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Accent on Openness: Reflection on Diversity through Accent Work

Aimée Johansen

Abstract

In today's higher education classroom, educators are always looking for ways to make their primary subject interesting, applicable and educational for their students, often drawing on work in other fields. In a CEFR C1-level English class on accents in English, the primary focus is on helping students improve their understanding of unfamiliar accents, with the ultimate goal of facilitating exchanges between users of English as a lingua franca in a variety of settings. However, a secondary but also very important goal is using materials and discussions of issues related to accent to encourage respect for cultural diversity and openness to different cultural groups. Even the definition of English is an opportunity for reflection: Whose English are we talking about? What norms of English use have developed in face-to-face and online communications and why? Introducing students to the concept of World Englishes (Kachru 1985) and demonstrating the value of different Englishes is a good starting point for encouraging reflection on deeper questions related to language, power and identity.

This chapter presents a number of social issues related to accent: accent-based discrimination, discrimination-based accent detection (i.e. hearing a foreign accent when none is present due to speaker appearance), clichés and stereotypes related to accent, and questions of identity, among other issues. The contextualization of these questions in class is discussed and student comments from final papers and writing samples are analyzed with respect to the notion of Intercultural Competency to show how the activities used in class can inspire reflection about respect for diversity in society more generally.

Key words

English, accents, pedagogy, intercultural competence, world English

Introduction

Given the context of globalization and the increasingly interconnected world in which we find ourselves today, both companies and institutions are seeking to help their employees and students develop the skills they need in order to work with people from a variety of backgrounds, namely Intercultural Competence (IC) (Gourvès-Hayward & Morace 2010). In order to help learners develop these skills, we must first define what is meant by IC. When discussing Intercultural Competence (IC), I propose using the definition of Gourvès-Hayward & Morace (2011), who draw on the work of Landis & Bennett (2004) and Knapp & Knapp-Pottoff (1990):

> «For all these authors, IC includes the ability to act and/or communicate in a pragmatic way in a concrete situation, including not only individuals but groups from different cultures. This definition presupposes the ability to act effectively in every concrete situation but to act effectively by adapting to different cultural contexts. Intercultural competences emerge as a learning skill based on cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes.»

This article will discuss the learning situations created in order to contribute to learners' Intercultural Competence, within the context of a course with a different primary objective. The hope is that other educators might draw on some of the ideas used in the course to incorporate similar strategies into their own courses that might have a primary focus in another area.

Course Design

The course in question is a C1-level[1] English course that meets for a total of 40 hours over the semester. The students are third- and fourth-year engineering students who have either been placed directly into level C1 upon arrival at the school, following a placement test, or who have validated a B2 level within the school. They have selected the theme of Accents from several options, as their first or second choice, as part of the requirements for their engineering degree. The course uses a two-tier pedagogical approach, combining purely linguistic work and more reflective approaches. Approximately half of class time and assignments are dedicated to improving student understanding of English spoken in a variety of accents that tend to be challenging for L2 speakers of English, including Scottish, Indian, South African, Australian, and African-American English. This work is important, because engineers today interact regularly with other professionals from

1 C1/C1+ is the highest level of English offered at IMT Atlantique. For information on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), see https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages.

around the globe, and they need to develop skills to understand their colleagues from other parts of the world. This is the author's principal area of research.

The second main area of work in class can be placed loosely in the context of more than 20 years of teaching and research surrounding intercultural instruction at IMT Atlantique (formerly Télécom Bretagne), as described in, among others, Gourvès-Hayward & Morace (2011); Gourvès-Hayward & Sablé (in press); Le Saout, Sintes & Gourvès-Hayward (2016); and Morace & Gourvès-Hayward (2014), inter alia. One of the contributions of this course when compared with other courses with a similar focus at the institution is the emphasis on unconscious bias when it comes to communicating with speakers of different backgrounds from one's own. What types of presuppositions do listeners make when hearing a speaker with a different accent, for example? Approximately a quarter of class time and assignments involve input and reflective work surrounding social aspects related to accents, and the final quarter is set aside for work on final group projects on topics arrived at through consensus in each small group and approved by the course instructor.

The main course objective is helping students better understand a variety of accents in English, with the goal of facilitating better communication between speakers of Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle speakers of English (Kachru *et al.* 2006). Secondary course objectives include encouraging respect for cultural diversity, promoting openness toward different populations, and exploring questions of language, power and identity. It is these secondary course objectives that will be the focus of this chapter.

Theoretical framework

While the course itself is very practical and content-based, it is undergirded by a certain theoretical framework. The two main elements of this framework are the notion of the facilitation of pluricultural space and the concept of World Englishes.

Facilitating pluricultural space

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume with New Descriptors (CEFR CV) includes a section called "Facilitating Pluricultural Space", which includes a scale of skills expected from CEFR levels A1 through C2 (emphasis added):

> «This scale reflects the notion of creating a shared space between and among linguistically and culturally different interlocutors, i.e. the capacity of dealing with 'otherness' to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration. The user/learner aims to facilitate a positive interactive environment for successful communication between participants of different cultural backgrounds, including in multicultural contexts. Rather than simply

building on his/her pluricultural repertoire to gain acceptance and to enhance his own mission or message (see *Building on pluricultural repertoire*), he/she is engaged as a cultural mediator: creating a neutral, trusted, shared 'space' in order to enhance the communication between others. He/she aims to expand and deepen intercultural understanding between participants in order to avoid and/or overcome any potential communication difficulties arising from contrasting cultural viewpoints.

This section lays out the following two competencies for the C1 level:

- Can act as mediator in intercultural encounters, contributing to a shared communication culture by managing ambiguity offering advice and support, and heading off misunderstandings.
- Can anticipate how people might misunderstand what has been said or written and help to maintain positive interaction by commenting on and interpreting different cultural perspectives on the issue concerned.

These two competencies are at front of mind in this course, as students work to better understand a variety of accents and issues surrounding accents. In addition, empathy is seen as an important aspect of facilitating pluricultural spaces, as emphasized in Gourvès-Hayward & Sablé (in press) and the CEFR CV, inter alia, and this is another objective of this course.

The concept of World Englishes

Braj Kachru's concept of World Englishes was used in the class, to encourage students to step outside the "native vs. non-native speaker" paradigm. Students were introduced to the idea of Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles of English, as described below.

	Description	**Examples of countries**
Inner Circle	Represents the traditional bases of English and is dominated by the «native language» varieties	USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand
Outer Circle	English has been institutionalized as an additional language, used for government functions, education, etc.	Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Zambia
Expanding Circle	Represents the rest of the world where people learn English to use mainly as a language of communication with people from other countries. Estimated to represent approximately 80% of English speakers.	China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Korea, Nepal, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Russia, Zimbabwe

What is the benefit of changing from a «native vs. non-native language» paradigm to a World Englishes model? Kachru's work emphasized the importance of making

professional and advanced students aware of seven major aspects related to English use. These are reproduced here, with the three that seem most applicable for engineering students in France in bold.

1. Sociolinguistic profile
2. Variety exposure
3. Attitudinal neutrality
4. Range of uses
5. Contrastive pragmatics
6. Multidimensionality of functions
7. Cross-cultural intelligibility

In other words, one variety of English is not superior to another, and we should have respect for all varieties of English (and other languages), which all have their own richness and legitimacy. Differences between one person's English and another person's English should not be a reason for negative judgment or lack of understanding.

A similar approach is taken in the updated version of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR CV) with respect to target pronunciation for language learners:

> «In language teaching, the phonological control of an idealised native speaker has traditionally been seen as the target, with accent being seen as a marker of poor phonological control. The focus on accent and on accuracy instead of on intelligibility has been detrimental to the development of the teaching of pronunciation. Idealised models that ignore the retention of accent lack consideration for context, sociolinguistic aspects and learners' needs. The current scale seemed to reinforce such views and for this reason, the scale was redeveloped from scratch.»

This is important for engineering students in an institution with a fairly high percentage of international students, working in multilingual, multicultural groups for projects, learning from instructors from a variety of countries, etc. In addition, many of these students will work in multilingual, multicultural contexts once they have left the school, so it will continue to be important for them to improve their understanding of have respect for different varieties of English. With an estimated 80% of English speakers using the language as a lingua franca, it is important to value the richness that speakers of different varieties of English bring to the table.

Implementation of diversity-related course objectives

The courses described in the present article were organized at IMT Atlantique graduate school of engineering, which has a strong international focus. The institution aims to attract students and faculty from abroad and develop international research partnernships, but also emphasizes the development of language and intercultural skills among its future engineers. IMT Atlantique is fortunate to have a diverse student population, with approximately 23% international students in the school during the period under consideration, in addition to a number of binational/bicultural/bilingual students. The student population is roughly 75% male.

The courses in question were taught between Fall 2015 and Fall 2021, including Spring 2020, the semester in which only the first two weeks of class took place in the classroom, as France went into Covid-related lockdown for most of the rest of the semester[2]. The course was taught by the author.

The following sub-sections describe ways in which course content was selected and developed with objectives of encouraging thought around sociolinguistic issues, inclusion, etc. in mind. First will be a discussion of how working on Appalachian English contributed to such objectives.

Work on Appalachian English

One class was dedicated to work on Appalachian varieties of American English, spoken in the Appalachian mountain region of the eastern United States. Part of the documentary Mountain Talk was shown, focusing on rich vocabulary items and expressions used in Appalachia, many of which arrived in Appalachia with the Scots-Irish ancestors of many of today's inhabitants, as well as non-standard structures. The goal of this work was to demonstrate the uniqueness and richness of this dialect of English, and to demonstrate that all varieties of language are a source of uniqueness and richness to be valued. This relates back to the attitudal neutrality and variety exposure emphasized by Kachru.

After an explanation of the negative stereotypes associated with speakers of Appalachian English and the discrimination often faced by these speakers outside of Appalachia, students discussed the following questions in small groups, and then as a class:

2 In adapting to online teaching during the Spring 2020 semester, there was more of an emphasis on the secondary course objectives. It was not practical to do the types of activities that are usually carried out in class to improve comprehension (e.g. imitating intonational patterns of sample sentences, acting out scenes from films, performing stand-up comedy, etc.), so there was a move toward reading applicable articles and discussing them in small groups. In addition, the number of face-to-face hours was reduced by over 50%, so less material could be covered.

1. What attitude do you think many Americans have toward people who speak with an Appalachian accent? Do you think Appalachian people experience that?
2. Are there parallels in France?
3. Do you know someone with a strong regional accent? Have you ever discussed their experience with them?
4. "He studied her with a confusion she recognized. She was well accustomed to watching Yankee brains grind their gears, attempting to reconcile a hillbilly accent with signs of a serious education." (Barbara Kingsolver, "Prodigal Summer") What are your thoughts about this quote?

Work on three articles related to non-standard accents in academia

One class involved having rotating groups of students work on three short (or abridged) pieces of writing related to non-standard accents in academia. The goal was to get students to think about attitudes toward speakers with a different ethnicity and/or a different accent, with the objective of encouraging attitudinal neutrality, per Kachru. Initially students were given one of the three articles to read, along with questions to answer individually before discussing them with other students who had read the same article. The three pieces of writing were the following:

Group	Piece of writing	Title
A	Zheng & Samuel (2017)	Does seeing an Asian face make speech sound more accented?
B	Patrick Schultz blog post	Teaching English as a non-native speaker
C	Munro & Derwing (1995)	Foreign accent, comprehensibility and intelligibility in the speech of second language learners

Zheng & Samuel (2017) describes a study in which university students listened to a recording of a lecture by a native speaker of American English, with a standard accent. Study participants were shown a picture of the instructor who had supposedly given the lecture. When the picture presented was of a person of Asian descent, participants rated the speaker as sounding less like a native speaker than when the picture presented was of a person of European descent.

The Patrick Schultz blog post draws on existing research demonstrating that students associate accented English with a lack of qualifications, no matter how good the instructor's grammar, lexicon, and pronunciation are. Their perceptions are influenced by social attitudes, including their perception of the instructor's assumed ethnicity. Instructors with some accents, e.g. Spanish or French, will be judged less harshly than those with other accents, e.g. Chinese, Indian, Russian or Mexican.

Munro & Derwing (1995) demonstrate that think people *think* that heavily accented speech is difficult to understand, when in fact this does not appear to be the case. Study participants were actually able to understand heavily accented speech, while feeling that the speakers were more difficult to understand than speakers with less heavily accented speech.

Once each group had finished discussing the article they had read, new groups were formed with one person from each initial group, with an information gap approach in mind, so that there was at least one person having read each article in the new groups. Each student described the main points of what s/he had read, and then the new groups discussed points they saw in common across the three pieces of writing. Then the class came back together and discussed the following questions:

1. Were you surprised overall by the findings? Were some of them more surprising than others?
2. Do you find your classmates difficult to understand if they speak French or English with a heavy, unfamiliar accent? Do these studies make you question your perception?
3. Do you think you might be guilty of this kind of bias toward your fellow students who speak heavily accented French or English?
4. Some of your classmates are French but have Asian, African or other ancestry. Do you think they have experiences with people hearing an accent that they do not have? How might this impact the way they are perceived by their fellow Frenchmen?
5. What implications does this work have for higher education?
6. Some of your instructors (professors or PhD students) speak French or English with an accent that is different from yours. Do you think they are difficult to understand? Do you think that your perception of how easy/difficult they are to understand might be affected by something other than their actual mastery of French or English?

The main takeaway from the Schultz blog post is summed up nicely in its final sentence: "Social attitudes and stereotypes influence students' evaluation of their teacher's linguistic competence and qualifications." This could be compared with the common experience of students studying abroad, as described by Pellegrino (2005), cited in Holliday *et al.* (2010:121):

> «Stripped of the comfortable mastery of their first language and of cultural and societal adroitness, learners in immersion environments, such as study abroad, often report feeling as if those around them may perceive them to be unintelligent, lacking personality or humor, or as having the intellectual development of a small child.»

Clearly such mistaken perceptions of their instructors by students is problematic. Discussions of this topic in class were intended to encourage reflection on the part of students with regard to their own personal unconscious bias, with the goal of helping to reduce that bias as much as possible.

Choice of materials in work on comprehension improvement

During the 50% of the course that is dedicated to helping students improve their understanding of unfamiliar accents, there is a choice of materials available on which to work. As much as possible, I try to use video and audio recordings that encourage thought about social issues, diversity, bias, representation, etc.

When working on Indian English, we watched the film Amu, in which there is discussion of social classes in India, as well as of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, in which over 3,000 Sikhs were killed while many government officials either turned a blind eye or actively encouraged violence. There is much questioning of this collaboration or lack of action by the main characters in the film. While there was no direct work on these questions, the choice of film itself was significant, as other films without such social commentary could have been used.

Similarly, in work on the Glaswegian accent, we focused on the film The Angel's Share, which addresses challenges faces by the working class in Glasgow, stereoypes, and being locked into an identity. Students were exposed to working-class Glaswegians with a very different background from their own, in most cases, and informal discussions revealed that students found the characters' stories compelling and made them think about how they would react in similar circumstances. This indirect work on empathy building was another area of focus in the class.

When working on Australian accents, I selected a number of stand-up comics from diverse backgrounds. I felt it was important to expose students to comics from a variety of backgrounds, as representation is important, even in courses that deal primarily with topics not explicitly focusing on diversity.

One semester, during the week of International Women's Day, we worked on rhoticity[3], which is one of the defining features of Inner Circle varieties of English. We listened to a number of audio recordings from presenters speaking about different topics related to feminism and women's issues, and students had to identify whether the person spoke a rhotic or non-rhotic variety of English. Students then identified the dialect of English spoken by several speakers of Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle varieties of English.

3 Rhoticity involves whether or not a speaker pronounces the r at the end of *water*, for example. Speakers of rhotic varieties do pronounce this r, while speakers of non-rhotic varieties do not, unless the following word beings with a vowel (e.g. *The wate<u>r</u> is on the table*). One phenomenon related to rhoticity is r-insertion, a common feature in non-rhotic dialects, in which speakers insert an r between vowels for purposes of ease of articulation, e.g. *The idea<u>r</u> is that*….

Another way in which student reflection on diversity and representation was spurred was by encouraging them to notice whose voices are heard in various contexts. For example, there were very few women interviewed in the Mountain Talk extract, and this was pointed out.[4]

Results

Students demonstrated that they consider questions of empathy, social discrimination, identity, accent discrimination, and other related topics to be important. The main two ways in which this becomes apparent toward the end of the semester are through the topics that they choose for their final projects and the comments they make in their final written exam. The following two subsections address these two areas.

Student project topics

At the end of the course, students form small groups and work on a project on the topic of their choice, approved by the instructor. A number of the topics selected over the years have addressed issues related to diversity, empathy, increasing understanding of others' experiences, etc. Here are some of the paper titles or subjects studied in the end-of-semester projects in recent years (emphasis added):

- "Keeping or losing native language in new country - questions of identity"
- "How does your accent affect how you are perceived by others?"
- "Sociological impact of accents in French and English"
- "Accents For Sale: The impact of accents on a salesperson's effectiveness" (addressing accent-based discrimination and attitudes toward speakers)
- Several papers on the Critical Period Hypothesis, stipulating that beyond puberty it appears nearly impossible to lose one's accent in a foreign language (encouraging **empathy** toward speakers with a foreign accent)
- the limited effectiveness of accent reduction courses (encouraging **empathy** toward speakers with a foreign accent)

These topic choices show that students go beyond simply trying to better understand different accents, reflecting and focusing on wider societal impacts surrounding accents and placing themselves in the shoes of those who face accent-based discrimination.

Student end-of-semester written reactions

At the end of each semester, students participate in a C1 Forum, during which they present their project work accompanied by a poster or other medium of their

4 There were also only white people interviewed, but this is not particularly surprising, given the high percentage of people of European descent in the region.

creation. They also learn about other student projects from their own class and projects from other classes.[5] The written exam involves writing about what they learned in the course of preparing their own project, as well as knowledge gained from other student projects and the course content more generally.

The main categories that emerged from the writing samples during the period under consideration in terms of the secondary objectives of the course were the following:

1. Cultural awareness, multicultural workspace
2. Social status
3. Bias / prejudice / accent discrimination / standardization
4. Empathy/ understanding
5. Appreciation of differences

(See appendix for full quotes from student writing.)

Cultural awareness, multicultural workspace

Many students demonstrated that they recognize the importance of cultural awareness and the the richness offered in the opportunity to work in a multicultural setting such as IMT Atlantique. The words 'culture' and 'cultural' appeared a number of times in the student writing samples, including in 'cultural awareness', 'different cultures' and 'cultural differences'. Some students wrote about the importance of 'open[ing] our mind' and 'develop[ing] cultural awareness', 'learn[ing] about different cultures', the importance of English in a 'complex social environment', etc. These reactions are significant in light of the potential for many of these students to work in international settings once they have completed their studies.

Social status

Some students showed awareness of accent as an indicator of social status. One group mentioned differences in spoken language due to "social, economical and geographical factors", while another group discussed speakers having different accents "depending on where you come from and what is your social status in society." This competency is in line with section 5.2.2.3 of the CEFR (121), which includes social class in the list of speaker characteristics that proficient speakers of English should be able to identify.

Bias / prejudice / accent discrimination / standardization

When asked what they learned from the class and how it fits in with other knowledge they had, many students tied accent discrimination into other forms

5 The C1 Forum was adapted to a Zoom format after the Covid-19 pandemic began, but still involved students learning from each other's projects.

of bias or prejudice that they know about, as well as raising standardization as a way in which attitudes toward speakers with different accents are demonstrated. They mentioned challenges that speakers with non-standard accents might face in job interviews, for example, along with student attitudes in the classroom toward instructors with foreign accents. They demonstrated an understanding that accent-related bias is «most of the time unconscious» and found that it is important to «take account of those biases to correct them and treat people fairly as we work.» This is encouraging, as many of these students will find themselves in managerial roles within a few years of graduating, so they should be less likely to discriminate against potential hires based on accent, for example.

Empathy/understanding

Some students showed evidence of an increase in empathy or understanding toward speakers with non-standard or foreign accents. For some students, understanding that "after a certain age, it is really difficult for someone to lose his/her native accent in a foreign language» seemed to help them «be more understanding and patient." Others found that the work done in class helped them "better understand what difficulties a non-native speaker might face." This type of empathy plays an important role in facilitating pluricultural spaces, which is one of the goals laid out in the CEFR CV.

Appreciation of differences

Studying in a school with a relatively high percentage of international students, it would seem to be important for students to recognize the value of what different students bring to the table. This indeed seems to be the case for some students, as one group wrote about the "opportunity to be with a lot of people who are not from France and we can work with them." For another group, a "foreign accent can be as beautiful as an inner circle accent." Appreciating differences ties back to empathy, which is one of the important aspects of being able to facilitate pluricultural spaces.

Not all groups seemed to reflect as much on topics related to social status, discrimination, etc. Some focused almost entirely on the fact that their understanding of different accents had improved. But many students did seem to gain an understanding of these different sociolinguistic aspects related to accent.

Conclusion

In this article, we have seen that it is possible to encourage reflection around diversity in a course that has a different primary subject. This can be done by including related material and encouraging discussion around it, as was done with Appalachian English and the three articles related to non-standard accents in academia. It can also be accomplished through the choice of materials used in

addressing the primary course objective. In this case, the primary course objective was to help learners better understand a variety of accents. In choosing content that contributed to this objective, thought was also given to encouraging learners to reflect on issues related to power (with the choice of *Amu*), stereotypes and identity (with *The Angel's Share*), and feminism and women's issues (through the work on rhoticity). Care was also taken in selecting content that gave representation of people from a variety of backgrounds (with the choice of Australian stand-up comics), or in pointing out the lack of representation in other contexts (in watching *Mountain Talk*).

Student writing at the end of the semester reflected that they had given thought to many of the issues raised in class, for example accent discrimination, not making assumptions about people based on their level of English (or French) or their accent, the value of different varieties of language, the role that social status plays in how valued a particular accent is, and being empathetic or understanding toward others. These are all elements of being able to "act effectively by adapting to different cultural contexts" (Gourvès-Hayward & Morace 2011) in today's highly interconnected world. It is encouraging that this type of reflection can take place in the context of a class whose primary objective is to help students better understand a variety of accents. Instructors in other subjects might be able to draw on the choices made in this course as inspiration for their own courses in thinking about ways to encourage reflection on the value of diversity, no matter the primary course content.

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Appendix

Below are some extracts from student writing at the end of the semester, with the most pertinent aspects in bolded text.

In what way has this C1/C1+ course contributed to your development as future engineers (empathy, thought clarification, ethical considerations, cultural awareness, work effectiveness, self-awareness, self-esteem, specific skills, etc.)?

> First of all, the content of this course was very meaningful since, as future engineers, we plan on having an international career, and focusing on not only English-speaking countries was essential, due to importance of working with everyone around the world. But working on accents, didn't only teach us about technical knowledge about phonetics and languages around the world. As a matter of fact, one of the main points of our English course this semester is to understand otherness. Otherness has its own particularities and it can be seen in the plurality of English pronunciations. It is an obvious cultural awareness and a way to open our mind about alterity through the different ways of speaking English. It is not insignificant that language is a method to confront otherness because it is a way to communicate with each other. So, understanding how communication "works", it is also an opportunity to understand other people. Therefore, we may have more empathy than before, when we could make a fast judgement on how bad someone's accent is. Moreover, learning about linguistic is scientifically interesting because it mixes an almost mathematical rationality and rules, and a long history that can explains the evolution of the way people speak a language.
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Compared to our B2.2 class, we found our C1 class a lot more based on **cultural awareness** which was really interesting throughout all the semester. This is maybe due to our theme which was "Accent on accents". During our classes we have learned a lot about phonetics, especially how vowels were pronounced all along England History and how people's English accents were influenced by their country of birth and their first language. Therefore, this class firstly taught us some phonetic skills: the ability to understand our mouth mechanics when we speak and also the ability to guess one's native country by their English accent. However, this class also helped us to be more aware of accent discrimination. We learned that one's accent, during a job interview, could be associated to cultural stereotypes. Depending on the interviewer, those stereotypes could influence whether or not you will be accepted for the job.. The worst thing about this type of discrimination is that it is most of the time unconscious. This is why we are convinced that the work we have done during these classes increased our self-awareness and our cultural awareness which will be essential in our future career. These qualities will be valued especially as we will surely deal in our career with people from all over the world, people with different backgrounds, people with different accents. (226 words)

During the semester, we worked with a bunch of documents. Through these, we developped our cultural awareness and learned a lot about different cultures, major differencies between french and other cultures.

But more importantly, it makes us raise our awareness about our biases caused by accents. Indeed, the latter may be a cause of prejudices as we found out in class. More specifically, they have negative impacts on the credibility and employability of the speaker notably in team work. It is important to take account of those biases to correct them and treat people fairly as we work.

As we have seen, this course helps us to better figure out the accent's problems, which is important in a as multicultural workspace as the engineer's one. It strengthens our versatility, fineness and indulgence in English in such a complex social environment.

In addition, reflecting on the ethical considerations related to accents made us aware of the issues involved: prejudice against people with strong accents, social discrimination, mockery… So that, we are able to be more understanding and patient with people who do not speak very well. This is clearly an asset for our future life as engineers.

> Thus, this course gave us a real technical background to better understand the different english accents that exist, which will be usefull in our engineer career giving the idea that we aim to work internationally. Moreover, the course allowed us to get a real reflexion about social discrimination around the world, a discrimination that seems to be far too common and need to be challenged.

What connections do you see between your final project and other classes you have taken at the school? Between your project and other knowledge or experience you had already had? Do you have any other thoughts on how this project relates to other things you know about?

> As future engineers meant to work in a global economy where English is the only common language, being aware of peculiarities of this language is an advantage. For instance, some of us will be working and/or studying abroad some in Asia, in the US but the English and more precisely the accent in the US is way different than the Indian one. By being aware of this differences in the spoken language due to social, economical and geographical factors, we tend to be more conscious of the cultural differences of each group of people. This course besides helping us building our cultural awareness also helped us being more aware of our accent and its causes by digging up some history of the spoken English (and French). It also learnt us to read phonetic language which can be useful when learning to speak an other language.
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> By learning the history of those accents, we tend to understand that a language is clearly not cast in stone and is meant to be modified so it is ever-changing but it is also shifting depending on where you come from and what is your social status in society. We understand that what we think as granted like the English language needs to be updated periodically.
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> Thanks to our Accents project, we learnt the reason why people often don't lose their native accent in another language when they are adults or adolescents. Thanks to the study published in the Journal of Phonetics in 2001, we understood that, after a certain age, it is really difficult for someone to lose his/her native accent in a foreign language. In fact, we can see this with many people at school. In this school, we have the opportunity to be with a lot of people who are not from France and we can work with them (most of the time in English at the beginning but then in French). The issue of accents is therefore really important.
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> Regarding the class on accents we managed to acquire some basic knowledge on how to identify different accents, which can always come in handy when you travel or meet new people. Also, it helps us to better understand what difficulties a non-native speaker might face…

… we learned to appreciate our own personal accent because it is part of who we are. Even if the desire for a melodious British accent or a cool American accent might be tempting, we still must keep in mind that a foreign accent can be as beautiful as an inner circle accent (if grammar is used correctly)

Chinese people from different regions speak Chinese with different accents, and students with different accents stay together for education. The interaction effect among them leads to the loss of their accents. On top of that, the popularization of standardized accent in school make students speak differently at school and in life. Gradually, most of them change while forgetting the accent and finally losing it.