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# EMERGING BILINGUALS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TARGET PRONUNCIATION

## *Actitudes de los bilingües emergentes hacia la pronunciación meta*

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**ABSTRACT**

This research explores how 95 English-dominant emerging bilinguals perceive English-accented Spanish across varying proficiency levels. The study examined the impact of self-reported Spanish language proficiency in the dimensions of Spanish grammar, pronunciation, and overall ability on positive and negative evaluations of recordings with differing degrees of foreign-accented Spanish-English speech. Results revealed that although self-reported proficiency did not significantly modulate the ratings of the recordings, the High Proficiency group gave overall more positive ratings to the recordings. Some significant differences were found, however, between the ratings of the recordings for positive and negative attributes. These findings suggest that the perception of second language accentedness constitutes a noteworthy feature of the emerging bilingual experience. They also suggest a relationship between language proficiency levels, highlighting the importance of considering proficiency when interpreting views of degree of foreign-accented speech.

**Keywords**: language attitudes, language identity, second language pronunciation, emerging bilingual.

**RESUMEN**

Esta investigación explora las percepciones de 95 bilingües emergentes de distintos niveles de proficiencia hacia la interferencia del inglés en la pronunciación del español en una serie de grabaciones. El estudio examinó el impacto de la autoidentificada proficiencia del español de los participantes en las dimensiones de gramática, pronunciación y capacidad general del español tanto en las evaluaciones positivas como en las negativas de esas grabaciones con diferentes grados de acento extranjero. Los resultados revelaron que, aunque la autoidentificada proficiencia no impactó significativamente las evaluaciones de las grabaciones, el grupo de alto dominio dio, en general, calificaciones más positivas hacia las grabaciones. Sin embargo, se encontraron algunas diferencias significativas entre las calificaciones de las grabaciones en cuanto a atributos positivos y negativos. Estos resultados sugieren que la percepción del acento en la segunda lengua constituye una característica notable de la experiencia del bilingüe emergente. También sugieren una relación entre los niveles de proficiencia del idioma,

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destacando la importancia de considerar la proficiencia al interpretar las opiniones sobre el nivel del acento extranjero.
**Palabras clave**: actitudes lingüísticas, identidad lingüística, pronunciación de una segunda lengua, bilingüe emergente.

# 1. Emerging bilinguals' attitudes towards target pronunciation

Many definitions exist in the discourse surrounding bilingualism. On one end of this continuum, Bloomfield posits that true bilingualism necessitates the native-like mastery of both languages (Butler & Hakuta, 2004, p. 114; Grosjean, 2022, p. 10). However, given the exclusivity inherent in such a criterion, other scholars advocate for a definition that encompasses individuals who regularly engage with two or more languages, as articulated by Grosjean (2022, pp. 10-11). This conceptualization fosters inclusivity, enabling individuals living with multilingualism to acknowledge and take pride in their bilingual identity, a sentiment inhibited when fluency —often measured as equal fluency in two or more languages— stands as the primary criterion for self-identification as bilingual (Grosjean, 2022, p. 11). Furthermore, this definition acknowledges bilingualism as a dynamic process rather than a static culmination, thereby accommodating variability in bilingual processes and outcomes. Grosjean (2022) likewise introduces the notion of "potential bilinguals", which he defines as individuals possessing proficiency in a second language but not incorporating it into their daily lives. Consequently, this definition encompasses not only so-called balanced bilinguals, but also sequential bilinguals who acquire their second language later in life, whether as a foreign language or through alternative late-learning settings. This perspective recognizes divergent levels of linguistic proficiency and accuracy, extending to pronunciation precision as well as varying degrees of identification with the foreign language and its speaker community.

## 2. Bilingualism as emerging in late-learners

"Emerging bilingualism", a term frequently employed to describe bilingual development occurring in early childhood but subsequent to the simultaneous bilingual phase (Espinosa, 2015), has garnered prominence in the past decade, particularly within the literature addressing bilingualism in educational contexts such as immersion and dual-language schools (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010). Despite the prevailing designations of students in settings such as English language learners (ELLs) or limited English proficiency learners (LEPs), these classifications tend to engender a predisposition toward perceiving these learners as inferior to monolingual or pre-established bilingual speakers. In response, Garcia (2009) contends that the term "emergent" is a more equitable alternative to ELL (or LEP) when instructing children who possess proficiency in another language. This nomenclature alludes to the positive quality of their bilingual status, fostering an optimistic perspective evident in its nuanced yet impactful connotation.

Considering the potential debate regarding the efficacy of defining early aged students learning an L2 as "emergent bilinguals", Garcia and Kleifgan (2010) assert definitively, "English learners are, in fact, emergent bilinguals. That is, through school and through acquiring English, these students become bilingual" (p. 3). By extension, we posit that individuals learning Spanish in educational or immersion settings similarly qualify as emergent bilinguals, as their bilingual status evolves through the acquisition of Spanish.

A historical precedent exists for designating early bilingual learners as "emergent", a nomenclature that is progressively gaining traction (Garcia & Kleifgan, 2010), particularly in the context of individuals characterized as late learners of an additional language. Given that the present study pertains to second language learners beyond elementary school age, an inquiry arises concerning how bilingualism may be conceptualized as emerging in late(er) learners. The notion of emergence, denoting the process of becoming known or evident, is applicable to various facets of second or foreign language acquisition, including phonology, morphology, syntax, prosody, and

lexicon, among others. Consequently, we assert that the term "emerging bilingual" is both apt and justifiable when delineating the linguistic development of late learners acquiring proficiency in another language. Emergent bilingualism acknowledges the dynamic and evolving nature of language acquisition and recognizes the diverse linguistic backgrounds, cultural diversity, and experiences of individuals who are in the process of developing proficiency in other languages.

As discussed, the acquisition of another language entails the emergence of numerous skills and features, with increased experience and practice correlating with enhanced language proficiency over time. The refinement of pronunciation, a pivotal component of bilingual competence, can be achieved through intentional practice, as highlighted by Elliott (1997). Despite this, other studies have found inconsistent findings when exploring the impact of pronunciation training (Lord, 2010). As learners advance in their mastery of the second language (L2), there is an observable shift in their perceptions of specific linguistic elements as well as attitudes toward the language and its speakers. Even though this aspect has received limited attention in the existing literature (LeVelle & Levis, 2014), our study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the potential evolution of learners' identities in tandem with their L2 proficiency. In particular, we endeavor to ascertain whether the indications of bilingualism in learners can be discerned as emergent in relation to their evolving L2 proficiency.

In the upcoming sections, we explore the nuanced definition of foreign accents, focusing specifically on salient features of English-influenced Spanish, followed by an exploration of the connection between attitudes and identities regarding L2 pronunciation.

## 3. Foreign Accent Definition and Implications

Although there is no widely-accepted definition of a foreign accent (Green & Wells, 1927, as cited in Munro, 1998), it generally refers to nonpathological speech by second language learners that differs systematically from the speech characteristics of native speakers, encompassing elements such as non-target-like sounds, speaking rates, intonation patterns, prosody, and stress timing. Moyer (2013) emphasizes the multifaceted nature of accent, indicating its role in encoding semantic and

discursive meaning through features like intonation, volume, pitch, rhythm, length, juncture, and stress.

The implications of foreign-accented speech extend beyond communication and influence individual and social constructs. Moyer (2013) posits that the foreign accent serves to project individual style and signals social identity, potentially leading to negative perceptions and marking the speaker as an outsider. In speech communities, foreign-accented speech affects listeners' assessments, with native accents receiving higher status and non-native accents facing lower prestige (Munro & Derwing, 1995). Negative attitudes toward Spanish-accented English, for example, in certain communities contribute to feelings of inferiority among speakers (Bouchard Ryan et al., 1977). While previous research has primarily explored native speakers' perceptions of L2 pronunciation, a significant gap exists in understanding how language learners of varying proficiencies perceive different levels of foreign-accented speech. This gap prompts an exploration of the specific phonological features influencing Spanish pronunciation among English-dominant bilinguals, followed by an investigation of the consequences of this pronunciation on attitudes and identity.

## 4. English-Influenced Pronunciation of Spanish

Although a foreign accent, in its most general terms, can be defined as the same regardless of the language(s) involved (see Munro,1998, above), the way in which a foreign accent manifests itself is determined precisely as a result of the language(s) involved. This study focuses on English speakers becoming emerging Spanish speakers (ESS), highlighting the phonological features of English-accented L2 Spanish. The Spanish phonetic system comprises 17-19 consonants and 5 vowels, some of which overlap with the English phonetic system. In a study on comprehensibility, Schairer (1992) found that the mispronunciation of Spanish vowels by ESS created more miscommunication than did mispronunciation of consonants. The challenge stems from the use of

just five vowels in Spanish /i, e, a, o, u/, while some varieties of General American English can have upwards of fifteen vowels (Ladefoged, 2001): /i, u, ɪ, ʊ, e, o, ə, ɚ, ɛ, ʌ, ɝ, ɔ, ɒ, æ, ɑ/.

Despite the presence of Spanish vowels in English speakers' phonetic repertoires, challenges persist in producing target-like forms, particularly the failure to articulate short, tense, and monophthong vowels. Examples include the production of the 3rd person singular indirect object pronoun (*le*) as *[leɪ̯] (vs. [le]), the reduction of unstressed vowels to schwa (e.g., habilidad 'ability' as *[ə-bI-li-daed] vs. [a-βi-li-ðað]), the separation of rising diphthongs into two syllables (e.g., bien 'well' > *[bi-en] vs. [bi̯en]), and the diphthongization of monophthong vowels in cognate words (e.g., música'music' > *[mi̯u-sɪ-kʌ] vs. [mu-si-ka]).

Spanish consonants present significant challenges for ESS, such as the substitution of the English retroflex approximant [ɻ] for the tap [ɾ] or trill [r] in appropriate contexts, underutilization of intervocalic voiced fricatives [β, ð, ɣ], and the production of word- and syllable-final alveolar lateral approximants [l] as velarized lateral approximants [ɬ]. Additionally, ESS grapple with voiceless stops /p, t, k/ in Spanish due to the presence of aspirated and unaspirated allophonic variations in English.

The intricate influence of L1 on L2 pronunciation is a multifaceted issue. The information provided is not exhaustive, as it does not encompass the entirety of potential English pronunciation interferences that may arise during the acquisition of Spanish as an L2. It is anticipated that there are variations in L2 learners' proficiency in producing target-like forms. Of particular significance to this inquiry is the exploration of how deviations from target-like forms impact attitudes and identity, as well as the examination of observer awareness regarding these deviations.

## 5. L2 Pronunciation: Recognition, Attitudes, and Identity

Within the context of emerging bilingualism, a nuanced exploration of language variation, specifically accents, serves as a pivotal avenue for understanding observers' awareness and attitudes towards linguistic diversity (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Toribio, 2007; Potowski & Bolyanatz,

2012). The intricate relationship between linguistic variations, individual perceptions, and group identity underscores the profound influence of accents on assumptions about speakers and their attributes, their personalities and their cultural belonging (Garrett et al., 2003). Critical to this discourse is the acknowledgement that individuals with more pronounced foreign accents are often ascribed to lower social qualities, a phenomenon intricately linked to perceptions of insider or outsider status (Bresnahan et al., 2002). The amplification of the outsider effect in the presence of stronger ethnic connections among judges (Bresnahan et al., 2002) underscores the intricate interplay of language, identity, and sociocultural affiliations.

Norton's (1997) conceptualization of identity as a salient force shaping language attitudes and accent strength amplifies the narrative, offering a theoretical framework for comprehending participants' perceptions. The symbiotic relationship between imitation, social attractiveness, and language attitudes, as underscored by Adank et al. (2013) and Babel (2012), further intertwines the strands of individual identity with the broader sociolinguistic landscape.

While extant literature predominantly explores how native speakers' perceptions impact judgments of non-native speakers, an equally imperative dimension surfaces: how non-native speakers perceive non-native pronunciation of the target language (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010). Moyer's (2007) revelation regarding the relationship between positive attitudes towards the target language and culture and the manifestation of more native-like accents introduces a novel perspective into the discourse. Moreover, Gluszek et al.'s (2011) findings, emphasizing the predictive nature of stronger identification with the target culture on accent strength, resonate with the broader narrative. Beyond the conventional trajectory, Lefkowitz and Hedgcock (2006) contribute a compelling layer by unveiling instances where language learners consciously maintain a foreign accent as a deliberate act of rejecting the target culture and language. This paradoxical phenomenon calls attention to the multifaceted nature of identity negotiation within the language acquisition process.

Building upon this rich theoretical foundation, the current study seeks to unravel a small part of the complex tapestry of emerging bilingualism and its intricate interplay with speaker identification. Focusing specifically on English-dominant Spanish speakers, the present research aims to investigate how individuals at different proficiency levels perceive themselves in comparison to speakers embodying a spectrum from heavily-accented Spanish to native Spanish pronunciation. The ensuing exploration, framed by two interconnected research questions, delves into the dynamics of identity and awareness within the multifaceted landscape of bilingual language acquisition, and attributes ascribed to people with different degrees of foreign-accented speech.

## 6. Previous reports

The study to be reported below finds its antecedent in two prior investigations (Anderson & Souza, 2009; Anderson & Souza, 2012). In this research (2009) we reported a discernible preference on the part of ESS for a native-like Spanish pronunciation, with heightened favorability observed among those whose self-reported proficiency was Mid or High. This was achieved by asking participants to listen to different recordings of speakers with more to less foreign accentedness (see *Methodology* section below). Additionally, this self-reported proficiency in Spanish emerged as a pivotal factor in shaping attitudes toward variances in accented speech, manifested in both English and Spanish contexts. Noteworthy outcomes indicate that ESS, in fact, exhibits a capacity to discriminate between levels of L2 pronunciation, with more accuracy among high proficiency individuals. In short, the self-reported proficiency in Spanish significantly modulated perceptions of L2 pronunciation, wherein attitudes of bilinguals toward L2 pronunciation were interwoven with their self-reported language competencies. As the current investigation unfolds, it aligns itself with its predecessor, endeavoring to contribute additional strata to the intricate interplay between language acquisition, identity formation, and the perceptual landscape of linguistic distinctions.

In the 2012 study we aimed to investigate how those Spanish learners construct their self-perception in relation to diverse levels of English interference in non-native and native Spanish

speech by having the participants rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement "This person is a lot like me". Our focus extended to comprehending the nuanced perspectives of learners regarding speakers ranging from those exhibiting substantial English influence in their Spanish pronunciation to those articulating native-like fluency. The results uncovered significant differences in identity ratings based on proficiency levels, highlighting the impact of language proficiency on reactions to speech samples. Notably, the High Proficiency group demonstrated a discernible continuum from non-native to native-like Spanish pronunciation, showcasing a heightened ability to distinguish finer distinctions among speech samples.

Additionally, the study examined how participants across Low, Mid, and High proficiency groups reacted to varying degrees of foreign-accented Spanish speech. The findings revealed that the Low proficiency group predominantly identified with English-influenced Spanish, showcasing a higher level of self-awareness than what is typically ascribed to ESS and an acknowledgment of their non-native fluency. Surprisingly, they rated more target-like Spanish lower, indicating a nuanced perception of their pronunciation limitations. On the other hand, the Mid Proficiency group demonstrated less sensitivity to speech sample differences, resembling traits associated with low proficiency. These insights contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how levels of language proficiency influence the identification patterns of bilingual learners, shedding light on the nuanced nature of language acquisition, language proficiency and self-perception in bilingual contexts (Zubrzycki, 2019).

# 7. Present study

This study aims to investigate the intricate dynamics of bilingualism, particularly how ESS across varying proficiency levels evaluate personal characteristics attributable to speakers with different degrees of foreign-accented speech. This inquiry is underpinned by two interrelated research questions:

1) What are Spanish learners' reactions to varying degrees of foreign-accented Spanish speech?

2) Will the strength of those opinions be a function of the proficiency of the learners —based on their self-proficiencies of Spanish grammar, pronunciation, and overall ability— or of the degree of foreign-accented Spanish speech found in the different recordings that they judged?

Based on these research questions, if it is true that the strength of opinions about characteristics attributed to the speakers with varying degrees of foreign-accented Spanish speech is significantly influenced by the proficiency levels of Spanish learners, then we anticipate that as proficiency levels increase, we will find a proportional strengthening of positive attributes of the more native-like Spanish speech samples. A corresponding decrease in favorability toward stronger foreign accents would then follow. This relationship aligns with the previous findings that higher proficiency language learners show a nuanced understanding and preference for linguistic differences, favoring speech patterns that closely resemble native pronunciation.

On the other hand, if it is true that the strength of opinions is significantly influenced by the degree of foreign accent present in the speech recordings, then we would expect to identify a relationship between the perceived strength of foreign accents and the reactions of the participants, regardless of their proficiency levels. Specifically, recordings featuring weaker foreign accents should elicit stronger positive characteristics attributable to the speakers, while those with more pronounced foreign accents might lead to stronger negative characteristics attributable to the speakers. These hypotheses are based on the idea that the degree of foreign accent in speech recordings serves as a prominent factor shaping the opinions of the participants. Either of these findings would underscore the role of foreign-accented speech in shaping attitudes and identification patterns of the emerging bilingual.

## 7.1. Methodology

The methodological framework employed draws from sociolinguistic and social-psychological tools, encompassing a survey with attitudinal rating scales, and the exploration of

questionnaire and survey responses. This approach allows us to discern the different degrees to which participants, characterized by proficiency levels, both judge foreign-accented Spanish as well as configure their identification with varying degrees of foreign accents.

The aim is to determine what individuals across varying proficiency levels think about speech with different degrees of foreign accents. By examining patterns within the Low, Mid, and High Proficiency groups, the study endeavors to contribute insights to the broader discourse on language acquisition, the emerging bilingual, and the connection between linguistic proficiency and characteristics attributed to individuals with accented L2 speech.

To address the aforementioned research inquiries, 95 English-dominant L2 Spanish speakers with varying proficiency levels participated in this study. Participants, recruited from two US universities, completed a 45-minute online survey, comprising a language history questionnaire (including self-reported language abilities in both Spanish and English), a direct evaluation of seven speech samples, and a language attitudes survey. Materials, excluding recordings, were presented in English, and participants were categorized into three proficiency groups based on self-reported Spanish abilities: Low (n=35), Mid (n=38), and High (n=22).

The language attitudes survey and direct evaluations featured seven recordings of three female speakers reading an excerpt from the fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” in either English or Spanish. This text was chosen for its familiarity and inclusion of phonetic features relevant to the study, such as Voice Onset Time (VOT). To control for potential gender bias, all readers were female between 25 and 35 years old. Speaker one was a balanced bilingual, speaker two an English-dominant bilingual, and speaker three an English monolingual. The speech samples represented a spectrum of non-native Spanish pronunciation, ranging from near-native (Sample D) to novice Spanish (Sample G). Each recording maintained consistent grammar, lexicon, and syntax.

Analyzing the recordings confirmed that speakers successfully produced intended interference effects, such as variations in VOT durations. For instance, VOT decreased from 55 ms

in the Spanish Intermediate sample (F) to 21 ms in the Native Spanish sample (C), aligning with established findings on VOT durations for English speakers learning Spanish. The controlled features ensured that participants' responses were based solely on accent strength, eliminating potential biases related to gender, grammar, or syntax differences.

**Table 1.**
*Recording Stimuli Information*

| Number and description of speech sample | Sample name | Recorded by | VOT Durations |
|---|---|---|---|
| A. English Native | English Native | Speaker 2 (English dominant bilingual) | |
| B. Poor English pronunciation, with common Spanish pronunciation interference | English Novice | Speaker 1 (Balanced bilingual) | |
| C. Spanish Native | Spanish Native | Speaker 1 (Balanced bilingual) | 21 ms |
| D. Near native Spanish, few pronunciation errors | Spanish Advanced | Speaker 2 (English dominant bilingual) | 28 ms |
| E. Non-Native Spanish with English aspiration | Spanish Advanced with Aspiration | Speaker 2 (English dominant bilingual) | 41 ms |
| F. Poor Spanish pronunciation, with additional common English pronunciation interference | Spanish Intermediate | Speaker 1 (Balanced bilingual) | 55 ms |
| G. Novice Spanish, with extreme pronunciation errors | Spanish Novice | Speaker 3 (English Monolingual) | |

Participants first completed a comprehensive language history questionnaire, extracting personal details, language usage patterns, and self-assessed proficiency levels in both English and Spanish. Next, participants engaged in the language attitudes section of the survey. After listening to one of the recordings, subjects provided initial impressions of the speaker through an open-ended survey. They then identified the reader's country of origin, assessed her intelligibility, and

determined whether she was perceived as a native Spanish or English speaker. Of particular relevance to this paper, participants indicated on a 6-point Likert scale whether they strongly agreed (1) or strongly disagreed (6) with 3 positive and 3 negative characteristics or perceived personal attributes of the speakers. Specifically, they were asked to rate the recordings based on the prompt *I think this person is…*, and then indicate on the scale about the following attributes: *prestigious-sounding, uneducated, friendly, poor, well-spoken, unpleasant*. They then expressed agreement or disagreement with the statement *This person is a lot like me*, with a score also ranging from 1 (strong agreement, indicating a strong identity with the speaker) to 6 (strong disagreement, signifying a substantial disassociation with the speaker). The survey process was repeated for all seven recordings, with the order of presentation randomized (B, E, C, D, F, G, A) and maintained consistently for all participants. Subsequent to listening to all seven samples and completing the corresponding indirect surveys, participants engaged in an additional direct survey that addressed the importance of pronunciation in language learning.

To address the aforementioned research questions, this paper will report on the responses to the prompt *I think this person is…* and briefly on the statement *This person is a lot like me* (Authors, 2012). Drawing on previous research in language attitudes and identity, which indicates varied reactions to subtle changes in language stimuli, this study extends its scope by asserting that the diverse responses to the statements offer valuable data for assessing individuals' ability to perceive, attribute characteristics to, and identify with differences in the speech samples at an individual level.

## 7.2 Results

The following is the report on the aggregated results from the answers for the prompt *I think this person is* and the attributes: *prestigious-sounding, uneducated, friendly, poor, well-spoken, unpleasant* across the dependent variable of the different recording and across the three independent variables of participants' self-reported 1) overall Spanish abilities, 2) pronunciation abilities, and finally 3) grammar abilities. The attributes were categorized as positive (prestigious-sounding,

friendly, well-spoken) or negative (uneducated, poor, unpleasant). Finally, the report explores various independent variables, first when divided by self-reported abilities in Spanish grammar, Spanish pronunciation, and overall ability with Spanish, and then when divided into three groups (High, Mid, Low). The reason that different analyses were performed for the different categories of self-reported Spanish proficiency was to address the heterogeneity found within participants among those categories. That is, a participant might have rated their overall Spanish ability a 3 and their Spanish pronunciation ability a 5, leading to a slightly different distribution of participant scores for the three proficiency groups.

We first report on the effect that participants' self-reported overall ability in Spanish had on their judgements of the characteristics attributed to the speakers of the recordings. When reading these numbers, it is important to note that a lower number (from the scale of 1 to 6) indicated that the participant agreed more with the characteristic attributed to the speaker of the recording; a higher number indicated that they disagreed more with the same. Therefore, low numbers for the negative attributes signify those participants agreed with those negative attributes, and viceversa for the higher numbers. The same goes for the positive attributes.

*7.2.1 Overall ability*

A repeated measures ANOVA test of the independent variable overall ability and the combined positive attributes scores of the different recordings indicated that there is a significant difference in the dependent variable between the different recordings, $F(1.73, 3.47) = 12.18$, $p = .028$, with a mean of 2.64 for Poor English, 2.8 for Non-Native w/ Aspiration, 2.16 for Native Spanish, 2.42 for Near-Native Spanish, 2.72 for Novice Spanish, 2.7 for Poor Spanish, 1.65 for Native English. The post-hoc paired t-test using a Bonferroni corrected $\alpha = .0024$ indicated that the mean of the following pair is significantly different: Native Spanish - Poor Spanish.

There was also a significant difference found when comparing the negative attribute scores: $F(6, 12) = 12.06$, $p < .001$, with a mean of 3.04 for Poor English, 2.9 for Non-Native w/

Aspiration, 3.22 for Native Spanish, 3.02 for Near-Native Spanish, 3.04 for Novice Spanish, 3.13 for Poor Spanish, 3.58 for Native English. The post-hoc paired t-test test using a Bonferroni corrected $\alpha = .0024$ indicated that the mean of the following pair is significantly different: Non-Native w/ Aspiration - Native English.

A non-significant difference was found for overall ability when the different proficiency levels (High, Mid, Low) were compared for their scores of the recordings for both the positive attributes, $F(2, 12) = 0.17$, $p = .846$, with a mean of 2.42 for High, 2.48 for Mid, 2.42 for Low, as well as the negative attributes, $F(1.17, 7.03) = 1.58$, $p = .255$, with a mean of 3.07 for High, 3.16 for Mid, 3.16 for Low.

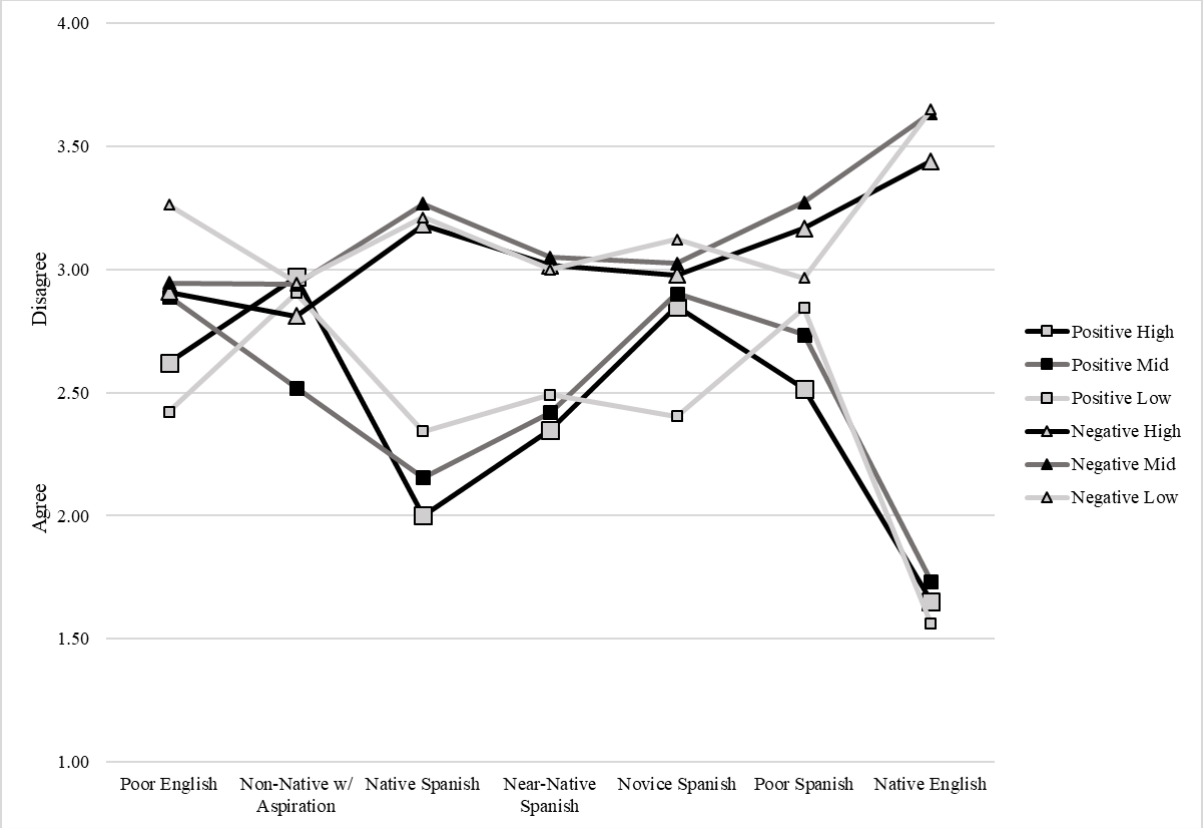
**Table 2.**
*Summary of positive and negative attribute ratings by self-reported overall Spanish ability*

| | Poor English | Non-Native w/ Aspiration | Native Spanish | Near Native Spanish | Novice Spanish | Poor Spanish | Native English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 2.64 | 2.80 | 2.16 | 2.42 | 2.72 | 2.70 | 1.65 |
| Negative | 3.04 | 2.90 | 3.22 | 3.02 | 3.04 | 3.13 | 3.58 |

These analyses revealed a few key findings: first, there was a significant difference in how the participants rated positive attributes across various recordings. Specifically, participants agreed more with the positive attributes of the Native Spanish recording than they did with those of the Poor Spanish recording. A significant difference was also found between the negative attributes of the recordings, with the Non-Native w/ Aspiration rated more negatively than the Native English recordings. This was also unsurprising, and we attribute it to our participants' status as native English speakers. On the other hand, the different proficiency levels of the participants did not significantly influence their ratings of the recordings, neither for the positive nor for the negative attributes. In Figure 1, these differences can be observed in the distances of the data points between the proficiency

levels. While the High and Mid groups recorded similar data, the Low Group differed somewhat in their responses to the Poor English and Novice Spanish. Within the responses, however, similar trends to the negative attributes are observed among all three groups. The same can be observed for the answers to the positive attributes, thus suggesting that proficiency levels did not significantly modulate their responses.

**Figure 1.**
*Overall Ability: Aggregate of Positive and Negative Attributes by Proficiency Level for Each Recording*




*7.2.2 Self-reported pronunciation ability*

Next, we report on the effect that participants' self-reported Spanish pronunciation ability had on their judgments of the characteristics attributed to the speakers of the recordings.

**Table 3.**
*Summary Of Positive and Negative Attribute Ratings by Self-Reported Pronunciation Ability in Spanish*

| | Poor English | Non-Native w/ Aspiration | Native Spanish | Near Native Spanish | Novice Spanish | Poor Spanish | Native English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 2.73 | 2.64 | 2.17 | 2.38 | 3.08 | 2.71 | 1.63 |
| Negative | 3.09 | 2.99 | 3.30 | 3.13 | 3.08 | 3.22 | 3.69 |

A repeated measures ANOVA test indicated that there is a non-significant difference between the different recordings, $F(1.23, 2.46) = 9.06$, $p = .074$, with a mean of 2.73 for Poor English, 2.64 for Non-Native w/ Aspiration, 2.17 for Native Spanish, 2.38 for Near-Native Spanish, 3.08 for Novice Spanish, 2.71 for Poor Spanish, 1.63 for Native English. Conversely, with the negative attributes, a repeated measures ANOVA test indicated that there is a significant difference, $F(6, 12) = 16.59$, $p < .001$, with a mean of 3.09 for Poor English, 2.99 for Non-Native w/ Aspiration, 3.3 for Native Spanish, 3.13 for Near-Native Spanish, 3.08 for Novice Spanish, 3.22 for Poor Spanish, 3.69 for Native English. Of the different recordings, only these pairings of the Spanish recordings were found to be significantly different: Native Spanish - Near Native Spanish and Native Spanish - Novice Spanish.

A non-significant difference was found for pronunciation ability when the different proficiency levels (High, Mid, Low) were compared for their scores of the recordings for the positive attributes, $F(2, 12) = 1.01$, $p = .394$, with a mean of 2.46 for High, 2.38 for Mid, 2.45 for Low. The repeated measures ANOVA test indicated that there is a significant difference in the dependent variable between the different groups, $F(2, 12) = 22.99$, $p < .001$, with a mean of 3.02 for High, 3.25 for Mid, 3.37 for Low.

Despite the lack of statistical significance of the positive attributes, these findings nevertheless suggest a trend in how pronunciation ability aligns with positive attributes. One

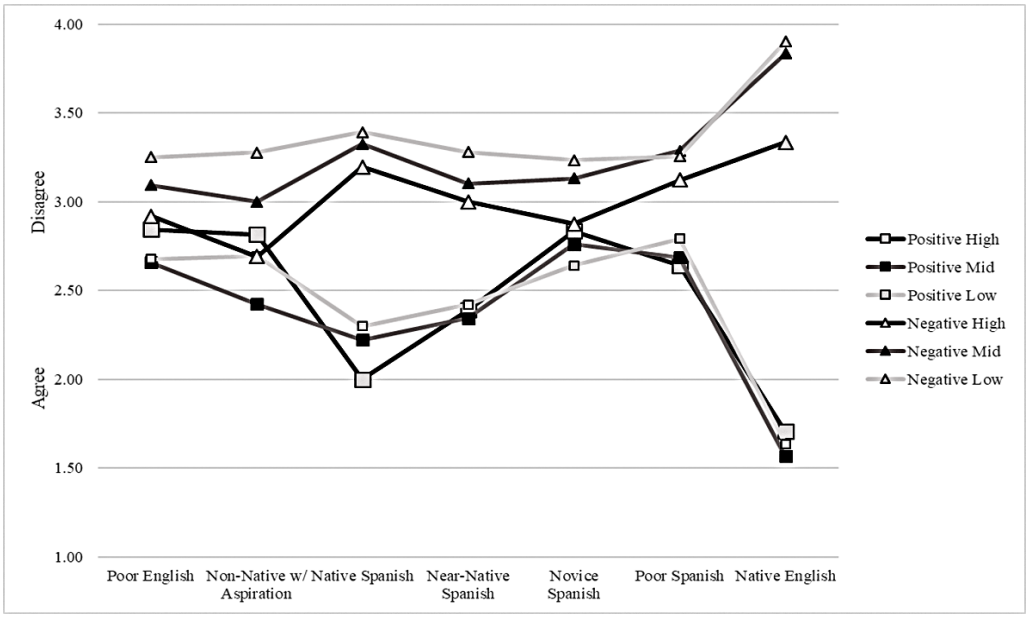
noteworthy result is the consistent mean score for Novice Spanish, which stands out with a higher mean of 3.08 compared to other recordings.

The findings of the negative attributes suggest that pronunciation ability plays a bigger role in shaping negative perceptions than positive ones. The pairs of Spanish recordings Native Spanish - Near-Native Spanish and Native Spanish - Novice Spanish contributed to the significant difference. The higher score of the Native Spanish recording indicates that participants disagreed more with the negative characteristics attributed to that speaker than they did with either the Near-Native or Novice Spanish speakers.

Regarding the differences between the proficiency levels of self-reported pronunciation ability, the mean scores of the positive attributes indicate relatively consistent ratings of the recordings across the High, Mid, and Low proficiency levels, as seen in Figure 2. For the negative attributes, the mean scores for each proficiency level highlight how self-reported pronunciation ability significantly influences negative perceptions, with a clear trend of decreasing mean scores from High to Low proficiency levels.

**Figure 2.**

*Spanish Pronunciation: Aggregate of Positive and Negative Attributes by Proficiency Level for Each Recording*



*7.2.3 Self-reported grammar abilities*

Finally, we will consider the impact that dividing the participants into proficiency groups based on their self-reported abilities with Spanish grammar have on their ratings of the recordings.

**Table 4.**
*Summary of Positive and Negative Attribute Ratings by Self-Reported Spanish Grammar*

| | Poor English | Non-Native w/ Aspiration | Native Spanish | Near Native Spanish | Novice Spanish | Poor Spanish | Native English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 2.71 | 2.72 | 2.13 | 2.35 | 2.71 | 2.68 | 1.65 |
| Negative | 3.02 | 2.95 | 3.35 | 3.10 | 3.06 | 3.16 | 3.62 |

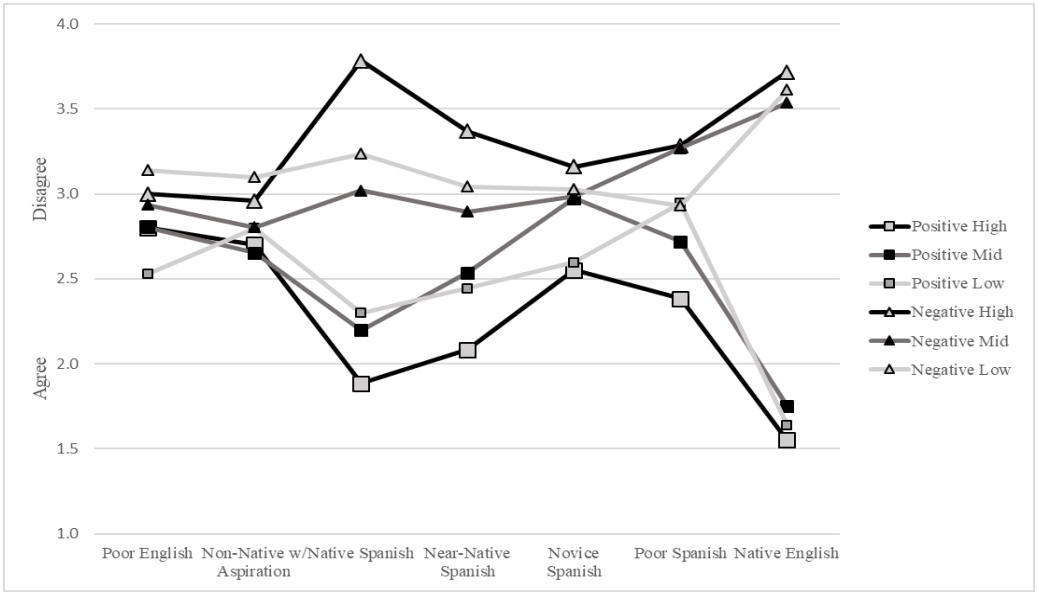
When considering the self-reported Spanish grammar ability for the positive attributes, a repeated measures ANOVA test indicated that there is a significant difference between the recordings, $F(6, 12) = 18.18$, $p < .001$, with a mean of 2.71 for Poor English, 2.72 for Non-Native w/ Aspiration, 2.13 for Native Spanish, 2.35 for Near-Native Spanish, 2.71 for Novice Spanish, 2.68 for Poor Spanish, 1.65 for Native English. Notably, the Non-Native w/ Aspiration - Native Spanish and Native Spanish - Poor Spanish pairings showed significant differences. For the negative attributes, the analysis revealed that there is a significant difference between the recordings, $F(6, 12) = 5.37$, $p = .007$, with a mean of 3.02 for Poor English, 2.95 for Non-Native w/ Aspiration, 3.35 for Native Spanish, 3.1 for Near-Native Spanish, 3.06 for Novice Spanish, 3.16 for Poor Spanish, 3.62 for Native English. The post-hoc paired t-test test using a Bonferroni corrected $\alpha = .0024$ indicated that the mean of only this pair is significantly different: Novice Spanish - Native English.

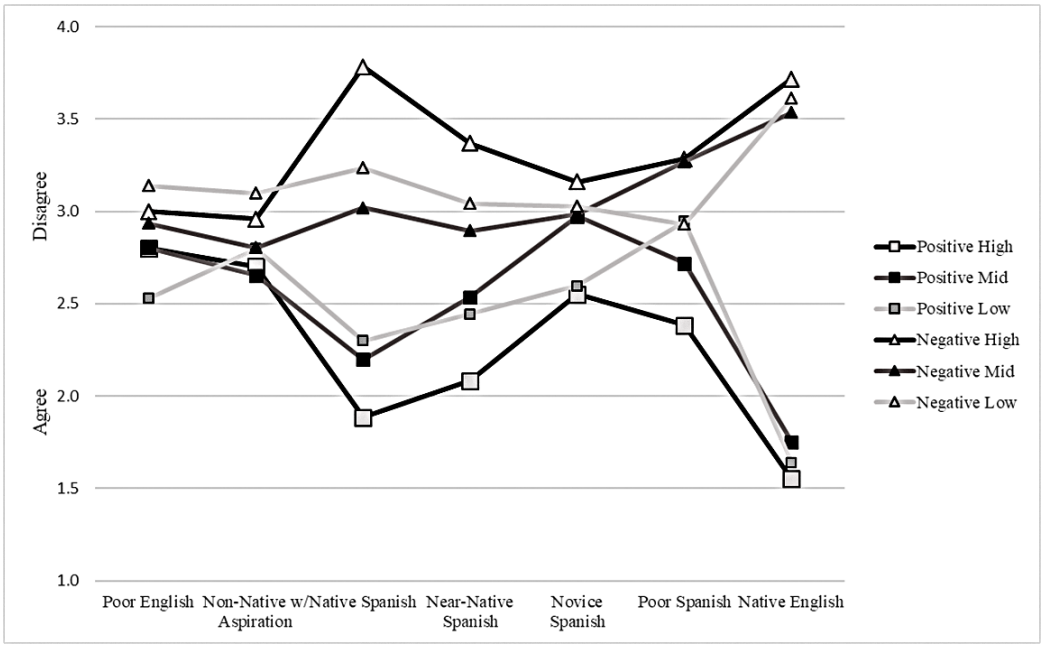
A repeated measures ANOVA between the proficiency groups revealed a non-significant difference for both the positive attributes, $F(2, 12) = 0.17$, $p = .846$, with a mean of 2.42 for High, 2.48 for Mid, 2.42 for Low as well as the negative attributes, $F(1.17, 7.03) = 1.58$, $p = .255$, with a mean of 3.07 for High, 3.16 for Mid, 3.16 for Low. This suggests that, irrespective of proficiency

levels, participants with self-reported Spanish grammar abilities rated the recordings similarly in terms of positive and negative attributes. While significant differences emerged across recordings, proficiency levels divided by self-reported grammar abilities alone do not appear to be significant factors influencing these perceptions. These differences can be seen below:

**Figure 3.**

*Spanish Grammar: Aggregate Of Positive and Negative Attributes by Proficiency Level for Each Recording*



Descriptively, there are obvious trends that can be seen among the different proficiency levels. These results also show that the High group favored the Native, Near-Native, Novice and Poor Spanish more than the other groups. Interestingly, all three groups were very similar in their somewhat neutral assessment of the Non-Native w/ Aspiration recording, suggesting that the differences either went unnoticed or that the participants did not have strong feelings for or against it.

There are several possible factors that could have contributed to the observed differences in self-reported abilities and how they influenced the participants' ratings of positive and negative attributes about the recordings. It should be noted that one factor could be due to a perception and reporting bias, where individuals with different proficiency levels may demonstrate varying self-awareness and biases when reporting their abilities in Spanish. In general, High proficiency individuals tend to have a more accurate and positive perception of their pronunciation (Huensch et al., 2017), which could have led to consistent ratings across positive attributes. Lower proficiency individuals may perceive their pronunciation less favorably, impacting negative attribute ratings. Our High proficiency participants were somewhat more forgiving of non-target recordings, suggesting that they didn't find them as objectionable as the lower proficiency group did. It seems unlikely that the lower group was somehow more attuned to the pronunciation variations than the higher group, based on our earlier reporting.

# 8. Conclusions

We argued at the beginning of the article that the term *emergent* was appropriate when considering the process of becoming bilingual. While similar research has focused on native speakers' reactions to non-native users of the language, the present research has shown that these emergent bilinguals also have much to add to the discussion. We have presented arguments that show that bilingual proficiency development has an impact on how emergent bilinguals react to differing levels of foreign-accentedness. We found that learners of Spanish want to have better pronunciation

when they speak Spanish. The data presented here also reveal that on the aggregate our Spanish L2 speakers identified more with the native-like Spanish varieties and less with the English-influenced samples. We believe this suggests that our participants, even in the early stages of acquisition, do indeed notice differences between L2 native-like and non-native-like Spanish pronunciation, indicating a much higher self-awareness than what is generally attributed to novice and intermediate users of a language. Furthermore, their identifying (or not) with the speakers of the different speech samples also suggests that they are aware of their own Spanish pronunciation ability (or lack thereof). Likewise, their preference for the more native-like Spanish samples seems to suggest that the participants aspire to develop good pronunciation in Spanish.

Furthermore, we found that the higher proficiency Spanish learners more closely identified with the more native-like Spanish speech samples and, in general, the opposite is true for the Low proficiency group, where they identified more with the speech sample that was representative of lower proficiency Spanish speakers. We believe that these two factors —Spanish proficiency and feelings of identity toward differing levels of English-influenced Spanish— go hand-in-hand but also function cyclically: an increase in proficiency leads to self-identifying with speakers of more native-like Spanish pronunciation, which can in turn lead to an increase in phonetic accuracy (or at least the desire for it). Our data has shed light on the hypothesis that identification with the speakers of the target language may amplify learners' desires to sound like the target language speakers.

In response to the positive and negative attributes of the recordings, the reactions based on the prompt *I think this person is…* shed light on the dynamics of language perception, particularly degrees of foreign-accented Spanish. We started by asking what Spanish learners think about varying degrees of foreign-accented Spanish speech and whether their proficiency levels impacted the strength of those opinions. We hypothesized that the strength of opinions about varying degrees of foreign-accented Spanish speech would be significantly influenced by the proficiency levels of Spanish learners, and/or by the degree of foreign accent present in the speech recordings.

The results were mixed in their support of the hypotheses. The significant differences in positive attribute scores across various recordings indicate that participants held varying opinions about the speakers with different degrees of foreign-accented Spanish speech. Particularly, participants agreed more with the positive attributes of the Native Spanish recording than with those of the Poor Spanish recording. Similarly, significant differences in negative attribute scores highlight that Non-Native w/Aspiration was rated more negatively than the Native English recordings, supporting the hypothesis that opinions are influenced by the degree of foreign accent in the recordings.

However, the second part of the hypothesis, which posited that proficiency levels would significantly influence opinions, did not find support in the results. The analysis revealed a non-significant difference in overall ability when comparing different proficiency levels for both positive and negative attributes. The results did not show a significant difference in positive attributes based on proficiency levels, contrary to the hypothesis that as proficiency levels increase, there would be a proportional strengthening of positive attributes. Therefore, this aspect of the hypothesis is not supported. However, the study did find significant differences in negative attributes based on pronunciation ability, indicating a more nuanced relationship. The results also indicate that the degree of foreign accent in the recordings significantly influenced opinions, supporting this aspect of the hypothesis. The significant differences in negative attributes for specific pairings of Spanish recordings align with the idea that the perceived strength of foreign accents shapes participants' reactions.

Additionally, there was no significant overall difference in pronunciation ability scores based on proficiency levels, contrary to the hypothesis. Looking more closely, however, we observed that proficiency levels did not strongly modulate participants' opinions of positive attributes, but they did significantly influence pronunciation ability scores for negative attributes, partially supporting

the hypothesis that proficiency level would be a significant factor in how they reacted to the recordings.

Finally, the findings generally align with the hypothesis regarding self-reported Spanish grammar ability influencing perceptions of positive attributes. However, the relationship with negative attributes is more nuanced, with significant differences identified in specific pairings. Additionally, proficiency levels alone, when divided by self-reported grammar abilities, do not appear to significantly influence perceptions of positive and negative attributes across the recordings.

Future studies could help shed additional light on how identity and accent strength are connected. In the present study, we have measured results based on indirect approaches to language attitudes and identity. Such responses should also be triangulated with data from more direct measures. To that end, future investigations will include results from ethnolinguistic interviews with a similar sample of emerging bilinguals to see if additional insights can be drawn from how students react to accent strength as well as to understand their desires to improve on pronunciation. Similarly, future investigations will focus on how differing groups of emerging bilinguals approach accent improvement and identity formation. Specifically, it could prove insightful to know how identity and pronunciation development are fostered in short-term (i.e., 5-week long) and long-term (i.e., 6+ month long) study abroad experiences as compared to the traditional classroom experience. As we continue to gain more insights into what it truly means to speak a language other than our own, we will learn how *who we are* emerges along with our emergent bilingual skills as we become speakers of another language.

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# Appendix

The texts used as the stimuli are as follows:

Spanish) Érase una vez una niña que se llamaba Caperucita Roja. Vivía con su madre viuda, que un día le dijo que tenía que visitar a su abuelita porque estaba enferma. Le dio una cestita con miel y otras cosas para que Caperucita se la llevara a su abuelita. Entonces le dio un beso a su hijita y empezó a preparar la cena para cuando regresara Caperucita Roja.

English) Once upon a time there was a little girl who was always called Little Red Riding Hood. She lived with her widowed mother, who one day said that she needed to go visit her sick Granny. She gave her a basket with honey and other things for Little Red Riding Hood to take to Granny's. Then she gave her little girl a kiss and went to get dinner ready for when she came back.