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Anna Gralińska-Brawata

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7821-3706>

Uniwersytet Łódzki/ University of Łódź

anna.brawata@uni.lodz.pl

Exploring First- and Second-Year University Students' Attitudes towards English Pronunciation

Abstract: Pronunciation attitude surveys provide insight into learners' beliefs about L2 pronunciation, yet few studies examine how these attitudes differ at successive stages of formal pronunciation training. This study compares the attitudes of first- and second-year English majors at the University of Łódź to explore whether exposure to a two-semester pronunciation course is associated with differences in students' beliefs, self-assessment, and priorities. A total of 112 students completed a 23-item Likert-scale questionnaire addressing the role of pronunciation in language learning, accent preferences, nativeness versus intelligibility, identity, motivation, and self-evaluation. While most attitudes remained stable, significant differences appeared in students' prioritisation of pronunciation relative to grammar and vocabulary, and in their pronunciation self-assessment. Second-year students also expressed more decisive opinions and a stronger orientation towards the British pronunciation model used in their training. The findings suggest that pronunciation instruction may not radically change core beliefs but can influence how confidently and realistically learners evaluate their own pronunciation.

Keywords: EFL, L2 pronunciation, learner attitudes, English majors, self-assessment

1. Introduction

Learners' attitudes towards various pronunciation issues have become the focus of attention of many English pronunciation teachers and researchers and have been widely investigated in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) teaching and learning over the past two decades. Pronunciation attitude surveys, often employed as research tools in explorations of respondents' views, can provide valuable insights into many areas related to speaking skills and are particularly useful from a pedagogical perspective, as identifying the patterns in learners' motivation and beliefs may contribute to their success in EFL and ESL language learning (Ellis 1994). There are a number

of recurring themes that are present in many such studies, and which may reveal some crucial differences between learners based on their nationality, language proficiency level, gender, age, field of study, educational institution, and others.

2. Literature review

In the vast majority of those empirical investigations, the respondents generally believe that pronunciation is an important element of effective communication and that attaining good pronunciation is vital for various reasons (Benzies 2013; Jarosz 2021; Nowacka 2012; Szpyra-Kozłowska 2013; Waniek-Klimczak 1997). Its priority over grammar is not clear-cut, as it is viewed as more important than grammar in Lintunen/Mäkilähde's study (2018) and less important than grammar or vocabulary in an earlier study by Sobkowiak (2002). What seems to remain constant is learners' strong preference for native-like pronunciation (Brabcová/Skarnitzl 2018; Janicka et al. 2005; Nowacka 2012; 2022; Trofimovich/Isaac 2017) with 94% of Polish students (Waniek-Klimczak et al. 2013) and 95% of Italian participants (Duryagin/Dal Maso 2022) claiming they would like to pass for a native speaker of English. However, when asked about the sufficiency of being understood rather than sounding native-like, the respondents tend to be more divisive (Duryagin/Dal Maso 2022), and they often prioritise fluency and ease of communication over the need to achieve a native-like accent (Waniek-Klimczak 1997). The nativeness approach is particularly common among English majors, who often become English teachers or interpreters, whereas the intelligibility principle is preferred by students from non-linguistic fields, for whom English functions as a *lingua franca* (Gomez-Lacabex/Gallardo-del-Puerto 2021; Gomez-Lacabex/Roothoof 2023). For example, in the Polish context, speaking like a native speaker was a goal for 82% of students of English and 44% of students of economics (Waniek-Klimczak/Klimczak 2005).

Another frequent question included in pronunciation questionnaires concerns accent preferences. If students opt for native-like pronunciation, they tend to prefer the British English variety over the American one in the European countries (Benzies 2013; Dimitrova/Chernogorova 2012; Dimitrova/Filipov 2007; Nowacka 2022; Waniek-Klimczak 1997; Waniek-Klimczak/Klimczak 2005). A cross-section study conducted by Dimitrova and Filipov (2007) also showed that 65% of the first-year and 60% of the second-year Bulgarian students wished to speak with a standard British accent rather than an American one. Furthermore, there are

questionnaire-based studies trying to get some insight into students' beliefs about pronunciation instruction and how they are related to their attainment (Pawlak et al. 2015), or investigating the choice of strategies they opt for in pronunciation practice (Jarosz 2021; Szyszka 2021). Gender differences are also a subject of interest in the context of L2 and foreign speaking skills development. Research reveals that females are more critical towards their own pronunciation in English and declare more concern about their foreign accent than male learners (Dewaele/McCloskey 2014; Pietraszek 2021; Waniek-Klimczak et al. 2015).

Pronunciation anxiety has also been investigated with the use of questionnaires by various scholars in relation to a number of factors such as self-perceived English pronunciation competence (Szyszka 2011), fear of negative evaluation, or pronunciation self-image (Baran-Łucarz 2013). Recent research into this area reveals that higher levels of pronunciation anxiety (particularly fear of ridicule and concern about making mistakes) are observed among English majors (who also show greater sensitivity to lecturers' pronunciation and hold higher expectations in this regard) compared to students enrolled in engineering programs (Gomez-Lacabex/Roothoof 2023). Moreover, questionnaire-based pronunciation studies reveal that multilingual speakers tend to be more irritated by their own accent than by others' (Dewaele/McCloskey 2014), and participants' responses reveal a strong tendency for a close relationship between pronunciation and identity issues (Duryagin/Dal Maso 2022). (See Nowacka 2012, for a comprehensive list of pronunciation-related issues explored with the use of questionnaires).

There are not many studies of the type mentioned above that take into consideration the transformation of learners' attitudes, that is, year of study, or educational experience as an independent variable with the focus on the differences in the expressed views between more and less advanced learners. Most of such studies are cross-sectional studies that explore pronunciation attitudes of first- and second-year students (e.g., Dimitrova/Filipov 2007), BA vs. MA students (e.g., Waniek-Klimczak et al. 2015), secondary school learners before and after an intervention in a longitudinal study (Jarosz 2019), or three groups of students: before pronunciation course, right after the course and at three years, or more, after the course (e.g., Lintunen/Mäkilähde 2018; Sobkowiak 2002). The differences between the investigated groups are often not readily observable; nevertheless, some reach statistical significance. For example, in a large-scale study conducted among English majors, Sobkowiak (2002) found that students' year of study has an inverse effect on their active use of phonetic transcription, their pronunciation practice outside the classroom, and their assessment of transcription difficulty. A comprehensive

attitude survey by Waniek-Klimczak et al. (2015) revealed that BA students showed greater concern about eliminating Polish features from their English pronunciation than MA students. This may indicate that, as learners advance in their studies and gain experience, they become more accepting of their accent or more aware of the difficulties involved in achieving native-like pronunciation.

According to Levis (2015), successful L2 pronunciation often requires a shift in learners' beliefs, as they may hold conflicting views that hinder their progress. The dynamics of learners' pronunciation attitudes and beliefs has been observed in relation to motivations for achieving native-like pronunciation. Waniek-Klimczak et al. (2013) found that BA students were primarily driven by personal goals, such as enhancing their self-image, sounding impressive, and striving for perfection. In contrast, MA students approached pronunciation more pragmatically, focusing on effective communication and professional development. This suggests a shift from idealistic to more realistic and goal-oriented attitudes as students advance in their studies. A similar observation was made by Lintunen/Mäkilähde (2018: 68) who investigated the attitudes of three groups of Finnish university students: before formal training, right after formal training and at least three years after the training. The results of their study show, among others, that with increased experience, learners showed greater acceptance of non-native accents, lowered their expectations of native-like performance and assessed their own pronunciation more positively. The present study aims to examine the attitudes of advanced English learners towards various pronunciation-related issues and to assess the validity of these attitudes in light of previous research, with a particular focus on identifying differences between two groups of respondents: first- and second-year students. It does not adopt a longitudinal design tracking the same learners over time. Instead, it employs a cross-sectional comparison of two cohorts of English majors at different stages of the curriculum. The observed differences are therefore interpreted in relation to students' exposure to formal pronunciation training rather than as direct evidence of individual attitude change.

2. The study

2.1. Aims

The following study was conducted to examine the attitudes of first- and second-year university students toward their English pronunciation and to see whether there are differences between the two groups that may be associated with their different

stages of exposure to a two-semester pronunciation course and academic experience. It was assumed that the course content and the awareness raised during the formal training might impact the way students perceive certain issues related to pronunciation and identity. In order to examine these issues, later developed into specific statements evaluated by the participants in the questionnaire, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the attitudes of the two groups of participants towards the role of pronunciation in the context of foreign language learning?
2. What are the attitudes of the two groups of participants towards the relationship between pronunciation and identity?
3. What are the attitudes of the two groups of participants regarding accent preferences?
4. What are the attitudes of the two groups of participants with regard to nativeness or intelligibility principle?
5. What are the attitudes of the two groups of participants towards their own pronunciation?
6. What are the attitudes of the two groups of students with regard to motivation and pronunciation learning?
7. What insights do individual students' comments provide about the questionnaire and English pronunciation in general (qualitative data)?

2.2. Respondents

The participants in the study were 112 students of the English language, enrolled in a three-year BA program at the University of Łódź. They belonged to two groups: Year 1 group consisted of 56 first-year students; and in Year 2 group, there were 56 second-year students.

Year 1 (Y1)

The age of the Y1 group ranged from 17 (4%) to 22 (5%), with the modal age of 19 years (46%) ($M = 19.1$; $SD = 1.1$). 41 (73%) students were Polish and 15 (27%) were of other nationalities: 7 (10%) Ukrainian, 4 (6%) Turkish, 2 (3%) Chinese, 1 Japanese and 1 Belarusian. The vast majority of respondents were female: 44 (79%), 10 (18%) were male and 2 (4%) reported another gender. At the time of the study, the Y1 group had been learning English between 5 and 19 years ($M = 12.3$; $SD = 2.5$); for the majority of them (21%), it was the period of 12 years. Only 4 (7%) respondents had stayed in an English-speaking country for more than two weeks.

Year 2 (Y2)

The age of the Y2 group ranged from 18 (7%) to 23 (one respondent; 2%), and the majority of students (50%) were 20 years old ($M = 20.0$; $SD = 1.0$). 47 respondents were Polish (84%), 6 were Ukrainian (11%), 1 Belarusian, 1 Bulgarian, and 1 Chinese. 32 were female (73%), 12 were male (21%), and 3 identified as a different gender (5%). At the time of completing the questionnaire, the Y2 group had been learning English between 9 and 20 years ($M = 13.8$; $SD = 2.2$), with the most frequent answer of 15 years (36%). 8 (14%) students reported having stayed in an English-speaking country for more than two weeks.

2.3. Pronunciation courses

All English majors at the University of Łódź attend a two-semester pronunciation course during their first year of studies and a one-semester prosody course in the winter semester of their second year as part of their curriculum. Foreign students who come to study under the Erasmus program (or other exchange programs) may, and they often do, choose practical phonetics classes as one of the courses in their learning agreement. During the first-year course students learn about and practise individual English sounds with particular emphasis on the most problematic vowels and consonants, as well as words commonly mispronounced by learners of English. The model accent used in the classes is Standard Southern British English. The prosody course is focused on suprasegmental elements of pronunciation, accents of English and presentation skills. Both courses make use of a number of pronunciation textbooks and online materials, and engage students in a variety of practical activities allowing them to improve their pronunciation skills. Apart from these, in their first year the students attend a descriptive grammar course that covers segmental and suprasegmental elements of English pronunciation in a more theoretical way.

2.4. Questionnaire

The questionnaire designed for the study was intended to gather quantitative data and it included 23 statements that the respondents were asked to judge using a 5-point Likert scale, indicating whether they strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), are undecided (3), agree (4), or strongly agree (5) with them. These 23 statements assess a number of issues related to attitudes towards pronunciation in general,

students' own pronunciation, the relation between pronunciation and identity, the nativeness vs. intelligibility principle, motivation for learning pronunciation and accent preferences. Although they were assigned to six different categories, corresponding to first six research questions presented in Section 2.1, the statements are randomly distributed in the questionnaire. Each research question was represented by four statements numbered below according to their order in the questionnaire (with the exception of Question 4, which included three statements), for example:

Question 1. Attitudes towards the role of pronunciation in the context of foreign language learning

2. Good pronunciation makes one feel more confident.

6. Having good pronunciation is very important for me.

7. Pronunciation is more important than vocabulary and grammar.

21. Poor pronunciation in English makes a bad impression on the people you talk to.

The survey was presented to respondents in English and included biographical questions. These included age, gender, nationality, experience in learning English, and stays in English-speaking countries. As the final element of the questionnaire, respondents could optionally add general comments on the issues raised earlier in the form, in response to a single open-ended question.

2.5. Procedure and analysis

The questionnaire was prepared with the help of Microsoft Forms online tool and distributed to students via a link sent to them during the first meeting at the very beginning of the academic year. The students completed the questionnaire in class as an introduction to their practical phonetics course and to a subsequent discussion of a number of pronunciation issues proposed by the instructor or raised spontaneously by the students. Their responses, which consisted in selecting the chosen Likert-scale items (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), were calculated into the averages, as well as frequencies and percentages of individual answers assigned to three categories: (A) strongly agree/agree, (U) undecided, (D) strongly disagree/disagree. In order to observe whether the two groups of students differ in the degree of agreement or disagreement in their attitudes, a p-value of a t-test for independent samples was also computed.

3. Results

The attitudes of the two student groups towards different aspects of English pronunciation are summarised in Tables 1-6. Each table reflects a specific area investigated in this study and corresponds to the research questions introduced in Section 2.1 (i.e. attitudes towards students' own pronunciation, the relation between pronunciation and identity, accent preferences, general attitudes towards the role of pronunciation, nativeness vs. intelligibility principle, and motivation for pronunciation learning). All the tables display the percentages for the Likert-scale responses grouped into three categories (A, U, D), together with the mean and standard deviation values for both groups (Y1 and Y2) and for each statement individually. The final column presents the p-value for the t-test, calculated in order to determine the extent of significance of the differences between the investigated groups of students.

3.1. Role of pronunciation in language learning

Table 1 presents attitudes expressed by first- and second-year students regarding the role of pronunciation in foreign language learning. Both groups of participants agree with statement 2, stating that good pronunciation makes one feel more confident ($M = 4.6$ for both groups). Only one Y1 respondent disagreed with the opinion, three were undecided in the Y1 group, and two were undecided in the Y2 group. A slightly higher percentage of hesitating responses can be observed

Table 1. Attitudes expressed by two groups of participants towards the role of pronunciation in the context of foreign language learning

| Statement | Year 1 | | | | Year 2 | | | | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------------|
| | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | |
| 2. Good pronunciation makes one feel more confident. | 2 | 5 | 93 | 4.6 (0.7) | 0 | 4 | 96 | 4.6 (0.6) | 0.649 |
| 6. Having good pronunciation is very important for me. | 5 | 11 | 84 | 4.2 (0.9) | 0 | 12 | 88 | 4.3 (0.7) | 0.902 |
| 7. Pronunciation is more important than vocabulary and grammar. | 41 | 46 | 13 | 2.6 (1.0) | 64 | 32 | 4 | 2.2 (0.8) | 0.032 |
| 21. Poor pronunciation in English makes a bad impression on people you talk to. | 28 | 34 | 38 | 3.2 (0.9) | 39 | 34 | 27 | 2.9 (0.9) | 0.160 |

Year 1 ($N = 56$), Year 2 ($N = 56$); D – strongly disagree/disagree, U – undecided, A – strongly agree/agree, M – mean, SD – standard deviation, *p* – p-value

in statement 6, with again a high degree of agreement in both groups, showing that having good pronunciation is very important for first- and second-year students to a very similar extent. Again, only a small minority of first-year students (5%) expressed disagreement with the stated opinion.

Pronunciation is viewed as more important than grammar and vocabulary only by a few individuals in both groups (Y1: 7; Y2: 2). Almost half of first-year (46%) and a third of second-year participants (32%) are undecided with regard to statement 7. The difference between the two groups is more visible and statistically significant, with relation to the extent to which they disagree: 9 of Y1 respondents strongly disagreed and 14 disagreed, giving 41% of disagreement percentage among this group, while in the Y2 group, 10 students disagreed strongly and 26 disagreed, which resulted in 64% of the disagreeing participants. The rise in the disagreeing responses and the fall in the undecided option might be reflective of the university experiences related to the way the students were assessed in separate courses on pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, as well as of greater awareness of their competence and shortcomings in all three areas, and the conviction that pronunciation carries less communicative meaning than vocabulary and grammar. First-year students might not feel confident enough to decide on the hierarchy of importance among pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, as they surely devoted a lot of time in their secondary school to expanding vocabulary and refining their grammar, but pronunciation is the area most students regularly admit is often neglected by teachers. Some learners entering university might get the impression that it is, in fact, more important than they had thought, since they have separate classes on how to pronounce English in their academic curriculum. This could explain the dominance of the 'undecided' option in their responses.

The participants are more unanimous with regard to statement 21, according to which poor pronunciation in English makes a bad impression on people you talk to. Their responses are distributed in a relatively similar manner across the three categories (D, U, A), with a slight tendency of Y1 students to agree with the statement (38%), an inclination of Y2 students to disagree with it (39%), and quite high and identical percentages of undecided respondents in both groups (34%). The statement might touch on a delicate issue of judging people based on their pronunciation skills, and the reaction to it can be grounded in personal experiences and observations of peers in some communicative context. The lack of a more definite attitude towards this opinion might reflect a high level of acceptance of the learning process and of the various ways in which English learners may communicate orally in different contexts.

3.2. Pronunciation and identity

As illustrated in Table 2, there are no major differences between Y1 and Y2 students in their attitudes towards the relationship between pronunciation and identity. Both groups appear to be divided in their views on the claim presented in statement 4 (*I don't mind speaking English with some traces of Polish (or other native) accent*) and represent similar means (Y1: $M = 3.0$; Y2: $M = 3.1$) and relatively high standard deviation value (Y1: $SD = 1.5$; Y2: $SD = 1.1$), showing that the observed responses are more spread out. However, Y2 participants are more undecided than Y1 (Y1: $U = 14\%$; Y2: $U = 32\%$), and hence their responses are less numerous in other options. Y2 students seem to be less strict and more hesitant in their attitudes regarding statement 4, which might be an indication of their awareness gained in the pronunciation course of the fact that it is very difficult to eradicate all the traces of their native accent, and that they are going to be in the process for a long time, and hence they are more willing to accept the reality.

Table 2. Attitudes manifested by two groups of participants towards the relationship between pronunciation and identity

| Statement | Year 1 | | | | Year 2 | | | | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----------|----------|
| | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | |
| 4. I don't mind speaking English with some traces of Polish (or other native) accent. | 43 | 14 | 43 | 3.0 (1.5) | 30 | 32 | 38 | 3.1 (1.1) | 0.773 |
| 12. I don't mind being recognised as Polish (or other) by the way I speak English. | 34 | 23 | 43 | 3.2 (1.3) | 18 | 23 | 59 | 3.6 (1.1) | 0.121 |
| 18. Having good pronunciation in English means losing your Polish (or other) identity. | 95 | 5 | 0 | 1.3 (0.6) | 98 | 2 | 0 | 1.3 (0.5) | 0.476 |
| 19. Trying to imitate the native pronunciation in English makes me feel like somebody else. | 70 | 14 | 16 | 2.2 (1.3) | 64 | 18 | 18 | 2.2 (1.2) | 1.000 |

Year 1 ($N = 56$), *Year 2* ($N = 56$); *D* – strongly disagree/disagree, *U* – undecided, *A* – strongly agree/agree, *M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, *p* – *p*-value

Second-year respondents appear to care less about being recognized as Polish (or any other native nationality) by the way they speak (statement 12), compared to first-year participants (Y1: $A = 43\%$; Y2: $A = 59\%$). The proportions between 'agree' and 'disagree' categories in both groups differ, with a greater contrast in the Y2 group, and an equal percentage of 'undecided' responses (23%). Being identified

as Polish (or other) is strongly related to stereotypes and attitudes towards various nationalities (Torstensson 2010: 9). If stereotypes about one's country and nationality in some parts of the world tend to be rather negative, some would try to conceal traces that could reveal them, including pronunciation. However, stereotypes and attitudes can be dynamic, especially in multicultural globalized societies and among younger generations, in which there is more ground for restructuring or redefining them on the basis of personal experiences, workplace cooperation practices and any kind of cohabitation. People tend to become more tolerant of accent differences and, in turn, suffer less from bias and prejudice. Perhaps Y2 students are becoming more aware of non-native accent variation and the priority of communicating intelligible messages, and can more readily accept themselves speaking English with some traces of their native accent.

The respondents are particularly unanimous in their disagreement with statement 18 ($M = 1.3$ in both groups and low SD). In both groups, there was no single person who agreed that having good pronunciation in English means losing their native (Polish or other) identity, and only three Y1 respondents and one Y2 respondent opted for the 'undecided' response. This may suggest that students do not equate high proficiency in English pronunciation (which may mean the absence of native features in L2) with an act of distancing from one's native language and culture. Their strong disagreement (41 students of Y1 – 73% and 43 students of Y2 – 77% strongly disagreed; 12 students – 21% in each group disagreed) could be an indication of treating good L2 pronunciation as an additional competence that can make them appear more professional as English teachers or language specialists, and by no means influence their Polish (or other) identity.

Apart from national identity, the students were asked to express their attitudes towards self-identity in statement 19, which states that trying to imitate native English pronunciation makes them feel like they are somebody else. Again, the majority of respondents generally disagreed with this claim ($M = 2.2$ in both groups), however, to a lesser extent than in the previously analysed statement, and both groups behaved in a very similar way, as the distribution of responses is fairly comparable. The difference in the strength of disagreement is less pronounced in both groups with almost identical proportion of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses in the Y1 group (20:19) and a slight prevalence of 'strongly disagree' answers in the Y2 group (22:14). The results for this statement show that there is no regular tendency among English learners to perceive their foreign language speaking habits as associated with taking on a separate identity or losing their original ones. Switching between two languages (native and non-native) does not mean

switching between two identities, at least to the majority of respondents. There are 5 ‘strongly agree’ and 4 ‘agree’ responses in the Y1 group, and 3 ‘strongly agree’ and 7 ‘agree’ answers in the Y2 group, which reveals that there are individuals who feel a different person, at least to some extent, when trying to imitate native pronunciation in English, or, in other words, when endeavouring to get rid of the native traits in their speech. It might be the case that when students try to change certain features in their English pronunciation in the course of their practical phonetics course, they may feel uncomfortable with the process, as it had been years that they pronounced certain words or sounds in a given way, and in a new educational setting, they are encouraged to alter the articulations to which they are accustomed. There are stories of students who had difficulty learning the correct pronunciation of TH sounds, and when they finally mastered the dentals, they decided they would not pronounce them correctly because they felt TH sounds were not part of their identities (Levis 2014).

3.3. Accent preferences

As can be seen in Table 3, containing statements related to accent preferences, there are two types of structures, with the use of which the statements were formulated: *I find _____ accent pleasant to listen to* and *I’d like to speak with _____ accent*. The choice of accent possibilities was very limited and the two options were not in any way described to participants. It was assumed that the general labels ‘British accent’ and ‘American accent’ can be safely used to denote standard pronunciation patterns in England and the US without any confusion. Perhaps, in both groups,

Table 3. Attitudes expressed by two groups of participants regarding accent preferences

| Statement | Year 1 | | | | Year 2 | | | | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----------|----------|
| | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | |
| 14. I find the American accent pleasant to listen to. | 14 | 11 | 75 | 3.9 (1.2) | 25 | 16 | 59 | 3.5 (1.2) | 0.109 |
| 15. I find the British accent pleasant to listen to. | 13 | 14 | 73 | 4.1 (1.1) | 4 | 19 | 77 | 4.2 (1.0) | 0.725 |
| 16. I’d like to speak with the British accent. | 18 | 28 | 54 | 3.6 (1.2) | 16 | 21 | 63 | 3.9 (1.3) | 0.363 |
| 17. I’d like to speak with the American accent. | 25 | 27 | 48 | 3.3 (1.4) | 34 | 23 | 43 | 3.1 (1.4) | 0.412 |

Year 1 (*N* = 56), *Year 2* (*N* = 56); *D* – strongly disagree/disagree, *U* – undecided, *A* – strongly agree/agree, *M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, *p* – *p*-value

there were respondents who were already oriented towards some other varieties (e.g., Scottish, Irish, Canadian or Australian) and had no chance to express their favourites. The aim of this part of the survey, however, was to observe general preferences of university learners in terms of the two models of English that still exist in the EFL teaching world, and, more importantly, to observe whether the choices differ between first- and second-language respondents.

When it comes to the pleasantness of the American accent (statement 14), the means show a slightly greater tendency for Y1 participants ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.2$) to agree that the accent is pleasant to their ears than for Y2 ones ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.2$). In the group of Y1 participants, 42 agreed with the opinion (20 strongly), whereas among Y2 students, 33 expressed agreement (13 strongly). What is more, there are more disagreeing voices in the Y2 group (25%) than in the Y1 group (14%) and a few more 'undecided' responses in the former one (Y1: $U = 11\%$, Y2: $U = 16\%$). Interestingly, when the statement is altered to include the British accent (statement 15), one can observe a slightly unexpected trend. It turns out that there is a similar degree of agreement in both groups (Y1: $M = 4.1$, $SD = 1.1$; Y2: $M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.0$), showing greater popularity of the British pronunciation than the American one in terms of aesthetic impressions among the two investigated groups, especially with regard to second-year respondents. Only 2 Y2 students denied that they found the British accent pleasant to listen to, and none of them expressed it strongly, whereas in the Y1 group, there were 7 disagreeing voices (6 expressed strong disagreement).

What is more, we can observe that the responses about accent pleasantness are often not a matter of *either-or* way of thinking, but rather the expression of being fond of both varieties at the same time. Table 3.1 below shows responses for statements 14 and 15 that could appear contradictory in the conveyed opinions, but the results show that it does not necessarily need to be that way. 50% of Y1 respondents and 39% of Y2 participants find both accents pleasant to listen to. 20% in the former group express strong agreement and the percentage within the latter group is 11%. A lower degree of agreement with both statements was observed among 9% of Y1 and 13% of Y2 students. Various degrees of agreement (choosing either 'agree' for statement 14 and 'strongly agree' for statement 15, or the other way round) were observed in the responses of 21% of Y1 and 16% of Y2 participants. When it comes to providing complementary information about preferences in the two statements (agreeing that the American accent is pleasant and at the same time disagreeing that the British one is pleasant to their ears, or the other way round), 21% of Y1 and 29% of Y2 students demonstrated that pattern. A strong contrast

in answers (choosing ‘strongly agree’ for statement 14 and ‘strongly disagree’ for statement 15, or the other way round) was expressed by 3 Y1 (5%) and 6 Y2 students (11%). Lesser contrast (which would mean assigning points in both statements in the following way: 5:2, 2:5, 4:1, 1:4, 4:2 or 2:4) can be noted in the responses of 16% of Y1 and 18% of Y2 participants.

Table 3.1. Similarities and differences in accent preferences between statement 14 and statement 15 in *Year 1* (N = 56) and *Year 2* (N = 56) groups

| Response pattern | Attitude | Year 1 | Year 2 |
|--------------------------|---|----------|----------|
| Both accents liked: | strong agreement with both statements | 11 (20%) | 6 (11%) |
| | agreement with both statements | 5 (9%) | 7 (13%) |
| | (strong) agreement with both statements | 12 (21%) | 9 (16%) |
| Total | | 28 (50%) | 22 (39%) |
| Contrasting preferences: | strong contrast in preferences | 3 (5%) | 6 (11%) |
| | contrast in preferences | 9 (16%) | 10 (18%) |
| Total | | 12 (21%) | 16 (29%) |

Number of responses and percentage against the group in brackets

According to the descriptive statistics for statements 16 and 17, more students would prefer a British accent to an American one. The preference towards the British accent (statement 16) was demonstrated by 54% of Y1 and 63% of Y2 respondents, while the willingness to speak the American way (statement 17) was expressed by 48% of Y1 and 43% of Y2 participants. Once again, Y2 students slightly outnumbered those in Y1 (Y1: 30 – 54%; Y2: 35 – 63%). A total of 25 respondents (45%) selected ‘strongly agree’ for statement 16 (19 in the Y1 group). In contrast, responses to statement 17 were more evenly divided, particularly among Y2 students: 43% agreed, 34% disagreed, and the remainder indicated uncertainty. As many as 48% of first-year participants agreed that they would like to speak with the American accent, compared to 25% who disagreed. The considerable variation of the selected options is manifested in a high standard deviation score in both groups ($SD = 1.4$), showing that the respondents differ in their attitudes within their groups to a similar degree. We have also observed that some individuals opt for both varieties to the same or similar degree: 10 respondents in both groups agree (or strongly agree) with statements 16 and 17. Only 8 Y1 and 11 Y2 students strongly disagreed with one statement and strongly agreed with the other.

Generally, the results for statements presented in Table 3 show the tendency for more experienced students to find the American accent less pleasant to listen

to and less preferred for speaking, which might be the consequence of the standard British English oriented pronunciation course that they are obliged to attend during the first year of studies. The extent of exposure to the accent and practicing its sounds may have reinforced their familiarity with the variety and the impression of feeling more at home.

3.4. Nativeness vs intelligibility

As regards the respondents' attitudes concerning the priority of nativeness or intelligibility (Table 4), there were three statements formulated and presented to them for consideration. As for statement 1 (*My foreign accent is not a problem as long as people can understand me*), almost half of the first-year students and slightly over a half of second-year respondents tend to accept their accented speech on condition that it is intelligible to their interlocutors. 11 Y1 and 6 Y2 individuals expressed their disagreement to the statement, perhaps for aesthetic and ambition reasons. For them, intelligibility may not be enough, and they would like to strive for perfection and achieve more native-like pronunciation. A relatively high proportion of undecided respondents (Y1: 32%; Y2: 36%) may indicate the fact that it is genuinely difficult for them to judge which of the two should be valued higher: near-native accent or intelligibility. Some of the students in this group may also be reluctant to accept their native-language traces in English, but at the same time, they realise that, for effective communication, it is not necessary to have a native accent.

Table 4. Attitudes expressed by two groups of participants with regard to the nativeness or intelligibility principle

| Statement | Year 1 | | | | Year 2 | | | | <i>p</i> |
|--|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----------|----------|
| | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | |
| 1. My foreign accent is not a problem as long as people can understand me. | 20 | 32 | 48 | 3.4 (1.2) | 11 | 36 | 54 | 3.7 (1.0) | 0.198 |
| 3. I'd like to speak English like a native speaker. | 2 | 11 | 87 | 4.5 (0.8) | 5 | 7 | 88 | 4.4 (0.8) | 0.726 |
| 22. I prefer listening to native English speakers rather than non-native ones. | 29 | 39 | 32 | 3.1 (1.0) | 29 | 26 | 45 | 3.3 (1.3) | 0.334 |

Year 1 (*N* = 56), Year 2 (*N* = 56); *D* – strongly/disagree, *U* – undecided, *A* – strongly agree/agree, *M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, *p* – p-value

Much fewer hesitant students were noted for statement 3 (*I'd like to speak like a native speaker*), and this is true for both groups of respondents (Y1: 11%; Y2: 7%). A great majority in the two observed groups (Y1: 87%; Y2: 88%) admit that they would like to sound like native speakers of English. Only one first-year student and three second-year ones disagreed with the opinion (neither of them strongly). The results for the statement confirm a long-term, expected trend among English majors who still look up to a native-speaker model, which is surely boosted by the teaching, textbooks, and resources used in the pronunciation courses.

Despite their willingness to speak like native speakers, the respondents do not seem particularly interested in receiving native input. A third of Y1 students and slightly fewer than half of Y2 students prefer listening to native speakers rather than non-native speakers (statement 22). The dominant answer in the Y1 group was 'I'm not sure' (39%), which may indicate that those who chose this response had not paid much attention to the accent they were exposed to. The lower percentage in the 'undecided' category and a higher agreement proportion in the Y2 group may indicate greater knowledge of native phonological features and heightened awareness of accent variation among the more experienced students.

3.5. Self-assessment

Table 5 shows attitudes expressed by Y1 and Y2 students with regard to their own pronunciation proficiency. Both groups in the vast majority disagree with the statement that they do not care about their pronunciation (Y1: $M = 1.6$, $SD = 0.8$;

Table 5. Attitudes expressed by two groups of participants towards their own pronunciation

| Statement | Year 1 | | | | Year 2 | | | | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------------|
| | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | |
| 5. I don't care about my pronunciation. | 91 | 4 | 5 | 1.6 (0.8) | 98 | 2 | 0 | 1.4 (0.5) | 0.336 |
| 9. My pronunciation in English is very good. | 21 | 43 | 36 | 3.1 (0.9) | 9 | 45 | 46 | 3.4 (0.8) | 0.046 |
| 20. I think my pronunciation in English is poor. | 68 | 21 | 11 | 2.1 (1.0) | 77 | 19 | 4 | 1.9 (0.8) | 0.263 |
| 23. I need to work on my pronunciation more than on vocabulary and grammar in improving my speaking skills. | 39 | 39 | 22 | 2.9 (0.9) | 54 | 28 | 18 | 2.6 (0.9) | 0.102 |

Year 1 ($N = 56$), Year 2 ($N = 56$); *D* – strongly disagree/disagree, *U* – undecided, *A* – strongly agree/agree, *M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, *p* – p-value

Y2: $M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.5$) and they seem quite determined in their conviction. Thirty-three Y1 students (59%) strongly disagree, and 18 (32%) disagree. The same number of Y2 students strongly disagree and 22 (39%) express less strong disagreement. Interestingly, 3 (5%) of the Y1 participants agreed that they did not care about their English pronunciation, while none of the Y2 participants opted for this response. The number of 'undecided' responses was low and did not differ much between the groups.

Y2 students may have become more convinced about the importance of pronunciation and that it is worth paying attention to the way they speak as none of them agreed with statement 5 (*I don't care about my pronunciation*), whereas three first-year students, who had no formal instruction or theoretical background on pronunciation provided before entering university, selected the response 'agree' in the questionnaire. There were also fewer undecided students in the Y2 group, which could be due to pronunciation training and heightened awareness. The high degree of disagreement with this statement might also come from the way it was formulated. If you admit openly that you do not really care about pronunciation, some people might perceive you as ignorant, not professional or even rude. Can you not care about pronunciation while being a university student of English? Is it okay not to care about it? Perhaps some of the respondents resolved not to risk the impression of being a reluctant student and/or liked the pronunciation teacher whom they did not want to disappoint.

The next two statements in Table 5 express respondents' judgements of their own pronunciation, whether they perceive it as 'very good' (statement 9) or 'poor' (statement 20). The former one is the only statement in the table that shows significant differences between the two groups. It is also the only statement with a very high percentage of undecided answers (Y1: 43%; Y2: 45%). The difference here is most pronounced in strongly disagree/disagree (D) responses (Y1: 21%; Y2: 9%), indicating that Y1 students are more strict in assessing their own pronunciation than Y2 students. A similar tendency can be observed in statement 20, to which only two (4%) Y2 respondents reacted with a claim that their pronunciation is poor, as opposed to six (11%) first-year individuals. There are fewer undecided (U) responses in both groups in comparison to the previous statement and generally the degree of disagreement is much higher in the case of 'poor' than in the case of 'good', which may prove that both groups tend to view their articulation skills as rather positive (however, with a considerable degree of hesitation) than negative.

The phrases 'very good' and 'poor' may mean slightly different things to Y1 and Y2 students. The latter group's self-image in terms of speaking skills might

have been modified by the one-year pronunciation course that equipped them with the knowledge of the appropriate articulation of sounds and accent consistency, which they had known little about before. By ‘very good’, they may understand consistent non-rhoticity, perfect TH sounds, clear vowel contrasts and appropriate aspiration (covered during the course). Y1 students may have some knowledge of these features, or even all of the mentioned elements, in their pronunciation, but at the same time, they may be unaware of them and rely more on fluency, intonation, and overall impression. What is more, we do not know to what extent Y2 students based their judgements of their pronunciation on the final grade in their practical phonetics course, their teachers’ and their peers’ comments or their own subjective perceptions of their performance. Additionally, the high percentage of undecided responses in both groups to statement 9 may be related, in some cases, to certain personality traits and low self-esteem observed in some learners. They may not feel the right to say that they are good at something and may underestimate their skills.

In terms of prioritizing the area of speaking skills that respondents feel they should improve, pronunciation does not seem to override grammar and vocabulary. Only 22% of the Y1 students and 18% of the Y2 students agreed with statement 23 (*I need to work on my pronunciation more than on vocabulary and grammar in improving my speaking skills*), with the mean 2.9 in the first group and 2.6 in the second one, and a relatively high proportion of undecided Y1 students (39%).

Y2 students appear to be more aware of their levels in the individual components of their speaking skills. They got regular feedback in classes and in practical exams (PNJA) in the first year of their studies. In the oral exam, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are assessed separately, and the results may give students some idea of their competence in each area. Perhaps this can explain fewer undecided students in this group, as they can better recognize their strong and weak points in oral performance. Moreover, their disagreement with the statement is more noticeable in the proportions of *D* responses (Y1: 39%; Y2: 54%), with over half of participants viewing vocabulary and grammar as areas they should focus on more in their learning process.

3.6. Motivation

The final table (Table 6) contains statements reflecting attitudes connected with motivation and pronunciation learning. The results show a high degree of agreement with all the statements (8, 10, 11, 13) presented in the table. The highest mean in both groups was observed for statement 11 (Y1: $M = 4.8$; Y2: $M = 4.7$), indicating

that, within this category, respondents are most unanimous in agreeing that they can improve their English pronunciation during their studies. There was only one hesitant individual in each group and nobody expressed their disagreement with the statement. The only and minimal difference in the results between the two groups lies in the proportion of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses (Y1 47:8; Y2 41:14). The two groups may, however, differ in the motivation behind their opinion; Y1 students may express their hopes and high expectations before attending the pronunciation course, while Y2 majors can draw some conclusions from their own observations and experience they gained during the training. The latter group may also feel that they learnt a lot about the phonology of English and the proper articulation of sounds after a one-year pronunciation course, as this area of learning English is usually unexplored at the level of secondary education and is a novelty to them, unlike grammar, vocabulary, or writing skills.

Table 6. Attitudes manifested by two groups of students with regard to motivation and pronunciation learning

| Statement | Year 1 | | | | Year 2 | | | | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------|-----|-----|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----------|----------|
| | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | D % | U % | A % | M (SD) | |
| 8. I'm interested in learning about correct pronunciation in English very much. | 5 | 9 | 86 | 4.3 (0.8) | 9 | 21 | 70 | 4.0 (1.0) | 0.129 |
| 10. It is ok for me when somebody corrects my pronunciation mistakes. | 0 | 14 | 86 | 4.3 (0.7) | 0 | 5 | 95 | 4.5 (0.6) | 0.120 |
| 11. I believe I can improve my English pronunciation during my studies. | 0 | 2 | 98 | 4.8 (0.4) | 0 | 2 | 98 | 4.7 (0.5) | 0.224 |
| 13. I pay attention to the way I pronounce individual words in English. | 6 | 14 | 80 | 4.0 (0.9) | 9 | 25 | 66 | 3.8 (0.9) | 0.252 |

Year 1 (N = 56), Year 2 (N = 56); D – strongly disagree/disagree, U – undecided, A – strongly agree/agree, M – mean, SD – standard deviation, *p* – p-value

Another statement in this category that noted no disagreeing voices was statement 10 (*It is ok for me when somebody corrects my pronunciation mistakes*), with a few more undecided students in both groups (Y1: *U* = 8; Y2: *U* = 3) than in the case of statement 11. The relatively strong agreement (Y1: *M* = 4.3; Y2: *M* = 4.5) may result from respondents' eagerness to improve their English pronunciation and awareness that progress without correction is not possible when it comes to such a practical skill. The students do not seem to mind being corrected, although

the statement does not make it clear who would be the one to do the correcting. Since the study was conducted in an academic setting, they can expect their pronunciation instructor, other academic teachers, or their peers to comment on their speaking performance in university classrooms. Perhaps the results would be different if the social context was changed. Moreover, Y2 students seem to be more open to receiving criticism. It might be due to the experience of getting regular feedback on their recorded speech during the pronunciation course and immediate in-class corrections. They might have grown used to frequent comments from their teachers and peers and have come to see the educational value in them.

The respondents are generally very interested in learning the correct pronunciation in English (statement 8 – Y1: $M = 4.3$; Y2: $M = 4.0$). This result shows that the enthusiasm and willingness to explore the articulatory intricacies of the English language, which they had often studied for years prior to their university education, are at a high level in both groups, and they do not drop dramatically (Y1: $A = 86\%$; Y2: $A = 70\%$) after completing a two-semester pronunciation course. What is more, more than half of the respondents in both groups strongly agreed with the formulated opinion in this category. However, a slight decline in interest in learning English pronunciation can be observed among Y2 students, with some expressing hesitation. Compared to Year 1, two more Year 2 participants disagreed (Y1: $D = 5\%$; Y2: $D = 9\%$), and seven more indicated uncertainty (Y1: $U = 9\%$; Y2: $U = 21\%$). The experience of pronunciation practice in the academic setting may have been challenging for some of the students and weakened their motivation. They could also think their pronunciation is good enough, or they would not agree completely with the extent of interest expressed in the statement, particularly with the use of the phrase ‘very much’ at the end of it.

80% of Y1 respondents agreed (30% of them strongly) that they pay attention to the way they pronounce individual words in English (statement 13). The number of Y2 students in this category is lower (66%), and more of them are not sure of their attitudes towards this matter or disagree. The result for this statement seems surprising, as one would expect the second-year group to be more aware and cautious about the correct pronunciation of individual words than the first-year group. Y2 students had the opportunity to receive explicit instruction and exposure on a regular basis, as well as practice with words that tend to be mispronounced by English learners. Perhaps at this point, they try to concentrate mostly on connected speech processes and the fluency of their utterances, and view focusing on separate words as unnatural and as breaking the stream of speech.

3.7. Qualitative data: students' comments

Forty-five (66%) respondents in the Y1 group decided to make a comment in the final section of the questionnaire. However, only 17 of them provided any relevant information regarding Research Question 7. The remaining ones were either giving information about not having a comment (“no comment”, “I don’t know”), giving thanks for the questionnaire, or wishing a good day. In the Y2 group, there were only two comments left, which does not make it possible to observe any differences in attitudes, opinions or any issue that could be raised with regard to pronunciation between the two investigated groups. The participants were not prompted, guided or restricted in their comments in any way, and an attempt was made to order the answers according to some discernible themes. All the comments were left in English.

The first and most general topic in the comments of first-year students was the importance of pronunciation and improving it. Five students shared their attitudes expressing similar views on the role of pronunciation, often in relation to their eagerness to sound like a native speaker:

1. I consider correct pronunciation as one of the fundamental parts of learning a language and would really like to learn more about so that with help of these classes and studies, later in the future I can sound like a native speaker.
2. Correct pronunciation is important for me so I can learn to speak with the British accent.
3. I want to improve my pronunciation, and that’s why I wanted to be in this class.
4. I want to improve my pronunciation. But it’s okay if i make a mistakes because I’m here to learn.
5. I don’t think pronunciation is the most important thing but I would like to speak a bit more like an English native (so that it’s easier to understand).

Five other respondents commented on their goals in terms of pronunciation emphasizing correctness rather than the priority of sounding like a native speaker of English (6, 7) or accent preferences for themselves (8, 10) and as a standard taught in schools (9):

6. I only care about pronouncing words correctly and understandably, I do not care about accents nor seeming like a native.
7. One of my primary goals is to sound natural and be fluent in my speaking skills as well as stick to grammatically correct pronunciation.
8. I would like to have a Cockney accent.

9. I think that American English is easier and more useful for students and it should be taught at school more than British.
10. I would really like to speak English with a perfect British RP accent. I think that if we're understood by others, it's not a big problem to have some traces of a foreign accent in English, but personally, I would prefer to reduce my Polish accent in English as much as possible, so that I sound better and feel better while speaking English. Besides, I would like to become an English teacher, so I need to have correct pronunciation – otherwise I won't be able to teach my students to speak correctly. Finally, I think that pronunciation is an important part of the language (just as grammar, vocabulary etc.), so if we want to be able to say that we speak English at a high level, we should learn the correct, standard pronunciation just like we learn any other language skill.

Two students wrote about confidence that could be boosted by good pronunciation (11, 12) and one expressed his or her concern with regard to the speaking exam (13):

11. I believe one's pronunciation can make you feel more confident, and gives you some pleasure from speaking it, yet vocabulary is far more important to communicate because what of pronunciation if you even don't know the word.
12. I need to be more confident.
13. I'm very stressed that because of my pronunciation I will not be able to pass the speaking exam.

The remaining comments were devoted to expressing opinions on the questionnaire and enthusiasm towards the pronunciation course:

14. I don't think I have any particular comments, but this questionnaire was interesting. I haven't thought about things like these much.
15. Great test!
16. This questionnaire is a great idea for students to decide how they would like to learn about phonetics
17. Hello, I'm really looking forward to taking your course!

The two comments provided by two second-year respondents were:

1. I felt good in the first course.
2. It would be a nice idea if there was a division between British and American pronunciation groups, so that students could choose which accent they would practice more and they won't be forced to study the accent they don't want.

4. Discussion

The analysis of questionnaire responses indicates that first- and second-year university students of English generally share similar attitudes toward pronunciation, suggesting that intensive pronunciation training and overall university experience exert only a limited influence on learners' underlying beliefs. The relatively similar distribution of responses across the two groups indicates that students' attitudes towards pronunciation remain broadly consistent during the first two years of their studies. It should be emphasised that the respondents represent a specific group of language learners, namely English majors who are likely to pursue careers as teachers, translators or language specialists, and who may therefore display heightened sensitivity to pronunciation norms and professional standards of language use.

Overall, the results reveal no substantial differences between first- and second-year students' attitudes towards pronunciation. Nevertheless, closer examination of the data reveals certain tendencies and shifts in the proportions of responses to particular questionnaire items. The most noticeable difference concerns the students' evaluation of their own pronunciation. Second-year students tend to assess their pronunciation more positively than first-year students, which may be related to increased exposure to pronunciation instruction, greater familiarity with assessment criteria and more frequent feedback. At the same time, a considerable number of respondents in both groups remain cautious in their self-assessment, which may reflect the subjective nature of pronunciation evaluation.

Another area in which some differences can be observed relates to the perceived importance of pronunciation in comparison with grammar and vocabulary. Although pronunciation is generally regarded as an important component of language competence, students in both groups express a greater need to improve grammatical accuracy and lexical range. This tendency is more evident among second-year students, who also more clearly reject the idea that pronunciation should be considered more important than grammar and vocabulary. This may indicate a more balanced understanding of speaking skills as comprising several interrelated components.

In terms of identity, the findings suggest that both groups display a strong sense of national and personal identity, which does not appear to be substantially affected by pronunciation training or academic experience. At the same time, second-year students seem to be less concerned about retaining traces of a native accent or being recognised as non-native speakers on the basis of pronunciation.

This may point to increased acceptance of accented speech and greater awareness of the diversity of English pronunciation.

Preferences for pronunciation models reveal a clear inclination towards British English in both groups, particularly with regard to aesthetic judgements and preferred accent for production. This tendency is stronger among second-year students. While this finding differs from the results reported by Dimitrova and Filipov (2007), it may be influenced by the instructional context of the present study, in which British English constitutes the dominant pronunciation model.

Despite the growing prominence of English as an international language, the majority of respondents in both groups express a desire to speak like native speakers. At the same time, a substantial proportion of students do not regard non-native accented speech as problematic, provided it remains intelligible. Moreover, fewer than half of the respondents report a clear preference for listening to native speakers over non-native speakers. These results suggest that learners may simultaneously endorse native-speaker norms and intelligibility-based criteria, reflecting a certain degree of ambivalence in their pronunciation attitudes.

Finally, both first- and second-year students strongly believe that their pronunciation can improve over the course of their studies. This finding points to generally high motivation and a positive orientation towards pronunciation learning, which may constitute an important factor supporting continued engagement with pronunciation instruction at the university level.

5. Limitations

The study is not free from limitations that should be addressed. First of all, the cross-sectional approach cannot track down the dynamics of change in individual learners' attitudes. The longitudinal approach could be implemented here as an invaluable source of information in following the way individual learners' attitudes develop and transform. What is more, the results of the present study would be more comprehensive and representative of the English majors if both of the investigated groups (Year 1 and Year 2) were more numerous. A relatively small representation of foreign students is also a drawback to this investigation, as their limited numbers and diverse nationalities did not allow treating them as a homogenous group (or nationality as a separate factor) that could reveal some individual patterns in the attitudes examined in the present paper. However, a preliminary insight into their responses did not reveal any considerable differences when compared

to their Polish fellow students' replies, and that is why they were ultimately included among the main two groups. Secondly, the final part of the questionnaire (Students' comments) could have been enhanced by suggesting specific topics related to the questionnaire or other pronunciation-related issues, which might have encouraged more detailed responses.

6. Conclusions

The present study explored the attitudes of first- and second-year English majors towards pronunciation and potential differences related to pronunciation training and academic experience. Overall, attitudes were similar across the two groups, suggesting that they are relatively stable and not substantially changed by formal instruction alone.

Some tendencies were noted: second-year students evaluated their own pronunciation more positively, placed slightly less emphasis on pronunciation over grammar and vocabulary, and were more accepting of non-native accentedness. Both groups maintained a strong sense of national and personal identity, a preference for British English, and a general orientation toward native-speaker pronunciation, while also valuing intelligibility.

To sum up, beyond providing insight into learners' current attitudes towards pronunciation, the study suggests that the pedagogical value of pronunciation courses may lie not only in developing articulatory skills, but also in shaping learners' awareness, confidence, and belief systems regarding spoken communication. This perspective highlights pronunciation instruction as an important factor in learners' overall conceptualisation of speaking competence in L2 English.

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