

Working with an Accent: The Aesthetic Labour of International Teaching Assistants in Ontario Universities

by

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Abstract

International teaching assistants (ITAs) in North American English-medium universities often work with an accent. In one sense, to work with an accent entails doing one's work while having an aural stigma. This is due to the increased likelihood that students and other university stakeholders perceive ITAs' foreign-accented English as difficult to understand. The purported problem of their foreign accents can thus create additional facets in working with an accent such as working with the idea of how to change an accent and performing (around) it in order to be viewed as effective workers. All of this work can be considered a type of aesthetic labour in that ITAs need to develop the right sound for their professional duties. Based on a narrative inquiry of the experiences of 14 ITAs working in various universities in Ontario, Canada, this thesis explores how they conceptualize and execute aesthetic labour. Specifically, it details their perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic for work as well as the extent to which they incorporate this aesthetic in discussions about their professional practices. Regarding the first research objective, the ITAs understood a satisfactory accent in linguistic, racial, and professional terms. Indeed, an accent could sound "native" or "nonnative," become "whitened" or remain racialized, and match or not match one's work (environment). In terms of taking up these perceptions in their professional practices, which took the general form of working on or around an accent, the ITAs' prior views on aural aesthetics were upheld and/or tempered by contextual factors in their universities. On the immediate level, the above findings provide suggestions for changes to existing forms of

ITA training, which tend to ignore the knowledge of ITAs and fail to prepare them to effectively communicate according to the specificities of their work environments. More broadly, the findings are useful in highlighting how accents are not stable individual traits, but rather, malleable tools that help workers negotiate intercultural encounters in a range of professional settings. Therefore, this study counters research that frames the ITA accent as an inherent problem needing to be rectified for a homogeneous audience.

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Dedication

In Loving Memory of Ramjit, Zeph, Basdaye, & Saha

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Chapter One: Introduction

What It Means to Work with an Accent for International Teaching Assistants

Participant: Uh do you really think that foreign accent is an important topic for international teaching assistants?

Vijay: Well yeah um like the literature um does suggest that their accents are a problem for communication while they uh while they're at work. Um I guess I want to complicate the situation by determining if they themselves uh think that their accents are an issue and what they do with this information when teaching.

Participant: Oh okay.

The above exchange involved me clumsily justifying the scope of the current study to my first participant, an international teaching assistant (ITA), who seemed skeptical about my examination of the foreign accents of ITAs.¹ This exchange acts as an appropriate entry point into understanding the topic of this thesis. Unless they possess a socially privileged manner of speaking, ITAs in North American English-medium universities typically work with an accent. As alluded in my response to the participant, to work with an accent entails doing work while carrying an aural stigma. Indeed, when teaching undergraduate students and performing other duties, ITAs must face criticism about their foreign-accented English, which is deemed to cause miscommunication between teacher and student and thus impede the latter's learning (e.g., Bailey, 1983; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Gorsuch, 2016; Kang, 2012; Kang, Rubin, & Lindemann, 2015; Plakans, 1997; Subtirelu, 2017). Such an issue creates further meanings of working with an accent.

First, if ITAs realize that their foreign accents are deemed professional liabilities, they may then need to work with the idea of changing their accents. This revelation might involve taking notice of everyday communications of what they should sound like in their working environments and/or generating their own

¹"ITA" and "foreign accent" are complicated terms to define in this introductory section. For detailed definitions of these terms, see pages 4 and 20-23, respectively.

notions of proper professional speech. The informal learning and sensemaking that ITAs do in order to understand the right professional accent can lead to yet another aspect of working with an accent: performing (around) it. That is, ITAs may manipulate their accents while carrying out their duties and/or undertake various measures to ensure that they are seen as orally capable workers.

ITAs' need to project the right sound for professional purposes may be considered an example of aesthetic labour, which is known as the work of "looking good and sounding right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001, as cited in Karlsson, 2012, p. 53). Aesthetic labour typically describes how service workers, particularly in the retail and hospitality sectors, are encouraged/required to "style" their bodily traits in order to visually appeal to customers (e.g., Karlsson, 2012; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Williams & Connell, 2010; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). However, in addition to looking good, some workers may need to style their voices to sound right as seen with the accent reduction training for Indian call centre workers who communicate with callers from the Global North, for example (Mirchandani, 2012; Nath, 2011). As individuals whose accents also play a salient role in their perceived effectiveness as workers, ITAs may style their accents in a way that is acceptable for students and others.

Thus far, my argument suggests that ITAs' work with their accents, as a form of aesthetic labour, is a straightforward process: once they are aware that their accent is a professional issue, ITAs quickly locate information on a satisfactory aural aesthetic and consciously utilize this information while teaching and performing related tasks. However, the process may be much more complex in reality. First, regarding the aural aesthetic for teaching, ITAs can have differing notions of sounding right. One major factor that explains these differences is the racialization of foreign accents. For instance, since the accents of White ethnic groups are often deemed more comprehensible than those of racialized groups (Creese, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2012), it might be the case that some ITAs are held to a stricter linguistic standard than others. Therefore, White ITAs may feel little need to change their voices when compared to their racialized peers who might think otherwise. It is even possible that racialized ITAs come to internalize this racial hierarchy

by articulating a preference to “sound White.” To further complicate matters, taking into account the increasing racial and linguistic diversity of the student body of many North American universities (e.g., Sterzuk, 2015), some ITAs will discover that retaining their current accents is acceptable in a classroom context where everyone speaks with a racially stigmatized accent or still believe that mimicking a so-called White accent facilitates communication for all. Sometimes, the specific academic discipline of ITAs enforces a particular manner of speech or, conversely, requires none whatsoever. As mentioned in my exchange with the participant, foreign accent may or may not be an issue for ITAs.

While the above scenarios highlight how there can be multiple (and perhaps conflicting) meanings of the aural aesthetic needed to be an ITA, it is equally important to consider the complexities of the performative aspect of working with an accent. In fact, once ITAs perceive a satisfactory professional accent, it is not guaranteed that they will explicitly perform this accent at work. Rather, it could be implicitly displayed through their talk about such things as teaching philosophies or evaluations of their speech. Even when the perceived accent is something created not through observation but by opinion, there is the potential that ITAs’ professional practices will (partially) go against their own beliefs. Once again, these situations can be influenced by variety of contextual factors like the audience with whom they must interact, their academic discipline, or the specific duties that they carry out as teaching assistants.

To summarize, then, the topic of this thesis concerns understanding the complex nature of a satisfactory aural aesthetic established by ITAs and the ways in which it is or is not manifested in their professional practices. Indeed, as I mentioned to the participant, this thesis seeks to complicate the literature on ITAs by exploring the notion that ITAs do not need to sound and professionally act in any one particular manner in the university classroom, which has increasingly become a multilingual and multiracial environment. Before delving into the specific details of the current study, the following section describes how I came to conceptualize the study through my reading of and consequent dissatisfaction with the existing ITA literature.

My Dissatisfaction with the Existing ITA Literature

Formally, an ITA “is an international [graduate] student who has a teaching assistant position that is part of their guaranteed funding, or in addition to their guaranteed funding” (Osborne, Kasprzak, & Majeed, 2016, p. 8).² My initial interest in studying this type of student-worker essentially arose from personal observation. As a former undergraduate and now graduate student at the University of Toronto, I have often encountered students from an array of nations. The reason for these frequent encounters is that there are a lot of international students at my institution! For instance, during the 2017-18 academic year, the university hosted over 16,000 international undergraduate and over 3000 graduate students coming from over 163 countries (University of Toronto, n.d.). This is a sizable increase given that the numbers were over 10,000 and 2000, respectively, during the 2013-14 period (University of Toronto, 2014). Beyond the University of Toronto, other universities in the Canadian province of Ontario also have a strong international student presence on their campuses given that the province hosts nearly half of all international students coming to Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). To give just one example, the University of Waterloo (n.d.) states that 40% of its students at the graduate level are international.

This increased presence of international students is not some random occurrence. Rather, it is related to the rapid internationalization of Canadian higher education in which universities actively recruit students from around the world to purportedly foster intercultural understanding and also increase revenue that offsets the lack of government funding of these institutions (e.g., Guo & Guo, 2017). International students are not only commodified in terms of the amount of money they bring into an institution, but also in the sense of being cheap labour for their universities. Indeed, due to the increasing casualization of

²In this definition, the word “international” should be broadly conceived. As Vinther and Slethaug (2015) note, the distinction between home and international (graduate) student has become increasingly blurred. Because of such things as globalization and war, many people have become refugees, immigrants, or citizens of new countries. Thus, “they become ‘home students’ without the cultural background and understanding of higher education systems” (p. 99). Due to this point, the pair suggests that “international student” should simply refer “to all who have [completed] their pre-university [education in] a country other than their tertiary place of study” (p. 99).

academic labour, which is meant to reduce costs for the increasingly corporatized university, students often take up teaching positions that would normally be the domain of full-time faculty (see Raaper, 2018).³ Thus, many international students become ITAs. Unless it is part of their funding package, what can personally incentivize these students to become teaching assistants is the fact that it provides them with valuable work experience, which can be difficult to attain due to restrictive student visas, and, furthermore, offers some students the opportunity to learn and improve their English (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, Marginson, Ramia, Sawir, & Smith, 2009). The fact that ITAs emblemize both the corporatization and internationalization of universities (in Ontario) leads to the importance of studying the work they do with their accents.

Indeed, corporatization and internationalization require some sort of linguistic labour on the part of ITAs. First, because they have become a noticeable portion of the workforce of universities due to the increasing use of flexible labour, ITAs are often responsible for imparting knowledge to students. Since this knowledge is linguistically coded, ITAs must ensure that they articulate information in a clear manner, which could entail ensuring that their accents are heard as understandable. However, because ITAs are representative of and situated in the increased presence of international students, who come from diverse linguistic and racial backgrounds, the changes in their accents must account for this diversity. As Aneesh (2015a, 2015b) notes, when there is a lack of a common sociocultural background among workers and clients, it becomes the duty of the former to develop linguistic practices that are *globally* understandable. In the case of ITAs, then, they will need to develop an accent that can be favourably perceived by learners coming from anywhere in the globe. Knowing how they accomplish this task is a significant area of inquiry given that their work mostly consists of orally imparting information to international audiences.

Recognizing this point, I began looking at the approaches that Canadian universities take in helping ITAs improve their speech. Based on a series of Internet searches, I found that universities have

³The impact of the internationalization and the corporatization/neoliberalization of universities on the work of ITAs will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

two general perspectives in addressing the connection between ITAs' accents and their teaching. On one end, some universities treat accent as something that needs to be remedied. For instance, the teaching and learning centres of the Universities of Alberta and Manitoba offer classes in accent reduction in order to help ITAs better adjust to teaching in a Canadian classroom (Osborne et al., 2016). One extreme example is found at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, where an accent clinic is offered by the Faculty of Health. Here, "accent training services are provided by certified speech-language pathologists who have education and experience in clinical phonetics, speech sound perception, and speech correction" (Dalhousie Accent Clinic, 2018a, para. 4). By having speech language pathologists examine students' speech, Dalhousie implies that a foreign accent is a type of disorder (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Instead of viewing accent as intimately tied to teaching, other university programs tend to ignore accent altogether. For example, in Communication in the Canadian Classroom (CCC), a 12-hour course at Western University, the emphasis is on developing overall communication skills in terms of recognizing and applying different cultural styles of communication (Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2019). Even though there is no publicly available information on the exact content of this course, the following anonymous testimonial from a student highlights some of its general topics:

The Culture Shock and Giving Feedback to Students sections gave me information that helped me to put my experiences in Canada into perspective, and better deal with the adjustments that I would have to make. Also, the explanations of Canadian behaviours helped a lot (Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2019, para. 5).

By noting "the *adjustments* that [they] would have to make," the student revealed that the CCC program is intended to make ITAs adapt to "Canadian" cultural norms and not vice versa. Therefore, it is important to consider how CCC might be similar to a site such as the Dalhousie Accent Clinic. Although CCC does not perceive an accent as a medicalized flaw, it, like the clinic, does position ITAs as lacking certain qualities (i.e., those pertaining to culture) that are needed to be an effective teacher in a Canadian context.

Beyond viewing ITAs from a deficit lens, which invalidates the skills and experience that they bring into the Canadian university classroom, there are other issues with programs such as CCC and the Dalhousie Accent Clinic. First, these programs may promote change for the sake of change. That is, Dalhousie's reduction of accents might be unnecessary when ITAs are teaching similarly-sounding international students who hear their accents as already clear. This leads to another issue: these programs are potentially not preparing ITAs for the specific realities of their professional environments. In the case of CCC, for instance, the adoption of generic "Canadian" behaviours could conflict with the local norms of ITAs' departments. The consequence of leaving the above issues unaddressed is that they can interfere with ITAs' execution of their work duties. For example, for ITAs needing to build rapport with learners of the same linguistic/racial background, accent reduction could widen the social distance between both parties since students may perceive their teaching assistants as dissimilar to themselves.

Wanting to understand how universities such as Dalhousie and Western can continue to have differing and, as discussed above, problematic perspectives on how to prepare ITAs for their teaching positions, I began looking at literature that explicitly dealt with issues surrounding the work of ITAs in North American university settings. The first finding from my literature review was the generally held assumption that ITAs are automatically unprepared to teach in their new academic environments. While this belief manifested in discussions about how ITAs require explicit training in adapting to the cultural norms of North American classrooms and/or acquiring necessary teaching skills, which is evidenced by the CCC program (e.g., Dawson, Dimitrov, Meadows, & Olsen, 2013; Gorsuch, 2012; Hoejke & Williams, 1992; Kim, 2009), it was mostly evident in negative perceptions of ITAs' language ability. As Yamazaki (2010) rightly notes, "researchers have overwhelmingly tended to focus on the various linguistic weaknesses of ITAs which can lead to comprehension difficulty, usually with the aim of suggesting instructional modifications to ITA training programs" (p. 6). Much of this focus pertains to the problems of the ITA accent in communication, which is exemplified by the Dalhousie Accent Clinic.

Even though I found this deficit framing of ITAs' accents (as well as their skills and knowledge) concerning, I began to ask myself the following question: if the accents of ITAs lead to comprehension difficulties, what type of accent, according to the literature, can foster better understanding? In trying to answer my own question, I presumed that an understandable accent is a clear one. This presumption was supported by research suggesting that "teachers' clear classroom communication [is very important since it] tends to always be related to greater student achievement and learning" (Li, Mazer, & Ju, 2011, p. 462). The issue, however, concerns how this rhetoric does not explicitly define clarity in terms of accent.

Based on further reading of the ITA literature, I came to recognize that clarity is associated with the speech of native speakers of English.⁴ This association mostly manifests in the notion that ITAs fail to incorporate/master specific elements of native speaker accents. In particular, much work examines their problems in such areas as word and sentence stress and intonation (e.g., Gorsuch, 2012; Hahn, 2004; Kang, 2008, 2012; Kao, Hwang, Baek, Takahashi, & Broselow, 2016; Pickering, 2004; Ye, 2013). For example, in her study of three groups of native-English-speaking university students that listened to ITA speech in which primary stress was correctly placed on a word, incorrectly placed, and completely missing, respectively, Hahn (2004) found that the first group remembered more information and rated the speech more favourably than the two other groups. In another study that looked at the intonation patterns used by native-speaking and nonnative-speaking teaching assistants in a science laboratory, Pickering (2004) found that the native speakers used a variety of tonal patterns (such as using high pitch to introduce a topic) that clearly organized the information to be delivered, whereas the nonnative speakers lacked these patterns, which ultimately led to comprehension problems. While Pickering (2004) overtly highlights the linguistic superiority of native speakers by showing how their pronunciation is more comprehensible than that of nonnative speakers, Hahn (2004) also upholds this superiority by making native speakers judge

⁴For now, the term "native speaker" is used as a purely linguistic category. However, as will be detailed in Chapter Two (pages 31-32), the term is complicated by notions of race and nation.

nonnative speech, thereby suggesting that native speakers of English have mastery and ownership over the language (Phillipson, 1992; Widdowson, 1994).

Just as there is work that (implicitly) values native speaker status as a source of clear speech, I also came across literature suggesting that clarity is much more than something located in a particular type of voice. Indeed, this literature views clarity as a process that is dependent on a series of contextual factors (Titsworth & Mazer, 2010). One such factor is the individual background of the listener. For example, in a series of experimental and survey studies, it has been noted how individuals who have had experience interacting with ITAs tend to rate ITA speech as more comprehensible than those who have had little interactive experience and/or had negative learning experiences with ITAs (e.g., Kang, 2012; Kang et al., 2015; Plakans, 1997). Furthermore, Kang and Rubin (2009) suggest that individuals who have taken foreign language classes and/or have formal training in linguistics are more likely to find nonnative English speech more comprehensible than others who lacked this training. These findings highlight how a clear accent is found in the ear of the beholder. However, while some listeners may hear the foreign-accented speech of ITAs as already comprehensible, others may still be critical of it. An interesting example of this point is seen in how international students perceive ITA accents. For instance, in her study of how the background characteristics of 70 undergraduate students influenced their ratings of ITA accents, Kang (2012) found that the nonnative-English-speaking students were more critical of ITAs' speech than the native-speaking participants. Kang (2012) hypothesizes that one reason for this finding is that since nonnative speakers have had to struggle to attain a high level of proficiency in English, they may be less tolerant of individuals who do not seem to put much work into their accents.

Beyond differences within the individual, other contextual factors such as course content can create heightened expectations for clear speech (Titsworth & Mazer, 2010). For example, ITAs teaching linguistics may be expected to have "flawless English" because of the emphasis on learning about language (see Yamazaki, 2010). Similarly, Fitch and Morgan (2003) explain that ITA accents may be

subject to harsher criticism in difficult subject areas such as mathematics and physics because they can be used as a scapegoat for poor student performance in these subjects.

The above discussion of how context affects perceptions of clarity resonated with me because of my training and experience in English language teaching (ELT). In fact, having had the opportunity to interact with English language learners from various countries enabled me to appreciate the fact that clarity can come from different-sounding voices. I also understood how course content could exacerbate negative perceptions of foreign-accented speech by witnessing students complain that they could not learn English from nonnative-speaking teachers who allegedly spoke poor English (e.g., Braine, 1999). These observations certainly supported themes from the ITA literature, but they also helped me to recognize further gaps in this literature. One gap was the lack of mention of how the racial identity of ITAs could influence perceptions of (un)clear accents. This gap was significant for me because at the beginning of my career in ELT, I quickly learned from students that being racialized meant that I was not to be seen as an expert speaker of the English language (see Ramjattan, 2014). Having experienced this positioning from students, I suspected that ITAs would have similar experiences.

Further reading from the literature confirmed my suspicions. Indeed, the most obvious example of how racial embodiment is connected to understandable speech is Rubin's (1992) well-cited study that involved two groups of American undergraduate students listening to the same recorded lecture orated by a native speaker of "Standard American English." Whereas the first group listened to the lecture accompanied by a picture of a White face, the second group saw an Asian face during their session. Interestingly, Rubin found that the second group's comprehension of the lecture was lower than that of the first group. Moreover, the second group believed that they heard a foreign accent. Even though the recorded lecture was identical for both groups, Rubin's findings suggest that Asian (and other racialized) ITAs are perceived to embody incomprehensibility while White bodies signify the opposite.

Therefore, the implication of these findings is that racialized ITAs may be expected to put more effort into modifying their accents since their racial backgrounds figuratively distort their speech for others. Indeed, research seems to note that racialized instructors are the particular ones who must ensure that they clearly communicate with their interlocutors (e.g., Curkovic, 2000; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Lippi-Green, 2012; Mutua, 2014; Subtirelu, 2015; Yamazaki, 2010). For instance, specifically focusing on the reasons why international faculty are denied tenure in American universities, Curkovic (2000) notes how the accents of international instructors of African, Middle Eastern, and (South) Asian origin are frequently deemed a stronger barrier to communication than those of faculty of European origin. Once again, these examples support the idea that a clear accent is packaged in a White body. Furthermore, they speak to the prevalence of what scholars such as Miles (1989) would call the “new racism,” where language, as an aspect of culture, replaces biology as the mechanism through which the discrimination against racialized people occurs. Indeed, Jenny Lee and colleagues have explored how international students and workers, particularly those who identify as nonwhite, experience “neo-racism” in which their language, cultural, and/or national backgrounds become the main factor in their marginalization in the (North American) academy (e.g., Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007).⁵

While my questions concerning the ITA literature led me to more scholarship on topics like race and accent as discussed above, there remained a gap that additional reading could not fill. That is, what do ITAs think about their own accents? Also, how do they define a clear accent? In fact, with the exception of some literature (e.g., Mutua, 2014, Yamazaki, 2010), the above-cited studies, based on experiments and/or survey data, offer ideas about how ITAs should sound like without consulting ITAs themselves. Although there is no literature, at least to my knowledge, that explicitly addresses this issue, some initial insights can

⁵As will be discussed in Chapter Two, neo-racism is not exactly new as there are historical connections between language and race.

be gleaned by considering how ITAs professionally respond to generalized comments about their speech made on both the interpersonal and institutional level.

One example of the latter level is Choi's (2016) qualitative study of how 20 South Korean teaching assistants legitimize themselves as good English speakers at a US university. Choi describes how through various policy documents and statements, the university creates a climate in which South Koreans and other international students are deemed deficient nonnative speakers of English whose accents (among other things) must be constantly monitored. From the teaching assistants' perspective, this discourse consequently creates the notion that native speaker accents are the valued aesthetic for instructors. Rather than embrace this discourse and see their accents as a liability, Choi's participants choose to display their pedagogical worth by communicating their advanced subject-matter knowledge instead of developing a "native-like" accent. Indeed, they focus on the content of their teaching rather than the manner of it. In other words, clarity is not found in any one accent, but through a general articulation of knowledge.

For other ITAs, however, there seems to be an (implicit) belief that their accents are still a source of incomprehensibility. For instance, in seeming contrast to the South Korean participants mentioned above, Wang and Mantero's (2018) study of the professional identity development of three Asian teaching assistants in a US mathematics program detailed how they felt that their professional knowledge and experience could not compensate for their accented English, which was fueled by misunderstandings in the classroom as well as internalized childhood beliefs that there are natural hierarchies of accents. Because of these factors, the ITAs gravitated toward the emulation of native English speakers (Wang & Mantero, 2018). In addition to emulation, ITAs may submit to the authority of the native speaker through compensatory work. Looking at the experiences of Indian teaching assistants in the US as an example, Bhalla (2012) notes that, on account of learning that students perceive their Indian-accented English as inferior to so-called Standard American English, these teaching assistants make it a point to acknowledge on a first day of a semester that their accents might be difficult to understand. Bhalla (2012) explains that

this acknowledgment is a pedagogical strategy that seeks to thwart students' future attempts to use the Indian accent as a reason for their difficulties in class. However, this strategy also conforms to the view that an Indian accent is naturally problematic. Aside from calling attention to one's accent, some ITAs may choose to silence their voices. For example, in their examination of the professional lives of a group of ITAs working in a teacher education program, Ates and Eslami (2012) mention how one of the participants chose to teach online courses in order to escape the stigma of her race and nonnative English. As the participant describes, "When online, my skin color or my language or my language proficiency or my accent, you know, don't really have any effect on [students] or my teaching quality, in this sense, because they don't think about me as much" (Ates & Eslami, 2012, p. 112). By choosing to hide her accent through online teaching, this ITA once again communicates the idea that, unless one is a (White) native speaker of English, it is better to cover up one's accented speech.

Within this dichotomy of being unapologetic about one's foreign accent to needing to highlight/hide its supposed deficiency, some ITAs may engage in the more nuanced practice of making students forget about their accents. For instance, in an autoethnography describing her experiences as a Kenyan teaching assistant in the US, Mutua (2014), in response to a general hostility from students about her Kenyan variety of English, chose to lessen negative perceptions of her accent by excelling in American pedagogical practices such as fostering more collaborative learning with students. The idea is that if her daily teaching practices help students better understand course content, then her foreign accent should not play a role in evaluations of her as an instructor. Other than interactional style, some ITAs may use visual supports to prevent students from focusing on their accents. In fact, Cheng, Myles, and Curtis (2004), Myles and Cheng (2003), Williams (2011), and Zheng (2017) detail how the ITAs in their respective studies used board work, overhead projections, or images to enhance their spoken explanations after experiencing multiple cases of miscommunication with students. What these studies suggest is that while ITAs may still

feel self-conscious about their accents, they hope to highlight to students that there are always practical solutions to comprehension difficulties.

Although the above literature highlights how ITAs may professionally respond to the stigmatization of their foreign accents in multiple ways, I was disappointed in the lack of consideration of how individual ITAs may develop multiple and perhaps conflicting responses. For example, could an ITA feel confident about their accent in one moment and then feel the need to compensate for it at another time? Moreover, there is little mention of how academic discipline, student demographics, or other contextual factors may influence these (contradictory) professional responses. In the end, then, along with wanting to know the type of accent that ITAs find satisfactory for teaching, I was left yearning to understand what they (plan to) do with this information.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

In order to find answers to these issues, this study conceptualizes ITAs as types of aesthetic labourers who come to define and enact their own aural aesthetic for teaching. Specifically drawing on the experiences of 14 ITAs working in universities in Ontario, which, as mentioned earlier, is the province that hosts the most potential ITAs in Canada, the study seeks to accomplish two research objectives. The first objective takes the form of the following question:

1. *What type of accent do these ITAs perceive to be a satisfactory aural aesthetic while working in Ontario universities?*

The use of the word “perceive” warrants mention here as it takes on a very broad meaning in this study. Indeed, along with referring to observing or becoming aware of something, “perceive” is used as a synonym for “believe.” Both meanings are important because they highlight the different ways in which ITAs come to understand a satisfactory aural aesthetic for themselves. For instance, a perceived accent may arise from ITAs taking notice of comments made about their foreign accents and decoding the meta-communication

behind those comments. Alternatively, ITAs may offer their own opinions on sounding right for the job, which might be based on ideologies of language/race, for example. Aside from “perceive,” it is important to note how the research question as a whole does not seek to find just one common perceived accent among the ITAs of my sample. In fact, as will be detailed later, ITAs will have their own nuanced perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic that will be dependent on contextual factors.

Connected to the first research objective, the second objective of the study takes the form of the following question:

2. To what extent do the ITAs incorporate this perceived accent into their professional practices?

The intention of this question is to explore how the professional practices of ITAs adopt and/or fight against the perceived accent for work. For example, if they learn that their work environments require them to sound more like native speakers of English, ITAs may strive hard to emulate these speakers. Conversely, they may want to retain their accents and spend time on convincing others of the merits of their current aural aesthetic. Of course, it may be likely that some ITAs show evidence of having both positions. All of these potential responses may be dependent on ITAs’ racial or ethnic background, language ability, and other contextual factors in their respective workplaces.

The above scenarios depend on understanding the perceived accent as something that is externally communicated to ITAs through such things as daily interactions with students or colleagues. However, remembering that “perceive” can also be a synonym for “believe,” it may seem redundant to ask the second research question since ITAs may have already stated what type of accent they use at work. Even with this potential redundancy, it is still worthwhile to answer this research question. In fact, many have noted that what people say does not always match with what they do. Although this study relies on ITAs’ talk about their professional practices rather than observation of these practices, this point remains relevant if one considers that people can do things with talk or language in general (e.g., Austin, 1962; Cavanaugh, 2016; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In the current research context, for instance, ITAs may use

their talk about their teaching, etc., to construct a desired professional identity for their listening audience. Therefore, the possibility exists that in wanting to project a particular professional identity, ITAs may consequently contradict their own notions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic for Ontario universities. A further benefit of exploring these potential contradictions of ITAs' professional practices is that they can offer suggestions on how to improve the current models of training given to ITAs elsewhere.

Significance of the Study

While there is much literature on the impact of ITAs on North American higher education, very little of it features the voices of ITAs themselves (Bhalla, 2012; Mutua, 2014). Thus, the main significance of the current study is that gives the opportunity for ITAs to describe their own workplace experiences. This aspect of the study is important because, in contrast to work that views ITAs from a deficit lens, it does not solely perceive ITAs as passive workers who willingly accept that their accents are incomprehensible and in need of correction. Rather, it seeks to highlight how ITAs can be actively engaged in understanding what type of accent is best for their instructional contexts and incorporating (some elements of) this accent into their professional practices. Adding to this broadened view of ITAs is the study being situated in the context of Ontario/Canadian universities, which receives less coverage in the existing US-centric ITA literature and can yield important insights into defining a satisfactory accent for ITAs (to be discussed later).

Despite attempting to provide a more holistic perspective of the working lives of ITAs, the study specifically focuses on the salience of foreign accent in their work. This narrow focus may be considered a limitation since other aspects of language such as overall linguistic proficiency and a lack of knowledge of Canadian/North American academic culture are typically argued as more salient factors affecting ITAs (e.g., Chiang, 2016; Guo & Chase, 2011; LaRocco, 2011; LeGros & Faez, 2012). However, foreign accent remains significant as it can act as the site from which these issues may be discussed. For instance, since it is mistakenly related to language proficiency (Creese, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2015), foreign accent may

be blamed for ITAs misusing a word when, in fact, they simply mispronounced it. Furthermore, foreign accent can be linked to cultural norms as exemplified by how teacher immediacy with students, which is valued in North America, can be affected by one's intonation (e.g., Pickering, 2004). Thus, the presence of foreign accent may perpetually manifest in other areas of ITAs' required skills.

The primary focus on accent also reflects another significant component of the current study: its interdisciplinarity. Indeed, unlike other ITA studies and as will be better highlighted in the remainder of this thesis, this research explicitly draws on literature from various disciplines to analyze the topic of working with an accent for ITAs. What is particularly noteworthy about my interdisciplinary stance is that by reading this thesis, readers from different scholarly backgrounds may ideally discover new research directions to advance their own fields. For example, for sociologists of work and labour studies scholars interested in the study of aesthetic labour, the description of ITAs' work as a type of this labour may inspire them to look at other professions where the aesthetic qualities of workers are also the subject of scrutiny. Also, they may come to appreciate that the specific requirements for aesthetic labour may not be upheld by a formal code of conduct, but rather, through workers' own perceptions of satisfactory aural aesthetics.⁶

For critical sociolinguistic and race scholars, the study continues the (fairly recent) exploration of language and race. As briefly highlighted in this chapter, the incomprehensibility of the ITA accent is not a purely linguistic issue since the racial background of ITAs can be perceived as either enhancing or reducing their comprehensibility for others. However, as will be fully detailed later, the connection between accent/language and race may be much more complex. In fact, in defining a satisfactory aural aesthetic for work, ITAs may choose to embody a particular race through their voice. For example, they may prefer to "whiten" themselves by articulating a preference to sound like a native speaker of English, who might be

⁶See Chapters Three and Seven for further examples of how the current study advances the existing research on aesthetic labour. Chapter Seven also summarizes the study's contributions to race and higher education research, which are discussed below.

imagined as a White person. Therefore, the study contributes to understanding how race is read/heard by others and how it can be performed by racialized people on the terrain of language/accent.

Finally, for scholars whose work is located in the realm of higher education, this study further considers the complexities that arise with the increasing presence of international students on campuses (in North America). In contrast to studies that perceive ITAs as needing to linguistically accommodate to a homogenous group of domestic students, the current research explores how or if ITAs need to make accommodations for other international learners, who may have unique notions about the right sound for their teaching assistants. This aspect of the study leads to its practical significance. More often than not and as mentioned before with the CCC program at Western University, formal (language) training for ITAs focuses on changing or managing their behaviour rather than drawing on their existing skills and knowledge (Korpan, 2014; Swan, Kramer, Gopal, Shi, & Roth, 2017). However, by investigating ITAs' own views on how to best sound for teaching, this study hopes to inspire trainers and other appropriate stakeholders to better involve ITAs in the planning and provision of curricula, etc., for training programs. Furthermore, it will ideally provide guidance on developing relevant content for these programs so as to prepare ITAs for what they will actually experience in the classroom.

Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis

The purpose of this introductory chapter was to outline and contextualize the topic and purpose of the current study as well as briefly describe its scholarly and practical significance. The remainder of this thesis serves to substantiate and explain various points made throughout this chapter. To begin, Chapters Two and Three work together to provide theoretical and empirical background to make sense of the study's findings. Chapter Two, which mostly relates to the defining of a satisfactory aural aesthetic, offers an extended understanding of foreign accent, the focus of the work of ITAs, by exploring its linguistic, racial, and professional dimensions. The third chapter, taking up and extending some debates presented in

Chapter Two, further defines aesthetic labour and thus provides the backdrop to discuss the differing professional practices of the participants. The main intent of this chapter is to expand the parameters of aesthetic labour so as to present ITAs as aesthetic labourers. Following this discussion, Chapter Four justifies the use of stories to understand and articulate the professional experiences of ITAs and subsequently details how narrative inquiry was used as the methodology of the study.

The next set of chapters present and discuss the research findings. In Chapter Five, I present a thematic portrait of ITAs' perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic to use in their respective workplaces, which takes the form of linguistic, racial, and professional stories. Afterward, in Chapter Six, I analyze how their professional practices conform to and/or resist this perceived aesthetic through a description of the work they do on and around their accents. Interwoven in the analysis of this dual accent work are brief commentaries of how the participants' practices reinforce and/or challenge current approaches in the training of ITAs. These commentaries play a significant role in Chapter Seven, which aims to provide concrete suggestions on improving the professional development opportunities for ITAs. Beyond this goal, the final chapter also offers my concluding thoughts about the significance of the study in light of the findings, its limitations, and its broader implications for future research.

One final point concerns my use of scholarly literature in this thesis. Rather than discuss relevant literature in concrete sections or chapters, I have chosen to use it at appropriate parts within the narrative of the thesis (Phillion, 1999). Thus, I sometimes introduce a set of literature in one chapter and then return to it in another. As seen in this chapter, for instance, I provided a brief literature review of existing ITA research because it was clearly connected to how I developed the topic of the current study. However, my exploration of this literature will reappear when discussing the applicability of aesthetic labour to the work of ITAs in Chapter Three. Last, when detailing the findings in later chapters, I occasionally go into brief explorations of pertinent research to explain the perceptions of the participants.

Chapter Two: The Linguistic, Racial, and Professional Dimensions of Foreign Accent

As Cavanaugh (2005) notes, “the [scholarly] pursuit of accents tends to fall into one of two camps: looking at accents as acoustical or phonological phenomena, or considering them as sociological markers” (p. 129). Like Cavanaugh, I see the benefit of marrying both perspectives in the context of studying the foreign accents of international teaching assistants (ITAs). Indeed, it is through hearing the material sound of ITAs’ accents that students and other individuals make judgments about their social locations and hence their professional worth. For this reason, this chapter sets out to outline the multidimensional nature of foreign accent. First, I discuss foreign accent as an assemblage of linguistic traits, its relation to concepts such as comprehensibility, and its reliance on folk linguistic information. The next part of the chapter explores the sociological side of foreign accent through detailing its ties to race. Specifically, I position foreign accent within the (historical) interconnection between language and race, describe how ideologies of Whiteness are often used to evaluate foreign-accented speech, and consider the use of accent in racial performances. The final section continues the sociological discussion of foreign accent by locating it within the demand for oral communication skills in the neoliberal economy, where the language/accents of workers are increasingly scrutinized by employers. Taken together, these three sections provide the backdrop to understand how ITAs are workers in a political economy that continues to determine the value of their accents through a linguistic and racial lens.

The Linguistic Dimensions of Foreign Accent

Defining a Foreign Accent

An accent has been defined as “a set of [various phonological] habits that convey linguistic meaning along with social and situational affiliation” (Moyer, 2013, p. 11). Oftentimes, accent is imprecisely equated to its related concept of pronunciation. Simply put, pronunciation refers to “all aspects of the oral production of language” (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 5). These aspects include segmentals (vowel and

consonant sounds), suprasegmentals (e.g., pitch, word and sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation), voice quality, and rate (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012; Moyer, 2013). Accent, in contrast, is a specific pattern of pronunciation and is thus a broader term (Derwing & Munro, 2015). In short, each accent produces its own unique pronunciation pattern.

The simple fact is that all people have some type of accent and, furthermore, this accent is tied to their identity. In fact, “accents provide critical clues to where persons were raised, what their first language might be, their gender, class background, and racialized bodies even in the absence of visual cues” (Creese, 2010, p. 297). Of current importance is how an accent can indicate a person’s first language (L1), which might be labelled as a foreign accent. As the prime focus of this thesis, a foreign accent refers to “patterns of [pronunciation] resulting from L1 influence on the L2 [second language] that are noticeably different from [native speaker] productions” (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 177). According to Major (2013), the effect of the L1 on the L2 is most often seen on the segmental level.

For instance, native speakers of French may pronounce the English word “theatre” as “teatre” since French does not have the /ə/ (TH) phoneme (i.e., sound) in its phonological system. Another example is the perceived inability of Japanese speakers of English to produce the /l/ and /r/ sounds (as in “lake” and “rake,” respectively) due to the lack of differentiation between these sounds in the Japanese language. These types of L1 interference can be deeply ingrained into the lips, mouths, and tongues of foreign-accented speakers and therefore be very resistant to change (Moyer, 2013; Weber, 2015). Beyond phonemes, L1 interference can also occur with the production of suprasegmentals. With regard to stress and rhythm, for example, it has been noted how Spanish speakers tend to stress every syllable in English because of the non-existence of unstressed syllables in Spanish (e.g., Major, 2013). Conversely, English speakers may fail to stress every syllable when speaking in Spanish.

Thus far, a foreign accent can be conceived as a type of accent, “which draw[s] on the phonological resources of one language, but the syntactic, morphological and lexical resources of another”

(Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 131). That is, as seen above, a French speaker of English may use the lexical item “theatre” in a statement but rely on French pronunciation to actually utter it. However, this conception of foreign accent is admittedly limited. Instead of language, what can constitute a foreign accent may involve place. Indeed, since an accent only becomes an accent when one travels from one region to another (Aneesh, 2015a; Creese, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2012), native speakers of different varieties of a language may come to have foreign accents in a new country. For example, native speakers of British English may be perceived to speak the language differently if they decided to move to the US. This point may be seen in the segmental realm where the first syllable of the word “privacy” may be pronounced with an /ɪ/ vowel sound (e.g., “in”) in British English as opposed to an /aɪ/ sound (e.g., “eye”) in US English. With regard to word stress as another example, whereas a British English speaker may say “conTROversy,” a US English speaker may say, “CONtroversy.”⁷

While an accent can become foreign as a result of human mobility as discussed above, it is important to consider how the foreignness of (certain elements) of accents may vary in particular places. Consider the example of British English speakers in the US once again. Although there are differences in pronunciation between British and US English, there are also similarities that might make a British accent less foreign in the US. For instance, in the US, the word “route” may be pronounced with an /aʊ/ vowel sound (e.g., “how”) or with an /u:/ sound (e.g., “boot”). Therefore, in the case of British-accented speakers who exclusively use the latter pronunciation, they may be perceived as sounding less foreign in parts of the US that also use the same pronunciation. Although this example is somewhat simplistic and perhaps even overstated, it does open up the possibility of understanding foreign accent as not simply a concrete, stable

⁷These examples are overly generalized as there may be phonological diversity among speakers of both varieties of English. For instance, it has been noted that due to the global impact of US culture, British English speakers are increasingly adopting US pronunciations of words (Copping, 2011). It is also important to note that there are always regional pronunciation differences within various countries (for a discussion of this point in the context of the US, see Lippi-Green, 2012).

trait, but also, something that is subject to change. This point will be detailed below with a discussion on the notion of accentedness.

Accentedness, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

Some scholars have argued that, rather than being concerned about whether or not someone has a foreign accent, research should investigate to what degree one has an accent (Moyer, 2013). The underlying belief of this argument is that foreign accents are not absolute; they may be perceived as more or less similar to particular varieties of a language (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Moyer, 2013). Therefore, the focus should be on accentedness, which can be defined as “how different a pattern of speech sounds compared to the local variety [of a language]” (Derwing & Munro, 2009, p. 478). Discussions about accentedness often centre on the age of the foreign-accented speaker.

In fact, as Derwing and Munro (2015) summarize, research concerning the relationship between age and foreign accent makes the following “long-standing observation: adult learners do not typically acquire native-like pronunciation, even after many years of experience with their [L2] and an otherwise high level of proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing” (p. 31). This is not to say that their accents do not change, but rather, that these acoustic changes would not necessarily make others perceive them as native speakers. This research on age and accent seems to support the critical period hypothesis (CPH), which states that in order for L2 learners of a language to attain native-like competence or specifically a native-like accent, they must start their learning before the age of puberty as their brains are better able to “naturally” acquire the L2 (DeKeyser, 2000; Lenneberg, 1967). According to the CPH, then, L2 learners can completely eliminate their foreign accents before the age of 13. However, it is important to note that the CPH is highly contested due to the presence of various counterexamples. For instance, it has been detailed how such factors as individual talent, motivation, and even the phonological similarities between an L1 and L2 can make adult foreign-accented speakers sound like native speakers of the L2 on

certain occasions (e.g., Bongaerts, van Summeren, Planken, & Schils, 1997; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Piller, 2002). Thus, it always remains possible to (radically) change the accentedness of one's speech, even after pre-adolescence.

Changing the accentedness of foreign-accented speech may seem like a holistic endeavour in that speakers would need to change all segmental and suprasegmental features of their accents to sound native-like, for instance. However, remembering the above mention of the British pronunciation of "route" in the US, particular phonological characteristics can make one seem more or less accented. For example, regarding the rate of speech, Kang (2010) and Munro and Derwing (1998) found that when foreign-accented speakers of English speak at a slower rate, listeners perceive them as having stronger accents. In these cases, then, simply changing one phonological trait (e.g., speaking rate) can influence overall perceptions of accentedness.

But why do people care whether someone is more or less accented? What is the importance of accentedness? Based on the example of the criticism of ITAs' accents as introduced in the previous chapter, the answer is that accentedness is perceived to interfere with the clarity of one's speech. While clarity was not properly defined in the preceding chapter, it can be thought of as a synonym for intelligibility. In terms of a definition, intelligibility is generally understood "as the degree of a listener's actual comprehension of an utterance" (Derwing & Munro, 2009, p. 479). Despite this seemingly straightforward meaning, there continues to be debate on what this term truly means and how to adequately measure it (Derwing & Munro, 2009, 2015; Isaacs, 2008; Moyer, 2013). What is better understood, however, is its relationship with accentedness. For instance, summarizing their vast amount of research on the topic of intelligibility, Derwing and Munro (2009) make the following conclusion: "intelligibility and accentedness are partially independent. In other words, it is possible to be completely intelligible and yet be perceived as having a heavy accent" (p. 479). It is important to emphasize their *partial* independence here. Indeed, even though having a foreign accent is not incongruent with being intelligible, many argue that modifying the

suprasegmental features of an accent can enhance intelligibility (Moyer, 2013). This point has already been exemplified in the last chapter with mention of studies like Hahn's (2004), which highlight how such features as word stress can influence listeners' comprehension.

Yet, intelligibility can sometimes be achieved through less objective means. For example, some studies have suggested that intelligibility is a matter of perception in that various listener factors such as the amount of exposure to foreign-accented speech or being monolingual or bilingual can influence ratings of (un)intelligible utterances (e.g., Bent & Bradlow, 2003; Fuse, Navichkova, & Alloggio, 2018). These findings question the usefulness of evaluating foreign accents in terms of intelligibility since what may be understandable for one may not be understandable for another. Moreover, given that intelligibility is highly contextual, it may sometimes be the case that the accents of native speakers can be heard as unintelligible in intercultural encounters (e.g., Bayyurt, 2018). This ambiguity of intelligibility (in relation to foreign accent) is matched by that of its related concept: comprehensibility.

At first glance, comprehensibility may simply be another synonym for intelligibility. However, for (applied) linguists, it specifically refers to "the amount of effort put into understanding another's speech (Derwing & Munro, 2009, 2015; Kang, 2010; Moyer, 2013). In other words, comprehensibility describes how easy or difficult it is to understand an utterance and can therefore be seen as the process towards intelligibility (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Derwing & Munro, 2009). While intelligibility and accentedness are certainly subjective, what makes research on comprehensibility particularly distinct is its explicit focus on variability. In fact, far from being based on any real linguistic measurement, comprehensibility is influenced by the listener's biases about others (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lindemann, 2011). If a listener holds a less favourable view of a speaker, then the latter's speech will be perceived as less comprehensible. Conversely, more comprehensible speech will be the result of more favourable views of a speaker.⁸

⁸These points will be better explored on the section concerning the racial dimensions of foreign accent.

Like intelligibility, it is often the case that comprehensibility is influenced by context (Derwing & Munro, 2015). For example, as discussed with the ITA literature in the previous chapter, factors such as prior interaction with foreign-accented speakers (Kang, 2012; Kang et al., 2015; Plakans, 1997), the formal language training of a listener (Kang & Rubin, 2009), or course content (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Titsworth & Mazer, 2010; Yamazaki, 2010) may affect perceptions of the comprehensibility of a foreign accent.

The above discussion on accentedness, intelligibility, and comprehensibility has highlighted how evaluations of a foreign accent are dynamic in nature. Furthermore, it emphasizes how these evaluations are rarely, if ever, objective. While it is worthwhile to question the utility of these concepts, then, it is also important to reconsider the notion of foreign accent at the same time. This suggestion may seem strange given that the discussion thus far on (foreign) accent has treated it as an easily definable thing in the world. For linguists, however, there continues to be no specific definition for “(foreign) accent” (Lippi-Green, 2012). Rather, understandings about accent usually rely on lay definitions of the term. These definitions often derive from a folk linguistic perspective on accents.

Folk Linguistics and Foreign Accent

In the simplest sense, folk linguistics is concerned with non-linguists’ knowledge and feelings about any aspect of language (Albury, 2017; Preston, 1993). As Albury (2017) notes, “the point about folk linguistics is not whether what people claim to know is correct or reliable from any positivist perspective that centralises knowledge authority” (p. 39), but rather, how they make sense of language in their social worlds. When it comes to the phenomenon of accent, Agha (2003) notes how folk linguistic knowledge “is neither very precise nor free of ideological distortion” (p. 232) when attempting to explain this phenomenon. This distortion typically occurs in three main areas.

First, Agha (2003) mentions that, according to a folk linguistic perspective, some people have accents while others simply speak a language. This belief operates in a Self/Other dichotomy in which

one's own group, particularly if it holds social and political power, is perceived to be non-accented while those from other (marginalized) groups have accents that are often deemed to be deficient. In the end, then, an "accent is what other people have; here the phonetic norms of *one's own group* comprise the default baseline of unaccented speech [original emphasis]" (p. 232). It is not only that an accent is a matter of different sound patterns; it carries social meaning as well.

Indeed, accent is "a sound pattern linked to a framework of social identities. The social identity is recognized, indexically, as the identity of the speaker who produces the utterance in the instance, and described, metalinguistically, through the use of identifying labels" (Agha, 2003, pp. 232-233). In other words, accents can come to have a life of their own and thus become personified in the sense of possessing their own characterological traits (Cavanaugh, 2005; Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles, & Sink, 2016). For example, French-accented English draws the image of the sensual lover (Lippi-Green, 2012) while Received Pronunciation (RP) in England relates to intelligence and a refined nature (e.g., Agha, 2003; Giles & Marsh, 1979; Moyer, 2013). Sometimes, people may perceive any foreign accent to be linked to positive traits. Take, for instance, Amy Chua's (2011) famous quote: "Do you know what a foreign accent is? It's a sign of bravery" (p. 30). Here, Chua is referring to how foreign accents signal the strong character of immigrants who take the risk of leaving their home countries to find a better life elsewhere.

Perhaps the most interesting example supporting how accents signal social identities comes from Lippi-Green's (2012) analysis of the presentation of accents in animated Disney movies. With regard to the portrayal of nonhuman characters, Lippi-Green notes how accents are often used to solidify the positioning of these characters within the story. For instance, in *The Lion King* where all of the characters are African animals, accents become audible reminders of who is good and bad. This point is particularly seen with the portrayal of the villainous hyenas, who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE), thereby making

the stereotypical suggestion that AAVE speakers engage in bad/criminal behaviour.⁹ Thus, this example highlights how an accent can map anthropomorphic qualities onto anything.

The final way that the term “accent” remains an imprecise concept is how listeners come to recognize certain accents. In fact, “in folk-terms, accents are often described as if they operated in an all-or-nothing way” (Agha, 2003, p. 233). However, as pointed out by the prior discussion on accentedness, individuals can speak with varying degrees of an accent. More importantly, accents can acquire general or specific identifications depending on the geographical location of the listener. For example, Agha (2003) describes how accented speech that is regularly heard in one’s country, region, or city will be subject to more precise definitions. This point is highlighted here:

A Liverpool working-class accent will strike a Chicagoan primarily as being British, a Glaswegian as being English, an English southerner as being northern, an English northerner as being Liverpoolian, and a Liverpoolian as being working-class. The closer we get to home, the more refined are our perceptions (Wells, 1982, as cited in Agha, 2003, p. 233).

The above example makes an important point about the perceptions of foreign accents: the level of detail in which an accent is characterized can influence its social meaning. Therefore, people in Chicago who hear a Liverpool working class accent as British might perceive this accent as prestigious and sophisticated like RP. Conversely, for Liverpoolians, the same accent might garner opposite impressions. These types of differing views may have certain consequences as seen in student perceptions of the foreign accents of ITAs, for instance. Indeed, even if ITAs speak with a prestigious accent in their home countries, students may nevertheless perceive their accents as generally foreign and incomprehensible. While ITAs may be situated among the linguistic elite at home, they can thus lose this status when abroad.

⁹It is important to note that more prestigious accents such as RP can be portrayed as villainous when juxtaposed to the so-called Standard American English of protagonists (Lippi-Green, 2012). As will be detailed in the next section, however, varieties of English like AAVE are particularly stigmatized since they are racialized as deviant.

Whether it concerns the differing perceptions of (ITA) accents or the notion that some people do not have accents, the discussion on folk conceptions of accent has alluded that they are not purely derived from individual beliefs, but also, come to constitute normative knowledge about language difference, which ultimately creates social hierarchies among speakers (Albury, 2017). However, to fully understand how folk linguistics produces such inequalities, it is necessary to explore the racial dimensions of foreign accent. This exploration begins in the following section.

The Racial Dimensions of Foreign Accent

Foreign Accent and the Formation of Racial Hierarchies

As Orelus (2017) correctly notes, “the acquisition of accents does not happen in a vacuum. Such an acquisition takes place through interaction occurring through...sociohistorical phenomena” (p. 128). One major sociohistorical phenomenon that explains the development of accents was the spread of European colonial projects that sought to “civilize” various indigenous populations throughout the world. A significant component of this civilizing mission was educating colonized peoples in European languages, which was intended to make them more European (e.g., Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Memmi, 1965; Orelus, 2017; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). In the context of the British control of India, this intent was clearly articulated by the *Minute on Indian Education*, which advocated for English-medium education in order to produce a new group of Indians who remained “Indian in blood and colour, but English, in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay, 1835/1972, p. 249). The resulting neglect of the home languages of colonized subjects further dehumanized them as noted by Memmi (1965):

The colonized’s mother tongue, that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions and dreams, that in which his tenderness and wonder are expressed, thus that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is the least valued. It has no stature in the country or in the concert of peoples (p. 107).

Yet, despite their purposeful silencing, these indigenous languages continued to influence the colonized in that their newly acquired European languages often carried phonological traces of their mother tongues, thus creating new accented varieties of the former set of languages (Orelus, 2017).

In addition to education, the forced migration and enslavement of African peoples in the Americas and Caribbean provide another example of the creation of accents. In fact, due to the increased contact between African slaves of different language backgrounds as well as contact with colonizers of various European languages, slaves developed pidgins (simplified combinations of multiple languages), which then evolved into creoles (advanced versions of pidgins), and then finally became new language varieties with their own particular accents (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Orelus, 2017). These varieties would subsequently be passed down to future generations and can thus be heard today.

The above colonial activities exposed Europeans to racial and linguistic diversity, which they struggled to comprehend and control. In order to justify their superiority over racial and linguistic Others, then, Europeans turned to the academy for support. Indeed, with colonial expansion came an expansion of (social) scientific scholarship that sought to prove the deficiencies of the colonized (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Said, 1978). Much of this scholarship, prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, helped to form popular conceptions of race today. That is, race was/is a set of biological differences between groups of people as displayed by physical features such as hair or skin colour (Miles & Torres, 1996; Satzewich, 1998). These features then signal higher-order characteristics like intelligence or morality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Memmi, 1965). Predictably, the White traits of Europeans signalled their heightened intellect, moral character, etc., when compared to the nonwhite features of colonized groups, thereby helping to justify and maintain the sociopolitical power of the former.

What is interesting to note is how language was used to emphasize the racial inferiority of the colonized. In fact, the advent of philology in the nineteenth century created the opportunity to display how the evolution of languages mirrored biological evolution and thereby prove that inferior languages are

spoken by inferior races (Ashcroft, 2001; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Phillipson, 2009). For the French philologist, Ernest Renan, language not only reflected racial difference; it was synonymous with race (Ashcroft, 2001; Said, 1978). For example, in order to distinguish Semitic and Aryan peoples, who are both phenotypically White, Renan suggested that the languages of each group could racially differentiate one from the other (Ashcroft, 2001; Omoniyi, 2016; Said, 1978).

This co-naturalization of race and language also extended to conceptions of the European nation-state, specifically the idea that there should be one common language and culture within one nation (e.g., Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Hackert, 2009; 2012; Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2016; Shuck, 2006). The people thought to sustain a nation were native speakers of the common language as they embodied the common culture through speaking the language (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Hackert, 2012). However, not everyone could become a native speaker. Instead, native speaker status was a birthright as one had to be born in the nation and, more often than not, be of a particular race/ethnicity (Bonfiglio, 2013). In the context of European colonialism, the idealization of the native speaker served to further differentiate the metropole from the colony: whereas those in the mostly White metropole were perceived to speak “pure,” native varieties of a language, the racialized subjects in the colony spoke “corrupted” varieties due the influence of their indigenous languages and cultures. This point is nicely echoed by Chow (2014):

Because the native speaker is thought to occupy an uncorrupted origination point, learning a language as a nonnative speaker can only be an exercise in woeful approximation. The failure to sound completely like the native speaker is thus given a pejorative name: “foreign accent.” Having an accent is, in other words, the symptom precisely of discontinuity—an incomplete assimilation, a botched attempt at eliminating another tongue’s competing copresence. In geopolitical terms, having an accent is tantamount to leaving on display—rather than successfully covering up—the embarrassing evidence of one’s alien origins and migratory status (p. 58).

According to Chow, then, the foreign accent of nonnative speakers serves to signify their status as failed native speakers. This perception of the foreign accent has many examples. For instance, Vigouroux (2017) discusses how circulating stereotypes about Africans being poor speakers of French, which began in

nineteenth-century France, helped to emphasize the “clarity” of the French used in the metropole. Such stereotypes often operated on European perceptions of pidgins and creoles, which “were often taken as evidence of the mental inabilities of Black people to learn European languages, or even to learn any languages properly” (Heller & McElhinny, 2017, p. 72).

While the native speaker was a European invention, it nevertheless became the yardstick from which the colonized evaluated their and others’ speech (Chow, 2014). This point is articulated by Derrida (1998), who grew up speaking French in Algeria and held a tortured bias towards a pure French accent:

I am not proud of it, I make no doctrine of it, but so it is: an accent—any French accent, but above all a strong southern accent—seems incompatible to me with the intellectual dignity of public speech...Despite everything I sometimes appear to profess, I concede that I have contracted a shameful but intractable intolerance: at least in French, insofar as the language is concerned, I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French (p. 46).

Derrida’s confession highlights how the accent of the colonizer can continue to colonize one’s perceptions of speech. Yet, it is interesting to note that Derrida did not only despise foreign-accented French, but also, the regional accents found in the French metropole. Indeed, his disdain for southern accents leads to a consideration of how the accents of *particular* native speakers came to be valued in a nation.

For instance, in *Race and the Rise of Standard American*, Bonfiglio (2002) details how the English accent found in the (mid)western US came to be regarded as the Standard American accent. For Bonfiglio, this rise to prominence is peculiar given that so-called standard accents like RP in England or Parisian French in France usually emerged from upper-class, urban centres of a country rather than its rural regions (as was the case for the [mid]western accent). However, what made the (mid)western accent standard was its racial character. Indeed, Bonfiglio posits that the preference for sound patterns from the (mid)west was particularly influenced by early-twentieth-century antisemitism and xenophobia that saw the “racial/ethnic contamination” of urban centres in the northeast as prohibiting the development of proper national speech. Since the (mid)western US was perceived to be largely White and thus free from “racial/ethnic impurities,” it

became the site for the correct manner of speaking. In short, the racial purity of the (mid)west ensured its aural purity for the US public.

The example of the (mid)western accent becoming the linguistic standard for the US emphasizes how a standard accent or language in general is something that is constructed instead of naturally heard (Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy, 2001). Moreover, what is considered standard often relies on the racial, specifically White, identity of a speaker. This point is particularly true for conceptions of Standard English accents. While the creation of the Standard American accent required dividing Whiteness from racial/ethnic diversity *within* the US, it is also the case that Standard English can arise with racial divisions on a global level. In fact, because of past colonial activities and their continuing sociopolitical power, majority-White, English-speaking nations such as the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are perceived to speak native, standard varieties of the language whereas mostly racialized countries like India or the Philippines, which are home to many people who would consider themselves native English speakers, are deemed to speak foreign varieties, due to the co-presence of “corrupting” languages that can degrade the English spoken there (e.g., Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). The corrupting influence of these other languages is evidenced by foreign-accented English.

This understanding of who/what constitutes a Standard English accent often emerges in the context of immigration. When immigrants decide to come to a new country, they typically travel through politically defined borders in order to reach their destination. However, for some immigrants, there remain additional symbolic borders that they cannot fully cross, one of them being the variety of English spoken in the new nation (Creese & Kambere, 2003). In the context of Canada, for example, Creese (2010) and Creese and Kambere (2003) note that while White immigrants with British- or Australian-accented English are deemed to speak varieties of the language that are compatible with so-called Standard Canadian English, racialized immigrants with accents originating from the Global South are thought to speak

incomprehensible English and thus be unable to fully participate in Canadian society. For the former set of immigrants, then, their accents remain standard even when they are heard in new spaces.

It is important to emphasize here that race, as an embodied category, is not objectively tied to accent/language. That is, as Ashcroft (2001) states, “language has no race” (p. 326). However, beginning with European colonialism as discussed above, race is constructed by assigning social meanings onto such things as language/accent (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Ashcroft, 2001). Therefore, to discuss race entails acknowledging this assignment of meanings known as racialization, the process of categorizing people into socially distinct races through linguistic and bodily traits (Chun & Lo, 2016; Miles, 1989; Satzewich, 1998). Racialization ultimately leads to racism since the process of categorizing individuals positions some people as superior or inferior to others, either in the idealist sense (i.e., racism is a matter of cognition or discourse) or materially (i.e., certain races receive institutional or structural advantages in the world) (e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Miles, 1989). What drives both the process of racialization and racism are ideologies, which, in the simplest sense, “are beliefs that shape and order our understanding of society” (DuBord, 2014, p. 26). One popular example of such ideologies is that of colourblindness.

Put simply, colourblindness purports that racism is thing of the past and consequently has no bearing on contemporary interpersonal, institutional, and/or structural inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Mueller, 2017). Moreover, it is important to note that, in the context of the current study, it often uses language as a proxy for race. For instance, discussions about the language practices of racialized groups operate on the ideology of colourblindness by framing these practices as objective evidence of these groups failing to succeed in academic or professional spheres (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Love-Nichols, 2018; Morita-Mullaney, 2018; Rosa & Flores, 2017). In the realm of North American higher education as a specific example, the English of racialized international students is often subject to a colourblind discourse stating that their alleged deficiency in this language is the reason for their failure to academically and socially adjust to their new campus environments (rather than racist perceptions and structures), thereby

constructing it as a race-neutral problem (e.g., El-Lahib et al., 2011; Kwon, Hernandez, & Moga, 2019; Lee & Rice, 2007). Beyond colourblindness, these examples are also dependent on raciolinguistic ideologies, which are discussed in the following sub-section.

Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Revisiting Accentedness, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

In order to better understand the racial dimensions of foreign accent, it is necessary to explore the raciolinguistic ideologies that support these dimensions. Concerned with not only the visual aspects of Whiteness but also its linguistic and auditory components, “raciolinguistic ideologies produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150). In other words, these ideologies specifically construct a White listening subject “who hears and interprets the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations as deviant based on their racial positioning in society as opposed to any objective characteristics of their language use” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 151). This listening subject is not necessarily an actual White person, but rather, an ideological mode of perception that can be adopted by racialized groups as well as embedded in institutional practices, policies, etc., that perpetuate racial inequalities (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017).¹⁰ For example, in the context of transnational call centres in India, Indian managers might actually perceive the English of their fellow Indian employees as inadequate for dealing with callers from the Global North and thus adopt the position of White listening subject by enacting training policies that require these employees to improve their language skills in the form of such things as accent modification (e.g., Cowie, 2007; Mirchandani, 2012; Ramjattan, 2018).

¹⁰The notion of the White listening subject draws from Inoue’s (2006) conception of the listening subject in which linguistic phenomena such as “Japanese women’s language” are not actual language categories, but rather, ideological constructions brought about by specific sociohistorical processes.

Raciolinguistic ideologies do not randomly materialize. Rather, they are the products of European colonial histories. In fact, Rosa and Flores (2017) note how these ideologies arose out of European contact with indigenous languages, which, as mentioned in the previous sub-section, were perceived to be primitive and even subhuman. Furthermore, even when colonized subjects adopted European languages to “civilize” themselves, they were still deemed to speak deficient versions of these new languages (e.g., Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017). This point was also seen in the last sub-section with examples such as Vigouroux’s (2017) discussion of how the Africans of France’s colonies were seen as being unable to speak French properly. The colonial histories of raciolinguistic ideologies remain significant as they shape contemporary understandings of who is and is not a capable user of a language.

What particularly sustains the coloniality of raciolinguistic ideologies is the sub-ideologies that undergird them. For the purposes of this thesis, two of these sub-ideologies are worthy to mention. First, there is the ideology of nativeness, which exaggerates the differences between native and nonnative speakers in particularly majority-White, English-speaking countries. Whereas the former are seen as true citizens of a monolingual and monocultural nation and speak the language of the nation with “no accent,” the latter are perpetual foreigners who speak with incomprehensible accents (Dragojevic, Giles, & Watson, 2013; Shuck, 2006). Moreover, this native-nonnative distinction is mapped onto racial differences such that White people are deemed native speakers while their racialized peers become nonnative (Shuck, 2006). In raciolinguistic terms, the ideology of nativeness positions all racialized people, no matter their language background, as deviant language users. As might be evident now, this ideology is the product of European nationalisms, which, as mentioned before, saw the native speaker as the individual who racially embodied the culture of a nation (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Bonfiglio, 2013; Hackert, 2012).

Alongside the ideology of nativeness, another pertinent sub-ideology is the standard language ideology. This ideology concerns itself with prescriptivism or the idea that there is one correct variety of a language and any other variety is deficient and/or socially undesirable (Dragojevic et al., 2013; Lippi-Green,

1994, 2012; Milroy, 2001; Milroy & Milroy, 1999; Weber, 2015). Like raciolinguistic ideologies in general, the standard language ideology does not simply reside in personal opinions, but also manifests at the institutional and societal level (Leeman, 2012; Lippi-Green, 2012). In particular, educational institutions are the main sites of the ideology since they promote linguistic uniformity as a means for learning (Creese, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2012). The fact that the standard language ideology thrives in educational institutions suggests that the standard language is attainable for everyone if they put in the effort into learning it (Dragojevic et al., 2013; Leeman, 2012).

Paradoxically, however, what is considered standard often depends on the identity of the speaker and their geographical location. Indeed, Bonfiglio's (2002) discussion of the Standard American accent highlights how standard languages are thought to be voiced from White bodies. Also, on a global scale, it has already been noted that nations with large White populations are considered the homes of standard varieties of English (e.g., Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). Therefore, from a raciolinguistic perspective, even if racialized people mastered a so-called standard language, the White listening subject might nevertheless perceive their bodies or the physical location of their bodies as indicators of their continued lack of command over the language.

With regard to perceptions of foreign accent, the standard language ideology and the ideology of nativeness, operating under the umbrella term of raciolinguistic ideologies, emerge from linguistic notions discussed earlier in this chapter: accentedness, intelligibility, and comprehensibility. Indeed, rather than attempt to understand these notions in an apolitical sense, it is worthwhile to explore how race can be a constitutive element of each of these terms.

Beginning with accentedness, raciolinguistic ideologies are often able to determine who is or is not accented (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This point was initially explored in the introductory chapter as exemplified by Rubin (1992), who found that a Standard American English accent associated with an Asian face was perceived as foreign-sounding. In this example, the White listening subject, working in conjunction with the

standard language and nativeness ideologies, perceived any racialized person as speaking with a foreign and non-standard accent. This raciolinguistic perception is also found in more recent studies that support Rubin's findings. For instance, in their respective experiments, Babel and Russell (2015) and Zheng and Samuel (2017) both found that native English speech associated with Asian faces was nevertheless perceived to be more foreign-sounding when compared to the same speech linked to a White appearance. Even when listeners know that they are listening to foreign-accented speech, it is interesting how race can exacerbate accentedness. For example, Yi, Phelps, Smiljanic, and Chandrasekaran (2013) found that when coupled with the image of an ethnic Korean, Korean-accented English was determined to be more accented as opposed to when it was heard by itself.

As mentioned before, accentedness is important for listeners since they typically associate it with intelligibility. What is interesting about the above-mentioned studies is that just as they support the notion that racialized people have more accented speech, they also highlight how these individuals are deemed less intelligible (Babel & Russell, 2015; Rubin, 1992; Yi et al., 2013; Zheng & Samuel, 2017). A noteworthy counterexample comes from McGowan (2015), who found that when people listen to Chinese-accented English accompanied by a Chinese face, they transcribe the English more accurately than when it is coupled with a White face. In explaining this finding, McGowan (2015) posits that transcription was more successful in the former scenario because the body and voice of the speaker matched each other. That is, when people see a Chinese face, they may expect to hear foreign-accented speech and thus process the speech accordingly, which is most likely influenced by the long-held stereotype of Asians/Chinese people being perpetual foreigners in English-speaking countries (e.g., Sue, 2010). When juxtaposed with the previous research, then, McGowan's work still reinforces the White listening subject as Asian people are denied aural variability in their speech if they are to be perceived as intelligible: unless they remain "foreign-sounding," they run the risk of not being understood.

Perhaps the greatest presence of raciolinguistic ideologies is seen in the idea of comprehensibility, which, as stated earlier, is more subjective than intelligibility and specifically refers to the amount of effort one must exert in order to understand another's speech. While the White listening subject of raciolinguistic ideologies hears the foreign accents of racialized groups as incomprehensible, it conversely perceives the foreign accents of White ethnic groups as requiring less effort to understand even though they may be phonologically similar to racialized accents. For instance, Hosoda and Stone-Romero (2010) detailed how nearly 300 US college students, listening to mock employment interviews, mostly deemed French-accented speakers equally as comprehensible as their American-English-accented peers for communication-based positions, whereas Japanese-accented speakers were given a much lower comprehensibility rating. Although the participants did not see images of the speakers, they were given ethnically-matching names for each type of accent, which may have helped them to imagine the racial identities of the speakers and thus apply the corresponding raciolinguistic ideologies to each one during the experiment.

Thus far, raciolinguistic ideologies have been portrayed as operating in a deterministic fashion: they create a White listening subject who hears all racialized speech as accented, unintelligible, and/or incomprehensible while giving opposite evaluations to speech attached to White bodies. However, it is important to consider how individual and situational factors can distort and/or dilute the power of these ideologies. One important factor may be the specific racial/linguistic identity of the speaker. For example, in her examination of 79 US undergraduate students' perceptions of various kinds of nonnative English, Lindemann (2005) found that while the students generally viewed Western European accents as easily comprehensible, they also saw the merits of less prestigious accents, including Indian ones. In fact, some respondents noted how Indian English speakers had clear pronunciation due to being taught British English at school. Therefore, because of its colonial history with British English, an esteemed variety of the language spoken in a majority-White country, Indian-accented English, for the students, becomes White-/British-like and thus comprehensible. In this case, a distorted raciolinguistic ideology emerges that allows

racialized speakers to be heard as comprehensible, but only in a particular way. That is, if Indian English speakers lost the “Britishness” of their accents, they may revert back to incomprehensibility.

Another factor that can distort raciolinguistic ideologies could be the simple misrecognition of a foreign accent, which is highlighted in evaluations of the foreign accents of Latinx speakers.¹¹ Despite their phenotypical diversity, (foreign-born) Latinx people in the US have collectively been racialized as nonwhite on account of speaking Spanish and also deemed poor speakers of English (e.g., Leeman, 2012; Lippi-Green, 2012). However, in their study of US-college-student evaluations of the suitability of three accents (Midwestern US, French, and Colombian) for the position of human resource manager, Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) found that the Colombian accent was more understandable (in terms of pitch and pace of voice) than the prestigious French accent. In explaining this finding, the researchers speculate that since participants were mostly unable to identify the origin of the Colombian accent *and* Colombian Spanish is similar to Iberian Spanish, they might have believed that they were listening to another European (Deprez Sims & Morris, 2010). In short, they may have thought that they heard another White accent.

While the above studies highlight how raciolinguistic ideologies can be altered in such a way so as to make racialized accents understandable, they still show the hegemonic status of aural Whiteness. However, it is possible that raciolinguistic ideologies can be diluted or even erased if one considers the specific identity of listeners and their geographical context. For instance, in his report of an English pronunciation workshop that he conducted with a group of Hong Kong university students, Sung (2013) described how several of these students, while acknowledging the international prestige of famous native speakers of British English such as David Beckham, nevertheless perceived these speakers as difficult to understand and thus unsatisfactory pronunciation models. Instead, the students believed that the local accents of various Hong Kong celebrities and politicians were more realistic models because they were

¹¹“Latinx” is a gender neutral term that replaces references to “Latino” or “Latina.”

better understood (Sung, 2013). Here, it seems that homophily plays a role in the positive evaluation of Hong Kong accents since the students wanted to sound like individuals who share their linguistic/ethnic background. In the context of global advertising, this role of homophily is also evident in Lwin and Wee's (1999) finding that in Myanmar, Myanmar listeners found radio commercials featuring local Myanmar accents more comprehensible than those with British accents, which was explained by the fact that many Myanmar citizens have had little (historical) contact with foreigners such as the British.

One intriguing aspect of these studies is how they present Whiteness as something that is highly audible and potentially stigmatized (Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001). In raciolinguistic terms, these studies *provisionally* transform the White listening subject into a racialized listening subject who hears racialized accents as better sounding than White ones. It is important to emphasize "provisional" here because the racialized listening subject is not the equivalent to its White counterpart. That is, whereas the White listening subject is upheld by global White supremacist structures (Rosa & Flores, 2017) and can come into existence almost anywhere, the racialized listening subject occupies select counter-spaces that challenge Whiteness. For instance, the above examples of homophily suggest that this listening subject is dependent on the identity of interlocutors as well as specific geohistorical conditions.

Whether they manifest as either a racialized or White listening subject, it is important to note that raciolinguistic ideologies frequently operate in conjunction with other axes of social differentiation ranging from class to nationality (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Using the intersection of race and gender in relation to foreign accent as just one example of this point, it is noteworthy that the accents of racialized women are sometimes judged more harshly than those of their male counterparts in the realm of employment (see Timming, 2017). This trend could be explained by the fact that since racialized immigrant women, as opposed to men, work in the service sector, which typically requires extensive oral communication (a topic to be explored later in this chapter), they are more likely to have their language policed (Creese, 2010). Yet, it is not only workplace context that can marginalize these women, but also, gender ideologies.

One relevant aspect of gender ideology pertains to the notion that there are natural differences in how men and women use language (Cameron, 2000, 2014). For instance, Cameron (2014) notes how the global popularity of the self-help book entitled *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* in the 1990s helped to perpetuate the myth that all men are inarticulate, minimal communicators while all women are the opposite. While such a distinction seemingly places the communication style of women in a favourable light, this positive view depends on the further devaluing of women. That is, the idea that women are more verbose than men can be related to the belief that they should not be speaking at all when in the presence of men (Mooney & Evans, 2015; Spender, 1980). Therefore, it is often the case that the alleged positive qualities of women can be turned into negative traits, which is evident at work. For example, the perception that women engage in a more cooperative style of communication than men may prove problematic in a leadership position, where one is expected to give orders to others (e.g., Holmes, 2014). This example of leadership leads to a significant point about the relationship between gender and language.

That is, language is indirectly connected to gender by being associated with specific qualities or roles that are then given gendered meaning (Cameron, 2000; Holmes, 2014; Ochs, 1992). In the context of leadership, for instance, discursive qualities of good leaders such as being direct and firm with subordinates become interpreted as “masculine” traits on account of (Western) cultural conventions that equate directness and firmness to masculinity (Holmes, 2014). It is important to note that, in this process of gendering language/communication, bodies matter. Indeed, the ideological linking of gender and language is made possible by imagining certain types of linguistic features being produced by particular types of bodies, which, more often than not, are labelled in terms of a male-female binary (Calder, 2019). This point becomes apparent when bodies linguistically violate gender norms.

In the realm of sociophonetics, for example, particular phonological features such as pitch and intonation are ascribed to gendered bodies. High pitch and frequent rising intonation are linked to female bodies, which, while they might be explained by vocal physiology in the case of pitch, are most likely

associated with the (Western) expectation of women needing to be emotionally expressive, thereby creating varied intonation patterns (Martín-Santana, Muela-Molina, Reinares-Lara, & Rodríguez-Guerra, 2015; Podesva & Kajino, 2014). However, when men have high-pitched voices, they can be perceived as aurally incongruent with their bodies (Calder, 2019; Podesva & Kajino, 2014). The implication of this perception is that they are deemed as sounding “less masculine,” which calls into question their sexuality due to the stereotype that men who sound “feminine” are also gay (Podesva & Kajino, 2014).

From a raciolinguistic perspective, the above discussion on gender highlights the need to not only talk about a White listening subject, but also, a White *male* listening subject. Whereas the former subject is produced by systems of White supremacy in the context of language, the latter is a product of White androcentrism in which the language practices of racialized women as well as “racially feminine” language are evaluated in accordance with negative racial/gender stereotypes. With regard to racialized women, the White male listening subject manifests in such instances as Black women being accused of having an overly aggressive communication style, which reflects the stereotype of the “angry Black woman” (e.g., Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011). Beyond the negative linguistic evaluation of specific gendered bodies, the White male listening subject is also evident in how racialized language itself is always gendered (Piller, 2016). For example, as will be detailed in Chapter Five, since the English of Farsi speakers can be heard as “melodic” on account of its rising and falling intonation pattern (e.g., Eisenclas & Tsurutani, 2011), Farsi accents can be heard as “feminine-sounding” due to being ideologically linked to women, who, as discussed above, are supposed to naturally embody varied intonation. It is important to note here that this connection between the Farsi accent and femininity is not formed in a vacuum. Rather, when heard in Western contexts, the “feminine” sound of this accent operates on an Orientalist binary in which the Middle East occupies a passive, subordinate position (here, traits culturally tied to femininity) in relation to White Western male dominance (Hasan, 2005; Said, 1978). Like the White listening subject, the White male listening subject is a product of colonial histories.

As highlighted in the above examples, what must be further noted is how the White male listening subject is not necessarily interested in intelligibility or comprehensibility in the traditional sense. That is, it is not concerned about whether one is actually understood, but rather, how individuals are able to aurally relate to the contexts in which they are situated. For instance, in the context of advertising where a low-pitched (and hence masculinized) voice is often deemed trustworthy and thus able to entice customers to purchase a product (Martín-Santana et al., 2015), a seemingly higher-pitched or “female” voice can be perceived as the opposite. Thus, it can be argued that the latter voice is “incomprehensible” in the sense that it does not affect the customer: if the voice sounds feminine, the customer is less likely to acknowledge its trustworthiness and will not go out to purchase the advertised product.

Foreign Accent and Racial Performances

The previous discussion on raciolinguistic ideologies has ideally shown that race (along with gender in particular) can have a sound (Casillas, Ferrada, & Hinojos, 2018). Indeed, as described above, race can be embodied through voice in that racialized people are thought to have particular accents (e.g., McGowan, 2015) or listeners may imagine the racial identities of speakers by simply hearing their accents (e.g., Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010). Along with understanding this point from the perspective of the listener, it is also important to study it with regard to the speaker. Specifically, it is valuable to explore how people use (foreign) accent to adjust their racial identities for others. This exploration corresponds with existing research that studies how language use can racialize bodies in different manners (e.g., Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011; Carbado & Gulati, 2013; Chun & Lo, 2016; Roth-Gordon, 2016; 2017; Swan & Flowers, 2018).

When language acts as the site of racialization, race becomes unstable (Roth-Gordon, 2016).¹² That is, rather than an absolute, unchanging category, race can operate on a spectrum in which people can be seen as displaying *degrees* of race (Carbado & Gulati, 2013). In other words, individuals can have shifting “racial temperatures” that make them more or less compatible to specific racial categorizations (Carbado & Gulati, 2013). Dynamic language practices certainly influence one’s racial temperature. For example, in their discussion of the shifting linguistic styles of former US president, Barack Obama, Alim and Smitherman (2012) note how his audiences may perceive him as more or less Black depending on the style of his speech. When he uses language that is racially coded as White, for instance, he “sounds White” and thus the Black part of his biracial identity becomes less salient for listeners who may have problems interacting with Black people in general (and therefore not willing to support a Black president). In the end, then, Obama’s use of language in his racial performances has political purposes. This idea of changing the salience of race to advance one’s interests is what Roth-Gordon (2016) calls racial malleability.

Based on her ethnographic research investigating the everyday experiences of poor racialized young men in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Roth-Gordon (2016) uses the term “racial malleability” to detail how these men attempt to change negative readings of their racial identities through language coded as White. When interacting with police, for example, one of the men described how he whitens himself by speaking in so-called Standard Portuguese to perform the role of law-abiding citizen instead of possible criminal, which his racial appearance typically communicates. This example of racial malleability is not an instance of racial passing. That is, by speaking Standard Portuguese, this male does not magically become White.

Instead, racial malleability should be seen as the banal borrowing of White linguistic or cultural practices to reduce the stigma of a person’s racial positioning on specific occasions (Roth-Gordon, 2016, 2017). Therefore, it is an instance of what Goffman (1963) calls covering, the activity of minimizing the

¹²The instability of race is also discussed with regard to how the concept of race and racial categorizations in particular have changed throughout history (e.g., Frankenberg, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1993).

significance of one's stigma. Even though it is tempting to solely view racial malleability as a process of empowering oneself in disempowering situations, it can still reinforce existing power structures by implicitly adopting raciolinguistic ideologies. Indeed, while these ideologies create White listening subjects who hear racialized speech as deficient, they also form White *speaking* subjects who embrace the language practices associated with White bodies in order to escape their linguistic/racial deficiencies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). The White speaking subject is explicitly seen in Fanon's (1952/2008) discussion of why Black colonial subjects from the French Caribbean desire to speak the French of France. Because they suffer from an inferiority complex due to not being White, these subjects desire to master the French of the metropole to achieve partial whitening:

He who can express himself, who masters [proper French], is the one to look out for: be wary of him; he's almost white.... The black man entering France reacts against the myth of the Martinican who swallows his r's.... He will make every effort not only to roll his r's, but also to make them stand out (Fanon, 1952/2008, pp. 4-5).

By speaking "proper French" through such efforts as avoiding the swallowing of /r/ sounds, Black people uphold the symbolic power of the colonizer: in order to garner respect from the colonizer and other colonized, the colonial subject must aurally resemble Whiteness. In this sense, then, racial malleability can uphold the status quo. But in order for racial malleability to uphold existing racial hierarchies, it must have some direct benefits for racialized people. Indeed, Fanon (1952/2008) mentions the heightened social status that comes when Black people master the French language:

I can remember just over a year ago in Lyon, following a lecture where I had drawn a parallel between black and European poetry, a French comrade telling me enthusiastically: "Basically, you're a white man." The fact I had studied such an interesting question in the white man's language gave me my credentials (p. 21).

Beyond the symbolic benefits, there appears to be material advantages as well.

With specific regard to the racial malleability of foreign accent, this point is suggested by Carlson and McHenry's (2006) study that asked 60 human resource professionals to evaluate the comprehensibility and employability of a Latinx, Asian, and African American applicant. In order to make their evaluations, the

professionals listened to various speech samples in which the applicants adjusted their accents to sound more or less representative of their racial/ethnic group (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). Surprisingly, the authors found that when there was a minimal trace of accent, all three applicants were rated highly comprehensible/employable (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). This finding suggests that the degree of accent can be tied to the degree of one's race (Carbado & Gulati, 2013; Moyer, 2013). In fact, when racialized speakers sound less like their race/ethnicity, they may be able to transcend negative stereotypes about themselves and thus receive material rewards such as employment.

Although it may be worthwhile to reduce a racialized accent in order to advance one's social and/or economic interests, it could also be the case that maintaining such an accent is a necessity. Indeed, the use of accent/language in racial performances is not confined to acting White; it can simultaneously entail emphasizing one's racial positioning in society. This latter type of racial performance has been the focus of critical media scholars who note how accent is used to reinforce the foreignness of racialized characters on television and in the movies (e.g., Antony, 2013; Casillas et al., 2018; Davé, 2013).

For instance, examining the portrayal of Gloria Delgado-Pritchett in the popular US sitcom called *Modern Family*, Casillas et al. (2018) discuss how the Latina identity of this character, played by the Colombian-born actress Sofia Vergara, is further racialized through her accent to highlight her racial difference from the primarily White, native-English-speaking cast. In fact, the show creates an exaggerated "vocal body" for Vergara through which stereotypes of Latinas being exotic, sexualized Others are projected, especially when juxtaposed with the "standard" speech of the White cast members.¹³ This creation of an exaggerated foreign accent is also seen in the depiction of South Asian characters who speak with a so-called brown voice, "a conspicuous set of phonetic markers—including (but not limited to) uniquely stressed syllables, stopped fricatives, and broken English—that characterize most popular media

¹³It is important to note that Vergara's racial performance is simultaneously gendered. In Chapter Three, I provide more detail on gender performativity in relation to accent/language.

representations of South Asians” (Antony, 2013, p. 196). Whether it is the convenience store clerk or the call centre agent, brown voice serves to position these characters as comical, inarticulate speakers, which are suitable linguistic identities for these subservient roles (Antony, 2013; Davé, 2013).

While it has been explored how language can strengthen racial performances in such realms as the media, it is important to briefly consider how accent might not always change perceptions of the racialized body. This point is raised by Cargile’s (2000) study of how 71 undergraduate students in the US evaluated the employability of an ethnically Chinese applicant who either spoke “Standard American” or Mandarin-Chinese-accented English. No matter the change of accent, it was found that the applicant was rated highly employable for high-status, communication-based work (Cargile, 2000). For Cargile (2000), this unchanging evaluation of the applicant can be explained by the model minority stereotype, which states that, unlike other racialized groups, East Asians are industrious and thus become ideal workers. As “Honorary Whites,” then, East Asians gain the ability to sound White in that their accents are not perceived as relevant when judging one’s ability for communicative work (Kushins, 2014).

This ability of a Chinese accent to be ignored by listeners leads to one final point about accent and racial performance: racialized accents can create multiple and differing impressions on an audience (e.g., Swan & Flowers, 2018). Although a Chinese accent can be heard as “White-sounding” as seen in the above example, earlier parts of this chapter have also shown how it can be “foreign-sounding” at the same time (e.g., McGowan, 2015). The likely reason for these differing impressions is that listeners apply different stereotypes when hearing Chinese-accented English. Whereas the perpetual foreigner stereotype might make a Chinese accent sound foreign (Reyes, 2016), the model minority stereotype, as discussed above, can whiten it.¹⁴ Another related point to consider is that when juxtaposed with one another, different accents create different impressions. Take, for example, Chinese and Mexican speakers of English. While,

¹⁴The application of these stereotypes will be dependent on workplace context, which will be better explained in Chapter Five.

in the North American context, both groups of speakers can be racialized as perpetual foreigners (e.g., Sue, 2010), their accents can create different personas. For instance, due to the greater phonological dissimilarities between Chinese and English and the increased phonological overlap between (Mexican) Spanish and English, Chinese speakers can aurally present themselves as poor, unintelligible English communicators as opposed to their Mexican counterparts (Lindemann, 2005). Furthermore, because Mexican accents might sound “lazy” when compared to Chinese accents, their speakers may reinforce the stereotype of the lazy immigrant (Lindemann, 2005). However, it is important to note that these accented performances are not conscious acts. Indeed, while accent can explicitly be used to construct racial identities as seen with the discussion of racial malleability, it can also indirectly give off a specific identity. This point is particularly salient in the area of work and organizations, where foreign accent is an integral part of workers’ identities as well as their job duties.

The Professional Dimensions of Foreign Accent

Language Skills in a Neoliberal Economy

Before exploring this point in detail, it is beneficial to first situate foreign accent within a larger discussion of changing conceptions of language in a neoliberal economy. Neoliberalism has become a defining feature of today’s globalized economy. Although subject to various interpretations (Holborow, 2015), neoliberalism is generally viewed as a set of political, economic, and ideological strategies that state “that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Originally put into practice in the 1980s by Western governments to deal with the global recession of the 1970s, neoliberalism has been critiqued for creating a poor quality of life for many people through such things as the flexibilization of labour leading to precarious employment, welfare

cuts, and the privatization (and consequent degradation) of public services in areas like education and health care (Canagarajah, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Shin & Park, 2016).

While neoliberalism has visible, material effects as mentioned above, it also involves “a [radical] transformation of subjectivities” (Shin & Park, 2016, p. 444). Indeed, various neoliberal ideologies have made individuals see themselves in ways that conform to the market. One such example of this point concerns how individuals are advised to take personal responsibility for their own success in the market by constantly improving themselves in the form of upgrading their knowledge and skills (Canagarajah, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Hasinoff, 2008; Hennessey, 2000; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Holborow, 2015; Shin & Park, 2016). This promotion of self-improvement or entrepreneurialism hides how the market may disadvantage individuals by explaining that people’s failures are a result of their own inability or unwillingness to acquire the skills needed for the economy (Fenwick, 2001; Park, 2016; Shin & Park, 2016). Furthermore, the drive for self-improvement leads to a fetishization of skills in which people come to see themselves as “bundles of skills” (Urciuoli, 2008) that can be readily commodified as forms of labour.

One skill from this figurative bundle that is particularly valuable is language. The importance of language lies in the fact that the neoliberal economy is increasingly composed of knowledge- and service-based industries where oral communication is the main component of working life (Boutet, 2012; Cameron, 2000; Canagarajah, 2017; Heller, 2010; Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Holborow, 2018; Urciuoli, 2008; Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013). Due to this tertiarization of the economy, then, much of today’s work can be characterized as “language work” and its workers as “language workers” (Boutet, 2012). In order to appreciate the idea of language being a skill that can be used for work, it is necessary to view “it as an activity rather than an attribute” (Heller & McElhinny, 2017, p. 243). This neoliberal view of language is seen in how the language practices of workers are increasingly subject to a Taylorist style of

management.¹⁵ For instance, in the realm of call centres (a workplace context to be further explored in the latter part of this section and Chapter Three), it has been noted how workers are expected to use scripted, formulaic language to shorten the length of calls with customers and thus be able to speak with more callers, which is all monitored by management through the use of surveillance technology (e.g., Cameron, 2000; Heller, 2010; Mirchandani, 2012; Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013). Such management of language is usually done in the name of increasing efficiency and worker productivity (Holborow, 2018).

The treatment of language as a skill in the neoliberal workplace suggests a conception of “skill” being something that anyone can master given the right amount of training and experience. However, critical labour scholars have always noted that this understanding of “skill” neglects its social construction (e.g., Fenwick, 2006; Guo, 2015; Otis & Wu, 2018; Sawchuk, 2008). That is, skill is not an apolitical thing that one possesses, but rather, a product of social relations in the workplace and in larger contexts. This position is concisely stated by Sawchuk (2008), who summarizes the failures of mainstream views of skill:

The failure to recognize the socially situated and collaborative nature of all skill performance, the failure to openly address the imbalances of power and thus the tendencies to reproduce inequities, the failure to recognize economic, sectoral, organizational dynamics, and finally the failure to address the conflation of ‘actual skill/competency’ versus relations of ‘power/control’ (p. 54).

One of countless examples of these failures associated with popular understandings of skill is seen in Guo’s (2015) claim that skill is a racialized concept. Speaking about the labour market experiences of skilled immigrants in Canada, Guo (2015) specifically discusses how “racialised immigrants’ foreign credentials, job skills, and work experience are devalued and denigrated based on the skin colour to whom they are attached” (p. 246). Therefore, in Canada, these immigrants become deskilled in spite of their

¹⁵Taylorism or scientific management was a method developed by Frederick W. Taylor (1911) that essentially involved separating work into discrete, repetitive tasks. For Taylor, scientific management consisted of managers tightly monitoring workers, who were supposed to perform the tasks that the managers had assigned them, in order to get more work done in a shorter period of time.

actual qualifications and, furthermore, can only reskill themselves by adopting White linguistic and cultural norms (Guo, 2015). With this example, then, skill is a thing that others determine you have or not.

Returning to the terrain of language, this problematization of skill emerges in the tension between seeing language as neutral tool for workplace communication versus believing it to be forever tied to one's identity (Heller, 2010; Heller & Duchêne, 2012). This contradiction is particularly evident in discussions about the authenticity of language use or language workers. For example, scholars have noted how language can enhance the perceived authenticity of products and services (Cavanaugh, 2016; Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2014; Heller, 2010; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). One interesting example of this point comes from Kraak and Holmqvist's (2017) discussion of how the hiring of British native-English-speaking staff at an English-style pub in France often adds to the authenticity of the service encounter for customers, who want to feel like they are in England. However, this example leads to a discussion about how "authenticity can quickly shade into nativist and exclusive understandings of identity" (Heller & McElhinny, 2017, p. 244). Indeed, in the context of an *English* pub, authenticity can only come from a native English speaker from England, not someone of another nationality. This nativist understanding of authenticity can also have racist undertones as seen in the field of English language teaching in which authentic teachers are thought to be native speakers from majority-White countries (e.g., Jenks, 2017; Ramjattan, 2015).

Once again, the exclusionary conceptions of authentic language workers echo the (historical) interconnections between language, race, and nation discussed in the previous section. Indeed, Urciuoli and LaDousa (2013) state that language work can often be situated within the nation-state where it is performed as the linguistic demands placed on workers are likely to mirror what is considered proper speech in the nation. This is particularly the case for foreign accents. For example, in her monograph about the role of language in the making of Filipino transnational domestic workers, Lorente (2018) mentions that, in spite of the international promotion of these workers knowing English, their accents can prevent them from finding work in certain English-speaking nations. In the Canadian context where accents that closely

resemble that of a White native English speaker are valued in the country's linguistic economy, for instance, Lorente (2018) notes that the Filipino accent is often used as an indicator of being unskilled for domestic work, especially when compared to prestigious European accents. Therefore, "a domestic worker's 'relative worth' is tied to her accent, which in turn is tied to her country's position in the world system" (Lorente, 2018, p. 80). It is important to state that this communication about Filipino accents is not articulated at the state level, but rather on the meso level with maid agencies (Lorente, 2018). This point leads to the idea that hegemonic understandings of foreign accents are typically located within specific organizations, a topic that is explored below.

Foreign Accent in Diverse Organizations

While neoliberalism has brought about changing conceptions about language/accent, it has also overseen increased transnational migration with people moving across national borders in search of better educational and professional opportunities as part of the neoliberal project of self-improvement, and also, Western nations actively seeking skilled immigrants to bolster their own knowledge- and service-based economies (e.g., Allan & McElhinny, 2017; Chatterjee, 2015; Guo, 2015; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Park, 2014). This movement of people has resulted in work organizations becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, which is openly celebrated by these organizations. In fact, in the neoliberal era where the entire being of an individual is capable of becoming a valuable commodity (Holborow, 2015; Park, 2016; Urciuoli, 2008), organizations often tout the racial/ethnic diversity of their workers to enhance their public image and hence generate further profit (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Park, 2013; Urciuoli, 2015). However, scholars like Ahmed (2012), Park (2013), and Williams, Kilanski, and Muller (2014) critique this superficial celebration of diversity since it typically treats race and ethnicity in an ahistorical manner and does little to address social inequalities. Yet another issue is how "diversity" remains focused on race and ethnicity while ignoring other kinds of diversity, particularly in the linguistic realm (Leone-Pizzighella & Rymes, 2018).

This issue is especially evident in the neglect of foreign accents. Perhaps one reason for this neglect is that an accent is deemed to interfere with workplace relations. Specifically, given that foreign accents are believed to negatively affect intelligibility, which may be problematic in organizations where oral communication is a vital component in completing tasks, it can be seen as acceptable to discriminate against foreign-accented workers, who may not be able to carry out their duties (Kim, Roberson, Russo, & Briganti, 2019; Lippi-Green, 1994, 2012; Matsuda, 1991; Munro, 2003). While this discrimination operates on a neoliberal view of language/accent as a technical skill, it runs counter to organizational commitments to racial diversity. Indeed, since discussions about language can act as a proxy for race (Piller, 2016), the critique of one's accent can disproportionately marginalize racialized workers. For instance, the previous discussion on the intersection between raciolinguistic ideologies and accent highlighted how racialized job applicants are seldom seen as employable for language-focused work with their existing accented speech (see Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010).

Even when racialized foreign-accented workers do manage to keep their jobs in an organization, the marginalization of their accents does not end. This is due to the fact that, even if they are racially diverse, workplaces can still uphold White normative organizational cultures, which are produced by systems of White normativity found in the larger society (e.g., Acker, 2006; Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010; Ward, 2008).¹⁶ Thus, if White, “non-accented” people hold material, cultural, and linguistic influence in society, then they will wield the same influence within a workplace (Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010). For instance, in their examination of the organizational practices of a transnational airline located in Australia and the experiences of Japanese-born flight attendants working for this airline, Piller and Takahashi (2013) discuss how the foreign-accented English of these flight attendants prevented them from being seen as

¹⁶This issue will be discussed again in the next chapter with regard to the internationalization of higher education institutions. Moreover, it will be complicated by considering how gendered regimes within certain areas of organizations further marginalize particular accents.

capable workers. This was seen in trainee flight attendants' complaints about having to be taught by Japanese trainers who supposedly could not speak proper English and also high-status managerial positions being solely held by White native-English-speaking Australians (Piller & Takahashi, 2013). The flight attendants also reported racist interactions with White Australian customers, who complained about their accented English (Piller & Takahashi, 2013). In the field of social work, similar findings were reported by Harrison (2012), who noted how a group of mostly racialized social workers in Australia felt that clients and other workers treated them as incompetent because of their foreign accents. In both research contexts, then, workers who do not physically or aurally resemble the White, native-English-speaking Australian worker are likely to confront racist backlash over their professional skills.

However, it is important to think about how the *specific* type of workplace may make racialized accents valued commodities on some occasions. For example, in their investigation of Australian consumers' attitudes toward foreign-accented service workers, Rao Hill and Tombs (2011) suggest that differences in types of service work also mean different evaluations of foreign accents. In reference to Indian accents, for instance, the pair found that while customers may be very frustrated with an "incomprehensible" Indian-accented call centre worker when they expect to speak with a fellow Australian, they would not see an Indian-accented waiter as incomprehensible in an Indian restaurant, even if the waiter had a strong accent. The customers' reasoning was that having a waiter that "aurally matched" the racial/ethnic character of the restaurant made the service and ambience more authentic. This example suggests that, given the right context, a racialized accent can be easily understood. In other words, the specific environment of a workplace can create a racialized listening subject that hears the accents of racialized people as better sounding than those of their White counterparts.

Foreign Accent as a Site for Work

Although there may be occupational spaces where racialized foreign-accented individuals can speak without consequence, it is mostly the case that they will be told or feel the need to change their accents in order to find employment. Once again, this external or internal communication is based on the neoliberal view of language as a learnable skill and thus malleable: if a foreign accent is preventing employment, then one must work on it to rectify the situation. Given that race is intimately connected to foreign accent, it seems that the work of changing foreign-accented speech entails lessening race. Specifically, if intelligible or comprehensible speech is White speech, then racialized speech must be “de-racialized” or made more “White-sounding” to achieve similar levels of intelligibility or comprehensibility (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Carbado & Gulati, 2013). While prevalent in a variety of realms, this message is particularly noticeable in the accent reduction industry.

As one example of the neoliberal tendency to offload language training to private sector actors (Allan & McElhinny, 2017; Blommaert, 2009), accent reduction programs promote themselves as the best means for skilled immigrants in North America to reduce their incomprehensible accents, which hinder their employment prospects. Even though much can be said about their lack of effectiveness, the underlying principle of these programs is more problematic (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2012).¹⁷ That is, by treating foreign accents as a disorder, the accent reduction industry solely blames foreign-accented speakers for miscommunication rather than their interlocutors or social context (Derwing & Munro, 2009, 2015; Matsuda, 1991). Thus, it becomes another example of how language training for immigrants focuses on individual deficits rather than structural problems (Allan, 2013). What is even more disturbing about this medicalized view of accents is how it mostly applies to racialized

¹⁷Derwing and Munro (2015) detail how accent reduction programs sometimes utilize outlandish techniques (such as putting marshmallows in one’s mouth) in order to correct accents. Moreover, since they are unregulated, these programs can be run by operators who may have little to no knowledge about phonetics, etc.

immigrants. In fact, through promotional and online testimonials, many programs imply that mostly Asian immigrants need training (Blommaert, 2009; Ramjattan, 2017). According to Guo (2015), this implicit appeal to have racialized immigrants reduce their accents for professional success in majority-White countries serves as a tool for these immigrants to adhere to White linguistic norms without the opportunity to challenge them. As Guo (2015) notes, “a [White] native accent becomes the yardstick to measure [racialized] immigrants’ workplace competence” (p. 245).

This assimilation process is exemplified in Guo’s (2009) case study of an employment program in Western Canada that offered accent reduction services for mostly Asian immigrant professionals. Instead of preparing these professionals for the institutional racism that they may encounter in the job market, Guo found that the instructors saw their clients’ employment issues deriving from their accents failing to be like “Canadian” accents, which is seen in this comment:

We’re now working with a girl. The tone of her voice makes her sound defensive. No matter what she’s saying, it’s like she’s confronting someone all the time. So that is something we can correct...so that an instructor will be able to guide this person in a way of reducing their accent, bringing them to the proper, not proper, but more clearly understood language (p. 44).

What is interesting here is how any “deviant” part of a racialized foreign accent is casually linked to incomprehensibility even when it seems illogical. Indeed, sounding angry does not necessarily mean that one is difficult to understand. As Guo speculates, not having a White English accent made the above-mentioned client and her peers in immediate need of imitating one.

Whereas the work of de-racializing foreign-accented speech can occur in the commodified context of purchasing accent reduction services, it can also be a vital component of the labour process in some workplaces. This point is detailed in descriptions of call centres in India where workers are trained to eliminate phonological features of their Indian-accented English to be more comprehensible for callers in the Global North (e.g., Aneesh, 2015a, 2015b; Cowie, 2007; Mirchandani, 2012; Nath, 2011; Rajan-Rankin, 2018). Even though this training is simply seen as an attempt to mask the location of workers who are

accused of stealing Western jobs, it also reinforces, through training materials, etc., that Indian English is flawed when compared to British or American varieties (Mirchandani, 2012; Nath, 2011). One ambiguity, however, is whether Indian accents are made more comprehensible through being “less Indian” or mimicking White accents (Cowie, 2007).¹⁸

Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in one call centre in Gurgaon, India, Aneesh (2015a, 2015b) tackles this issue in his pondering of how effective global communication is made possible when interlocutors do not have a shared linguistic/cultural framework. In order to facilitate such communication, Aneesh notes how workers engage in the dual processes of neutralization and mimesis. Neutralization entails eliminating such things as the intonation of regional accents, which partly involves mimesis: the mimicking of features of British/American accents. However, since workers are not always successful at this imitation, their modified accents become “placeless” in nature and thus deemed to be comprehensible for international audiences. Sounding placeless consequently makes Indian call centre workers “raceless” as they adopt phonological traits not previously linked to any racial/ethnic group. Aneesh’s findings, then, suggest that true comprehensibility entails divorcing oneself from any racial identity. The implication of this point is that any work done to change an accent will result in a change/absence of identity.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the multidimensional nature of foreign accent. First, it is perceived as a linguistic phenomenon determined by a person’s L1 or geography, capable of change, (falsely) linked to intelligibility and comprehensibility, and subject to folk beliefs. This folk perspective on foreign accent can consequently lead to a racial understanding of it in that racialized foreign-accented individuals are generally, but not always, perceived as deviant speakers of a language, a perception no

¹⁸What Indian call centre agents have to do with their accents is a type of aesthetic labour, and as such, it will be discussed again in the following chapter on aesthetic labour.

doubt fueled by colonial and nationalist histories as well as contemporary raciolinguistic ideologies. Foreign accent can also act as a site for racial performances, where racial identities may become more or less salient depending on the degree of accent. There is finally a professional side to foreign accent as accents can make one unqualified for work or be the work itself in a neoliberal economy where language is treated as a technical skill. The discussion of these multiple dimensions of foreign accent is by no means exhaustive. Indeed, as I mentioned at the end of the introductory chapter, my approach to using literature in this thesis is to provide momentary reviews of it in appropriate places throughout the manuscript. Therefore, in later chapters, there will be additional information on the multiple dimensions of foreign accent that further complicate the above discussion.

It is also important to note that while each dimension of foreign accent received its own section for the sake of creating a coherent text, it is often the case that they are all interconnected. For example, consider the notion of comprehensibility. As stated before, comprehensibility is a subjective aspect of a foreign accent, and as such, may be subject to raciolinguistic ideologies that view racialized accents as deficient. If a racialized accent is deemed incomprehensible, then it may be unsuitable for certain communication-based professions. This type of interconnection and others will become evident with the exploration of how ITAs work with their foreign accents. Before this exploration, however, the following chapter describes how the work of ITAs can be considered a type of aesthetic labour, a concept that needs to be defined and expanded for the current research context.

Chapter Three: Understanding and Expanding Aesthetic Labour

In the last section of the previous chapter, foreign accent was presented as a site for work in a neoliberal economy where language has become part of the process and product of labour (Heller, 2010; Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013). But what must be emphasized is the materiality of this language work. That is, language work is typically produced by physical bodies, who project language through the material sounds of their voices (Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2014; Cho, 2017; Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2012). Moreover, it is worthwhile to consider how the appearance of bodies and the actual sounds of voices may add to or subtract from the value of the work being performed (e.g., Cho, 2017). Indeed, within language work, workers may also need to perform the additional work of aesthetic labour, which, as mentioned in the introduction, is the practice of “looking good and sounding right” (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001, as cited in Karlsson, 2012, p. 53).

This chapter sets out to detail the nature of aesthetic labour and expand this concept in order to explain the work of international teaching assistants (ITAs). The first part of the chapter mostly describes how the concept of aesthetic labour came to be and some of its main characteristics and tenets. The remaining part of the chapter broadens the meaning of this concept through a point-by-point discussion of how it can be applied to the professional experiences of ITAs.

What is Aesthetic Labour?

Before answering the question of what is aesthetic labour, it is necessary to understand how it emerged from emotional labour, a much better-known concept used to describe the labour that workers must perform for clients in the service encounter. Developed by Arlie Hochschild (2003) in the classic book called *The Managed Heart*, emotional labour refers to work that “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others [such as a]

sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place” (p. 7).¹⁹ This management of feeling requires various forms of acting. First, emotional labourers may engage in surface acting in which they feign feelings for the customer when they are unable or unwilling to generate these feelings. Essentially, surface acting can be pretending to be enthusiastic and energetic even when having the opposite feelings, for example. In contrast to surface acting, there is deep acting where workers attempt to experience organizationally-expected emotions. While it might be tempting to see surface and deep acting as simply forms of acting, Hochschild highlights their difference when they are used as part of service work:

Surface and deep acting in a commercial setting, unlike acting in a dramatic, private, or therapeutic context, make one’s face and one’s feelings take on the properties of a resource. But it is not a resource to be used for the purposes of art, as in drama, or for the purposes of self-discovery, as in therapy, or for the pursuit of fulfillment, as in everyday life. It is a resource to be used to make money (p. 55).

In other words, workers’ emotions are meant to generate profit for an organization. What is even more important is the mention that the worker’s face is a part of this resource. Using the work of flight attendants as an example, Hochschild describes how they are trained to smile for customers as a way to display (genuine) friendliness to these customers, who will thus have a favourable view of the service. In short, the smile becomes a valued commodity for the airline.

Witz et al. (2003) claim that while Hochschild rightly acknowledges that bodily displays such as smiles are pertinent aspects of the production of feeling, she does not fully explore how these aspects of one’s corporeality are *specifically* managed in order to produce certain feelings. In response to this lack of consideration, the concept of aesthetic labour particularly details how the corporeality of workers are managed to generate appropriate feelings for the service encounter (Warhurst, 2016; Witz et al., 2003;

¹⁹The concept of emotional labour draws inspiration from Mills’ (1951) classic book, *White Collar*. In this book discussing the creation of white collar workers, Mills (1951) mentions how the rise of the service sector created a “personality market” where workers sold their personalities on the job market. The reason for this trend was that the service sector involved working with people and not with things (Mills, 1951). However, for Hochschild (2003), Mills’ work did not consider how having the right personality for the job involved active labour on the part of the worker.

Sheane, 2012). Therefore, aesthetic labour does not diverge from emotional labour; it is an extension of it by stressing the importance of embodiment (part of which includes the voice) in displaying emotions (Sheane, 2012). Accepting this premise requires an altered understanding of the body and voice. That is, rather than being immutable things that are given at birth, body and voice are perceived as attributes that one can manage (Nickson, Warhurst, Cullen, & Watt, 2003; Pettinger, 2016).

In fact, bearing in mind that people transform into a set of skills in the neoliberal economy, workers can come to learn that all aspects of their being, which include the body and voice, can be manipulated into skills that are used for labour (Holborow, 2015; Park, 2016; Urciuoli, 2008). This point leads to a widely-cited definition of aesthetic labour offered by Warhurst and Nickson (2007):

Aesthetic labour is the employment of workers with desired corporeal dispositions....These dispositions are, to an extent, possessed by workers at the point of entry to employment. However, and importantly, employers then mobilize, develop and commodify these dispositions through processes of recruitment, selection, training, monitoring, discipline and reward, reconfiguring them as 'skills' intended to produce a 'style' of service encounter that appeals to the senses of customers, most usually visually or aurally (p. 107).

There are several major points to make about this detailed explanation.

First, the notion that employers look for workers with certain corporeal dispositions (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007) is influenced by the concept of habitus, which Bourdieu (1984, 1991) describes as a set of embodied dispositions that inclines people to behave and think in certain ways. Understood as “durable ways of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu, 1990, as cited in Witz et al., 2003, p. 40), these embodied dispositions are acquired through socialization beginning at childhood. It is important to note that since “different conditions of existence produce different habitus” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170), it is often the case that a person’s habitus is different from that of another. Despite this individuality, Warhurst (2016) states that “with habitus, the social is inscribed onto the individual. Thus, while habitus is manifest individually, it is at the same time collective” (p. 222). In particular, habitus can denote one’s social positioning in terms of class, for instance (Bourdieu, 1984; Warhurst, 2016).

One prominent issue with recruiting aesthetic labourers on the basis of habitus is that it can perpetuate stereotypes and social inequalities (Pettinger, 2016; Williams & Connell, 2016). In particular, aesthetic labour can reinforce gender norms. Given that this labour, as an extension of emotional labour, often requires the pampering and caring of customers, which are treated as stereotypically feminine behaviour, women are frequently deemed ideal aesthetic labourers (Pettinger, 2016). As discussed in the last chapter, it is important to emphasize that such an assumption, while arbitrary, is naturalized by gender ideology that bifurcates interactional styles into either “male” or “female” behaviour. What was understated earlier, however, is how this ideology relies on a performative understanding of gender in which the category of “woman” comes into being through repeated performances of cultural codes in everyday interaction (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). That is, a woman’s perceived ability to be subservient is a result of needing to do this trait in various social situations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Mears (2014) also notes that employers’ mandate that workers “look good” for customers unfairly targets women, who are expected to be invested in their appearance and thus become pressured to embody a specific physical aesthetic. Along with gender, the desired embodied dispositions for work are also racialized and classed in nature (Mears, 2014; Walters, 2018; Williams & Connell, 2010, 2016; Witz et al., 2003). In the realm of retail business, for example, “the ideal aesthetic is middle class, white, and conventionally gendered” (Williams & Connell, 2010, p. 371). This point is raised by Williams and Connell’s (2010, 2016) study of the experiences of aesthetic labourers working in high-end retail stores in the US.

Speaking with 19 workers from a variety of retail establishments, Williams and Connell (2010, 2016) noted how employers typically recruit middle-class workers as they already embody the brands of stores by purchasing their products and, furthermore, would not object to receiving meager wages given their class backgrounds (i.e., those from the middle class are not living pay cheque to pay cheque). In addition to class, workers can be relegated to certain tasks along the lines of gender. For instance, the authors found that, in most cases, women were given more customer-facing work as they were perceived

to be better able to handle difficult customers. This gender segregation was also racialized in the sense that some workers described how their Black colleagues lacked the communication skills to properly interact with customers and thus entice them to buy goods.²⁰ By conceptualizing Black workers' perceived deficiency in oral communication as a personal failing rather than a social construction, these workers highlight a central point about aesthetic labour: "the focus on aesthetic labor encourages workers to blame themselves and not their employers for discriminatory labor practices" (2016, p. 206). That is, if workers understand that their failure to find employment is based on something *naturally within themselves*, it is difficult to accuse others of discrimination.

However, while a worker's habitus may be used to justify employment discrimination, it may be possible to work around it. In fact, remembering that it is a set of *socialized* traits, habitus is therefore considered malleable, meaning that it can change when exposed to new social contexts (e.g., DuBord, 2014). The implication of this point is that workers who can change/refine their habitus might be able to become ideal aesthetic labourers. This leads to another major feature of aesthetic labour as mentioned above: workers are not necessarily required to have perfectly-refined dispositions at the time of employment, but rather, have the opportunity to develop these dispositions. Put figuratively, if workers possess the "raw material," then employers can transform it into "an artefact" that is appreciated by others (Witz et al., 2003). In reality, this transformation from "material" to "artefact" involves employee training, which can take a variety of forms. For instance, in the retail and hospitality industries, training can involve such things as learning how to properly wear a uniform or adhering to a general dress code, adopting particular grooming habits, and using specific (body) language (e.g., Mears, 2014; Warhurst & Nickson,

²⁰The racialization of ideal aesthetic labourers for retail is not confined to sounding right. For example, Walters (2018) discusses how racial and colour hierarchies within retail stores create a desire for workers who most resemble phenotypical Whiteness.

2007; Witz et al., 2003). On some occasions, even employee smells might also be under the control of management (see Mears, 2014).

This idea that workers can enhance themselves through the right guidance is reminiscent of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical view of everyday life in which people, like actors, may have to alter their physical traits and behaviours in order for an audience to believe their performance. Indeed, aesthetic labour is a staged performance whereby workers present an *embodied self* that is designed to create positive impressions of the service that they deliver (Nickson et al., 2003; Witz et al., 2003). From a Goffmanian perspective, the performance of a desired embodied self requires work in two areas on the stage of life. First, the aesthetic labourer is first developed in the "backstage area" where the preparatory work needed for the performance is done (Goffman, 1959). This point has already been discussed in the previous paragraph with how employers refine the habitus of workers through such things as dress codes and grooming, which is done before workers engage with clients. The engagement with clients constitutes the "frontstage region" where the aesthetic labourer gives the actual performance (Goffman, 1959). Like any good performance, the performance of the aesthetic labourer is especially effective when it is deemed effortless. In fact, the success of aesthetic labour depends on workers not being perceived as acting, but rather, casually expressing their natural dispositions (Williams & Connell, 2010; Witz et al., 2003). This effortlessness is a type of skill, which leads to another important point about aesthetic labour.

That is, employers reconfigure the embodied dispositions of workers as skills to enhance the relationship between service provider and customer (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). It is important to state that these skills are not hard skills, the technical skills actually needed to complete work tasks (e.g., knowing how to operate the cash register at a grocery store). Instead, they can be seen as another manifestation of soft skills (Pettinger, 2016; Williams & Connell, 2010). Moss and Tilly (1996) define "soft skills as skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge" (p. 256). As essentially interpersonal skills, then, soft skills are not required to operate a cash

register, for instance, but they may be used to complement the service being offered. One example of this point is seen in Barber's (2016) study of the aesthetic labour performed by heterosexual female hairstylists at two salons catered to men. In keeping with the salons' intention of attracting heterosexual male clients, Barber (2016) described how these stylists were obligated to acknowledge the potential sexual desires of the clients through bodily and behavioural means. This entailed wearing (a lot of) makeup, hugging clients, and coyly brushing off sexual advances from some clients (Barber, 2016). As seen here, these soft skills were not needed to style hair, but required to create a heterosexual space where men would feel comfortable getting their haircut.²¹ However, for Sheane (2012) who also studies the work of hairstylists, it might not be so simple to distinguish between soft and hard skills. As Sheane (2012) notes, since it is the job of hairstylists to ensure that their customers are content with their haircuts, they must constantly "[monitor] the body and face of the client for signs of approval, satisfaction, trust and excitement—or not—and [monitor] their own expressions of enthusiasm and confidence accordingly" (p. 155). In other words, hairstylists are not simply cutting hair, but also making sure that their customers like what they are doing and adjusting their own bodily expressions to match those of the customer.

Whether it is to ignite sexual desires or just make customers feel good about themselves, the main purpose of aesthetic labour is to appeal to the visual and/or aural senses of the client (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007), which is the final point to be made about the nature of this labour. When customers determine the value of a service, "the personal embodied attributes of workers enter into the exchange process in a direct way" (McDowell, 2009, p. 9). This point is seen in the following types of examples:

When we ask for a waiter's advice about what to choose to eat, or consult a stylist about what might suit us, we evaluate their advice not just on the basis of the technical information that they might give us but also on the basis of what we think about them: whether we find them sympathetic and trustworthy, whether they are personable, friendly,

²¹Note once again how skill is not an apolitical attribute possessed by workers (see Chapter Two). In this case, the soft skills of female hairstylists are created out of social/organizational assumptions that women are sexual objects for heterosexual men (Barber, 2016).

standoffish, even aggressive, whether we admire or resent their youthful good looks or their facial piercings and fashionable dress (McDowell, 2009, p. 9).

What these examples suggest is that customers will have a favourable impression of a service if they have a favourable impression of the embodied traits of the service provider. This is why Warhurst and Nickson (2007) claim that the service encounter is a sensory experience: workers must have a particular look or specific manner of speaking in order for customers to deem a service satisfactory.

While this aesthetic labour is an important component in enhancing the service encounter, it is important to explore the meaning of “aesthetic.” Because aesthetic labour is believed to be mostly situated in the retail and hospitality sectors where the styling of physical appearance is particularly prominent, “aesthetic” tends to refer to beauty (Pettinger, 2016). Furthermore, “beauty” tends to have sexual connotations. This point is seen Barber’s (2016) study of female hairstylists as described above, but also occurs in other types of workplaces. For example, Walters (2016) discusses how the clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch explicitly recruits young, muscular men to be shirtless models, who are meant to *attract* (more) customers to their stores. The sexualized nature of physical attractiveness is also seen in so-called breasteraurants, which “are casual dining establishments such as Hooters where all the servers are attractive young women who are dressed in revealing, sexually provocative costumes” (Avery, 2016, p. 171). As Avery (2016) describes, the duties of breasteraurant workers entail “offering customers vicarious sexual entertainment and simulated intimacy” (p. 171) that can leave workers susceptible to sexual harassment. Even when bodies are not in actual display for customers, the sexualization of the worker can nevertheless occur. This is particularly seen in the realm of telephone sex work. For instance, based on interviews with phone sex workers in the US, Hall (1995) describes how these workers need to sexualize their language in order to produce the characters that align with callers’ sexual fantasies. As Hall (1995) rightly states, “person and voice are indistinguishable” (p. 203) in this type of aesthetic labour because workers need to become particular characters through their voices.

For scholars such as Pettinger (2016) and Waring (2011), understanding “aesthetic” as simply referring to physical beauty or sexual attractiveness does not fully capture what can constitute aesthetic labour. Indeed, by thinking about “aesthetic” in more general terms such as being generally pleasing to one’s sensory experience, it becomes possible to see how aesthetic labour can be a major feature of various types of service work (Pettinger, 2016). This point is especially seen in how “managers attempt to match the “type” of service provider with their assumptions concerning the customer’s expectations of the nature and meaning of the service” (Macdonald & Merrill, 2009, p. 115). For example, in their study of how management at a London hotel uses the embodiment of migrant workers to determine their suitability for different kinds of work, McDowell, Batnitzky, and Dyer (2007) found that employers relied on racial, national, and/or gender stereotypes to find suitable service providers. In the area of restaurant work where guests expect deferential service and a pleasant demeanour from waitstaff, for instance, McDowell et al. (2007) noted how Indian men came to dominate this area possibly due to the stereotype of (South) Asian men being effeminate and hence docile. As seen with this example, then, Indian male waiters are not ideal aesthetic labourers for restaurants because of the physical attractiveness of their bodies (although this could also be a factor). Rather, their racialized, gendered bodies communicate who they are as service providers: someone who will fulfill customers’ requests without any resistance.

Beyond communicating the nature of a service, Indian waitstaff and other aesthetic labourers also communicate the identities of their respective organizations (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Waring, 2011). When thinking about the identity of a service organization, one may come across the notion of the servicescape. Consisting of the actual physical environment of an organization, including signage and layout, servicescapes are often the means by which “consumers make judgments about the providers’ quality of service which subsequently forms a basis of expectations before any interaction with the provider takes place” (Touchstone, Koslow, Shamdassani, & D’Alessandro, 2017). This “hardware” of an organization thus becomes something that must be carefully managed in order to attract and keep customers (Witz et

al., 2003). However, rather than being outside the servicescape, Witz et al. (2003) argue that workers, by performing aesthetic labour, are actually embedded in this landscape. In fact, through such things as uniforms and particular body language, workers become animate expressions of how organizations would like to present themselves to clients (Witz et al., 2003). In short, aesthetic labourers humanize the organization for which they work.

Expanding Aesthetic Labour to Explain the Work of ITAs

There is much more that can be said about the development and nature of aesthetic labour. But for the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to specifically explore how it can be applied to the work of ITAs. Doing so actually entails providing more details about aesthetic labour, but in the sense of how ITAs' professional experiences may complicate understandings of this labour. These complications are explored in the following sub-sections.

From Retail and Hospitality to the Neoliberal University

Even though examples from hairstyling, restaurant work, and phone sex work were discussed in the previous section, the phenomenon and study of aesthetic labour seems to be concentrated in the retail and hospitality sectors (see Gruys, 2012; Karlsson, 2012; McDowell et al., 2007; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Walters, 2016, 2018; Williams & Connell, 2010, 2016; Witz, et al., 2003). This concentration is perhaps due to the fact that the formulation of this concept first happened in these sectors. However, scholars have noted how aesthetic labour is also prominent in other types of (service) work (Macdonald & Merrill, 2009). There are many examples from which to choose.

For instance, it has been noted how airlines look for flight attendants with particular racial looks and behaviour (e.g., the subservient Asian woman) in order to communicate that they truly cater to customers' needs in the air (Piller & Takahashi, 2013; Spiess & Waring, 2005). Beyond the need to look good, the

context of call centres highlights how workers need to sound right for customers in the sense of projecting happy, energetic, and caring selves through their voices (e.g., Cameron, 2000; Mirchandani, 2015). Even in workplace contexts where it is seemingly unnecessary, the presence of aesthetic labour still prevails. This point is raised by Cho's (2017) discussion of the saturation of (female) Korean-English translators in the South Korean translation market. In order to distinguish themselves from other competitors, these translators are often obliged to enhance their physical beauty through various means so as to create the impression that English skills are more valuable when coming from a beautiful body (Cho, 2017). In the public sector, Dahl (2013) details how parking patrol officers in Denmark also engage in aesthetic labour as seen through such things as being expected to have clean and tidy uniforms.

These expanded sites of aesthetic labour open up the possibility to explore how it can permeate other sites of work such as higher education. At first glance, aesthetic labour might seem irrelevant in academia as the intellect is given more importance over corporeality (Brown, 2017; Donaghue, 2017). However, this might not always be the case. In an autoethnography detailing her preparation to interview elite professionals for her doctoral research, Brown (2017) described how her supervisor and funding organization told her that she did not have the "professional look and demeanour" to do such interviews and consequently had her work with an image consultant. Some of the recommendations from the consultant included tidying up her physical appearance and controlling her energy. The conception of professionalism in terms of embodiment is also seen in Donaghue's (2017) discussion of the tensions experienced by female academics when choosing clothing for work. Indeed, due to the historical and contemporary marginalization of women in the academy, female scholars may feel the need to give up traditionally feminine attire in order to be taken seriously as intellectuals (Donaghue, 2017).

Along with considering its corporeal dimensions as seen above, it is equally worthwhile to consider the vocal aspects of aesthetic labour done in universities. This point entails understanding how the university is configured under neoliberalism. As discussed in Chapter Two, the prominence of knowledge-

and service-based industries in the neoliberal economy has seen a consequent need to perform work through language (Boutet, 2012; Cameron, 2000; Canagarajah, 2017; Heller, 2010; Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Holborow, 2018; Urciuoli, 2008; Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013). Specifically, this language work uses language to convey information that is consumed by others, which usefully describes the teaching done in neoliberal universities. The neoliberal university is typically defined as a site where marketized discourses transform teaching into a service that is delivered to students, now viewed as consumers, who then receive the product of knowledge that can be used for their own social and economic advancement (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004; Holborow, 2015; Shin, 2016). This knowledge is imparted through the language of service providers, that is, the teaching staff. In fact, it is through their talk with students in the form of lectures, tutorials, online discussions, and informal interactions that ensures that the latter gain new knowledge to compete in the globalized economy.

It is important to remember that this language work of the neoliberal university is increasingly done by teaching assistants, who provide much needed support for professors who, in addition to being pressured to publish and secure funding for their research, are responsible for teaching more and more student-customers (e.g., Gaertner, 2009; Raaper, 2018).²² However, when these teaching assistants are ITAs, the value of their language work may come into question. In fact, given that their foreign accents are perceived by students and others to interfere with learning (e.g., Bailey, 1983; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Gorsuch, 2016; Kang, 2012; Kang, Rubin, & Lindemann, 2015; Plakans, 1997; Subtirelu, 2017), ITAs are not only questioned about if they can use a language to impart knowledge, but also whether they can speak it *well enough* in order to complete this task. Therefore, the language work of ITAs becomes more complex as they may need to work on fixing their foreign accents in order to be seen as linguistically competent. In short, ITAs must also perform aesthetic labour in terms of sounding right.

²²Indeed, in Ontario, for instance, the average teaching load of professors is just three courses per year, which means that the remainder must be taught by graduate students and contract faculty (Wente, 2018).

According to Subtirelu (2017), the need for such aesthetic labour is often articulated through institutional policies that view ITAs' oral communication skills under a deficit lens and consequently require them to undergo remedial training before they can commence their teaching duties. The most extreme examples of such training are accent reduction or modification programs that attempt to make ITAs clearer communicators. For instance, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, the accent clinic of Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia convinces international students to adjust their accents as exemplified below:

Everyone has an accent. This particular way of speaking often allows a listener to identify where the speaker may be from. While diverse accents are a wonderful aspect of spoken English, sometimes an accent can make it difficult for individuals from one country or region to fully understand people from another. The Dalhousie Accent Clinic provides services to enable you to recognize and produce the sounds and speech patterns of North American English so that you may more easily communicate with other individuals from this region (Dalhousie Accent Clinic, 2018b, para. 1).

Similar to other accent reduction programs mentioned in the last chapter, this accent clinic solely blames the foreign-accented speaker for misunderstandings without considering other social factors (Derwing & Munro, 2009, 2015; Matsuda, 1991). Such a message fits in well in the neoliberal university since ITAs, as service providers, need to cater to the needs of student-customers, who may expect to be delivered information in an understandable manner.

The Interconnection between Body and Voice through Racialization

However, understanding what counts as understandable entails examining the interconnection between bodies and voices, especially in the sense of how they each “carry” assumptions about one another. In order to appreciate this point, it is first necessary to problematize the analytical focus of much aesthetic labour research. Remembering the shorthand definition of aesthetic labour being the work of “looking good and sounding right” (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001, as cited in Karlsson, 2012, p. 53), most studies focus on the former job requirement and give little to no attention to the latter. This point is evident in discussions of how the bodies of aesthetic labourers are dressed, sanitized, and/or taught how to move

in order to appeal to the customer (e.g., Cho, 2017; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Witz et al., 2003). Due to the continued lack of scholarly concern over sounding right, select studies have made the voice of aesthetic labourers the primary area of analysis.

For instance, drawing on the experiences of frontline service workers in Glasgow, Scotland, Eustace (2012) describes how these workers are obliged (by employers) to standardize their Scots dialect of English in order to create more favourable impressions of themselves as service providers. Butler (2014) also considers the role of speech in impression management, but does so in the context of the professional obstacles faced by men with speech disorders. While studies such as these provide much needed insight into the importance of sounding right for work, they suffer from the opposite issue of not considering how body and voice actually work together in sounding right.²³ This issue is particularly significant because, at one level, the voice is projected from the body as seen by how the mouth, tongue, and vocal tracts create audible sounds that convey meaning to others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016; Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2012). But on another level, the body-voice connection goes much deeper in that people often “read” bodies to determine the quality of the voice coming from these bodies. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, “speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it” (p. 652).

Based on this observation, it is important to explore how looking good and sounding right actually constitute each other (Ramjattan, 2018). That is, instead of focusing on looking good *or* sounding right, it is more productive to consider how sounding right means looking good and vice versa. The interconnection of these two job requirements is particularly noticeable through the racialization of aesthetic labourers, which is exemplified in the field of English language teaching (ELT).

Although it is rarely recognized as such, ELT is nevertheless a type of aesthetic labour because teachers with particular voices are those who are deemed most effective by employers and students

²³See Timming (2017) for a possible exception.

(Ramjattan, 2015, 2018). Specifically, teachers who are native speakers of English are perceived as naturally sounding right for the profession. However, as briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the racial look of teachers often determines their native speaker status. Indeed, because of colonial and nationalist histories, nativeness in English is frequently tied to a White body from a majority-White nation (Amin, 1997; Jenks, 2017; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Motha, 2014; Ramjattan, 2015; 2018, 2019). The implication of this connection is that White teachers are deemed to look good for ELT because their bodies indicate that they sound right. Conversely, it also means that racialized instructors, even when they have native speaker voices, can be seen as unqualified/substandard aesthetic labourers (see Ramjattan, 2015).

While the body determines the value of the voice in ELT, the voice may be able to create valued bodies in other types of aesthetic labour. For example, this point was previously highlighted in Hall's (1995) exploration of how phone sex workers need to embody the sexual fantasies of their clients through their voices. In fact, Hall (1995) notes that, on some occasions, workers may need to linguistically embody particular racial identities, which can lead to stereotypical portrayals of various racialized groups. In this case, then, having a good racial look for customers entails developing the right-sounding voice. This task is also evident in call centre work in India where agents need to transmit an image of an ideal worker through their voice (Mirchandani, 2015).

Indeed, as discussed in the last chapter, the work of Indian call centre agents largely consists of de-racializing their foreign-accented English so as to present themselves as non-Indian for Global North callers, who may not want to speak with someone allegedly stealing Western jobs (e.g., Mirchandani, 2012; Nath, 2011; Poster, 2007). Whether this accent modification is an attempt to become a White worker or someone unable to be racially classified (see Aneesh, 2015a, 2015b) is up for debate, but it once again suggests that changes in voice can change the image of the worker in the mind of the customer and thereby make the former look good for the latter. One interesting point about the aesthetic labour of Indian call centre workers is that it is performed due to the stigmatization of these workers (Nath, 2011). While it is

true that companies desire Indians with a particular linguistic habitus, that is, those who received English language education from elite convent schools, their racial identity as Indians positions them as deficient language workers (Mirchandani, 2012). The specific reason for their devalued linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991) is that Indian English is characterized as flawed when compared to British or American varieties, which are believed to be spoken by socially and economically powerful White people and subsequently reflected in the learning goals of organizational language training (e.g., Mirchandani, 2012; Nath, 2011). Thus, Indian agents, like other stigmatized individuals, are required to learn that they are not “normal” and also learn to cope with this abnormal status through accent training (Goffman, 1963). In short, they need to reform their habitus (DuBord, 2014) to do their work.

Returning to the topic of ITAs, it is important to consider how their aesthetic labour is done out of stigmatization as well. Similar to Indian call centre workers, ITAs have the necessary linguistic capital to study and teach in North American English-medium universities, yet they are criticized for their foreign accents that are deemed to interfere with their speaking-related duties (e.g., Bailey, 1983; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Gorsuch, 2016; Kang, 2012; Kang, Rubin, & Lindemann, 2015; Plakans, 1997; Subtirelu, 2017). But taking into account the above discussion about the interconnection between body and voice through racialization, this criticism of the ITA accent must be examined alongside the body of the ITA. In fact, the bodies of ITAs cannot be separated from their voices in the sense that raciolinguistic ideologies can determine whether individuals speak properly or improperly based on their racial positioning in society (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017). This effect of raciolinguistic ideologies was seen in Rubin’s (1992) study and other related scholarly work (Babel & Russell, 2015; Yi et al., 2013; Zheng & Samuel, 2017) that highlighted how the level of accentedness and intelligibility can be determined by the racial identity of a speaker. What these findings suggest is that, depending on their racial background, some ITAs may be held to a stricter linguistic standard than others. For example, while raciolinguistic ideologies may hear the foreign-accented speech of White ITAs as suitably comprehensible for teaching

and thus deem it unnecessary to be modified, they may simultaneously perceive the speech of racialized ITAs as perpetually deficient and in need of correction.²⁴ Therefore, the racialized bodies of ITAs might help define the parameters of sounding right for teaching and other related duties.

If sounding right is intimately related to race, then it is important to view it as “an ideological practice” (Eustace, 2012, p. 334). That is, if raciolinguistic ideologies position White ITAs as already better sounding than their racialized peers, a logical assumption among the latter set of ITAs would be to strive toward aural Whiteness. As described in Chapter Two, bodies can be differentially racialized according to changes in linguistic practices (e.g., Roth-Gordon, 2016, 2017). Thus, if racialized ITAs manage to “whiten” their foreign-accented speech, then there is the possibility that they “whiten” their racial appearances, which in turn can make them seem more intelligible/comprehensible. This is not to say that ITAs become phenotypically whiter by whitening their accents, but rather, that “in real-life, face-to-face communication, there is no way to separate how people *sound* from the visual cues we normally associate with race [original emphasis]” (Roth-Gordon, 2016, p. 55). In other words, a modified accent, for example, may distract people from noticing one’s racial difference.

The Cultural, Contextual, and Dynamic Aspects of Aesthetic Labour

To better understand the racialization of sounding right, it is worthwhile to explore its cultural component. “Culture,” specifically “national culture,” is often used as a code word for “race” and thus both terms cannot be readily divorced from one another (e.g., Carbado & Gulati, 2013; Lee & Rice, 2007; Miles, 1989; Piller, 2011; Urciuoli, 1999, 2009). For example, if it is possible to talk about race as a type of performance as discussed above and in the previous chapter, then culture can also have a performative element in that it can be something that individuals do while interacting with others (Piller, 2011). In the

²⁴However, as will be noted in later parts of this chapter and thesis, there are specific instances in which racialized speakers are deemed particularly comprehensible.

realm of service work, the performativity of culture is particularly noticeable. Indeed, as Otis (2010) states, “service labor requires workers to be culturally competent. A central component of most service labor is interaction between a worker and a...customer. This interaction requires that workers recognize and manipulate culturally dominant forms of...etiquette” (p. 428). The cultural aspect of service work becomes an issue when the service worker and client come from different racial/cultural backgrounds.

For instance, examining the aesthetic labour of Chinese women working at a luxury hotel located in Beijing, Otis (2016) argues that, when serving mostly White male executives from the Global North, these female workers have to go beyond looking good and sounding right to “[looking] familiar and [sounding] understandable” (p. 913). That is, workers need to conform to foreign self-presentation rules in order to provide culturally familiar service for customers of a different national/cultural background. This entails embodying a mainly (American) middle class womanhood as seen in such job requirements as wearing Western female clothing, learning English, and knowing when to smile and make eye contact with clients. For management, the intended goal of this training is to alleviate customers’ burden to adapt to new cultural practices, thereby allowing them to be comfortable in any foreign setting. However, this goal subsequently upholds the global cultural dominance of the US and the rest of the Global North by having workers subscribe to so-called White cultural norms. Aside from hotel workers, the cultural nature of aesthetic labour is once again seen in transnational call centre work in India.

Indeed, Indian call centre workers represent a more extreme example of aesthetic labourers needing to be culturally congruent to customers by literally transforming their identities. As already seen with the accent modification training used to make them less linguistically Indian, agents are subject to what Poster (2007) calls national identity management, “a labor strategy in which ethnicity and citizenship are considered malleable and subject to managerial control” (p. 273). While national identity management mainly consists of attempting to sound similar to Western callers, it also involves the adoption of Western

aliases and learning Western cultural information in order to help callers believe that they are receiving service in their own nation (e.g., Nath, 2011; Poster, 2007; Rajan-Rankin, 2018).

According to Mirchandani (2012), this type of identity work serves to make Indian agents believe in their own cultural deficiency. Mirchandani notes that this indoctrination appears in the curricular materials of training programs as exemplified in the following excerpt:

In a section from one of the training materials on “barriers to fluency,” it is noted that “an individual who belongs to a conservative society might not be expressive or vocal about his or her thoughts; or an individual who has not been exposed to an English-speaking environment, in spite of being excellent in written English, would be unable to string his thoughts in English comfortably.” In this case, the links between English exposure, a conservative society, and expressiveness serve to entrench the distinctions between the “modern” and the “traditional” (p. 51).

As alluded in the above information, what is considered “traditional” and hence conservative and less expressive is allegedly Indian culture, which might interfere with being able to properly converse with callers from more “modern,” “expressive” cultures in the Global North. Thus, these materials remind Indian call centre workers that they have to embrace the cultural dispositions of their clients in order to ensure effective professional communication.

Like transnational call centre or hotel workers, ITAs are also aesthetic labourers who need to pay attention to culture when working with their foreign accents. However, the cultural component of their aesthetic labour is a bit more complex given that they are working for universities that actively seek to internationalize their campuses. Before explaining this point, it is necessary to dedicate some space to understand this internationalization of higher education and what it means for oral communication within higher education institutions (in North America).²⁵

Knight (2004) notes that defining the internationalization of higher education is a daunting task since it can have multiple meanings for different individuals across time and space. In just the Canadian

²⁵While higher education also includes colleges, my discussion exclusively focuses on universities.

context, for example, internationalization has described a number of phenomena ranging from student mobility to international research projects (Larsen, 2015). Due to this complexity, it is imperative to provide a broad definition of internationalization that can be applied to many contexts (Knight, 2004). In response to this need, Knight (2003) defines internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 2). By viewing it as a process, Knight (2004) acknowledges that internationalization is not a singular event, but rather, an ongoing effort. Moreover, the words “international,” “intercultural,” and “global” describe the multifaceted nature of internationalization: “international” refers to relations between countries and cultures; “intercultural” describes the diversity of cultures within institutions, local communities, and countries; and “global” signifies the worldwide scale of the concept (Knight, 2004).

Although it is of interest to macro-level players such as governments and non-governmental organizations (see Chatterjee, 2015; Johnstone & Lee, 2017, for Canadian examples), internationalization presents the most direct benefits at the institutional level. Indeed, from the perspective of individual universities, internationalization is first rationalized for its potential to enhance their international reputation and generate further income (Knight, 2004). These benefits are derived from neoliberal trends in which universities act like businesses that need to promote themselves in order to attract student-customers to purchase their services (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Constanti & Gibbs, 2004; Holborow, 2015; Shin, 2016). Apart from these economic benefits, other altruistic reasons for internationalization include such things as increasing the intercultural/international understanding of students and staff and facilitating international research collaborations (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Guo & Chase, 2011; Knight, 2004).

There are certainly various rationales for internationalization, but what are some examples of this process? Looking at the activities that occur on home campuses rather than those that happen abroad, internationalization is primarily seen in the increased presence of international students (Baker, 2016; Guo & Chase, 2011; Guo & Guo, 2017; Sterzuk, 2015). For example, at Canadian universities, international

student populations increased from 173,781 in the 2012/2013 academic year to 244,842 in 2016/2017 (Statistics Canada, 2019). Along with the added presence of international students that generates further revenue for universities (through the higher tuition rates paid by these students) (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Guo & Guo, 2017; Yao, George Mwangi, & Malaney Brown, 2018; Zha, 2003), internationalization can also entail changes to existing curricula. Specifically, there has been a recent inclination among university administrators and faculty to promote more foreign language study for domestic students in order to better prepare them for the globalized knowledge economy in which knowledge of additional languages leads to better career opportunities (Kubota, 2009; Spitzer & Cordero-Ramon, 2013; Warner, 2011).

While internationalization has the apparent goal to prepare particularly English-medium universities in such countries as the US and Canada to connect with the globalized world, it has been criticized as lip service to diversity. In fact, despite their purported internationalization efforts, many have noted how these universities promote neocolonial agendas by upholding White, Anglocentric ontologies and epistemologies, research methods and methodologies, and academic discourses (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Cantwell & Lee, 2010; El-Lahib, George, Pon, & Wehbi, 2011; Kubota, 2009). This “homogenized English-based academic culture” (Kubota, 2009, p. 608) may be of no consequence to domestic students who are already familiar with it.²⁶ However, for international students who may not have been exposed to the culture, they must “whiten themselves” in order to fully function in their new academic settings.

The idea that these students need to fend for themselves should not be understated as Guo and Chase (2011) note how, despite the increased recruitment of international students, there is often a lack of formal support at host universities that facilitate the successful academic integration of these students. In particular, Kubota (2009) states that there is little English language training for students at English-medium institutions because of the expectation that international students should already have strong competence

²⁶Of course, this point can be challenged given that racialized and Indigenous students can also be marginalized by this academic culture.

in the language before coming abroad. In reference to Canadian universities, Sterzuk (2015) explains that this expectation maintains linguistic and racial hierarchies. Namely, by being native speakers of English, international students from majority-White countries such as England and Australia would seemingly have an easier time adjusting to Canadian campuses than their (racialized) nonnative-speaking peers.

For those students who may eventually become teaching assistants, the above hierarchies may become further entrenched as those who are deemed linguistically and racially closer to the White academic culture of the (Canadian) campus may be seen as more suitable instructors. In spite of being perceived as incompatible to this academic culture, international students from non-Anglocentric cultures do eventually become teaching assistants. In order to perform their work, however, these students may require additional sets of skills. One such set of skills is intercultural communication competence, which generically refers to “the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with individuals who have a different cultural background” (Jackson, 2014, p. 372). For ITAs, this competence may entail having “the ability to notice academic cultural differences and communicate effectively to achieve teaching outcomes” (LeGros & Faez, 2012, p. 9). In a Western context such as North American universities, intercultural communication competence may not be considered a completely neutral ability. Indeed, Ladegaard and Jenks (2015) lament that much of the current conception of intercultural communication remains Eurocentric and Anglocentric in nature. Using the example of the criticism of Chinese students’ indirect and passive communicative style, the pair exemplify how intercultural communication is still dominated by Anglo-Saxon notions of direct, upfront interaction (Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015).

The biased nature of intercultural communication competence therefore privileges ITAs whose communication style is Western-based and disadvantages those whose communicative habits deviate from this style. For the latter set of ITAs, then, intercultural communication competence is something that they lack in a university context. This perceived deficiency relates to ITAs’ accents, which, as a part of language, are a component of culture and thus, relevant in discussions about intercultural communication (Jackson,

2014; Piller, 2011; Titsworth & Mazer, 2010). As discussed in earlier parts of this thesis, foreign accents are not simply a matter of phonology; they are also subject to folk linguistic beliefs that state that accents embody particular cultural traits (Cavanaugh, 2005; Dragojevic et al., 2016). For instance, Pickering (2004) notes how Chinese teaching assistants' foreign-accented-English intonation may sometimes be perceived as a sign of them being disengaged or unsympathetic, which might foster the impression that Chinese culture is less expressive than other cultures. Moreover, this perceived cultural feature of Chinese people would be especially problematic in a North American classroom where engagement and sympathy are desired qualities for all teaching staff. Thus far, the above discussion of particular ITAs needing to adapt to North American academic culture suggests that universities are institutions that uphold a single White normative national culture to which those who are racially and/or linguistically dissimilar must subscribe (e.g., Baker, 2016; El-Lahib et al., 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yao et al., 2018). However, Baker (2016) complicates this notion by stating that while it is still important to acknowledge the White normativity that dominates universities, it is equally significant to examine their "transcultural" nature.

Indeed, focusing on the use of English in Anglophone higher education institutions, Baker (2016) details how international students (and staff) are not simply using the language in accordance with hegemonic Anglophone norms, but also, "in a flexible and situational-specific manner in which national cultural groupings are just one of many possible cultural orientations" (p. 446). While this point may describe how students from non-Anglophone countries may not need to speak like a native English speaker when conversing with one another, it could also describe how they need to subscribe to communicative norms particular to micro-cultures within the university, be it a specific academic department or discipline, club or association, and/or a group of friends. Therefore, this transcultural university forces students to navigate the multiple cultures that co-exist in this institution and develop an awareness of how to communicate when these cultures come into play.

When thinking about the idea of the transcultural university (or internationalization in general) in relation to aesthetic labour, then, it is important to remember how this “labour is predicated on the notion of presentational rules that are [both] cultural and contextual” (Butler, 2014, p. 723). In fact, as Mears (2014) notes, “what counts as aesthetic in aesthetic labor will diverge sharply across the contexts where the work is performed” (p. 1337).²⁷ In aesthetic labour that is focused on language, it is equally important to highlight the nature of “context.” Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005) rightly state that “context...is not a passive ‘décor’ but an active, agentive aspect of communication” (p. 205). Specifically, it “*does something* to people when it comes to communicating. It organizes and defines sociolinguistic regimes in which spaces are characterized by sets of norms and expectations about communicative behavior [original emphasis]” (Blommaert et al., 2005, p. 203). The implication of this point is that “a change in spatial environment...affects our capacity to deploy linguistic resources and skills and imposes requirements on us which we may fail to meet” (Blommaert et al., 2005, p. 198). This point may be especially true for ITAs. Indeed, ITAs who come to English-speaking nations such as Canada and the US might experience a restriction on their linguistic resources because, first of all, their mother tongues may not be widely spoken in these countries and, as mentioned repeatedly in this thesis, the manner in which they speak English might be labelled as deficient when compared to so-called national varieties of the language. On the macro level of the nation, then, ITAs may lack the required aural aesthetic to be seen as qualified workers. However, in the context of the transcultural university, the various cultures situated in university settings

²⁷This point has been addressed in other aesthetic labour research that explores how contextual factors define the parameters of looking good and sounding right. For instance, Timming, Nickson, Re, and Perrett (2017) found that while job seekers with tattoos and body piercings might not have a good look for positions involving direct customer interaction, they are more likely to be hired if applying for non-customer-facing work in which appearance is of relative unimportance. Similar findings were made by Timming’s (2017) study of the effects of foreign accent on the employability of workers. That is, whereas Chinese, Indian, and Mexican accents were found to be inappropriate for customer-facing work in a US context (especially when compared to British or American accents), they were rated positively when considered for non-customer-facing positions. Therefore, these examples suggest that the nature of work can influence perceptions of the appropriateness of various visual or aural aesthetics.

may deem ITAs' accents as satisfactory or even irrelevant for certain interactions. To further complicate matters, it may even be the case that these cultures place more restrictions on ITAs' speech in that they (informally) enforce particular styles or conventions regarding everyday communication.

Consider two main examples of how the aesthetic labour of ITAs is shaped by these transcultural environments. First, remembering that internationalization is most noticeable in the increasing racial and linguistic diversity of student populations, ITAs might be responsible for mastering different kinds of aural aesthetics for changing audiences. Such a hypothesis relies on communication accommodation theory (CAT). As Giles, Willemyns, Gallois, and Anderson (2007) note, "according to CAT, people modify their speech, non-verbal behavior, and/or discourse patterns to become more like their interactant in a bid to decrease social distance, seek or signal approval, and thereby accommodate" (p. 142). In terms of accent, then, foreign-accented speakers, such as ITAs, may retain or modify their accents in order to create a favourable impression on particular people, who share or do not share the same accent (e.g., Giles et al., 2007; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

In the context of entering mostly linguistically and racially homogeneous environments, the CAT aspect of ITAs' aesthetic labour can involve conforming to a White, Anglocentric culture to aurally appease students. Bresnahan, Ohashi, Nebashi, Liu, and Morinaga-Shearman (2002), in their experiment involving around 250 White US students evaluating the accented English of different ITAs, found that those students who strongly identified with their racial identity perceived ITA speech as less intelligible, thereby suggesting that ITAs need to "Americanize" their accents in order to make a more favourable impression on these students. If students who are invested in their Whiteness constitute the majority of a classroom, then it can further pressure ITAs to lose the "foreignness" of their accents. For example, Fitch and Morgan (2003) and Ates and Eslami (2012) note that when teaching in mostly White US classrooms, ITAs who do not physically or aurally resemble a White native speaker of American English are seldom heard as intelligible

and can even be actively ignored by students. This can result in their attempt to sound “more native” in order to build a better rapport with their learners (e.g., Zheng, 2017).

However, when interacting with groups of linguistically and racially diverse students, the attempt to sound native may dissipate. Because internationalization creates the conditions for ITAs to interact with other international students, both of whom might identify as nonnative English speakers, there is the likelihood that both parties can connect on their shared nonnative status. For instance, in their qualitative study on the experiences of 12 ITAs at a Canadian university, Myles and Cheng (2003) described how one of the participants from Bulgaria felt that her mostly Chinese students could understand her accent very well and even sought her advice on various language issues. While being a fellow nonnative speaker of English can certainly make her a linguistic role model for her Chinese students, it is worthwhile to question whether the Bulgarian ITA's racial identity also played a role in making a positive impression, which leads to a discussion on the potentially complicated nature of the aural expectations of ITAs in mostly White, monolingual versus multiracial, multilingual classrooms.

For example, even in linguistically and racially diverse university environments, students may use the White native speaker of English as a yardstick to measure the social attractiveness or intelligibility of other international students (McKenzie & Gilmore, 2017).²⁸ The implication of this point is that those ITAs who (aurally) resemble this figure, which, in most cases, are Europeans (such as the Bulgarian ITA), are more likely to be heard as intelligible and thus be under no immediate pressure to change their accents (e.g., Alberts, 2008). Yet, when these ITAs are situated in classes mostly populated by White native English speakers, their accents can actually racialize them as racial outsiders and therefore put them in the position of having to modify their voices. For instance, Williams (2011) notes that ITAs from such European countries as Spain can be heard as just as incomprehensible as someone from the Global South because

²⁸Note how this echoes the point in Chapter Two of how White normativity can still thrive in diverse organizations (e.g., Acker, 2006; Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010; Ward, 2008).

their accents might be equally unfamiliar to students. The idea that accent acts as a site for racialization can also be applied to student audiences, who can become “whitened” on account of identifying as native English speakers and might consequently expect ITAs to aurally whiten themselves as well. This point was addressed by Mthethwa-Sommers (2012), an African-born instructor in the US who noted that her foreign accent was not well-received by even her African American student due to the fact that this student was raised in a national context where Whiteness, in its linguistic and other forms, continues to be upheld as the norm and thus valued by most people.

As seen above, the transcultural university can place ITAs in the company of an array of students from various linguistic/racial backgrounds who can create specific parameters for sounding right. It is important to note that whether ITAs find themselves in either a mostly White or mostly racialized classroom will depend on the academic discipline that they choose to pursue. Indeed, at many North American universities, the majority of international students, many of whom are Asian, tend to be found in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (e.g., Redden, 2017), thereby suggesting that ITAs will teach linguistically and racially diverse students in mostly these disciplines. This mention of academic discipline is significant in the discussion of transcultural universities because, as stated above, ITAs will also need to conform to the communicative norms of specific disciplinary cultures as part of their aesthetic labour (Alphonso, 2007; Sterzuk, 2015). In order to exemplify this point, it is worthwhile to explore the distinctions between engineering and the social sciences, two academic disciplines that came to be highly influential in the findings of the current study.

With regard to the social sciences, it is obvious how oral communication is a major component of doing work in this macro-discipline. In the field of history, as a random example, students and scholars are expected to articulate clear and persuasive utterances as well as formulate and defend one’s opinion on various topics (University of Toronto Mississauga, 2018). However, even in the field of engineering, which, in the simplest sense, is concerned with building things, oral communication can be equally important. In

fact, Darling and Dannels (2003) note that engineers have to be proficient in a number of communicative genres: they need to present technical information in oral presentations, run meetings, train other engineers, and persuade funding agencies, etc., to support their projects. Interestingly, engineering may have even stricter oral communication conventions than the social sciences in that it encourages concise utterances that provide specific information in a logical sequence (Darling & Dannels, 2003), which is in contrast to the freer, extended, and expressive communication of the social sciences (and humanities) (Tobias, 1990).²⁹ As will be detailed in Chapter Five, the perceived foreignness of an accent can seemingly interfere with this precise communication in the sense that interlocutors may spend valuable time trying to decipher this accent, especially when it prevents the understanding of a key point. Yet, in the social sciences where developing a well-developed argument is paramount, an accent can also be problematic as it might come to falsely signify that one is foreign to and thus unknowledgeable about a certain topic. For example, for some, speaking about Canadian history with a so-called non-Canadian accent can threaten one's pedagogical credibility.

Returning to the aesthetic labour of ITAs, then, the communicative cultures of the social sciences and engineering may force them to adjust their accents in such a way so as to ensure the trustworthiness and precision of their utterances, respectively. But the impact of these disciplines does not end here. In the particular case of engineering, some ITAs need to contend with the gendered regimes of the field.

Before delving into this point, it is important to note how organizations are gendered spaces and, in particular, masculinized. Speaking about her research on US women working in the police force, McElhinny (1998) states,

²⁹It is also worthwhile to consider how these differing communicative styles reflect the status differences between the disciplines. For example, because engineering (and other STEM fields) typically receive more (external) funding than the humanities and social sciences and their alleged role in bettering students' employment prospects and the overall economy (Cohen, 2016), engineers might be expected to "get down to business" and only talk about things that directly impact the work needed to be performed.

Workplaces are gendered both by the numerical predominance of one sex within them and by the cultural interpretation of given types of work which, in conjunction with cultural norms and interpretations of gender, dictate who is understood as best suited for different types of employment (p. 309).

For instance, when men comprise the majority of workers in an organization, hegemonic understandings about men and masculinity in terms of interpreting the nature of work tasks as well as who should perform them dominate (Acker, 1990; Williams, Muller, & Kilanski, 2012). Thus, from this standpoint, they help to perpetuate an organizational androcentrism in which “male perspectives and behaviour” are considered “neutral” aspects of the workplace (Acker, 1990; William et al., 2012). The implication of this androcentrism is that it “delimit[s] who can properly participate in [an organization] and/or how such participation can take place” (McElhinny, 1998, p. 309), which certainly defines the experiences of women in engineering.

Women can experience engineering departments as highly masculinized spaces in two ways. First, in terms of demographics in the North American context, engineering programs are male-dominated, with White males holding the most material and symbolic prestige (e.g., Dutta, 2016; Seron, Silbey, Cech, & Rubineau, 2018). As highlighted in the above paragraph, this numerical dominance of men reproduces an androcentric organizational culture, which consequently views (White) men as ideal engineers and, furthermore, treats (racialized) women as illegitimate workers who cannot fully participate in the workplace. Dutta (2016) notes how this marginalization happens in many ways “including receiving limited information about degree requirements and funding opportunities, not being included in important projects, and being treated differently from men by their professors and peers during class assessments and team projects” (p. 180). This mistreatment can lead female engineers to make bodily, verbal, and/or behavioural changes to themselves in order to “become ‘one of the boys,’ or honorary men” (Jorgensen, 2002, p. 352), all in the hope of increasing the possibility of receiving the same material rewards as their male peers. Regarding the aesthetic labour of female ITAs, such a transformation might rely on their accents being used as a resource to “do gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). For example, they may garner the professional authority of a

male by deepening the pitch of their accents/voices (e.g., Martín-Santana et al., 2015). Moreover, in the case of male ITAs who are perceived as “feminine” by their peers, they may also modify their accents in order to “re-masculinize” themselves and thus sound right for engineering. These scenarios will be better explained in later chapters.

For now, it is important to be reminded of the fact that the aural aesthetic for ITAs is dynamic in the sense of it changing in response to shifting cultural contexts within internationalizing universities. However, it is worthwhile to conclude this sub-section by noting how its dynamic nature is also seen in its actual auditory features. In order to grasp this point, it is necessary to move beyond the notion that language in general and accent in particular are monolithic systems (Eckert, 1996; Rymes, 2014). Indeed, “an identifiable ‘way of speaking’ is inevitably a combination of many ways of speaking, involving a mix of emblematic elements” (Rymes, 2014, p. 55). That is, although a person might be identified as speaking English with a Portuguese accent, for instance, the manner in which they pronounce words or even individual sounds might draw on linguistic elements from other speech communities, which might be the result of their admiration for or desire to emulate such communities. Therefore, a manner of speaking can be composed of a bricolage of linguistic resources (Eckert, 1996). This point may apply to ITAs, who, for example, may *choose* to style their voices as native speakers of English with regard to segmental features of pronunciation, but retain suprasegmental components that are influenced by their mother tongues. “Choose” is a very important word in this example because it could be the case that the specific aural aesthetic needed to be a teaching assistant is determined by ITAs themselves, which is the subject of the following sub-section.

Aesthetic Labour as Determined by the Aesthetic Labourer

According to early research on the phenomenon, the requirements for aesthetic labour are typically outlined in formal employee training or codes of conduct in organizations (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006).

However, looking for these requirements solely through these means may miss other sites where aesthetic labour can occur. In fact, given the global promotion of the entrepreneurial subject under neoliberalism, it is often the case that individuals may need to make themselves look good and/or sound right in order to secure employment (Cho, 2017; Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017; Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Hasinoff, 2008; Van den Berg & Arts, 2018; Wissinger, 2012). For instance, in the realm of fashion modelling where models work contract-to-contract, it is the duty of these models to continually style their appearances in anticipation of what prospective clients desire for the next contract (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Hasinoff, 2008; Wissinger, 2012). In the case of ITAs, the self-development of a satisfactory professional aesthetic may come from their close observation of the social environments of their respective universities.

Indeed, rather than understanding the right accent through overt classroom instruction, for instance, ITAs' learning of this aural aesthetic may be situational (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the sense that students' visceral reactions to the way they sound in a tutorial or observing that ITA trainers come from particular linguistic backgrounds may inform them of how certain accents are (not) valued in real social settings. It thus becomes the responsibility of ITAs to decode these experiences so that they know what aural aesthetic is being directed to them at work. It is important to note, however, that this social learning should not be understood as a process of language socialization whereby ITAs simply come to adopt the linguistic norms of their social surroundings. Instead, ITAs may exercise some agency by adapting what they have learned to suit their own purposes (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006). In other words, they may choose to adhere to specific aspects of an aesthetic promoted in a social space that correspond to their desired teaching practices. Of course, the above discussion is not to imply that the learning of an aural aesthetic is some sort of apolitical process.

That is, when they learn what type of accent is satisfactory for teaching through their social surroundings, ITAs are not necessarily obtaining objective information, but rather, coming under the

influence of (raciolinguistic) ideologies embedded in these surroundings.³⁰ In other words, ITAs' understandings of satisfactory aural aesthetics may be the result of interpellation. According to Althusser (1971), interpellation describes how ideology "hails" an identity onto a person who then adopts this identity. While it is deemed as absolute in that everyone becomes a subject to ideology, there is an ample amount of empirical evidence that shows how individuals can resist interpellation through their daily working practices (e.g., Salzinger, 2003; Wright, 2006). Thus, when ITAs possibly adapt their social learning to suit their own needs as mentioned in the previous paragraph, they are possibly resisting oppressive ideologies found within this learning. However, understanding that resistance can often reproduce the status quo (e.g., Canagarajah, 2017; Duchêne, Moyer, & Roberts, 2013; Mumby, 2005), it may sometimes be the case that ITAs' resistance to a particular manner of sounding right replicates it under another guise. This can be particularly true when ITAs have to navigate multiple (and competing) ideologies being "hailed" onto them from different interlocutors.

Aside from external forces making (indirect) communications, ITAs may also offer their own suggestions on how to sound right. Once again, these suggestions are not apolitical judgments based on "verifiable" knowledge. Instead, they may be the products of internalized ideological assumptions. With regard to raciolinguistic ideologies, for instance, ITAs may adopt the position of White listening subject who hears racialized accents as unsuitable for teaching and/or White speaking subject who attempts to "whiten" their accent in order to be seen as a qualified instructor (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Moreover, it is important to remember that since knowledge is socially situated and thus shaped or constrained by one's social location on the basis of race, gender, class, and so on and so forth (e.g., Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004), ITAs will have differing understandings of a satisfactory accent. For

³⁰This point applies to other aesthetic labourers as well. For instance, in the realm of fashion modelling, Wissinger (2012) states that who counts as beautiful in this industry is determined by racial and gendered ideologies positioning White female bodies as the (international) standard for feminine beauty. Therefore, Black and other racialized models might be obliged to "whiten" their appearances in order to find work.

example, whereas an ethnically Nigerian ITA may come to understand that ideal English accents are tied to White bodies by experiencing accent discrimination on a White-dominated university campus, a White British ITA may be unaware of this point on account of others simply accepting their manner of speech. Thus, the latter ITA may offer seemingly race-neutral advice on sounding right.

Even when ITAs offer their own opinions on what type of accent is satisfactory to be a teaching assistant, they may sometimes contradict their own beliefs. The reason for this contradiction is that “since language beliefs are created at the intersections of personal experiences and larger ideologies, teaching practice can reproduce the very ideologies that teachers are attempting to reject in their beliefs” (Mainz, 2018, p. 49). With respect to accent, then, ITAs may openly reject adopting some kind of hegemonic manner of speaking but subconsciously reinforce this way of speaking (or highlight how they have no choice but to accept it) when describing their professional practices. This may be exemplified by ITAs who wish to retain their foreign accents yet continue to look to native speakers as linguistic models. To conclude, although ITAs, as aesthetic labourers, can define their own aural aesthetic, their situatedness in specific professional contexts will highly influence how they define sounding right.

Aesthetic Labour is not a Superficial Process

Another point to make about aesthetic labour is that it should not be seen as a superficial process. Because it remains focused on the bodies of service workers rather than something more meaningful like their emotions as explored by Hochschild (2003) in the concept of emotional labour, aesthetic labour might be perceived as solely concerned with seemingly frivolous things such as physical attractiveness. However, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) argue that aesthetic labourers should not be seen as “cardboard cut-outs” that are styled for superficial performances, but rather, real human beings whose (obliged) aesthetic practices have lasting impacts on their identities. For instance, using their research on fashion models, the

pair discuss how models who have strong emotional ties to certain bodily features may feel resentment and a sense of loss when asked by employers to modify these features (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006).

Beyond their bodies, aesthetic labourers may also have a strong emotional bond with their voices in general and accents in particular. In fact, since accent is intimately tied to one's identity, employer requests or self-identified needs to change an accent may generate some ambivalence (Eustace, 2012). That is, even though workers may desire to be seen as linguistically competent, they may see the need to change their accent as an attack on their identities. As Matsuda (1991) states, "your self is inseparable from your accent. Someone who tells you they don't like the way you speak is quite likely telling you that they don't like you" (p. 1329). These ambivalent feelings may also form in ITAs' aesthetic labour.

When ITAs decide to modify their accents to suit their new teaching contexts, they are orally projecting how they would like to be seen as teachers. However, this desire to be viewed as a qualified worker may be intertwined with a longing to maintain their original accents, which communicate their national origins, etc., to the rest of the world. Therefore, rather than some spur-of-the-moment decision, ITAs' choice to sound a particular way may be carefully planned so as to satisfy both yearnings at once. For them, an accent serves both professional and personal purposes.

Expanding Notions of "Labour" in Aesthetic Labour

The above discussion on whether ITAs choose to change or maintain (parts of) their accents leads to one final point to be made about the nature of aesthetic labour in the current study. That is, the actual "labour" component of aesthetic labour has to be understood in expansive terms. To begin, it is important to note that this labour should not simply be the work of sounding right, but also the work involved in making others believe that one sounds right in the first place. In other words, while ITAs can be concerned about changing their accents to better appeal to an audience, they may also put effort into ensuring that their accents are not perceived as an obstacle in undertaking their professional duties. This could take the form

of relying on spatial resources in a work environment such as physical objects or even body movement across a space to successfully communicate a point (Canagarajah, 2018). Of course, such actions should not be solely perceived as voluntary. Indeed, given the prior discussion on the racialized interconnection of the body and voice of aesthetic labourers, ITAs who identify as nonwhite might need to write down information or use gesture, for instance, because they cannot escape raciolinguistic ideologies that position their speech as incomprehensible, no matter what actual changes they make to their voices (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Furthermore, the decision to use the above tactics can often be influenced by disciplinary context, which, as also discussed before, may uphold particular communication conventions that override the necessity of developing an accent (Canagarajah, 2017, 2018).

Aside from its purposes and functions, an expanded view of the “labour” of aesthetic labour also entails recognizing its subtle nature. As will be particularly seen in Chapter Six, aesthetic labour does not have to be expressed through descriptions of overt visual or audible activities meant to create a particular impression on interlocutors. Rather, it can be revealed by how ITAs choose to talk about themselves as workers, which can include discussions about their teaching philosophies or even their aspirations or anxieties about doing work in the academy. In other words, it is worthwhile to recognize constructions of professional selves as a type of aesthetic practice.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter had two objectives. First, it sought to provide a concise description of the concept of aesthetic labour and, furthermore, expand on this notion by applying it to the working lives of ITAs. As described earlier, aesthetic labour, as an offshoot of emotional labour that focuses on the corporeal production of feeling, involves employers seeking out workers with a particular habitus who are trained to do bodily and vocal performances that create a favourable company image for customers. In order for this concept to adequately describe the work of ITAs, the following points were made: aesthetic labour happens

in neoliberal universities where ITAs, as service providers, need to deliver information in an understandable manner; the (racialized) body of the ITA will typically determine whether or not they sound right for the job; learning how to sound right may entail adapting to multiple cultural rules within a university; thus, sounding right may vary by situation and also consist of different phonological features; ITAs determine their own aural aesthetic either based on observation of their local environments or their opinions; and finally, the linguistic identities of ITAs may need to be addressed in their performance of aesthetic labour, which can take on a variety of guises and functions.

It is important to note that the above points may not be consistently at play for all ITAs. Indeed, concerning the teaching assistants of the current study, some largely focus on the role of accent in service provision while others mostly think about their changing linguistic identities in relation to their work. I came to learn about these differences through an analysis of *stories* that they shared with me when conducting the study. The next chapter describes how these stories came to be through a discussion of the methodology used to answer the research questions of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Methodology

As stated in the introductory chapter, this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions, which are based on the professional experiences of 14 international teaching assistants (ITAs) at various universities located in Ontario, Canada:

1. *What type of accent do these ITAs perceive to be a satisfactory aural aesthetic while working in Ontario universities?*
2. *To what extent do the ITAs incorporate this perceived accent into their professional practices?*

Because these questions concern how ITAs understand and perform aesthetic labour for their individual contexts, it was necessary to place them at the forefront of the research. In fact, as Clement (2007) argues, any type of labour process research should place the perspectives of workers at the centre of analysis. In order to adhere to this suggestion, I deemed it vital to allow ITAs to share their *own* stories of their working lives. Therefore, for me at least, the best methodology to accomplish this feat was narrative inquiry.

In this chapter, then, I detail and ultimately justify the use of narrative as the method for the current study. I begin with a relatively brief exploration of narrative inquiry as well as the features of narratives in general. Next, I discuss my selection of the setting of the research and the recruitment of participants. Concise introductions to the 14 participants will then be provided along with a reflection of my role as researcher. Following these introductions and reflection, I outline the data collection and analysis procedures designed to answer the research questions. Last, I address some ethical issues that may arise when conducting narrative research.

A Brief Exploration of Narrative (Inquiry)

To best understand the usefulness of narrative inquiry, it is first important to note that this thesis concerns ITAs' *experiences* of aesthetic labour in Ontario universities. Experience is ubiquitous in everyday life as individuals often talk about their lives in the form of various experiences ranging from those that

happened in their childhood to those that occur in the workplace (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). It is not only that experience is an ever-present part of life; it also “happens narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). That is, experience is both lived and told in the form of narratives in which characters meet other characters, experience various plot twists, and so on and so forth (Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Since experience occurs in storied form, the most logical way to understand people’s experiences is to study the narratives that they tell. This point leads to the primary purpose of narrative inquiry, which can be defined as

a branch of qualitative research concerned with the way in which experience is shaped and mediated by story. Narrative inquirers study how stories are lived and told, utilize narrative methods to construct and co-construct meaning, and create research texts using narrative techniques (Hegge, 2013, pp. 3-4).

I will come back to this definition in various parts of this chapter.

One aspect of the above definition to highlight is that narrative inquiry sees “narrative [as] both phenomenon and method: [narrative] names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 416).³¹ Whether it is a phenomenon or method, narrative is somewhat complex to explain as it can have multiple meanings depending on the context. For example, a narrative could entail a storyteller arranging events in a logical sequence that conveys particular meanings for an audience (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Riessman, 2008). However, narratives need not always take on a coherent form as mentioned above. Indeed, De Fina and Johnstone (2015) note how stories can take a variety of forms that go beyond some sort of monologue with an established plotline. For instance, while Baynham (2003) discusses the presence of generic narratives in which there is no specific character but a description of a general situation, Carranza (1998) and

³¹In order to distinguish these two views of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) use “story” to describe the phenomenon and “narrative” for the method. However, since Squire et al. (2014) mention that the distinction between story and narrative is often blurred (due to the co-constructed nature of stories, which is discussed later), it is not helpful to differentiate the two. For this reason, I use “story” and “narrative” interchangeably in the current study.

Riessman (2008) talk about habitual narratives, stories that do not describe a single situation, but rather, a pattern of events that happens regularly or over a specific period of time.

In more recent years, the discussion of what can constitute a narrative has also developed in a growing interest in the study of small stories. Rather than large, full-fledged accounts of significant past experiences in one's life, small stories are "a gamut of underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, and shared (known) events, [and]...also [capture] allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 381). What makes small stories "small" is their description of everyday, insignificant events and their presence in passing moments of conversation (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina & Johnstone, 2015; Taylor, Khan Vlach, & Mosely Wetzel, 2018). According to this point, then, a small story may consist of a mention of what one ate for breakfast or casual speculation among coworkers as to why a colleague might be running late for an important business meeting.

Even though they are banal in nature, small stories serve to accomplish things, which leads to an important aspect of narratives in general. In fact, according to Riessman (2008), narratives can serve a variety of interrelated purposes: they help remember and make sense of past experiences; they argue and persuade others to adopt a certain position, they help others empathize with the storyteller, and they may simply be used as a form of entertainment. By being used to argue, persuade, entertain, and so on and so forth, narratives are interactive in nature. In other words, narratives are frequently *co-produced* by both storytellers and their audiences (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2014; Todorova, 2007). In the context of a research interview, for instance, it is the responsibility of researchers to elicit stories from their participants, which ideally correspond to the research topic (Squire et al., 2014). In this scenario, then, narratives are not entirely owned by participants since it is the researchers who create these stories through their questioning and influence their content through their own research interests. Aside from content, the joint production of stories can be seen at the

level of embodiment (Squire et al., 2014). Using the example of the research interview once again, researchers, through such things as eye contact and nodding, encourage participants to continue telling their stories. On their end, participants may add auditory information such as using word or sentence stress to signal important content in a story and mimicking the voices of characters in the story. Even when participants and other storytellers write stories in journals, novels, etc., there is still an interactive element to their storytelling in that they are typically writing for an audience, be it other people or even themselves, which influences the content of their stories (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007).³²

It is not only that interaction affects stories themselves; it also helps to display the identities of the storytellers. Indeed, remembering that narratives can do things, individuals may use stories to perform certain identities (e.g., De Fina & Johnstone, 2015; Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2018; Todorova, 2007). From the perspective of Goffman (1959) and others who adopt a dramaturgical view of everyday life in which individuals engage in performances for various audiences (as discussed in the last chapter), this point may mean that storytellers can detail specific narratives that project particular selves to different people. But as Riessman (2008) notes, “to emphasize the performative [aspect of narrative] is not to suggest that identities are inauthentic...but only that identities are situated and accomplished with audience in mind” (p. 106). Having made this point, however, it is not simply that identities are expressed by performance; they are made by it (Squire et al., 2014). That is, an identity does not exist beforehand waiting to be narratively performed, but rather, emerges during the actual performance.

The way that this emergence of identity occurs is best explained by the notion of positioning. Developed by Davies and Harré (1990), positioning describes “the discursive process whereby selves are

³²The idea that stories are a production between the storyteller and audience highlights how narrative, as a method, can fall under a social constructivist/postmodern framework in which *realities* are created through interaction and individual experience, thereby suggesting that people’s narrative lives cannot be solely understood in terms of a grand theory of the world. (Creswell, 2013; Sears & Cairns, 2015). However, as will be detailed later in the chapter, narrative research also relies on a critical paradigm because experience is nevertheless shaped by the structuring of society, which privileges and oppresses certain groups of people (Creswell, 2013; Sears & Cairns, 2015).

located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). Davies and Harré argue that these “coherent participants” are subject positions from which people come to view the world and their place in it. In order to explain what positioning looks like in a real-life situation, the authors provide a short story about themselves using the fictional characters of Sano, a healthy male, and Enfermada, a female who feels sick. While attending a conference, Sano and Enfermada are in wintry weather trying to find a pharmacy so that Enfermada can buy some medicine. When it is clear that they cannot find a pharmacy, “Sano...says ‘I’m sorry to have dragged you all this way when you’re not well.’ His...words [surprise] Enfermada who replies ‘You didn’t drag me, I chose to come,’ occasioning some surprise in turn to Sano” (p. 55). Davies and Harré argue that positioning can explain this conflict as Sano and Enfermada viewed their shared experience from different so-called story lines. Whereas Sano viewed the experience as a story about the healthy helping the sick, Enfermada saw it as a story of sexism. Therefore, when Sano apologizes for dragging Enfermada around, he positions himself as a caregiver who has failed his mission. However, for Enfermada, this statement positions her as a woman who is unable to make her own decisions, which prompts her to state her agency.

This example highlights two important points about positioning. First, “it shows the way in which two people can be living quite different narratives without realising that they are doing so” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 57). Furthermore, it highlights how in the process of positioning oneself in an interaction, one can simultaneously position another (Davies & Harré, 1990; Gordon, 2015). While the work of Davies and Harré provides these much needed insights, their understanding of positioning has been critiqued by narrative inquirers influenced by discourse analysis and interactional sociolinguistics. For example, De Fina (2013) states how positioning, as defined by Davies and Harré, implies “that positions automatically come with attached world-views and philosophies” (p. 41) without much consideration of how understandings associated with positions are generated at the local level of actual interactions.

In response to this issue and to highlight the complex nature of identity construction, an increasing number of narrative inquirers examine the different *levels* of positioning. This type of narrative inquiry is inspired by the work of Bamberg (1997), who argues that “what actually is being said is one of the many different performance features in what the speaker aims to achieve in the act of narrating” (p. 335). Bamberg (1997) notes how these different performances or positionings operate on three interrelated levels. First, there is Level 1 positioning, which focuses on how characters are positioned in the event being narrated (Bamberg, 1997; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2013; Taylor et al., 2018). This level is thus concerned with who are the heroes and villains in a story and, more generally, how language constructs individuals as agentive protagonists or people who are subject to the control of others, for instance (Bamberg, 1997). Level 2 positioning highlights “how the speaker/narrator positions [themselves in] the interactive situation” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 385). For example, a person who tells a story about saving someone’s life may (wish to) present a heroic identity for their listening audience. The final type of positioning, Level 3, deals with “how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regard to dominant discourses or master narratives” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 385). For the purposes of this thesis, this level of positioning warrants further explanation.

Beyond recognizing that stories are produced through interpersonal communication, narrative inquiry also notes that individual stories are born from larger social and historical contexts (e.g., Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Clandinin et al., 2007; De Fina, 2013; Gordon, 2015; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2014). Therefore, the telling of a personal narrative is a collective accomplishment. This idea of the social influencing the personal in storytelling draws from Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of polyphony or multivoicedness. For Bakhtin (1981), an utterance does not solely represent the voice of the speaker, but also carries past utterances representing others’ voices as seen here:

The word...is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own...semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language...but rather it

exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions (pp. 293-294).

Based on this argument, then, "a given word...is saturated with ideology and meanings from previous usage" (Riessman, 2008, p. 107). When applied to storytelling, this point means that an individual narrative can carry traces of multiple narratives told by previous storytellers, which is particularly seen in how people seem to come under the influence of master narratives.

As vehicles for the values of dominant sociopolitical groups, master narratives seek to define reality and ultimately maintain existing power relations (Jorgensen, 2002; Mishler, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Squire et al., 2014). In fact, these narratives privilege those in power such as "Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these [types of] social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). What makes master narratives particularly powerful is their ability to manifest in narratives that seek to counteract dominant discourses. For instance, Squire et al. (2014) note that while various proponents of same-sex marriage reject the heteronormative master narrative of marriage being a heterosexual union, they nevertheless uphold one aspect of this narrative: monogamous relationships should be the norm for everyone. Thus, returning to the notion of Level 3 positioning, these proponents position themselves as individuals who strongly believe in the dominant view that everyone should be in a committed relationship.

This example certainly highlights how counter-narratives cannot always be easily separated from master narratives (Squire et al., 2014). While they can (unintentionally) uphold the status quo, these counter-narratives are still significant for narrative inquirers interested in social change. Indeed, one advantage of counter-storytelling is that it provides an outlet for sharing the experiences of those who are silenced by master narratives and consequently dismantling the logic behind these narratives (Forbes, 2009; Riessman, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Moreover, this storytelling humanizes marginalized groups and ideally mobilizes others to fight for social justice on behalf and/or with these groups (Delgado,

1989; Riessman, 2008). In the current research context, these features of counter-stories are important because ITAs are often subject to the master narrative of them being linguistically deficient in terms of accent and may thus desire to share stories about their professional lives that emphasize the (linguistic) wealth they bring into the university classroom (e.g., Yep, 2014). Once again, in telling these stories, ITAs may draw on master narratives to present themselves as linguistically competent instructors. However, their participation in a narrative inquiry may help them to critically reflect on their narrative performances.

In fact, another benefit of narrative inquiry is that it may allow teachers in general and ITAs in particular to recognize how various ideologies influence their pedagogy. Through the process of telling their stories to a researcher, teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices and eventually come to better understand themselves as instructors (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Clandinin et al., 2007; Williams, 2011). By reflecting on their practice and discovering what aspects of it need to change, ITAs (and other teachers) ultimately become better professionals (in the sense of serving others). In the end, then, narrative here is not a method that seeks to extract information from participants, but rather, a means through which participants can better their (professional) lives.

Setting of the Study and Recruitment of Participants

In order for narrative inquirers to facilitate the self-development of their participants, they must first decide on the place of the research. Place, here meaning an actual physical environment, is an important component of any narrative inquiry because it often shapes people's experiences and thus the stories they tell about these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2007). Keeping this point in mind, I decided to look for ITAs working in universities in the province of Ontario. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Ontario hosts nearly one half of all international students in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018), who may become teaching assistants during the course of their

studies.³³ Indeed, compared to British Columbia and Québec, which took in 145,691 and 67,534 international students in 2016, respectively, Ontario hosted 233,226 students due to its greater number of schools (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., 2017). Because ITAs in Ontario would be more likely to hear a greater amount of foreign accents from other students, then, I believed that they would have more nuanced understandings (and would ultimately tell more complex narratives) of what it means to sound right than ITAs in other provinces. I thought that this would particularly be the case in Southern Ontario, which has the greatest concentration of universities in the province and thus more international students. Having made the decision to situate my study in Southern Ontario, I began my search for participants.

According to such scholars as Creswell (2013), good narrative studies have a maximum of three participants in order to delve deeply into the experiences of individuals. I chose to ignore this suggestion by originally seeking out 15 to 20 ITAs. While acknowledging the decreased opportunity to thoroughly understand the professional lives of ITAs, I thought that this number of participants would be beneficial because, first, it would allow for a greater diversity of participants in terms of such things as race, gender, nationality, and, of course, accent, and, second, would subsequently lead to a greater variety of perspectives of what it means to sound right in a university context. Therefore, I remained committed to finding a diverse set of participants during the recruitment phase of the study.

Recruitment was solely done through an electronic flyer advertising the nature of the study and participant criteria and responsibilities (see Appendix A). This recruitment flyer was initially sent as an e-mail to my personal, professional, and scholarly networks. I encouraged the individuals from these networks to forward the flyer on my behalf to any prospective participants. In the case of contacts who were ITAs, I did not directly ask them to participate in the study in order to prevent coercion.³⁴ Along with sharing it within my networks, I forwarded the flyer as a mass e-mail to the student listservs of various graduate

³³There are no national data that state the number of *ITAs* in Canada.

³⁴None of these contacts are participants in this study.

departments and associations of universities located in Southern Ontario. This was made possible by sending an e-mail beforehand to seek administrative consent (see Appendix B). Lastly, I posted the flyer in relevant online groups from the social media sites, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Although I had a variety of means to forward my flyer, the recruitment process was long and sometimes disappointing. Beginning in April 2017 and not ending until June 2018, recruitment was filled with obstacles and setbacks. For example, for every 10 departments/associations I e-mailed in order to forward the recruitment flyer, perhaps two or three would respond to my e-mail, and one would actually agree to forward the flyer on my behalf. Also, while I received many e-mails from prospective participants interested in the nature of the study, many of my follow-up e-mails were left unanswered. Due to this trouble in securing participants (and upon consultation with my thesis committee), I decided to have 14 ITAs participate in the research.³⁵

These 14 participants satisfied three main criteria that were outlined in the recruitment flyer. First, they identified as an ITA. Bearing in mind Vinther and Slethaug's (2015) assertion that the difference between home and international student is difficult to explain (see the footnote on page 4), "ITAs" were broadly defined as "graduate students who are permanent residents, immigrants, or living in Canada on student visas" (LeGros & Faez, 2012, p. 9). Furthermore, they completed their high school and earlier education in a country other than Canada and were working as teaching assistants in an Ontario university at the time of the study. Beyond identifying as an ITA, participants also believed that they spoke English with a foreign accent. Once again, foreign accents were also broadly defined in that they could refer to both native and nonnative varieties of English not traditionally associated with Canada. The final criterion for participants was that they often thought about their foreign accent in relation to their work as teaching

³⁵I originally had 16 ITAs, but two were unable to fulfill all of their responsibilities as participants. Even though I managed to collect some data from these ITAs, I decided not to include these data in the thesis.

assistants. This could be in the sense of being aware of how students or colleagues react to their accents or how they engage in oral preparation to do their daily duties.

Once I confirmed that each ITA was willing to be a participant, I had them sign an informed consent letter that fully detailed the study and their participation in it (see Appendix C). After I received a copy of this letter, I made arrangements to meet with participants at (semi-)private locations such as a study room or coffee shop and/or have a phone conversation with them to start the data collection process.

Introductions to the Participants and a Reflection on my Role as Researcher

Before describing how data were collected, it is necessary to introduce the participants whose experiences make this thesis possible. In Table 1 below, I offer some demographic information of each participant (listed by order of recruitment). All of their names are pseudonyms, which were chosen by themselves or given to them by myself when they had no preference for a name.

Table 1—Demographic Information of the Participants

Name	Self-ascribed Gender	Age Range	Self-ascribed Ethnic Background	General Academic Discipline	Self-ascribed status as an English Speaker	Self-ascribed name of foreign accent
Johnny	Male	Late 30s	Chinese	Science	Nonnative Speaker	Chinese
Navid	Male	Late 20s	Iranian	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	Iranian/Persian/Farsi
Adeela	Female	Late 20s	Indian	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	Indian
Farhad	Male	Late 30s	Iranian	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	Iranian/Persian/Farsi
Lei	Male	Mid 20s	French	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	French
Alejandra	Female	Early 20s	Colombian	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	Spanish
Patricia	Female	40s	Latin American	Education	Nonnative Speaker	Spanish

Betsy	Female	Early 30s	Mexican	Social Sciences	Nonnative Speaker	Spanish/Mexican
Martina	Female	Late 20s	Mexican	Science	Nonnative Speaker	Spanish/Mexican
Zack	Male	Early 20s	Chinese	Social Sciences	Nonnative Speaker	Chinese
Suzy	Female	Early 20s	Chinese	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	Chinese
Jasmine	Female	Early 30s	Egyptian	Engineering	Nonnative Speaker	Egyptian/Arabic
Lana	Female	Late 20s	Iranian	Social Sciences	Nonnative Speaker	Iranian/Persian/Farsi
Fredrick	Male	Late 30s	African	Science	Nonnative Speaker	African

The above table may seem incomplete in the sense that I have not mentioned seemingly pertinent information such as the participants' country of birth, the number of years they have lived in Canada, or the type of degree that they are pursuing. Moreover, it may seem vague in that, for instance, I state the general academic discipline of each participant rather than their specific program of study. While these gaps and generalizations were the result of complying with the ethics protocol of my university so as to ensure the confidentiality of participants, I also came to accept that I could still conduct a good narrative study without mentioning these things. For example, although country of birth is an important factor in classifying foreign accents, I realized that I could address the geographical origins of ITAs by stating their *continent/region* of birth rather than *nation* where applicable (e.g., Alberts, 2008; Ates & Eslami, 2012).³⁶ Also, not being able to explore and discuss all of the specificities of participants' lives was occasionally beneficial when analyzing their perceptions of a satisfactory accent for teaching as I could look at how repeating patterns of discourse among the ITAs reflect ideological thinking at the institutional/societal level (Rys, 2018).

³⁶At first glance, the self-ascribed ethnic backgrounds of the participants may reveal their country of origin. However, being ethnically Chinese, for example, does not mean that one is from China. It could also be possible that someone who is ethnically Chinese is originally from a variety of places such as Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, or Peru.

Although I did not actively strive to accomplish this point, the participants mostly reflected the overall geographical origins of international students coming to Canada. Indeed, while not being proportionally accurate, the sample did highlight how these students mainly come from East and South Asia, the Middle East, Western Africa and Europe, and select countries in Latin America (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). However, given that this study is qualitative in nature and thus not necessarily generalizable to other research contexts, I do not suggest that the experiences of the participants reflect those of other ITAs in Canada or Ontario (although there is certainly room for some comparison). Even though the sample might not offer a completely representative portrait of all ITAs (in Canada), there are particular commonalities among the participants that warrant some mention.

First, in terms of their linguistic background, all 14 participants reported that they developed foreign-accented English on account of learning English through formal schooling in their home countries where the language was not regularly heard in the public sphere. For Navid, Alejandra, Martina, and Jasmine, learning English in their early childhood helped them to greatly reduce their foreign accentedness in a Canadian context. By contrast, due to having fairly limited English training that began in later stages of their lives, ITAs like Farhad and Patricia felt less confident in their accents and general English proficiency. In the case of the Chinese participants, they felt that the paper- and exam-based curricula of their English classes seemingly reduced the quality of their accents. One notable exception to the above perceptions was Lana, who will be discussed separately later in this chapter.

While all of the participants made mention of attending universities where there was a noticeable presence of international students of varying linguistic and racial backgrounds, the specific department in which they were located could determine the amount of interaction they had with this diversity. In fact, whereas Navid, Adeela, Alejandra, Suzy, and Jasmine, who were in engineering, and Johnny, who was in science, regularly interacted with students and colleagues from (South) Asia and Latin America, Zack and Lana, who were in social science departments, taught mostly White Canadian students. These distinctions

reflect how international students generally find themselves in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (e.g., Redden, 2017). Sometimes, however, the discipline of the ITA did not always determine demographics. For example, Martina and Fredrick, who were also in the sciences, reported working in a mostly White environment with few international students or faculty. Also, Betsy and Patricia, who were working in social science and education departments, respectively, mostly interacted with students and superiors from a variety of countries. Finally, Farhad and Lei, who were in engineering, had a fairly nuanced work environment. That is, while they interacted with international faculty and graduate students whom they would identify as nonnative speakers of English, they mentioned how, when actually teaching, they interacted with Canadian-English-speaking students, who were racially diverse.

Regarding the topic of teaching, nearly all of the participants stated that they received fairly superficial training for their teaching assistantships. With the exception of Suzy, who had the opportunity to participate in a brief training course specifically designed for ITAs, the remainder of the participants mentioned that they attended departmental workshops or orientation events that provided generic training on how to interact with students, provide feedback (for assignments), etc. As these sessions catered to both domestic and international students, there was no formal mention of the potential issue of foreign accent in relation to teaching. However, for ITAs who wanted help with their (oral) communication skills in English, the participants all mentioned that these students could receive language tutoring at various centres catering to international learners within their respective universities. Due to the lack of formalized, long-term professional development, then, the participants usually relied on themselves to upgrade their pedagogical skills through such things as monitoring the teaching behaviour of their (international) peers or seeking advice from graduate supervisors.

To varying degrees, all of the ITAs were focused on improving their pedagogy in terms of language or accent because the nature of their teaching required extensive oral communication. For the participants in the social sciences and education, their teaching duties involved conducting tutorials in which they had to

give lectures or actively engage with students in interactive activities that they themselves designed. The engineering participants also engaged in extended speaking, albeit in a different form. Most of these participants had to conduct “labs” (i.e., tutorials) in which they were given problems by the professor of the course and expected to present these problems to students and help them find answers to each one. But in contrast to the unstructured conversation that can happen in the social sciences, the engineering teaching assistants noted how they needed to provide concise, sequential information in order to help students understand the material. On occasion, these ITAs could limit their speaking by relying on writing things on the blackboard in response to student questions. The teaching activities of the science participants could vary. Whereas Johnny, who worked in a computer lab, could have limited vocal interactions with students because he could show them what to do through a computer, Martina and Fredrick needed to have extended discussion with students in their tutorials because the nature of their science fields required them to lead discussions on occasionally abstract topics.

Beginning in the next sub-section, I provide further information on each participant that goes beyond the general background information presented above. Some points must be made before starting these introductions. First, in order to further protect the confidentiality of the ITAs, I only provide details on each participant that are relevant for the thesis or are generally noteworthy. Furthermore, given the discussion of how narratives should not be simply understood as coherent accounts of major life events, I focus on telling small stories about the participants, which concern such things as the first time that they met with me. This example leads to a final point to mention: just as I am interested in detailing aspects of the participants’ lives, I am also interested in describing my initial interactions with each one. As narrative inquiry requires the researcher to deeply connect with the participant, it is important to highlight the beginnings of this connection through story.

Johnny

Johnny was the very first participant who expressed interest in the study. As someone who was quite aware of how racial or ethnic identity influences perceptions of foreign accents, Johnny was quite blunt in stating that people who are not ethnically Chinese like himself will have a difficult time processing his accented English. When he made this statement, I felt ashamed since I questioned whether my initial difficulty in understanding his speech was the result of me succumbing to raciolinguistic ideologies, which I have openly critiqued as seen in earlier parts of this thesis. As I became comfortable with Johnny's accent through continued conversation, I also came to realize that he not only attributed his incomprehensibility to external perceptions, but also to his own failings as a learner of English.

Although he began learning English in middle school in his home country, Johnny still felt like his performance in the language was nowhere near that of a native English speaker. He particularly believed that the phonological influence of his Mandarin Chinese contributed to his poor English pronunciation. Therefore, when he came to Canada to pursue his graduate degree, Johnny sought (informal) English language support for developing his oral communication skills.

When I met Johnny, he was just beginning his first teaching assistant position at his university. Even though he felt insecure about his English, his teaching context seemed to reduce this insecurity. In fact, because the subject area of the course was primarily focused on using computers, Johnny relied less on his voice and more on his physical actions to instruct students on how to do programming, etc. Also, due to the heightened presence of other international Chinese students in his classes, he could often use Mandarin with these students when delivering information. Discussing these contextual factors with me seemed to make Johnny question the scope of my study. Indeed, it was Johnny who asked me whether foreign accent was really an important issue for ITAs at the beginning of this thesis. This doubt about the nature of my research coupled with his continued desire to improve his English pronunciation was perplexing to understand as a researcher.

Navid

Compared to my time with Johnny, my experience with Navid was quite different. First, I only came to know Navid through telephone conversations due to his busy schedule. Indeed, along with his tutorial duties, which mostly consisted of him providing problems and solutions for undergraduate students in engineering-related courses, I discovered that Navid took up positions in such places as student services and the writing centre of his current university. Another difference with Navid was that, in contrast to Johnny, I could only hear traces of a foreign accent from him, and, on some occasions, I thought that he sounded “native-like.” Perhaps my perception could be explained by the fact that Navid started learning English at the age of seven in his home country and thus has had an extended time to refine his manner of speaking. Navid himself commented that his foreign accent is nevertheless present as seen by how his Farsi creates a “melodic” intonation when he speaks English.

One interesting point that Navid brought up during our first interview was that his minimally-accented English coupled with his ability to pass as White sometimes positioned him as European rather than Middle Eastern. For Navid, these cases of mistaken identity proved beneficial as he could gain both personal and professional advantages in Canada by drawing on his symbolic capital of looking and sounding White (which will be addressed in the next chapter). While he was aware that, in the Canadian context at least, race plays a role in determining who looks good and sounds right (for work), he never considered how race might have affected his evaluations of other individuals’ foreign accents. For example, when describing the alleged incomprehensibility of fellow international students and staff in his department, Navid remained adamant that their incomprehensible accents were based on objective linguistic features rather than ideological perceptions. His apparent comfort with criticizing other foreign-accented speakers seemed to be facilitated by the culture of engineering, which seems to view accents as interfering with “efficient” communication. The “masculine” nature of this culture, in terms of mocking and teasing others, also deemed it acceptable to make fun of foreign accents.

Adeela

Another participant aware of this masculine culture was Adeela, who described how being one of a few women in her engineering department resulted in what she called “teasing” from male colleagues. In fact, Adeela recounted experiences where her peers assumed that she was more interested in stereotypically feminine topics like shopping than actual engineering. Furthermore, she noted how colleagues often commented on her allegedly high-pitched voice. Despite these incidents, Adeela felt (linguistically) comfortable in her department because she mostly interacted with other (South) Asian nonnative English speakers. These interactions communicated to her that it is acceptable to speak English in a variety of manners. This communication was echoed by living in Canada, where it was normal for Adeela to hear an even more diverse array of foreign accents in her everyday life.

What was particularly memorable about my experience with Adeela was her repeated mention of how she became a “sponge” when exposed to different accents. That is, when interacting with someone speaking with a different accent from hers, Adeela tended to pick up some of the phonological features of her interlocutor. This was first evident during her time attending an English-medium school and university in the Middle East in her younger years. Along with the influence of Urdu, her home language, Adeela noted that her English accent became more “Arabic-sounding” through continued interaction with her female Arab classmates. When she moved to Canada, Adeela noted that other people, like her sister’s fiancé, commented on how she sounded more “Western.”

Due to her seemingly automatic inclination to “soak up” other accents, Adeela stated that she was very cautious when needing to pronounce a new word as a teaching assistant. This caution came as the result of her departmental colleagues misrecognizing her Arabic-influenced pronunciation of various technical terms in engineering. Like Navid, Adeela described how foreign accent could negatively affect perceptions of one’s competence as an engineering professional. Therefore, she did not want to make any pronunciation mistakes in order to preserve her professional identity.

Farhad

Whereas Adeela remained concerned about the local culture of engineering in relation to views of foreign accents, Farhad seemed more worried about Canadian culture at large. Even though he praised Canada for its tolerance of racial and linguistic diversity, Farhad noted how he felt marginalized when others seemed to struggle in understanding and/or dismiss his Farsi-accented English. Moreover, he was quite aware of the accent discrimination of immigrant professionals in the Canadian labour market and how his accent may be used by employers as a reason to deny him employment. Canadian culture was finally important in the sense of Farhad feeling that he could not automatically garner student respect on account of his role as instructor as much as he could back in his home country, where teachers are granted automatic authority. These feelings prompted a desire to master a so-called Canadian English accent in order to facilitate better relations with not only his students, but also Canadians in general.

The primary way that Farhad strived to achieve this mastery of a Canadian accent is through careful observation. Specifically, he described how he might closely monitor the speech of Canadian students/people by paying attention to how they pronounce certain words, use slang, and speak with contractions (i.e., “don’t” instead of “do not,” for example). In addition, he stated that he occasionally watched English language movies to improve his accent.

By describing how he sought to emulate a type of accent understandable for an entire nation, I discovered that Farhad held a strong belief that each nation of the world possesses its own unique linguistic character. Furthermore, this linguistic character determined the cultural character of a country. For instance, Farhad mentioned such things as how the presence of many famous German philosophers and mathematicians was the result of speaking German, a presumably “logical” language. This type of thought process made me wonder whether or not Farhad had a particular vision of the cultural identity of Canadians who speak English. If speaking German could lead one to become an expert scholar of philosophy or math, what kinds of superior qualities might a speaker of Canadian English possess according to Farhad?

Lei

Although I never received a satisfactory answer from Farhad, his thinking seemed to influence my first impressions of Lei, a White, French-speaking ITA. Upon hearing him speak for the first time, I began to subconsciously connect his natural charisma and sophisticated presence to his French-accented English. Thus aware that his racial and linguistic identities may generally create positive impressions on others, I directly asked Lei about his racial and aural privilege when compared to other ITAs. I was surprised that he was quite comfortable in acknowledging and exploring this privilege. As I expected, Lei never felt linguistically/racially marginalized in Canada and consequently could not recount any instance of accent discrimination in a personal/professional context. Indeed, I found out that Lei was frequently asked by professors to do guest lectures, thereby suggesting that they had no qualms with his voice.

While he himself never experienced marginalization, Lei was nevertheless interested in exploring and addressing issues of social justice. In fact, unlike other branches of engineering, his specific field of expertise is explicitly concerned with bettering human societies, and, furthermore, he stated that he hoped to find a career where he can use his skills and knowledge to contribute to lasting social change. When I mentioned that other participants in engineering talked about the belittling of women in the field, Lei made it clear that he had no tolerance for this interpersonal sexism in his workplace. For example, when he hears male engineers teasing a female, Lei will typically confront the former on their behaviour.

Just as he was passionate about confronting injustice in its various guises, Lei displayed the same passion when discussing his role as a teaching assistant. In contrast to the other participants, Lei had a clearly articulated teaching philosophy in which he saw himself as responsible for ensuring that students receive an education that not only enhances their intelligence, but also better their lives. With the increasing corporatization of higher education that positions students as entitled customers, Lei described how his teaching convictions were threatened by learners who simply wanted him to fulfill their instrumental needs such as giving them the necessary information to pass a test or examination.

Alejandra

Alejandra was also concerned about how students influence her teaching practice, but in the sense of making sure that they actually understood her speech. Indeed, whereas she felt reassured that native-English-speaking Canadian students understood her as seen by their questions about her explanations of course material, Alejandra detailed how she sometimes resorted to visual techniques, etc., to ensure that she delivered clear information for her nonnative-speaking international students, who typically offered no indication that they understood her explanations.

From my perspective, I was somewhat perplexed by Alejandra's concern over her voice as she initially seemed to have no foreign accent during the first few minutes of our first interview. Alejandra addressed this point when discussing how people barely notice the foreignness of her accent during small talk. This perception was likely due to the fact that Alejandra had had a long personal history with the English language. Not only did she start learning the language at the age of six or seven in a private institute in Latin America, she also lived in the US for a while before coming to Canada. While her level of accentedness had continued to decrease, Alejandra noted how the suprasegmental features of her accent, like her intonation, continued to have a Spanish influence. This influence was not particularly bothersome for her since she still desired to be aurally identified as Latina, even though she looked to native speakers of English as linguistic models.

Another perplexing aspect of my experience with Alejandra was that, while she was aware of the potential impact of foreign accent in one's professional life as a teaching assistant, she sometimes felt that the discipline of engineering made accent irrelevant. For instance, since engineers favour precise communication and often communicate through numerical figures, Alejandra did not feel that her discipline in general and department in particular prescribed a specific manner of speech. Having made this point, however, Alejandra described how she sought to be *precise* in her pronunciation in the sense of pronouncing individual words in a "universally understandable" manner.

Patricia

As the only participant in education, Patricia saw her discipline as fundamentally different from engineering and related fields in terms of communicative norms. Whereas the latter set of fields promote a concise and impersonal style of communication, Patricia saw education as requiring instructors to share their experiences and worldviews in extended interactions with students. She had no objection to this requirement as evidenced by her telling of stories detailing her enjoyment of talking about her experiences as a parent in a course about human development, for example. Despite her apparent ease in putting herself out there in the classroom, Patricia noted that she could also feel very self-conscious when interacting with students. In fact, she described how her insecurity about her Spanish-accented English was sometimes made worse by students who seemed to have strange facial expressions whenever she began to speak. These facial expressions prompted Patricia to speak even faster, which subsequently heightened her feeling that her accent was being heard as incomprehensible.

Even though she could not be definitively certain that her accent was hard to understand, Patricia recounted many instances where it conflicted with her true national origins. As a result of living in Brazil to do a graduate degree, Patricia became fluent in Portuguese, which has come to phonologically influence the other languages that she speaks. Indeed, she stated that when she speaks English, people often assume that she is Brazilian. One such person was actually myself when I first met with Patricia. Upon first hearing her intonation, which was similar to that of the Brazilian learners whom I used to teach as an English language instructor, I stated, "Oh, I guess you're from Brazil." Patricia politely refuted my statement and told me that she is originally from a Spanish-speaking country in another part of Latin America. An interesting fact that emerged from this case of mistaken identity was how Patricia had become prouder of her Latin American identity. Back in her home country, Patricia saw herself as White (due to her skin colour). However, upon coming to Canada and filling out various university applications, she was forced to see herself beyond phenotype and embrace the notion that she is a Latin American in Canada.

Betsy

Similar to Patricia, Betsy also expressed pride in her Mexican identity throughout the research process. This pride was most evident in her stories of exaggerating and joking about her Spanish-accented English with other Mexican colleagues, thereby suggesting that she was comfortable with the phonological influence of her Mexican heritage. Betsy told me that this pride was facilitated by the general atmosphere of her university and department. Specifically, Betsy described how interacting with a multitude of racially and linguistically diverse students, faculty, and staff in different parts of campus highlighted that her university had no issue with foreign accents. Therefore, when I informed Betsy of my desire to mainly focus on accent, she seemed to initially disagree with the scope of my research.

Along with citing the environment of her university, Betsy argued for the insignificance of accent by claiming that it is the personal qualities of an ITA that determines professional success. Indeed, she maintained that by being dedicated to mastering course material as well as ensuring that students are treated with dignity and respect, ITAs could overcome any negative perceptions of their foreign-accented English. This dismissal of the potential importance of foreign accent was also heightened by the fact that Betsy was currently teaching a course about world geography, where it seemed appropriate to have students hear a variety of different accents (from instructors).

However, while going through the data collection process, I came to realize that Betsy held a more nuanced understanding of her foreign accent. As someone who was pursuing a degree in the social sciences and thus familiar with various types of critical research, Betsy noted the power relations that come to form around accent. For example, because the foreign accents of individuals serve as a perceived indicator of their foreignness to a nation, Betsy understood that questions such as “Where are you from?” would never be directed to her if she spoke with a so-called Canadian accent (although a change of accent might not always prevent questions such as these). Interestingly, Betsy only noted this issue in general discussions about immigrants living in Canada and not in relation to her teaching assistantship.

Martina

Somewhat similar to Betsy, Martina also discussed how foreign accents may be particularly devalued in a Canadian context. Before coming to Canada to pursue her current degree, Martina went to graduate school in Europe, where she was exposed to different types of foreign-accented English since English was used as the lingua franca for communication between students and professors. Therefore, whereas Europe seemed to be more tolerant of foreign accents due to the fact that everyone identified as nonnative English speakers, Martina felt that Canada, a seemingly native-English-speaking country, had less tolerance for diverse accents due its implicit expectation that everyone should strive to sound like a native speaker of Canadian English.

Martina certainly felt this expectation as seen by her stories of students mocking her speech as well as her inclination to occasionally modify her accent. Yet, she seemed comfortable with her nonnative English for two main reasons. First, since her field of study and current teaching assistant position was situated in the field of science, which she understood as a discipline more interested in linguistic substance than style, Martina believed that foreign accent had no correlation to professional worth. This belief was reinforced by Martina's experiences in Europe and in international conferences where she interacted with academics who had strong accents yet were brilliant scholars.

The other reason why Martina felt comfortable with her accent was that she held her proficiency in English in high regard. In fact, because English is deemed the language of science, Martina had to do most of her undergraduate and graduate studies using the language. Also, in terms of aesthetics, Martina felt that consuming various types of English language media as a child had reduced the overall level of her accentedness. When I first met her, I thought that Martina's comfort with her accent could also be explained by her appearance. By not looking like the stereotypically dark-skinned Mexican, Martina remarked how her fair skin in conjunction with her ambiguous accent made others see her as Greek or European in general. Thus, she was not subject to the same level of accent discrimination as other racialized ITAs.

Zack

Being ethnically Chinese, Zack did not have the same ability to pass as European/White. With regard to perceptions of his foreign-accented English on his university campus, Zack noted how students or colleagues might use his Chinese identity to make stereotypical assumptions about his accent. However, while people might assume that he had poor pronunciation, for example, they could change their minds when they actually engaged with him in conversation. Indeed, Zack detailed how he was sometimes labelled as the atypical Chinese international student since he did not have the same intonation problems as his Chinese peers. When I met Zack, I also came to perceive him in this manner as the tone of his voice somewhat sounded like a stereotypical “surfer dude” found on television.

Like other participants such as Johnny and Betsy, Zack was skeptical about the scope of my study because he believed himself to be free from preoccupation about his foreign accent. Whereas his younger self was committed to sounding like a native English speaker when first arriving to Canada, Zack expressed how he was less concerned with doing so over the years. This diminished concern was the result of Zack learning to embrace his Chinese heritage, which was further reflected by using his original Chinese first name in Canada instead of the previous anglicized name “Zack.” Having stated this point, however, Zack desired to not be simply seen as another international Chinese student.

Apart from changes to his personal identity, Zack also described a transition of his views regarding his professional identity in the university classroom. While he once thought of himself as needing to be an authoritative knowledge provider for students, Zack now considered himself more of a facilitator. For instance, instead of simply lecturing for the entire time of a tutorial session, Zack discussed how he attempted to make his tutorials as interactive as possible. This dedication to professional self-development seemed to have favourable outcomes for Zack as he noted various occasions where students would switch their tutorial sections in order to be taught by him. Experiencing such student enthusiasm for his instruction made Zack love his current teaching assistantship.

Suzy

In some ways, Suzy reminded me of Zack. Aside from the fact that they were both ethnically Chinese, Suzy also received comments and believed that she was a unique Chinese speaker of English. This was seemingly explained by her ability to easily pronounce specific phonemes that most Chinese English speakers would find difficult to produce. For example, whereas Chinese speakers would find it difficult to say /**au**/ as in “how,” Suzy could effortlessly produce this sound. What made Suzy different from Zack (and other participants) was her unapologetic goal to develop a native English accent.

This goal seemed to be reinforced by Suzy’s prior experience learning English in her home country in Asia. In her English classes, which used phonics as the primary teaching methodology, Suzy came to understand that correct pronunciation was associated with the native speaker of English. She specifically remembered having to use learning materials that were mostly based on British and American varieties of English. It was not only that these varieties of English were aurally correct for Suzy; they were deemed understandable for all. Therefore, in her engineering tutorials that contained a large number of international, nonnative-English-speaking students, Suzy felt that sounding more British or American would help her deliver information more efficiently.

Because she would be the one who typically did most of the talking in her tutorials, Suzy welcomed the opportunity to practice her English and thus increase her confidence as a teaching assistant. However, there were some issues that she had to face as an *engineering* instructor. For instance, since engineering favours concise communication as described by other participants, Suzy believed that she did not excel at this task due to her difficulty in getting directly to the point in her utterances. Another issue was that because most engineering classes/tutorials in her university usually had a large number of students, she sometimes found it challenging to control the class in terms of getting people’s attention or having them follow her instructions. In order to combat these challenges, Suzy believed it necessary to project a clear voice for everyone to hear.

Jasmine

Control of the classroom was also an important issue for Jasmine. However, it had an explicitly gendered dimension. That is, as a female engineer, Jasmine believed that she lacked the automatic authority that was typically given to her male counterparts. In fact, she recounted stories in which students would instantly listen to the instructions of her male colleagues and superiors while ignoring her own directives. This trouble in gaining authority prompted Jasmine to adopt various self-presentation strategies to enhance her assertiveness and self-confidence. As will be discussed in the later parts of this thesis, Jasmine had the overall goal to “toughen” herself for engineering.

Besides the issue of professional authority, another prominent theme in my discussions with Jasmine was the comparison of her graduate studies in Europe versus Canada. Unlike Martina, who had a seemingly pleasant academic experience in Europe, Jasmine expressed much more ambivalence. While she praised the European willingness to engage with other cultures and openly talk about difference, she also felt that there could be intolerance. This was due to the fact that, as a Muslim immigrant who wears a hijab, Jasmine was usually subject to questions about religion and politics that were not geared toward other international students. Now living and working in Canada, Jasmine described how Ontario, in particular, was more tolerant of racial/cultural diversity than Europe. Yet, she had a problem with the supposed lack of intercultural mingling in Canada, which was prevalent in the European context. Jasmine stated that this lack of mingling was problematic for nonnative-English-speaking ethnic groups because they lose the opportunity to practice their English when they only speak in their mother tongues.

Even though Jasmine was very concerned about this issue with regard to the development of her own English pronunciation, she was nevertheless confident about her accent and even claimed that people might mistake her for a native speaker of Canadian English on some occasions. One component of her accent that might betray her nonnative status is the rhythm of her English, which is influenced by Arabic, her first language.

Lana

One participant who could certainly be mistaken for a native English speaker, in my opinion, was Lana. At our first meeting, I thought that she had misread the criteria for participants as her accent did not sound foreign in a Canadian context, but rather, reminded me of a voice coming from a White teenaged girl. Upon learning about her linguistic and educational background, I was further amazed to discover that Lana never had any formal English language education. Indeed, her native-like accent and proficiency in English was the result of informal learning from various types of English language media. Her accent could be particularly attributed to watching the US television series *Gossip Girl*, which might have explained my perception of her sounding like a White teenager (the majority of the cast fits this demographic).

Another factor that contributed to Lana's seeming mastery of the English language was her time living and studying in Japan. Because she attended school with not only Japanese peers but also students from a variety of nations, English was used as the lingua franca. Therefore, Lana had no choice but to improve her English in order to successfully communicate with her peers. While Lana noted how her fellow students praised the quality of her English, I could not help but notice that she displayed a certain insecurity about her language ability. Due to learning English on her own, Lana has never received any formal feedback from an instructor on her use of the language. I thus heard many mentions of her being concerned over whether or not she was using English in a so-called natural manner.

In conjunction with her English, Lana detailed her insecurity with being a teaching assistant in the social sciences. Since social scientists are expected to sway the opinions of individuals through their ideas, Lana felt that her accentedness could affect her ability to convince others. Moreover, she mentioned the obligation of teaching assistants in the discipline to perform emotional labour as seen by her various discussions of needing to be friendly and supportive for students as well as developing a range of activities to sustain their interest in course material. Lana became aware of these needs by making the switch from engineering to social science during her earlier postsecondary years.

Fredrick

Unlike Lana, who was deemed by others to have a clear accent but was nevertheless insecure about her voice, Fredrick seemed to have the opposite experience. In spite of knowing that he had “terrible pronunciation” through comments about his fast rate of speech, Fredrick was unapologetic about his accent. Even though I too found the pace of his speech difficult to follow at some points (especially during the transcription of our interviews), I nevertheless admired his conviction in not wanting to change his accent unless it actually interfered with his students’ learning.

A recurring theme in my conversations with Fredrick was the acknowledgment that, while they may be subject to accent discrimination and have their overall knowledge and credentials devalued by students and others in the Canadian university, ITAs should not let these forces undermine their sense of worth and hinder their professional development. In fact, Fredrick lamented how his international peers feared that professors might perceive them as unqualified for teaching assistant positions if they ever asked for any guidance on how to do certain things such as marking assignments or how to interact with learners. For Fredrick, this fear conflicted with the entire purpose of a teaching assistantship, which is to learn how to become an effective instructor. Along with ITAs changing their mindsets, Fredrick articulated the need for faculty/institutions and the larger host society to make changes as well. Regarding societal changes, Fredrick stated that Canadian people simply had to appreciate the diversity of the world, part of which entails accepting that individuals from various parts of the globe will have differing knowledge and skills. In terms of institutional change, Fredrick suggested that there should be (temporary) supports made available to all ITAs. Just as students with disabilities may have the option to request someone do notetaking on their behalf during a lecture, Fredrick believed that ITAs could have similar accommodations when performing their teaching duties. In the case of marking, for example, ITAs could ask their professors to co-mark an assignment. According to Fredrick, this type of accommodation would decrease ITAs’ fear of stating their lack of competence in particular pedagogical duties.

Vijay

There is much more that can be said about Fredrick and the other ITAs. However, recognizing that their lives and perspectives will be further examined in the next two chapters, my intent in the preceding 14 pages was not to write exhaustive life histories of each participant, but provide concise introductions (hence the title of the sub-section). For now, it is important to briefly explore my role as the researcher in the study. In a narrative inquiry, it is often the case that researchers specifically make mention of their own storied lives since they influence how researchers interpret the experiences of their participants (e.g., Creswell, 2013; Phillion, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In the introductory chapter, I have already made mention of some components of my background. For instance, I discussed how I approach the topic of ITAs and foreign accents from an etic perspective, having come across the topic through personal observation. I also mentioned that my experience as an English language teacher made me aware of how foreign-accented instructors could be blamed for poor student performance as well as how racialized teachers, like myself, could be perceived as non-experts of the language. When interacting with the participants, these aspects of my personal background seemed to have some effect on my interpretations of their utterances. For example, I could clearly relate to their occasional stories of being judged as incomprehensible on account of their racial backgrounds since I also experienced similar judgments from English language learners, who seemingly used my racial identity to determine my “deficiency” in the language. With respect to my status as an outsider of the research topic, I often questioned whether I could completely empathize with each participant.

Indeed, as someone who is not an ITA and identifies as a native speaker of English, I usually struggled to identify with some of the participants’ narratives. In the case of Farhad’s struggle to adapt to Canadian (academic) culture, for instance, I could not identify with this struggle since I was born and raised in Canada and thus only familiar with the Canadian educational system. When Lana expressed her insecurity about the naturalness of her English as another example, I found it perplexing because I never

consciously considered whether or not I was using English in a so-called natural manner. My status as a(n) (linguistic) outsider seemed to be noticeable for the participants as well. In fact, they often made reference to the “deficiencies” of their accents in comparison to my so-called native accent. Furthermore, they would typically ask me if they were pronouncing particular words correctly, thereby suggesting that they saw me as an outside linguistic authority.

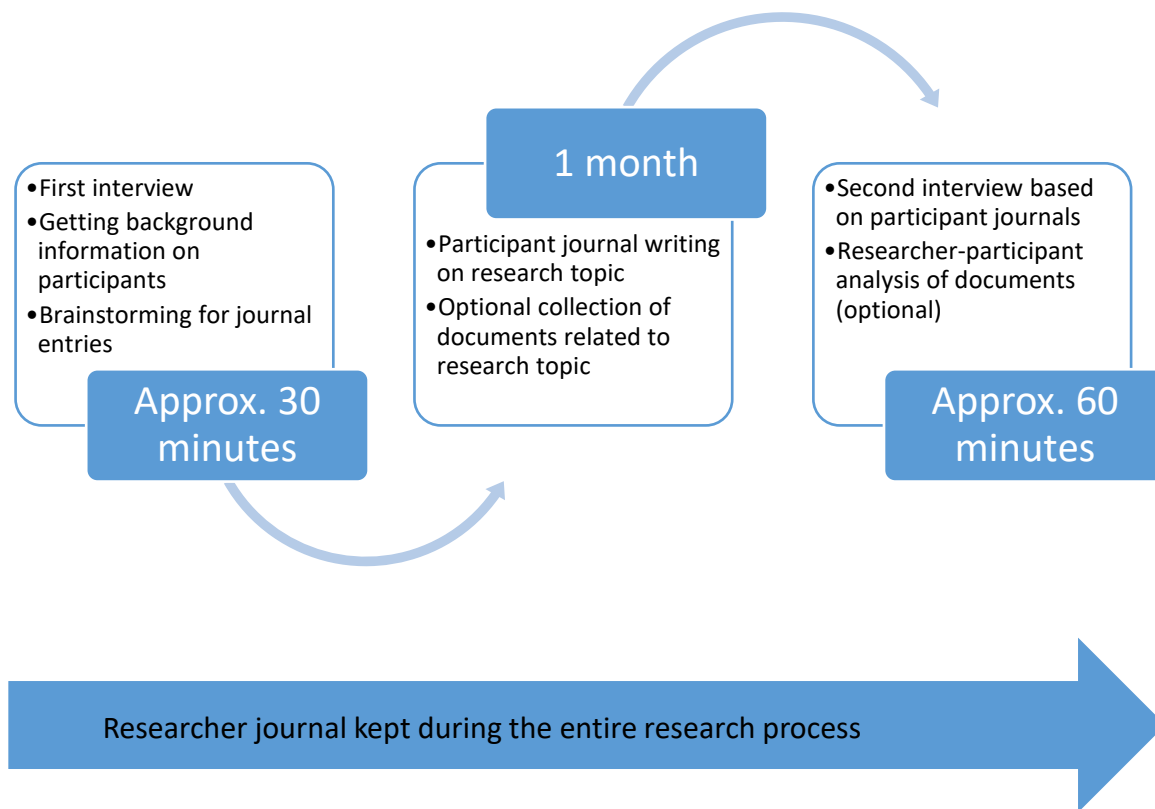
Another factor that affected my interactions with participants and interpretations of their narrated experiences was the tension between wanting to make participants feel comfortable and a desire to examine language/accent (and race) from a critical perspective. When some of the participants expressed clearly racialized views about what constitutes intelligible or comprehensible speech, I typically left these views unchallenged due to an uncertainty as to how to effectively address them without making participants feel under attack (Love-Nichols, 2018). When it came to data analysis and presenting the participants in the thesis, I also struggled to find an effective way to portray them as admirable workers while providing critical analysis of the oppressive language ideologies that they articulated (Love-Nichols, 2018).

While I was finding “ideological faults” in the participants’ narratives, I was shocked to discover that I had internalized the same ideologies as those of these ITAs. In fact, as mentioned in my introduction to Johnny, I may have subconsciously become a White listening subject in raciolinguistic terms by initially having a difficult time in understanding his speech (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Also evident in my introductions to the participants was my unproblematic classifications of participants and/or their foreign accents. Upon hearing Zack’s voice, for example, I quickly labelled it as “surfer dude,” thereby creating an association between his accent and the image of a White stereotypical figure in the US. Therefore, I urge readers of this thesis to remind themselves that although I may critique racialized understandings of language, I am not immune from articulating these understandings. In other words, this narrative inquiry should not be viewed as my omniscient reading of ITAs’ views on foreign accent, but rather, a potentially skewed interpretation not entirely divorced from circulating discourses.

Data Collection/Creation

An important aspect of narrative inquiry is that because stories are often *created* through the collaboration between the researcher and participant (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2013), it is more accurate to refer to data collection as data creation, especially when it comes to the researcher's interpretation of stories. This point can be tied back to Hegge's (2013) definition of narrative inquiry near the beginning of this chapter, which states how researchers use "narrative methods to construct and *co-construct* meaning [added emphasis]" (p. 4). In Figure 1 below, I outline the narrative methods that I used with the ITAs. Next, I detail each method.

Figure 1—Outline of Data Collection/Creation Procedures



Research Interviews

Riessman (2008) views “interviews as narrative occasions” (p. 23). Indeed, in narrative inquiry, interviews are seen as the primary means to create stories since they naturally promote dialogue between the researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 2008). For this reason, I decided to conduct two research interviews with each participant.

The purpose of the first interview, which originally intended to be 45 minutes but typically lasted for 30 minutes, was intended to explore the biographical and workplace context in which ITAs experience aesthetic labour. This entailed such things as obtaining basic demographic information about each participant, detailing their linguistic and educational backgrounds, examining their particular university environments, and understanding the nature of the duties of being a teaching assistant (see Appendix D for the complete list of questions). It is important to note that, since narratives better emerge through extended conversation between researcher and participant than conventional question-and-answer exchanges (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008), the above topics were addressed in as “natural” a manner as possible. That is, instead of adhering to the order of my prepared list of questions, I brought up certain topics only when they became relevant to the conversation. Beyond exploring the individual backgrounds of participants, another objective of the first interview was to establish the content of the research. As the beginning of any narrative inquiry dictates that participants have an equal voice in the research process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), it was important that the participants of my study had a say in what stories they would like to coproduce. Thus, the majority of the first interview was dedicated to selecting what specific aspects of their experiences would help answer the two research questions. Specifically, after we had addressed my prepared interview questions, I suggested possible themes from the participants’ answers that could form the content of their journals (see next sub-section) and the subsequent interview. The ITAs then either expressed their approval, offered alternative themes, or provided refinements to the themes that I had already offered.

One month after the first interview, the participants and I engaged in a second interview, which was meant to have participants elaborate on their journal entries and/or provide additional commentary on any documents that they submitted (see below). Because they did not continuously write coherent narratives about their experiences, my role as researcher was to have participants create specific accounts of their experiences rather than general statements, a central goal of narrative interviewing (Riessman, 2008). Moreover, in certain cases where participants did not explicitly discuss accents in their journals, I tried to ask additional questions to help make some partial connections to accent or voice. These second interviews were originally planned to be 90 minutes, but usually ended at around 60 minutes. (See Appendix D for an example of how these interviews were structured in terms of questions).³⁷

Along with the first interview, the second interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word. The audio files and transcripts were secured in a password-protected, encrypted computer file, and following transcription, the audio files were permanently deleted. Hard copies of the transcripts and the voice recorder were stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home. In order to give them greater input in the research process, I offered the participants the opportunity to review their transcripts and make any necessary changes (which mostly took the form of correcting factual information that I had misheard during transcription). Revised transcripts were also encrypted and placed in the locked filing cabinet.

Participant Journals

As mentioned above, the participants were responsible for maintaining a journal for approximately one month after the first interview (see Appendix E for the instructions that were given to participants during

³⁷Given the complex nature of the topic of accent and aesthetic labour, conducting 30- and 60-minute interviews might seem insufficient to delve deeply into this topic. However, I typically found these durations to be adequate because, in the case of the second interviews, for example, participants were simply expanding on what they wrote in their journals.

the first meeting). The purpose of the journal was to make the ITAs connect their experiences to the two research questions of the study. In contrast to interviews that require real-time responses, journal writing provides participants with more time to reflect on their experiences, which leads to more insightful responses. More importantly, since narrative inquiry condemns forcing participants' experiences to fit into existing literature (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion, 1999), journals allow participants to form their own opinions about a research topic without the immediate influence of the researcher. This point was important in the context of ITAs defining what type of accent was satisfactory for teaching.

After the one month, participants gave me a copy of their journals that either took the form of a Microsoft Word file sent by e-mail or a physical notebook collected by myself. Upon receiving the journals, I read them over multiple times in order to create questions/themes for the second interview as described above. Electronic journals were stored in another password-protected, encrypted computer file, while the photocopied pages of the notebooks were locked in my filing cabinet. At the second interview, I returned the notebooks to their respective authors.

It is important to note that while all 14 participants did complete their journals, the quantity, quality, and nature of each journal varied. Whereas some of the ITAs wrote lengthy entries providing detailed descriptions of the connection between accent and their (personal and) professional lives, others provided brief, generic observations and reflections. The journals from the rest of the participants were somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. Regarding their nature, it was interesting how nearly all of the journals were used as conscious tools for professional development. In fact, in the progression of their journal writing, the ITAs began to recognize and even change their perspectives on such things as the need to be worried about their accents while teaching or the utility of developing a specific accent for work. Such reflections were useful during the second interviews as they provided the initial template to explore how the participants both perceive and enact a satisfactory aural aesthetic.

Documents

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that since the narrative inquiry process is mostly interactive in nature, documents are often ignored for their story-making potential. For the purposes of this thesis, “documents contain text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher’s intervention” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Understanding that documents can act as the conduit through which wider social relations come to influence everyday life (Smith, 1996), I thought that, in the case of ITAs, it was possible that institutional/societal notions of what accent(s) sound(s) right could be expressed through their encounters with such things as university policy documents, training materials, and student evaluations. Therefore, I encouraged the participants to write in their journals about how various documents may (implicitly) communicate certain aural aesthetics (see Appendix E). Optionally, the ITAs could bring these documents for further discussion and analysis during the second interview. Although a select number of participants did provide course outlines or student evaluation comments, I decided not to use these materials because, first, they were beyond the scope of the current research topic, and, furthermore, they could potentially identify the participants if presented in the thesis (even if they were anonymized).

Nevertheless, some participants provided publically available texts (e.g., postings from Twitter [i.e., tweets] and guides for ITAs on other university websites) that helped them in understanding the role of accent in their professional life. Since these materials clearly connected to the study, I decided to present some examples in select parts of the thesis.

Researcher’s Journal

Throughout a narrative inquiry, researchers need to be actively examining their participants’ varied experiences. One way to stay actively engaged is to keep a researcher’s journal that allows researchers to connect their experiences with those of their participants (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In my own journal of the entire research process, I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and relevant experiences in relation to my

interviews with the ITAs, what they wrote in their journals, and the preliminary findings that I began to uncover. These journal entries thus provided the starting points for data analysis.

Data Analysis

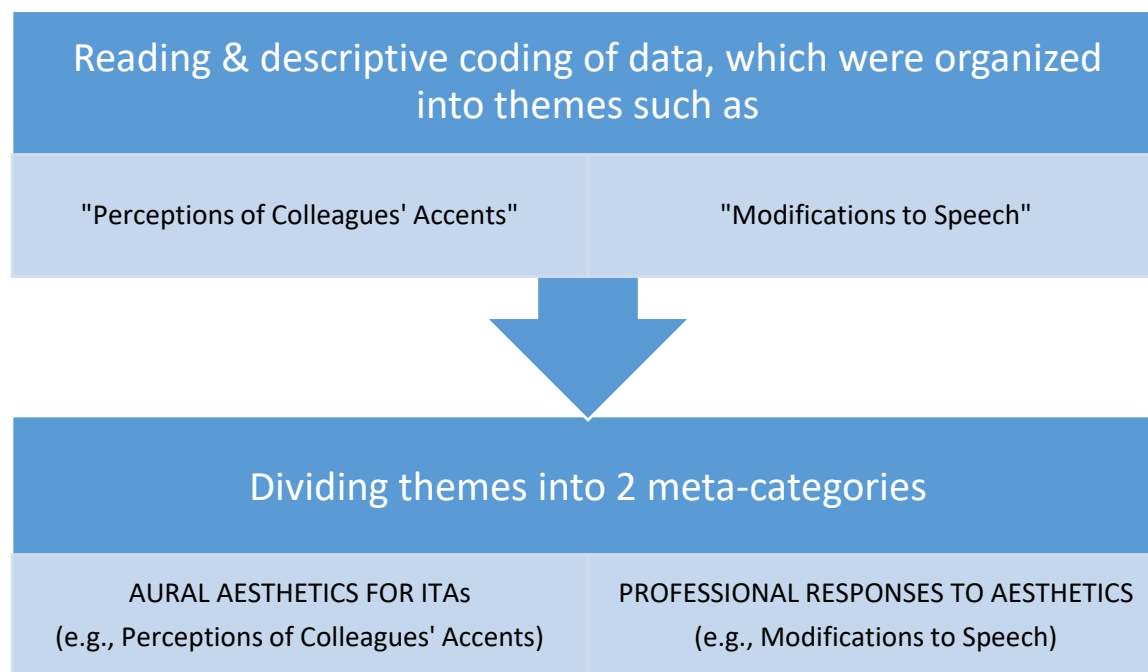
Regarding data analysis, there is no single way to analyze stories in a narrative inquiry (Squire et al., 2014). However, in the context of this study, the most appropriate form was thematic narrative analysis, which focuses on the content of stories rather than their format or how they are told (Riessman, 2008). Due to being interested in the main message of a narrative (Riessman, 2008), thematic analysis corresponded to my research objective of understanding how stories about ITAs' experiences influence their perceptions of what type of accent is a satisfactory professional aesthetic. One issue with this type of analysis is that "language is viewed as a resource, rather than a topic of inquiry" (Riessman, 2008, p. 59). That is, researchers usually take the utterances of participants at face value, without considering how their choice of words, etc., affect the underlying meaning of their narratives. This point was problematic for me because the second major objective of the study was to understand the ways in which ITAs conform to and/or resist their perceived accent for teaching.³⁸ As I was not observing their actual professional practices, ITAs had to display these practices through narrative, which did not always manifest in clear-cut stories stating how they did or did not perform activities in a particular aural manner. Thus, I had to examine how resistance and conformity were subtly produced through discourse (Forbes, 2009; Mumby, 2005).

In order to accomplish this task, I found it necessary to integrate my thematic analysis of the data with dialogic/performance analysis, which, while interested in the content of narratives, examines how they are made and performed (Riessman, 2008). According to Riessman (2008), dialogic/performance analysis

³⁸Another potential issue is that developing themes simply on what participants say may undermine an analysis of how power relations shape experience. However, in the context of the current study, I mitigate this problem by linking themes to critical literature, which is explained below.

never takes the language of stories at face value because they are never solely produced by individuals, but instead, by sociohistorical discourses and interpersonal interaction. Therefore, this type of analysis operates on a Bakhtinian notion that there multiple voices found within a narrative as well as a Goffmanian view of narratives facilitating the performance of identity (Riessman, 2008; Todorova, 2007), points already made earlier in this chapter. In specific terms, dialogic/performance analysis requires the researcher to perform such tasks as “interrogate [the use of] particular words, listen to voices of minor characters, identify hidden discourses speakers take for granted, and locate gaps and indeterminate sections in personal narrative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 107). As seen with these examples, dialogic/performance analysis is equally interested in examining “the said and unsaid” of narratives (Todorova, 2007). When organizing the data for this study, I kept this dual interest at the forefront of my analysis.

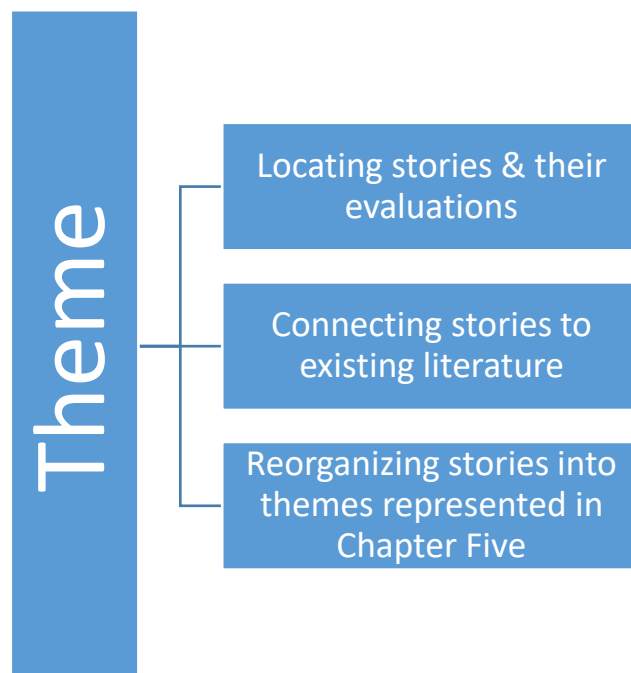
After informally reading the interview transcripts, documents, and participant and researcher’s journals multiple times, the first step in my hybrid thematic-dialogic/performance analysis was to perform descriptive coding of these data at the sentence/paragraph level. My reasoning for initially looking at these longer stretches of text was that I eventually wanted to draw out stories from the data, which typically go beyond one line. Once I had my list of codes, I checked to see if certain “codes seem[ed] to cluster and interrelate” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 41) with one another and ultimately organized them into recurring themes. These themes were then placed into two meta-categories based on the two research questions of the study: aural aesthetics for ITAs and professional responses to these aesthetics. For instance, a theme like “Perceptions of Colleagues’ Accents” would be placed in the former category as I anticipated that ITAs’ talk about the speech of their colleagues might reveal what they believe to be a satisfactory accent for teaching. Conversely, themes such as “Modifications to Speech” were placed in the second category since they might have highlighted how the ITAs (do not) embrace certain aesthetics at work. The procedures thus far described are visually summarized in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2—Initial Data Analysis Procedures

The themes in the first category were primarily subject to thematic analysis. This first entailed identifying stories within each theme. As my first inclination was to see stories as coherent accounts of past events, I initially defined them as “brief, bounded segments of [written/spoken] text...with clear beginnings, middles, and ends” (Riessman, 2008, pp. 61-62). However, given the prior discussion on habitual and generic narratives as well as small stories, I also came to see stories manifested in general descriptions of people and places (as was the particular case for documents), for example. No matter their form, I was always interested in understanding the evaluation of narratives, which Labov (1972) and Labov and Waletzky (1997) note as the “so what” or noteworthy aspect of a story that can be directly stated from an outside perspective (e.g., “Looking back at that experience, I now know that all accents are equal”) or embedded within the text (e.g., “Native speakers of English have the loveliest accents” [the superlative ‘loveliest’ acts as a subtle evaluation indicating the speaker’s preference for ‘native’ accents]). Once I understood the evaluative components of the participants’ stories, I connected these evaluations to relevant

theoretical and empirical literature to highlight their ideological underpinnings and then reorganized their attached stories into new themes, which are represented in the following chapter on the ITAs' perceptions of the aural aesthetic needed for teaching. The above steps are highlighted in Figure 3.

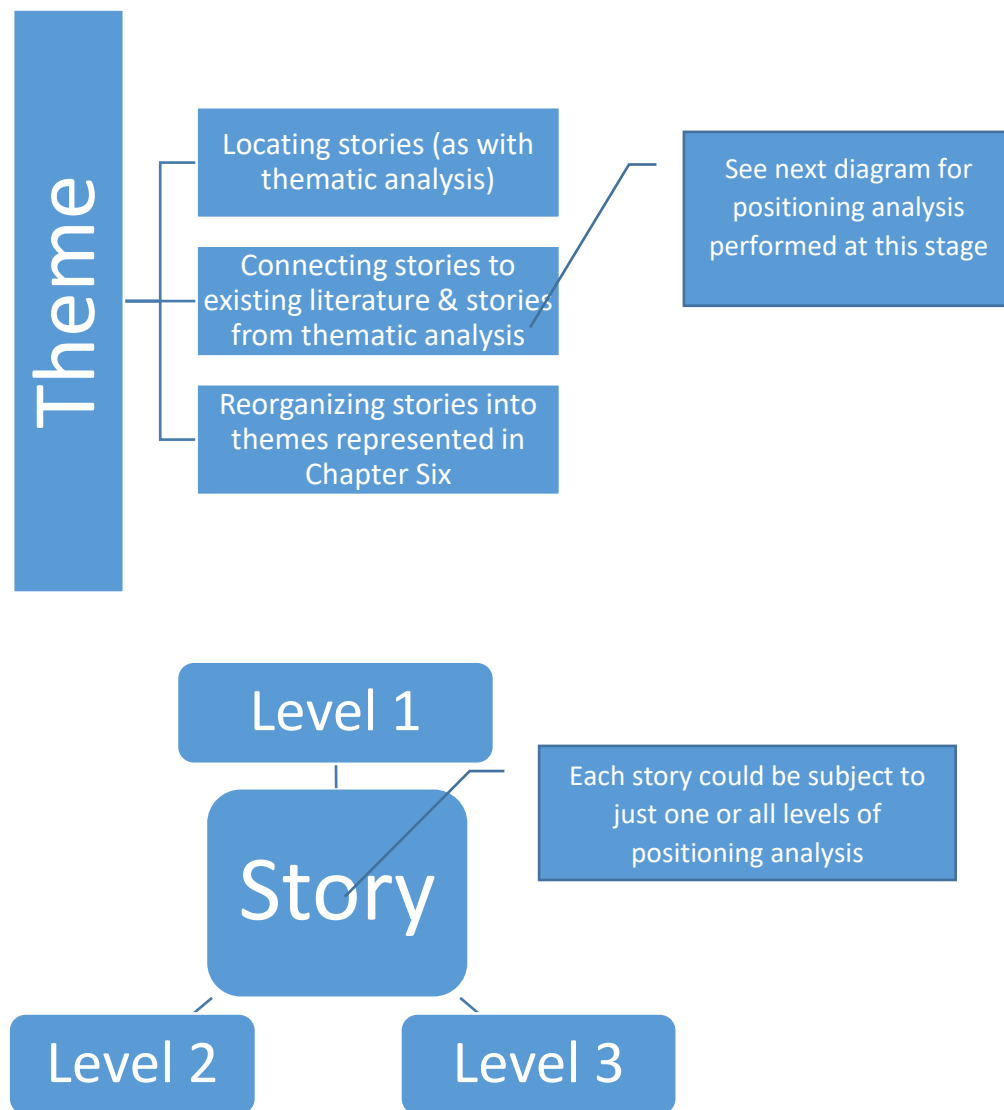
Figure 3—Procedures for the First Meta-Category



Instead of being analyzed thematically, the themes from the second meta-category underwent dialogic/performance analysis. Just like the thematic analysis, my first step was to identify stories within these themes, which were broadly defined as mentioned above. Furthermore, I would then connect these stories to existing literature as well as the stories generated from the thematic analysis in order to explain how ITAs' professional practices embrace and/or fight against particular aural aesthetics. Last, I organized these practices into new themes, which are represented in Chapter Six. Yet because dialogic/performance analysis emphasizes the interactive nature of narrative, my analysis had to become a bit more complex. In particular, I decided to undertake a positioning analysis of the participants' narratives. As discussed earlier

in this chapter, there are three levels of positioning that narrators can adopt in the act of storytelling: first, they may position themselves as characters in a narrative; second, they craft certain identities in relation to their audience; and last, they may position themselves in relation to master narratives in a society (e.g., Bamberg, 1997). When the participants told stories of their professional practice with regard to accent, I attempted to understand how their positioning in these stories helped to highlight the extent to which they adopted certain aural aesthetics, which is detailed in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4—Procedures for the Second Meta-Category



Regarding the first level of positioning, or Level 1, I looked at how the ITAs actually depicted themselves as instructors in their narratives, with attention paid to various linguistic and discursive devices (such as metaphor/allegory and allusions) that potentially communicated their teaching philosophies, etc. For Level 2, I considered how my questioning of participants as well as my responses/reactions to their utterances might have influenced how they wanted to project themselves as instructors. Finally, with regard to Level 3, I examined how the written/spoken text of participants echoed wider ideologies. Once again, I explored how specific language in the form of keywords or phrases could have ideological meanings (e.g., Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Williams, 1976). I also took notice of the “unsaid aspects” of narratives such as omitted information, which could also articulate ideological information (Todorova, 2007). It is important to note that I did not perform all three levels of analysis for each narrative that I identified. In fact, while I was interested in examining Level 3 positioning for some narratives, I occasionally felt that the significance of a story was better linked to the interaction between the participants and myself or simply the specific content of the narrative being told. This leads to another noteworthy detail about data analysis in general.

That is, while I dedicated one type of narrative analysis for each research question of the study, I frequently found it necessary to perform thematic analysis on the stories of professional practices and dialogic/performance analysis for those based on perceived aural aesthetics. For example, it was sometimes the case that participants directly described how they perform as workers, which simply required a thematic analysis of their stories. On the other hand, in order to understand the type of accent the ITAs perceived to be satisfactory, I often needed to scrutinize their choice of words or analyze the conversational context from which a narrative emerged. This point was particularly true when determining the evaluation of a story, which may be subtly embedded within various (para)linguistic cues such as the use of superlative language or emphatic stress, for instance (Johnstone, 2016; Labov, 1972).

One final point to make about data analysis is to emphasize my role in the construction of the narratives for study. As mentioned in this chapter, the researcher and participant co-construct narratives

through interaction. Yet another aspect of this co-construction is how the researcher decides to interpret and present participant narratives for the reading audience (Hegge, 2013). Indeed, when interpreting data, I had to engage in further storytelling by filling in the gaps of participants' experiences as seen in such things as determining the reasons why certain events occurred in a particular manner (Denzin, 2004; Todorova, 2007). Beyond interpretation, my co-construction of narrative took the form of "restorying," which attempted to construct participants' stories in a logical sequence when they were not told in a coherent manner (Creswell, 2013). In particular, restorying sometimes took the form of paraphrasing a participant's story when it was intermittently told on a transcript page. It also entailed me deleting insignificant pauses, fillers, and repetitions so as to clearly communicate the particular message of a narrative.

Concluding Thoughts about Ethical Concerns

The above discussion on my role in data analysis raises an important ethical concern in narrative inquiry: which voices are given more or less prominence in the presentation of the research? Even though participants have the opportunity to share their experiences in either spoken or written form, narrative inquirers reserve the authority to interpret these data according to their own perspective (Riessman, 2008). The issue, therefore, is that researchers may detail participants' experiences from a perspective that conflicts with participants' own views of these experiences. For this study, the above-mentioned data creation methods were the primary means to lessen this ethical problem. That is, by brainstorming with ITAs about what aspects of their work experiences can best answer the research questions and having them freely write about these aspects in a journal, I was attempting to give them greater input into the content of the research. Thus, although my interpretation of their experiences is the dominant perspective in this thesis, at least the ITAs and I can agree that these experiences are worthy of interpretation.

Aside from the issue of voice, another ethical dilemma concerns the truthfulness of participants' narratives. Perhaps influenced by positivist paradigms that value objective, verifiable data, a great deal of

researchers may question whether the events in their participants' stories actually happened. However, as Squire et al. (2014) note, simply raising this question is problematic because

any two people observing the same phenomenon will offer different accounts of their experience. One will emphasize one aspect, while the other might focus on something entirely different. Neither account is false, but each account is and can only ever be partial (p. 109).

Squire et al. make the point that since individuals can only see what they are able and/or willing to see, their knowledge of events is never complete. Acknowledging this point, this study is simply interested in understanding how ITAs come to perceive an aural aesthetic for teaching through *their* experiences, which, as discussed in the last chapter, may be influenced by their individual and social locations (e.g., Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). Even when exploring their teaching practices, narrative truth is unimportant as the concern is whether ITAs choose (not) to believe that certain aural aesthetics are best practice rather than how they truly teach in the classroom.

While the truthfulness of stories is not a significant cause for concern, their artificial nature could be problematic. As Clandinin and Connelly (1994) note, "in the study of experience, it is the researcher's intentionality that defines the starting and stopping points" (p. 50). In other words, it is the narrative inquirer who decides when participants' stories begin and end. This decision could pose problems because individuals' narrative lives are fluid in nature. By entering into the midst of participants' lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion, 1999), researchers can only know their experiences at the time of data creation without any knowledge of how these experiences might change in the future (although they may gain insights into how past experiences have changed in the present). This issue may be salient in this study as the satisfactory aural aesthetic that ITAs come to perceive may change if they were ever to change programs or universities and, furthermore, their professional practices may evolve over time as they refine their pedagogical philosophies. Therefore, the stories presented in the next two chapters must be qualified by their potentially temporal nature.

Chapter Five: Narratives of a Satisfactory Aural Aesthetic for International Teaching Assistants

Having explained the methods that I used to answer my research questions, it is now appropriate to present the answers to these questions in storied form. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the first question: *what type of accent do the international teaching assistants (ITAs) of this study perceive to be a satisfactory aural aesthetic while working in Ontario universities?* While I had hoped that the participants would make explicit statements such as “I believe that Accent X is best for ITAs,” it was often the case that their perceptions were more implicit. As Inoue (2006) notes, “narratives about language use are surreptitiously embedded in narratives about things other than language” (p. 215). Nevertheless, through my analysis of the data, I began to understand that the participants, as a whole, told three interrelated meta-narratives articulating how sounding right can be perceived in a linguistic, racial, and/or professional sense. Within each of these meta-narratives, the ITAs told specific stories detailing what types or features of accents are (not) aurally acceptable for work.

First, in their linguistic perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic, they highlighted the merits of so-called native and nonnative speech in terms of intelligibility/comprehensibility and outlined folk linguistic justifications for maintaining one’s original accent. When situating accent within racial formations, the ITAs perceived a satisfactory aural aesthetic to be associated with Whiteness (and not nonwhiteness) while admitting how racialized accents can be heard as aurally acceptable provided that certain conditions are met. Last, their professional stories of satisfactory aural aesthetics, which incorporated linguistic and racial understandings of accent, emphasized that accents did or did not need to match work (cultures) as well as detailed how all accents are valued in the context of internationalizing Canadian higher education institutions. What can account for these multiple and often conflicting narratives is a series of contextual factors that made the participants embrace some narratives while rejecting others. These factors, ranging from the ITAs’ racial and linguistic backgrounds to their academic disciplines, will be further noted throughout this chapter.

Linguistic Analyses of a Satisfactory Aural Aesthetic

Native Speech Is Intelligible/Comprehensible

Nearly all of the ITAs of this study expressed the view that a satisfactory aural aesthetic consisted of a *clear* accent. Based on further questioning, I soon discovered that their understanding of clarity was tied to intelligibility: as long as one speaks clearly, others will actually understand their utterances. Yet, when the participants made this claim, I began to question the meaning of clarity/intelligibility as I did when first developing the topic of the study. Upon additional inquiry, I came to learn that intelligibility was often connected to nativeness in English, which echoed what I had already read in the existing ITA literature (e.g., Gorsuch, 2012; Hahn, 2004; Kang, 2008, 2012; Kao et al., 2016; Pickering, 2004; Ye, 2013). Adeela, who learned English in the Middle East, explicitly made this connection as seen in the following statement:

I would say that [intelligibility and nativeness] are connected because that's how we would think is the most right way to pronounce a thing.... Since we think [English belongs to native speakers], they know the right way of speaking.

There are two interesting points about Adeela's reasoning. First, she suggested that intelligibility is an exclusive trait in that native speakers' original ownership of the English language makes them the authority in deciding "the most right way to pronounce" something (Chow, 2014; Widdowson, 1994). Second, if native speakers "know the *right way* of speaking," then there is only one way to be intelligible.

What might explain Adeela's linking of intelligibility to nativeness is the fact that intelligibility, rather than an objective characteristic, can often be heightened (or lessened) by various listener traits such as personal familiarity with certain types of spoken language (e.g., Bent & Bradlow, 2003; Fuse et al., 2018). In fact, since Adeela, like the other participants, first became exposed to English through learning materials ostensibly based on native speaker models of the language, it could be possible that she perceives native speech as already intelligible speech. Beyond English language learning experience, it is worthwhile to consider how school context, in the form of listening audience and teaching duties, might reinforce the connection between nativeness in English and intelligibility.

For instance, Suzy, another ITA who learned English through native-speaker-inspired materials back in Asia, believed that sounding native was the best way to be intelligible in the context of her internationalizing university where a sizable number of students would consequently be labelled as nonnative English speakers. Suzy explained her reasoning in the generic narrative below:

We have many international students [in my department]. And I believe that when they learned English in their countries, they were taught by the [materials made by] native speakers, like myself. So I guess the native accent will be easy to understand. So this is important during my tutorial sessions when I have to explain solutions to mathematical problems for the students. If I can't speak clearly like a native speaker, then they won't understand. If they don't understand, then I have to repeat it again and again. So this will definitely slow down my teaching session.

As detailed above, Suzy expressed a common view that having a so-called native accent can increase one's intelligibility for English speakers of all linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Bayyurt, 2018; Sung, 2016). Because international students, like herself, learned English through emulating native speakers of the language, it is logical to assume that their listening comprehension is enhanced through hearing native or native-like speech. It is important to note that this narrative emerged from my question about one of her journal entries in which she linked sounding like a native speaker to "teaching efficiency." As noted by Suzy, if she cannot speak clearly like a native speaker, this will halt the pace of her teaching since she would need to stop to repeat herself. Thus, this potential problem is reminiscent of the prior discussion of how language needs to be managed in such workplaces as call centres in order to ensure efficient production (Holborow, 2018). Indeed, in the neoliberal university where knowledge is supposed to be verbally deposited into the minds of student-customers, a native accent, according to an ITA like Suzy, will ensure that this deposit proceeds without interruption. Moreover, given that the neoliberal university also values efficiency in the sense of workers doing more with less resources (e.g., Martimianakis & Muzzin, 2015; Shepherd, 2018), a native accent might become even more important. Suzy, for instance, noted that since she was responsible for teaching large numbers of students without a co-teacher, etc., her voice became the primary tool in holding the class' attention. If she does not project a native voice, then students

might lose interest in her delivery of information, which would cause her to spend extra time on reclaiming their attention and thus thwart the goal of teaching efficiently in the classroom.

One possible reason why Suzy and other similarly-minded ITAs view a native accent as intelligible and thus a means for efficient oral communication might be its perceived *comprehensibility*. If sounding native makes a person intelligible, then it is likely that this person is also comprehensible in that others find it simple to process their utterances (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Derwing & Munro, 2009). This perception was articulated by Lana, who, as Iranian, noted the problems of trying to sound “more native” in class:

Vijay: So if you’re forcing an accent [to sound native], it doesn’t sound native?

Lana: When I try too hard, it doesn’t. It sounds nonnative.

Vijay: But what does a forced accent actually sound like?

Lana: I speak slower.... And I have like pauses, trying to think about the words before saying them aloud. So that makes it worse [for the class to better understand me].

By stating how her conscious attempts to sound more native can result in slow and halted speech, Lana simultaneously highlighted the alleged superiority of native speakers over nonnative speakers. That is, the notion of a nonnative accent being tied to slower speech implicitly speaks to the idea that native speakers speak English more fluently than their nonnative peers (e.g., Davies, 2003; Medgyes, 1992). According to Lana’s reasoning, then, successfully sounding native would make one more fluent, which would then allow others to quickly decipher the meaning of their utterance.

An unexplained aspect of the above exchange concerns Lana’s perceived need to sound like a native speaker in the first place. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I initially did not believe that Lana was a self-identified nonnative English speaker due to her native-like accent and advanced proficiency in the language. Thus, when we had the above interaction, I was perplexed because I did not think that she needed to change her accent to sound more native. On further reflection, it seemed that Lana’s insecurity about her accent could be explained by how she learned English. In contrast to the other participants, Lana

learned the language through independent study. Since she had no instructor who could provide feedback on the naturalness of her pronunciation, Lana might need to constantly gauge the quality of her accent based on her surrounding environment. In fact, part of what explains Lana's desire to sound native is perhaps her listening audience. While she was not concerned about the quality of her accent when attending school in Japan, which had her mostly interact with those whom she considered nonnative English speakers, Lana made note of how she was the only nonnative speaker in her current social sciences department, where few international students pursue academic degrees. Therefore, because she might perceive her current students as not being familiar with nonnative English, Lana may feel that any slight "deviation" in her accent could make her incomprehensible (Kang, 2012; Kang et al., 2015; Plakans, 1997). In the end, then, whereas ITAs like Suzy can value native speech for its ability to efficiently convey one's message to listeners of all language backgrounds, others such as Lana can perceive its value in terms of aurally matching their listening audience.

Nonnative Speech Is Intelligible/Comprehensible

Although they mostly thought that a native accent was the primary means in achieving intelligibility or comprehensibility in the classroom, the ITAs occasionally deemed nonnative speech as adequately intelligible/comprehensible. The most frequent way that they made this judgment was by making a distinction between the segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation. As discussed in Chapter Two, segmentals refer to the small units of pronunciation such as phonemes (i.e., individual sounds) while suprasegmentals consist of larger features like intonation. Regarding intelligibility and comprehensibility, scholars have argued that the segmental parts of pronunciation do not severely limit one's ability to be understood (Moyer, 2013). Therefore, in the case of those who are labelled as nonnative English speakers and experience difficulties in producing particular segmentals in the language, it is possible for them to be heard as understandable without addressing these difficulties.

For example, Martina, a Mexican teaching assistant, addressed this point when mentioning the quality of the accented English of her supervisor, who identifies as a native Spanish speaker like herself:

I noticed that my supervisor speaks very good English, but has trouble with the pronunciation of “she.” Instead, he says “si,” with very little “sh” sound.... [Despite this, he reminds me that] I don’t have to speak perfect English [to be understood] (November 17, 2017).³⁹

According to Martina, even though her supervisor has a problem with pronouncing “she,” this does not interfere with his overall intelligibility. What possibly influences Martina’s evaluation of her supervisor’s English is her own accentedness in the language. As someone who has managed to significantly reduce the influence of Spanish on her English in both the segmental and suprasegmental realm, which includes being able to pronounce the SH sound, Martina has phonologically surpassed her supervisor. However, because her supervisor occupies a senior academic position in spite of his accent, Martina possibly understands that, as someone occupying the lower-status position of teaching assistant, striving for complete nativeness in English is not necessary to be seen as a competent worker.

For Alejandra, another self-identified native Spanish speaker from Latin America, the way that she perceives the segmental features of nonnative English as not interfering with intelligibility/comprehensibility is through the simple fact that her interlocutors actually understand her utterances:

[I don’t pronounce individual sounds] in the fully native speaker way, but in a way that people can know the word that I’m talking about. It helps me to be understood.

While I could understand why Alejandra’s interlocutors would have no issue with the idiosyncrasies of her accent given that I also understood her pronunciation of words during our interviews, I nevertheless began to question why she and Martina easily came to perceive their accents as aurally satisfactory.

From a linguistic perspective, when juxtaposed with the other participants who speak non-Romance languages as their self-identified mother tongues, the fact that Alejandra and Martina speak

³⁹I use italics to indicate when excerpts come from participant journals.

Spanish seems to give them an advantage when speaking English. Because Spanish and English share many morphological and phonological similarities, it can often be the case that Spanish speakers can positively transfer their morphological/phonological knowledge of Spanish when using English (Derwing & Munro, 2015). For instance, the Spanish translation of the English word “global” is also “global.” Both morphologically and semantically, “global” is the same word in both languages. However, there is a slight difference in pronunciation as the second syllable in Spanish “global” is fully pronounced (i.e., /æɪ/ as in the name “AI”). Despite this difference, it is possible that Spanish-accented English speakers can use the Spanish pronunciation of “global” and still be understood within the context of their remaining utterance as in the following: “*Global* warming increases the occurrence of extreme weather.” Therefore, even if Spanish speakers such as Alejandra do not pronounce words precisely like a native English speaker, the fact that they can produce many of the same phonemes, etc., can make them intelligible/comprehensible.

Nonnative Speech Carries Symbolic Value

Beyond the purely linguistic justifications offered by Alejandra and Martina, the ITAs also relied on *folk* linguistic reasoning to justify the aural acceptability of nonnative speech. As discussed earlier in this thesis, a folk linguistic perspective on accents views them as signs of social identities or characterological traits (Agha, 2003; Cavanaugh, 2005; Dragojevic et al., 2016). While such a perspective is often used to present certain groups of speakers in a negative light, it can also have the opposite function. Indeed, some of the ITAs saw the value of their self-identified nonnative English accents not for their actual intelligibility or comprehensibility, but rather, in terms of the prestige they offer to them as professionals.

In the case of Lana, for example, an accent can act as a resource in establishing oneself as a qualified teacher since it acts as an aural reminder that an ITA has travelled from another country and thus brings unique knowledge and skills for their teaching positions (Yep, 2014). This point became apparent for her in a tweet that she discovered while surfing the Internet one day:

Figure 5—Tweet about the Place of Accent in Academia

تو دنیای علم، انگلیسی رو با لهجه حرف زدن خودش یه نوع برتری حساب میشه

(Mahraz, 2017)

Lana's literal translation: "In the world of science [academia], speaking English with a foreign accent is a [sign of] superiority in itself."

What Lana learned from this tweet was detailed in the following journal entry:

I think my perception of the importance of changing my foreign accent was changed when I read this tweet on Twitter. It said that having an accent in academia could actually be an asset since it shows you're from a different background, you know a lot more things, have experienced different things, and are able to compete and work in the same environment without being any less than native speakers (March 16, 2018).

To summarize, the benefit of having an accent is that it serves as a cue for listeners to remember that ITAs and international instructors in general bring a vast array of cultural wealth and life experiences to the classroom, which are not always available to native speakers. In a way, then, a foreign accent can be used as a transnational resource by ITAs to flaunt their worth as instructors in environments where they might be professionally devalued (Starks, Taylor-Leech, & Willoughby, 2017).

This point seemingly explains Lana's contradictory views on the satisfactory aural aesthetic seen thus far in the chapter. As noted above, Lana expressed the need to sound native in order to be as comprehensible as possible for her native-English-speaking students. But in the event that she cannot accomplish this task, she can always rely on the above tweet as a reminder that her students should value her accented English for its connection to her unique knowledge and experience gained from afar. Yet, what makes Lana embrace this non-deficient view of her English is most likely the *degree* of her accent. In fact, as someone who can already be heard as a native English speaker by individuals like myself, Lana is able to be more forgiving of her accent because she may not be heard as "foreign" in the first place. Therefore, Lana is similar to Martina, who, as mentioned before, is another ITA who accepts her accent due to her ability to minimize its presence.

Whereas Lana perceived a foreign accent as denoting one's worldly knowledge, etc., other participants viewed it as a type of accomplishment. According to them, speaking with an accent signified that one had achieved enough proficiency in an additional language in order to become a teaching professional. For instance, Suzy became aware of this viewpoint during her initial teaching assistant training. She had mentioned that this training did not explicitly focus on accent/language training because of the assumption that she and her international peers had already proven their English proficiency by gaining admission to their university. Moreover, Suzy remembered how one trainer had directed her and the other trainees to an ITA handbook from another Ontario university that emphasized how ITAs should be proud of their accents. Suzy recounted one memorable passage from the handbook regarding this point:

Do **NOT** apologize for the fact that English is your second language. First of all, students will not see this as humility on your part—they will see it as a weakness. Moreover, a lot of native speakers find accents very attractive. In addition, that you are teaching in a second language is a strength: therefore, do not apologize for it [original emphasis] (LeGros, 2009, pp. 104-105).

Leaving aside the problematic notion of native English speakers finding accents attractive, which assumes that native speakers are the natural arbiters on foreign-accented speech and does not consider how all accents are not viewed as similarly attractive, the idea of teaching in a second language being a strength was noteworthy for Suzy. This statement highlights the invisible (i.e., unacknowledged) labour that comes with being an ITA. By communicating with a foreign accent in the classroom, ITAs are not only engaging in the difficult task of helping students understand difficult subject matter, but also doing so in a language that most likely took years to master. In short, speaking with a foreign accent makes one a hard worker by doing both pedagogical and linguistic labour for students. But once again, Suzy's citing of the above passage contradicts her emulation of a native accent for intelligible communication. As seen with Lana, one way that Suzy seems to reconcile this contradiction relates to accentedness. Even though the passage emphasizes to not apologize for an accent, it does not explicitly encourage the maintenance of this accent. For Suzy, then, this advice might be temporal: be proud of a nonnative accent until it can be "improved."

While Suzy and the other participants easily made distinctions between native and nonnative English speakers when articulating what does or does not sound intelligible/comprehensible or have symbolic value, I became uncomfortable noticing that I too accepted these distinctions. For example, when asking Lana if a forced accent does not sound *native*, I upheld the idea of “native” and “nonnative” being objective linguistic categories that can be readily distinguished from one another (e.g., Aneja, 2016a, 2016b). However, although I engaged in this problematic distinction on many occasions during the research process, I frequently tried to disrupt “native speaker” as an apolitical term in the interviews. Specifically, I attempted to explore how the labels of native and nonnative could be tied to race (e.g., Amin, 1997), which is explored in the next section discussing the racial component of a satisfactory aural aesthetic.

The Racial Formations of a Satisfactory Aural Aesthetic

Whiteness Is Aurally Preferable

To better understand how the participants developed their linguistic analyses on sounding right for their work, it is necessary to explore how these analyses came to be racially formed. In fact, the ITAs often expressed how a satisfactory aural aesthetic could be racially determined, which was evidenced by their specific mention of the preferability of Whiteness. One way to appreciate this point is to remember how language is typically used as a proxy for conversations about race and is thus considered a race-neutral topic (e.g., Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Lippi-Green, 2012; Morita-Mullaney, 2018). This is especially seen in the linguistic labelling of individuals. For instance, when Black people are praised for being articulate in a conversation, it is deemed a simple compliment rather than a microaggression indicating that Black individuals are not normally perceived to be well-spoken (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). This example leads to an important point made by Reyes (2016): talking about language involves the “*voicing of figures* [original emphasis]” (p. 310). That is, individuals link language to images of people. Thus, being labelled as “articulate” might mean linguistically resembling a White person, who is deemed to be naturally articulate

(Alim & Smitherman, 2012). In the case of the ITAs of this study, another linguistic category that seemed to be linked to White people was “native English speaker.”

Indeed, while participants such as Suzy and Adeela promoted a so-called native accent for its ability to be automatically understood, they simultaneously connected this accent to White bodies. It is important to note that this linking of nativeness to Whiteness was not usually done overtly, but rather, emerged from assumptions that native accents “coincidentally” originate from majority-White, English-speaking nations (e.g., Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). These assumptions were evident in Suzy’s conception of who could be considered a native speaker of English:

- Suzy: I think native speakers of English are those who were born and raised in some countries whose first language is English.
- Vijay: So it has to be countries where English is the only language or official language? Or could it be countries like the Philippines or India where there are multiple languages as well?
- Suzy: I wouldn’t say official because I know the official language of India is English too. But I won’t say that they are native speakers of English. So I mean countries like in North America or Australia.
- Vijay: So it’s more about only hearing one language in your everyday life?
- Suzy: Yeah.

Based on this exchange, Suzy seemed to be influenced by the ideology of nativeness, a sub-ideology of raciolinguistic ideologies, stating that native English speakers are born in ostensibly monolingual English nations (Dragojevic et al., 2013; Shuck, 2006). Therefore, when I suggested that native English speakers could originate from multilingual nations such as India or the Philippines, she disagreed. What makes Suzy’s definition of native English speakers particularly racialized is how her examples of native-English-speaking countries were all nations where English only became the “native” language through White settler colonialism. Of course, Suzy’s understanding of who can and cannot be a native speaker of English is most likely structured by her prior learning of English through mainly US- and UK-based learning materials,

thereby creating the perception that native English is solely spoken in these areas. Alejandra, another ITA who learned English with the very same materials, also expressed the ideology that only White people can be native English speakers (Shuck, 2006). Surprisingly, however, she overtly made this point.

In fact, when I asked her to clarify how she defined “native English speaker” in one of her journal entries, without any prompts, Alejandra, a Colombian teaching assistant, responded:

Well, I would just say someone who has been here long enough that you can't tell that they have an accent. So the person I would have in mind is like a Caucasian person.

Upon hearing this statement, I was shocked that Alejandra could nonchalantly articulate a connection between a White body and native and “accentless” English (Dragojevic et al., 2013; Shuck, 2006).

However, with further reflection, I came to realize that her nonchalance about making this connection might be explained by the ideology of colourblindness. Although colourblindness often argues that race and racism have no direct bearing on modern society, Bonilla-Silva (2010) mentions that one of the central frames of this ideology is naturalization, which allows potentially racist perceptions, preferences, etc., to be explained away by deeming them descriptions of natural occurrences. In the case of Alejandra, articulating that a native speaker of English is White is simply a casual observation that English is an innate linguistic trait of White people. Just as parents might teach their children that a cat says “Meow” and a cow goes “Moo,” it might be fair to say that a White person naturally speaks English.

Along with the ideology of nativeness, another sub-ideology of raciolinguistic ideologies that seemed to help Alejandra and the other ITAs connect a native speaker accent with the image of a White person was the standard language ideology. That is, varieties of English spoken by White people from majority-White countries are the global standard for all other varieties of the language and thus ideal models for pronunciation (e.g., Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). Yet, because the participants were working in Canada, some of them saw the need to acquire a so-called Standard Canadian accent. Because standard varieties of a language are more abstractions than actual linguistic

phenomena (Trudgill, 1999), I often tried to have participants specifically define a Canadian accent. Much of the time, I received vague answers as seen with Farhad, an Iranian teaching assistant, below:

Vijay: How do you define a Canadian accent again?

Farhad: An accent that is spoken by a majority of people in Canada.

When asked for the detailed aural components of this accent, I often heard the following representative details, in this case from Lei, a French teaching assistant, who stated:

So Canadian accent, I think it's not a very strong accent. It's an understandable accent.... It's like people cannot tell that you have an accent. Even though in English, you have different accents from different places. But I would say that the Canadian accent is very flat when compared to people from the US, Australia, and the UK.... I know that people in Canada have a certain way of saying "out," for example. But it's very different from the Australian accent or UK, which is a very strong accent that you can recognize. So I mean it's my way of describing a neutral sort of flat accent.

Lei's description of the Canadian accent is interesting because although this accent has its distinctive features, it is nevertheless neutral- or flat-sounding in comparison to more globally recognized accents from Australia or the UK. Indeed, Lei's mention of the pronunciation of "out" highlights the phenomenon of Canadian Raising, which describes how vowel sounds are "raised" when appearing before various consonant sounds (Chambers, 1973). Thus, "out" might sound like "oot" for non-Canadian listeners. Despite this unique trait, Lei perceived the Canadian accent as being subtle enough to be "universally" understandable. Among the "White, prestigious varieties" of English, then, the argument goes that Canadian English carries a linguistic advantage.

If I directly asked Lei and Farhad whether they deemed a Canadian accent to be a White accent, they would most likely deny making such a connection. However, remembering that discussions about language involve linking it to images of people (Reyes, 2016), I wondered if their definitions made implicit connections between a Canadian accent and Whiteness. For example, in demographic terms, Farhad's view that a Canadian accent is spoken by *a majority* of people in the country could be in reference to White people since, according to census figures, individuals originating from the British Isles still constitute the

majority of the country (Statistics Canada, 2017). Also, Lei's specific mention of Canadian Raising may highlight the White settler influence on Canadian English. Indeed, even though it cannot be empirically proven, linguists speculate that Canadian Raising originates from the English phonological system of Scottish settlers in the country (Chambers, 2010). Once again, these are only conjectures.

Yet, even if Farhad and Lei do not perceive a Canadian accent as originating from White people, this is not to say that they do not make any connections between this accent and Whiteness. In order to make this point, it is important to examine the main listening audience of these ITAs and consider how Whiteness is not always about embodiment, but also a practice or performance. Although both participants noted the racial diversity of not only their departments and universities but also the city in which they were located, they indicated various differences between the racialized people they encountered. For example, while they determined that their fellow graduate students were born outside Canada and thus considered them as foreign-accented English speakers, Lei and Farhad remarked how teaching mostly undergraduate courses put them in contact with a different type of student as noted by Lei below:

I'll say that [my undergraduate students] are mostly Canadian. They're maybe second-generation because their families could have been here for a long time. So that's why they are Canadian.

The implication of Lei's observation is that by being born to immigrant parents living in the country for a long time, his and Farhad's students speak English with a Canadian accent. If sounding Canadian can make one "non-accented" as mentioned above, it can consequently "neutralize" one's racial/ethnic origins. In a sense, then, despite their appearances, Lei's and Farhad's students are whitened through their speech (e.g., Alim & Smitherman, 2012) and thus become a more homogenous listening audience for these ITAs. As a result, both ITAs may feel the need to homogenize their accents in order to become aurally White like their students. For Farhad, this entails lessening auditory traces of his Iranian identity. In the case of Lei, it means re-emphasizing his embodied Whiteness through his voice.

Lei's promotion of the Canadian accent is perplexing given that his White racial identity and French accent would seemingly allow him to escape the influence of raciolinguistic ideologies that would target his racialized peers like Farhad (e.g., Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010). Therefore, it is important to consider how Lei's endorsement of sounding Canadian is more of a voluntary act than a perceived necessity. One way to explore this point is to acknowledge the fact that language has been used as a tool to ensure the dominance of White people in Canada. As scholars such as Haque (2012) note, the formal recognition of English and French as the official languages of Canada solidified racial hierarchies by having the mother tongues of the two ostensible founders of the country (i.e., the British and French) dominate all aspects of public life, with all others needing to master these languages to fully participate in society. Regarding immigration policy, then, it was often the case that those who most conformed to Anglophone or Francophone culture were believed to be able to fully integrate in Canada, which typically meant Western Europeans (e.g., El-Lahib et al., 2011; Sterzuk, 2015). With regard to foreign accents in particular, this perspective manifests in the perception that Western European accents are readily comprehensible in a Canadian context (Creese, 2010; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Lorente, 2018). For Lei, who never reported any accent discrimination while living in Canada, it was obvious that his French accent coupled with his White body constructed him as a "de facto Canadian." He mentioned this point in a journal entry:

Since French is one of the official languages of Canada, I don't think that a French accent is an unusual or difficult-sounding accent here. I could potentially come from Québec. So I don't have any embarrassment of having a French accent (October 8, 2017).

The implication here is that a French accent, particularly when projected from a White body, is not exactly a *foreign* accent in the Canadian context as it could be linked to one of the "founding races" of the country. Therefore, Lei suggests that even if ITAs cannot acquire a Canadian English accent to become intelligible workers, sounding French can suffice.

The potential advantages offered to European teaching assistants who look and sound like "real Canadians" were also apparent for Navid, an Iranian teaching assistant. As mentioned in Chapter Four,

Navid's minimal accentedness in conjunction with his ability to pass as European have benefitted him professionally while studying in Canada. Specifically, he noted how his appearance and voice could act as additional qualifications for academic positions when he and the competition held almost identical credentials (Ray, 2019). Navid detailed this point in the following narrative where he and another "more-Persian-looking" colleague were both interviewed for a particular position in his department:

I remember me and my friend [going for the same job]. He looks more Persian than I do. Everybody even thinks he looks Arab. So we went to the same interview for the same job with the same qualifications and school for the part-time job. I got the job and he didn't. And the only thing that was different was the look and the manner of pronunciation. Like his pronunciation is more Persian and he's less confident with his English, let's just say.

According to Navid, the professor who refused to hire his friend was making the implicit statement that teaching assistants who more physically and aurally resembled a White person are more qualified for certain positions. Thus, this experience exemplifies how degrees of foreign accent and race can affect one's employability (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). By not looking and sounding like the typical Persian international student, Navid was seemingly deemed more employable than his peer. Taking note of the fact that Navid works in a context where few (if any) of his peers *and* superiors identify as White, it is interesting how the hegemony of Whiteness can still be upheld amid this racial diversity (Walton, 2018). As will be detailed later in this chapter, this can be explained by Navid working in field the engineering, where professional competence is racialized (and gendered).

Because Racialized Accents Are Not Intelligible/Comprehensible

For now, it is important to examine another dimension in how the ITAs perceived Whiteness as aurally preferable for work. Thus far, I have shown how the participants connected Whiteness to a satisfactory aural aesthetic by associating it with the figure of the native English speaker, valuing a so-called Canadian accent, or highlighting how other White nonnative accents can be acceptable for a Canadian working environment. However, it is valuable to consider how the linguistic superiority of

Whiteness can also emerge through evaluations of the linguistic inferiority of nonwhiteness (Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001). In fact, all of the ITAs, with the exception of Lei, made some mention of how others indicated the alleged deviance of their racialized speech, thereby positioning White (native) English speakers as the aural yardstick for intelligibility/comprehensibility. Rather than direct commentary, this indicated deviance was frequently articulated through misunderstandings.

For instance, Fredrick, in the following journal entry, detailed how the phrase “come again” signals his incomprehensibility while teaching in the classroom:

Today, students were constantly saying to me, “Come again?” This signals that they are struggling to understand me.... This “come again” phrase becomes a humiliating moment for me. This is because I have consciously categorized “come again” as a phrase people say when they don’t understand.... This is my perception (March 20, 2018).

Fredrick stated how “come again” was racialized in nature by noting that when students hear the accent of an African teacher like himself, they have to go through a certain process to decipher this accent:

[When I teach a new term, etc., to students,] they want to know the pronunciation of the word first before they ask the meaning of it.... But when a White native speaker says it, they know that the pronunciation is right and just directly ask for the meaning.... But when a nonnative speaker says it, they’re like, “I need to hear him or her again to understand whether or not the pronunciation is correct.... If it’s correct, I know the meaning. Let me ask him or her again. But if it’s not correct, what does it mean?” So there are layers to understanding when a foreign accent is involved in it.

To summarize, when students hear an utterance from a racialized nonnative speaker like Fredrick, they have to pass through various “layers” of intelligibility to understand this utterance. Once they verify that this speaker has given the “correct” pronunciation of a word, then they can inquire about its meaning if it is a specialized term. However, when the same word is pronounced by a White native speaker, the pronunciation layer can be skipped since it is assumed that this individual always provides correct pronunciation. In the end, then, Fredrick highlights how “White native speakers of English are privileged with the illusion that their accents are neutral, standard and natural” (Piller, 2011, p. 132).

When racialized ITAs are perceived to be unintelligible, their professional authority can come to be undermined and even ridiculed. This was the case for Martina, who occasionally became subject to student mockery of her Mexican accent as exemplified in the following incident:

This one time, a group of four students asked me for help because they did not understand a question. I guess two of the ladies in the group were already chatting and laughing.... I started explaining according to what I had studied from the answer key, but expanding a bit more, and at some point, I used a word which was somehow technical.... I heard one lady who I was explaining to saying to her friend, "Is that even a word," which was referring to what I was explaining. And of course, she was laughing.... I was feeling doubtful and insecure.... [I thought] that I used the incorrect word since a native English speaker did not know or recognize it (October 31, 2017).

It is important to note that, upon checking the technical word in an online dictionary after this incident, Martina did use and pronounce the word correctly. Yet, as already seen with Fredrick's discussion of the layers of intelligibility, the student's asking if Martina actually used a real word was an example of someone needing to pass through the layer of pronunciation to determine whether Martina's jargon might have been some kind of mispronounced word.

In raciolinguistic terms, both Martina and Fredrick were linguistically judged by a White listening subject who heard their speech as naturally deviant, even when they might be pronouncing a word in the same manner as a White native speaker (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). With regard to Fredrick, the formation of this listening subject must be understood in the context of the anti-Black racism directed against African immigrants in Canada. Even though many of them have acquired English language capital from a British colonial education in their home countries, African immigrants are often heard as speaking incomprehensible English when situated in Canadian professional spaces where they do not occupy a significant linguistic presence (see Creese, 2010; Creese & Kambere, 2003). As an African immigrant who primarily teaches White, native-English-speaking students and who is one of a handful of international students in his program, then, Fredrick is more likely to encounter instances where listeners are unable/unwilling to understand his accent. The physical and linguistic homogeneity of students can

even undermine those who are able to come close to this homogeneity. Indeed, in the case of Martina, whose body and minimized Mexican accent can often present her as European, it is noteworthy how she experiences similar cases of accent discrimination as Fredrick. To understand this point, it is important to recognize that racialization often goes beyond skin colour. Although Martina may look physically similar to the mostly White, native-English-speaking students in her department, the slight traces of her Mexican accent might reveal her “non-Canadian” origins. In other words, despite being phenotypically White, Martina’s accent can racialize her as a racial Other and thus make her subject to linguistic marginalization in the classroom (e.g., Leeman, 2004). In the end, then, Martina’s linguistic background can make her “darker” for interlocutors and thus allow the White listening subject to target her speech.

However, the White listening subject does not necessarily require an actual White audience in order to form and may actually thrive in more racially heterogeneous environments. Furthermore, it can even be articulated by racialized English speakers who experience accent discrimination themselves. Regarding this point, I was genuinely surprised that while the ITAs told stories of others criticizing their own accents, they simultaneously deprecated the English of their racialized peers. Part of what could explain such criticism is the fact that nearly all of the participants learned English through US- and UK-centred materials, thereby creating the impression that the English from majority-White nations is considered correct and thus intelligible/comprehensible. Moreover, in the case where ITAs are frequently interacting with a variety of racialized English users, this raciolinguistic ideology may come into effect due to the constant exposure to racialized accents. This seems to be the case for Farhad, who, despite teaching mostly Canadian English speakers, engages in regular communication with other racialized international students at the graduate level. Along with his own Iranian voice, Farhad has come to develop fine-grained analyses of his racialized peers’ accents as exemplified by the following linguistic evaluation of the South Asian workers in his department:

I find people who are from countries like Bangladesh or Sri Lanka or some parts of India speak English correctly. They use the best grammar. They use the best vocabulary. But in terms of their accents, most of the time, it's very difficult for me to understand. And I found this difference when I'll listen to them and I cannot understand.

Farhad's description of the English of his peers highlights how he was able to separate intelligibility from comprehensibility (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Derwing & Munro, 2009). That is, by noting that they have the best grammar and vocabulary when using English, Farhad communicated that he actually understood the sophistication of his colleagues' speech. Nevertheless, his critique of their accents signified his difficulty in achieving this understanding. While it seems that Farhad's commentary was fairly nuanced by stating the weaknesses *and* strengths of South Asian English speakers, it is nevertheless a type of White listening subject by being a generalization: the South Asians that Farhad encounters all have similarly incomprehensible accents, without any consideration of possible variation.

Just as Farhad and the other ITAs could easily determine the alleged aural deficiency of their racialized colleagues, they also came under the influence of raciolinguistic ideologies when assessing their own accents. For instance, when asked about what specific features of his Chinese accent interfere with intelligibility, Johnny gave the following example:

I think we Chinese speakers can't speak "think." The TH sound. We have some problems with that.

What makes this critique unreasonable is the fact that not being able to pronounce /θ/ (the TH sound) and other consonant sounds is not necessarily the sole cause of intelligibility issues (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015). Moreover, the problem with this consonant sound is not unique to Chinese speakers given that Lei, a French speaker, also reported difficulty in producing the sound. However, in contrast to Lei, whose French background grants enough social prestige in a Canadian context to offset any listener problems with his pronunciation of /θ/, Chinese speakers like Johnny more likely face harsher judgments on their pronunciation due to the widely-circulated stereotype of Asians being poor communicators in the English language (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Walter, 2007).

It is important to consider how Johnny's promotion of this raciolinguistic ideology with regard to his own speech might be strengthened by the pronunciation advice that he receives from his White English language tutor. Wanting to improve his oral communication in English, Johnny described how he often meets with this tutor to specifically receive feedback on his pronunciation as exemplified below:

[My tutor tells] me that my pronunciation is not good. For example, yesterday, when I first said, "Yesterday," she said my pronunciation was not correct.... She told me that I was missing the syllable in the middle. So I should say, "Yes-ter-day."

Although it is perfectly fine to fully pronounce all three syllables in the word "yesterday," the problem with the tutor's advice is that it does not acknowledge that, at least in British English, for example, people do not stress all of the syllables. That is, the ER in "yesterday" is often pronounced with a schwa (an unstressed vowel sound), thereby sounding like "yes-*tuh*-day." Therefore, from a raciolinguistic perspective, even when Johnny adopted a linguistic practice associated with a privileged variety of English, he was nevertheless perceived to be making a pronunciation error (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

However, Racialized Accents Can Become Aurally Acceptable

While Johnny's interactions with his tutor suggest the possible futility of racialized English speakers changing their speech in order to garner more favourable impressions, the participants nevertheless believed that racialized accents could be heard as comprehensible/intelligible or at least less accented under certain conditions. Most notably, racialized speech could lose its deficient status if it became "de-racialized," that is, made White-sounding (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Carbado & Gulati, 2013). Returning to Johnny, this perception arose from teaching and working with the Indian students in his department. As noted before with Farhad, Indian speakers of English can be intelligible but may be perceived as incomprehensible. However, for Johnny, when compared to the accents of his peers from China and Japan, Indian accents are very comprehensible as well. Below, he explained his reasoning:

When I talk with some Indian students, I think that they are good at English. Compared with another country's students such as Chinese and Japanese, the communication skill or accent is clearer and better.... [I learned] that they use English in their schools [back in India].... So they're similar to native English speakers.

What can be implied from Johnny's observation about Indian English speakers is that the reason why these speakers are good at English is due to the legacy of British colonialism.

Indeed, due to being historical recipients of a British colonial education, which was not available to Chinese and Japanese English speakers (with the notable exception of Hong Kong), Indians may be deemed comprehensible because they have a British-like accent, one that is associated with White people (see Lindemann, 2005). Even though Johnny did not explicitly mention the British, his statement that Indians are *similar to* native English speakers suggests that Indians model their speech after foreign native speakers, which have historically been the British. Furthermore, Johnny's commentary highlights how the specific racial identity of the racialized speaking subject can distort raciolinguistic ideologies. That is, while the White listening subject allows Indian English speakers to be heard as comprehensible, it only does so because they aurally resemble White native speakers. It is important to emphasize here the salience of racial identity in this raciolinguistic evaluation. For example, even though African English speakers like Fredrick also acquired the language through British colonialism, it is interesting that he and other Africans (Creese, 2010; Creese & Kambere, 2003) are rarely, if ever, perceived as understandable. One possible explanation for this relates to how Indians, unlike Africans, are constructed as model minorities in North America: just as they are able to become White-like by achieving educational and economic success, their voices might graduate to White-like comprehensibility as well (Davé, 2013).

Returning to a broader lens, the idea that racialized English speakers can "look White/native" through their linguistic practices stresses how accent can act as a site for racial performances. In fact, through changes in accent, people can consequently lessen the salience of their racial backgrounds (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). This was explored earlier in this thesis with the mention of Roth-Gordon's (2016)

concept of racial malleability, the process in which individuals adopt certain (historically) privileged linguistic practices in order to reduce the stigma of their racial identities. As seen above with Johnny's commentary, Indian English speakers become "less Indian" due to sounding like native speakers of the language. But it is important to note that racial malleability can be intentional and favoured by those who engage in this process. For instance, for the Chinese ITAs of this study, one way to escape the White listening subject that hears Chinese people as poor English speakers is to lessen specific traces of a Chinese accent. Even though this racial malleability does not dismantle the White listening subject, it allows these ITAs to become atypical representatives of their racial/ethnic group.

This point was particularly evident with Zack. As I mentioned when introducing him in Chapter Four, Zack discussed how people's assumptions about the sound of his Chinese-accented English might be overturned when they actually heard him speak. Indeed, Zack viewed himself as the atypical Chinese international student through the changes of his voice over the years:

I've been told that I have a different accent than lots of Chinese international students. And I think that comes with my improved English proficiency.... The tones in Chinese are very different than the tones in English. I had some trouble with [them] before, but now, I'm getting better.... Before I had more of a robotic tone or monotone voice. Now, I'm better at changing that.

Zack's mention of once having a "robotic voice" exemplifies the perceived intonation problems of Chinese speakers of English, which purportedly make them seem disengaged and even emotionless (e.g., Pickering, 2004). While it is common for the accentedness of one's speech to change over time, Zack's possible reasoning for advertising his change of voice can highlight it as an instance of racial malleability. As once again mentioned in Chapter Four, even though Zack had come to embrace his Chinese heritage while living in Canada, he stated that he did not want to be simply viewed as just a *Chinese* student. This desire could possibly be explained by him being one of a very few number of international students in a mostly White, native-English-speaking department, where most of the comments made about his speech

often take place. By sounding “less Chinese” through his voice, then, Zack may want his seniors and colleagues to see him as “less Chinese” as well.

Whereas it can only be implied that Zack favoured sounding less Chinese, this process became more evident with regard to Suzy. Like Zack, Suzy mentioned how she was also seen as a unique Chinese speaker of English by being able to produce sounds deemed difficult for other Chinese speakers. This seemed to please Suzy as evidenced in the following story involving a case of mistaken identity:

Suzy: So there are two Asian girls in our office, but actually, they speak native English because they grew up [in Canada]. So I was talking with other colleagues who come from Iran and they don't know me so much. Somehow, we were talking about English and they said that they thought I was like those Asian girls.

Vijay: So how did you feel when they said that?

Suzy: I felt happy because it meant that I was getting rid of my Chinese accent. I was more like a native speaker of English.

Suzy's reply to my question was interesting because rather than simply state that she was happy to sound like a native English speaker, she prefaced it by stating that her colleagues' comment signified how she had managed to discard her Chinese-accented speech. This point is important as it suggests that sounding like a native English speaker is not some neutral characteristic, but rather, a means to get rid of aural traces of one's racial/ethnic identity. An even more important point to consider is how sounding less Chinese is relational rather than constant. Indeed, it is noteworthy how Suzy was not complimented by the Canadian girls, whom she would characterize as real native English speakers, but rather, by her Iranian peers, who might perceive her accent as more “native-sounding” than their so-called nonnative speech. Thus, becoming a native speaker of English might not be entirely dependent on changes in one's voice; it can simultaneously rely on who hears these changes.

The importance of audience in assessing the Chinese accents of Suzy and the other participants could also be seen in how these accents were occasionally deemed comprehensible on their own merits.

Specifically, Chinese accents did not need to sound native when heard by other Chinese speakers. For example, Suzy mentioned how Chinese-accented ITAs or professors were better understandable for Chinese students as exemplified by the following narrative involving one of her friends:

I have a friend who was here for maybe several months. He was a Chinese exchange student. He told me once they have a professor here who is Chinese too. So the professor speaks English with a Chinese accent. So my friend went to the professor's lecture and when he came back, he told me that he easily understood everything the professor was saying when compared to other professors who were White Canadians.

Suzy's story communicates two interesting messages. First, by noting how her friend did not find White Canadian professors particularly comprehensible, Suzy highlighted how in the realm of intercultural or interracial interactions, accents associated with White bodies are not always understandable (e.g., Lwin & Wee, 1999; Sung, 2013). Second, this is because of homophily: Suzy's friend perceived the professor's accent as comprehensible due to it being similar to his own and thus familiar. Johnny supported the influence of homophily in his everyday interactions with fellow Chinese English speakers:

- Johnny: Most Chinese have some accent that I can recognize in English. When I hear some Chinese speak English, I feel better than when hearing the accents of other countries.
- Vijay: So you understand Chinese-accented English speakers better than other types of foreign accents?
- Johnny: Yes, better than other accents.

What might be perplexing about Johnny's and Suzy's promotion of the aural merits of Chinese accents is how it seemingly contradicts their promotion of sounding native as seen earlier in this chapter. One way to explain this contradiction is to once again emphasize the identities of their listening audience. For instance, while Suzy finds it necessary to develop a native accent to efficiently teach students of *many* language backgrounds, retaining (aspects of) one's Chinese accent could prove beneficial when solely interacting with those who share the same accent, thereby eliminating the need to engage in racial malleability.

From a raciolinguistic perspective, then, the influence of homophily has the ability to diminish the power of the White listening subject, who would normally hear Chinese and other racialized accents as deficient in some manner. In fact, homophily may even create a racialized listening subject that perceives accents associated with White bodies as inferior for communication. But it is important to remember that a racialized listening subject is not the opposing equivalent to the White listening subject. To begin, because the White listening subject is a product of ideologies justifying global White supremacy (Rosa & Flores, 2017), it has the potential to be upheld across a variety of raciolinguistic contexts. In contrast, a racialized listening subject can only be present in *particular* contexts as exemplified by Suzy and Johnny becoming this subject only when discussing the benefits of Chinese accents for Chinese listeners. Also, a racialized listening subject might rely on racial stereotypes in order to come into formation. This point became apparent to me when listening to participants discuss instances where they thought that the accents of their racialized professors were intelligible for them as students.

For example, even though she was one of the ITAs who connected intelligibility to nativeness in English, Adeela mentioned how one of her nonnative-English-speaking professors was intelligible:

I have had professors from East Asia who didn't have a native accent or close to a native accent, but their English was clear; I could understand them.... For example, we took this robotics course with an Asian prof. He didn't have a native accent. But I felt that the way he delivered and structured the course and his pronunciation was very clear. So we never had any issues.

While it may have certainly been the case that the manner in which the professor structured the course was the main factor in Adeela and her fellow (South) Asian peers not experiencing any issues in class, I often thought about whether the fact that the professor taught a robotics course had some influence as well. Sometimes, racialized individuals who are deemed deficient for certain types of work may become ideal employees in other workplace contexts (Rao Hill & Tombs, 2011). Since Asian men are often constructed as ideal workers for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics) fields due to the stereotype of them being naturally adept in such fields (e.g., Alfrey & Twine, 2017), it could be possible that, no matter

his manner of speech, the professor would have been perceived as knowledgeable and helpful (Cargile, 2000).⁴⁰ To summarize, Adeela might have assumed the position of racialized listening subject because of her assumptions of who is “naturally qualified” to teach STEM content.

I managed to explicitly explore this hypothesis with Zack when he was explaining why he had decided to teach the tutorial for a particular course. Even though he is pursuing a degree in the social sciences, Zack had chosen to teach a class on introductory statistics during the period of the study. The reason for this decision was that since statistics involves less discussion and more straightforward delivery of formulas, etc., there would be less opportunities for students to criticize his English pronunciation. When Zack noted that he had not experienced any negative comments or reactions to his accent while teaching the statistics tutorial, I asked him about the possibility that the absence of such criticism might have been connected to any stereotypical assumptions about him as an instructor:

Vijay: I'm thinking about the stereotype of like Chinese people or Asian people in general about being good at math. Since you're maybe living up to that stereotype by being a good teacher, maybe that's why people are not so concerned about your voice? Is that fair to ask?

Zack: That is very interesting. Maybe. I guess there are many ways to answer this. But the one thing that just came to mind is that...my department is one of the departments with the least number of international students. So I think the students in my class haven't encountered a teaching assistant who is a nonnative English speaker. So with the math component, I never considered that until now.

At first glance, the above conversation might be an example of what not to do in qualitative interviewing: coaxing a participant into adopting the viewpoint of the researcher. Indeed, while Zack would have liked to think that his students are satisfied with him due to the actual strength of his teaching, I, through my question, encouraged him to think otherwise. Although he did not definitively agree with the hypothesis

⁴⁰An additional reason for Adeela's acceptance of her professor's accent could relate to how professors garner more professional authority than ITAs on account of being workers with advanced credentials and teaching experience.

about the role of stereotyping in perceptions of him as a teacher, Zack's toying with this idea is noteworthy. By speculating that the students in his department were unlikely to have met a nonnative-speaking teaching assistant before, Zack seemed to imply that, under normal circumstances, they should have had hostile reactions to his Chinese-accented English (e.g., Kang, 2012; Kang et al., 2015; Plakans, 1997). Yet, by stating that he never considered the math stereotype before the time of my question, Zack seemed to suggest that this could explain their unusual behaviour. That is, the "unsaid" component of Zack's small story (Todorova, 2007) was that students who might disfavour a Chinese accent due to lack of exposure may change their minds if the accent "matches" the disciplinary context in which it is heard. This notion of an accent needing to correspond to one's work in order to be perceived as intelligible/comprehensible leads to the professional stories that the ITAs told about a satisfactory aural aesthetic.

A Satisfactory Aural Aesthetic within Professions and Organizations

One Needs an Accent that Matches the Work (Culture)

In fact, the participants perceived foreign accents as needing to conform to how work is performed in their professions or their disciplinary cultures. Because half of the sample consisted of engineering students, I particularly came to understand how accent could be a constitutive element in being a respected engineer. Before exploring this point, it is important to note how professions contain communicative repertoires to which workers of all language backgrounds may conform (Canagarajah, 2017). In the case of engineering, engineers, as highlighted in Chapter Two, are expected to be proficient in various professional communicative genres ranging from public speaking to conducting meetings and, furthermore, must be able to construct their messages within these genres in an efficient, precise manner (Darling & Dannels, 2003). Therefore, engineering is often interested in capturing vital information in the form of keywords or phrases, for example.

According to the engineering participants, an accent can occasionally hinder the processing of this vital information. This point was referenced by Navid, who described instances where the intelligence of professors could be undermined by their accented speech. One such example is detailed below:

When I arrived in Canada, I had a course with a Chinese professor during my first semester. He pronounced “left-*hand*-side” as “left-*kand*-side,” and it took me two sessions to understand what he meant by that and finally make sense of the theory he was explaining on the board.

In order to understand Navid’s complaint, it is worthwhile to re-emphasize how the culture of engineering influenced his perception. If engineers favour clear, exact communication, then Navid’s preoccupation with “left-*hand*-side” might be explained by his need to obtain information as quickly as possible. What is further interesting about this example is how, from a raciolinguistic perspective, the communicative context of engineering both diminishes and exacerbates the White listening subject. Indeed, Navid’s concern about the professor pronouncing the /h/ in “hand” as /k/ suggests how the White listening subject in engineering is not interested in hearing the suprasegmental features of foreign-accented speech, but rather, focuses on minute details (such as consonant sounds) that seemingly interfere with communication. This might be explained by observations that STEM workers prefer to immediately deal with unknown variables when listening to an argument, etc., rather than being comfortable in not knowing (Tobias, 1990). Yet, while the White listening subject is diminished in this regard, it is also strengthened in the sense that it can become hypervigilant by scrutinizing *every word or phrase* uttered by racialized engineering professionals.

Along with formal teaching and learning contexts, this enhanced White listening subject can also be prevalent in everyday communications between engineers. For instance, Adeela provided a humorous story about one of her colleagues to explain this point:

Adeela: This is a funny experience from one of my labmates. Farsi is his primary language; pronouncing complicated English words are difficult for him. Once our supervisor emailed telling us he got pneumonia and is taking the week off. So my friend wanted to tell our friends from the other lab about the email. He tried very hard to remember the word and ending up saying very seriously that our supervisor is down with nunuma.

Vijay: So even though this story isn't serious, does it still teach you anything about the professional consequences of mispronouncing words?

Adeela: I wouldn't understand my friend. I would think there was a new disease that I don't know about.

Once again, Adeela highlighted how the mispronunciation of a single word can have a detrimental effect on the entirety of one's message. As Adeela noted, by hearing "nunuma," she would have thought that there was a brand-new disease out in the world. But what was particularly interesting about this narrative was how a Farsi accent made a serious situation into a humorous one. A racialized accent is often a source for comedy (e.g., Antony, 2013; Casillas et al., 2018; Davé, 2013), and in the case of Adeela's story, it was used as a juxtaposition against the seriousness of the message: although her colleague was using a serious tone, his nonnative pronunciation made him sound comedic.

As detailed above, the stories from Adeela and Navid highlight how the communication norms of engineering can make racialized accents segmentally deficient and thus implicitly require these accents to become "de-racialized" at the phonemic level. It is noteworthy how this de-racialization of speech can be necessary even amid the racial and linguistic diversity that both ITAs encounter on a daily basis. Indeed, as already highlighted in Navid's story about how he received a position on account of his White appearance and voice, Whiteness can continue to act as the default for what is considered professional in a diverse work setting (Ray, 2019; Walton, 2018). Therefore, even though there can be racial heterogeneity among engineers, the verbal norms of engineering can nevertheless dictate racial homogeneity in terms of accent (albeit in a limited manner). However, foreign accents in engineering may not be heard as deficient purely in a racial sense, but also in terms of gender. To understand this claim, it is necessary to recognize that the communication style of engineering reflects the androcentric nature of the profession.

Beyond the simple fact that it is a male-dominated field, engineering, as mentioned in the third chapter, upholds a male normative culture on account of this numerical dominance. What was understated, however, is how this masculinizing of engineering culture is done through the gendering of certain aspects

of the field. As discussed in Chapter Two, particular behaviours, traits, etc., are arbitrarily divided into a male-female binary, which is based on cultural conventions in (Western) society (Cameron, 2000; Holmes, 2014; Ochs, 1992). In the case of engineering, its emphasis on “a mechanistic worldview, the control of nature, and [its] privileging of ‘cool’ mathematical reasoning over inexact humanistic knowledge” (Jorgensen, 2002, p. 351) has been culturally associated with “male characteristics,” no doubt fueled by histories of men being the ones allowed to work in areas like construction and technology where such characteristics are valued (e.g., Faulkner, 2000). In terms of oral communication, Adeela particularly corroborated these points by noting the ways in which people talk in different disciplines:

So whenever I talk to a person from an engineering background, they tend to talk more facts and points and don't put their own personal feelings in it. But I have had friends in the psychology department, for instance, and I feel when they talk, they have to make sure that they add their own perspective, their own thoughts. For me, sometimes the story becomes long. So I feel that difference regardless of gender.

The fact that Adeela explicitly mentioned how the communication style of engineers remains the same no matter how they are gendered highlights the insidiousness of masculinity in engineering. When speaking in a direct, impersonal manner (which can be understood as a reflection of the “cool reasoning” of engineering and thus coded as masculine behaviour as noted above) is considered standard practice, it can lose its gendered meaning on account of *everyone* needing to use it (Acker, 1990; William et al., 2012). Therefore, Adeela could be comfortable in making the above observation because she was stating a job duty rather than an oppressive gendered performance (McElhinny, 1998). To summarize, Adeela does not associate a technical communication style with being gendered, but rather, a discipline or profession.

However, even if female engineers like Adeela readily adopt covertly male linguistic behaviour in order to do engineering properly (Jorgensen, 2002; Seron et al., 2018), this is not to say that they will be easily accepted as respected professionals, especially if they are racialized. Indeed, given that White men often hold the most institutional/symbolic power in engineering, racialized women, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, might need to navigate an intersectional hierarchy in which they must deal with

racism, sexism, nativism, ageism, and other systems of oppression in order to fit in as engineers (e.g., Dutta, 2016; Seron et al., 2018).⁴¹ For Jasmine, whose Egyptian accent and hijab subject her to Orientalist perceptions of her being a meek, oppressed, and perpetually foreign (Hasan, 2005; Said, 1978), this intersectional oppression is regularly made apparent to her as a young Muslim woman. In particular, she experiences this oppression on the first day of a tutorial where she has to immediately fight against negative perceptions of her embodied deficiencies as an engineering professional:

I think the hardest part for me is the first hour of the first day of a tutorial where I have to prove myself as an instructor. My appearance, gender, age, and language all put me at a disadvantage when compared to a White male native speaker of English. I face a lot of student disrespect on the first day. So I have to work hard and use a tough tone to gain respect.

Jasmine's need to use a tough tone of voice is in stark contrast to her fellow racialized male colleagues and professors, who can still garner respect no matter the quality of their speech:

Like Egyptian males, they have automatic authority. For example, they could just glance at students to get them to listen. They don't have to worry about modifying their accents, etc. Because they're male, they can speak any way that they want and still get respect.... But for me, I need to be louder and deeper in my voice to get some respect.

What is interesting about Jasmine's observation is how gender embodiment seemingly relieves one of engaging in active gender performance. That is, according to Jasmine, since her Egyptian peers, as males, naturally embody professional authority, they do not need to engage in explicit vocal behaviour to establish this authority (such as using a deeper tone of voice). This echoes research on how men in leadership roles can engage in various communication styles (including those considered to be stereotypically feminine) without sacrificing the respect they receive from workers (see Holmes, 2014). Yet, in the case of Jasmine who does not automatically embody authority, she must establish this authority by developing a style of speech that is congruent with the alleged *qualities* indexed by a male body. In other words, if authority and

⁴¹This is not to say that male engineers never experience this intersectional oppression. However, Faulkner (2009) notes how the hegemonic (White) *masculinity* in engineering cultures better accepts the presence of alternate masculinities (albeit holding subordinate status) than different types of femininity.

toughness are associated with male bodies, then other bodies can acquire these traits through other semiotic resources such as a lower-pitched voice, which also communicates authority and thus becomes associated with “maleness” (e.g., Martín-Santana et al., 2015).

However, as noted in Chapter Two, pitch is not entirely independent from perceptions of gendered bodies in that women are expected to have a higher-pitched voice than men (Martín-Santana et al., 2015; Podesva & Kajino, 2014). This may be especially problematic in the engineering workplace, which was particularly noted by Adeela. Along with being subject to jokes about female engineers being more interested in shopping and cooking than actual engineering topics, Adeela often encounters joking comments about how the alleged “screechiness” of her Indian accent can be off-putting for her male colleagues. She detailed this point in the following small story:

My lab members did comment that my accent is so high-pitched. And they always make fun of me. Like they always make fun of how they should record the frequency of my voice because it is so high-pitched and stuff. So that’s something I got commented on by my lab members.

Even though it cannot be empirically demonstrated whether or not Adeela really has a high-pitched accent, it is important to consider that her male colleagues are critiquing not some objective auditory trait, but rather, providing ideological commentary on the status of racialized women in engineering (Inoue, 2006). Indeed, from a raciolinguistic perspective, the above jokes about Adeela’s speech could be the result of a White *male* listening subject that hears the voices of racialized female engineers as perpetually deviant due to the notion that they should not be in an engineering environment in the first place. That is, because they already do not conform to the ideal figure of the White male engineer, any additional “faults” of racialized women such as a foreign accent are heard as additional evidence of why they are (linguistically) failed engineering professionals.

The White male listening subject is not only an ideological position taken up by actual White male engineers and, furthermore, does not solely criticize the speech of their female counterparts. In fact, male

engineers may also feel pressured to uphold the hegemonic masculinity of engineering through the management of their accents. This pressure may stem from the folk linguistic idea that accents carry certain characterological traits (Cavanaugh, 2005; Dragojevic et al., 2016). Because of the social meanings ascribed to his Farsi accent, Navid is particularly aware of this point. When discussing the phonological influence of Farsi on his English, Navid mentioned how the former language creates a “melodic” intonation for the latter language. This intonation could also make him sound more French- or European-sounding on certain occasions (e.g., Eisenclas & Tsurutani, 2011). However, rather than garner him extra prestige, Navid noted that his intonation is often deemed particularly feminine for two reasons. First, given that varied intonation patterns are ideologically imagined to be projected from female bodies, which was mentioned in Chapter Two, the implication is that men who display the same intonation can be understood as “sounding feminine” and thus deviating from their gender (Calder, 2019; Podesva & Kajino, 2014). Furthermore, since the masculinized culture of engineering workplaces can quickly turn heteronormative in terms of the acceptability of homophobic joking (see Faulkner, 2009), any speech deemed feminine can also be perceived as “gay-sounding” (Podesva & Kajino, 2014).

Indeed, Navid’s accent constructs him as gay, which often results in awkward encounters with colleagues. This is exemplified in the following interaction between him and a female international student:

[I was working with a girl from Afghanistan] and she heard me talking to another person in the room. When I finished that conversation with the other person, she told me, “When you speak, it sounds very feminine. I always think you’re a gay guy.” This one particular incident I remember because we were working for a year or two together and every time she made the same comment. So what can I do? I can’t fix it.

What is noteworthy here is not only how the White male listening subject can be internalized by females, but also, how a satisfactory aural aesthetic for ITAs extends beyond actual teaching and other formal duties. That is, even when engaging in semi-private conversations, male engineers are expected to “sound male” for any outside audience. For Navid, failure to live up to this expectation has consequences.

For instance, sounding gay can result in social ostracism and ridicule. In fact, Navid described how his intonation seems to specifically repel his male engineering colleagues:

[My intonation] definitely has an effect in the way that more masculine people tend not to hang out with you.... What I notice is that it is assumed that you're not as masculine and people don't want to hang out with someone who is not as masculine.... I felt like it has affected my friendships in certain ways.... Like I can be excluded from conversations about sports, cars, drinks, etc. Sometimes, people may mock my accent in a girly way or make it look like I am less or not as masculine or manly as I should be.

As seen above, a foreign accent, particularly in the context of engineering, is not simply a matter of comprehensibility or intelligibility in the traditionally linguistic sense. Instead, what makes someone comprehensible/intelligible is the degree to which they aurally match expectations of the social culture of engineering. When someone does not sound masculine enough, others may struggle to understand how they can still engage in stereotypically male conversational topics with this person. Even though Navid has attained advanced proficiency in English and is thus easily comprehensible and intelligible in the linguistic sense, his inability to neutralize the so-called feminine quality of his voice results in his continued incomprehensibility, manifested in sexist/homophobic comments, in the masculinized realm of engineering. In other words, his Farsi-accented English erects an auditory barrier that prevents others from hearing beyond its perceived feminine quality. To conclude, it is important to consider how the feminization of Navid's accent is the result of the White male listening subject being influenced by Orientalist histories. In Orientalist views of the Middle East (and the rest of Asia), its inhabitants were constructed as weak and effeminate when juxtaposed with the masculinized dominance of the West (Hasan, 2005; Said, 1978). Since engineering workplaces uphold the figure of the White male as the ideal engineer as noted above (e.g., Dutta, 2016; Seron et al., 2018), this figure can perpetuate Orientalist perceptions by being the yardstick to measure the masculinity of racialized men. In terms of accent, then, if a "non-melodic" intonation is thought to be a part of White masculinity in engineering, racialized men who stray from this suprasegmental feature can reinforce the "femininity" that they embody under an Orientalist lens.

While the field of engineering has the potential to dictate specific demands in relation to sounding right for the workplace, this is not to say that other academic disciplines do not promote their own requirements. Indeed, in the case of Lana, who is Iranian, being situated in the social sciences can make her accent a relevant feature of her job duties. Lana noted that in contrast to engineering, which favours the delivery of precise, straightforward information, the social sciences allow for extended communication (see Tobias, 1990). This is because social scientists have the goal of convincing others about their ideas, which often requires more than a single utterance. For Lana, who needs to engage in extended dialogue with students during tutorials, an accent can influence the quality of her convincing. This point was mentioned earlier in this chapter where Lana stated that the perceived foreignness of an accent could signal a person's worldly knowledge (and thus can make others accept the arguments being conveyed by this person). However, when describing the specific topics on which she must convince students, Lana seemed to loosen her embrace of "sounding foreign." One example of this loosening is detailed here:

In general, [with regard to] the convincing part of teaching [and the connection with my accent], it depends on the topic of discussion. When it's something not about you, like imagine that we're discussing something about Canadian society and you have this accent, it obviously shows that you're not from Canada. And then you're supposed to convince people of your opinion and they might not take you seriously when compared to a Canadian [teaching assistant].

According to Lana, then, the consequence of having a non-Canadian accent is that one cannot be a credible teacher when speaking on topics internal to a country like Canada. In other words, speaking about a Canadian topic requires a "Canadian" accent. The logic behind such a perspective seems outlandish given that speaking about topics specific to particular nations would require a continuous changing of accent. Yet Lana's perception can be better explained by considering her listening audience once again. As mentioned before, being the only self-identified international, nonnative-English-speaking student in her department means that Lana exclusively interacts with native English speakers who are Canadian and, not to mention, mostly White. Due to this linguistic and racial homogeneity, Lana's Iranian accent can further

racialize her as foreign to the Canadian nation (Davé, 2013; Lippi-Green, 1994) and thus unaware of its inner workings, etc. Therefore, Lana's desire to sound "more native" as mentioned near the beginning of this chapter is not simply about comprehensibility, but also, based on a need to be seen as a convincing conveyer of information on so-called insider topics.

Another ITA who perceived accent as relevant to her work was Patricia, albeit in a very specific manner. Throughout the research process, Patricia expressed insecurity over her Latin-American-Spanish-accented English by sharing stories of how it was perceived as too fast and thus incomprehensible. This purported problem with her accent is especially pronounced when needing to give lectures, a common teaching activity for her education teaching assistantship. Since a lecture requires the clarity of speech and content in order to be considered effective, an accent that is heard as fast-sounding will make the lecture difficult to understand and therefore hurts its overall message. Patricia made note of this issue below:

[When you give a lecture,] you want to show [the students] that you are reliable in what you're saying, you deliver it well, and it's supported by research. But the way they look at me when I speak, it makes me question my competence. Like they are looking at me because I speak fast or in a weird way for them. [My accent diminishes] the content that I'm saying. But's there no relation [between the two]. I mean, the way you speak is the way you speak, and this does not relate to the content or ideas that [you're conveying]. But they do get related when giving a lecture. When one is broken [like my accent], the other [the content] will be broken as well.

What Patricia articulated above is how accent becomes connected to professionalism (here, understood as a synonym for competence) in teaching (e.g., Baratta, 2017; Lippi-Green, 2012). Even though she acknowledged that the manner of speech has no direct bearing on the content of speech, Patricia still believed that students use the "incomprehensible" pace of her voice to determine the "incomprehensibility" of the information that she conveys through lecturing. In explaining this issue, Patricia communicated that in order to be an effective lecturer, she needs to lessen the speed of her Spanish accent.

An Accent Does Not Harm One's Professional Capacities

Just as an accent can become a vital component in justifying one's presence in a profession or completing specific tasks as seen with Patricia and Lana, it can also be deemed irrelevant in these areas. In fact, many of the ITAs emphasized that foreign accents do not need to be heard and hence scrutinized because they have no direct relationship with the work that they do as instructors. For these ITAs, the satisfactory aural aesthetic is a "non-accent," something that is not heard since it is not needed. Perhaps the most vocal proponent of this perception was Martina, who adamantly refuted the connection between her own Mexican accent and professional competence.

Indeed, throughout the research process, Martina repeated the following mantra-like statement: "accent does not determine competence." She repeated this statement in her journal and interviews due to her experience attending graduate school in Europe, which was further explained in this journal entry:

I wanted to write first about the differences between grad school in Europe vs. Canada because the statement about "accent doesn't determine one's competence" is very linked to it. Since I did [my first graduate degree] in Europe, where all courses and discussions with supervisors were in English, I was able to experience very different ways of teaching with people from very distinct countries. Some professors had a great English accent and were fluent while giving lectures. However, others were not, but this did not make them less competent in what they were teaching. As long as the content, words, and explanations were accurate, I realized that the accent was not important. In fact, I think it's better to focus only on the content while teaching (November 6, 2017).

It is interesting how Martina's narrative is in stark contrast to that of Patricia in the previous sub-section.

Whereas Patricia speculated that students will link an incomprehensible accent to incomprehensible content in a lecture, Martina explicitly contradicted this point by stating how she could separate the quality of her professors' accents from the content that they were conveying. One possible way to explain these contrasting narratives is to consider disciplinary context. That is, specifically working in the field of science may make Martina (and others in the field) less concerned about accent due to the popular idea that doing good science is not dependent on the (linguistic) identity of the scientist (Wells, 2013). This valuing of substance was seen in Martina's reflection about attending international science conferences:

Also going to international science conferences makes it so clear that accent does not really matter as long as you...know what you're talking about.... I do feel scientists are very patient and not picky at all about [accents] (November 18, 2017).

Therefore, according to Martina, scientists will have relaxed expectations on the sound of an ITA's accent as they remain focused on listening for the delivery of scientific knowledge.

The influence of academic discipline in the promotion of a non-accent was unexpectedly articulated by select engineering participants as well. As discussed above, engineering culture can dictate highly specific manners of speech. Yet, certain engineers may be able to bypass and/or manipulate the meanings of these linguistic norms to reaffirm the idea that their accents do not require any modification. Take Farhad as an example. As a self-identified male, Farhad would not have to engage in vocal tasks to establish his authority in the classroom as expressed earlier by Jasmine. Moreover, as a Farsi-accented English speaker who has not been accused of sounding feminine (unlike Navid), he can ignore the androcentric aural norms that permeate engineering. Last, regarding the promotion of precise oral communication in the field, Farhad seemed to use this communication style to justify the nonimportance of his accent. This is seen when he discussed the differing language requirements for various academic programs in his university:

- Vijay: So you were talking about how in engineering, you can get away with using limited vocabulary. Like you can speak very little.
- Farhad: Yes. There is a difference between engineering and the humanities or social sciences. So people studying like economics or literature have to use a broader type of vocabulary. But in engineering, we're just using a couple of words between colleagues and can understand each other.
- Vijay: So you feel accent is not a big issue when compared to these programs?
- Farhad: Yeah, language doesn't have that influence as in other disciplines. In other programs, the minimum English language requirement is 7 in IELTS [*International English Language Testing System: an assessment test for international students wanting to study in English-medium higher education institutions*], but in engineering, it can be 6 or 6.5.

Farhad's mention of students needing a lower IELTS score to gain entrance into engineering programs reflects a general trend in which nonnative-English-speaking undergraduate students, who feel insecure

about their English, choose majors in STEM fields in order to avoid using the language extensively. If engineers do not need to converse much with each other in English, then there would likely be little scrutiny of a seemingly minor thing such as a foreign accent. It is important to note how Farhad's promotion of a non-accent here can coexist with his desire to sound "more Canadian," which was detailed earlier.

When promoting a so-called Canadian accent, Farhad deemed it a satisfactory aural aesthetic because it matched the accent of his Canadian students. Because these students have a rudimentary knowledge of engineering, there would seemingly be more oral communication on the part of Farhad in order to help them better understand specific topics, thereby requiring the maintenance of a Canadian accent for this extended dialogue. However, when Farhad noted that little dialogue happens between *colleagues*, individuals such as graduate students and professors who have advanced knowledge of the field like himself, the implication is that an accent is less scrutinized because these people only need finite information to further a conversation. To summarize, then, Farhad can have a Canadian *and* non-accent because each is used with different audiences of varying engineering knowledge.

As exemplified with Farhad, the amount of oral communication in engineering can make an accent irrelevant in particular interactions. Beyond the amount, the actual content of communication can have an impact as well. For instance, since engineering heavily relies on mathematics, Alejandra described how engineers can articulate important information through numbers rather than extensive conversation:

I think that the advantage with engineers is that you don't really have to argue because it's all numbers. And numbers are like a universal language. Like we can say straightforward things like x is 5, etc. So accent doesn't really interfere with this.

For Alejandra, then, because numbers are universally known to engineers, verbalizing mathematical formulas, etc., with a particular accent will not hinder the understanding of an utterance. What might explain Alejandra's embrace of this view is her own Spanish-influenced accent. As detailed earlier in this chapter, being a Spanish-accented speaker of English could be advantageous because, in contrast to those who do not speak a Romance language, one can draw on phonological features from Spanish that are also used in

English, thereby increasing the likelihood of being perceived as intelligible/comprehensible for other English users. Therefore, Alejandra's promotion of math rendering accent almost meaningless may be dependent on the actual accentedness of engineers and their language background. This point is only speculative and it is also important to mention that Alejandra's perception was strengthened by the fact that numerical communication is also done through writing, which eliminates the need to speak in the first place. This point leads to another dimension of the insignificance of accent.

As the focus of this thesis concerns the accented voices of ITAs, it may mislead the reader into believing that accent is the sole tool in establishing oneself as an effective instructor. However, it is vital to remember that ITAs can rely on multimodal communication practices to deliver important information to students. For instance, rather than speak all of the time and worry about his Chinese accent, Johnny stated that he preferred to write down class instructions on the board in order to avoid misunderstandings. Furthermore, given that his job duties require him to work with computers, Johnny often noted how he could use the computers as well as gesture in order to help students find solutions to specific problems:

[My course deals with] computer networks and programs. So most of the students are using a computer in class. In the computer lab, they will me ask questions about lab project problems. So [instead of explaining the answer] to them, I can go to their computer screens and point to things. I can also make a demo for them or just show them how to do certain things.

Based on this description, Johnny has multiple resources to aid in his teaching aside from his voice. By pointing to things on a computer screen and giving physical demonstrations on how to do tasks, he can ensure that his students have the necessary information to successfully complete the course. While thus being similar to Alejandra in articulating the nonimportance of accent in his work, it is important to consider how Johnny's reasoning for such a perception might differ. Indeed, whereas Alejandra viewed accent as "irrelevant" when communicating in math due to others possibly perceiving her Spanish accent as adequately understandable, Johnny might have understood the irrelevance of accent as a result of needing to mitigate negative perceptions of his own accent. As discussed before, Johnny, as a Chinese English

speaker, would find it difficult to completely escape raciolinguistic ideologies that position Asians as less understandable than Europeans (e.g., Lippi-Green, 2012). Thus, possibly recognizing that changing his accent would not dismantle the White listening subject, Johnny might have to resort to nonverbal means to complete tasks, which would lead to the realization that accent does not prevent the doing of work.

This idea that the White listening subject can be dismantled or at least mitigated with nonverbal actions on the part of ITAs was certainly applicable to how Fredrick described the insignificance of accent in his workplace. Because his speech is often perceived as unintelligible in his mostly White classes, which was described earlier, Fredrick understood that his African accent would position him as an unfit instructor. But much of my time with Fredrick made me recognize that he was not willing to accept this situation. In fact, throughout the research process, he was quite vocal in explaining that ITAs need to take initiative in combatting any negative framings of their language. For Fredrick, one method in doing so is to distract students from his accent by highlighting the various positive qualities that he offers as a teacher. One of these qualities was empathy, which is exemplified in the following story:

I had an instance where I was teaching and everybody was like quiet. And I asked some questions and everybody was still quiet. And I'm 100% sure that they knew it. So I'm like, "Okay guys, let's debrief. What's going on?" They were like, "Fredrick, they're killing us with so much work." You know, in their mind, they want to be in the class, but what is happening around them in the program is not okay for them. So they went on, "Fredrick, could you believe that we're coming from so and so class to this one?! And from here, we're rushing to so and so class." So you see, I studied their body language and took a few minutes to talk about what their problems were and how to solve them. Then, they were better able to understand my lecture. But if an ITA did not take notice of their problems, they might just continue teaching and the students might complain that they didn't understand anything after class. But when I stopped the class, it gave me authority over them. It made them understand that I have some empathy in their academic career. So it gave them more trust in me, and we had more rapport. So even if I have an accent, they might ignore it because I actually put myself in their shoes and understand what they're going through.

Fredrick's stopping of his lecture is a reminder that ITAs not only perform aesthetic labour; they may need to perform emotional labour as well. In fact, by spending a few minutes to understand the academic issues of his students, Fredrick seemed to engage in what Hochschild (2003) would call deep acting, that is, trying

to feel the actual exhaustion and frustration of his learners. Through his empathy, Fredrick believed that he could potentially make his accent “inaudible.” Indeed, students may be willing to dismiss their prior racist notions of his African accent if they know that he genuinely cares for their well-being.

Betsy echoed this feeling when I asked her whether her Mexican accent affected her relationships with students. For her, being on the side of students could override any hostile opinions about her accent:

I actually don't think that my accent can influence the kind of relationship that [I have with students]. I don't think that being a good [teaching assistant] and giving the students a good learning experience are related to accent at all.... I think it has been more about showing yourself like available for them, willing to provide help, or other things.... So like I remind them about deadlines for assignments and do stuff that shows them that I'm attentive to their needs. So they feel like they can approach me. They know I'm supportive of them.... So because of that, I think to be human is more important than the accent.

The idea that “being human” is more significant than foreign accent with regard to being a good teaching assistant highlights how qualifications are displayed through actions rather than vocalized. That is, Betsy does not need to portray herself as a supportive professional through changes to her accent, but rather, show her support by actually being cognizant of student needs. Once again, competence is emotional in nature instead of purely linguistic. It is important to note, however, that Betsy can embrace this viewpoint on account of teaching in a more racially and linguistically diverse environment than Fredrick. If Betsy and her students all have stigmatized accents constructed as foreign to Canada, then the latter should be able to move past the former's voice and appreciate the care and attention that she offers as a teacher.

The Heterogeneity of Accents Is Valued in Internationalizing Institutions in Canada

If ITAs like Fredrick and Betsy believe that their accents have no bearing on their professional worth, then their unstated assumption is that their speech does not need to conform to any specific standard. In fact, other participants seemed to openly embrace the idea that a heterogeneous accent can be a satisfactory aural aesthetic, especially when considering their institutional contexts. Specifically, due to the internationalization efforts of their respective universities that increased the number of racially and

linguistically diverse international students (Baker, 2016; Guo & Chase, 2011; Guo & Guo, 2017; Sterzuk, 2015), many participants came to understand that they should not be insecure about or feel the need to change their foreign accents as these accents matched those of their students. Indeed, according to the ITAs, there was no point in modifying an accent that could easily be heard in multiple areas of their field of study or generally promoted by their respective universities. Thus, having a so-called diverse accent could make an ITA the aural norm, not the exception, in an institution.

What was interesting about this perception was how the participants came to develop it during the research process. Perhaps the most noticeable example of this trend was Patricia, who, despite telling numerous stories of feeling self-conscious when speaking in front of a class (as exemplified earlier), came to realize through her journaling that she should not feel insecure about her Latin American accent given that the majority of her students were self-identified foreign-accented English speakers as well:

After the first interview and after seeing the topics for reflection, I couldn't stop thinking that I should be more in the "resistance" part of the spectrum. Why accent should be a matter of concern while performing as a [teaching assistant], you were right. Maybe 80% of the students in class are from different places and their accents are so different. So actually, in a way, I am not that different from them because we all speak English in our own way, right? And there are so many different ways of speaking English in a sense.... So I should feel comfortable with my accent and with the way I speak English (October 7, 2017).

In this journal entry, Patricia seemed to address the "primordial" debate within the field of linguistics and language studies more generally: prescription versus description. Whereas the former entails establishing rules for language use, the latter involves describing what people actually do with language (e.g., Cameron, 1995; Mooney & Evans, 2015). By noting that her students speak English in their own way as well as stating that there are various ways to speak the language, Patricia aligned herself with a descriptive view of accent, which would argue that there is no one correct manner of pronunciation for any language.

Despite being shielded from linguistic insecurity on account of his French accent (and White body) as well as mostly teaching students with so-called Canadian accents, Lei also took notice of this descriptive view by connecting it to the organizational identity of his university, especially with regard to how it helps to

linguistically integrate international students as a whole. Lei articulated this point when describing a workshop he attended where pronunciation questions were raised:

[I attended some workshops on grammar and writing for international students]. But in these workshops, a lot of people had concerns about how we should pronounce certain words. Typically, for example, do you say “often” with the T sound or “ofen” with no T? And it was interesting because the teacher was just trying to present the idea that there are different ways of saying things in English in different countries. But it was not saying that you, as an international student, should change your accent. It was more like we say different words in different ways.... I don’t know if it’s just this teacher or maybe like there’s an internal discussion or internal expectation where the university is trying to say, “We have to be open and be diverse.”

It is important to note that Lei’s speculation that the teacher’s comments were the result of some covert diversity policy was made in his overall observation of how his university actively promotes the diversity of its international students and the ways in which it supports them. If the teacher’s comments were official institutional policy, it is praiseworthy since linguistic diversity is frequently neglected in organizational diversity statements (Leone-Pizzighella & Rymes, 2018), and, moreover, it counters programs such as Dalhousie University’s accent reduction services, which, as mentioned before, view such diversity as inherently problematic. However, as Ahmed (2012) notes, the typical problem with diversity policies is that, under neoliberal regimes, they are simply meant to generate a happy atmosphere in which marginalized people are supposed to feel welcomed in an institution without addressing the deep-seated inequalities that structure the institution. Therefore, when Lei’s teacher or even Patricia proclaim that there are equally valid ways to pronounce various words in English, they are neglecting the fact that racism and other intersecting forms of institutional oppression can construct the English of particular international students as flawed and in need of correction (El-Lahib et al., 2011; Sterzuk, 2015). This issue highlights that while embracing the diversity of accents is a seemingly admirable action, it might entail the erasure of the oppressive responses to this linguistic diversity.

Another factor that may contribute to this erasure is the country in which a university is situated. Indeed, many of the participants discussed how being in Canada made them appreciate the notion that

there was no one way for ITAs to sound right for work. Even though there has been previous mention of how the Whiteness of the Canadian nation is upheld by such things as the favouring of English (and French) for public life, the country's adoption of multiculturalism as official policy has seemingly transformed it from a White settler into a "diverse" nation (Haque, 2012; Thobani, 2007). In fact, as Thobani (2007) states, "the adoption of multiculturalism enabled the nation's self-presentation on the global stage as urbane, cosmopolitan, and at the cutting edge of promoting racial and ethnic tolerance among western nations" (p. 144). This multicultural character of Canada has even sparked debates on whether there is even such a thing as a Canadian national identity. When it comes to perceptions of foreign accents, then, there can be increased tolerance for them in a Canadian context as detailed by Jasmine, who, as an Egyptian Muslim woman who experienced overt Islamophobia during her graduate studies in Europe, was appreciative of the seeming lack of a "majority culture" in Canada:

In terms of race, etc., since Canada is a multicultural society, there is an understanding that everyone has origins from somewhere else. There's no original Canadian. I think that this mindset of multiculturalism is what makes Canadians more tolerant of other foreign-accented people than say Europeans.

The implication of there being no original Canadian is that there is no original Canadian accent. Thus, the reason why Canadians are tolerant of foreign accents might be because they have no clear conception of what a Canadian should sound like. What is noteworthy about Jasmine's view on accent in a Canadian context is how much it differs from that of Farhad and Lei, who felt that there was a Canadian accent that should be emulated in the classroom. The best method to understand this difference is to look at their listening audiences once again. As noted earlier, even though they taught racially diverse classes, Farhad and Lei stated that their students spoke with "Canadian accents" (on account of being born in the country) and thus would have the ability to implicitly pressure them to sound "more Canadian."⁴² Yet, in her teaching

⁴²It is important to remember that Lei can also embrace aural heterogeneity by ignoring his teaching context and examining how his university handles linguistic diversity. Lei's French identity might explain his noticing of this point: since he could come from Québec, his accent might be heard as "Canadian" and thus already acceptable.

context where the vast majority of her students could be labelled racialized nonnative English speakers like herself, Jasmine might not have the opportunity to hear an “original Canadian accent” on a regular basis and would therefore feel less obliged to adopt such an accent. Therefore, it is important not to dismiss how a Canadian multicultural mindset can develop through simply hearing and seeing linguistic and racial diversity in one’s daily environment (Suspitsyna, 2013).

This was certainly the case for Betsy, who, as noted in the previous sub-section, also teaches linguistically and racially diverse classes and expressed her (continued) amazement of the diversity that is found in her current university, which is exemplified in the following narrative:

Coming from [a country in Latin America] that has a contrasting composition of population when compared to Canada [and this city], I was really surprised and glad of what I found at [my current university]. [This university] is very diverse. I can see it in the halls, in the department I am enrolled in, in my tutorials, etc. I get to hear a vast variety of accents. I think that this experience in a diverse environment makes me feel that I am actually free to speak the way I do, without hiding my accent. I had this professor, originally from Ghana. The course with him was my first encounter with the diversity I am referring to. It was during my first semester. Seeing him teaching in English with a strong Ghanaian accent was for me beautiful and inspiring regarding the way he has kept his accent after so many years of being in Canada. One of the morals from this experience: not needing to pretend to have a different accent. Later on, as I got more involved in the department, I got to meet other people and their accents, from India, from China, from Colombia, from Turkey. In general, these sounds tell me that accent is not a problem or obstacle for a teaching professional [at this university] (December, 18, 2017).

Betsy’s journal entry is very similar to that of Patricia in the sense that hearing the diversity of foreign accents in her program/university/Canada signals the unnecessariness of changing one’s own accent for teaching. But what is noteworthy about this entry is Betsy’s mention of her Ghanaian professor. By being inspired by the fact that this professor maintained his accent while living in Canada, Betsy suggested that people naturally embraced his accent. One issue with this romanticized view is that it could perpetuate the notion that the multicultural Canadian state accepts everyone for who they are without consideration of how inequalities can persist in even racially diverse environments (e.g., Nast & Pulido, 2000; Suspitsyna, 2013). In fact, Betsy neglected the possibility that her professor received student and/or colleague critique about

his manner of speech. However, it is equally important to consider that, while it is perhaps romanticized, Betsy's perception is completely logical. By seeing a Ghanaian speaker of English occupy the prestigious position of professor in spite of his racialized accent, it is perfectly understandable for Betsy to believe that her own accent as a TA is satisfactory for work (note how this is a similar point made with regard to Martina and her Spanish-accented professor on page 145). If her professor can teach her without any seeming resistance, then this is adequate evidence for her own views.

Concluding Narrative

This chapter sought to explore ITAs' perceptions of a satisfactory accent for working in various Ontario universities, either in the form of their direct observations of phenomena or their opinions on what might sound right for the workplace. As detailed above, these perceptions took the form of three meta-narratives that provided linguistic, racial, and professional/organizational descriptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic. In a general sense, these interrelated meta-narratives highlighted how the participants promoted both aural homogeneity and heterogeneity. For example, their linguistic stories detailed how they should homogenize their voices by attempting to sound like a native speaker of English or promoted the diverse phonology of their accents by highlighting the merits of nonnative speech. This dichotomous thinking extended to their racial narratives in which developing a satisfactory accent entailed striving for Whiteness or retaining the racialized character of one's speech. Finally, as recently explored, their professional stories either articulated how accents need or do not need to conform to work (cultures). However, when looking at these narratives in greater detail, it becomes evident that the ITAs offer more complex perspectives on accent than the simple promotion of homogeneity or heterogeneity.

To begin, it is important to remember that, more often than not, they do not subscribe to a single aural aesthetic. That is, an accent can fluctuate on a daily basis, which can be explained by the fact that people enact different "storylines" when describing their lives (Davies & Harré, 1990). In fact, as seen

throughout this chapter, depending on the story that they narrate, the ITAs can arrive at different conclusions about accent, thereby creating a “situated accent” for every story they narrate. Take Jasmine as just one example of this point. In the previous sub-section, Jasmine noted how working in a *Canadian* institution, with its consequent raciolinguistic diversity, allows for the retention of one’s original accent. Yet, when talking about herself as a Muslim woman working in the specifically androcentric field of engineering, she emphasized the need to modify her voice to aurally align with this work culture. Therefore, by specifying herself and the context in which she works, Jasmine can contradict her prior notions on the ITA voice. What is additionally noteworthy about this shifting focus on context is its impact on an accent itself. For instance, when he explained the importance of precise communication in engineering through his story of his professor mispronouncing “left-hand-side,” Navid implicitly articulated how ITA accents only need to be modified at the segmental level. However, when describing his continued estrangement from male colleagues, he suggested that, with regard to the establishment of social relationships, engineering may also scrutinize suprasegmental features, which might be deemed to contribute to a “feminine-sounding” voice. In the case of Navid, then, the different purposes of communication in engineering (e.g., transactional and relational) can require fairly distinct changes in one’s accented speech.

While situatedness creates multiple and conflicting stories about a satisfactory accent, it is possible that seemingly disparate narratives can be interrelated. This can be seen with an ITA like Lana, who strives to sound more like a native English speaker but also believes that the foreignness of her accent can represent her worldly knowledge. As discussed above, these conflicting perceptions can coexist because they are developed in response to teaching in a mostly White, native-English-speaking department. In particular, both perceptions can act as survival strategies in a potentially hostile work environment: in order to garner respect from students, Lana can either try to sound “more native” to become more aurally familiar or emphasize her current accent as a means to highlight her qualifications as a teacher. This kind of identity work might also apply to Martina, who, while experiencing heightened student critique about her

accent as exemplified in the “is-that-even-a-word” story, could use the idea that science does not care about accent in order to justify her aural presence in the classroom.

In exploring these differing yet complimentary perceptions of sounding right, it is important to remember that they are derived from “situated knowledges” (e.g., Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). That is, when ITAs such as Martina and Lana develop perceptions about satisfactory aural aesthetics, they are using their own social locations and experiences to create such perceptions. Therefore, when they play with the idea of not needing to change their accents, this must be understood in the context of their ability to minimize their accentedness, thereby making students and others perceive them as already intelligible or comprehensible. Along with linguistic background, the social location of race has certainly influenced how ITAs come to understand satisfactory aural aesthetics. For example, whereas a participant such as Lei might view his accent as readily acceptable for a Canadian higher education workplace because he aurally and visually resembles the stereotypically White (French) Canadian and thus has not been subject to overt accent discrimination, an ITA like Johnny may see his Chinese-accented English as unsuitable for teaching due to explicit mentions about its flaws when compared to the English of a native speaker.

What needs to be stressed here is that the reader should not be concerned whether Johnny’s and the other participants’ perceptions of accent are objectively accurate or generalizable. Indeed, I do not suggest that Johnny’s Chinese accent would naturally cause communication difficulties, for instance. What does need to be emphasized, however, is how the ITAs relied on ideology to evaluate their and others’ speech. In fact, as discussed throughout this chapter, they often used raciolinguistic ideologies, along with their sub-ideologies, to (implicitly) create a racial hierarchy of accents. A striking feature of this use of raciolinguistic ideologies was the ease in which they were articulated. For example, while Alejandra perceived the link between nativeness in English and White people as a natural fact (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), Zack seemed comfortable in describing his voice as once being monotone, without considering how he may have adopted external perceptions of his speech. As mentioned before, these articulations were most

likely made possible by the notion that discussions about language or accent can be neatly separated from conversations about race (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Lippi-Green, 2012; Morita-Mullaney, 2018).

However, an important reminder is that raciolinguistic ideologies do not always operate in a deterministic fashion. Indeed, the ITAs' narratives highlighted how these ideologies can be distorted and/or diluted in certain contexts. Indian accents, for instance, can subvert the ear of the White listening subject by being "British-sounding" (Lindemann, 2005). Moreover, being located in a racially and linguistically diverse university environment may even make the White listening subject disappear due to the perception that this diversity signals a seeming acceptance of all manners of speech. Yet, in order for this to happen, it is often necessary to draw on other master narratives. For example, those ITAs who stated that the multicultural character of the Canadian nation (and by extension, Canadian universities) disrupted the linguistic hegemony of Whiteness adopted an apolitical view of Canada representing a mosaic of cultures. In other words, this diminishing of the White listening subject relied on the adoption of an alternate narrative, a national narrative that touts the diverse identities of Canadians yet neglects to fully address underlying power relations in the nation (Creese, 2018).⁴³

Returning to the general idea that the diversity of the internationalizing university leads to the acceptance of all types of accents, it remains valuable to remember that this acceptance is not stable. In fact, amid this diversity, people can nevertheless engage in "habits of Whiteness," everyday orientations or practices that uphold the material and symbolic dominance of White people (Walton, 2018). For instance, even though he works in a racially and linguistically diverse department, Navid noted how those who "look and sound White" are seen as more employable as detailed in his narrative. Also, despite working with

⁴³Although it was not explicitly discussed during interviews, etc., one likely reason why the ITAs embraced this narrative concerns how Canada markets itself as an ideal destination for higher education. Perhaps through such things as promotional materials distributed in their home countries, international students may come to see Canada as a haven to study, where their racial and linguistic presence would not be under scrutiny. Indeed, many of the participants noted this point when mentioning their reasons for choosing Canada over a country like the US, which, given its contemporary political climate, seemed to be unwelcoming to all foreigners.

fellow international students on a daily basis which would seemingly increase his tolerance of all foreign-accented speech, Farhad, as exemplified in his description of South Asian English speakers, can continue to evaluate these speakers on implicit White aural norms. To summarize, these examples highlight how Whiteness can be upheld in spite of the absence or minimal presence of White people.

In order to better understand this upholding of Whiteness, it is important to consider the idea that the raciolinguistic diversity of a department or university in general can present a type of “disorder.” That is, having to understand and be understood by a range of aurally unfamiliar speakers might be chaotic in the sense of needing to specifically match the auditory expectations of every interlocutor. Therefore, to manage this “auditory chaos,” emulating or (implicitly) expecting others to emulate a White accent, coded in such terms as “native speaker accent,” can provide “linguistic order” since it is something perceived to be understandable for everyone, which might be explained by prior learning experiences as noted by ITAs such as Suzy. Remembering that these learning experiences of ITAs are made possible by the (neo)colonial history of the English language (e.g., Motha, 2014), their embrace of Whiteness can reproduce colonial relations in the classroom in terms of promoting a White governing force, in the form of accent, to bring formerly colonized people into some linguistic uniformity.

The implication of Whiteness being upheld in primarily racialized settings is that ITAs can articulate the same or similar narratives about satisfactory aural aesthetics despite being situated in different professional contexts. For instance, while an ITA like Fredrick can understand that a White native speaker of English is seen as an intelligible figure on account of being a Black instructor in a mostly White classroom, participants such as Suzy could communicate the same point by taking note of how “sounding native” is an efficient means to simultaneously communicate with students of varying linguistic backgrounds, who have learned English by emulating the speech of White native speakers in the form of learning materials, a point just mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

At this point, the reader may wonder how Suzy and the other participants could be certain that their notions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic are actually effective. As mentioned before, I do not argue that the ITAs' perceptions are objective truths. However, there is the problem of how their perceptions have the possibility of conflicting with accent research. For example, using the case of Suzy once again, her belief that sounding like a native English speaker increases her intelligibility for fellow international students conflicts with studies that highlight how a so-called native speaker accent is not always intelligible in intercultural interactions and, furthermore, ignores how intelligibility is dependent on the specific context of an interaction (see Bayyurt, 2018). Because this study did not utilize participant observation, there is no way to confirm whether or not the ITAs' perceptions of accent are indeed valid. But an important reason to raise this issue is that it leads to the idea that ITAs' conceptualization of aesthetic labour might not exactly match their execution of it. That is, while an ITA might proclaim that sounding like a native English speaker is a satisfactory aural aesthetic, they may find that it is easier to resort to other (linguistic) means when engaging in their actual work practices. Such discrepancies are explored in the penultimate chapter, which examines how the ITAs incorporate perceived aural aesthetics into their professional activities.

Chapter Six: The Narrative Incorporation of Aural Aesthetics into Professional Practices

Whereas the last chapter addressed the first research question of this study by exploring the international teaching assistants' (ITAs') perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic for work, this chapter answers the second research question: *to what extent do they incorporate this perceived aesthetic into their professional practices?* There are several points to note before answering this question. First, by using the phrase "professional practices," I not only detail ITAs' actual teaching in classrooms, but also such items as their self-presentation strategies, teaching philosophies, or how they choose to interact with colleagues. Therefore, on many occasions, the reader will notice that the participants do not provide straightforward descriptions of their practices, but rather, implicitly detail them through further perceptions of themselves and/or their professional contexts. Another point to remember is that by exploring the *extent* to which ITAs incorporate an aural aesthetic into their practices, I am suggesting that there are a range of ways in which an ITA interacts with a specific aesthetic. For example, their professional practices may completely embrace or resist a particular aesthetic, operate on the middle ground between two positions, or even occupy both positions at the same time.

Because only representative narratives were used to detail perceived aural aesthetics in the previous chapter, it is also important to note that the discussion of particular ITAs' professional practices might not neatly connect to what they said in Chapter Five. Thus, in this chapter, it is sometimes the case that one participant's practices might be in response to another's perception of an accent. This simply reflects that while one ITA might have provided a better narrative to exemplify the social cognition of the rest of the participants, another narrative from a different ITA worked as a clearer exemplar when detailing professional practices. Beyond this decision, one final point to note here concerns the nature of the stories being told. Instead of offering some grand, exhaustive narrative of how they conduct themselves as education workers, the rest of this chapter provides glimpses into ITAs' professional identities through the telling of small stories.

These stories are grouped into descriptions of two general practices: working *on* accent and working *around* accent. Working on accent refers to how the participants (intend to) modify (their) accented speech and encompasses learning about and monitoring (their) accents, identity management through the use of accent, and the creation of “dynamic” accents. In contrast, working around accent concerns how they perform work duties without the need for accent modification, which includes bringing up the topic of their accents with students, making themselves understood beyond the use of voice, and simply ignoring the alleged importance of accent in their professional lives. While I have divided the main practices of the participants into these various sub-practices, there is certainly overlap between them, which will be highlighted throughout the chapter. Moreover, it is worthwhile to take note of what these practices might suggest about how universities can facilitate the professional development of ITAs in general. In fact, while the participants seem to reproduce current approaches to training ITAs, they also articulate nuanced resistance against these approaches as well as offer alternative forms of training. To address all of the above points, representative stories are presented below.

Working on Accent

Learning and Monitoring

Because they did not receive formal, long-term professional development opportunities, which was mentioned in Chapter Four, the participants often detailed how they relied on informal learning to develop their skills as teaching assistants. In the case of their accents, this learning mostly took the form of asking their peers for pronunciation advice. For instance, in describing how she linguistically prepared for her classes, Jasmine noted that she sought the advice of a particular type of person when needing to use a specialized term during her tutorial sessions, which is exemplified in the following:

One time, I had this word that I couldn't pronounce. It was “azimuth.” So I got a native-English-speaking friend to tell me the correct pronunciation. Sometimes, you need to

check with trusted native speakers because there are some national or cultural differences in pronouncing words. I don't trust the pronunciation from Google Translate [brief laugh].

What is interesting about this narrative is how Jasmine both contested and reaffirmed ideologies about language. First, by joking about her distrust of Google Translate, an Internet application that not only provides acontextual translations of words and phrases but also provides their pronunciation, she refuted the neoliberal view of language being devoid of any cultural meaning as well as a standardized tool for communication (Heller, 2010; Heller & Duchêne, 2012). That is, language use is never neutral, but rather, inflected by the sociocultural context in which one is situated. However, in advancing this view, Jasmine relied on standard language and nativeness ideologies. That is, by checking with “*trusted* native speakers” for “the *correct* pronunciation” of words, Jasmine reinforced the notion that native speakers in an English-speaking nation are the natural arbiters on what constitutes proper-sounding speech (e.g., Lippi-Green, 2012). This sentiment contradicts Jasmine’s earlier-expressed perception of how the multicultural character of Canada embraces the heterogeneity of foreign accents (like her Egyptian accent) in universities. Also, it better aligns with the narrative of native speakers being naturally understandable, which was articulated by other ITAs in the previous chapter. While it is simple to conclude that Jasmine betrays her own views on accent when learning pronunciation, an alternative is to offer a more nuanced analysis.

Even though she values native speaker input on the right pronunciation of words, it is significant to note that Jasmine only seems to be interested in the native pronunciation of *words*. Indeed, like the other engineers of this study, Jasmine seems to find nativeness relevant in the segmental realm, possibly because this is where she needs to convey important information. This point is seen in her example of “azimuth” (a type of geometric measurement), which would be a technical term that students would need to know in her field of engineering. In the end, then, the “azimuth” story represents how Jasmine might embrace nativeness in her professional practices in a limited manner. Based on the above narrative,

sounding native for engineering does not relate to the suprasegmental features of pronunciation and may allow Jasmine to uphold the idea that she can mostly retain the unique features of her accent in Canada.

As a fellow engineer, Adeela was also concerned with the precision of pronunciation. This was already seen in the last chapter with her story about her colleague mispronouncing “pneumonia,” which suggested that an accent needs to be “de-racialized” at the segmental level in order to ensure that vital information is immediately communicated. However, in contrast to Jasmine, who explicitly noted how she learns segmental pronunciation, Adeela detailed her learning and enactment of new pronunciation through more covert means. In fact, it was often the case that she revealed the accent she wishes to use as an aesthetic labourer by using anecdotes of how she discovered the pronunciation of a particular term. For instance, this is exemplified in the following journal entry that detailed how she had seemingly mispronounced a technical term for an entire semester:

This is something that happened this winter 2017 term for [a course on control systems]. When I did the controls course as a student, I was in [the Middle East] and most of my teachers or profs were Arab and nonnative English speakers. In particular, my controls prof was Egyptian. We studied a topic in this course, which is called “bode plots.” Now my prof pronounced it always as “body plots,” and I picked up that pronunciation. After that, I never came across this topic until I had to teach controls this semester (winter 2017) and once before (winter 2015). I had a question about a problem, so I went to discuss it with another teaching assistant, who laughed at my pronunciation of “body plot.” He, [a native English speaker], said it was “bode” like “toad.” I was shocked because for the entire winter 2015 controls course, I kept telling the students “body plots,” and no one corrected me (April 2017).

Through this telling of the ostensible error that she made as a teacher, Adeela positioned herself as someone who takes note of this error and no longer repeats it. In this positioning, she seemed to align herself with the standard language ideology, the raciolinguistic sub-ideology stating that there is a single correct variety of a language with all other varieties considered deviant and unequal (Dragojevic et al., 2013; Lippi-Green, 1994, 2012; Milroy, 2001; Milroy & Milroy, 1999; Weber, 2015). However, as noted before, what is considered standard depends on the identity of the speaker and place. Therefore, when

Adeela implied that there could only be one pronunciation of “bode plots,” it was no mistake that she mentioned the origins of her mispronunciation of the term.

Indeed, in the orientation near the beginning of her story, which provided necessary background information to understand the narrative (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1997), Adeela gave the reason why she had mispronounced “bode plots”: she had picked up the extra vowel sound from her Egyptian, nonnative-English-speaking professor. The purpose of this orientation was to seemingly highlight the assumption that (racialized) nonnative speakers speak a nonstandard variety of English (e.g., Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). For the record, however, it is important to note that the professor’s pronunciation of the term actually matched its historical origins (Wikipedia contributors, 2018). Therefore, when confronted with laughter about her alleged mispronunciation, Adeela became a White listening subject who automatically believed that her racialized professor had always used the wrong pronunciation of the term (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). By using the intensified adjective “shocked” to describe her feelings upon this alleged discovery, Adeela indicated a strong desire to abandon what she had linguistically learned from her professor.

Thus far, it might seem that the bode plots story serves as a firm example of how Adeela embraces her perception of an accent needing to be segmentally “de-racialized” for engineering. However, it is important to consider that, at least initially, she was not entirely committed to this viewpoint. When she noted that she had been saying “body plots” for the entire 2015 winter term, this might suggest that she was not self-conscious about her manner of speech when starting to work in Canada. That is, she did not ask her colleagues or professors how to “correctly” pronounce the term before she started using it in the classroom. In other words, then, Adeela held enough trust in her professor to use his pronunciation without question in a new national environment (which, of course, is understandable given that people have to rely on their existing linguistic repertoires when needing to speak in new contexts). With no one correcting her pronunciation, this trust remained intact until the above-mentioned incident.

Despite this nuance, it is important to note how Adeela is similar to an ITA like Jasmine in terms of professional practice. Whether it is the deliberate learning of Jasmine or the incidental learning of Adeela, both participants' stories involved them taking up the advice of a so-called native speaker of English. Although their professional contexts certainly qualify the amount of advice they utilize (i.e., engineering only requires the "correct" pronunciation of specialized terms), they still perceived themselves to benefit from the expertise of a native speaker. Furthermore, their informal learning somewhat echoes the training provided by such universities as Dalhousie, which, as mentioned before, strives to neutralize the raciolinguistic difference of ITAs in order to make them sound "more native" for a Canadian academic workplace. It is thus interesting to explore how this seemingly mutual endorsement of accent reduction can occur.

One way to engage in such an exploration is to look at how (and why) the participants monitor their accents. Upon learning any particular aspect of pronunciation, carefully monitoring one's speech ensures that this learning is retained. This was certainly applicable for Betsy as seen in the following narrative of her encounter with an English language trainer at her current university:

Even though I only visited the centre for ESL [English as a Second Language] once during my first semester in Canada (fall 2016), it was a milestone for me in the sense that it helped me to gain confidence in the level of English I already had. The individual session I had was very useful because the [native-English-speaking] woman who gave me the session pinpointed some of the things I could improve on while speaking in English. She explained to me (and it was then I learned to realize) that Spanish speakers tend to turn down the volume of our voice when finishing sentences in Spanish. She made me realize that I do the same when speaking in English. From that moment onwards, I started to notice the moments when I would do that and I would try to improve by keeping (or even accentuating) the volume of my voice when finishing sentences. [I also learned] that in order to speak in a way that can be more intelligible to my audience, I need to slow the pace of my pronunciation down and that I have to...open my mouth widely, for instance, in a more marked way. Every time I have my tutorials, I remind myself of these tips that I have found useful (November 27, 2017).

In a follow-up interview where we talked about this entry, Betsy informed me that the specific reason why her brief time at the ESL centre improved her confidence as an English speaker was that the trainer believed that her English was already advanced. Despite this praise, it is interesting how the unsaid details

of this story (Todorova, 2007) positioned Betsy as still in need of training. Indeed, Betsy's mention that the trainer "pinpointed" possible improvements to her English highlighted that she needed to *search* for any deficiencies in Betsy's proficient speech. This pinpointing suggested that while Betsy had the linguistic competence to be a teaching assistant, she could still work on the suprasegmental style of her voice.

While there is not enough information in the narrative to test the validity of the trainer's advice to Betsy, what seems to be problematic, from an outside perspective, was how she framed Betsy's pronunciation problems. That is, by perceiving the volume issues of Betsy's voice as not a unique fault but as a trait of all Spanish speakers, the trainer failed to recognize that speakers of a language do not necessarily speak the language in a uniform manner (Eckert, 1996; Rymes, 2014). Therefore, at the risk of being overly polemic, advising Betsy to speak louder, slow down, and further open her mouth could be seen as an attempt to encourage her to "lose" her Spanish linguistic identity. What was further interesting was how Betsy's adoption of these tips seemed to be a result of "pedagogical interpellation." Through the use of such phrases as "she explained to me (and then I learned to realize)" and "she made me realize," Betsy indicated that she had no knowledge of her pronunciation issues until the trainer "hailed" these problems onto her (Althusser, 1971). Yet, it is important to remember that the positive tone of her story highlights how Betsy welcomed this new awareness of her speech, which paradoxically conflicts with her previous views on (her) foreign accent.

Indeed, in relation to her perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic in Chapter Five, Betsy's self-monitoring of her mouth and voice moves away from her prior notions of an accent being unnecessary for teaching or not needing to change in the context of the internationalizing Canadian university. Perhaps one way to make sense of this contradiction is to consider the compromises that Betsy must make to teach racially and linguistically diverse students. For example, similar to how Suzy believed that emulating a native English speaker is the most efficient means to be intelligible for a wide array of international students in the last chapter, Betsy might come to understand that, although all types of accents should be valued in

an ideal world, she needs to diminish traces of her Spanish accent in order to actually communicate in the classroom. To summarize, what might push Betsy away from her own perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic is a pragmatic need to be heard as intelligible. This need may thus sway Betsy toward taking an accent reduction course that teaches her to be uniformly understood by any English speaker. But in contrast to Adeela and Jasmine, whose academic discipline of engineering allows them to minutely reduce their accentedness on the lexical level, Betsy would seemingly desire suprasegmental reduction (as evidenced by her concern over the pace and volume of her voice).

Whereas Betsy might seek out external assistance from an ESL trainer to help her monitor her own accentedness, other ITAs implicitly expressed how they themselves could take on the role of monitoring the accents of their peers on certain occasions. Most likely due to his advanced proficiency in English as well as his “greatly reduced” Iranian accent, for example, Navid described how his friends and colleagues requested that he correct any errors that they make in English. While he felt pride in becoming a linguistic mentor, Navid also noted how he can use this role as a reminder not to make the same pronunciation errors as his peers. In a way, then, his aesthetic labour intimately involves the aesthetic supervision of his and others’ speech. However, in describing his role as an aesthetic supervisor, Navid positioned himself, in raciolinguistic terms, as a White listening subject. One instance of this is detailed below:

Today, one of my colleagues was asking me the difference between “hell” and “hail” and how the two are pronounced. The challenge started when I picked on his accent for pronouncing various words. For example, he pronounced “strawberry” as “shrawberry” and, at first, I didn’t understand what he said. My intention was and is to help those around me to better communicate in English, to the extent I can. My colleague is from Panama, but he looks very Indian and also has a strong, Indian-sounding accent. Ever since, he asks me for the correct pronunciation of words he does not know in order to improve his pronunciation game (June 8, 2017).

Through sharing this narrative, Navid positioned himself as someone who is dedicated to and concerned about his colleagues’ linguistic well-being. In fact, by specifying that his intention “was and is” to help others

better communicate in English “to the extent he could,” Navid wanted to emphasize how his role as an aesthetic supervisor is ongoing and demanding, respectively.

But in highlighting his dedication to his peers, Navid simultaneously drew on a master narrative of Indian people being naturally incomprehensible English speakers (e.g., Mirchandani, 2012; Ramjattan, 2018). From a raciolinguistic perspective, Navid insinuated that by looking Indian, his peer consequently adopted a “strong” (here meaning “incomprehensible”) Indian accent (Zarate, 2018). Therefore, the basis on which Navid judged his colleague’s accent was not objective linguistic criteria, but rather, his physical/aural resemblance to another racial/ethnic group (Rosa, 2019). What must be emphasized, however, is how Navid’s denigration of his peer’s accent was not holistic in nature. That is, his misunderstanding of “shrawberry” signalled how Indian-sounding speech only causes segmental issues, which, once again, could be explained by how the communicative culture of engineering values precise and specific verbal information. Thus, Navid’s aesthetic supervision of his colleagues reinforces his perception of accents needing to be segmentally “de-racialized” in order to be heard as sufficiently intelligible or comprehensible for the context of engineering. As similarly discussed with Jasmine and Adeela, then, Navid might endorse accent reduction training where engineers can learn to monitor each other’s foreign accents when needing to talk in a precise manner.

Doing Identity Work

The communicative culture of engineering can further require accent training that is also gendered in nature. That is, as detailed in the previous chapter, engineering culture not only constructs a White listening subject that hears the “natural deficiency” of racialized accents in terms of segmental features of pronunciation, but also creates a White *male* listening subject that perceives anyone who does not match the figure of a White male engineer as aurally deviant. While all of the engineering participants (with the possible exception of Lei) did not entirely match this figure, it was seen how Navid, Adeela, and Jasmine

particularly experienced the White male listening subject phenomenon due to the specific gendering of their racial identities. Thus, when detailing more of their professional practices, these three ITAs described how they manipulate their voices as a form of identity work to better match their professional environments. Beginning with Navid, it quickly became evident how the context of engineering requires him to become a so-called White male *speaking* subject.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Navid stated that the “melodic” intonation of his Iranian accent could construct him as too “feminine” or “gay-sounding” for the White androcentric engineering workplace, an environment that can indirectly reproduce the Orientalist binary of “masculine West” and “feminine East.” Therefore, his Middle Eastern voice becomes an aesthetic device that inscribes sexual/gendered meaning to his entire racialized identity (Bridges, 2014). When Navid detailed this information during our interviews, I did not have the impression that he was particularly bothered by the critique of his accent. Yet, in other parts of our interviews where androcentric engineering culture was not the topic of conversation, I saw glimpses of Navid’s desire to sound more masculine. For example, when I asked the generic question of whether he had a linguistic role model when conversing in a professional setting, Navid replied:

I would usually imagine how a masculine Hollywood actor (as shown in action movies and TV shows) talks and acts. And I believe that is what subconsciously influences me in the way I try to talk in an environment that I don’t feel comfortable.

By stating how he is subconsciously influenced by the (vocal) performance of a masculine Hollywood actor, a figure who is presumably White due to Hollywood being a majority-White institution (e.g., Jenks, 2017), Navid implied that he desires to become a White male speaking subject. Therefore, it is possible that Navid’s experiences of being mocked by his peers as detailed in the last chapter may have interpellated him as a worker needing to aurally conform to the masculine engineering workplace. Navid’s mention that he inadvertently tries to sound more masculine in environments in which he feels uncomfortable most likely served as an allusion to this point. Once again, Navid’s natural inclination to sound more masculine does

not signal a need to be comprehensible/intelligible in the traditional sense. Rather, comprehensibility or intelligibility is a matter of aurally matching an occupational culture performatively.

Although Navid did not discuss what exactly constituted a masculine Hollywood voice, his previous mention of his accent sounding “melodic” most likely indicated that he attempts to achieve a “flatter” intonation. For Adeela, a masculinized accent was clearly connected to a deeper tone of voice that racialized women like herself did not naturally possess. In Chapter Five, I discussed how Adeela’s male lab members made fun of her seemingly high-pitched accent. When describing her academic transition from the Middle East to Canada, Adeela seemed to be concerned about this perceived aspect of her accent in relation to her professional authority in the engineering classroom:

[Doing a teaching assistantship in the Middle East] was very different than here [in Canada]. When I came here, I was nervous since I came from an all-girls university. And now, I’m in the engineering department, which is mainly guys. I initially felt that they wouldn’t listen to me because I’m a girl teaching assistant and I don’t know how to deepen my voice.... It’s about the level of my tone. If the lab gets too noisy, I can’t get them in control because my voice is not loud enough.

What is theoretically interesting about this narrative is how Adeela discursively naturalized her status and aural deficiency in her new Canadian working environment. It has been noted how (racialized) female engineers may help to perpetuate (White) male hegemony in the engineering field by changing their own outlooks or behaviour “to fit in” rather than question structural inequalities (e.g., Seron et al., 2018). Indeed, according to Adeela, she was the one who needed to adapt to her new surroundings. This is particularly seen in how she stated her lack of knowledge in deepening her voice. By saying, “I don’t *know how to* deepen my voice” instead of something like, “I am expected to deepen my voice,” Adeela communicated a belief that making a voice sound “more masculine” is simply a part of the procedural knowledge needed to be an engineer rather than an ideological task. Thus, her mention of being unable to control her lab due to the lack of pitch in her voice can be understood as an instance of failing to acquire procedural knowledge. In advocating this point, Adeela’s narrative upholds the master narrative that women engineers can only

thrive in the field by becoming as “male-like” as possible (Jorgensen, 2002). If they experience hardships, it is not due to gender inequality, but rather, to their own failings as professionals (Jorgensen, 2002; Seron et al., 2018). By upholding this narrative, Adeela constructed herself as an instructor who closely aligns with her prior discussion of how her accent is inadequate for teaching mostly male engineers.

Rather than imply that she desires to deepen the tone of her Egyptian voice, Jasmine often described how she actually does this linguistic task specifically for the engineering classroom. As explored in Chapter Five, the deep voice that Jasmine perceived necessary for engineering was not tied to a (White) male body (as opposed to Adeela’s and Navid’s perceptions that connected maleness to pitch/intonation), but rather, a change to her own voice was calculated to indirectly gain the authority of a man. Furthermore, Jasmine emphasized the intent to display toughness through her voice, which was evident in stories about her everyday teaching practices, one of which is detailed below:

Jasmine: I had this tutorial and the projector was broken. So I had to stand up in the middle of the class and started giving instructions. The students were just chatting with each other and not listening to me. I paused the class and told them to stop speaking in a loud voice. I told them in a tough way something like, “If you’re not interested in doing any work, please leave the lab. You need to respect the class.” I’m not teaching students who are in preschool. I shouldn’t have to be doing this all the time.

Vijay: So this loud, tough tone of voice that you used helps you maintain authority in the classroom?

Jasmine: My tone of voice is a type of discipline. I can’t control the class without being firm...or sounding more male somehow. I can never let the students control the class.

At first glance, Jasmine’s narrative positions her as a proponent of adopting “aural toughness.” Indeed, by telling the students “to stop speaking in a loud voice” and informing them that they could leave the class “in a tough way,” Jasmine highlighted that she needed to become “vocally male” to garner any sort of respect. This was confirmed by her noting that her voice is the primary means through which she can control her classes, which meant “sounding more male somehow.” It is also important to remember that Jasmine’s use

of her voice as a disciplinary tool is most likely influenced by her being a Muslim woman. Because she may be stereotypically perceived to embody a repressed, passive persona as communicated by wearing a hijab (e.g., Hasan, 2005), which was mentioned in the previous chapter, Jasmine may be especially pressed to present the opposite persona. Not being able to change her appearance, then, Jasmine needs to adopt vocal measures to uphold her professional authority.

While it may seem that she is similar to Adeela in the sense that she sees the need to embrace androcentric vocal behaviours (Jorgensen, 2002), Jasmine might not be entirely interpellated into accepting masculinized aural norms. In fact, whereas Adeela saw the masculinizing of her voice as simply a technical requirement to be an engineering teacher, Jasmine might not accept the toughening of her tone as another job task. This point is seen how Jasmine ended the story about the broken projector. Through her declaration that “she is not teaching students who are in preschool” and statement that she “shouldn’t have to be [toughening her voice] all the time,” Jasmine was rejecting the *necessity* of changing her voice in order to gain respect as an instructor. However, in making this complaint, she highlighted the gendered interactions that she must have with students. While much of the discussion on gender and language in this thesis has involved noting how the ITAs actively draw on a male-female binary surrounding language use to interpret and enact certain aural aesthetics, it is worthwhile to note how language can concurrently traverse and reinforce gender boundaries. That is, it is possible that “male-like” linguistic behaviour can be used to subscribe to social expectations for women and vice versa (Cameron, 1997). In the case of Jasmine, this point might be seen by how her vocal projection of toughness upholds the notion that women need to take care of others at work (Hochschild, 2003). In fact, by referring to her students as preschool-like, Jasmine indirectly noted that her aesthetic labour is a type of mothering in the sense of ensuring that her “children” are doing what they are supposed to be doing. To do this “feminine practice,” it is then interesting how she has to vocally embody a trait culturally coded as masculine. In the end then, rather than teaching her students a discipline, Jasmine must exert effort to ensure that they are disciplined.

In articulating this frustration about needing to be firm with students, Jasmine interestingly highlighted the particularities of professional development for female ITAs in engineering. Rather than seeking out simple accent reduction services like those provided by Dalhousie University, ITAs like Jasmine might benefit from cultural training such as that offered by the Communication in the Canadian Classroom (CCC) program at Western University, which was mentioned in the introductory chapter. However, instead of looking at how to adapt to a new national educational culture, which is the mandate of the CCC program, these ITAs might desire to learn how to particularly survive the gendered culture of engineering. Indeed, Jasmine's above-mentioned practice suggests a curriculum instructing female engineers to develop interactional styles that garner male-like authority in this professional context. Such a curriculum was also suggested by Adeela's concern over not knowing how to deepen her voice to gain the attention of her male students. But in the case of Adeela as well as Navid, who is cast as feminine by his Iranian accent, the cultural training that they might desire would need to incorporate some accent modification since the actual suprasegmental features of their foreign accents are *culturally* incongruent with the male-dominated sphere of engineering.

Whereas Navid's, Adeela's, and Jasmine's acute awareness of the masculine culture of engineers might signal their desire for specific training that helps them vocally embody this culture, other engineering ITAs did not express this same desire. For instance, as briefly mentioned in Chapter Five, Farhad, a male engineer not deemed to have a "feminine" Iranian accent, did not express concern about masculine engineering culture since he would not be perceived as lacking any so-called masculine qualities.⁴⁴ However, while Farhad would not necessarily be minoritized in the micro-context of engineering, he did

⁴⁴Although Farhad and Navid identified as Persian, I certainly did not perceive their accents as similar sounding, which might be explained by their varying levels of proficiency in English. While Navid's fluency allowed me to take notice of his "melodic" intonation at times, I did not hear the same intonation from Farhad due to his need to pause his speech when trying to recall words, etc., in English. Therefore, it is possible that Farhad's lower English proficiency might mask his intonation, thereby making him not mention and not be affected by the White male listening subject in an engineering environment.

perceive himself as aurally dissimilar to his mostly Canadian-English-speaking students. Therefore, as discussed in the last chapter, Farhad felt the need to acquire a so-called Canadian accent to lessen the presence of his Persian background. Even though I did not get a definitive answer from him on what this accent sounds like, Farhad held it in high regard as seen when he reacted to the nature of my study:

Vijay: So I generally want to talk about what type of accent is communicated to you and what you do with this information in your actual teaching.

Farhad: So you want to know if I change my accent?

Vijay: I don't want to lead you on, but that might be one possibility.

Farhad: Well, I prefer to speak correctly at first, which means observing the accent of people who are living [in this city] and Canada. I feel like if I can talk to others with their accent, our communication is better.

Vijay: Uh huh.

Farhad: Maybe it's not right. I'm not sure, but I prefer to do that...[either by] listening to how Canadians speak or watching movies.

One noteworthy aspect of this conversation is how I positioned Farhad through my utterances (Davies & Harré, 1990; Gordon, 2015). When Farhad asked the confirmation question of whether I wanted to know if he changes his accent and I replied that that could be a possibility, my reply, although hesitant, acted as an invitation for him to immediately present himself as a worker concerned with changing his accent.

Farhad's unprompted response seemed to signal an embrace of communication accommodation theory (CAT), which posits that an attempt to (aurally) resemble one's interlocutor can improve social relations (Giles et al., 2007). In fact, as Farhad noted above, by observing the Canadian accent and using it with other Canadians, he could ensure a better communicative experience. His embrace of CAT thus may be seen as an example of what Bell (1984) calls audience design, the styling of one's language to have a certain effect on a listening audience. What must be emphasized about this audience design is Farhad's possible notion of correctness. When he stated that he preferred to speak correctly, Farhad linked correct speech to what he hears from people in Canada. This might suggest that he knows how correctness is

contextual in the sense that if he had lived in another country like the US, he might need to develop an American accent. Thus, while it may appear that Farhad closely aligns with his prior perception of the importance of sounding Canadian, this unsaid part of his narrative (Todorova, 2007) highlights the possibility that he would not be committed to sounding Canadian when placed in another context.

In addition to this speculation, my response to Farhad's description of his professional practice may have also prompted him to further resist the active adoption of a Canadian accent. Indeed, after I uttered "Uh huh" with regard to his previous utterance, which signalled that I had simply heard him rather than an enthusiastic endorsement of the content of his speech, Farhad began to question his own practice. By briefly considering that what he does might not be right, Farhad may have wanted to perform an identity of someone who does not wholeheartedly want to linguistically assimilate in Canada. However, through ending his utterance by restating his preference for mimicking a Canadian accent, he highlighted how his resistance to such an accent may be fleeting in nature.

In contrast to Farhad, Lei was seemingly uninterested in trying to use a Canadian accent on a consistent basis. Although he extolled the neutral or flat sound of this accent in the previous chapter, Lei described how a Canadian accent was not a conscious part of his teaching, which is seen below:

When I am teaching, I am not trying to...follow an unspoken rule of a necessary Canadian accent, but I know that students are easily distracted and that my goal is to make them understand several challenging concepts. Therefore, the words that I use and the way that I speak have to facilitate the learning process. If I have a strong accent, I know that some students are distracted by it.... I know that those students are not listening to my words and are only focusing on the way that I am speaking. Hence, the whole purpose of teaching is lost.... This is the reason why I try not to rely on my French background when I know that I have a lecture or a tutorial. To prepare, I check many words, I listen to them, and I practice them before lecturing.... Our duty [as teachers is] to make sure that the students understand what we are giving them. Whatever our native language is, we need to ensure that the students understand what we say (October 8, 2017).

According to Lei, the main point of this narrative is to highlight the "vampire effect" of foreign accents: they have the potential to "suck" listeners' attention away from the content of an utterance (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). Thus, by focusing their attention on his accent, Lei cannot make students pay attention to the

content of his teaching. While Lei began by proclaiming that he does not follow any linguistic rule regarding Canadian accents, the remainder of his story might suggest otherwise. To argue this point, it is necessary to note that there are multiple voices in the above narrative (Bakhtin, 1981). In fact, apart from Lei's immediate voice stating that he is not intentionally trying to sound Canadian (i.e., not changing his French identity), there is also his previous voice that praised the Canadian accent for its neutral character. By linking this story to the one he told in Chapter Five, then, it is possible to see how Lei might implicitly value performing a Canadian accent.

First, Lei's mention that students can be distracted by "a strong accent" must be compared with his previous mention of the Canadian accent "not being a very strong accent" in Chapter Five (see page 152). Even if Lei is not explicitly striving to acquire a Canadian accent, the need for a "strong" accent to be addressed by a teacher would seemingly require the adoption of less noticeable phonological features, thereby making it similar to Lei's definition of a Canadian accent. Moreover, Lei's prior mention that a Canadian accent can make one seem "accentless" and thus comprehensible (see page 152) may have been rearticulated through his statement of not trying to rely on his French background when needing to pronounce things in the classroom. That is, sounding (too) French can make students focus on his French identity and thereby make himself less comprehensible for them. Therefore, a Canadian accent, with its seeming neutrality, may be a suitable linguistic model when preparing for a teaching performance.

What is further noteworthy about Lei's narrative performance as a teacher is how his implicit embrace of a Canadian accent relied on yet another hidden voice concerning the role of instructors in the corporatized university. Although Lei held a disdain for the increasing neoliberalization/corporatization of higher education because of its treatment of students as entitled customers, who could dictate their own learning, the manner in which he described the problem of student distraction suggests that he is in the service of student-customers, however unwillingly. In particular, his repeated use of first-person possessive and subject pronouns highlights how the issue of the vampire effect of accents is solely his concern as a

service provider. For example, through phrases such as “*my goal is to help students understand*” and “the words that *I use and the way that I speak have to facilitate the learning process*,” Lei seemed to suggest that it is only the teacher’s responsibility to ensure successful learning. This is further supported by his claim that the “duty” of teachers is to make sure that students understand what they are *given*. If teachers simply provide knowledge that is passively consumed by learners, then, of course, they have to take complete responsibility for the learning process as they are the producers of this knowledge. Because of this point, developing an understandable accent would seem to be a logical job task.

Aside from possibly being influenced by his role as dutiful service provider in the neoliberal university, another factor that might encourage Lei’s implicit endorsement of a Canadian accent is his near ability to embody complete “Canadianness” for his Canadian students. Because he already identifies as White, thereby making him physically resemble the stereotypical Canadian (e.g., Creese, 2018), Lei only needs to make his accent match his embodied Whiteness in order to become “fully Canadian.” Therefore, in contrast to Farhad, whose goal to achieve a Canadian accent can only *mitigate* any negative perceptions about his racialized identity, Lei’s potential ability to sound “more Canadian,” coupled with his White body, can make his students forget about his status as an international student and thus see him as simply another Canadian instructor.

While the effect of Lei’s emulation of a Canadian accent might be different from that of Farhad, it is important to note how both ITAs seemingly articulate a similar necessity for accent reduction training that lessens the foreignness of their accents. When Farhad stated that he listens to the speech of Canadians to improve his accent, he echoed Jasmine’s and Adeela’s implicit sentiment of checking with native English speakers as a way to sound “more native” or, in his specific case, “more Canadian.” Also, Lei’s practice of studying and repeating words to make them sound less French speaks to his possible embrace of learning techniques to guess the correct pronunciation of words without having to rely on his French.

This potential feeling to become adept at using accent to strive for or reinforce Whiteness was also evident in the aesthetic labour of other ITAs such as Martina. In spite of being the atypically light-skinned Mexican, Martina could be racialized as a foreign outsider in her mostly White Canadian department on account of her accent, as noted in the last chapter. To mitigate this issue, Martina described how she sought to minimize the foreignness of her accent during her time as a teaching assistant. As seen in the following exchange, Martina held a specific view on what constituted minimization:

- Vijay: So in what ways are you trying to minimize [your accent]? Like what are you doing specifically?
- Martina: Like in Spanish, we tend to use the T sound very tough. Whereas the English [in Canada], it's not that tough, right?
- Vijay: So you try to make it more like the D sound while you're teaching?
- Martina: Yeah, exactly.
- Vijay: So like instead of saying "city," you would say "cidy?"
- Martina: I could say "city," but I would say "cidy."
- Vijay: So why are you doing that? Is it for understanding or fitting in the class?
- Martina: I think it's more for fitting in because I don't want them to focus on how I speak [brief laugh], but focus more on the content of what I'm saying.

The pronunciation change that Martina described above is referred to as flapping, a common phonological practice in Canada and the US where the /t/ consonant sound in a word such as "city" is pronounced similar to a /d/, thereby making it sound like "cidy" (e.g., Demirezen, 2006). It is noteworthy how such a miniscule change to her accent seemed to suggest that the purpose of minimizing the foreignness of an accent is not entirely about comprehensibility or intelligibility.

That is, when I asked whether her flapping was done to be more understandable or to fit in with her students, Martina chose the latter purpose, which highlights how she seemed to be concerned with what the flap signifies rather than its supposed function for listeners. Specifically, by distinguishing fitting in from

being understandable, Martina possibly wanted to highlight that if students perceive her as aurally similar to themselves, then they will not be preoccupied with her foreign identity/accent and continue with their learning. Thus, to give a crude example, fully pronouncing /t/ is akin to speaking with food stuck in one's teeth. Just as interlocutors might wish that someone could floss their teeth before continuing their conversation, they may also want this person to "clean up" their accent! In terms of professional development, then, Martina echoes Lei's potential desire for training that helps ITAs' accents be "less distracting" for students. Yet, Martina's need to fit in with her learners highlights how such training would not just be about the practical issue of being understood (as seen with Lei, whose self-stated goal is to help students comprehend course material), but rather, assimilating to a racially homogeneous classroom.

While it seems that Martina is clearly affected by her marginalized status in the classroom and thus wants to closely align with the figure of a White native speaker of English, it is worthwhile to consider how she engages in some resistance. First, by stating how she wished to *minimize* rather than *erase* her accent, Martina still expressed a desire to retain some of her Mexican linguistic identity, thereby suggesting that she does not want training that completely neutralizes her accent. Furthermore, her brief laugh near the end of her final utterance is telling. This laugh might have been in response to my rather direct question of whether she says "cidy" for intelligibility or fitting in. By confirming that she flaps for the seemingly superfluous reason of becoming more of a racial/linguistic insider, Martina might have felt embarrassed that her phonological action was not done for a justifiable professional purpose. In the end, then, this laugh may signify that while she may journey toward minimizing the foreignness of her accent, Martina is cognizant that doing so might not be perceived as entirely admirable, necessary, or consistent with maintaining her desired raciolinguistic identity.

For Martina and Lei, the reason to emphasize one's (perceived) Whiteness through accent is to aurally conform to students who either identify as White (in the case of Martina) or are "whitened" by speaking with a so-called Canadian accent (in the case of Lei). However, in the context of teaching

linguistically and racially diverse students, emphasizing one's Whiteness might serve as a strategy to deal with specific sets of students. This seemed to be the case with Navid. As detailed in the last chapter, Navid noted how looking and sounding European has offered him various symbolic and material benefits, especially with regard to his professional life as a teaching assistant. This ability to pass as White has also given Navid the opportunity to shape the nature of his interactions with others at work. Specifically, by passing as non-Persian, Navid described how he can maintain his professional authority in the classroom.

This point is seen in how he withholds information about himself to Persian students:

- Vijay: So based on your appearance and accent, do you ever intentionally not tell people that you're Persian or nonwhite?
- Navid: At some points, yes. I mean not looking or sounding Persian has benefited me, specifically with other Persians. Like if someone doesn't know that I'm Persian and I know that they're Persian, sometimes I try to hide.
- Vijay: And so why do you sometimes do this?
- Navid: I feel like Persian [students] are very opportunistic. If they know that you're Persian, they're going to thoroughly judge you and can take advantage of you.... So when students find out I'm Persian, they're like, "Give us marks" or "Can you do this for me?" So I try to avoid those situations by not saying I'm Persian.

While Navid's discussion centred on his racialized stereotyping of his Persian students, it nevertheless offers some insight into the type of aural aesthetic he embraces while teaching.

Indeed, by letting students assume that he is not Persian and possibly from Europe, Navid sees the use value of looking and sounding White. However, examining the interactional context in which he made his statements, Navid might not wholeheartedly embrace a White accent. When I asked him whether he intentionally passes as non-Persian, Navid did not give a direct, definitive answer. Even though he quickly confirmed my speculation, he immediately hedged his response afterward. Beyond the use of "I mean," Navid presented himself as non-agentive in his racial/aural passing. That is, by noting that not looking or sounding Persian has benefited *him*, Navid positioned himself as the receiving object of his

appearance and voice. He does not do anything to his body and voice; they do something to him when students are unaware of his real identity. A possible reason why Navid would want to emphasize this point could relate to my mandate as the researcher. As someone who repeatedly asked questions about the racialization of accents during our interviews, I may have communicated to Navid the idea that White people/accents are inherently bad. In order to position himself as someone who does not embrace embodied/aural Whiteness, Navid may have wanted to downplay his agency in passing.

Navid's interactions with his fellow Persian students highlight the dynamic quality of his aesthetic labour. Whereas he might desire to look/sound non-Persian when in the presence of other Persians, Navid may be concerned about working on other features of his accent when interacting with other people such as trying to sound more masculine for male engineers, which was seen earlier. The implication of this dynamic aesthetic labour is that, in terms of professional training, ITAs like Navid could appreciate formal opportunities to develop specific types of accented speech for specific audiences.

Creating Dynamic Speech

This possible appreciation of having the option to develop professional speech that fluctuates with changes in situated listening audiences was also articulated by other participants, who noted the dynamic quality of their accents with respect to their professional activities. One notable example of this point was Betsy. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Betsy seemed to betray her prior perception that the diversity of her university allows for heterogeneous accents by carefully monitoring and lessening the Spanish quality of her English (which suggested that she wanted a straightforward accent reduction class). However, upon learning more about her professional practices, I soon discovered that the lessening of her Mexican accent became more or less pronounced in relation to the linguistic identity of her interlocutor:

Vijay: How does your voice change when speaking with a native-English-speaking student versus a nonnative-speaking one, for example?

Betsy: I think it's just a matter of how comfortable I feel.... But I perceive that I make a lot of effort with those who are native by softening my accent or improving the pronunciation of words. Whereas with nonnative people, I'm not afraid of making those mistakes. [It's] because if a native person is not understanding the things I am saying, I always assume that they are not understanding due to the way I'm saying it.

It is interesting how the diversity of her teaching context can mitigate Betsy's practice of sounding less like a Spanish speaker. In fact, when not in the presence of people whom she would identify as native English speakers, Betsy can be rather carefree with her accent. Yet, by noting how she softens her accent or improves her pronunciation of words when in the presence of these speakers, she positions herself as upholding a particular master narrative about the interactions between native and nonnative speakers. Specifically, when assuming that she is the reason for any miscommunication with a native speaker, Betsy articulated the common notion that nonnative speakers do and should hold the burden of communication (e.g., Lippi-Green, 2012). Therefore, while the diversity of her institution allows Betsy to abandon native speaker norms, this is only intermittent rather than constant.

As seen with Betsy, the creation of dynamic speech as part of an ITA's aesthetic labour involves switching from one accent to another in relation to the identity of the listening audience. However, dynamic speech can refer to the mixing of phonological resources as well. This was particularly seen in my further exploration of Lei's professional practices. As noted earlier in this chapter, Lei's checking and rehearsing of words to distract students from his French background seem to embrace the perceived neutrality of a so-called Canadian accent. But as a researcher, I remained perplexed about this endorsement of neutrality given that Lei was one of the participants who noted that his university environment communicated an embrace of all types of accents for work. In one of our interviews, I asked him how he could reconcile this apparent conflict:

Vijay: So before, you were talking about being understandable by having like a neutral accent that everybody can understand. But [with the instructor who said it was fine to say "ofen" and "often"], he's saying like you can sound different and that's okay. So, neutrality and diversity, are these things

compatible in your opinion?

Lei: I see your point. I mean neutrality is a very subjective point. So what I'm trying to say is that I will decide, for example, do I say "ofen" or "often?" I say "ofen" because people say "ofen" here [in Canada] most of the time. So it's my way of staying neutral.

Vijay: Okay, so you mean...

Lei: It's very subjective, but because we are in [this Canadian city], we know that students are familiar with the average way of saying it. So basically, if I have the choice between two ways of pronouncing and I know that this is the most common way that I could hear, then I would use it. It's my way of defining neutrality. But it doesn't change the diversity of the accent because I have an accent. I will always have an accent and being neutral is really in terms of being understandable. For example, I can say "often" or "ofen," but even with those two pronunciations, I can have my French accent in both. So I think neutrality is in terms of choices, but the accent will be there.

Vijay: So like in terms of adapting your accent, you're talking more about the pronunciation of specific words rather than losing your French accent in terms of larger things like intonation, etc.?

Lei: Yeah.

Through my direct question of whether neutrality and diversity can be compatible, I indirectly forced Lei to adopt one position from his seemingly incoherent perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic. Possibly aware of my intent, Lei needed to reposition himself as someone who could balance both perspectives. For instance, his repeated mention that neutrality is a subjective practice served to underscore the idea that since he defined neutrality to suit his own professional context, he could shift its meaning to incorporate divergent views. In this narrative positioning, Lei highlighted how neutrality, especially with regard to accent, is rarely, if ever, absent of any meaning (Aneesh, 2015a; Cowie, 2007; Rahman, 2009).

Indeed, his definition of neutrality was very specific as it referred to what he normally hears in a Canadian context. For Lei, remaining neutral seemingly relies on standard language and nativeness ideologies. That is, by suggesting that he has to choose the most common manner of pronunciation from a limited number of options used in a nation, Lei emphasized how speaking in an "average way" entails

adhering to an informal national standard. While it may thus seem that Lei wants to position himself as embracing a neutral Canadian accent, it is important to explore how he expects to do so in a limited manner. In fact, as summarized by my final confirmation question, Lei is attempting to mute his Frenchness solely in the segmental realm. As he himself noted above, even when he pronounces “often” as “ofen,” he will remain identifiably French in this utterance in terms of such suprasegmental features as intonation. Therefore, what one sees here is the hybridity of Lei’s aural self-presentation as a teacher. While it is important to sound less French/more Canadian in specific areas of speech in order to convey intelligible information, the phonological remainder of this speech can remain diverse.

Of course, Lei’s focus on the segmental rather than suprasegmental components of pronunciation once again speaks to the influence of his academic discipline. Similar to ITAs such as Jasmine and Adeela, who are committed to working on the pronunciation of specific words to provide precise information that is valued in engineering, Lei’s modification of minute features of pronunciation might be in response to this communicative culture of the field as well. Beyond the influence of engineering, it is important to consider how Lei’s racial and linguistic background shape his practice of sounding segmentally neutral. In fact, this practice seems to uphold another of Lei’s perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic as noted in Chapter Five: since his White body and French accent make him a *de facto* Canadian (in the sense that he could be from Québec), Lei would not be perceived as a foreigner and thus would not be obliged to change his accent. Therefore, Lei’s lack of concern about changing the entirety of his French accent might signal that, for him, retaining most of this accent would not hurt his intelligibility/comprehensibility and would thus preserve his credibility as an instructor in Canada.

Lei was not the only ITA to hybridize his accent. In fact, Alejandra also engaged in this practice of aural hybridity, but additionally outlined its racial character. Like most of the participants, Alejandra saw the accent of a native English speaker as a satisfactory aural aesthetic and, furthermore, explicitly connected this accent to a White body as discussed in Chapter Five. Yet, when I asked her to clarify what she meant

by “understandable” in one of our interviews, I noticed that Alejandra did not seem to entirely embrace nativeness/Whiteness in terms of describing the practice of changing her speech:

- Vijay: So like having an understandable accent, does that mean having a native or native-like accent?
- Alejandra: I would say yes and no. I feel that you can still have your accent, but still be understood perfectly. So I think it's more in terms of words, like if they sound similar to that of a native speaker. But you can sound how you are when pronouncing sentences. It's more like [1-2 second pause].
- Vijay: Just taking some elements.
- Alejandra: Yeah taking some elements [emphatic stress on “elements”]! That's right.
- Vijay: So I guess you're developing like a hybrid accent. Like you still have your Spanish intonation and rhythm, but the pronunciation of specific words would sound native?
- Alejandra: Yeah, yeah...I don't want to forget where I come from. So I think it's also about keeping a sense of identity...like being recognized as Latina.

What is interesting in the above exchange is how my questions/interjections helped to craft a coherent professional practice for Alejandra. Indeed, by filling in the brief pause in our conversation with my observation that she simply takes elements from a native accent, Alejandra was given explicit vocabulary on what she does as an ITA, which she enthusiastically embraced as evidenced by her emphatic stress on “elements.” Moreover, her agreement with my speculation that she desires to be segmentally native and suprasegmentally Spanish highlights her view of aesthetic labour being a hybrid performance. Instead of being purely linguistic, however, Alejandra's stated desire to maintain her Latina identity signalled that this labour is a racially hybrid performance as well. Indeed, remembering that she links a native speaker accent to Whiteness, Alejandra's choice to only pronounce specific words like a native English speaker shows an intent to partially whiten herself when it is deemed necessary for the job.

Once again, this partial whitening of specific vocabulary speaks to the influence of Alejandra's workplace context of engineering, which, as exemplified by Lei above, expects the precise delivery of

information in the form of keywords or other concise forms. But more importantly, Alejandra's practice of taking elements from "native English" is a manifestation of her personal project of letting others be reminded of her Latina identity. As someone who once studied in the US, Alejandra was acutely aware of the demonization of Latinx people, especially with the rise of Donald Trump. Due to bearing witness to the racist nativist framing of Latinx individuals being dangerous foreigners, then, she wanted to resist this framing by displaying pride in her *Latinidad*. Thus, while she may need to sound segmentally native to be perceived as an effective engineering communicator, Alejandra's retention of her Spanish suprasegmentals is an explicit invitation to others to accept her racial/ethnic background.

On the surface, it seems that Alejandra's practice of taking elements from "native English" is fairly identical to that of Lei: both participants undergo minute vocal changes to adhere to engineering norms without worrying about losing the entirety of their accents. However, when speculating about what type of professional development opportunities they would like to receive as ITAs, it becomes clear that there are indeed differences, especially with regard to intent. Whereas Lei is interested in linguistically assimilating to the so-called Canadian voices surrounding him, which would suggest that he would benefit from accent training that helps him mimic a "Canadian accent," Alejandra's goal of remaining aurally Latina possibly highlights how she would like accent reduction services that ensure that ITAs change their accents just enough so as to remain racially/ethnically recognizable (to themselves). This idea that one's professional training needs to accommodate to one's accent, and not vice versa, leads to the exploration of the second main professional practice of the participants: working around their accents.

Working around Accent

Explaining Accent

While ITAs like Alejandra can resist the total homogenization of their accents by selecting specific aspects of their speech to change, this resistance can also take the form of not doing anything with one's

accent. In fact, rather than worry about how they might change their accents in order to cater to the various expectations of students, etc., other participants detailed how their aesthetic labour involved encouraging others to accept their current accents. For example, Fredrick often told of occasions where he was forthright in telling students that they might have a problem when hearing his African voice for the first time. Indeed, due to such instances as when his students were repeating “come again” when listening to him speak, Fredrick deemed it necessary to warn students about his accent before actually teaching:

When I come to speak to the class, I'll tell them that I talk fast and have an accent. I tell them to stop me at any time and ask me to explain something again. So I tell them that murmuring is not allowed because I know sometimes they are murmuring while I'm speaking. I basically tell them, “Okay, I have a terrible accent, which you might be perceiving now.... However, if I talk too fast, raise your hand and ask me to slow down. When I'm excited about a topic, I tend to talk fast about it.” So I basically tell them that this is who I am. I tell them this ahead of time.... They should tell me directly whether they're not understanding instead of murmuring with each other, trying to figure out what I said.

In telling this small story, Fredrick positioned himself as the protagonist who is unwilling to solely carry the burden of communication when interacting with his students. Instead of modifying his voice in anticipation of student misunderstandings, Fredrick gives his learners the responsibility of letting him know when his speaking causes a communication issue. Yet, in establishing this relationship with his classes, it is important to consider how Fredrick's stance on maintaining his accent simultaneously accommodates students' aural expectations (Forbes, 2009). Examining this point entails looking at the additional voices in Fredrick's narrative (Bakhtin, 1981). When telling his students, “I have a terrible accent, which you might be perceiving now,” Fredrick engages in a type of double-voicing in which he anticipates and voices the apparent thoughts of his students (Baxter, 2014). Possibly due to raciolinguistic ideologies that hear his speech as unintelligible, Fredrick's students might label his accent as terrible when compared to that of a White native English speaker, which Fredrick himself speculated in Chapter Five. Therefore, in anticipation of this perception, he explicitly provides directions to mitigate the “terribleness” of his accent.

To summarize, then, while Fredrick can be said to distance himself from raciolinguistic ideologies directed against him by informing students that his voice “is who he is,” this distancing is intermittent. Once students ask him to slow down, Fredrick will momentarily need to homogenize his speech in accordance with their expectations. However, it would be too simplistic to suggest that Fredrick typically succumbs to raciolinguistic ideologies. Rather, he may have pragmatic reasons relating to performativity and control. As mentioned above, the purpose of stating that he has a terrible accent is to prevent the murmuring that can occur when students fail to understand his utterances. Because this murmuring can become distracting for a teaching assistant who is trying to progress a lecture, quickly addressing the cause of the murmuring can allow one to continue teaching without further interruptions.

On some occasions, this necessity to acknowledge the potential interference of an accent may also require explaining its “incongruence” with the body projecting it. This was particularly the case for Patricia. Because of the need to lecture most of the time, in Chapter Five, I pointed to how Patricia was very insecure about her fast-paced Spanish-accented English. Yet, as described later in the chapter, Patricia, by participating in the current study, came to realize that she should feel proud about her accent because she was teaching students with their own foreign accents. This mixture of pride and struggle with regard to her accent is evident in Patricia’s self-introduction to new students, which was a topic that I raised in one of our conversations in relation to possible perceptions of her racial appearance:

Vijay: So you were saying how when you introduce yourself to a class for the first time, you say, “Hi, I’m from [home country]. It’s like showcasing your pride in your origins. But I wonder if it could also be related to accent. Like when students hear you speak and see your White-looking appearance, do you think that they might get confused because they think you should be European, etc.? Like is your intro in anticipation of this confusion?

Patricia: I think that you are right because...people think that Latin Americans have darker skin and hair.... I definitely don’t represent the stereotype.... So I think you touch exactly on the point. Like I don’t look like [a typical Latin American]. So in a way, I just want to make clear right away where I come from. And yes, you’re right. It’s a sense of pride.... [But] instead of feeling like, “Yes, I’m from Latin America and this is the way I speak,” I still

struggle. There's still this struggle in [accepting] the way I talk.

From the perspective of a researcher, what was interesting about Patricia's response to my question was her explicit commentary on her shifting positions in relation to her accent. Indeed, rather than needing to decode her speech, Patricia readily noted that her self-introduction as Latin American is an instance of both being proud of and struggling with her foreign-accented English.

First, because of her phenotype, which would not immediately signify her as Latin American for everyday observers, Patricia desires to indicate her country of origin in order to dispel the myth that all Latin Americans are supposed to be brown-skinned Others. However, as I alluded in my question, when coupled with her foreign accent, this self-introduction as Latin American simultaneously "explains" why a White body would seemingly sound incomprehensible for listeners. That is, since her voice "does not match" the social prestige of her phenotypical Whiteness, Patricia needs to clarify this potential confusion for students. In the end, then, as Patricia herself noted, while her self-introduction may apparently be an indicator of embracing the perceived foreignness of her accent in a Canadian context, it is not a total embrace given that she feels the need to make mention of this foreignness before commencing her other professional duties.

When thinking about how their self-introductions might be indicative of the type of professional training they would like to receive, it is important to consider the way in which Patricia and Fredrick both minimize and promote the salience of accent for ITAs. First, by either informing students of what they can expect to hear from their voices or proudly indicating their national origins as a type of icebreaker, these ITAs might endorse explicit instruction on how to make students immediately comfortable with ITA accents, thereby making them irrelevant in future interactions. However, even though such training would not require any accent modification (at least initially in the case of Fredrick), it may nevertheless promote a similar message as a course on accent reduction. That is, as highlighted by Fredrick's pragmatic need to stop distracting murmurs or Patricia's desire to mitigate student confusion about her appearance and voice, the viewpoint of such hypothetical training would still be that a foreign accent is an issue that must be quickly

addressed by an ITA. Perhaps one way to avoid this message is to emphasize how an ITA's aural presence in a university can act as a form of activism against negative perceptions of their speech, which leads to how Martina tends to "explain herself" to learners.

Whereas Patricia and Fredrick explicitly explain their accents in anticipation of possible student confusion or critique about how they sound, Martina's mention of her own Mexican accent is neither overt nor meant to appease her learners. In fact, in the following exchange, Martina stated how she intended her simple presence in the classroom to communicate a particular message to her students:

Vijay: So for the students who have a lack of exposure to ITAs like yourself, do you try to change their perceptions?

Martina: Not consciously.... It just goes on its own. Like I'm here and I'm not a native speaker [of English]. And I'm teaching them.

Vijay: So your presence is like your activism?

Martina: Yeah, exactly.

In her response to my initial question, it appeared that, in terms of performing aesthetic labour, Martina does little to change her accent for her students. Through stating that simply being in their presence as a nonnative English speaker was sufficient to have students accept her as a teacher, the implication seemed to be that she did not need to explicitly justify herself and/or her accent to teach in the classroom. By being assigned a teaching position in the first place, Martina had already proven her professional worth. This subtle "practice" then highlights her commitment to her prior perception in Chapter Five of accent not being equated to one's competence. Moreover, it is a response to the linguistic marginalization that she faces as one of the only international instructors in a mostly White native-English-speaking department, which was also discussed earlier. However, it is important to note how Martina's current response to this linguistic marginalization is a starkly different practice than what was theorized before. As noted above, one way that Martina responded to her marginalization is to minimize the "foreignness" of her accent in order to sound

more like a Canadian English speaker. Yet, as seen now, Martina's implicit forcing of students to accept her foreignness is an alternate interpretation that contradicts this previous practice.

These competing interpretations can most likely be explained by how individuals often shift positions within discourse on a regular basis (Davies & Harré, 1990). Indeed, as previously noted near the end of Chapter Five, in different situations, people typically "shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying story lines are taken up" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 58). Regarding Martina, then, understanding why she shifts from non-accent modifier to accent modifier entails noting who she is *and* what she does in the classroom. When discussing how she represents an opportunity for students to appreciate the linguistic/racial diversity of ITAs, Martina is not interested in aurally homogenizing herself in that particular story line. However, in detailing her pragmatic need to ensure that students take note of the content of her utterances, Martina positions herself as someone who must eliminate all possible distractions in accomplishing this task, which can include guaranteeing that students are not focused on her foreign-accented English.

Supplementing Accent

Another way to ensure that students are not focused on an ITA's accent is to do supplemental actions that distract them from the accent. For example, beyond explicitly preparing students on how they should handle his speech as discussed above, Fredrick mentioned how he could rely on multimodal communication practices to signal his professional competence. In particular, because he works in the health sciences, which requires in-depth discussion about diseases and various medical conditions, Fredrick found that it actually makes more sense to use his body than his voice to explain specific details about these topics. One example of this viewpoint is described below:

For instance, in one of my [classes], we talked about Parkinson's disease and I had to demonstrate how a person with Parkinson's walks. So as I am demonstrating, I cue them

in what I am doing now [Fredrick mimicked what he did]. So you see I'm doing less talking; I'm doing more acting. So the students are understanding and totally ignoring the accent.

According to Fredrick, the right body language can mute the language originating from the voice. That is, by being transfixed with his body movements, which helps them understand the information he wishes to articulate, Fredrick's students might not seem to mind how he sounds. In other words, if students believe that they are having a worthwhile learning experience, they are less likely to have disparaging views of their instructor's accent (Rao Hill & Tombs, 2011).

Fredrick's demonstrations thus exemplify his endorsement of the "non-accent" in Chapter Five: by being able to perform his work without the sole use of his voice, he can disregard the alleged need to change his accent. However, as already discussed with his habit of talking about his accent with students, it is important to consider how Fredrick's racialized body makes this practice more of a professional survival strategy than a voluntary act. While one might argue that an ITA like Martina is able to simply be her aural self in the classroom on account of her White-like body matching those of her students (and thus allowing the possibility for them to perceive her as a linguistic insider), Fredrick must actively deal with the raciolinguistic ideologies that position African speakers of English as aurally deficient (e.g., Creese, 2010). That is, even if Fredrick could "whiten" his speech, the White listening subject may still perceive his accent as unintelligible due to his racial positioning in his department and society in general (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Thus, if his racialized body cannot make his speech intelligible for his mostly White students, Fredrick then must resort to nonverbal actions (using his body no less) to deflect any criticism about how he sounds.

The inability to completely evade raciolinguistic ideologies was also a significant theme in Johnny's professional practices. As detailed in the last chapter, Johnny, like the other participants, had a range of perceptions with regard to a satisfactory aural aesthetic for ITAs. Indeed, while he critiqued his own Chinese accent, thereby suggesting that he implicitly respected the English of a White native speaker, he also saw the lack of need to speak altogether in his teaching context where he could use objects and

gesture to signal his message. These competing perceptions became evident in Johnny's everyday stories of supplementing his accent with physical action. One of these stories involved an incident having to do with a baseball cap, which was detailed in the following journal entry:

There was a final examination today, so not much communication between me and the students. One thing that happened was that a student wore a baseball cap (according to the exam guide, students can only wear a baseball cap backwards). So I told him, "Please reverse your hat." But the student did not understand me. I think he was a White native Canadian. I had to gesture [reversing a hat] to let him know (October 19, 2017).

Through telling this narrative, Johnny seemed to position himself, both as a character in the story and as a storyteller who can capably solve problems at work. That is, when the student could not understand his instructions, Johnny quickly found another means to deliver his request. On the surface, this story highlights how Johnny aligned himself with an ideology of pragmatism: when speaking does not accomplish a work task, it is best to choose a more effective modality to complete the task.

However, by scrutinizing his story a bit further, it is possible to see how Johnny might have become subject to the ideology of nativeness as well. As mentioned before, the ideology of nativeness, a sub-ideology of raciolinguistic ideologies, posits that in an English-speaking nation such as Canada, White people are deemed true citizens of the nation as well as native speakers of the language (Dragojevic et al., 2013; Shuck, 2006). The implication here is that racialized people, as noncitizens and nonnative speakers, have little authority in using English. This point may be relevant in how Johnny described his interaction with the student. Being a White Canadian, the student seemingly had a natural authority over the English language, which seemed to influence Johnny's actions. That is, rather than repeat himself until his foreign-accented speech was understood, Johnny apparently upheld the perception that his English was unintelligible by immediately using gesture. By using the modal verb "had to," Johnny suggested that he was obligated to adhere to the linguistic authority of the student rather than voluntarily doing so. His use of gesture once again showed how (racialized) nonnative speakers, even when they are authority figures, carry the communicative burden when interacting with native speakers (e.g., Lippi-Green, 2012).

To repeat, Johnny's use of gesture in the above story suggests that he simultaneously takes up two positions on his accent. While his gesture might signal that he perceives his accent as irrelevant in getting his message across to students, his seemingly immediate need to use this tactic may suggest that he would use his voice more often if it was closer to the English spoken by White Canadians and not "unintelligibly Chinese." Thus, similar to Fredrick, Johnny needs to rely on his body movements to professionally survive in situations where his accent would not be accepted by interlocutors.

The similarity between Johnny and Fredrick highlights how ITAs like these two participants may benefit from extralinguistic training in order to be understood at work. That is, rather than spending time and effort into making modifications to their speech, which might not allow them to escape raciolinguistic ideologies, ITAs may find it more useful to learn nonverbal methods to increase their comprehensibility or intelligibility for students. As alluded by Fredrick above, when they actually understand the message of ITAs through supplemental actions, students are less likely to hold hostile views about racialized accents. It is interesting to note that the teaching of how to supplement an accent with other modes of communication may not be necessary in particular work environments since it is already done as a regular practice.

This point was particularly relevant for the participants in engineering. For instance, in the last chapter, I detailed how, for Alejandra, accent can be irrelevant for engineers because there is not much talk between them and they can communicate numerically. When describing her own interactions with other engineers, it became evident that she embraces this perception of the non-accent as stated below:

[I communicate in numbers] with my supervisor whenever I have to report what I've done and stuff like that. I say a lot of brief things like, "It's 98%" or "It's more like 80%." It's just these brief things and he could infer what I'm talking about through the context of our conversation.... [Also, with students], when you're supervising quizzes and stuff, I don't have to say the whole sentence.... I can write things down on the board and just say, "Oh, this happens" or "You do this."

Similar to Johnny, Alejandra seemed to embrace an ideology of pragmatism in her professional practice. In fact, through her telling of her use of brief sentences, stating specific figures, and writing when interacting

with superiors and students, Alejandra made it clear that there is sometimes no need to develop a specific accent when there are more convenient options to ensure successful communication in an engineering environment. Therefore, in terms of recommending workplace learning for fellow ITAs, she may encourage her peers (in other professional surroundings) to take notice of the communication conventions of their discipline/department to see whether their accents actually need any modification.

Yet, unlike Johnny and beyond the context of engineering, a likely reason why Alejandra does not need to worry about her accent (and can possibly recommend that other ITAs just follow the communicative norms of their fields) is that her accent rarely causes problems for others. Indeed, as discussed before, Alejandra noted that her Spanish-accented English does not interfere with her intelligibility, which could be explained by the phonological similarities between Spanish and English. Therefore, Alejandra is able to work around her accent because it is not being met by resistance from interlocutors who might (implicitly) demand that she modify her accent before continuing her numerical communication.

Ignoring Accent

If ITAs like Alejandra can engage in communication without the sole use of their voices, then there is the likelihood that they can simply ignore the perceived importance of accent when performing their professional practices. In fact, some participants believed that sounding right for the job had nothing to do with their accents, one of whom was Zack. As detailed in Chapter Five, I presented to Zack the hypothesis that his Chinese accent did not seem to be a problem in teaching statistics because it aurally corresponded to the stereotype that Chinese/Asian people are naturally talented in mathematics. Although he did play with this idea (as discussed in the last chapter), Zack soon attempted to refute it by noting reasons why students would like him as an instructor regardless of his racial/ethnic identity, which was detailed in the following narrative:

I don't think my students respect me just because I live up to the expectation of stereotyping. I do think I deliver very clear explanations. And the reason I say this is because if I don't explain well, they wouldn't keep coming to me [and] asking me questions, right? And some students from last semester, they actually switched from another [teaching assistant's] session, and he was a White Canadian student. You would consider him a clear, fluent speaker and stuff. But I guess I put in more effort and I give better explanations. So I could draw in a couple of students from the other session. If I wasn't able to provide clear explanations, the students wouldn't say that I'm actually being helpful to them.

The main message of Zack's narrative was that it is not his Chinese identity that keeps students in his class, but rather, his clear explanations. Indeed, Zack reinforced this message through his tag question: "if I don't explain well, they wouldn't keep coming to me [and] asking me questions, right?" Beyond the use of "right" to confirm the validity of this claim, the manner in which Zack positioned himself in the story served to further highlight the obviousness of his skill as a teacher. That is, by describing how some students decided to leave a White Canadian teaching assistant, who would be considered an already "clear [and] fluent speaker" of English, to join his class, Zack presented his explanation skills as overriding the aural hegemony of a White native English speaker in a Canadian academic environment.

These explanation skills highlight how Zack redefines the meaning of "clear" when it comes to the work of ITAs. Instead of being tied to the specific sound of one's voice, clarity is linked to the quality of the content and structure of an utterance. Thus, in redefining "clear" in the above narrative, Zack expressed that his value as an instructor has no correlation with the alleged connection between his Chinese accent and the content of his course. What is interesting here is that in advocating this position, Zack emphasized two important points. First, because he finds clarity in explanations instead of accent, Zack might endorse ITA training that prepares his peers to effectively explain course content to students, thereby coinciding with a program like CCC at Western University, which, as mentioned before, focuses on developing a range of communication skills beyond the manner of speech. Second, Zack seemed to rely on a master narrative about meritocracy. In fact, through speculating that he "put in more effort" and provided "better explanations" than his White Canadian peer, he implicitly articulated the ideological view that hard work is

all that is needed to bypass raciolinguistic hierarchies (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Putman, 2017), which might not be achievable for all ITAs. Therefore, instead of performing the role of a White speaking subject, Zack becomes a meritocratic subject.

Although she did not (implicitly) endorse a meritocracy narrative, Suzy was somewhat similar to Zack in that she described how she tries to be understandable for students by going beyond her Chinese accent. This was articulated in the following exchange during one of our interviews:

Vijay: How do you practice being understandable for students? Like when you say things like, “I try to speak in an understandable manner,” how are you doing this?

Suzy: I think that the most important thing I do is work on my grammar, so that means that I make sure to use the right sequence of words.... The second thing that I do is to be logical...[by letting students] hear the relationship between the sentences that I’m saying to them. [And] the third thing is to try to have a native [English] accent. Those are the three things I do.

In terms of its connection to her perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic that were outlined in the previous chapter, Suzy’s practice of being understandable is a bit perplexing. To begin, while she acknowledges that having a native English accent is a necessary part in being understandable, which aligns with her prior notion that sounding native makes one intelligible for a wide array of international students, it is seemingly ranked lower in importance by being mentioned after grammar and logic. Perhaps one reason explaining this contradiction is that Suzy is more influenced by another of her perceptions on a satisfactory aural aesthetic. Specifically, remembering that she noted how an ITA handbook informed her that she should never apologize for her accent (since it signals that she is able to teach in a second language), it could be the case that Suzy may take this advice to heart by focusing her attention on developing her grammatical competence and the ordering of her ideas.

What might influence Suzy’s leaning toward this latter perception is her specific duty as a teaching assistant. Because many of her tutorial sessions involve her going through specific mathematical problems

and solutions with students, there might be more emphasis on ensuring that one is providing information in a step-by-step manner than in any one particular accent. (Note how this is likely a similar reason for Zack, whose concern over clear explanations might be related to his teaching of statistics). This lack of emphasis on accent could also be facilitated by the fact that Suzy teaches mostly international students like herself. Since these learners also do not identify as native speakers of English, they could have relaxed aural expectations for Suzy, who might subconsciously lessen her perceived need to sound native.

Interestingly, Suzy was not the only ITA to explicitly minimize the significance of accent in their professional practices. Another participant was Lana, who noted how the grammar and structure of her utterances were more important than her Iranian accent:

Being a perfectionist, it makes me so frustrated to make grammar mistakes since I can't go back to fix them every time I make a mistake. I [then] realized that I care much less about my accent than the way I articulate my sentences and how I structure sentences (March 9, 2018).

What is of interest in the above journal entry is how Lana began by identifying herself as a perfectionist. When perfectionism is tied to the topic of accent, it is noteworthy that being mostly frustrated about not producing perfect grammatical speech could imply that Lana has perfected her accent and thus “care[s] much less about [it].” This would thus contradict her previous concern about having a forced, nonnative accent as detailed in Chapter Five. Of course, a likely reason for this contradiction is that, as I noted when first meeting her, Lana’s accent could already be heard as sounding like that of a native speaker of English, which gives her more opportunities to perfect other areas of her English.

But what is more interesting is how Lana’s desire to focus on the articulation and structuring of her sentences is also connected to her previous discussion of how convincing people is a primary job duty in the social sciences. In the last chapter, Lana argued that the perceived foreignness of an accent could interfere with conveying and convincing students about ideas particular to their nation. As exemplified by her perfectionism, Lana may partially practice this perception. While she is less concerned about her

accent, it is possible that she nevertheless views her language to be inextricably linked to her ability to convince students. That is, rather than focus on how she sounds, Lana might see grammar and the sequencing of ideas as vital elements in creating an argument that students will likely support.

Once again looking at Lana's similarity to Suzy, it is worthwhile to explore how the practices of both participants possibly create the need for more nuanced ITA professional development. Indeed, rather than benefit from a program like CCC, which teaches them how to orally communicate according to some unspecified Canadian culture, Lana and Suzy would seemingly embrace micro-cultural training related to their academic disciplines. Whereas Suzy's focus on the sequence and logic of her ideas can be developed in a course specifically designed for engineers who need to convey precise, straightforward information as part of their profession, Lana may appreciate explicit social science training in which she can refine her ability to convince people through instruction on how to carefully craft and articulate utterances. It is important to note here that while this imagined training does not require accent reduction, it nevertheless entails some language training in the form of grammar instruction, for example.

Just as ITAs like Lana and Suzy might need to be trained in using other areas of their language to convey information, they may also be required to do more with their bodies to accomplish the same task. Returning to Zack as an example, this point can be seen in how he thinks about his aesthetic presence in the classroom. As discussed earlier in this section, Zack firmly stated that his Chinese identity/accents did not make him a valuable instructor, but rather, his ability to deliver clear explanations. However, this is not to say that Zack never thought about his accent given that I detailed how he has managed to sound less Chinese/robotic in Chapter Five. Although this suggests that he explicitly attempts to become more "White-sounding," Zack never articulated this attempt when further explaining his other professional practices. Rather, he seemed to move away from the importance of his English intonation by being concerned about the need to engage students while actually teaching, which was exemplified here:

I'm still pretty awkward with my body language.... Sometimes, I'm not sure what to do with my hands, especially when I have 20 to 30 students looking at me. And when I need to stand up to do an introduction, I usually put my hands in my pocket.... [Also], I guess I'm more worried about if I'm able to provide full sentences during my introduction. I mean I know my job okay and have experience, but still being like a kind of knowledge facilitator, students still expect you to be [engaging].... And certainly, I don't want to project the image that I speak broken English.

Zack's insecurities about his body language and ability to form complete sentences highlights the need for a more expansive view of the aesthetic labour performed by ITAs. Indeed, looking good and sounding right for the job goes beyond embodying and sounding like a particular racial identity, for example, and moves into a more complex adaptation of one's habitus that involves mastering other corporeal and vocal activities (DuBord, 2014). In the case of Zack, looking good is not simply about embodiment, but also moving the body in order to have an engaging effect on the learner (which was also seen with Fredrick). Furthermore, sounding right is not simply about developing an ideal accent, but, as seen before with Suzy and Lana, producing coherent utterances. Thus, for Zack at least, aesthetic labour requires doing multiple tasks with the body and voice, thereby suggesting that ITAs should receive formal instruction in their physical self-presentation and the verbal organization of their ideas, respectively.

Instead of dismissing Zack's Chinese identity in performing this multifaceted aesthetic labour, it is worthwhile to explore how it influences his expanded view of sounding right in particular. Zack's statement that he does not "want to *project the image* [of speaking] broken English" speaks to the stereotype about the English speech of Chinese people being choppy in nature (e.g., Lindemann, 2005). Consequently, Zack's preoccupation with providing "full sentences" can be seen as an attempt to dispel this stereotypical image of himself. Similar to the toning down of his robotic voice, then, Zack's need to speak in coherent sentences could be another instance of becoming the atypical Chinese speaker of English. This might suggest that what Zack is interested in attaining is not a whitened accent, but rather, a whitened syntax, which similarly reduces the salience of his Chinese identity.

Whereas Zack exemplifies how ITAs can (implicitly) resist changing their accents by focusing on the management of other language and corporeal traits, there is the possibility that they can enact the same resistance through fatigue. One important point that has not been given sufficient attention in this thesis is the mentally taxing nature of consciously trying to change one's accent. In fact, it often requires an intense self-monitoring that is difficult to sustain over time. This was particularly true for Farhad. Although it has been noted that he actively tries to maintain a so-called Canadian accent, Farhad did note that maintaining such an accent was arduous work and could not be maintained under stressful situations:

I'm trying to speak like in a Canadian accent, but it's not something that comes from my nature. It's something that I'm trying to mimic. So when I'm in a situation where I'm stressed, maybe it's an automatic reaction I have, but I switch to an Iranian accent just to communicate. The only thing I want to do is just communicate with the person in front of me. I don't care about the Canadian accent at that moment.

What Farhad highlighted above is the idea that he resists the Canadian accent through mental exhaustion. During stressful times when he might be cognitively engaged in solving some engineering problem, etc., Farhad cannot expend extra mental energy maintaining an accent, which might be unnecessary to engage with his interlocutor. Indeed, by simply wanting to communicate with his interlocutor and not caring about using a Canadian accent, Farhad seemed to suggest that intelligible communication is possible without some form of audience design. Furthermore, through his mention of switching to an Iranian accent to communicate, Farhad highlights how a shift in accent can result in re-racialization. Whereas mimicking a Canadian accent might have made him "less Iranian" for his interlocutors, returning to an Iranian accent may make them more aware of his racial/ethnic background.

This point raises the question of whether Farhad allows mental exhaustion to take over his accent when in the presence of particular listeners. Even though he did not specify with whom he converses in an Iranian accent, it is worthwhile to consider that Farhad is not bothered to sound more Iranian when interacting with other Iranians or other international peers since they would not "sound Canadian" and thus not expect him to do the same. In fact, Farhad's stress may actually correspond to his other previous

perception that there is no need to develop a specific aural aesthetic in engineering since there is minimal talk required and, as implied earlier, this minimal talk is done between fellow international students and faculty. Therefore, Farhad can “relax his Canadian accent” when in the company of these individuals and only be obliged to work through his stress when engaging in conversation with Canadian students.

As seen above, Farhad's switching to his Iranian accent during stressful situations is more of a non-practice in the sense that he is not putting effort into reverting to his original accent. Regarding ITA professional development, then, Farhad exemplifies the unimportance of any kind of accent training since it is possible to effectively communicate without intentional modification of the voice. For some of the participants, the lack of necessity to change their accents consequently led to a belief that their interlocutors are the ones who must undergo training to interact with ITAs with unfamiliar accents. For example, while he tries to circumvent negative student reactions to his African speech by informing them on how it might sound or providing physical demonstrations to supplement it, Fredrick also reinforced the idea that universities and students need to adapt to ITAs' accents:

I believe that my accent does not have much impact [on effective communication]. It has to do with those who are not used to hearing different types of people speak. I believe schools have lots of strategies to implement. Students should be introduced to different accents during the orientation program in their frosh week at the university (April 4, 2018).

Somewhat similar to his story on how he tells students about his “terrible accent,” Fredrick's journal entry sought to highlight how ITAs should not carry the communicative burden in workplace interactions. By suggesting that new students need to encounter different accents during their orientation, Fredrick was implying that it is not the accent of the ITA that must change, but rather, the ear of the student. In other words, ITAs are not obligated to engage in any type of aesthetic labour, which, in the case of Fredrick, means that he is not interested in making his African accent more White-sounding (as expressed in the linguistic marginalization he experiences in his mostly White classes).

Fredrick thus highlights that even when situated in a racially and linguistically homogeneous work environment, ITAs do not need to succumb to raciolinguistic ideologies that can thrive in this environment and, furthermore, can actively promote strategies of resistance.

Concluding Narrative

Unlike the last chapter, which explored ITAs' perceptions on what their aesthetic labour should entail, the purpose of this chapter detailed how they actually perform this labour through stories ranging from coherent accounts of what they do or who they are as teaching assistants to generic or habitual narratives discussing these same things. Strangely, however, these stories, while (implicitly) describing the doing of aesthetic labour, require the reader to think expansively about what constitutes this labour.

In fact, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the professional practices of ITAs do not need to take the form of concrete activities meant to cater to others' aural demands, but also, can consist of such things as constructions of selves. This is because modifying one's aesthetic qualities is not necessarily a superficial process, but rather, deeply tied to one's identity (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Eustace, 2012). For example, Alejandra's "Taking Elements" narrative highlighted how sounding like a White/native speaker of English has to achieve a balance with her desire to be recognized as Latina. As already noted, Alejandra's taking of the segmental features of "native English" while remaining Spanish suprasegmentally represents a hybrid racial performance in which she is partially whitened and mostly Latina. It is worthwhile to point out that in engaging in this performance, Alejandra simultaneously redefines who has ownership over and the ability to change the English language. Indeed, "Taking Elements" signals how Alejandra is a *Latina* speaker of English who selectively incorporates privileged English pronunciation, thereby communicating that she can be a competent user of the language in her own unique manner (Harvey, 2016). In other words, she expresses the idea that, no matter their background, "all language users adapt, contribute to and share in [a particular] language" (Harvey, 2016, p. 380).

The example of Alejandra also highlights that while the aesthetic labour of ITAs involves the work of changing (aspects of) one's accent, it is the labour of maintaining (aspects of) this accent at the same time. Take, for instance, Fredrick's last narrative on having students be exposed to different accents. As mentioned above, the allusion of this story is that sounding right for Fredrick is a matter of maintaining rather than changing his African accent. Furthermore, as seen in his informing of students about his "terrible accent," aesthetic labour for Fredrick might even be defined as the labour of explaining one's aural aesthetic for others before engaging in other professional tasks. These examples highlight that the participants of this study both work on and around their accents on a daily basis.

In performing this dual work with accent, the ITAs communicated how "one's accent can be modified as an agentic resource in order to fit in or it can be retained in order to stand out from the crowd" (Starks et al., 2017, p. 551). When ITAs engage in the former task, it is important to note how it is done in response to interactional and organizational factors. This was particularly the case for some of the participants in engineering. Given that the occupational culture of engineering upholds the White male native speaker of English as the "standard" worker, it is often the case that those who do not (aurally) embody this figure are marginalized and thus forced to modify their voices. Therefore, I argued that an accent can be used as a semiotic resource to accomplish racialized/gendered performances in everyday interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Whereas Navid tries to sound like a masculine Hollywood actor to possibly be accepted by his male peers, Adeela and Jasmine are required to escape their racialized femininity by adopting androcentric vocal behaviour. In contrast, an ITA like Martina may choose not to aurally conform to her surroundings by using the foreignness of her accent as a political project in making Canadian students come to accept the professional worth of international instructors.

When connected to their perceptions of a satisfactory aural aesthetic in Chapter Five, the above practices of working on and around an accent confirm these perceptions and, at times, contradict them. More often than not, the ITAs' descriptions of their professional practices matched with their previously

articulated notions of sounding right. Using the example of engineering once again, what can explain this alignment of perception with practice is the minoritized status of ITAs in specific work environments.

Because Navid, Adeela, and Jasmine noted how they continue to be disrespected by colleagues and/or students on account of lacking the embodied traits of a “typical” engineer, it is then logical to see how they would continue to acknowledge this disrespect when fashioning their voices for work. However, it is peculiar how certain perceptions can get ignored in actual practice. For instance, as already noted with an ITA like Betsy, it is interesting that while she proclaimed that the raciolinguistic diversity of her university signals that her accent is fine in its current state, this very same diversity may create a pragmatic need to lessen traces of her linguistic/racial background in order to be understood by a variety of interlocutors. Thus, it may be necessary to abandon one’s ideals to deal with immediate necessities.

Beyond the deviations between a perception of an aural aesthetic and the practice of it, it is also important to note the apparent contradictions between an individual ITA’s professional practices. While, on the surface, it may seem that two practices oppose each other, they can actually complement one another upon further inspection. One example of this point can be seen with Lei. As noted earlier in this chapter, Lei, through studying the pronunciation of new words before a tutorial, seeks to lessen the presence of his French accent, which may distract students from the content of his utterances. Yet, as described later in his practice of staying aurally “neutral,” he is paradoxically comfortable with being heard as a French speaker of English. It is worthwhile to remember that these contradictory practices do not interfere with one another due to Lei’s racial and linguistic background. Indeed, because his French identity is rarely subject to discrimination in a Canadian context, Lei’s accent is currently sufficient to perform communicative tasks while he strives to sound less French for students. In other words, there might be a temporal quality to Lei’s French accent in that it is to be used as a temporary resource until his voice undergoes further change (or when it is situated in new contexts that enforce some type of change).

Just as professional practices can implicitly be complementary to one another, they may also be doing other things that are not immediately visible. For example, they can act as a form of resistance. Instead of being overt and dramatic, resistance is often subtle and thus hard to immediately detect (Evans & Moore, 2015; Ramjattan, 2019). In fact, while it is tempting to assume that certain ITAs simply accept prescribed manners of speech, it is important to note how they may be participating in micro-level resistance as well. This point has already been seen with Alejandra, who engages in resistance against notions of who can be intelligible and capable workers in English-medium universities by deciding to retain certain aspects of her Spanish accent. Another example came from Patricia, whose self-introduction as Latin American at the beginning of a class is an expression of insecurity about the foreignness of her accent in a Canadian context yet an instance of pride in her background, which communicates a partial resistance against her linguistic insecurity. It can even be the case that resistance can be vocalized under conformity (Evans & Moore, 2015). For instance, Jasmine's complaint about needing to toughen her voice to gain respect exemplified her internal opposition against the masculinized vocal demands placed on her by the field of engineering. As she herself noted, she "shouldn't have to do this" on a regular basis.

Within these practices of resistance, the ITAs also articulated rather profound statements about the nature of communicative competence (in the classroom). For instance, consider participants such as Johnny and Fredrick, who choose to supplement their accents with various resources when interacting with students. These ITAs, as racialized individuals, highlight how the bodies of aesthetic labourers cannot be separated from evaluations of their speech (Ramjattan, 2018). That is, because of raciolinguistic ideologies that position them as deviant speakers of English no matter their actual language ability, Johnny and Fredrick resort to other tactics to distract students from their accents. Thus, it was seen how both ITAs use gesture and demonstrations, respectively, to convey important information. In using their bodies to supplement their oral communication, Johnny and Fredrick subsequently promoted the idea that people should judge the communicative competence of a speaker in terms of the end result of a communicative

activity instead of any one notion of correct or incorrect speech (Canagarajah, 2018). In other words, both ITAs are successful communicators because, even though they do not solely use language, they are able to use other semiotic resources (i.e., their bodies) to deliver their intended message to their audiences. Therefore, it is important to understand how the ability to communicate can be expressed through the performance of work in the broader sense (Canagarajah, 2018).

As discussed thus far, ITAs' professional practices may have multiple functions that go beyond the immediate need to sound right. However, it is important to repeat that ITAs can have multiple practices because they have multiple aesthetic preferences (Lee & Jenks, 2018). As seen throughout this chapter, what can further explain this point is that ITAs need to traverse multiple contexts that influence the nature of their aesthetic labour. For instance, with regard to audience, it has been seen how an ITA like Farhad will attempt to sound "more Canadian" while teaching his Canadian students, but when possibly in the presence of other international colleagues who may have relaxed expectations on his speech, he might reduce the work he performs on his accent. In the case of Navid, as another example, the meaning behind his aesthetic labour involves what specific impression he wanted to make on his listening audience. Thus, for seemingly opportunistic Persian students, Navid thought it necessary to pass as non-Persian in order to avoid having to do favours for these learners on account of their shared racial and ethnic background. But when situated in the androcentric context of engineering where his accent might be heard as feminine, Navid's aesthetic labour becomes concerned with sounding more like a masculine Hollywood actor. In the case of the latter performance, it is important to remember that the engineering field subconsciously creates his desire to sound more masculine, which underscores the fact that changes in the form of one's aesthetic labour are not necessarily conscious activities. What can account for the dynamic nature of the above examples of aesthetic labour is how the ITAs work in internationalizing universities, which create macro- and micro-level cultures that may require differing forms of sounding right.

While the internationalization of Ontario universities creates dynamic types of aesthetic labour, their neoliberalization creates the need for aesthetic labour in the first place. Because ITAs, as service providers, are expected to deliver knowledge in a clear, direct manner for their student-customers, the onus is on them to remove any obstacle that might interfere with this delivery, which can include their foreign-accented English. Therefore, as particularly seen with Lei and his desire to not have his French accent distract students from the information that he is conveying, ITAs can come to believe how the sound of their voices might be responsible for harming the learning experience of their students and adopt professional practices that rectify this problem.

However, it is noteworthy to mention that the ITAs do exercise limited agency in developing these practices since they self-style their own aesthetic labour performances (Cho, 2017). That is, they are under no direct order to sound a particular way and, to varying degrees, can be selective in what they want and do not want to change in their voices. Interestingly, not only do the participants style their own voices for work, but also, they style the conditions from which to justify their decisions to change or retain their accents. Indeed, through narrative, the ITAs detail the specific aspects of their professional lives that warrant the (non)performance of aesthetic labour. Therefore, by understanding that Zack's pedagogical skills trump the need to change his accent or Adeela is obliged to deepen her voice due to being surrounded by male colleagues and students, it becomes easier to empathize with their professional practices in relation to their foreign accents.

To conclude, it is worthwhile to address what these practices have to say about the professional development opportunities that all ITAs should receive in (Ontario) universities. As sporadically noted throughout this chapter, when the participants were describing the nature of their aesthetic labour, they were simultaneously offering their opinions on desired forms of training (or of no training at all), albeit in an implicit sense. While there was brief discussion on how they endorsed and/or complicated current

approaches to training ITAs, it is important to summarize what, according to the participants, must change or remain the same in terms of ITA professional development.

With regard to the general practice of working on their accents, it was apparent that many of the ITAs echoed such sites as the Dalhousie Accent Clinic that perceive a foreign accent as requiring reduction to aurally appeal to others. Indeed, whether it is Farhad's continued attempt to sound more Canadian for his Canadian students or Betsy's self-monitoring of the volume and pace of her voice, there is certainly support for the idea that ITAs do find it beneficial to lessen the foreignness of their accents. Yet, upon closer examination of their professional practices, it is not always the case that the participants completely endorse accent reduction. First, as evidenced by Betsy's and Navid's practice of having fluctuating accents with different audiences, accent reduction is something that is only needed during particular situations. Moreover, as repeatedly noted with the engineering participants, what ITAs are interested in reducing is the segmental component of their accents. In other words, they are not interested in losing the entirety of their foreign-accented speech! The implication of this point is that these ITAs do not desire accent reduction training, but rather, pronunciation teaching. While the former type of training is about eliminating all phonological features of an accent, the latter concerns improving specific features that cause genuine intelligibility issues, which are determined by students and qualified instructors (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Thomson, 2014). Thus, for a participant such as Alejandra, who is focused on changing her Spanish-accented English just enough to be both intelligible and aurally recognizable as Latina, learning how to effectively pronounce specific words, etc., would not interfere with these dual goals.

While the ITAs' promotion of pronunciation instruction over accent reduction is understandable, this is not to say that what they want in pronunciation teaching is unproblematic. This point is once again seen with the participants in engineering. Because engineering culture enforces not only the precise verbal delivery of vocabulary but also androcentric (vocal) behaviour, it was seen how ITAs like Navid, Jasmine, and Adeela undergo multiple changes to their accents. Whereas the need for precise information requires

these participants to change the segmental features of their English pronunciation in the form of phonemes or syllables, the masculinized nature of engineering dictates suprasegmental changes in the realm of intonation and pitch, which can make one “feminine-sounding” when left unaddressed. If these three ITAs are expected/expect themselves to undergo *both* segmental and suprasegmental changes to their voices, then their hypothetical pronunciation teaching is even more questionable accent reduction training.

An additional problem concerns the purpose of this multi-faceted pronunciation teaching. That is, while it can be argued that a mispronounced phoneme perhaps creates genuine communication breakdowns in the context of engineering, the need to develop a “less melodic” or lower-pitched voice arises out of social pressure to fit into one’s masculinized surroundings. Thus, pronunciation teaching for (female) engineering ITAs would need to promote aural conformity rather than intelligibility. This would also apply to non-engineers such as Martina, whose flapping of her /t/ is a racialized linguistic project meant to make her more aurally similar to Canadians instead of more comprehensible.

Moving past its potential issues, it is interesting to note how this pronunciation teaching cannot be readily divorced from culture. Using the engineering participants yet again, it is important to repeat that the changes to their pronunciation are supposed to carry cultural meaning in the sense that developing a deeper tone of voice or flatter intonation helps to reinforce the normative masculinity of the engineering profession. What is noteworthy here is how teaching that addresses this point differs from the cultural training offered by such a program as CCC at Western University. Beyond its explicit focus on language, this teaching would not prepare ITAs to develop skills and behaviour suitable for a generic Canadian educational setting, which is the mandate of CCC, but rather, prepare them to be compatible with the micro-cultural norms of an engineering department.

When examining the participants’ second major practice of working around their accents, this emphasis on micro-cultures continues to manifest itself. In fact, while engineering can dictate specific types of accent training, Suzy’s focus on the sequence and logic of her ideas suggests that ITAs in this field could

receive instruction on how to structure their ideas. This point was echoed by Lana, whose construction of sentences is paramount to her when convincing students in the social sciences. But as mentioned earlier, even though these ITAs do not require accent training, their practices still warrant work on their language in the form of grammar instruction.

In addition to other forms of language learning, Zack's concern over his self-perceived awkward body language or Fredrick's and Johnny's use of body movement to deliver information exemplify how ITAs might want to learn corporeal strategies to either create a positive professional image for students or ensure that students actually understand their utterances. As mentioned earlier in this section, learning how to use these extralinguistic techniques makes the powerful statement that language is only one aspect of ITAs' communicative repertoires or *habitus*, which means that they have a range of resources to engage in successful intercultural communication (Canagarajah, 2018). Indeed, "resources" could even entail physical objects as seen with Alejandra's use of the blackboard when giving instructions to students, for instance. Aside from being trained on how to use their full communicative repertoires, another type of training that might be impactful concerns how ITAs prepare students to listen to their accents. For example, Fredrick's instructions for students on how to deal with his fast speech or Patricia's sharing of her national origins implicitly advocate for training in which ITAs learn to reassure students that their accents do not present a pedagogical issue and inform them of the phenotypic diversity of English speakers, respectively.

But as discussed before, one issue with the above-suggested training is that it may reinforce the idea of ITAs being the sole carriers of the burden of communication with students and others in the academic workplace. That is, by needing to think of ways to explain and/or supplement their accents, ITAs mostly absolve their interlocutors of any responsibility to develop listening strategies, etc., to help foster successful intercultural communication. Perhaps due to this reason, it was seen how Fredrick's final narrative in this chapter did emphasize some sort of formal language awareness training for incoming undergraduates in (Canadian) universities. However, as evidenced by the discussion of hypothetical ITA

training as a whole thus far, there are still the questions of how this training can be successfully and fairly implemented in various campuses.

While this question as well as the other unresolved tensions of the participants' implied suggestions for training will be concretely addressed in the final chapter, it is important to underscore how ITAs are valuable stakeholders in the design of professional development for their peers. Indeed, since the participants of this study are able to work on and around accent utilizing their own knowledge and experience, they should play an active role in ITA training. For example, even though there is the issue of him coming under the influence of raciolinguistic ideologies when doing so, Navid's practice of supervising the speech of his racialized peers suggests how ITAs can linguistically mentor other ITAs. The point here is that rather than view ITAs as lacking in skills and knowledge, it is useful to think about the various assets that they bring into the classroom (Swan et al., 2017; Yep, 2014).

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Summarizing the Findings about Working with an Accent

To conclude this thesis, it is worthwhile to review how the aesthetic labour of the international teaching assistants (ITAs) in this study is a matter of working with their accents. As detailed in Chapters Five and Six, working with an accent is both perception- and activity-based. That is, it first involves working to understand what is lacking in a foreign accent and/or working with the idea that an accent is already sufficient for being a teaching assistant. In Chapter Five, which examined what aural aesthetic is perceived by the participants to be satisfactory for working in Ontario universities, this ongoing mental work took the form of three interrelated meta-narratives.

In linguistic stories of a satisfactory aural aesthetic, the participants worked with the idea that nativeness and nonnativeness in English, categories that they and I treated as real linguistic markers, could relate to intelligibility or comprehensibility. Since they believed that native English speakers are the original source of the language, easily understandable for global audiences, and verbally fluent, the ITAs deemed a “native” accent as more intelligible/comprehensible than a “nonnative” one. However, by recognizing the unimportance of the segmental elements of pronunciation in achieving intelligibility as well as benefiting from the phonological similarities between their first languages and English in the particular case of Spanish-speaking ITAs, the participants could simultaneously acknowledge nonnative speech as intelligible/comprehensible. This perception was certainly amplified by folk linguistic ideas positing that a nonnative accent signified an ITA’s worldly knowledge and praiseworthy ability to work in an additional language. While the native-nonnative distinction was the operating force in defining a satisfactory accent in the linguistic sense, the participants’ racial narratives of suitable aural aesthetics concerned the difference between Whiteness and nonwhiteness. Linked to the colonial history of the English language, the participants’ valuing of nativeness in the language also meant an (implicit) valuing of White people, who can be perceived as the “original users” of English. Therefore, the auditory satisfactoriness of a “native”

accent (indirectly) signified the acceptability of “sounding White.” To complicate matters, some of the ITAs deemed it necessary to acquire a White accent appropriate for their particular geographical context, which meant seeing the value in a so-called Canadian accent. Yet, as seen with Lei and Navid, it was also the case that any accent coming from a (phenotypically) White body could be suitable in the Canadian classroom, given the country’s history of (linguistically) favouring European immigrants over their racialized counterparts. This raciolinguistic hierarchy is consistent with how the participants reinforced their perceptions of the superiority of Whiteness by noting the “deficiency” of racialized speech. Indeed, whether it was cases of accent discrimination or their linguistic analyses of their own accents and those of their peers, the ITAs, through their storytelling, expressed how raciolinguistic ideologies can find “faults” in racialized people’s accents in spite of evidence that would suggest otherwise. But to complicate the analysis once again, they also provided intermittent praise for racialized accents by noting how speakers who “orally distance” themselves from their race/ethnicity, aurally match their interlocutors, or stereotypically adhere to the specific nature of work can be heard as understandable. This mention of work brings up the last set of stories detailing the professional component of a satisfactory aural aesthetic. In some cases, the participants detailed the need to aurally match one’s work (culture) as particularly exemplified by how engineering ITAs have to work on the segmental aspects of their accents to convey precise information and/or the suprasegmental components to adhere to the androcentric culture of the field. However, the communicative conventions of a discipline, the nature of a task, or interpersonal skills could override the need to develop a particular accent. This view was reinforced by the idea that the multicultural character of Canadian universities made all accents equally appropriate for work.

The perceptions generated from all of these stories then required the second component of working with an accent: the enactment of perceived aural aesthetics through practice. As seen in Chapter Six, which explored the extent to which the ITAs incorporated perceived accents into their professional practices, this next step in working with an accent took the form of working *on* and *around* it.

Working *on* accent was a general practice that involved the participants learning about or monitoring accents, performing particular identities through accent, and/or developing “dynamic” accents. First, when detailing their learning or monitoring of accents, which either took the form of receiving and taking note of (informal) language advice or monitoring the speech of their peers, the ITAs seemed to reinforce the value of a “native” accent and the disparaging of racialized speech as described in Chapter Five. However, as especially seen with the engineering participants, these perceptions were tempered by the communicative culture of their academic disciplines, which only valued nativeness or devalued racialized accents in terms of minute phonological details. In terms of doing identity work through accent, discipline played a role once again with Navid, Adeela, and Jasmine vocally masculinizing themselves in accordance with the androcentric culture of engineering that they described (albeit unwillingly for Jasmine). Also, other ITAs reinforced the alleged prestige of “sounding Canadian or White” by “aurally whitening” themselves to satisfy the identities of their interlocutors or their particular teaching goals. Yet, as seen with a participant like Martina, for example, this whitening could be mitigated by a desire to simply *minimize* an accent rather than eliminating it. This leads to how the ITAs also strove for a dynamic quality to their accents in the sense of balancing native and nonnative phonological features in their speech or shifting the amount of effort into lessening the foreignness of their accents in response to specific audiences.

Beyond the above examples of working *on* accent, the participants simultaneously engaged in activities characterized as working *around* accent. These activities did not seek to make changes to an accent, but rather, entailed (implicitly) explaining the nature of their accents, doing supplemental activities to make themselves understood, and/or ignoring the importance of any type of accent modification. Regarding the practice of explaining accent, the ITAs sought to make students comfortable with their accents by acknowledging possible student critique or confusion about their speech or using their actual presence in the classroom to encourage student acceptance of ITAs. This has the potential to both disrupt raciolinguistic ideologies by having students come to accept racialized accents and sustain these

ideologies by framing these accents as an issue that needs to be addressed. This dual effect of an ITA's professional practice was echoed in the supplementation of an accent in which participants such as Fredrick and Johnny, while embracing the unimportance of an accent when using their bodies to convey information, indirectly privilege the White listening subject by needing to rely on nonlinguistic actions to gain acceptance of their speech. However, when describing how they ignore accent altogether as evidenced by such practices as organizing the sequence of their explanations and simply wanting to communicate in any accent when stressed, the ITAs also noted how they are not always concerned about the interconnection of race and accent in their professional lives.

What must be emphasized about these performative and perceptual aspects of working with an accent is how the participants were always influenced by individual and contextual factors. That is, while the above summary of the findings cannot adequately capture all of the nuance outlined in Chapters Five and Six, it is important to remember that working with an accent is shaped by ITAs' social locations, their interlocutors, and their overall work environments. But aside from noting its situated nature, what is particularly noteworthy about working with an accent? Put differently, what new insights does it provide for the study of aesthetic labour? How does it advance understandings of foreign accent in linguistic, racial, and professional domains? Last, what does it reveal about the working lives of ITAs in internationalizing universities? Each of these questions will be answered below.

New Insights Gleaned from Working with an Accent

Although I have already suggested how a study on ITAs requires an expansion of the concept of aesthetic labour in Chapter Three, it is worthwhile to re-highlight and complicate some points from that chapter in light of the findings. As noted, a traditional conception of aesthetic labour involves workers being formally trained to look, act, and speak in an organizationally prescribed manner and consistently display this behaviour while in the presence of customers (e.g., Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Witz et al., 2003). Such

a conception aligns with the viewpoints of scholars such as Braverman (1974), who would argue that aesthetic labour exemplifies the deskilling of workers in that they are considered to be simply doing routinized corporeal/vocal tasks based on orders from management. However, the ITAs in this study have underscored how aesthetic labour is not a “mindless” activity. In fact, their work with their accents is clearly a complex form of aesthetic labour that requires an awareness of, and response to, one’s professional environment, which, in other words, means conceiving of and executing aural aesthetics using one’s own knowledge and skills. Using Lei as just one example of this point, it was seen how his decision to sound “more Canadian” in the segmental realm was the result of his careful assessing of the alleged merits of a so-called Canadian accent as well as a thoughtful reflection on how this accent could help him fulfill his duties as an engineering teaching assistant in the neoliberal university.

Another way that the participants are fairly unique aesthetic labourers concerns how they deviate from the idea that aesthetic labour is only done in front of customers. From the perspective of Goffman (1959), aesthetic labourers only need to look good and sound right in the “frontstage area” of the workplace (e.g., at the front desk of a hotel) and then end their performance when in the “backstage” (e.g., an employee break room). Yet, when it comes to working with an accent for ITAs, aesthetic labour is pervasive in multiple domains of the workplace. Indeed, the participants’ work with their accents is not confined to teacher-student interactions, which would be considered their frontstage work, but also extends to other social relationships outside the classroom. For instance, Navid’s awareness of needing to sound “more masculine” only pertained to socializing with his fellow male engineers, an activity that is informally required by teaching assistants in order to fit into the androcentric culture of engineering.

To emphasize how working with an accent is an ever-present activity for the ITAs in this study also means acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of their aesthetic labour. This point entails a reconsideration of the role of habitus in performing this labour. As discussed in Chapter Three, when workers do not have the exact type of habitus, or embodied dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991), needed to do a job, they may

be (formally) required to reform their habitus (DuBord, 2014). What has not been underscored was how habitus is in constant revision during ITAs' performance of aesthetic labour. This is not only in the sense of general differences between participants as exemplified by racialized ITAs being under more pressure to "whiten" their accents as opposed to their White or White-passing counterparts. Rather, the revision of habitus happens within individual ITAs when they are situated in specific stories. For example, while Suzy emphasized her emulation of a native speaker of English when noting the need to find a common voice for an audience of varying linguistic backgrounds, this was of less concern to her when describing the importance of sequence and logic in developing clear mathematical solutions for her engineering tutorials. These examples of shifting linguistic priorities highlight how working with an accent never creates a single ideal aesthetic labourer. That is, in contrast to such fields as English language teaching where the White native English speaker is a consistent visual and aural benchmark for workers in the industry (e.g., Ramjattan, 2015, 2018), this study has suggested that different types of satisfactory workers are created contextually. For instance, even though it has been seen how Chinese English speakers are stigmatized under raciolinguistic ideologies, they can nevertheless become desired aesthetic labourers for fellow Chinese speakers who might feel comfortable deciphering their speech or when stereotypically matching their work (as seen with Zack and his statistics class).

Along with outlining the heterogeneous nature of aesthetic labour, another contribution of this study is its micro-level analysis of this labour. The discussion on Indian call centres in previous chapters has detailed how aesthetic labourers are specifically trained to sound right and has explained the complexities of crafting a voice for successful customer interactions (see e.g., Aneesh, 2015a, 2015b). However, there continues to be a lack of exploration of how workers actually accomplish aesthetic labour, especially when they themselves have to determine its parameters. This study moves the field forward by indicating the micro-processes that aesthetic labourers have to undergo in order to achieve their individual goals at work. For example, to appreciate Alejandra's desire to sound both "native" and Latina, it is necessary to note how

she mixes “native English” segmental pronunciation with Spanish suprasegmental features. This example stresses how working with an accent can reveal the individual-level intricacies of doing aesthetic labour. Paying closer attention to these intricacies leads to a discussion of how working with an accent lends further insights into the nature of foreign accent in the linguistic, racial, and professional sense.

In Chapter Two, the mention of accentedness served to argue how foreign accents can change over time (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Moyer, 2013). However, not all of the participants described how their accents move along a spectrum in the sense of initially sounding “foreign” and then eventually sounding “native” as time goes by. Some emphasized that “an accent is [always] a moving and dynamic target” (Bhatia, 2018, p. 425), which might mean seeing the value of sounding native with one set of speakers and then reverting to one’s original accentedness in a different context. This situated aspect of speech can be seen with an ITA like Betsy, who might attempt to reduce her Spanish accentedness when interacting with native English speakers and then “resume it” in the presence of fellow nonnative speakers.

This situated flexibility of foreign accent is seemingly at odds with the notion of working *with* an accent since the use of “with” as a preposition of possession suggests that ITAs carry an accent at all times. In fact, rather than view it as something that is created through social interaction as exemplified by Betsy, the way in which the participants discussed accent highlighted its “thinginess” in the sense of how it could be “picked up,” according to Adeela, or become a “holder” of worldly knowledge as expressed by Lana (Silverstein, 1996). This thinginess should not be surprising given that these ITAs, as aesthetic labourers, are supposed to view all aspects of themselves as commodities ready to be manipulated (Nickson et al., 2003; Pettinger, 2016). But in recognizing accent to be a stable thing that *can be manipulated*, the idea of working with an accent does not need to conflict with the flexibility of accented speech. To clarify this point, it is helpful to think of accent as akin to something like hair. While hair is attached to a person’s head, it can be styled in different ways for various occasions. For instance, hair that is normally unkempt might need to be combed for a job interview in order to highlight one’s professionalism.

The hair is still there but transformed to fulfill a purpose. Similarly with accent, it can be tweaked to make a particular impression in certain contexts while not disappearing altogether. In the end, then, while the participants tended to perceive their foreign accents as an inherent quality, they nevertheless emphasized how these accents are capable of change.

This promotion of change is pertinent when exploring how working with an accent is not simply a linguistic project for ITAs, but also, a racial one. Indeed, this thesis has detailed the deep interconnections of accent and race in that changes to the former often result in changes to the latter. In other words, the instability of accent typically leads to the instability of race. This point was seen in prior discussions on racial malleability where changes to linguistic practices could lessen negative perceptions of one's racial identity (Roth-Gordon, 2016). For instance, Zack's improving command of his tone of voice makes him an atypical Chinese speaker of English for his interlocutors, thereby allowing him to escape the stereotype of having an incoherent Chinese accent. But while racial malleability may typically involve lessening stereotypical assumptions about one's racial background, this study has suggested how this process can reinforce Whiteness. In the case of Lei, for example, looking to a Canadian accent to gradually neutralize his French voice serves to link his phenotypical Whiteness to the privileged status of a native speaker of English, a figure thought to be White. This example leads to an important reminder: when examined through the lens of race, working with an accent cannot be similarly done by every ITA.

In fact, another contribution of the current research is how it leads to a better understanding of how labouring practices, when examined within the intersection of language and race, need to be crafted in response to raciolinguistic hierarchies. Consider Lei and Johnny as two contrasting examples of this point. As a Chinese speaker of English, Johnny understood that the phonological differences between Mandarin and English as well as his visible Chinese ethnicity could make him unintelligible in a Canadian context. Yet, since he was still in the process of improving his overall English proficiency and, furthermore, could not necessarily escape perceptions that connect "Chinese" with "incomprehensible," Johnny needed to

circumvent these issues by working *around* his accent, which entailed using objects and gestures. In contrast, it can be argued that an ITA like Lei, a White French speaker, could work *on* his accent because the “positive” qualities of his body and voice allowed for no pressing need to change his accent. As discussed above, he could *gradually* sound less French due to his accent being recognized as more prestigious than that of an Asian English speaker like Johnny (Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010).

Such a distinction between Johnny’s and Lei’s labouring practices is seemingly indicative of the prevalence of raciolinguistic ideologies in the reception and performance of accent. However, it would be a mistake to assume that these ideologies structure working with an accent in an uninterrupted manner. Rather, this study has suggested how raciolinguistic ideologies can be manipulated by workers, as exemplified by Johnny’s “allowing” of Indian speakers of English to be intelligible because they aurally resemble the British. Another example is seen with Suzy’s story of her Chinese friend whose familiarity with Chinese accents made them more comprehensible than those of White Canadians. Even with regard to the activity-based component of working with an accent, my research displayed how ITAs bypass and refute these ideologies. For instance, while Farhad could indirectly reassert his Iranian identity through his desire to simply communicate when stressed, Martina could do the same with her Mexican identity by thinking that her aural presence in the classroom reminds students of how professional competence is not only located in the voices of White native speakers of English. These examples highlight that while the study of raciolinguistic ideologies focuses on how the language practices of racialized people are viewed as perpetually deficient (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017), which is a necessary research topic, it is equally important to note how, in the performance of work, racialized people themselves can create openings for micro-level resistance against the White listening subject.

As seen above, the participants’ work with their accents complicates the study of the hegemony of Whiteness by highlighting how it is not always the main consideration in conceiving and enacting an aural aesthetic. Indeed, when thinking of it beyond a type of racial identity, Whiteness, first as an ideological

vantage point from which to evaluate (one's own) accent, can be disrupted by such things as the shared ethnoracial background of two racialized interlocutors. Second, when conceiving of Whiteness as a practice or process that minimizes perceptions of racial difference, it may be partial in the sense of (inadvertently) returning to the racialized character of one's accent when fatigued or wanting to make a point to others, for instance. While this fluctuating status of Whiteness might lead to the question of whether it truly is a defining force in perceiving and performing accents, it is important to remember its insidiousness. That is, even when it is not immediately apparent, Whiteness can nevertheless be intimately tied to accent. For example, as highlighted by Farhad's and Lei's valuing of a Canadian accent, which can be spoken by a racially diverse audience, the alleged neutrality of this accent can lead to an "aural distancing" of one's ethnoracial background. Moreover, it is vital not to forget that a Canadian accent is an auditory reminder of the White settler colonial past and present of the nation (e.g., Haque, 2012; Denis & D'Arcy, 2018). Therefore, to speak with a Canadian accent means adopting a manner of speech that was originally established by the political power of White people on Indigenous land.

Beyond the interconnection of accent and Whiteness, another area in which working with an accent creates complications is language use at work. In Chapter Two, I discussed how, in the neoliberal economy, foreign accent is a site for work in the sense of accent reduction training to make oneself "aurally presentable" for the job or similar training to interact with callers in transnational call centre work. In that discussion, two points were neglected.

First, when thinking about changing or performing an accent for work, it is important to remember that there are limits on this performativity. Indeed, as evidenced by the engineering participants in particular, it was observed how the ITAs of this study mostly modify their accents in the segmental realm, especially given the fact that some segmental features are difficult to modify (Moyer, 2013; Weber, 2015). While I have explained this observation in terms of the valuing of precise communication in engineering, another explanation might be the fact that many people do not have expertise in linguistics (Lippi-Green,

1994). That is, when needing to change their pronunciation, most people will find it easier to focus on segmental features because they are simpler to conceptualize than suprasegmentals. Therefore, it is possible that, while working with an accent, the (engineering) participants do not try to change their suprasegmentals because they might not know what to actually do. Of course, it is equally important to consider how the ITAs intentionally limit their workplace speech. As already seen with Alejandra, for example, the reason why she does not alter the suprasegmental components of her accent is her desire to be aurally recognized as a Latina.

Apart from highlighting how the changing of foreign accent can be performed in a limited manner at work, the other neglected point about working with an accent is its subconscious nature. Even though my research has detailed how the ITAs describe their professional language practices and has introduced such terms as “audience design” to note how they style their language to produce a particular effect on an audience (Bell, 1984), this is not to say that they are always aware of how they modify their voices or overall communicative behaviour during real-time workplace encounters. For example, when Jasmine detailed the “broken projector” story of her toughening her voice with unruly students, this linguistic action was done in response to her frustration with the class rather than carefully planned to help her gain male-like authority as an engineering instructor. The point here is that when accent acts as a form of work, it is not necessarily a conscious activity because language is used spontaneously in response to varied social interactions in which people engage during their everyday lives.

Thus far, I have explored how the notion of working with an accent complicates the study of foreign accent as a professional activity, a mechanism for racialization, and a linguistic phenomenon. Preceding this exploration, I further detailed how it can reshape current understandings of aesthetic labour. Since this thesis is also about ITAs, it is worthwhile to look at how working with an accent deepens knowledge on their professional experiences in the context of internationalizing universities.

For ITAs (or international education workers in general), their “international” status “is more than a legal category. Being international...is also defined by a feeling of alienation” (Cantwell & Lee, 2010, p. 509). This is certainly seen with the negative reception of their accents, which, according to the literature on international students, is a type of neo-racism that obscures the “biological deficiency” of these individuals by focusing on their alleged cultural and linguistic deficits (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007). However, as witnessed by the discussion on the transcultural university where ITAs have to navigate multiple (micro-)cultures that emerge from internationalization (Baker, 2016), their alienation is not a constant experience, but rather, something that can be diminished or amplified in particular contexts. Indeed, when thinking about the notion of working with an accent, the experience of an ITA like Jasmine is instructive: she can feel comfortable with her racialized voice when situating herself in the macro culture of the Canadian nation that purportedly values multiculturalism while noting its “inadequacies” when placed in the culture of engineering, where her status as Muslim woman can increase her feelings of alienation.

But beyond highlighting how ITAs *experience* their work on a daily basis, the idea of working with an accent details how they *conceive* of their work in universities that are not only internationalizing but neoliberalizing as well. As mentioned earlier, in the neoliberal university where ITAs are expected to be service providers who *orally* impart knowledge to be consumed by students, the modification or supplementation of accent can simply be seen as a necessary, instead of an additional, job task. In fact, for the participants of this study, they viewed accent as a natural fact of their professional lives. Whether it is Lei’s attempt to make his French accent less distracting when lecturing or Lana’s concern about sounding “nonnative” with her Canadian students, most of the participants did not question the alleged need of accent in their job duties. Even when they were articulating or displaying the nonimportance of accent for work, the ITAs occasionally privileged the influence of accent by needing to explain the contextual factors that lessen its significance. For instance, if Johnny were working in a professional environment where he could not use computers to communicate with students, he might have displayed even more concern about

his accent than what was presented in this thesis. The implication of this invisibility of their aesthetic labour is that ITAs may not have an awareness of the extent to which they are exploited by the neoliberal university (Warhurst, 2016). Indeed, even though teaching assistantships are supposed to be low-stakes preparation for a career in academia, ITAs, through working with an accent, carry the extra burden of making sure that their voices do not interfere with knowledge provision to student-customers. In short, while they are learners, ITAs are workers first.

However, it would be simplistic to argue that the participants are always exploited at work. To repeat, teaching assistantships are meant to be learning opportunities for ITAs, who may appreciate the ability to gain work experience as well as a chance to practice their English (Nyland et al., 2009). Moreover, this study has highlighted that ITAs can take great care in and actually enjoy working with their accents. For example, Farhad's need to develop a Canadian accent is not only a response to his raciolinguistic marginalization in Canada, but can also be based on his genuine desire to make personal connections with others. Similarly, Fredrick's display of empathy for his students' predicaments is not just a means to distract them from this accent, but possibly an expression of his commitment to be a caring teacher. In the end then, working with an accent is a reminder that ITAs can take great pride in their work even if said work is a result of neoliberal and raciolinguistic processes within their universities.

Addressing Limitations, Suggesting Future Research, and Offering Solutions

You can never hear your own accent! (Lei, October 23, 2017)

In spite of the above scholarly contributions, this study, like others, certainly has limitations. One potential issue concerns the above observation made by Lei in one of his journal entries. As mentioned before in Chapter Two, folk linguistic notions inform people's conceptions of accents in that an accent is what someone else has, not oneself (Agha, 2003). Therefore, when Lei stated, "You can never hear your own accent," he was possibly referring to this point. The problem here concerns how a thesis dedicated to

examining foreign accents can yield original insights when the speakers of these accents might not hear themselves! In fact, since accents are *auditory* phenomena, it might seem to make little sense to examine these phenomena from the perspective of their speakers. While this point is certainly a valid critique for a purely linguistic analysis of accents, the concurrent emphasis on the social aspect of foreign accent in this study lessens its importance. To explain this point, consider the differences between ITAs like Lei and Johnny once again. One likely factor that explains why Lei cannot hear his own foreign accent relates to his privileged racial and linguistic background in a Canadian context. As previously discussed, due to his White body and French voice, Lei did not hear any overt criticism about his accent, which may have caused him to think less about how it sounds for various audiences. However, for those ITAs from more marginalized backgrounds, it was seen how they were acutely aware of their foreign accents. Therefore, an ITA such as Johnny knew of the “deficiencies” of his Chinese accent when comparing it to that of a White native speaker of English. In short, raciolinguistic marginalization can allow foreign-accented speakers to hear their own voices most of the time.

Another seeming limitation of the study concerns its choice of methods. Because the purpose of this thesis was to understand ITAs’ perceptions of a satisfactory accent for their work and the extent to which they incorporate it into their professional practices, one may question the absence of formal observation to actually witness these practices. In response to this point, it is important to remember that this study was not some kind of linguistic ethnography that sought to capture the actual language practices of ITAs working in Ontario universities. Rather, as seen before, the intention was to explore how the (lack of) enactment of particular aural aesthetics happens through storytelling, which might have the purpose of creating particular impressions for an audience instead of providing some form of truth. Thus, this thesis concerned how ITAs construct desired professional selves in terms of accent.

While potential issues with the current study can be adequately addressed by noting its specific features, etc., there are certainly gaps within it that can be addressed in future research. First, because the

mandate of the thesis was to highlight the experiences of ITAs, which do not receive proper coverage in existing literature, there was a consequent absence of the perspectives of other university stakeholders, who may have a vested interest in how ITAs perform aesthetic labour. For example, it would be worthwhile to juxtapose ITAs' perceptions of satisfactory aural aesthetics with those of those students or trainers who may have differing expectations of or guidelines for sounding right, respectively. Moreover, closer attention to geography may provide additional insights on ITAs' aesthetic labour. Situating the current study in the context of Ontario, a Canadian province that has been most impacted by internationalization in terms of the presence of international bodies, highlighted how ITAs could be influenced by both Whiteness ideologies and liberal multicultural discourses to make sense of this student diversity in terms of perceiving a satisfactory aural aesthetic. However, if these ITAs were teaching in another province or even country where students and staff were linguistically and racially homogeneous, it would be interesting to see whether they automatically adopt a deficit understanding of their accents when juxtaposed to this homogeneity, for instance. An even more interesting site of inquiry would be the internationalization of English-medium universities in "non-English-speaking" nations in such continents as Asia. Because these institutions are situated in national contexts where Whiteness is not a physical and aural norm, students of varying raciolinguistic backgrounds could either look to the accents of ostensibly White countries such as the US and UK as models for successful intercultural communication (see McKenzie & Gilmore, 2017, for discussion of this point in the Japanese context) or be content with engaging in interactions that do not favour the emulation of so-called White accents.

Beyond considering the general geographical context of higher education institutions, another research area to consider is that given how the linguistic and/or communicative differentiation between the disciplinary cultures of the participants often shaped their aesthetic labour, it is worth conducting a comparative or contrastive analysis of working with an accent in other academic disciplines not mentioned in this thesis. One final research question concerns who else needs to work with an accent in the

internationalizing university. Foreign accent is not only salient in the professional lives of ITAs, but also pertinent for international contingent faculty, who might not receive future teaching contracts on account of their “poor communication skills,” or even full-time faculty, who might be denied tenure due to student complaints about their speech (Curkovic, 2000). Therefore, it is important to investigate how international faculty address foreign accent in their teaching and how this might differ from the work of ITAs in terms of student-teacher relations, hiring, etc.

Despite not being able to answer the above scholarly questions, this study offers some practical recommendations for those wishing to enhance the professional experiences of ITAs in Ontario and elsewhere (in Canada). Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, the participants, through how they enacted aural aesthetics in their professional practices, provided suggestions on how to improve ITA professional development. Interestingly, this point leads to the most important recommendation: rather than ignore the knowledge and skills that ITAs develop from their own experiences, which is typically the case for current ITA training that attempts to solely modify their behaviour (Korpan, 2014; Swan et al., 2017), there should be a concerted effort to have ITAs act as resources for their international peers.

Although it is not possible to figure out the exact logistics here, perhaps a dramatic way to include ITAs in their own professional development is to have them form their own professional organizations within their respective universities. Because institutions, like universities, are slow to change, it is typically up to professional organizations to advocate for this change (e.g., Williams et al., 2014). In the case of ITAs, their organizations would need to counter the deficit framing of ITA knowledge and skills and subsequently offer varying types of professional development opportunities that empower (soon-to-be) ITAs. This could take the form of mentoring programs in which novice ITAs regularly meet with senior teaching assistants in order to discuss and get feedback on their evolving pedagogy (e.g., Kasztalska, 2018). The point here is not to change the teaching behaviours of ITAs, but rather, to provide them with an audience to hear their pedagogical priorities and concerns. This mentoring could generally take the form of Navid’s linguistic

monitoring of his peers, for instance. Beyond mentoring, another way to capitalize on the experience of ITAs is to have trainers conduct needs analyses with incoming ITAs before an academic term. Perhaps taking the form of focus groups, these needs analyses could determine what ITAs already know in terms of pedagogy, which would then allow for the creation of training curricula that addresses what they *would like* to know. But what should be the main aspects of such training?

According to the participants of this study, ITA training must focus on accent. However, rather than promote full-fledged accent reduction as seen in the Dalhousie Accent Clinic, for example, the ITAs often articulated the need for pronunciation teaching, which entails targeting specific features of an accent that cause communication issues. Aside from pronunciation, they sometimes expressed a desire for other types of language teaching in the form of grammar to adhere to the communicative conventions associated with their work. This point highlights how the language training of ITAs needs to be coupled with some sort of cultural training. But in contrast to a program such as Communication in the Canadian Classroom (CCC) at Western University, which encourages students to adopt generic “Canadian” styles of communication and interaction, this cultural training would be most beneficial at the micro level of disciplinary cultures. For instance, engineering ITAs would benefit from learning phonological and grammatical means to adhere to their discipline’s requirement for clear, logical speech. Moreover, given that some of the participants were able to use writing, gesture, etc., to communicate, there needs to be equal emphasis on developing ITAs’ own alternative strategies to be understood, thereby privileging their existing knowledge and skills.

But as already noted in Chapter Six, the above recommendations are not without their own problems. As seen in the case of the engineering participants, depending on their specific context, pronunciation training could quickly become accent reduction in that female or “female-like” engineers may need to both modify segmental features of pronunciation to enhance the precision of speech and suprasegmental aspects to be heard as more “masculine-sounding.” Furthermore, having ITAs come up with any means to communicate with students still places the sole burden of communication on

themselves, especially when they are racialized and thus affected by raciolinguistic ideologies. To address these types of issues, it is vital that there be critical discussions on accent and language in every type of ITA training. In fact, ITAs should have the opportunity to explore and question hegemonic understandings of who or what sounds right for the academic workplace and, additionally, develop strategies to combat these understandings (Wang & Mantero, 2018). As just one example, these strategies might take the form of Fredrick's practice of explicitly addressing students' assumptions about his accent and providing suggestions on how they can respectfully ask for clarifications when needed.

It is also worthwhile to take Fredrick's advice with regard to having some sort of pronunciation training for ITA interlocutors. Indeed, perhaps starting with a mandatory workshop during orientation week at their universities, incoming undergraduate students should learn strategies to help them understand ITAs' accents. Even though such training would likely be superficial due to time constraints or the lack of availability of trainers, students, at the very least, should appreciate that the burden of communication should not be solely carried by an ITA. Beyond changing the mindsets of interlocutors, there also needs to be changes to professional cultures. As particularly seen in the context of engineering, for example, negative perceptions of racialized and feminized accents cannot be combatted without addressing the gendered racism prevalent in the entire field. Thus, formal efforts to attract (racialized) women to the field combined with concerted attempts to rectify the inherent inequalities in the performance of engineering are required before critical language awareness becomes possible (Seron et al., 2018).

However, this awareness should not be solely reserved for individual disciplines. In fact, the narratives told by the participants of this study have provided partial glimpses into entire universities that purportedly value linguistic and racial diversity in terms of bodies yet do little to "diversify" their everyday practices (Ahmed, 2012; Ward, 2008). Simply put, universities (in Canada) that host large numbers of international students should share an equal burden in developing diverse standards for effective oral

communication. Although not directly speaking about ITAs and foreign accent, Sterzuk (2015) offers some preliminary ideas that are worth real-life implementation:

First, institutions should work towards awareness-raising by introducing critical discussion through faculty councils and campus initiatives around the ‘neutrality’ of language standards and should proceed with the anti-racist goal of highlighting the relationship between race and standards of English. Next, beyond discussion, change might also take the shape of rewriting, as well as implementing new, language policy that explicitly outlines a diversified range of acceptable linguistic performances that go beyond positioning native speaker and white settler performances as the benchmark for academic achievement. Finally, in addition to discussion and policy implementation, institutional practices must also be addressed (p. 64).

Of course, as Sterzuk (2015) notes, these suggestions might not be applicable or implementable for all institutional contexts. Yet, they do highlight the general need to acknowledge the past and present co-naturalization of race and language (Rosa & Flores, 2017), which not only affect international students and instructors, but also domestic students and staff who are racialized.

Final Remarks

Based on the above suggestions to “diversify” universities in the linguistic sense, the reader might misconstrue my call to examine the connection between language and race as an appeal to look at intelligible or comprehensible speech in an apolitical manner. This is certainly not the case because experiences that seem entirely sensory in nature “are thoroughly social, cultural, and ideological at their core” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016, p. 186). Indeed, as repeatedly highlighted in this thesis with regard to accent, all manners of speech will always be heard through an “ideological filter” that views some accents as inherently better than others (Lippi-Green, 2012). With regard to speaking with an accent, it is important to consider that a change in accent will have to acknowledge and circumvent this ideological filter in order to make a particular impression on a listening audience.

The implication of these points for the aesthetic labour of ITAs is that performing such labour is never a neutral task. Sounding right for the job can entail conforming to a particular aural standard held by

society; it can also become an opportunity to create new, liberating norms that hear all manners of speech as uniquely understandable for the academic workplace and beyond. This mention of “beyond” is an appropriate way to conclude this thesis.

That is, given that much of today’s work involves the use of verbal communication, nearly everyone works with an accent. Whether it is a fast food worker taking a customer’s order or a lawyer defending their client in the courtroom, people do their work with a particular manner of speech, figure out what is “wrong” with this speech when it presents professional issues, and ensure that it does not present further problems in subsequent workplace performances. But as this thesis on ITAs has certainly demonstrated, working with an accent is not a straightforward, fair, and equitable process. Indeed, it might mean understanding that a person is not expected to consistently be any one type of worker linguistically. It could also mean acknowledging that due to their social locations or even the physical locations in which they are situated, some workers will have to think and do more about their accents than others. However, it is vital to remember that these variabilities of working with an accent always present the opportunity to bypass oppressive forces, which will ideally lead to lasting vocal emancipation.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer (Originally Printed on OISE/University of Toronto Letterhead)

Invitation to participate in a study about the workplace experiences of international teaching assistants (ITAs) in Ontario universities

Are you an ITA who is currently working at an Ontario university?

Do you speak English with a foreign accent?

Do you often think about your accent in relation to your work?

If you answered “yes” to all of the above questions, then you may want to be a participant in my study.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Adult Education & Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), a division of the University of Toronto. For my dissertation, I am interested in looking at how ITAs understand what type of accent is right for teaching through their workplace experiences. Furthermore, I intend to examine how their pedagogy is or is not influenced by this accent. As evident above, this study places the experiences of ITAs at the centre of analysis, which is rare in the existing (Canadian) literature.

In order to contribute to this literature, I am currently looking for 15 to 20 ITAs, that is, graduate students who are living in Canada as citizens, permanent residents, or visa students, have completed their high school and earlier education in a country other than Canada, and work as teaching assistants in an Ontario university. Although I would like to have participants of different races and ethnicities, genders, nationalities, and programs of study, ITAs of the same/similar backgrounds as existing participants are nevertheless encouraged to participate.

Participants will first take part in a 45-minute interview, which will ask them for information about their demographic, linguistic, educational, and professional backgrounds. This interview will also give them the opportunity to brainstorm possible topics for their journals. These journals, in which participants write about their workplace experiences as ITAs for approximately one month, will be the subject of a second interview that lasts for 90 minutes. Participants also have the opportunity to share any relevant workplace documents during the second interview. All of these data will be kept confidential, and the interviews will take place in a location convenient for each participant and/or conducted by telephone/Skype. For their participation, participants will receive two \$10 gift cards for a food/beverage establishment (one at the beginning of the first interview and the other during the second).

Aside from its scholarly contribution as noted above, there are great benefits in participating in this study. First, you will have the opportunity to seriously reflect on your teaching practices. Also, you will feel empowered knowing that voicing your experiences may help bring positive change to existing ITA training (in Ontario).

If you are interested in participating in this study and/or would like more information, please feel free to contact me, Vijay Ramjattan, by phone (XXX-XXX-XXXX) or by e-mail (XXXXXX@XXX.XXXX.XX).

Appendix B: E-Mail Seeking Administrative Consent to Forward Recruitment Flyer

Dear (Name of Contact Person),

My name is Vijay Ramjattan, and I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Adult Education and Community Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), a division of the University of Toronto. At the moment, I am looking for participants for my dissertation research, which examines the workplace experiences of international teaching assistants (ITAs) in Ontario universities. The purpose of this e-mail is to ask for your permission to forward the attached recruitment flyer to your student listserv in order to find more participants.

As you will see in the flyer, I am in search of 15 to 20 ITAs or graduate students who are living in Canada as citizens, permanent residents, or visa students, have completed their high school and earlier education in a country other than Canada, and work as teaching assistants in an Ontario university. These ITAs will believe that they speak foreign-accented English and often think about their accents in relation to their work.

If you believe that there are students in your department/institution who satisfy the above criteria, I encourage you to forward the flyer on my behalf.

If they are interested in participating in this study, potential participants can contact me directly at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.XXXX.XX. Additionally, if you require more information about this study, please feel free to contact me at the same telephone number or e-mail address.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Vijay Ramjattan (Ph.D. Candidate)
Leadership, Higher & Adult Education
OISE/University of Toronto

Appendix C: Informed Consent Letter (Originally Printed on OISE/University of Toronto Letterhead)

Dear Teaching Assistant,

First of all, thank you very much for your consideration in being a participant in this study. My name is Vijay Ramjattan, and I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Adult Education & Community Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), a division of the University of Toronto. As part of the degree requirements for the Ph.D., I am required to write a dissertation based on original research. The title of this study is *Working with an Accent: The Aesthetic Labour of International Teaching Assistants in Ontario Universities*. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kiran Mirchandani.

The general purpose of my research is to examine the aesthetic labour of 15 to 20 international teaching assistants (ITAs) who work in Ontario universities. Aesthetic labour refers to how some types of workers need to speak in particular ways to appeal to customers, which may also describe how ITAs need to adjust their accents in order for students to understand them. My specific research objectives include examining how ITAs' workplace experiences inform them of the type of accent needed to teach and detailing how their pedagogy is or is not influenced by this communicated accent.

I am inviting you to be a participant in my study because you identify as an ITA (a graduate student who is living in Canada as a citizen, permanent resident, or visa student, has completed their high school and earlier education in a country other than Canada, and works as a teaching assistant in an Ontario university), speak English with a foreign accent, and often think about your accent in relation to your work.

As a participant in this study, you will first take part in a 45-minute interview in which you will provide basic demographic information about yourself, describe your linguistic and educational backgrounds, and outline your general duties as a teaching assistant. Part of this interview will involve brainstorming specific aspects of your workplace experiences that may help satisfy the above research objectives and will become the major themes of a journal about your experiences as an ITA (I will give and verbally explain to you the written instructions on how to complete this journal upon receiving your written consent). You will have the choice to write your journal in a notebook (I will provide you with one) or electronically (in a Microsoft Word document, for example), and you will write in this journal at your own leisure for one month after the interview. While you will have flexibility while writing, please remember that your journal is an obligatory part of the research process. After one month, you will e-mail your journal to me, or I will make arrangements to collect your journal at your convenience and at no cost to you if you choose to write in a notebook. I will then go through your journal to generate questions for our second interview together. In this interview lasting around 90 minutes, I will ask you to clarify and/or elaborate on your various journal entries. Also, if you discussed any relevant workplace documents in your journal, you will be invited to bring these materials during the second interview so that we can further analyze them together and I can orally read them for future reference in the interview transcripts. Both interviews will take place at a private location that is convenient for both you and me or by telephone/Skype.

Also, both interviews will be semi-structured, meaning that while I will have a list of prepared questions to ask you, I may alter or omit certain questions based on what you say (I may even ask you to elaborate on a certain idea, etc.). Each interview will be audio-taped using a digital voice recorder and will be transcribed verbatim to paper using Microsoft Word with your written permission. (If you do not consent to be audio-taped, I will take detailed notes of your responses and workplace documents). Two weeks after each interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts in order to make any changes, etc., to your responses. I may mail or e-mail the transcripts upon your request and ask that you return the revised transcripts one week after you receive them. (In the event that there are no transcripts, you are free to request mailed photocopies of the notes taken during the interviews at any stage of data collection). If you decide to write your journal in a notebook, I will photocopy each page and return it to you by mail or during our second interview. If you provide your journal through e-mail, I will subsequently delete your e-mail after your file has been downloaded in order to keep your personal information confidential.

Audio files, interview transcripts, electronic journals (if applicable), and a list of participants (with their contact information) will be stored in password-protected, encrypted computer files, while the digital voice recorder, hard copies of transcripts, journal photocopies (if applicable), and copies of the informed consent letters will be placed in a locked filing cabinet at my home. I will be keeping a researcher's journal (to take notes during the interviews if they are not audio-recorded), which will also be secured in the filing cabinet when not in use. Aside from myself, my thesis supervisor will be the only person with access to the data. Also, there is the possibility that a representative from the University of Toronto's Human Research Ethics Program may review the above data to ensure that all required laws and guidelines are followed. In the transcripts, names and other identifying information about you and your university will be systematically replaced with pseudonyms. If your journal entries (or notes taken in your interviews) are presented in the dissertation, pseudonyms will also be used for any mention of particular people and places. In order to further protect your confidentiality, you will be assigned a case number that will be used to group your audio files, transcripts, and journals. (These case numbers will be used in the notes of the researcher's journal if you do not want your interviews audio-recorded). For continued privacy, the transcripts, photocopied or electronic journals, and researcher's journal will be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation (along with the consent letters and participants' contact information). The audio files from both the digital voice recorder and the computer will be destroyed sooner as they will be deleted once transcription is done.

To make clear, participation in the study is voluntary. Additionally, you will be at low risk of harm by participating in this study. By talking and writing about how you come to learn what accent is right for teaching, you may describe instances of accent discrimination (such as someone mocking your accent), which may make you feel uncomfortable (as it possibly means recapping derogatory statements about yourself). To lower this risk, you may refuse to answer any interview question, request that certain sections of transcripts/notes of interviews and journal entries be struck from the record, or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence (please inform me by telephone or e-mail). Also, at no time will I place value judgments on you (as an instructor), nor will I place value judgments on your responses. To help you feel more comfortable in sharing negative experiences, you are always free to ask me questions about your involvement in the study. Also, if you wish to further discuss and get help about your experiences of accent discrimination, I will provide you with possible contacts/resources from your institution to help you do so. If you do decide to report an incident of accent discrimination to your human resources department, union, etc., during the course of this study, you may be ostracized by your offending employer, peers, or students. In order to lessen this risk, please remember that you have no obligation to report cases of accent discrimination to any authority. If you still wish to report such cases, I will help you research ways to file a complaint anonymously, etc.

You will be offered two \$10 gift cards for a food/beverage establishment (one at the beginning of the first interview and the other during the second) in recognition of your contributions to this study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, this small gift of appreciation does not have to be returned.

There are many benefits of being a participant. First, you will have the opportunity to seriously reflect on your own teaching practices through journal writing, which many teachers are unable to do because of busy schedules. Second, by detailing your own experiences, you will be contributing to the literature on ITAs that mostly neglects their first-hand experiences. Last, telling your experiences may help improve training for ITAs (in Ontario) by letting various stakeholders know the linguistic realities of ITAs at work.

In addition to this study, your responses may be used in future publications and conference presentations. If that is the case, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name and the name of your university.

If you have any questions about the research process, please feel free to contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.XXXX.XX. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Kiran Mirchandani at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.XX. Additionally, if you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Research Oversight and Compliance Office—Human Research Ethics Program at XXXXX@XXX.XX or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Vijay Ramjattan (Ph.D. Candidate)
 Leadership, Higher & Adult Education
 OISE/University of Toronto
 XXXXX
 XXXX, ON
 XXX XXX
 Tel: XXX-XXX-XXXX
 E-Mail: XXXXX@XXX.XXXX.XX

Dr. Kiran Mirchandani (Professor)
 Leadership, Higher & Adult Education
 OISE/University of Toronto
 XXXXX
 XXXX, ON
 XXX XXX
 Tel: XXX-XXX-XXXX
 E-Mail: XXXXX@XXX.XX

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name _____
 Signature _____
 Date _____

Preferred telephone number _____
 Preferred e-mail address _____

1. Please initial if you agree to have your interviews audio-taped and transcribed _____ OR
 Please initial if you DO NOT want your interviews audio-taped (notes will be taken instead) _____
2. Please initial if you agree to write in a journal for approximately one month _____
3. Please initial if you would like an electronic copy of the study upon completion _____

Please sign and return one copy of this letter to Vijay Ramjattan and keep a second copy for your own records.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

FIRST INTERVIEW (45 MINUTES): BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Please tell me your gender, age range (e.g., late 20s, early 30s), and ethnic background.

Do you consider yourself a native or nonnative speaker of English and why? Describe when, why, and how you learned English if you believe that these questions apply to you.

Other than English, what language(s) do you speak (if applicable)? In what ways, if any, does this language/do these languages influence your English accent? Do any aspects of your identity (such as your race, gender, or class) affect (perceptions of) your accent?

Give a brief summary of your educational background PRIOR to arriving in Canada.

Why did you decide to study in Canada/Ontario? Why did you choose this particular university? In what ways does your university support international students?

What is your general discipline of study (e.g., Social Sciences) and why are you interested in this discipline?

Describe the generic duties involved in your current teaching assistantship.

What are the benefits and issues of performing these generic duties?

SECOND INTERVIEW (90 MINUTES): PARTICIPANT JOURNALS & WORKPLACE DOCUMENTS

Note: Since the questions for the second interview will be entirely based on what participants say in their respective journals, they cannot be presented here. However, some questions may be framed as the following:

On page # of your journal, you mentioned _____. Could you elaborate on this experience?
What did you mean when you said _____ on page #?

If participants bring any workplace documents, certain questions/requests may be the following:

Could you re-explain why (this section of) this document communicates a certain aural aesthetic?

In the event that participants' journal entries do not make any mention of accents, certain questions may be framed like the following:

I noticed that your journal entry on _____ does not mention accents at first glance. Could you think of ways that this experience can be related to the topic of the right aural aesthetic for teaching?

Appendix E: Instructions for Participant Journals (Originally Printed on OISE/University of Toronto Letterhead)

Dear Teaching Assistant,

Thank you for agreeing to write a journal about your experiences as an international teaching assistant (ITA) for approximately one month following our first interview. The following points are meant to help you in writing this journal:

1. Your journal will detail your workplace experiences in relation to the two main research objectives of this study: understanding how your experiences inform you of the right type of accent needed to be a teaching assistant and how your teaching practices are or are not influenced by this accent. Although we have already decided what aspects of your experiences will help satisfy these objectives, you may also want to consider the following broad topics as part of your journal:
 - a. *ITA training experiences—any specific language/accent training, etc.*
 - b. *Interactions with students, professors, and staff—any comments about your accent, etc.*
 - c. *Teaching philosophy—how you linguistically represent yourself as a teacher, etc.*
 - d. *Professional development—do you take any extra measures to work on your accent?*
 - e. *Documents—training curricula, student evaluations, etc., that talk about language/accents, etc.*
 - f. *Identities—how aspects of your and your students' identities affect the way you speak, etc.*
2. For any documents that you mention in your journal, you have the option to bring these documents for our second interview so that we can further analyze them together and I can orally read these documents for future reference in the interview transcripts (or take detailed notes about them if you choose not to have your interview audio-recorded).
3. You have the freedom to organize your journal in any way that you see fit. However, one suggestion is to group your journal entries according to major themes. For example, if we have decided that your workplace training is a significant theme on which to comment, you may record your experiences with trainers, training materials, etc., under this theme. Please put a date on each of your journal entries. Also, it is helpful if you provide a title for each journal entry (although this is not required).
4. During the one month that you keep your journal, feel free to write as much or as little as you want because there is no minimum number of journal entries. As I am interested in presenting *stories* of your experiences, it would be helpful if you could write about specific experiences in as much detail as possible. However, I understand that it is sometimes difficult to be specific, so it is perfectly fine if you write a few sentences or even point-form notes for a journal entry. Also, do not worry about spelling or grammar as I am solely concerned about the content of your entries. If certain areas of your journal are unclear, I will simply ask for clarification during our second interview.
5. While writing your journal entries, you may write the real names of particular people and places. If I choose these entries to be part of the final draft of the dissertation, I will replace the names with pseudonyms. Alternatively, you can use pseudonyms while writing. Whatever option you choose, please inform me of your choice at the beginning of your journal. If you decide that you do not want certain journal entries to be part of the data, please cross them out (if writing in a notebook) or delete them (if using a computer). You can also ask me to cross out/delete entries at a later date.

If you have any questions or concerns about the journal writing process, please feel free to contact me, Vijay Ramjattan, at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.XXXX.XX.