provided a study-specific estimate of participants' speaking ability (given that our participants came from various language programs and course levels). These two measures were explored separately for their potential relationships with participants' audio ratings.

RESULTS

*Preliminary Analysis*

Before proceeding with the main analysis, we first checked the extent to which participants believed that the Quebec guise indeed involved a Quebec French speaker. This check focused on the scale asking participants to identify the speaker's French variety (0 = "Quebec French," 100 = "European French"). The speaker in the European guise was recognized consistently as European French, as illustrated in the negatively skewed histogram in Figure 1 (left panel). In contrast, the speaker in the Quebec guise elicited a wide range of ratings, sometimes identified as Quebec French and sometimes (correctly) as European French (right panel). Thus, there was a range of sensitivity to the RLS manipulation among participants, such that some participants believed the false presentation of the speaker's identity while others rejected the false identity by labeling the speaker correctly as European French. We assumed that

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those who believed our false presentation of the speaker's identity would be those whose preconceived ideas about Quebec French might be activated. We expected these participants to reveal attitudinal biases towards Quebec French through more negative ratings, compared to the ratings for the speaker in the European guise (e.g., Kang & Rubin, 2009). Therefore, to account for (and ultimately explain) the variation in participants' tendency to go along with the manipulation and to explore its possible impact on speaker ratings, participants' rating of the Quebec guise (reflecting their degree of sensitivity to the manipulation) was included as a variable in subsequent quantitative analyses.
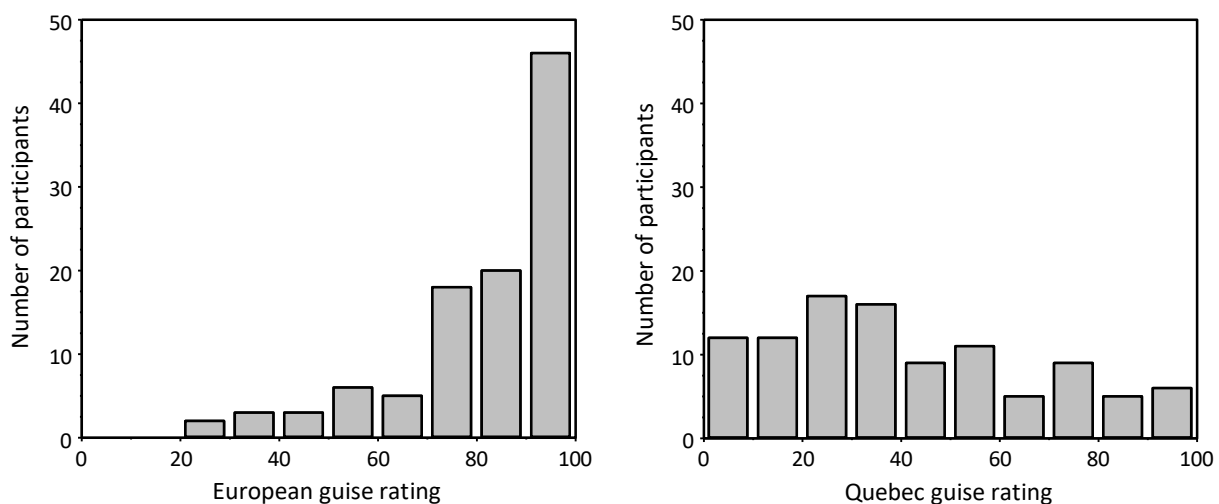


*Figure 1*. Histogram of participants' rating the speaker in the European (left) and Quebec (right) guises as belonging to the European or the Quebec French variety (0 = "Quebec French," 100 = "European French").

*L2 Learners' Attitudes Towards Quebec French*

*Speech ratings*. To answer the first research question, which asked whether L2 learners demonstrate any attitudinal biases towards Quebec French, we first compared participants'

ratings of the speakers in the two guises for the six target dimensions: accentedness, comprehensibility, intelligence, competence as a teacher, desire to have the speaker as a teacher, and desire to sound like her. If participants held any attitudinal biases towards Quebec French, they should rate the two speakers differently depending on their presented linguistic identity as a speaker of either European or Quebec French. As summarized in Table 3, planned pairwise comparisons yielded only one significant difference, namely, participants were less willing to sound like the speaker in the Quebec guise ($M = 69.39$) than the speaker in the European guise ($M = 76.20$), with a small effect size (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). This result should be interpreted cautiously given that a conservative Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .008$) would have rendered the obtained difference non-significant.

Table 3. *Summary Statistics for Rated Dimensions and Between-Guise Comparisons*

| Rated dimension | European guise M (SD) | Quebec guise M (SD) | Paired-samples $t$ test | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | $t$ | $df$ | $p$ | $d$ |
| Accentedness | 52.73 (31.69) | 52.54 (26.88) | 0.07 | 104 | .948 | 0.00 |
| Comprehensibility | 61.34 (28.68) | 61.64 (26.78) | –0.09 | 103 | .926 | 0.01 |
| Desire to speak like | 76.20 (24.73) | 69.39 (26.26) | 2.18 | 103 | .032 | 0.26 |
| Good teacher | 72.53 (22.12) | 70.77 (20.21) | 0.76 | 102 | .448 | 0.08 |
| Their teacher | 66.63 (22.88) | 64.63 (22.47) | 0.76 | 104 | .449 | 0.09 |
| Intelligence | 66.64 (20.56) | 66.66 (19.44) | –0.01 | 95 | .989 | 0.00 |

*Note.* Degrees of freedom (*df*) vary because of several missing responses per rated dimension.

Although participants generally showed a preference to sound like the speaker in the European guise, this tendency was amplified by their sensitivity to the guise manipulation

(illustrated in Figure 2 through regression). As shown by a significant $\beta$ coefficient of .22, where a linear relationship proved to provide the best fit, $t = 2.31$, $p = .02$, 95% CI = [.03, .40], those who tended to believe the Quebec guise manipulation (low ratings on the x-axis) were even less likely to prefer the presumed Quebec French speaker as a desirable speech model (by an average of –22 points on a 100-point scale) than those who were not susceptible to the manipulation (high ratings on the x-axis).
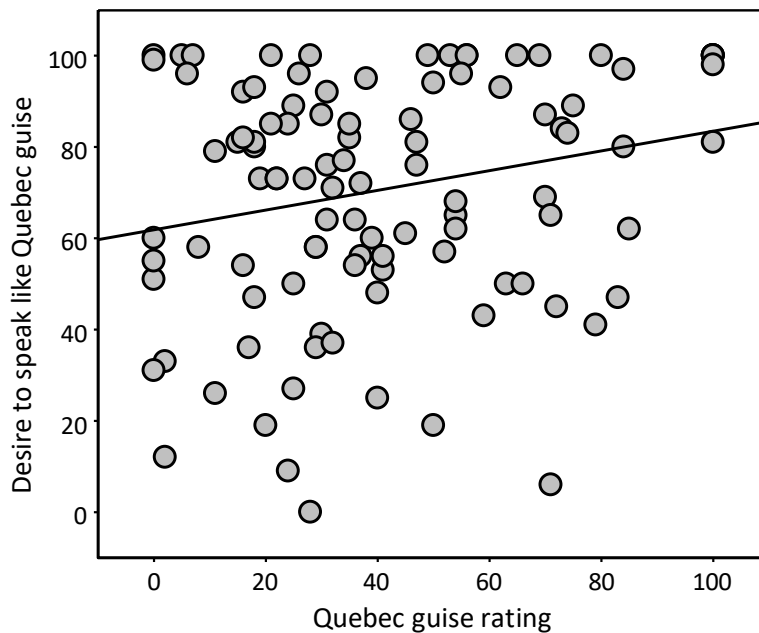


*Figure 2*. Relationship between participants' sensitivity to the guise manipulation (x-axis) and their rated desire to sound like the speaker in the Quebec guise (y-axis), with the regression line showing the best linear fit to the data.

*Qualitative responses.* We next examined participants' qualitative responses, to capture any potential attitudinal reactions that might underlie their ratings. Regarding the question after each audio asking participants to choose descriptors characterizing each speaker's speech, they

tended to choose positive and negative adjectives at similar rates in response to the Quebec French guise (81% positive, 19% negative) and the European French guise (86.2% positive, 13.8% negative). The descriptors most often chosen for Quebec French were *normal* (63 out of 106 participants), *clear* (57), *smooth* (56), *standard* (49), and *accented* (38), and these rates were similar to those shown for the European French guise (see Appendix S3 for full frequency data). However, participants appeared to have attributed certain positive descriptors more frequently to the European French guise than to the Quebec French guise: *international* (26 vs. 8), *proper* (50 vs. 36), *the original* (24 vs. 10), *sophisticated* (27 vs. 11), *elegant* (33 vs. 20), and *pure* (26 vs. 17). In addition, when given the same word bank on the background questionnaire and directly asked to circle those describing Quebec French, twice as many participants overall chose *accented* (76 out of 106 participants), making it the most frequent descriptor followed by *difficult* (47), *unclear* (41), *nonstandard* (33), *bizarre* (27), and *normal* (27). Negative descriptors were chosen over three times more frequently to describe Quebec French on the questionnaire (32.9% positive, 67.1% negative) than after listening to the speaker (81% positive, 19% negative).

At the end of the session, participants selected the speaker they preferred for the activity, allowing them to express their overall impressions after being able to compare both speakers. Based on 33 participants who explained their preference for the European French guise, their preference was largely based on the speaker's speech being clearer and easier to understand (46.5% of the reasons), even though they did not distinguish the two speakers through comprehensibility ratings. In addition, their choice was explained through reference to the speaker's French being more standard (14%), more aesthetically pleasing, purer and more sophisticated (11.6%), more pleasant to listen to (9.3%), more familiar (9.3%), or because they simply preferred the accent from France (9.3%). Of the 25 participants who justified their

preference for the Quebec French guise, most reasons were also related to the speaker's speech being easier to understand (52% of the reasons given), more pleasant to listen to (20%) or more familiar (8%), but also because they preferred to learn Quebec French (20%). As seen in Table 4, at least some of these reasons seem to have been based on the assumption that the two speakers had different linguistic backgrounds, revealing attitudes towards the two French varieties. Taken together, the results from speech ratings and questionnaire responses suggested that participants did not generally differ in their evaluations of the two speech guises (shown through ratings) but that they nevertheless held some bias against Quebec French (shown through their qualitative responses).

Table 4. *Sample Reasons for Participants' Preferred Speaker*

| Preference for European French guise | Preference for Quebec French guise |
|---|---|
| • "[She] speak as native France French. She didn't use the accent, her voice was pure and international." | • "I'm more used to her pronunciation and the rest of the people at Quebec pronounces like her." |
| • "Preferred that accent and more universal (standard)." | • "If you are living in Quebec, you should get in use to this accent." |
| • "I felt that it's more useful to learn standard French as it is better understood worldwide." | • "Since I live in Quebec, I would choose this teacher at the moment." |
| • "Because French originated in France and I prefer French teachers." | • "Since I personally need to get more used to a Quebecois accent." |
| • "More sophisticated." | • "Easier to understand, more accented speaking." |
| • "More elegant and was easy to understand and clear, which is required." | • "Because she has the accent Quebecois and I want to learn like that." |

| | |
|---|---|
| • "More used to France French accent, so find it easier to follow." | • "I liked the more accented voice." |

*Proficiency, Exposure, and Experience and Learners' Attitudes Towards Quebec French*

To answer the second research question, which investigated possible associations between L2 learners' attitudes towards Quebec French and their proficiency and exposure profiles, the next analysis involved Pearson correlations (two-tailed) between participants' ratings of the speaker in the Quebec guise and their proficiency, exposure, and experience variables specific to Quebec French (see Appendix S4 for a parallel set of analyses targeting participants' attitudes towards European French; although these analyses fall outside this study's scope, they might be of interest to some readers). As shown in Table 5, four of the six ratings of the speaker in the Quebec French guise (comprehensibility, desire to speak like the speaker, her competence as a teacher, and desire to have her as a teacher) were associated with several background and exposure variables. The PCA-derived background variable of having had positive experiences in Quebec (i.e., feeling welcome in Quebec, having positive experiences with Quebec French speakers) was the only variable positively linked to the two teacher ratings, with weak associations (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). Those participants who had reported more positive experiences in Quebec, compared to those with fewer positive experiences, provided higher ratings for the speaker in the Quebec guise, evaluating her as a more competent teacher and expressing a stronger desire to have her as their teacher.

To determine the relative weight of multiple background and exposure variables associated with the ratings of comprehensibility and desire to speak like the speaker (see Table 5), we carried out two regression analyses, separately for these two ratings. In each analysis, the speech rating was the criterion variable, and the background and exposure variables in Table 5

that were significantly correlated with the relevant speech rating served as predictors. The ratings of speaker origin in the Quebec French guise (0 = "Quebec French," 100 = "European French") were entered in Step 1 in both models, to account for participants' sensitivity to the guise manipulation, and the relevant background and exposure variables were entered in a stepwise procedure in Step 2. For comprehensibility, the predictors entered in the model were Variables 1–3, 7, 8, 11, and 12 (as shown in Table 5). For desire to speak like the speaker, the predictors entered in the model were Variables 4–6 and 11 (as listed in Table 5). The predictors chosen for each model only included those that had the potential to influence the criterion variable in each model, based on their non-trivial associations ($r > .20$) with the measures of comprehensibility and desire to speak like the speaker. The sample size of 106 was deemed sufficiently large to detect a medium-size effect with up to 10 predictors entered into the model (Field, 2009, p. 223).

Table 5. *Correlations Between Background Variables and Speaker Ratings in the Quebec French Guise*

| Background variable | Accent | Compre-hensibility | Speak like | Good teacher | Their teacher | Intelligent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Length of French study | .01 | .25* | −.14 | .01 | −.02 | −.08 |
| 2. Length of Quebec residence | .04 | .23* | −.05 | .05 | .01 | −.10 |
| 3. Social network size | −.03 | .21* | −.15 | .06 | .06 | −.05 |
| 4. Social network intimacy | −.06 | .10 | −.26** | −.12 | −.14 | .03 |
| 5. Social network inclusiveness | .04 | .17 | −.24* | −.06 | −.10 | −.11 |
| 6. Social network density | .06 | .11 | −.25** | −.12 | −.19 | −.11 |
| 7. Listening comprehension score | .11 | .26** | −.09 | .03 | −.10 | −.12 |
| 8. Speaking score | .14 | .35** | −.15 | .06 | −.04 | −.12 |
| 9. Classroom exposure and familiarity with Quebec French | −.13 | −.01 | −.02 | −.05 | −.03 | .08 |
| 10. Relevance of Quebec French | .02 | −.12 | .11 | −.07 | .01 | .16 |
| 11. Positive experience in Quebec | .20 | .27** | .27** | .28** | .21* | .10 |
| 12. Use of Quebec French | .05 | .26** | −.11 | .07 | .11 | −.06 |
| 13. Quebec guise sensitivity | .21* | .19 | .23* | .20* | .12 | .08 |

*Note.* *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

The regression model for comprehensibility (summarized in Table 6) yielded a two-factor solution, accounting for 19% of shared variance. First, participants' sensitivity to the Quebec guise was associated with the rating of how comprehensible they found the speaker (7% of shared variance), $F(1, 90) = 6.94$, $p = .01$, such that those who were more likely to go along with

the guise manipulation (i.e., labeling the speaker as Quebec French) tended to provide lower comprehensibility ratings. Speaking score was the only other significant predictor accounting for additional variance (12%) in rated comprehensibility, $F(2, 90) = 10.34$, $p < .001$. Thus, regardless of their sensitivity to the guise manipulation, participants with higher L2 speaking scores, compared to those with lower scores, tended to assign higher ratings to the speaker in the Quebec guise.

Table 6. *Results of Multiple Regression Analyses Using Background and Exposure/Experience Variables as Predictors of Speaker Ratings in the Quebec French Guise*

| Predictors | $R$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\beta$ | 95% CI | $t$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Comprehensibility | | | | | | |
| Sensitivity to guise manipulation | .27 | .07 | 0.26 | [0.07, 0.46] | 2.63 | .010 |
| Speaking score | .44 | .12 | 2.13 | [0.95, 3.31] | 3.58 | .001 |
| Desire to speak like the speaker | | | | | | |
| Sensitivity to guise manipulation | .23 | .05 | 0.22 | [0.03, 0.41] | 2.31 | .023 |
| Social network density | .36 | .08 | −25.64 | [−43.46, −7.81] | −2.86 | .005 |
| Positive experience in Quebec | .47 | .09 | 8.01 | [3.22, 12.79] | 3.32 | .001 |

The regression model targeting participants' desire to sound like the speaker (Table 6) yielded a three-factor solution, with sensitivity to guise manipulation, social network density, and positive experience in Quebec jointly accounting for 22% of shared variance in participants' desire to sound like the speaker ($R^2 = .22$). Participants' sensitivity to the guise manipulation again predicted the rating (5%), $F(1, 95) = 5.35$, $p = .023$. The density of participants' Quebec French social networks accounted for additional variance (8%), $F(2, 95) = 6.96$, $p = .002$, with a

negative association. The PCA-derived background variable of having had positive experiences in Quebec was the final predictor (9%), $F(3, 95) = 8.83$, $p < .001$, with a positive association. Thus, regardless of their sensitivity to the guise manipulation, participants with sparser Quebec French social networks and those with more positive experiences in Quebec tended to express a stronger desire to sound like the speaker in the Quebec guise, compared to those with denser social networks and fewer positive experiences in Quebec. Finally, we conducted two post hoc regression analyses (suggested by an anonymous reviewer) where participants' ratings of speaker origin in the European French guise was entered as a variable in Step 1. Results remained unchanged, with participants' speaking scores being the only significant predictor of the presumed Quebec French speaker's comprehensibility (9% of variance explained) and with social network density (8% of variance explained) and positive experience in Quebec (8% of variance explained) predicting participants' desire to sound like the presumed Quebec French speaker.

DISCUSSION

*L2 Learners' Attitudes Towards Target Language Varieties*

The first research question asked whether L2 French learners demonstrate any attitudinal bias towards Quebec French, either through speaker ratings in a RLS procedure or through their qualitative responses. With respect to speaker ratings, any difference in the ratings given to two speakers of European French (one of whom was falsely presented as a Quebec French speaker) would be consistent with RLS, due to learners' judgments being influenced by the label of the speaker's identity. Despite our expectations, there was only weak support for possible bias. Of the six target measures, only the rating of learners' desire to sound like the speaker (a solidarity trait) was associated with a between-speaker difference, where learners expressed a marginally

stronger preference to speak like the speaker in the European French than in the Quebec French guise. Thus, at least for this measure, learners seemed to have engaged in RLS, with knowledge of Quebec-specific stereotypes contributing to their ratings.

Social bias linked to a particular social group often affects not only speaker preference but also listening comprehension (Hu & Su, 2015; Kang & Rubin, 2009; Rubin, 1992). To the extent that comprehensibility (a measure of ease of understanding) captures some aspects of speech comprehension (see Kang et al., 2019), there was no quantitative evidence in this study of preconceived ideas influencing learners' comprehension of the speakers, as both were rated equally comprehensible. Similarly, there were no between-speaker differences for measures of speaker status. For example, the ratings of speaker intelligence were comparable across both guises because the majority gave a neutral rating and responded that they could not accurately rate either speaker based solely on a voice recording, while also suggesting that a speech variety is independent of a speaker's intelligence.

Based on prior results by Hume et al. (1993), where undergraduate L2 French learners in Ontario rated the European French teacher highest on status traits and professional competence, we also expected that the European French speaker would be evaluated more positively regarding her teaching competence and would be rated more favorably as a potential teacher, compared to the reactions to the presumed Quebec French speaker. However, there was no difference in learners' preference for having either speaker as a teacher, and one was not believed to be a better teacher than the other. Instead, learners generally showed awareness of the importance of being exposed to different varieties, with 86 out of 106 responding that having a combination of both French varieties spoken would be ideal.

Whereas speech ratings (collected through a RLS procedure) yielded weak evidence for consistent bias effects, learners' qualitative responses suggested that many believed European French to carry more prestige than Quebec French. Outside the rating task, learners often expressed explicit preference for European French or generally associated it with positive descriptors, choosing negative adjectives for Quebec French over three times more frequently on the post-task questionnaire than during the rating task. L2 learners referred to European French as being more standard, universal, familiar, and sophisticated, implying that they consider it the standard variety. Similarly, they most frequently chose accented to describe Quebec French (76 out of 106 participants), which is a biased expectation because accentedness was assessed similarly in the two guises. These attitudes towards Quebec French, expressed outside the rating task, indicated a prestige hierarchy consistent with that held by participants of Kircher's (2012) study, who classified Quebec French as bizarre, anglicized, and accented.

The conclusion that emerges from both sets of findings (rating task, qualitative responses) is that learners held negative attitudes towards Quebec French but that these attitudes did not generally influence their ratings in a RLS procedure. For example, the top two descriptors chosen by learners for Quebec French were accented and difficult, yet these expectations did not seem to lead them to assign harsher ratings to the presumed Quebec French speaker, as both guises were rated equally accented and equally easy to understand. Of course, it is possible that our guise manipulation did not produce the intended effect, such that learners did not believe that one speaker was speaking Quebec French, which might have precluded them from expressing their attitudes. In addition, even though participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous, any learners holding negative bias may have been unwilling to express their attitudes (Munro et al., 2006). Nevertheless, there were many learners

who went along with the manipulation, downgrading the presumed Quebec French speaker (see Figures 1 and 2), such that those who believed the false presentation of the speaker's identity were the ones who expressed more negative attitudes towards wanting to speak like her.

A more likely explanation for the lack of strong RLS effects in this study is that we targeted two native varieties, where ratings could depend on listeners' familiarity and experience with each variety. In contrast, in most prior RLS studies, listeners were led to believe that they were exposed to L2 speakers (e.g., Hu & Su, 2015; Rubin, 1992), which triggered their biases against accented speech. Indeed, when it comes to accented speech, listeners can easily distinguish native speakers from L2 speakers (e.g., Munro et al., 2010), but they may know less about which speech patterns differentiate two native varieties (e.g., Clark & Schleef, 2010) and, more specifically, have little understanding of what phonetic features characterize Quebec French (Bergeron, 2019). It remains for future research to establish whether and to what degree L2 learners can distinguish different varieties of French and to examine whether biases are amplified or mitigated when learners evaluate actual (rather than presumed) speakers of a particular variety.

*Proficiency, Social Networks, and Exposure*

If listeners' attitudes depend on their familiarity and experience with each speech variety, then it is important to understand how listener background and experiential profiles contribute to their ratings. Our second research question therefore aimed to explore what background and experiential variables were associated with learners' ratings of the Quebec French guise, which represents a novel contribution. Learners' experience in interactions involving Quebec French speakers was the composite variable associated with four of the six rated dimensions, such that having more positive experiences was linked to greater speaker comprehensibility, stronger

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preference to sound like the speaker, greater perceived teacher competence, and stronger desire for learners to have the speaker as their teacher (Table 5). Multiple regressions further clarified that learners' perception of the presumed Quebec French speaker as being more difficult to understand and as a less desirable speech model could be explained through background variables, where lower oral proficiency (for comprehensibility) and fewer positive experiences in Quebec and greater social network density (for desire to sound like the speaker) predicted negative ratings. These relationships held even after learners' sensitivity to the guise manipulation had been accounted for.

Considering that "attitudes specifically associated with the group or the language are quite probably dormant until the student is confronted with learning the language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 8), we expected that lower-level learners (e.g., presumably those who had started learning the language recently) would display more neutral attitudes towards the Quebec French guise compared to higher-level learners (e.g., those with a lengthier experience with language learning). This expectation was also consistent with Lambert's (1967) hypothesis that L2 learners' attitudes can be influenced by language learning, as they begin to identify with the language and the speech community during this process. However, there were no major associations between learners' proficiency measures and their ratings. In fact, as shown in Table 5, listening comprehension and speaking scores were linked to one of the six measures—speaker comprehensibility (with small-to-medium associations). Learners in the top quartile of the proficiency range (B1+) rated the speaker's comprehensibility at 74 (on a 100-point scale) while those in the bottom quartile (A1) rated her comprehensibility at 46. More advanced L2 proficiency likely enabled learners to assess speaker comprehensibility more accurately, in a manner that was not colored by attitudes. Alternatively, learners' own ease with language

(presumed at higher L2 levels) helped them to assess the speaker as more comprehensible.

Because these results generally do not align with previous findings indicating more pronounced attitudes for learners who gain greater amounts of experience with and linguistic knowledge of the target language (Giles et al., 1974, 1979), perhaps the development of attitudes is instead related more to the type and quality of the experience, as suggested by Kang and Rubin (2009). The current results reflected this idea, such that L2 learners who had experienced more positive interactions with Quebec French speakers and felt more welcome in Quebec were more likely to wish to sound like the presumed Quebec French speaker, rate her as comprehensible, perceive her as a good teacher, and want her as their French teacher. In fact, "positive experience in Quebec" emerged as one of two factors uniquely predicting L2 learners' desire to sound like the speaker in the Quebec French guise.

Besides positive experience in Quebec, learners' social network density involving Quebec French speakers was also predictive of their desire to sound like the speaker in the Quebec French guise, such that denser social networks were associated with lower ratings. L2 speakers with social network density scores in the top quartile provided a rating of 62 (on a 100-point scale) for wanting to speak like the Quebec guise, while those with density scores in the bottom quartile assigned the rating of 77. Because denser networks allow for greater exposure to and familiarity with Quebec French, this linguistic experience may have enabled learners to develop a more accurate perception of how Quebec French differs from European French (e.g., Baker & Smith, 2010; Bergeron, 2019), resulting in learners' preference to not consider Quebec French as a desirable speech model. Consistent with this idea, learners with network density greater than 0 rated their familiarity with Quebec French higher (52) than learners with low network density (35). It is also possible that Quebec French speakers themselves—known to hold

negative views of their own variety (e.g., Kircher, 2012)—also exposed learners within dense social networks to negative attitudes towards Quebec French (e.g., Baker, 2008), leading learners to solidify their stereotypes.

Taken together, these findings begin to support the idea that developing quality contacts within a language community can have a measurable social impact, which can determine how attitudes are adopted (Cortes-Colomé et al., 2016). In some cases, quality contacts can foster positive feelings, leading to positive attitudinal consequences. However, other quality contacts— such as those involving dense social networks within the target language variety—may result in some attitudes becoming potentially entrenched, for example, through more intensive exposure experiences. These findings also crucially support the idea that it is often the quality, not the quantity, of linguistic experiences that matters for L2 development (e.g., Moyer, 2011), including the development and maintenance of attitudes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Although these findings are suggestive of the complex interplay of learners' language attitudes, their L2 proficiency, and their social experiences with the target language variety, these findings must be revisited in future research. For example, researchers could examine in more detail the root causes of any negative feelings that learners adopt towards Quebec French during their language instruction and even prior to their exposure to it, to see if language teachers could address these issues in class. Perhaps learners encounter difficulties and frustrations when communicating with Quebec French speakers, and such occurrences of communication breakdowns could be lessened through more practice and interaction with the local variety in a safe classroom environment. Therefore, one possible implication for L2 French instructors could be to expose French learners to diverse pedagogical models, which would also familiarize

learners with the linguistic reality of the Francophonie and potentially contribute to learners having balanced attitudes towards different French varieties, speakers, and cultures. Alternatively, perhaps learners are sensitive to Quebec speakers' own negative attitudes towards their home variety (e.g., Kircher, 2012; Lambert et al., 1960), which would call for a change in attitudes in Quebec French speakers themselves, before they can project positive feelings about their language to others. Similarly, this study has begun to identify L2 learners' existing attitudes towards French varieties and to uncover their possible experiential origins. However, what remains to be investigated is how these attitudes can affect learners' L2 motivation and their learning outcomes. This work would be important to establishing the role, if any, that attitudes towards language varieties play in L2 development.

The results of this study are also inextricably linked to the research context. For instance, it is possible that our participants' attitudinal reactions are less pronounced than those documented in prior work (Hu & Su, 2015, Rubin, 1992) due to the specific characteristics of our participants and our research setting. Perhaps Montreal's culturally diverse environment lends itself to a more linguistically aware population of learners who may not hold as strong language biases as those in a more monolingual setting. Additionally, because many of our participants were immigrants or international students who arrived in Montreal with intentions of settling in the community, it could be that their integrative motivation towards learning French played a role in how they viewed Quebec French speakers. This was evident in our participants' desire to hear different French varieties in their language input. Conducting similar research in a less linguistically diverse city, or with learners who have no intention of immigrating to the local community, may reveal a different attitudinal profile.

Similarly, our lack of strong attitudinal differences in response to two French varieties

may be attributed to issues of methodology. Unlike prior research, where images have often been used to establish a speaker's identity (e.g., Rubin, 1992), our procedure involved only providing participants with a verbal description of a speaker's origin, because one cannot unambiguously differentiate a French speaker from France from a Quebec French speaker based on physical features alone. Thus, a verbal label of a speaker's origin may not have been sufficiently powerful to activate any potential attitudinal biases. Last but not least, because we tested most of this study's participants during their regular classroom instruction, we could not include many experimental features typical of the standard matched-guise procedure (e.g., presentation of multiple files with distractor audios). Therefore, our findings must be revisited in research employing stricter experimental controls among other more focused methodological tools, such as including an obligatory comment section and conducting stimulated recall interviews to assess participants' sensitivity to the guise manipulation and its impact on their ratings.

CONCLUSION

In summary, our findings shed light on the attitudes that L2 French learners in Montreal hold towards Quebec and European French. L2 learners generally held some negative attitudes towards Quebec French. However, apart from rating the presumed Quebec French speaker as the less preferred model to follow, they did not seem to attribute their negative attitudes in rating native French speakers while completing a realistic listening comprehension activity. The most important finding was that feeling welcome in Quebec and having positive interactions with Quebec French speakers, along with higher L2 speaking scores and greater social engagement with Quebec French speakers within dense social networks, was the strongest predictor of learners' attitudes towards what was presumed to be Quebec French speech, revealing a strong experiential component to language attitudes. We call for more research, particularly in

multilingual, multicultural contexts, targeting the role of social and experiential variables in the development and maintenance of L2 learners' attitudes towards native varieties of the target language, to gain a better understanding of how language attitudes shape L2 learning.

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