

Accents and Attitudes. Investigating the Heritage Accent: Insights from Bilingual Heritage Speakers of Russian in Finland

Abstract

The current study investigates the “heritage accent” in 24 bilingual heritage speakers of Russian in Finland as well as the attitudes of heritage speakers towards accents. A foreign accent rating study was conducted to assess the phonetic production in three groups of heritage speakers: late bilinguals, early sequential bilinguals, and simultaneous bilinguals. 20 raters judged the accent and described perceived non-native features. Results show a wide range of individual variation in phonetic production in both languages. The majority of simultaneous bilinguals were reported to have an accent in Russian, while early sequential and late bilinguals were perceived as being close to Russian native speakers. The perceivable accent was detected in the dominant Finnish language in all three groups. However, despite the existence of the “non-native” accent in Russian and Finnish, it was reported to be minor or “weak”. The study also provides evidence on heritage speakers’ attitudes towards foreign accents.

Keywords: heritage speakers, heritage accent, accent rating, Russian, Finnish

Introduction

As a result of today’s global mobility, there is increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in classrooms. The growing presence of heritage language learners in foreign language classes is generally acknowledged. As a result, heritage language (HL) research has become a popular field among applied linguistics researchers and practitioners, which answers the needs and challenges of education in multilingual classrooms. A deeper understanding of the heritage language phenomenon helps to deal better with growing diversity in classrooms.

One aspect that helps to explore the nature of language competence is the empirical study of pronunciation. Pronunciation research is one more field that has lately experienced a growing interest among researchers, which is reflected in the emergence of pronunciation-related books, journal issues, and articles (Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2017; Levis, 2015). Still, despite extensive research in the field, “phonetics and phonology remain among the least understood properties of HLs” (Polinsky, 2020, p. 162)

In the current chapter, I will present evidence of accents in bilingual heritage speakers (HSs) of Russian in Finland: simultaneous, early sequential, and late bilinguals. The foreign accent

rating study was designed to investigate the accent both in Russian and in Finnish. I aim to demonstrate how HSs with different bilingual histories perform. Furthermore, I will discuss heritage speakers' attitudes towards foreign accents. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by considering the pedagogical implications of the research for the assessment and teaching of different groups of university students.

Theoretical background / Overview of literature

Heritage Language and Heritage Speakers

As this chapter explores the pronunciation of heritage speakers, it is appropriate to start with a definition of heritage language and heritage speakers. First, I will address the heritage language phenomenon. Traditionally, *heritage languages* are described as culturally or ethnologically minority languages which are acquired naturally in the home setting and develop in a situation where socio-politically the majority language is spoken (e.g. Montrul & Polinsky, 2011; Montrul, 2015; Kupisch, 2013). Owing to the lack of input from the social environment, the HL often becomes a weaker language in the bilingual dyad of heritage speakers, while the language of the larger national community is dominant (Valdés, 2000; Benmamoun et al., 2013).

HL learners or *heritage speakers* are thus bilinguals who acquired the minority language (HL) and the language of the society during childhood. In regard to HL, they are usually described by researchers as “a different breed of language learners, whose partial knowledge of the language presents a unique set of challenges to language practitioners” (Montrul, 2010, pp. 3-4). However, in their brand-new extensive, cross-linguistic study, Wiese et al. (2022) argue that heritage speakers (HSs) should be recognized as native speakers. The research is based on approaching HSs and monolingual speakers on equal terms, not using the latter just as a control group. The data were obtained from speakers' ordinary linguistic behaviour in different communicative settings (such as formal, informal, written, and spoken). The material was collected across different languages and registers, contact-linguistic situations, and groups of participants. The presented results suggest “the integration of heritage speakers into *the native speaker continuum* and show that they can shed light on language variation and change in native grammars” (Wiese et al., 2022, p. 16).

Based on the large-scale research of HS language proficiency, Polinsky and Kagan emphasized the high interspeaker variation/variability, and they thus argued that they are a part of “*a continuum that ranges from fluent speakers to barely-speaking individuals of the home language*”. Thus, HSs constitute a heterogeneous group of speakers with highly diverse language experiences and practices. One of the reasons for the heterogeneity is certainly that HSs come from different “groups” originating from different backgrounds. HSs are the children of recent immigrants, who themselves could be considered the first generation of HL speakers. So-called 1.5-generation HSs left their homeland in their late childhood (at age 11 or later), and in the current study, I refer to them as *late bilinguals* (Late_BL). The second-generation HSs were born into minority language-speaking or in bilingual families in their parents’ new homeland. The children from minority language-speaking families mainly used the L1 for the first three or four years; for them the age of onset (AoO) in the majority language happened in early childhood, at the age of 3 or 4 (AoO 4–8 yr.), and thus they could be called *early sequential bilinguals* (Early_Seq_BL). Children born into bilingual families grow up with two languages at home, acquiring them simultaneously (AoO 0–3 yr.), and they are addressed here as *simultaneous bilinguals* (Sim_BL).

Considerable research has been conducted on different aspects of pronunciation in HSs. It has uncovered two different trends: on the one hand, HSs are reported as having good phonology, addressed as a bilingual advantage, but on the other hand, they tend to display some non-native phonological features, which are often perceived as a foreign accent by native speakers. The phonological features of HSs are usually described in terms of accent.

Accent

There is no easy way to define accent, as it is widely associated with various aspects that go beyond our clear awareness. Crystal described *accent* as “the *cumulative auditory effect* of those features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regionally or socially”, and he continues that from a linguistic viewpoint, everyone must have (his own) accent (Crystal, 1997, p. 2). Moyer introduced a holistic approach to accent, pointing out that it is not bounded by segmental features of speech; rather, it comprises also suprasegmental features such as intonation, loudness, pitch, rhythm, length, juncture, and stress. Moyer defined accent broadly: “... accent is a medium, through which we project individual style and signal our relationship to interlocutors... it reflects social identity along various categorical lines” (Moyer, 2013, p. 19).

Phonetic Advantage in Heritage Speakers

Based on a large number of studies, many researchers would agree that HSs often have a “native accent” – in other words they sound native-like (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007; Grosjean, 2021). Polinsky confirms that sound production and overall comprehension in HSs are the best examples of their closeness to baseline speakers (Polinsky, 2020, p. 350). This gives them an advantage and confidence in class while learning or re-learning their L1. The phonetic advantage is one of the crucial qualities that separates HSs from second-language (L2) learners (Polinsky, 2020, p. 116). Due to this phonetic bilingual advantage, HL and L2 learners are also often placed in different groups in the classroom (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007).

“Heritage Accent”

At the same time, pronunciation assessment studies have shown that HSs tend to display some non-native phonological features, which are often perceived as a foreign accent by native speakers (e.g. Montrul, 2010; Polinsky, 2020; Benmamoun et al., 2013, Kupisch et al., 2014; Llama & López-Morelos, 2020). This enabled Polinsky to suggest the term “heritage accent” to describe the special phonetic features of HL learners (Polinsky, 2020, pp. 116-122). Non-native features are especially observable within the areas of stress and prosody (Polinsky, 2020, pp. 147-148). One interesting research question to consider is whether a non-native accent can be perceived only in the HL or in both languages of the bilingual dyad. Kupisch et al. (2014) have found that adult simultaneous bilinguals are native-like in the majority language, while their HL results fall in between those of L1 and L2 speakers. On the other hand, there is the evidence that in HSs, both the dominant and the weaker HL languages could be affected (Grosjean, 2021, p. 19; Polinsky, 2020, p. 147).

Individual Variation

Numerous researchers (e.g. Grosjean, 2021; Babatsouli & Ball, 2020; Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2016; Polinsky, 2020) have presented evidence of the considerable individual variation in pronunciation found among HSs. They are very diverse in terms of phonetic production for many extralinguistic and intralinguistic reasons. The most significant factor impacting the degree and nature of the “heritage accent” is the *maturational factor*, in other words *age* (Age of Learning/AOL or Age of Onset/AoO). The main tendency within the field of bilingual phonetic development is that early learners demonstrate more native-like pronunciation

compared to late learners (e.g. Flege et al., 1999; Piske et al., 2001; Wesche, 2002). One of the major linguistic reasons for accentedness is *phonetic similarity between the L1 and L2*. Flege (1995) argues that the phonetic similarity of contact languages helps to presage accented features in HS speech production. Individual variation in the “heritage accent” pinpoints the complex nature of HSs’ sound system, which can be robust and unstable at the same time. Due to the language contact, the sound system can be subject to cross-linguistic influence (CLI) (Polinsky & Scontras, 2019; Kupisch, 2013). Other important factors for accentedness include *the amount of experience* in a language (the length of residence (LOR) in the heritage country, *the phonetic input* the HSs have received, *the amount of language use, motivation and cultural sensitivity, formal instruction, and language learning aptitude* (Flege et al., 1999; Piske et al., 2001; Kupisch et al., 2014; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010; Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2016; Bradlow et al., 1997; Aliaga-García & Mora, 2009).

Heritage Speakers’ Attitudes Towards Foreign Accents

Research has reported on various attitudes towards foreign-accented speech in society. Some accents are regarded as popular or pleasant, while others can provoke negative attitudes that may lead to accent stereotyping, harassment, and discrimination against second-language users (see e.g. Munro, 2003). As accents arouse strong feelings, they may affect communication and impact the way a speaker is considered by others. As Thordardottir and Hávarðarson (2021, p. 4829) note, “it can thus impact the second language (L2) speaker’s comfort and willingness to speak with others and others’ willingness to speak with them. In that way, it can negatively impact language exposure.”

HSs are known for their language awareness and therefore they are conscious of their accents. They often receive judgments from monolingual speakers regarding their “foreign accent”, such as having a “slight accent”, sounding “funny”, “strange”, “weird”, and “childlike”, etc. Usually, bilinguals are worried when they notice that they start to have an accent in their stronger language (L1). Grosjean (2021) has pointed out that while being conscious of accents, some tend to see disadvantages whereas others notice advantages. The disadvantages include standing out when one wants to belong to the group; seeming that one is not trying hard enough to learn the language, and even impeding the communication. Still, there are certain advantages to having an accent, e.g. some accents are favoured by people or groups, or the accent can be a signal of belonging to a desired group. Grosjean concludes that for the bilingual person,

accented speech “is a fact of life; it is something you get used to, as do the others you interact with” (Grosjean, 2021, pp. 20-21).

Methodology

As discussed in the “Theoretical background” section, the bilingual phonetic advantage does not apply to all bilinguals. This is the research problem I want to address in the current chapter.

Research questions

In order to investigate the “heritage accent” and attitudes to it in bilingual heritage speakers of Russian in Finland, the following research questions (RQs) were formulated:

- (1) What kind of bilinguals are perceived as accent-free by native speakers of Russian and Finnish?
- (2) What kind of bilinguals demonstrate a “heritage accent”?
- (3) What is the nature of the “heritage accent” in bilingual heritage speakers of Russian in Finland?
- (4) What are the attitudes of heritage language learners towards accents?

The study *hypothesis* is as follows: the type of bilingualism correlates with the accentedness. In heritage Russian, simultaneous bilinguals will have a stronger accent than early sequential bilinguals, while early sequential bilinguals will have a stronger accent than late bilinguals. Finnish is expected to be less accented or even accent-free in all three groups, especially in simultaneous bilinguals.

Two independent studies were conducted to answer the RQs.

(1) The foreign accent rating study was used to identify the differences in phonetic production between three groups of HSs of Russian in Finland. The subjects in the study were matched for variables such as L1 background and age of L2 learning, and thus they were assigned to one of the three groups as follows: 6 late bilinguals (Late_BL; age 20-34), 7 early sequential bilinguals (Early Seq_BL; age 20-35), and 11 simultaneous bilinguals (Sim_BL; age 22-31).

(2) Interviews were conducted to explore speakers’ attitudes towards foreign accents, the interplay of native speaker status, comprehensibility, and acceptability.

Table 1*Participants*

Speakers	Group	Number of participants	Age	Mean age	Sex F	Sex M	AOL
HL speakers	Sim_BL	11	22-31	25	7	4	0- yr.
	Early Seq_BL	7	20-35	24	4	3	4-8(10) yr.
	Late_BL	6	20-34	27	5	1	11- yr.

Participants were recruited among the students in Russian language programme at Tampere University, Finland. 24 participants, who were willing to participate in the study, were tested outside of their university classes. All of them were HSs of Russian in Finland, at the same time the subjects represented a broad range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As mentioned before the decision was made to differentiate three groups of HSs, the main aim behind this group division was to obtain the data on different types of bilinguals and to test the hypothesis on the correlation between the type of bilingualism and accentedness. Thus, the participants were divided into three groups: (1) *simultaneous bilinguals*, second-generation HL speakers born in Finland in a Russian-Finnish family where they acquired two languages simultaneously from birth (Sim_BL); (2) *early sequential bilinguals*, who are sequential 2-generation speakers successive bilinguals with an early (4-8/10) years old) onset of exposure to Finnish, born in Finland in a Russian-speaking family (Early Seq_BL) and (3) *late bilinguals*, who are sequential 1.5-generation speakers, successive bilinguals with a late (11-13 years old) onset of exposure to the socially dominant language (Late_BL). The group of simultaneous bilinguals was larger (11 participants) in comparison with other groups. The larger sample size from the simultaneous group was utilized to provide more evidence for testing the hypothesis according to which the stronger accent in heritage Russian could be observed in simultaneous bilinguals.

A panel of 20 native raters, 10 monolingual L1 in Russian (R1-R10) and 10 monolingual L1 in Finnish (R11-R20), evaluated the pronunciation of the participants, judging the accent (numerical rating scale 0-5) and describing perceived non-native features.

Production Task

The data for the production task were collected using Zoom. Speech samples were drawn from spontaneous monologues using the Audacity audio editor. One sample (lasting approximately 30 seconds) was selected per speaker. It should be noted that some samples were modified by cutting the sections with grammatical errors, hesitations, and long pauses. In addition to the production task, a background questionnaire was used to ask the participants about their bilingual history, language learning, and motivation. The questionnaire helped to determine the test takers' group.

Some 24 speech samples in Russian were presented to the native Russian raters in a random order. Correspondingly, 24 speech samples in Finnish were presented to the native Finnish raters. Three stages were used to judge the samples: (1) After the first listening, the raters provided their perception on whether the speaker was accented or not by answering the 1st question: Did the speaker sound native, non-native, or was this a doubtful/unclear case? (2) After the second listening, the raters evaluated the perceived accent according to the 0-5 scale (0 meaning no accent; 5 meaning a strong accent). (3) In the third step, the raters were asked to describe the phonetic or phonological features of the accent, if any. The raters could answer all three questions based on the first listening if they were sure about the case. In several cases, one listening session was enough for the judgement.

Findings

Results of the foreign accent rating study

Research Questions 1 and 2

The first and second research questions asked about the presence or absence of an accent in HSs. The analyses of the raters' judgements support the previous findings that the HSs demonstrate a wide range of individual variation. The most informative finding was the individual data, which is presented in the bar chart showing the performance of each test taker in turn (Illustration 1). In addition, all the participants are shown in Illustration 1 as members of a particular group: late bilinguals, early sequential bilinguals, or simultaneous bilinguals.

<Figure 9.1: Accent rating data for all participants on the individual level in all groups.>

The bar graph presents comparisons between the accent in Russian and Finnish for every speaker within all three groups. The blue colour shows the cases with the accent only in Finnish,

the red signals the accent only in Russian, the orange colour shows the cases with an accent in both Finnish and Russian, while black means that the sample was perceived as accent-free in both languages of the bilingual dyad. Overall, the salience of a non-native accent was marked by the raters in every case except for two speakers: early sequential bilingual 12A and simultaneous bilingual 16J. It should also be added that both Russian and Finnish raters noted that the perceived accent was usually “light/slight”. When examined on the group level, certain similarities or tendencies could be observed within the groups. Thus, late bilinguals (Late_BL) demonstrate a low range of accent either only in Finnish (4 participants out of 6) or in both Russian and Finnish (2 participants out of 6). The main tendency in the early sequential bilinguals (Early_Seq_BL) group is again a slight accent only in Finnish (5 cases out of 7), while one speaker was reported as having an accent in both languages of the bilingual pair, and one speaker was perceived as accent-free. The group of simultaneous bilinguals (Sim_BL) appeared to be highly heterogeneous, with 3 cases (out of 11) of accentedness only in Finnish, 3 cases (out of 11) of accentedness only in Russian, 4 cases (out of 11) with an accent in both languages, and finally, one case where the speaker was evaluated to be native-like in both Finnish and Russian.

To endorse the assumption that certain bilingual groups (Late_BL, Early_Seq_BL, or Sim_BL) may demonstrate similar production, the results were analysed further on the group level for two variables: the percentage of raters who noticed an accent and the median accent score. GraphPad Prism 2D graphic and statistic software was used for the purpose. The graphs showing the ratings for the three groups under discussion are presented in Illustration 2.

<Figure 9.2: Accent rating data for all participants on the individual level in all groups.>

There are two column charts for every language. The first chart demonstrates the percentage of raters who perceived an accent in the groups: the vertical axis shows the percentage and the horizontal axis shows the bilingual group. The second chart displays the median accent rating in all groups, with the vertical axis showing accent rate/score and the horizontal axis showing the bilingual group.

While evaluating pronunciation in the Russian language, raters noticed an accent as follows: 60% of raters noticed an accent in simultaneous bilinguals; 15% in early sequential bilinguals, and 37.5% in late bilinguals. The results of the simultaneous group met the expectations about the clear accentedness of this group. The result of the late bilingual group was, on the contrary,

much higher than anticipated. As for the accent score in Russian, it was low, with a median of 0 in both late bilinguals and early sequential bilinguals, and 1 in simultaneous bilinguals. As expected, simultaneous bilinguals stand out with a definitely perceivable “heritage accent”. However, the accent rating in all three groups was surprisingly low considering we are dealing with heritage Russian language in Finland.

The expectations were not met in the data obtained on the Finnish language. The percentage of raters who perceived a foreign accent in Finnish was high for all three groups: 50% of raters noticed an accent in simultaneous bilinguals; 92.5% in late bilinguals, and 90% in early sequential bilinguals. Specifically for the simultaneous and early sequential groups, a much lower percentage was foreseen. Still, it is important to mention that the accent rating in Finnish was low, gradually fading from late bilinguals with a median of 1.88 to early sequential bilinguals with 1, and finally to simultaneous bilinguals with 0.5. Thus, it can be concluded that all three bilingual groups demonstrated an accent in Finnish, but the accent was characterized as mild, especially in simultaneous bilinguals.

The presented generalization helps to create an overall picture of the “heritage accent” in Russian and the accent in Finnish. The above-mentioned results indicate that accentedness is correlated with the bilingual group.

Research Question 3

The third research question aimed at investigating the nature of the “heritage accent” in bilingual heritage speakers of Russian in Finland. In order to explore the subject, the raters were asked to describe the accent perceived in the HSs’ production.

The results indicated the complexity of the topic. As mentioned above, there is no easy way to define or to describe an accent. Consequently, the raters experienced difficulties in pointing out accent features in the material. Some were able to verbalize them, while others provided answers like “no comment”, “hard to say”, and “accent everywhere”. The results demonstrate that a single question of a general nature asking to name accent features is definitely insufficient to answer RQ3. A more detailed study should be conducted to explore the topic. In spite of the mentioned limitation, it is still possible to name some of the accent features pointed out by the raters. I thus outline the “problem areas” where the accent features were identified, starting with the most frequent cases and then proceeding to less numerous mentions. For Russian, the

suggested accent features were disfluency, Finnish intonational patterns, word stress, low speech rate, absence of vowel reduction, the vowels /i/ and /i/, palatalized consonants, voiced consonants, and a too long and too intensive trill on consonant /r/ (transfer from Finnish). Accent features in Finnish were found in the following spheres: non-native intonation patterns, disfluency, vowel duration, vowel /i/, consonant palatalization before /e/ and /i/ (transfer from Russian), vowel /æ/, vowel reduction at the end of the word (transfer from Russian), word stress, and consonant /l/ palatalized in the same way as in Russian. The mentioned accent features seem to cover mainly language-specific phonological features, and to some extent similar but still different phonological phenomena in Russian and in Finnish (as in the trill /r/), so the accent emerges as a result of language contact.

Interview on the attitudes to foreign accents

The interview task was designed to investigate the attitudes of HSs towards foreign accents and in particular their attitude to the “heritage accent”. The main research questions in this part of the study were (1) Do the respondents feel that a foreign accent is important in other speakers? and (2) Do they consider their own accent acceptable? First, the subjects attended a lecture about CLI and accent, then they were asked to complete the questionnaire. A final round-table discussion was held after the individual sessions were conducted.

Questionnaire task

The questionnaire task was designed as a ten-question survey:

- 1) What is your first language (L1)?
- 2) What other languages do you use (L1, L2, L3, ...)? Evaluate your language proficiency.
- 3) Do you pay attention to a foreign language accent?
- 4) How do you rate the foreign accent:
 - a) 1 (very low), 2, 3, 4, 5 (very strong)
 - b) close to native-like – mild – heavy
 - c) accent – no accent.
- 5) When you hear a foreign accent, can you identify the native language (L1) of the speaker?
- 6) What do you feel when you hear a foreign accent?

- 7) What factors affect a foreign accent (pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, etc.)?
- 8) Have you been told that you have a foreign accent?
- 9) How did you feel in the situation?
- 10) What is more important:
 - a) to speak without a foreign accent, to sound native-like (L1)
 - b) to be understood (intelligibility and comprehensibility)?

Results of the interview study

Research Question 4

Research question 4 guided the study on the attitudes of HSs towards accents. The introductory lecture increased the language awareness of the test takers. Many of them reported that they started to pay more attention to the phonological aspects of speech.

When answering the question about their attitudes to a foreign accent in other speakers, nearly all the respondents reported their generally positive or tolerant attitude towards non-native/foreign accents in other speakers. They expressed respect and appreciation for the efforts of other language learners. For them, being understood is the most important value. Only one respondent (Late_BL, male) reported that he was irritated by a certain foreign accent.

As expected, speaking about themselves, the respondents indicated that the “correct pronunciation” without a “perceivable accent” was crucially important to them. The majority of the test takers appeared to be very ambitious and self-critical (self-controlled); they have set native speaker standards for their own speech production.

Most of the HSs were told that they have an accent in Russian. Typically, the situation occurred while travelling to Russia and communicating with monolingual Russian speakers there. The respondents often described their feelings of discomfort, distress, uneasiness, and anxiousness in the mentioned situations. Overall, the results suggest that HSs tend to have accent anxiety and the whole situation is problematic. The following problem-solving strategies were mentioned by the respondents: 1) accepting the situation/considering the reality that being bilingual involves being influenced by another language, 2) trying to work on the accent and develop more native-like features (e.g. training, travelling), and 3) ignoring the mentioned comments.

Discussion

In the current study, I aimed to gain a better understanding of HL phonology, in particular the “heritage accent” in HSs of Russian in Finland. As described in the literature, HSs may sound native-like, but on the other hand they can have a tangible accent that makes them sound different from homeland speakers. In other words, the bilingual phonetic advantage does not apply to all bilinguals. I aimed to explore this postulate on the data acquired from HSs of Russian in Finland. One of the most essential results of the current study is the evidence of an accent in both languages of HSs, which once again gives the proof of contact-induced language change.

At the beginning of the analysis section, the data of every participant were discussed. This approach can help to illustrate different varieties of HSs’ pronunciation and improve understanding of the phonology of the heritage language system in adult speakers as a whole. The results give strong evidence of a “heritage accent” – only two out of 24 HSs were reported to be accent-free in both Russian and Finnish. Twelve participants had an accent only in Finnish, three participants (all simultaneous bilinguals) only in Russian, and seven participants were accented in both languages. The study has once again proved a wide range of individual variation in phonetic production (see Illustration 1), and it reminds us that no two speakers speak in exactly the same manner. The diversity could be explained by a number of variables, as mentioned above in the theoretical section. Every speaker has his/her own language history, individual differences, motivation, and cultural sensitivity, and these factors formulate the language competence and pronunciation. However, the maturational factor (AoO) appears to be the crucial one, hence late and early sequential bilinguals perform generally better in Russian, and correspondingly simultaneous bilinguals received the best scores in Finnish.

The study hypothesis was formulated based on previous observations: according to it, the type of bilingualism correlates with the rate of accent. For example, in heritage Russian, simultaneous bilinguals would have a stronger accent than early sequential bilinguals, and early sequential bilinguals would have a stronger accent than late bilinguals. Finnish was expected to be less accented or even accent-free in all three groups, especially in simultaneous bilinguals.

In the next stage of this exploratory study, the data were analysed on the group level. The findings of the study failed to fully support the hypothesis. As predicted, simultaneous bilinguals had a stronger accent in Russian compared to the other two groups, and they

outperformed these groups in Finnish. As for late bilinguals, they also acted according to expectations and were perceived as being close to Russian native speakers, and they were reported to have an accent mainly in Finnish (the data depicting the findings on a group level are presented in Illustration 2). However, the study also revealed some surprising findings. The first was the notable accent in Finnish found in all three groups of speakers, including simultaneous bilinguals. This contradicts the results of previous research, which found that simultaneous bilinguals were close to native speakers in the majority language of their childhood environment, and correspondingly were within the range of L2 speakers in HL (Kupisch et al., 2014; Thordardottir & Hávarðarson, 2021). The second unanticipated finding was the perceived accent in both languages in the group of early sequential bilinguals. Another unexpected result was that the early sequential group outperformed the late bilingual group in Russian on the group level (see Illustration 2). Thus, the results prove the hypothesis only partially – the type of bilingualism appears to be related to the rating of the accent, which could be explained by a number of similar variables in the groups, such as the same AoO, comparable amount of input, equally long experience in language use, etc. Nevertheless, contrary to expectations, early sequential bilinguals did not necessarily have a stronger accent than late bilinguals, and Finnish is not necessarily less accented nor accent-free in any of the three groups. It is also worth mentioning that in spite of the similar tendencies noticed within the bilingual groups, in every bilingual group there are speakers who stand out and perform in unexpected ways.

There was one important reason for conducting the study on attitudes to accent – while HSs are known for their good phonology (bilingual advantage) (Polinsky, 2020), they are still often assessed on pronunciation by native speakers. As a result, HSs receive judgements that produce strong feelings, which may affect their personal and social well-being. To investigate HSs' attitudes towards foreign accents and the interplay of native-speaker status, comprehensibility, and acceptability, a specially designed questionnaire was presented to them. The participants were conscious of their accent, and they are accustomed to hearing judgements about their pronunciation from native speakers (usually from natives/speakers of Russian). As a rule, these judgements evoke negative feelings, so some HSs experience accent anxiety. When asked about their attitudes to non-native accents in other speakers, the participants reported positive or neutral feelings; they usually feel respect for other people who are learning languages. While judging others' pronunciation, the test takers indicated that being understood is more important than being able to speak without a foreign accent. So, intelligibility and comprehensibility are

valued more than a native-like accent. When speaking about themselves, the participants revealed that they strive to be accent-free.

The results of both the accent rating study and the accent attitude questionnaire shed light on our knowledge of heritage language and foreign accent. The accent rating findings revealed the mappings between the type of bilingualism and the degree of “heritage language”. The questionnaire task revealed the different attitudes of HSs towards foreign accents in themselves and others.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications of the research for the assessment and teaching of different groups of students at university

This study extends HL phonology research by introducing the data from a new bilingual Russian-Finnish dyad. Furthermore, it investigates phonetic production of HSs not only in their HL (Russian) but also in the majority language (Finnish) and indicates that a non-native accent can be perceived in both languages of the bilingual dyad. The study gives more evidence of how language competence develops in different situations of bilingualism and in different language settings. Overall, the results indicate that HSs develop unique phonetic features (“heritage accent”) which differ from that of monolinguals due to the circumstances of their origin and environment.

The study aimed to further investigate the “heritage accent” and attitudes towards it. It reveals some areas that could be taken into account when assessing and teaching students at university. The current trend of linguistic and cultural diversity in classrooms is widely known. We have heterogeneous groups of students with L2, L1, and HL learners attending language classes together. This sets serious challenges related to language education in multilingual classrooms. For instance, teachers have often to decide whether they teach the HSs together with native-speakers (L1 group) or if it would be more effective to place them in the same group with L2 learners or even place all the students in the same group.

Numerous studies, including the current one, have found evidence of HL speakers having a phonetic advantage. However, the question of placing HSs and L2 learners on different tracks in the classroom still needs further exploration. Due to the phonetic advantage, a division of this kind could be compelling in phonetics classes, but it may need further consideration in regard to the other language subjects.

The research reveals the existence of a “heritage accent” in HSs of Russian in Finland. To say more, HSs are aware of their accent and many of them would like to get rid of it. The results of the first study indicate certain phonetic features that should be incorporated into Russian language lessons: language-specific vowels (и-ы and reduced vowels) and consonants (palatalized, voiced, sibilants, and affricates), phonemically similar consonants that have different articulations in Russian and Finnish (r and h), word stress, intonation patterns, fluency, and speech rate. Still, it is important for language teachers to keep in mind that according to accent and pronunciation research, it is easier to enhance pronunciation than to change the impression of accentedness (see more in Wu, 2011, p. 159).

It is also important for the language teacher to keep in mind the students’ attitudes towards accents. The results confirm that HSs generally strive for native-like pronunciation themselves. However, they are very tolerant towards accents in other people’s speech. There still exist many prejudices about accents in the speech of L2, HL, and even L1 learners, and these speakers may have to endure pejorative evaluations. However, as proved in previous research (e.g. Cummins, 1980; Thordardottir & Hávarðarson, 2021; Voorwinden, 2021), the presence of a foreign accent does not directly correlate with language proficiency; an accent often accompanies multilingualism. In intercultural communication settings, intelligibility is more important than a native accent. In language educational practice, adopting a more flexible approach to accentedness may be difficult at first, but it can also be liberating. It could be of crucial importance for the cognitive, personal, and social well-being of the students.

Limitations and Further Research

At this stage, I must acknowledge that the study has its limitations, one of them being the small sample size of heritage speakers (24) and raters (10 native-speakers of Russian and 10 native-speakers of Finnish). Hence, it would be essential to investigate how a bigger sample size might influence the outcome of the research. Another limitation concerns the tool for exploring the nature of the “heritage accent”. A single question asking to describe the accent of the speakers was not enough, and the study of the topic should embrace more material. In addition, the raters need special training on accent features. Due to this limitation, only a short description of accents in Russian and Finnish was included in this chapter. The overview of the non-native features on the segmental and suprasegmental levels can be found in the section discussing RQ3. The present study is thus bound by its small-scale character and limited generalizability.

A larger sample size and versatile research methods would be useful in the further exploration of the “heritage accent”.

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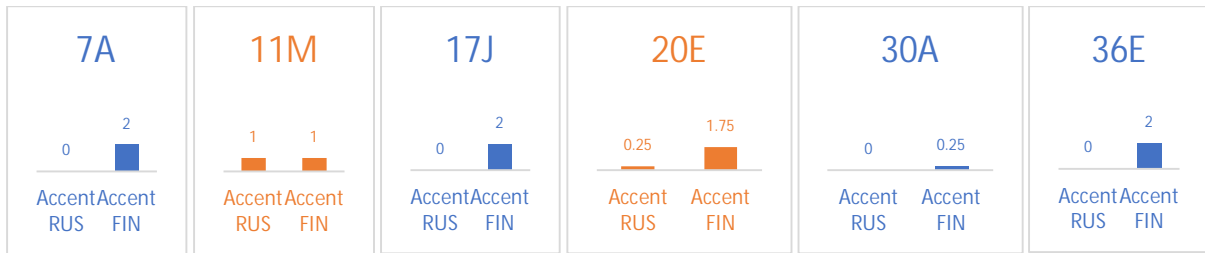
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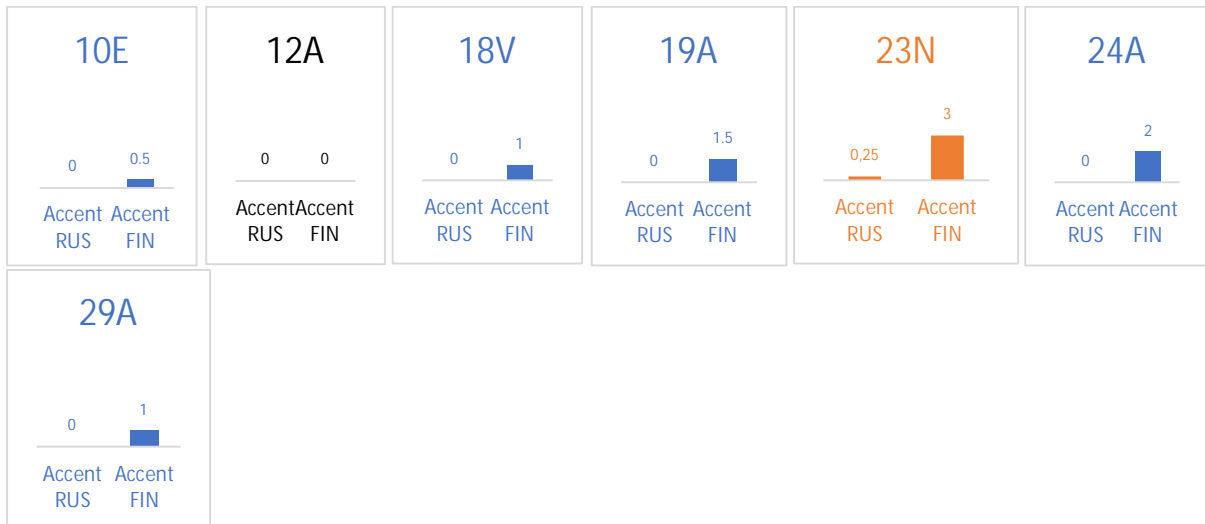
Attachments

Figure 9.1 Accent rating data for all participants on the individual level in all groups

Late bilinguals (Late_BL)



Early sequential bilinguals (Early_Seq_BL)



Simultaneous bilinguals (Sim_BL)

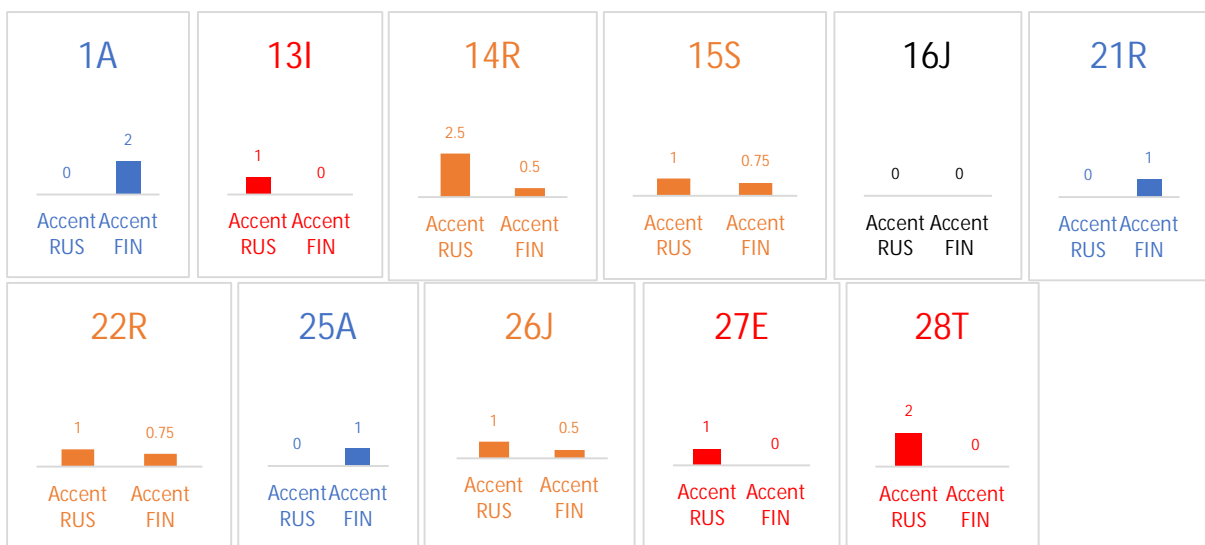
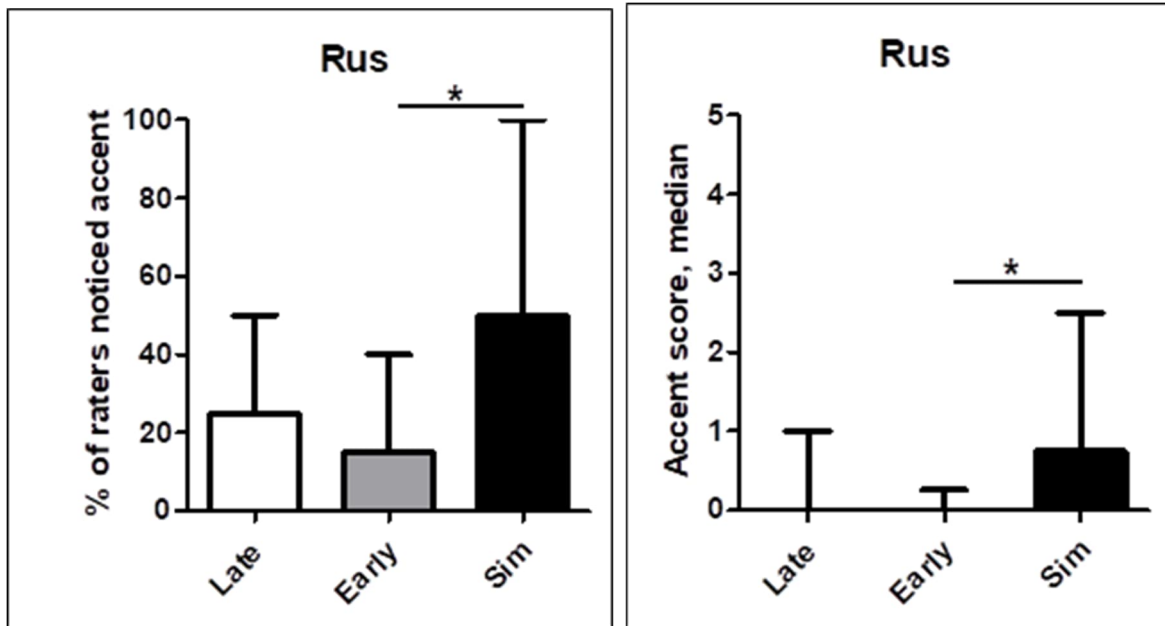


Figure 9.2 Accent on the group level: percentage and rate

Russian



Finnish

