



A Study of Parental Attitudes to Teacher Pronunciation in Very Early English

Réka BOZSÓ

University of Szeged (Hungary)
Doctoral School of English Applied Linguistics
rekabozso@gmail.com

Judit NAGY

University of Szeged (Hungary)
Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics
nagyj@lit.u-szeged.hu

Abstract. Teaching English as a foreign language at an early (7–12) and even at a very early (under 7) age is becoming more and more popular and accessible, mainly due to the pressure from parents. Parents are essential stakeholders in the TEFL of these ages, and thus it is beneficial for the future of TEFL to do research into parental attitudes in order to be able to assure that expectations and outcomes meet. Our study examines parental attitudes towards the teacher and the ideal age to start learning a foreign language. Fifty Hungarian parents of children aged 0–7 completed our online questionnaire, which mapped the demographics and linguistic profiles of respondents and their views and attitudes related to language learning. Furthermore, attitudes towards teachers' pronunciation (American, British, or Hungarian) were measured on a 5-point Likert-scale. The 8-item attitude scale showed good reliability ($N = 50$, Cronbach $\alpha = 0.772$, $p < 0.001$). Parents generally placed high emphasis on native-like pronunciation. However, accent-related attitudes varied among parents preferring different ages to start FL learning. Parents favouring an early start preferred native-speaking teachers, with no preference for a British or American accent.

Keywords: teaching English to very young learners, parental attitudes, accent, non-/native teacher.

1. Introduction

Teaching English has become a widely researched and discussed priority in education, and it is in the joint interest of stakeholders and policy makers to reach the most effective outcomes. Parents of very young children are generally on the

opinion that it is ideal to start as early as possible (Griva and Chouvarda 2012, Linse 2011, Purdjaková 2006). Language learning is generally believed to have wide-ranging benefits on the child's personal, intellectual, educational development and future career prospects (Tekin 2015: 39). Correspondingly, Greek parents were reported to be aware of the benefits of multilingualism and have positive attitudes towards early start provided that learning materials are suitable to young learners and their specific age-related needs are taken into consideration (Griva and Chouvarda 2012: 10–11). However, it is not evident that an early start of learning foreign languages is an advantage in and of itself (Nikolov and Djigunović 2011). For instance, Hanušová and Najvar (2005) investigated the long-term effects of an early start by examining university entrance exam language test scores. They found no evidence of any relationship between test score results and the start of language learning (Hanusová and Najvar 2005: 209–210). According to a public opinion survey carried out in the Czech Republic in 2006, around 68% of the public (non-teachers, generally parents) are of the opinion that children should start learning English as a Foreign Language as early as in kindergarten (Purdjaková 2006). It is essential to note that an early start is not an essential prerequisite to successful outcomes. Eventual learning success for young learners depends on an interplay of various other factors such as continuity, language policy, classroom circumstances, curriculum, or the qualification of the teacher (Hanusová and Najvar 2005, Nikolov and Djigunović 2011, Purdjaková 2006). In spite of the key role of the teacher's proficiency and language use in the classroom, Nikolov (2006) draws attention to the scarcity of available research focusing on the effect of teachers' pronunciation and fluency as a major factor contributing to young learners' language development (Nikolov 2006: 250). However, it has recently become popular and viable to carry out research into stakeholder attitudes since it is very important to have a dialogue between parents and teachers (Linse 2011, Nikolov and Djigunović 2011). For these reasons, it is of interest what views parents have about teachers and teacher accent when it comes to dealing with young learners.

2. Literature review

2.1. Accent and native speaker norms

In their highly influential study, Derwing and Munro (2009) defined accent as “the ways in which their speech differs from that local variety of English and the impact of that difference on speakers and listeners” within the context of immigrant L2 speaker research in Canada (Derwing and Munro 2009: 476). However, they also drew attention to the shared and individual features that may characterize various language learning contexts. In the present paper, we shall

use the term accent to refer to pronunciation features differing from those of native speaker Englishes, narrowed down for the purposes of this study to what our participants perceive as British and American English.

There is vast literature on attitudes towards accents, which reveal that accents (for example, British or American) are ranked by the research subjects in different ways across cultures. For instance, British English in Korea and American English in Japan were rated higher due to the pervasiveness of the given countries in those cultures (Balogh 2014, Carrie and McKenzie 2017). Feyér (2015) found that Hungarian secondary school learners of English had positive attitudes concerning traditionally prestigious native varieties such as the more highly rated General American (GA) or Received Pronunciation (RP). On the other hand, non-native varieties were generally unfavoured, especially in the case of a Hungarian accent (Feyér 2015: 23).

Furthermore, Nagy (2014) found that Hungarian university students had more positive attitudes towards native speakers, even if they found non-natives easier to understand, which is in line with previous research reporting the greater prestige of native speaker English accents (Jenkins, 2000, Kaur 2013, Kaur and Raman 2014). As opposed to this, Linse (2011) found that in Korea English native speakers were not identified as most suitable to teach English due to their lack of cultural and linguistic information deemed necessary to prepare learners for Korean compulsory language exams. Moreover, markedly different language attitudes were measured in Korea by Ahn and Kang (2017), who found that Korean students had generally more positive attitudes towards Korean-accented English than, for example, towards American native accents.

Teachers are one of the most important factors that contribute to successful learning outcomes. In Hungary and Central Europe, there is a very similar tendency according to which teachers of young learners are either specialist teachers with high proficiency but insufficient methodological training or generalist teachers with age-appropriate teaching methods but low proficiency (Nikolov 2006: 250). In the last decade, in Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, about two-thirds of the teachers dealing with young learners were insufficiently qualified, had methodological and linguistic shortcomings, and lacked the desire to improve their practice (Dvoráková 2006, Loyová 2006, Medgyes and Nikolov 2016). Unfortunately, it has also been reported that parents often voice unrealistic expectations regarding the proficiency that they expect their children to achieve (Curtain 2000, Nikolov 2002). Furthermore, Rixon advocates the need for acceptable pronunciation models for young learners so that young learners can exploit their ability to mimic and thus adhere to a pronunciation model (Rixon 2000 cited in Vojtková 2006).

Europe has been categorized as a unique context due to the history, linguistic functions of English, and range of users. These factors have been claimed to place

Europe in the Expanding Circle within the paradigm of World Englishes and support the legitimacy of European English, or Euro-English, which is used locally by native and non-native speakers of the multilingual community of the European Union (Berns 2009: 195–196). In general, both in Europe and worldwide, stakeholders, including teachers, attribute most success to native-speaking teachers of English, which has been termed native-speakerism (Holliday 2005, Balogh 2014).

With respect to attitudes towards teachers, native and non-native teachers are generally perceived differently, although language competence appears to be the only area in which the non-native teacher may be at a disadvantage in a context where native speaker pronunciation is the norm (Medgyes 1992). While native speaker teachers are viewed positively as a result of their native pronunciation, which is often labelled as “accent-free”, non-native teachers have been reported to perform better when it comes to language-teaching strategy and anticipating learners’ difficulties (Gurkan and Yuksel 2012: 2957). Consequently, learning from non-native teachers has numerous advantages, which mainly stem from the fact that these teachers are successful language learners themselves. These benefits include having an extensive knowledge of learning strategies, needs and difficulties of language learners, and in some cases sharing the same mother tongue (Medgyes 1992: 346–347). Despite these advantages, non-native teachers are often at a disadvantage on the labour market (Clark and Paran 2007: 423–424).

The need for re-evaluation of the dominance of native speaker norms and the foregrounding of intelligibility, function over form and communicative efficiency have been argued by numerous researchers (Smith and Nelson 1985, Derwing and Munro 1995, Jenkins 2000). Furthermore, the dominance of native speaker norms seems to be diminishing, and teachers’ esteem for native speaker norms tends to be replaced by the need for communicative efficiency in non-native contexts (Timmis 2002: 248). While students consider a native speaker accent a reflection of being proficient in English, teachers are more likely to set “accented intelligibility” as a realistic goal, especially in future non-native contexts. They generally view native speaker accents as desirable but mostly unattainable or unnecessary goals for their learners (Timmis 2002: 242–243).

2.2. Parental attitudes

For the purposes of this study, we define parental attitudes as the opinion(s) that parents of children aged 0–7 are willing to word in a questionnaire about language learning. Parent beliefs were previously defined by Murphey as including “attitudes, values, perceptions, conceptions of the developmental process, attributions and expectations” (Murphey 1992: 2).

It is important to examine parental attitudes first of all because parents are essential stakeholders in their children’s academic development and foreign

language education (Bempechat 1992, Clarke 2009, Csizér and Lukács 2010, Gardner 1985, Lugossy 2009). We believe that the comparison of attitudes of parents and other stakeholders (e.g. decision makers or teachers) may yield more clarity and understanding in this debated field. Also, once we examine these attitudes, it may become of interest to see what factors can coexist with them.

Hungarian researchers have carried out qualitative inquiries into the way the family influences learning motivation. They revealed that it is definitely the family who decides when and what language a child starts learning, providing the possibilities for children to start learning or be surrounded by foreign languages at early ages (Kormos and Csizér 2005). The parents are key decision makers, and thus their views and opinions shape the learner in giving them directions, even influencing their attitudes towards the languages learnt (Kormos and Csizér 2005, Bartram 2006). Furthermore, the central role of parental attitudes was observed in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands as well. Despite differences in educational systems, parental attitudes towards their own and their children's language learning were reflected in children's attitude and learning practices (Bartram 2006: 220).

Parental attitudes towards English-related issues that concern the language learning of their children are often to be tied to certain demographic factors. For instance, Lan et al. (2011) in their Taiwanese study examined how mothers facilitate learning English for their children under the age of six in their homes. They found that the level of education of the mother matters in how home learning happens for Taiwanese children. Parental education was also found to be relevant when considering what out-of-school input contributes to foreign language learning success, as it is revealed in the large European early language learning survey ELLiE (Munoz and Lindgren 2011: 118). In his tri-national European study, Bartram (2006) examined the way parents influence the attitudes of their children towards foreign language learning and found that the language learning background of the responding parent matters. Similar evidence came from Song (2003), who found that in the Korean-American context parents of young learners had different attitudes towards the home teaching of foreign languages and also different teaching practices depending on their sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, the age of the parents emerged as an important factor in the Greek attitude study carried out by Griva and Chouvarda (2012), where parental views about the usefulness of early English seemed different when comparing respondents of different ages. One of their findings were that younger parents placed more emphasis on the usefulness of the adequate and age-appropriate methodology. Finally, attitudes towards the accented or native speech of teachers may also be informed by demographic factors, although Timmis (2002) found that students' desire to be similar to native speakers is not always stronger when they plan to use English primarily with native speakers.

2.3. Young versus very young learners

In the definition of a working group of the EU Member States, learners aged 7–12 are young (YL) and aged 3–6 are very young learners (VYL) of foreign languages (Nikolov and Djigunović 2011, Hanušová and Najvar 2005). Concluded from this, “teaching” English at these ages is therefore termed Early English or Teaching English to Young Learners and Very Early English or Teaching English to Very Young Learners. In the present study, children who learn English in some way before the age of 3 are also called very young learners. It is important to note that, methodologically, teaching or instruction does not essentially take place for these age-groups. However, in our study, the notion of teaching is extended to include the foundational educational work carried out with very young learners as well.

In the present paper, we define very early and early English as any organized English as a foreign-language-centred activity for Hungarian native-speaking children aged 0–12. Formal institutional education (compulsory from age 3 in Hungary) was the threshold used to separate learners taking a very early start (VES) before preschool and those taking an early start (ES) in preschool or later in primary education. In Hungary – the country concerned in the present study –, compulsory formal education starts with kindergarten at the age of three. Following three years spent in kindergarten, primary school is commenced at the age of 6 or 7. Compulsory foreign language education starts in the fourth grade of primary school, at the age of 10–11 (Hungarian National Core Curriculum). National educational statistics show that around 48% of the pupils commence learning foreign languages previously to the mandatory start (Ministry of Education 2004). As it turns out from a survey by the Ministry of Education and Culture, around one third of the primary schools themselves run various types of early start programmes teaching foreign languages in the first three grades of primary school (Morvai et al. 2009 qtd in Medgyes and Nikolov 2014), with kindergartens in the southern region of Hungary showing a similar rate, as 38% of kindergartens offer English language activities in Szeged (Szarvas 2013).

3. Research questions

1. What are parents’ attitudes towards the teacher’s accent and are these attitudes different among parents preferring the earliest possible instruction (before preschool)?
2. Are parental attitudes different among parents (a) who have various (self-assessed) proficiency levels of English, (b) plan to move abroad, or (c) whose children learn a FL in informal or formal educational contexts?

4. Methods

The study itself was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire distributed in a convenience and snowball sampled way through social media and was filled by 50 Hungarian parents of children aged 0–7.

The 25-item questionnaire had several questions on the demographics and linguistic profiles of the parents and five Likert-scale attitude questions, one of which was the 8-item attitude scale that is the subject of the present investigation. In answering the attitude question, respondents could choose to completely disagree, slightly disagree, have neutral opinions or no opinion, agree, or completely agree. The complete questionnaire was in Hungarian for the easier understanding of all respondents. In the 5-point Likert-scale item on attitudes towards teacher accent, the respondents needed to mark if and how much they agreed with eight statements (*Table 1*), all to be understood for a teacher teaching English to very young children.

The data were analysed in SPSS in two stages. Firstly, we examined the reliability of the 8-item parental attitude scale and found that the reliability was good, as Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = 0.772$, $p < .001$. We also carried out preliminary testing for factor analysis for future research purposes and found promising results. The Kaiser–Meier–Olkin test showed that factor analysis is appropriate, and clearly identifiable factors can be detected ($KMO = .765$, $p < .001$). A KMO value between 0.7 and 0.8 is categorized as good, which was supported by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which also produced a statistically significant result ($p < .001$).

Secondly, general descriptive statistical testing was carried out for the questions relating to the demographics and linguistic background of participants, namely parents' self-rated proficiency in English, their views on the ideal age to start learning a foreign language, their plans to move abroad, and whether their child is involved in formal or informal learning contexts. In the final stage, parental attitudes were examined based on the demographics and linguistic background of participants, and mean attitude ratings and standard deviations were compared across the groups.

5. Discussion of results

5.1. Parental attitudes towards teacher pronunciation

Given our experience as teachers, we had hypothesized that parental opinions would show wide ranges of responses since those tend to even fall into extremities. In our process of analysis to begin with, we examined scatterplots to see if the data were normally distributed ($N = 50$). Apart from the item *having a Hungarian*

accent is a problem, the data were not normally distributed, and the responses tended to shift towards one or the other extreme, which supported our primary hypothesis. In other words, participants tended to agree in their responses and displayed similar attitudes, such as *the teacher should have a native speaker accent* ($M = 3.36.12$, $SD = 1.41$) and *good pronunciation is important* ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.04$), but *good pronunciation* was not evaluated more important than *fluent, comprehensible speech* ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.04$) or having a *British* ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.30$) or *American accent* ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.02$) (Figure 1).

Table 1. Average ratings across all items of the 8-item attitude scale

	Mean	SD
Good pronunciation is very important	4.12	1.04
The teacher should be a native speaker of English	3.36	1.41
The teacher should have native British pronunciation	2.34	1.30
The teacher should have native American pronunciation	2.08	1.02
It is a problem if the teacher has a Hungarian accent	2.88	1.40
Pronunciation is more important than fluency or comprehensibility	2.42	1.23
Pronunciation is more important than methodology	2.72	1.37
Advanced language skills are needed	3.32	1.40

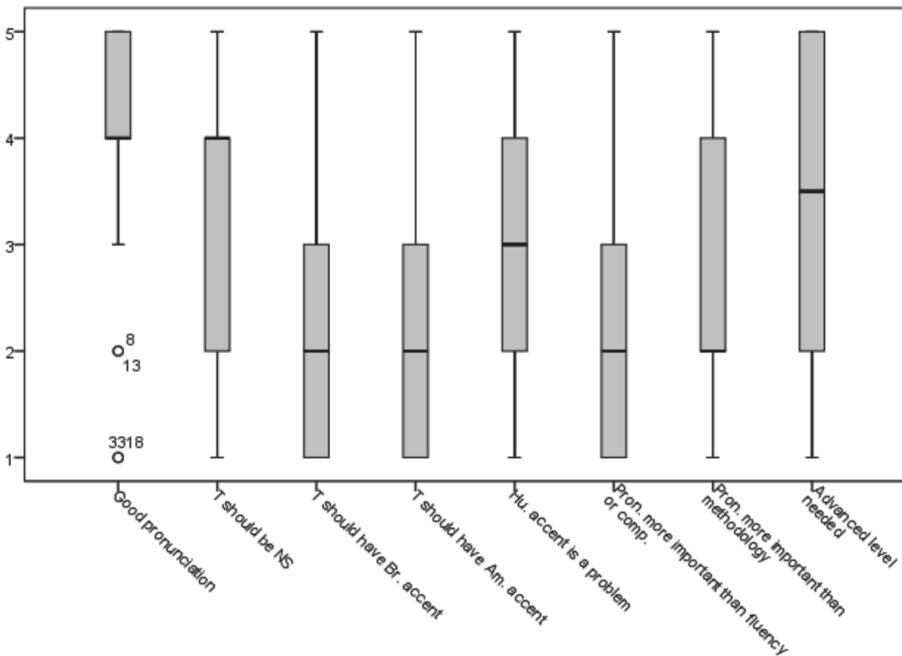


Figure 1. Scatterplot of ratings for the 8-item parental attitude scale

The general finding that the parents taking part in this survey rated Hungarian accent as not a serious problem is a welcome development, especially in the light of previous research reflecting the negative attitudes attached to Hungarian-accented English. Previously, Feyér (2015) had found that secondary school students were quite unwilling to accept Hungarian-accented speech. Based on our results, we can conclude that the population surveyed is rather well informed about TEVYL. The present findings support this view since it is clearly observable that although the respondents find pronunciation very important, accent is not considered essential ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.409$), and pronunciation is ranked less important than methodology or fluency. On the contrary, there are respondents who advocate that *advanced proficiency is needed* even for a teacher of young learners ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.40$). In the Czech context, Vojtková (2006) reveals similar attitudes, according to which pronunciation supersedes language proficiency in importance with teachers of young learners (Vojtková 2006: 91).

5.2. Parental attitudes among parents preferring early/very early English

The second part of our first research question refers to the relationship between parental preference for very early/early start and their attitudes towards teachers. We divided the responses into two groups based on the start of formal institutional education (compulsory from age 3 in Hungary). Half of the parents surveyed ($N = 50$) favoured a very early start (VES), before preschool ($N=25$), whereas the other half opted for preschool or later (ES, $N = 25$). It is noteworthy that no parents indicated that they would not prefer an early start, that is, a start after the compulsory 4th grade in primary school. This finding is parallel to the public opinion survey that was carried out in the Czech Republic, which revealed that only very few respondents considered that a start of foreign language learning is enough later than in the fourth primary class; what is more, none of the surveyed language teachers or lower-secondary school teachers in the Czech Republic would find a non-early start acceptable (Purdjaková 2006).

Our results revealed that, in general, respondents preferring early start (ES) (preschool to fourth grade) tended to assign higher scores to each of the attitude scale items (Table 2). The most prominent difference was measured for items *Teacher should have British native accent* ($M_{VES} = 1.96$, $SD_{VES} = 1.20$; $M_{ES} = 2.72$, $SD_{ES} = 1.30$) and *Teacher should have American native accent* ($M_{VES} = 1.76$, $SD_{VES} = 0.97$; $M_{ES} = 2.40$, $SD_{ES} = 1.00$). Parents preferring an early start are more likely to expect to have a native speaker teacher ($M_{ES} = 3.56$, $SD_{ES} = 1.30$), while parents for very early start are closer to a neutral position ($M_{VES} = 3.16$, $SD_{VES} = 1.43$). The former group had increased expectations towards the teacher and their language use and placed an increased emphasis on pronunciation, especially having a British or American accent.

Table 2. *Ideal age of start and attitudes*

Ideal age of start		Good pronunciation	T should be NS	T should have Br. accent	T should have Am. accent	Hu. accent is a problem	Pron. more important than fluency or comp.	Pron. more important than methodology	Advanced level needed
Before preschool (VES) N = 25	Mean	4.08	3.16	1.96	1.76	2.84	2.24	2.64	3.28
	SD	1.038	1.434	1.207	.970	1.405	1.200	1.381	1.34
Preschool to fourth grade (ES) N = 25	Mean	4.16	3.56	2.72	2.40	2.92	2.60	2.80	3.36
	SD	1.068	1.387	1.308	1.000	1.441	1.258	1.384	1.49
Total N = 50	Mean	4.12	3.36	2.34	2.08	2.88	2.42	2.72	3.32
	SD	1.043	1.411	1.303	1.027	1.409	1.230	1.371	1.40

On the whole, both groups value good pronunciation ($M_{VES} = 4.08$, $SD_{VES} = 1.03$; $M_{ES} = 4.16$, $SD_{ES} = 1.06$), but they do not prefer a British or American accent. This indicates that those in favour of an early start tend more towards native-speakerism since they agree more with the statements that imply native-speaking teachers are needed and pronunciation is more important than methodology or fluency, yet they do not have a clear preference for either of the two most prominent and prestigious native speaker accents. We may say that parents who support the very early start seem more informed (Vojtková 2006) since they emphasize methodology and fluency over pronunciation. Griva and Chouvarda (2012) in Greece found age-related differences when they described how younger parents emphasize the right methodology rather than older ones. Thus, with a larger sample, age will also be worth examining.

Parental attitudes and the parents' self-rated proficiency in English

The questionnaire also addressed participants' self-evaluated language skills, using the categories *Does not speak a foreign language* (N = 6), *Elementary* (N = 12), *Intermediate* (N = 16), and *Advanced* (N = 16) language skills. Good teacher pronunciation was rated the highest by participants who claimed not to speak any foreign languages ($M_{No FL} = 4.50$, $SD_{No FL} = 0.84$), but other participants also agreed on its importance ($M_{Elem} = 3.92$, $SD_{Elem} = 1.17$; $M_{Intermed} = 4.06$, $SD_{Intermed} =$

1.25; $M_{Adv} = 4.19$, $SD_{Adv} = 0.83$). Data reveal that the less proficient a respondent is, the more importance they attribute to pronunciation as opposed to fluency or comprehensibility ($M_{No\ FL} = 3.00$, $SD_{No\ FL} = 1.41$; $M_{Elem} = 2.67$, $SD_{Elem} = 1.50$; $M_{Intermed} = 2.25$, $SD_{Intermed} = 1.18$; $M_{Adv} = 2.19$, $SD_{Adv} = 0.98$) (Table 3). It should also be noted that attitude ratings are more consistent among the parents with better self-reported language skills, who seem to display a more balanced view of linguistic aspects, and do not foreground pronunciation as a key criterion of proficiency in a foreign language.

Table 3. Self-reported language proficiency and attitudes

Self-reported language proficiency		Good pronunciation	T should be NS	T should have Br. accent	T should have Am. accent	Hu. accent is a problem	Pron. more important than fluency or comp.	Pron. more important than methodology	Advanced level needed
Does not speak FL	Mean	4.50	3.50	2.33	2.33	2.67	3.00	2.67	2.83
	N = 6 SD	0.84	1.38	0.82	0.82	1.37	1.41	1.51	1.47
Elementary	Mean	3.92	3.75	2.83	2.42	2.17	2.67	2.42	3.92
	N = 12 SD	1.17	1.36	1.19	1.08	1.12	1.50	1.44	1.00
Intermediate	Mean	4.06	3.31	2.38	2.00	3.06	2.25	3.00	2.94
	N = 16 SD	1.24	1.45	1.54	1.21	1.61	1.18	1.46	1.65
Advanced	Mean	4.19	3.06	1.94	1.81	3.31	2.19	2.69	3.44
	N = 16 SD	0.83	1.48	1.24	0.83	1.30	0.98	1.25	1.31
Total	Mean	4.12	3.36	2.34	2.08	2.88	2.42	2.72	3.32
	N = 50 SD	1.04	1.41	1.30	1.03	1.41	1.23	1.37	1.41

Conversely, our results also revealed that intermediate and advanced speakers were more concerned about *Hungarian accent* ($M_{Intermed} = 3.06$, $SD_{Intermed} = 1.61$; $M_{Adv} = 3.31$, $SD_{Adv} = 1.30$) than less proficient parents ($M_{No\ FL} = 2.67$, $SD_{No\ FL} = 1.37$; $M_{Elem} = 2.17$, $SD_{Elem} = 1.12$). Despite this concern with having a Hungarian accent, parents with advanced language skills attribute less importance to *native-speaking teachers* ($M_{Adv} = 1.94$, $SD_{Adv} = 1.24$) than lower proficiency respondents ($M_{No\ FL} = 2.337$, $SD_{No\ FL} = 0.82$; $M_{Elem} = 2.42$, $SD_{Elem} = 1.08$; $M_{Intermed} = 2.38$, $SD_{Intermed} = 1.54$) (Table 3). Based on these results, we conclude that parents with more advanced language skills appear to have a more comprehensive view of language learning and use that is not solely focused on pronunciation but includes comprehensibility or fluency as well. They seem to be moving further away from

native-speakerism within the classroom, yet they disapprove of a Hungarian accent to a greater degree than less proficient parents. Similarly to previous findings about parental education and language-learning background (Lan et al. 2011, Munoz and Lindgren 2011, Bartram 2006, Song 2003), self-reported language skills may therefore be a factor requiring further study.

5.4. Parental attitudes and plans to move abroad

Before the study, we had hypothesized that, given that there is a large number of Hungarian young adults leaving the country to earn a better living elsewhere, EFL-related issues would be influenced by whether they plan to do so. It must be noted that all respondents were Hungarians, and none had lived abroad. Only 6% of them ($N = 3$) plan to move abroad with their children; so, our analysis will focus on the responses of those who do not plan to move ($N = 31$) and those who gave an uncertain answer ($N = 16$) (Table 4).

Firstly, those who may want to *move abroad* ($M_{\text{Maybe}} = 4.50$, $SD_{\text{Maybe}} = 0.62$) found *good pronunciation* more important than those who do not ($M_{\text{No}} = 3.94$, $SD_{\text{No}} = 1.20$) and were markedly more consistent in their responses. Secondly, Hungarian accent of teachers emerges as a key issue between these two groups. Those who do not plan to move abroad claimed it is not a problem ($M_{\text{No}} = 2.61$, $SD_{\text{No}} = 1.40$), while those who are contemplating moving abroad leaned towards rejecting a *Hungarian accent* ($M_{\text{Maybe}} = 3.44$, $SD_{\text{Maybe}} = 1.35$). Thirdly, *native speaker teachers* ($M_{\text{No}} = 3.26$, $SD_{\text{No}} = 1.50$; $M_{\text{Maybe}} = 3.69$, $SD_{\text{Maybe}} = 1.19$) were rated positively by both groups but were rated lower by the group not planning to move abroad. However, neither of the two groups evaluated a British or American accent particularly desirable, and *advanced proficiency* ($M_{\text{No}} = 3.32$, $SD_{\text{No}} = 1.42$; $M_{\text{Maybe}} = 3.50$, $SD_{\text{Maybe}} = 1.36$) was viewed as important as being a native speaker. Finally, it can be concluded that our prior hypothesis was confirmed with respect to participants' attitudes towards good pronunciation and Hungarian accent and their relationship with plans to move abroad.

Table 4. *Plans to move abroad and attitudes*

Do you plan to move abroad?			Good pronunciation	T should be NS	T should have Br. Accent	T should have Am. accent	Hu. accent is a problem	Pron. more important than fluency or comp.	Pron. more important than methodology	Advanced level needed
No	N = 31	Mean	3.94	3.26	2.35	2.13	2.61	2.45	2.61	3.32
		SD	1.209	1.505	1.380	1.118	1.407	1.287	1.407	1.42
Maybe	N = 16	Mean	4.50	3.69	2.38	2.00	3.44	2.25	2.94	3.50
		SD	.632	1.195	1.258	.894	1.315	1.183	1.237	1.36
Yes	N = 3	Mean	4.00	2.67	2.00	2.00	2.67	3.00	2.67	2.33
		SD	.000	1.528	1.000	1.000	1.528	1.000	2.082	1.52
Total	N = 50	Mean	4.12	3.36	2.34	2.08	2.88	2.42	2.72	3.32
		SD	1.043	1.411	1.303	1.027	1.409	1.230	1.371	1.40

Our results shed light on the importance of the wider linguistic context and the different attitudes attached to communicating with native speakers and non-natives potentially sharing the same first language. As pointed out by Feyér (2015), native speaker accents were generally preferred compared to a discernible Hungarian accent. However, our results also reveal that neither of the most prominent native varieties is preferred over the other by our participants, and advanced proficiency irrespective of accent is also evaluated positively. This appears to point towards a decreasing attention on direct imitation of certain native speaker varieties and, hopefully, an increasing emphasis on communicative efficiency.

Moreover, respondents generally agree with the statement that *the teacher should be a native speaker of English* (M = 3.36, SD = 1.41), but when we compare the answers of those who anticipate using English abroad (i.e. may plan to move) and those who do not, there is no significant difference (Table 4). This is in tune with previous findings that the desire to adhere to native speaker norms is not limited to students who will at some point use English with native speakers (Timmis 2002: 248).

5.5. Parental attitudes and in/formal educational contexts

Our final research question addressed the nature of the educational context the parents and children in the study were involved in. With this goal in mind, we examined the attitudes connected with whether the children learn English in a formal ($N = 12$) or informal context ($N = 17$) (at home, from family members). The results reveal that in case the child is taking part in organized teaching, the parents claimed that the *pronunciation* ($M_{\text{Pron}} = 3.83$, $SD_{\text{Pron}} = 1.47$), accent, and *native-likeness* of the teacher ($M_{\text{NST}} = 3.17$, $SD_{\text{NST}} = 1.53$) was less important compared to informal learning contexts, where *good pronunciation* ($M_{\text{Pron}} = 4.06$, $SD_{\text{Pron}} = 0.90$) and *native speaker teachers* ($M_{\text{NST}} = 3.53$, $SD_{\text{NST}} = 1.38$) were evaluated more positively. In general, the need for British or American accents is not imperative. However, a slight difference could be measured between the two groups. When *teaching at home*, parents found less relevance of British ($M_{\text{Br}} = 2.35$, $SD_{\text{Br}} = 1.32$) or American ($M_{\text{Am}} = 2.35$, $SD_{\text{Am}} = 1.32$) pronunciations than in *organized settings* ($M_{\text{Br}} = 2.42$, $SD_{\text{Br}} = 1.56$; $M_{\text{Am}} = 2.25$, $SD_{\text{Am}} = 1.29$) (Table 5). These results are in line with Song (2003), who measured differences in parental attitudes towards home teaching and found different teaching practices depending on participants' sociocultural contexts.

Table 5. *Formal or informal learning contexts and attitudes*

In what context does your child learn English?		Good pronunciation	T should be NS	T should have Br. accent	T should have Am. accent	Hu. accent is a problem	Pron. more important than fluency or comp.	Pron. more important than methodology	Advanced level needed
From parents/family members	Mean	4.06	3.53	2.35	1.88	3.18	2.29	3.00	3.12
	N = 17 SD	0.90	1.38	1.32	0.86	1.43	1.31	1.28	1.27
Formal education	Mean	3.83	3.17	2.42	2.25	2.58	2.83	2.92	3.33
	N = 12 SD	1.47	1.53	1.56	1.29	1.38	1.47	1.56	1.50
Total	Mean	3.95	3.35	2.39	2.07	2.88	2.56	2.96	3.23
	N = 29 SD	1.19	1.46	1.44	1.08	1.41	1.39	1.42	1.39

Conclusions

Our findings reveal that parents generally agreed on the importance of good pronunciation, especially parents with lower self-rated proficiency in English, but they also claimed that it was not more important than fluent and comprehensible

speech. These views were more dominant among parents of children participating in informal learning contexts. Although parents, overall, placed some emphasis on having native speaker teachers, parents preferring a very early start (VES) attributed less importance to it as compared to parents opting for a start in or after preschool (ES). Correspondingly, there was a stronger consensus among parents preferring very early start that British or American accents are not necessary prerequisites, but parents preferring a later start also agreed in this respect. Even though no considerable preference was measured for native speaker teachers or dominant native speaker accents, Hungarian accent was still viewed as problematic, especially by parents who were contemplating moving abroad or among parents of children learning from parents or family members. These negative attitudes may stem from concerns regarding native-speakerism children may encounter in the future or a lack of familiarity with either native or non-native communicative contexts other than the Hungarian one. When we look more closely at the results about how much respondents value and require native-speaking teachers, we see that the self-rated proficiency, the age of preferred start, the plans to move abroad, and the learning contexts all have some relationship with attitudes towards this issue. We found that those who prefer the earliest start, those who are more proficient in English, those who do not plan to move abroad, and those who have children taught English in formal contexts all find less need for native speaker teachers.

Thus, we can draw the general conclusion that the respondents in this study appear to have realistic views about the importance of accents: native-speakerism is not very strong, there is no urgent need for native-speaking teachers, and a Hungarian accent can be tolerated, especially in the Hungarian context. Results suggest that parents seem to be aware of the unnecessary burden that is placed on learners by native-speakerism, and they seem to be moving away from a focus on accent towards a more pragmatic approach aimed at accomplishing communicative goals. This pragmatism is also reflected in the responses of parents staying in Hungary or planning to move abroad, who adjust their attitudes to accent to the anticipated context of language use. Moreover, this shift away from native-speakerism is highlighted by the emphasis placed on teachers using the appropriate methodology and a fluent, comprehensible language.

However, these results should be treated with some caution, and parental views on comprehensibility, fluency, and methodology need to be addressed in more detail. Special attention must be devoted to the notions of fluency and comprehensibility and their relationship with speech perception and attitudes. In the following stage of the research process, the attitude scale should be extended, and fluency and comprehensibility should be addressed as distinct and occasionally diametrically opposed factors affecting listener perceptions. Finally, we also plan to extend the sample in order to carry out in-depth statistical testing and involve other stakeholders as well.

References

- Ahn, So-Yeon–Hyun-Sook Kang. 2017. South Korean university students' perceptions of different English varieties and their contribution to the learning of English as a foreign language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 38(8): 712–725.
- Asgari, Azadeh. 2010. The influence of informal language learning environment (parents and home environment) on the vocabulary learning strategies. *Canadian Center for Science and Education: English Language and Literature Studies* 1(1): 7–13.
- Balogh, Erzsébet. 2014. *Language Attitudes towards English Accent Varieties: Hungarian Secondary School Students' Labeling, Evaluating and Commenting on Foreign Accented Englishes*. PhD Thesis, University of Szeged, Hungary.
- Bartram, Brendan. 2006. An examination of perceptions of parental influence on attitudes to language learning. *Educational Research* 48(2): 211–21.
- Bempechat, Janine. 1992. The role of parent involvement in children's academic achievement. *The School Community Journal* 2(2): 31–41.
- Berns, Margie. 2009. English as lingua franca and English in Europe. *World Englishes* 28(2): 192–199.
- Carrie, Erin–Robert M. McKenzie. 2018. American or British? L2 speakers' recognition and evaluations of accent features in English. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39(4): 313–28.
- Clark, Elizabeth–Paran, Amos. 2007. The employability of non-native-speaker teachers of EFL: A UK survey. *System* 35(4): 407–430.
- Clarke, Priscilla M. [Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority]. 2009. *Supporting Children Learning English as A Second Language in the Early Years (Birth to Six Years)*. East Melbourne, VIC.: VCAA. http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EY_Teyll_Paper.pdf (Last accessed: 06 May 2018).
- Curtain, Helena. 2000. Early language learning in the USA. In Marianne Nikolov and Helena Curtain (eds), *An Early Start: Young Learners and Modern Languages in Europe and Beyond*, 191–208. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Csizér, Kata–Gabriella Lukács. 2010. The comparative analysis of motivation, attitudes and selves: The case of English and German in Hungary. *System* 38(1): 1–13.
- Derwing, Tracey M.–Munro, Murray J. 2009. Putting accent in its place: Rethinking obstacles to communication. *Language Teaching* 42(4): 476–490.
- Dvořáková, Kateřina. 2006. Early foreign language teaching in the Czech Republic: Existing problems and future challenges. In Hanusová, Svetlana and Najvar, Petr (eds), *Foreign Language Acquisition at an Early Age. Proceedings from the*

- Conference Organized and Hosted by Faculty of Education, Masaryk University on March 16, 2006, 61–70. Brno.
- Farkašová, Eva–Květa Biskupičová. 2000. Teaching English from the first grade of primary school: Psychological and pedagogical perspectives. In J. Moon and Marianne Nikolov (eds), *Research into Teaching English to Young Learners*, 121–136. Pécs: University Press.
- Feyér, Bálint. 2015. *Investigating Hungarian EFL Learners' Comprehension and Attitudes Pertaining to English Speech Varieties*. PhD Thesis: Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Language pedagogy PhD programme.
- Gardner, Richard. 1985. Second language acquisition: focus on the parent. In Robert C. Gardner (ed.), *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitude and Motivation*, 108–123. Edward Arnold.
- Griva, Eleni–Panagiota Chouvarda. 2012. Developing plurilingual children: Parents' beliefs and attitudes towards English language learning and multilingual learning. *World Journal of English Language* 2(3): 1–13.
- Gurkan, Serkan–Dogan Yuksel. 2012. Evaluating the contributions of native and non-native teachers to an English language teaching program. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 46: 2951–2958.
- Hanušová, Světlana–Petr Najvar. 2005. Do the early birds really catch the worm? Demystifying the factor of early age in language learning. In *Theory and Practice in English Studies 3. Proceedings from the Eighth Conference of British, American and Canadian Studies*. Vol. 1. Citeseer.
- Holliday, Adrian. 2005. The struggle to teach English as an international language. *Applied Linguistics* 28(1): 147–150.
- Jenkins, Jennifer. 2000. *The Phonology of English as an International Language: New Models, New Norms, New Goals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaur, Paramjit. 2014. Accent attitudes: Reactions to English as a lingua franca. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 134: 3–12.
- Kaur, Paramjit–Arumugam Raman. 2014. Exploring native speaker and non-native speaker accents: The English as a lingua franca perspective. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 155: 253–259.
- Kemal Tekin, Ali. 2015. Early EFL education is on the rise in Oman: A qualitative inquiry of parental beliefs about early EFL learning. *English Language Teaching* 8(2): 35–43.
- Kormos, Judit–Csizér Kata. 2005. A családi környezet hatása az idegen nyelvi motivációra: egy kvalitatív módszerekkel történő kutatás tanulságai [The influence of home environment on learning motivation: What we learnt from a qualitative inquiry]. *Magyar Pedagógia* 105(1): 29–40.
- Lan, Yi-Chen–Sheila Degotardi–Jane Torr. 2011. Factors related to the home teaching of English language to preschool aged children: A Taiwanese study. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education* 5(2): 27–48.

- Linse, Caroline. 2011. Korean parental beliefs about ELT from the perspective of teachers. *TTEYLOL Journal* 2(4): 473–491.
- Loyová, Gabriela. 2006. Foreign language learning/acquisition at an early age. In Hanusová, Svetlana and Najvar, Petr (eds), *Foreign Language Acquisition at an Early Age. Proceedings from the Conference Organized and Hosted by Faculty of Education, Masaryk University on March 16, 2006*, 43–57. Brno.
- Lugossy, Réka. 2009. “I will think about this...” A case study with a lower-primary school teacher of English. In Réka Lugossy, József Horváth and Marianne Nikolov (eds), *UPRT 2008: Empirical Studies in English Applied Linguistics*, 59–70.
- Medgyes, Péter. 1992. Native or non-native: Who’s worth more? *TEYLL Journal* 46(4): 340–349.
- Medgyes, Péter–Marianne Nikolov. 2014. Research in foreign language education in Hungary (2006–2012). *Language Teaching* 47(4): 504–537.
- Ministry of Education, Hungary. 2004. *Ajánlások az általános iskola első három osztályában folyó idegennyelv-oktatás eredményesebbé tételére* [Recommendations for making FL education more successful in grades 1–3]. <http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/nemzetkozi-kapcsolatok/archivum/ajanlasok-altalanos>. (Last accessed: 05 December 2016).
- Morvai, Edit–István Ottó–Enikő Öveges. 2009. *Idegennyelv-oktatás a nyolcosztályos általános iskolák 1–3. osztályában* [Foreign Language Teaching in the First Three Years of Primary School]. Budapest: Oktatási és Kulturális Minisztérium. http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/letolt/vilagnyelv/vny_okm_1_3_felmeres_100510.pdf. (Last accessed: 20 May 2018).
- Muñoz, Carmen–Eva Lindgren. 2011. Out-of-school factors: The home. In Enever, Janet (ed.), *ELLiE. Early Language Learning in Europe*. British Council. 103–124. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/B309%20ELLiE%20Book%202011%20FINAL.pdf>. (Last accessed: 06 May 2018).
- Murphey, David. 1992. Constructing the child: Relations between parents’ beliefs and child outcomes. *Developmental Review* 12(2): 199–232.
- Nagy, Judit. 2014. Az angol nem anyanyelvi változatainak érthetősége: normák, attitűdök és a hallás utáni szövegértés viszonya [Comprehensibility of non-native varieties of English: Norms, attitudes and their relationship to listening comprehension]. In Benő, Attila, Fazekas, Emese, Zsemlyei, Borbála (eds), *Többnyelvűség és kommunikáció Kelet-Közép-Európában: XXIV. Magyar Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Kongresszus előadásai* [Multilingualism and Communication in Central and Eastern Europe: Lectures presented at the 24th Hungarian Applied Linguistics Conference], 103–111. Kolozsvár: EME.
- Nemzeti alaptanterv: 110/2012. (VI. 4.) Korm. rendelet a Nemzeti alaptanterv kiadásáról, bevezetéséről és alkalmazásáról [Hungarian National Core Curriculum: 110/2012. (VI.4.). Statute on the introduction and use of the national

- core curriculum]. http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1200110. KOR. (Last accessed: 13 June 2016).
- Nikolov, Marianne. 2002. *Issues in English Language Education*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Nikolov, Marianne–Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović. 2006. Recent research on age, second language acquisition, and early foreign language learning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 26: 234–260.
- Nikolov, Marianne–Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović. 2011. All shades of every color: An overview of early teaching and learning of foreign languages. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 31: 95–119.
- Purdjaková, Sárka. 2006. When should children start learning a foreign language in Czech context (findings of an opinion survey). In Hanusová, Svetlana and Najvar, Petr (eds), *Foreign Language Acquisition at an Early Age. Proceedings from the Conference Organized and Hosted by Faculty of Education, Masaryk University on March 16, 2006*, 71–76. Brno.
- Rixon, Shelagh. 2000. *Optimum Age or Optimum Conditions? Issues Related to the Teaching of Languages to Primary Age Children*. <http://www.britishcouncil.org/english/eyl/article01.htm>. (Last accessed: 14. 06. 2003).
- Smith, Larry E.–Nelson, Cecil L. 1985. International intelligibility of English: Directions and resources. *World Englishes* 4(3): 333–342.
- Song, Seung Min. 2003. *Korean Mothers' Beliefs and Practices on Early English Education in TEYLL and EFL Contexts*. PhD Thesis: The Pennsylvania State University, The Graduate School College of Education.
- Szarvas, Júlia. 2013. *Is Kindergarten English Vocational English?* Presented at the International Scientific Conference for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning, 17–19 October 2013. Szeged: University of Szeged.
- Tekin, Ali Kemal. 2015. Early EFL education is on the rise in Oman: A qualitative inquiry of parental beliefs about early EFL learning. *English Language Teaching* 8(2): 35–43.
- Timmis, Ivor. 2002. Native-speaker norms and International English: A classroom view. *ELT Journal* 56(3): 240–249.
- Vojtková, Naděžda. 2006. The teacher – The most important agent for educating very young learners. In Hanusová, Svetlana and Najvar, Petr (eds.), *Foreign Language Acquisition at an Early Age. Proceedings from the Conference Organized and Hosted by Faculty of Education, Masaryk University on March 16, 2006*, 89–96. Brno: Masaryk University.