



THE ACCENT PREFERENCES OF RESEARCH ASSISTANTS IN TURKISH CONTEXT

(Research article)

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Abstract

Research assistants (RAs) are generally criticized for having 'unintelligible' accents for professional communication. Therefore, the use of accent variety is a big matter for them because ELT departments prefer that students are exposed to a standard or widely understood variety of English such as General American or Received Pronunciation (RP). In this regard, this study aims to explore the role of accent preference and perception in English language teaching and learning by RAs in Türkiye. Through a self-developed questionnaire comprising multiple-choice items, this research investigates which accents are commonly used and preferred by 35 Turkish RAs, and how different accents impact perceptions of skillfulness and pronunciation difficulty. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Additionally, the questionnaire probes which accents are more challenging to pronounce for the respondents. The research aims to highlight trends in accent preference, such as the popularity of North American English (NAE) and British English (RP) accents along with three others, and the ways these preferences can influence language acquisition. Among the main findings of this article is that NAE is the number one while RP is the second preferred accent. The results expose a significant impact of accent on both learner comfort and RAs' effectiveness, with varying levels of difficulty in pronunciation. Actually, accent preference of Turkish ELT RAs in English language education isn't about which accent is "better", but it's about intelligibility, consistency, and alignment with instructional goals. Consequently, this research aims to explore the role of accent preference and perception in English language teaching and learning by RAs in Türkiye.

Keywords: Accent, dialect, language, neutral accent, natural accent, foreign accent

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1. Introduction

With recognized status in over 50 countries, since English language is the most common official language in the world, 160 different accents of English have developed all over the world. It must be remembered that an **accent**, which does not mean **dialect**, is the set of pronunciation conventions of some speech community. In general, “accent refers to variations in pronunciation, while *dialect* also encompasses specific variations in grammar and vocabulary” (Lyons, 1981, p. 261; Crystal, 2008, p.142). Additionally, Crystal (2003: 3) again says that an accent is “the cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation that identify where a person is from, regionally or socially”. However, to fully grasp the concept of accent, it is important to clarify the concepts of intelligibility and comprehensibility because accent clarity alone is not sufficient. According to Munro and Derwing (1995), accent prominence is distinct from the concepts of intelligibility (the extent to which an expression uttered by the speaker is understood) and comprehensibility (the listener's perceived difficulty of the expression to understand it). Among these accents, some of the accents may be easier to understand to some than others, but they are all English. Differences in pronunciation do not necessarily hinder communication as long as the speech remains intelligible and comprehensible. Different types of English accents are used in different countries and regions across the globe. There is a large array of different accents within primarily English speaking countries, like the US, Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand, and there is a wide variety of foreign English accents in the other continents of the world. However, one of the complexities stems from the multitude of these accents, which may cause a challenge for both teachers and learners regarding which varieties should be prioritized for intelligibility. Therefore, investigating RAs’ perceptions of these accents is crucial to understand how this multitude is navigated and prioritized in academic contexts.

1.1. Common Accents of English Language

On the global stage, American, Canadian, British, Australian, and New Zealand native speaking countries, each major English-speaking country mentioned below has its unique way of pronouncing words, using vocabulary, and even structuring sentences. Apart from these five basic accents Hancock (1977) cited 155 more inform of separate accent, creole and pidgin forms some of which are *Hawaiian Creole*, *Gullah or Sea Islands Creole (spoken on the islands off the coasts of northern Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina)*, *Jamaican Creole*, *Guyana Creole*, *Krio (spoken in Sierra Leone)*, *Sranan and Djuka (spoken in Suriname)*, *Cameroon Pidgin English*, *Tok Pisin*, *Solomon Islands Pidgin*, *Nigerian Pidgin English*, and so on. All of them were made by means of colonial powers of Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, Germany, America, etc.

1.1.1. Received Pronunciation (RP)

When it comes to the British English language, it cannot be denied that that it was the British English that has played a significant role in its history and development in giving birth to 160 accents through colonization and dominions. In Great Britain, Received Pronunciation (RP) is often referred to as “Standard English” the “Queen’s English” or “BBC English”. It

has traditionally been associated with the middle and upper classes. It is an accent also associated with higher-classes. Honestly, only 3-5% of British people would speak this way.

As stated by Roach (2009), RP is a non-rhotic accent where the /r/ sound is pronounced only before vowels (as in “red”), but not before consonants (as in “hard”) or at the end of words (as in “car”). Additionally, RP is distinguished by the use of the long back vowel /ɑ:/ in words like “bath”, “grass”, and “dance”, which is known as the Trap-Bath split, and the preservation of the distinct /t/ sound between vowels. It also uses the rounded short vowel /ɒ/ in words like “lot” and “cloth”.

Within Great Britain itself, there are 29 to 40 distinct dialects from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands. Accents and dialects vary greatly across Great Britain, some of which are Cockney, Scouse, Geordie, Brummie, West Country, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish, Yorkshire accent, Mancunian accent (Manchester), and so on. There is no such thing as a single “British accent”. RP is considered to have the widest geographical distribution along with World Englishes, and there are fewest regional peculiarities. RP was originally the pronunciation of educated speakers in southern England and officially used at the court and in the public schools. RP was also supported by Oxford and Cambridge universities and widely used in broadcasting, which made it a prestige accent. RP was additionally adopted by many speakers elsewhere in the Commonwealth countries (Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, etc.) and across the globe as an amalgamation of different ones including the creoles and Pidgins (i.e, Hawaiian accent, Singaporean accent, Jamaican accent, Hong Kong English, Nigerian English, etc.), all of which carry stories of colonization and dominion history of Great Britain.

1.1.2. American English Accent (NAE)

After the Second World War, American movies, especially the Hollywood films, American mass media and TV shows are enjoyed by millions of foreigners worldwide. In handling these facilities, people or the world exposed themselves to the American accent, its typical vocabulary items, and phrases. This constant exposure has led to a familiarity, prioritization, and acceptance of NAE as the standard form. The dominance of American media has also influenced pronunciation preferences. The distinct American accent is often imitated or adopted by non-native English speakers due to its prevalence in popular culture.

For the preference of NAE pronunciation, American mass media and internet dominance have introduced and popularized numerous words and expressions into the global vocabulary. Vocabulary items like “cool”, “awesome”, or “dude” have repeatedly become part of everyday informal speech worldwide (English dictionary, translations & thesaurus, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>). With the enormous size of the United States in North America being so huge, one can imagine the number of accents that exist there. “There are roughly 30 major dialects in America” (Fluency Corp, American English dialects 2023); therefore, in North America, English accents are as diverse as the landscape itself. Actually and most likely, Americans speak dialects of American English based on the region where they are raised.

A great part of North American English (NAE), otherwise called General American (GA), uses a rhotic accent. NAE in the United States quickly follows with a multitude of totaling 27 to 30 distinctly recognized accents some of which include the New York accent (non-rhotic),

the Southern Accent. NAE distinguishes itself from British English through its unique consonant and vowel traits, and is known for its distinct pronunciation and intonation patterns. Most importantly, NAE is often known as a neutral or standard accent, prevails across much of the central and western United States and frequently features in education, at the court, and national media. It typically lacks any distinctly regional, ethnic, or socioeconomic characteristics. NAE accent is one of the most widely recognized, influential, and preferred accents.

NAE uses a rhotic accent and distinguishes itself from British English through its unique consonant and vowel traits, and is known for its distinct pronunciation and intonation patterns. The main phonological features include alveolar flapping, where the intervocalic /t/ sound like a quick /d/ (e.g., “water”, “butter”). Also, the yod-dropping after alveolar consonants causes words like “duke” or “new” to sound like /du:k/ and /nu:/ instead of /dju:k/ and /nju:/ in RP. Besides, GA typically lacks the rounded /ɒ/ vowel and it merges with the non-rounded /ɑ/ as in the first syllables of “father” and “bother” (Labov, et al. 2008; Kretzschmar, 2008). The differences regarding pronunciation between NAE and RP can be seen in the following words (Table 1).

Table 1.

NAE vs. RP (Pronunciation on Cambridge Dictionary. Adapted from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/pronunciation/>)

Vocabulary	NAE	RP
advertisement	/,æd.və'taɪz.mənt/	/əd'vɜ:.tɪs.mənt/
civilization	/,sɪv.əl.ə'zeɪ.jən/	/,sɪv.əl.aɪ'zeɪ.jən/
industrialization	/ɪn,dʌs.tri.ə.lə'zeɪ.jən/	/ɪn,dʌs.tri:ə.laɪ'zeɪ.jən/
lieutenant	/lu:'ten.ənt/	/lef'ten.ənt/
panorama	/,pæn.ə'ræm.ə/	/,pæn.ər'ɑ:.mə/
schedule	/'skedʒ.u:l/	/'fedʒ.u:l/

1.1.3. The Canadian Accent

The Canadian accent spoken in Canada is known as Canadian English, which is a mix of British and American influences, resulting in a unique blend. However, Canadian English has developed characteristics of its own. Standard Canadian English (except in the province of Newfoundland) is very similar to General American, and it doesn't vary much from place to place. So, the Canadian accent bears similarities to the American accent in some areas, while in neighboring dialects, a slight British influence is noticed. Canadian English merges with unique Canadian traits and makes it hard for outsiders to distinguish the Canadian accent from the American. Like NAE, the Canadian accent has adopted a rhotic accent and utilizes the alveolar flap. However, a distinctive phonetic feature is “Canadian Raising”, where the diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ are raised before voiceless consonants, often making words like

“about” or “writer” sound distinctly different from their NAE counterparts (Chambers, 1973; Boberg, 2010).

1.1.4. The Australian Accent

The Australian accent was created by the migration of both native and non-native English speakers to Australia. It shares the most similarity with New Zealand English. Furthermore, Australia also has had hundreds of indigenous languages that have impacted Australian English. Australia has been having immigrants through centuries which paved the way for interaction with many different cultural and linguistic groups. Several centuries of being half a world away from England Australian English has developed plenty of unique features. In brief, the Australian accent of English started to evolve from British English due to colonization and the convicts in the early days of the new white colony that began in Sydney in 1788.

The year 1788 is the year of the beginning of pronunciation-based separation of Australian dialect from British dialect because the children who were born into the new colony were exposed to a whole range of different dialects in Australia. Thus, a combination of the various accents of the people that moved to Australia and had to learn to communicate with each other even though they spoke a variety of English dialects. It has developed unique features influenced by the Australian environment in relation to aborigines and the multicultural population of immigrants. Australian accent has adopted a non-rhotic accent, in which the /r/ sound at the end of words is omitted unless followed by a vowel in the subsequent word. Similar to GA, Australian English accent is characterized by the alveolar flapping of /t/ in words like “butter” or “water”. Additionally, High Rising Terminal (HRT) is frequently used where statements end with a rising intonation typically associated with questions (Cox & Palethorpe, 2007).

1.1.5. The New Zealand Accent

New Zealand English (NZE) is a version of the English of Great Britain spoken and written by most English-speaking New Zealanders (Hay, et al., 2008). “An early version of the New Zealand accent was being used by people in some New Zealand towns as early as the 1870s” (Gordon, 2009, p.45). It is one of “the newest native-speaker variet[ies] of the English language in existence, a variety which has developed and become distinctive only in the last 150 years” (Trudgill et al., 2000, p. 300). The similarities between the two accents are so great that people who speak the New Zealand accent can usually relate to those who speak the British accent. The New Zealand accent is also commonly known as the Kiwi accent.

“The variety of English that had the biggest influence on the development of New Zealand English was Australian English, itself derived from Southeastern England English, with considerable influence from Scottish and Hiberno-English, and with lesser influences the British prestige accent Received Pronunciation (RP) and American English. An important source of vocabulary is the Māori language of the indigenous people of New Zealand, whose contribution distinguishes New Zealand English from other varieties” (Bayard, 2000, p. 8-14).

Phonetically, New Zealand English (NZE) is distinguished by the centralization of the short /ɪ/ vowel, which causes words like “fish” and “chips” to be perceived by outsiders as “fush” and “chups”. Furthermore, the merger of the diphthongs in “ear” and “air” is frequently observed. This results in the words “cheer” and “chair” being pronounced almost identically (Gordon et al., 2004; Gordon & Maclagan, 1989).

Apparently, English accents vary widely across regions, with notable examples including the British, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and so on. They are marked with geographical, regional, and socio-cultural factors. For the most part, these dialects do not necessarily keep the speakers from understanding each other. Collectively, they remind us that languages, dialects, and accents are living entities, constantly changing and adapting, just as the people who speak it will.

1.2. *Literature Review*

EFL learners prefer learning English within the standards of NAE or RP, or any other accents for different preferences (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). The concept of whether native pronunciation in spoken English should be followed by EFL learners has been greatly discussed and challenged (Erling, 2005) in the global stage. In this respect, it has been found that native English is preferred by most non-native learners of English, who would also like to adhere to the native English models like either GA or RP (Bayard & Green, 2005; Chiba et al., 1995; Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Timmis, 2002).

Bayard and Green (2005) discovered that learners from Europe and Southeast Asia prioritized GA because of the popularity of Hollywood movies and American mass media worldwide. Austrian non-native learners of English preferred a native English accent higher which was of their own familiarity, i.e. Austrian-British one. Austrian learners rated the speakers with the RP accent as “the most educated, organized, and courteous” (Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997, p.122). Likewise, learners from Denmark also found RP “to be the unsurpassed prestige variety” and it is the correct model of pronunciation in Danish EFL classrooms (Ladegaard, 1998).

In Japan, Japanese undergraduate students rated the UK and the NAE accents higher than those of the expanding circle like Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Hong Kong (Chiba, et al., 1995). A larger scale of research was made by Timmis (2002), who sampled 400 learners in more than 45 countries in this respect. He found his 400 learners prefer native speaking pronunciation standards in spoken English and its grammar. In the Asian continent, Qiong (2004) found that 100% of the respondents at a Chinese university regarded British and American accents to be the only English standards and he believed that this deeply rooted belief was engraved in their minds by their English teachers. In Li’s (2009) study, 80% of the educated Chinese bilingual users also favored native English accents. Recent studies confirm that NAE and RP accents still remain strong. For example, in a study on Indonesian EFL students, Yanti et al. (2025) found that most students have a preference for NAE accent, heavily influenced by digital media. Similarly, Sung (2023) argues that in contexts such as Hong Kong, even when students are of ELF, native-speaker ideology continues to dominate their ideal self-image as English

speakers, creating a conflict between their local identity and their desire for standard pronunciation.

In line with learners' preferences, research on EFL teachers reveals their strong adherence to native speaker norms. Sifakis and Sougari (2005) emphasized that non-native EFL teachers often view native English accents as the only legitimate model and associate them with professional competence. This tendency persists in recent literature. Despite teachers' awareness of the international status of English and its diversity, they usually tend to stick with NAE and RP, which are perceived by the teachers as a sign of competence and of being a good role model to the students as stated in Tsang's (2025) research on both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers. Furthermore, Noviana's (2020) study on international EFL teachers' attitudes towards accent revealed that they mostly prefer NAE accent due to their familiarity, while others use a blend of their L1 accents, such as Thai and Indonesian. Some of them prefer both NAE and RP accents to teach the differences to the students.

Conversely, only very few studies found that learners of English would not like to speak like a native speaker (Widdowson, 1997; Yano, 2001). The reason for this disinclination is given by Kramsch (1993:9), "Nonnative teachers and students alike are intimidated by the native speaker norm". Supporting this, several studies highlighted the shift towards mutual intelligibility. For instance, Chan (2019) evidenced that a significant number of EFL learners, teachers, and professionals aimed for mutual intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation, emphasizing that native speaker norms, particularly in assessments, may hinder their motivation and self-confidence in learning English as suggested by Kirkpatrick (2007). Further, Kholid and Hidayat (2025) found that while some EFL learners idealized native accents, a growing number preferred clear communication over native-like pronunciation to preserve their cultural identities which could be hindered by native accents. Besides, the study revealed that learners feel nervous when speaking English due to the fear of making pronunciation errors.

Despite this shift, native speaker norms continue to maintain their hegemony in Turkish context regarding both learners and teachers. For example, Koçak et al. 's (2022) research on Turkish EFL learners revealed that Turkish learners of English did not underestimate non-native accents and they appreciated using L1 Turkish accents, but they expressed their desire to speak like a North American or a British speaker. Similarly, Mısır and Gürbüz (2022), in a study with Turkish EFL teachers, found that while teachers were aware of non-native accents, they mostly preferred NAE and RP respectively, for both using and teaching. Complementing these findings from a phonological perspective, Solmaz's (2021) study found that one of the reasons Turkish EFL pre-service teachers gravitate towards the NAE accent is its rhotic nature.

Consequently, the literature presents a landscape defined by the interplay of three dynamics regarding accent preference. First, the native-speaker ideology leads learners and teachers toward the use of NAE and RP, which are idealized norms and symbols of prestige. Second, as the "Familiarity Principle" highlights, using and being familiar with a particular accent elicits positive responses to the accent, yielding a more favorable approach to it (Abu Guba et al., 2023; Chiba et al., 1995; Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997). The prevalence of American media

makes NAE default for many EFL learners and teachers and reinforces this trend. Third, the challenges posed by native speaker norms bring the concepts of "Intelligibility" and "Identity" to the forefront.

Although a great deal of research was conducted to investigate the accent preferences of EFL learners and teachers, studies on Research Assistants (RAs) in ELT departments are understudied. This creates a critical gap because RAs have dual positions. They are advanced academic students pursuing graduate degrees, and serve as future teacher educators and role models for future EFL teachers. Their accent preferences and beliefs will inevitably shape the pedagogical perspectives of future teachers. Therefore, understanding the accent preferences of this academic group is crucial for predicting the future direction of accent use in higher education. Responding to a need identified in previous studies and the gap specific to Türkiye, this research aimed to define the role of accent preference and perception among RAs in English language education. By understanding RAs' accent awareness and preference, the study sought to provide the necessary foundation for them to establish consistent dialect use, thereby improving their ability to effectively support learning, reduce learner confusion, and successfully meet institutional and learner expectations. To achieve this, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the percentage of awareness of English accent by Turkish ELT research assistants?
2. What is most favored English accent by Turkish ELT research assistants?
3. Which one of the accents is the least pleasing accent for Turkish ELT research assistants?
4. Which accent type is the most skill promoting accent for Turkish ELT research assistants?
5. Which accent types do Turkish ELT research assistants perceive as the easiest and the most difficult to pronounce?
6. What is the order of noticing pronunciation differences through accent by Turkish ELT research assistants?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a descriptive questionnaire. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 41), quantitative research is an approach for “testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” which “can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures.” Consistent with this definition, this study is non-experimental and cross-sectional, since it includes no intervention, manipulation, or comparison over time. The purpose of this research is to find out the Turkish EL) RAs’ preferences of English language accents they favor. Through the questionnaire, it aims to describe the current state of accent preferences in this specific academic group.

2.2. *Participants*

The participants consist of 35 RAs working in ELT departments in the state and foundation universities in four corners of Türkiye. They contributed to this research on voluntary basis. A snowball sampling technique was employed through which initially contacted participants were encouraged to forward the questionnaire to their colleagues. As displayed in the demographic data, the participants were composed of 35 females (N=25; 71.4 %) and males (N=10; 28.6 %) ELT RAs' from different state (N=27, 77.14%) and Foundation (N=8, 22.86 %) universities of Türkiye. Their age ranged from 23 to 30 and due to the proximity of their ages, age factor was not included in the list of independent variables in the analysis.

2.3. *Instruments*

To collect the data, a self-developed questionnaire was designed by the principal researcher in line with the research objectives. For content validity and item clarity, the initial draft of the self-developed questionnaire was examined, evaluated, and refined by three experts in the field of ELT. In the light of expert feedback, suggested modifications were made and the questionnaire was finalized to be put into practice. The final instrument consists of 8 multiple-choice where participants were required to select from five distinct native accents: General American English, British English, Canadian English, Australian English, and New Zealand English. These items investigated self-identification of accent use, preferences in teaching and studying, aesthetic judgments, perceived contribution to skill development, articulatory difficulty, and awareness regarding the differentiation of accents.

2.4. *Data Collection*

To facilitate accessibility for data collection, the questionnaire was converted into Google Forms. The questionnaire link was offered to participants across various universities in Türkiye through snowball sampling technique as previously mentioned. It is important to underline that data collection in this research was carried out on a voluntary basis. Snowball sampling technique was employed through which initially contacted participants were encouraged to forward the questionnaire to their colleagues.

2.5. *Data Analysis*

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentiles, to interpret participants' accent awareness, preferences, and perceptions, and these six research questions were tested accordingly. Responses were also analyzed to examine the distribution according to the independent variables of gender (Male/Female) and university type (State/Foundation). The findings were then tabulated to provide a clear overview of accent preferences.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of descriptive statistics for all variables under investigation. The frequencies and percentages were used to indicate the frequency of accent awareness, accent preference, and other accent related variables among participants in general as well as their awareness and preferences in relation to independent variables such as gender (Male or Female) and type of university (State or Foundation). The results are given below according to the research questions formulated in review of the related literature section.

3.1. Research Question 1-What is the percentage of awareness of English accent by Turkish ELT research assistants?

The results of descriptive statistics (Table 2) showed that most of the students (57.1 %) were aware of their accent type. On the other hand, the results revealed 2.90 percent of them were reluctant to their accent type. The results also disclosed that both the male and female groups reported high percentages of accent awareness (Female= 56.0 %; Male= 60.0%). The results also revealed that participants from both state and Foundation universities reported high percentages of accent awareness (State= 55.6 %; Foundation= 62.5%). Additionally, 22.2% of the participants from state universities and 25.0 % from Foundation universities stated that accent wasn't important for them.

Table 2.
The Accent Awareness of the Participants

Variable	Group	N	I am definitely sure of the type of English accent I use in my speech. N (%)	I am not sure. N (%)	I never pay attention to my accent. N (%)	Accent is not important for me. N (%)
Overall		35	20 (57.1%)	6 (17.1%)	1 (2.9%)	8 (22.9%)
Gender	Female	25	14 (56.0%)	3 (12.0%)	-	8 (32.0%)
	Male	10	6 (60.0%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	-
University	State	27	15 (55.6%)	5 (18.5%)	1 (3.7%)	6 (22.2%)
	Foundation	8	5 (62.5%)	1 (12.5%)	-	2 (25.0%)

3.2. Research Question 2-What is most favored English accent by Turkish ELT research assistants?

As shown in Table 3, the results of descriptive statistics revealed that the NAE accent (88.6 %) was the most favored one among the participants, followed by the British English accent

(11.4 %). The results also disclosed that both of the male and female groups reported high percentages of the NAE accent (Female= 84.0 %; Male= 100 %). In addition, the participants from both the state and Foundation universities reported high percentages of accent awareness in the NAE accent (State= 96.30 %; Foundation = 62.5 %).

Table 3.

Distribution of the Most Favored English Accent

Variable	Group	N	1. General American English N (%)	2. British English N (%)	3. Canadian English N (%)	4. Australian English N (%)	5. New Zealand English N (%)
Overall		35	31 (88.6%)	4 (11.4%)	-	-	-
Gender	Female	25	21 (84.0%)	4 (16.0%)	-	-	-
	Male	10	10 (100%)	-	-	-	-
University	State	27	26 (96.3%)	1 (3.7%)	-	-	-
	Foundation	8	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)	-	-	-

3.3. Research Question 3-Which one of the accents is the least pleasing accent for Turkish ELT research assistants?

As indicated in Table 4, the New Zealand English (54.3 %) was the most annoying accent among the participants, followed by the British English (20.0 %) and Australian English (20.0 %) accents. The results also revealed that both the male and female groups reported a high percentage of annoyance to the New Zealand English accent (Female= 44.0 %; Male= 80 %). In addition, 59.3% of participants from state universities and 38.0% from Foundation universities reported being annoyed mostly by the New Zealand English accent.

Table 4.

Distribution of the Most Annoying Accent among the Participants

Variable	Group	N	1. General American English N (%)	2. British English N (%)	3. Canadian English N (%)	4. Australian English N (%)	5. New Zealand English N (%)
Overall		35	1 (2.9%)	7 (20.0%)	1 (2.9%)	7 (20.0%)	19 (54.3%)
Gender	Female	25	-	6 (24.0%)	1 (4.0%)	7 (28.0%)	11 (44.0%)
	Male	10	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	-	-	8 (80.0%)
University	State	27	-	6 (22.2%)	1 (3.7%)	4 (14.8%)	16 (59.3%)
	Foundation	8	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	-	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)

3.4. Research Question 4-Which accent type is the most skill-promoting accent for Turkish ELT research assistants?

The results illustrated in Table 5 underlined that the British English accent (60.0 %) appeared to be the most skill-promoting, followed by the NAE accent (37.1 %). Likewise, the British English accent was considered the most skill-enhancing accent across both gender groups (Female/Male = 60.0%) and university groups (State = 59.3%; Foundation = 62.5%). It was followed by the NAE accent, reported by females (40.0%), males (30.0%), and participants from state (40.7%) and Foundation (25.0%) universities.

Table 5.
Distribution of Skill-Promoting Accent

Variable	Group	N	1. General American English N (%)	2. British English N (%)	3. Canadian English N (%)	4. Australian English N (%)	5. New Zealand English N (%)
Overall		35	13 (37.1%)	21 (60.0%)	-	1 (2.9%)	-
Gender	Female	25	10 (40.0%)	15 (60.0%)	-	-	-
	Male	10	3 (30.0%)	6 (60.0%)	-	1 (10.0%)	-
University	State	27	11 (40.7%)	16 (59.3%)	-	-	-
	Foundation	8	2 (25.0%)	5 (62.5%)	-	1 (12.5%)	-

3.5. Research Question 5-Which accent types do Turkish ELT research assistants perceive as the easiest and the most difficult to pronounce?

According to the participants' responses shown in Table 6, the British English accent (54.3 %) appeared to be the most difficult accent in pronunciation, followed by the Australian English accent (34.3 %). The analysis of descriptive statistics also revealed similar results for both gender groups, i.e. 48.0% for the British English accent in females and 44.0% for males, 70.0% for British English accent and 30.0% for Australian English accent, respectively. Moreover, participants from both state (59.3%) and foundation (38.0%) universities reported a high difficulty index for the British English accent.

Table 6.
Distribution of Accent Difficulty in Pronunciation

Variable	Group	N	1. General American English N (%)	2. British English N (%)	3. Canadian English N (%)	4. Australian English N (%)	5. New Zealand English N (%)
Overall		35	-	19 (54.3%)	-	12 (34.3%)	4 (11.4%)
Gender	Female	25	-	12 (48.0%)	-	11 (44.0%)	2 (8.0%)
	Male	10	-	7 (70.0%)	-	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)
University	State	27	-	16 (59.3%)	-	9 (33.3%)	2 (7.4%)
	Foundation	8	-	3 (38.0%)	-	3 (37.0%)	2 (25.0%)

3.6. Research Question 6-What is the order of noticing pronunciation differences through accent by Turkish ELT research assistants

The descriptive statistics indicated that the combined NAE and British English accents (43.9%) were the most prominent in identifying pronunciation differences (Table 7). A similar pattern was observed across gender groups, with 41.0% for females and 52.0% for males. Additionally, the participants from state university reported a high index for detecting pronunciation differences through the “Altogether North American English/British English/Canadian English/Australian English” (51.9 %) accent type, whereas the participants in the Foundation universities reported a high index for detecting pronunciation differences through the “Both North American English and British English together” (62.5 %) accent type.

Table 7.
Distribution of Noticing Pronunciation Differences through Accent

Variable	Group	N	1. Only General American English N (%)	2. Only British English N (%)	3. Both General American English and British English together N (%)	4. Altogether General American English/British English/Canadian English N (%)	5. Altogether General American English/British English/Canadian English/Australian English N (%)
Overall		35	-	-	15 (42.9%)	5 (14.3%)	15 (42.9%)
Gender	Female	25	-	-	10 (40.0%)	5 (20%)	10 (40.0%)
	Male	10	-	-	5 (50.0%)	-	5 (50.0%)
University	State	27	-	-	10 (37.0%)	3 (11.1%)	14 (51.9%)
	Foundation	8	-	-	5 (62.5%)	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)

4. Discussion

A great majority of Turkish RAs favor native-like English pronunciation standards in their teaching and learning. The findings of this research go on a par with the findings of Bayard and Green (2005), who found that learners from Europe and Southeast Asia preferred American Accent. This consistency across different geographies highlights the global commonality of the “native-speaker fallacy” (Phillipson, 1992), which idealizes the superiority of native speakers of English. Likewise, Danish learners also found RP “to be the unsurpassed prestige variety” and it is the correct model of pronunciation in Danish EFL classrooms (Ladegaard, 1998). Similarly, Turkish RAs, too, preferred just like the participants of Qiong (2004) who found that 100% of the respondents at a Chinese university regarded British and American accents to be the only English standards to be learned. These findings support the view that, despite the rising awareness of Global Englishes and ELF (Koçak et al., 2022), the native speaker ideology continues to dominate the academic context, particularly among future EFL teacher educators.

Regarding the RAs' awareness of their own accent, the results of descriptive statistics showed that of the 35 participants, 57.1 % were aware of their accent type they were using. While this indicates the awareness of the majority, the fact that nearly half of the RAs are unsure or indifferent about their accents highlights a potential gap in phonological awareness training in graduate courses. This apparent lack of awareness may hinder their future teaching practices of teaching English accents and variations in the future.

With respect to the most favored accent, the results indicated that the NAE (88.6 %) was the most favored one among the participants, followed by the British English accent (11.4 %). The results also disclosed that both the male and female groups reported high percentages of the NAE accent (Female= 84.0 %; Male= 100 %). This overwhelming preference for the NAE accent confirms the findings of recent studies and reveals a continued strong adherence to this accent. Similarly, Lastima et al. (2024) noted that learners generally held a positive attitude toward the American accent. While their study focused on high school students, it remains significant in reflecting the broader accent preferences of non-native English speakers in similar EFL contexts. Although the reasons underlying the most favored accent preference were not directly investigated in this study, existing literature provides possible reasons. First, this tendency may be related to the mainstream and digital American media, which identifies the NAE accent as the default (Yanti et al., 2025), and the perception of NAE as more intelligible and comfortable (Lastima et al. 2024). Second, this preference may be attributed to the rhotic nature of Turkish phonology as shown in Solmaz's (2021) research that underlines Turkish EFL pre-service teachers' tendency to NAE for its rhotic nature. This alignment stems from the fact that Turkish is also rhotic, making it phonetically closer to NAE, and physically easier to articulate compared to the non-rhotic RP.

As for the least pleasing accent, New Zealand English (54.3%) was found to be the least pleasing accent, followed by Australian English. This can be attributed to the familiarity principle. As previously mentioned, familiarity with a particular accent may evoke positive reactions to using that accent, and it may be accepted as the norm (Abu Guba et al., 2023; Chiba et al., 1995; Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997). Because EFL learners and instructors are

heavily exposed to American and British accents in Turkish context, accents from the Southern Hemisphere (New Zealand/Australia) can be perceived as unfamiliar, annoying, and difficult to understand. This supports the idea that familiarity is a significant determinant of judgment in accent preferences.

The findings also revealed a dissonance between the overt prestige of RP and the covert prestige of NAE. In terms of the accent perceived as most skill-promoting, the British English accent (60.0 %) appeared to be the most skill-promoting accent, followed by the NAE accent (37.1 %). Interestingly, while RAs overwhelmingly prefer the NAE (88.6%), they view RP as more skill-promoting (60%). This suggests that British English holds a status of prestige in Turkish academic context, even if it is not the language they personally use, supporting Ladegaard's (1998) research.

On the other hand, concerning the difficulty of pronunciation, the British English accent (54.3 %) appeared to be the most difficult accent in pronunciation, followed by the Australian English accent (34.3 %). This perceived difficulty by RAs clarifies the findings of the fourth research question, which indicates the paradox regarding accent preferences. RAs view British English as a skill-promoting accent, but they report difficulty using it, likely due to the non-rhotic nature of RP which does not concur with the Turkish language. Therefore, this leads them to adopt NAE accent for their own pronunciation which is considered easier and more familiar.

Finally, regarding the order of noticing pronunciation differences, the descriptive statistics also pointed out that the combined NAE and British English accents (43.9%) were the most prominent in identifying pronunciation differences. A similar pattern was observed across gender groups, with 41.0% for females and 52.0% for males. The order of noticing pronunciation differences through accent among Turkish English language research assistants from state universities comes up as “North American English/British English/Canadian English/Australian English/New Zealand English” by 51.9 %. This confirms that Turkish RAs' phonological awareness primarily encompasses standard varieties (NAE and RP), which aligns with Mısır and Gürbüz's (2022) findings. This lack of ability to notice differences between other varieties (Canadian/Australian/New Zealand) further highlights RAs' limited exposure to Global Englishes beyond the standard British and American norms. and the need for awareness-raising activities for varieties of English accents.

All in all, the order of accent preference was NAE (88.6%) as the primary preference and British English (11.4%) as the second. Surprisingly, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand English were not preferred by the participants. The same pattern was observed in the “university type” variable (96.3% State; 3.7% Foundation). Regarding gender group, the order of preference was NAE (84.0%) and British English (16.0%) among females. However, male participants preferred only the American English accent (100%). In conclusion, this study shows that Turkish RAs' preference for the NAE accent was largely driven by familiarity, which likely led them to fail to recognize other native accent varieties. It can be inferred from the results that developing a critical awareness of accents is necessary for RAs'. As highlighted by Tezgiden-Cakcak and Ataş (2024), becoming a teacher educator requires questioning

established norms and hegemonies. Thereby, they will gain more awareness of the multitude of accents.

5. Conclusions

English is spoken by millions of people across the globe, and as a result, it has evolved into different accents, dialects, and variations. However, it is important to note that each English-speaking country has its own variant of English, each with its unique accent, vocabulary, and grammar rules. The notion of the best "correct" English is subjective and varies depending on cultural context and geographical location. The study aimed to investigate Turkish ELT RAs' accent preferences and perceptions. While the existing body of literature has revealed that American English and British English are dominant varieties across the world, this study specifically addresses the research gap concerning RAs, who serve as future teacher educators and current graduate students pursuing academic degrees, holding dual position that bridges the learner and instructor perspectives. Because of their positions, their perceptions and preferences will inevitably shape the preferences of future EFL teachers, thus examining RAs' perceptions provides a distinct contribution to the literature.

Aligning with the previous research, the native-speaker ideology remains entrenched in the Turkish ELT academic landscape. RAs' preference for NAE confirms the prevalence of American English and demonstrates its place in the Turkish ELT academic landscape. Due to the influence of globalization and American media, it may be argued that NAE is the most widely understood and accepted accent of English. Even though NAE is perceived by RAs to be the easiest and most understandable variety, the British English accent appeared to be the most skill-promoting accent. Conversely, New Zealand and Australian English were perceived as annoying, confirming that lack of familiarity can negatively influence attitudes towards accent preference.

The findings reveal crucial implications for teacher education. Firstly, consistent accent use is a professional requirement for English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals. As future teacher educators, RAs will serve as primary language models for pre-service EFL teachers. Hence, whether NAE or RP, adhering to a specific standard is not a matter of prestige. It is a pedagogical requirement to be clear and consistent in accent use and to reduce confusion for pre-service EFL teachers and, in turn, for their students in the future. While maintaining this consistency, ELT professionals should avoid projecting these norms as the indicator of success for both themselves and teachers. To raise awareness, both undergraduate and graduate ELT programs should encourage students to distinguish between modeling a standard and demanding native-speaker pronunciation. The former reflects the job of ELT professionals whereas the latter may cause a hindrance for learners and teachers. Emphasizing the importance of mutual intelligibility and existence of multiple varieties across the world will enable professionals to serve as language models without undermining the self-confidence of EFL learners who can speak with intelligible accents.

This study has several limitations. It is important to note that the sample was limited to 35 RAs, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to the broader Turkish ELT academic context. Next, the study is solely based on quantitative data collected through a

questionnaire. As this is the first study to use this particular questionnaire, presents a methodological limitation and requires further validation of the instrument. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data constitutes another constraint. RAs' self-reported preferences for the accents may not fully reflect their actual use in real-life settings. Therefore, the psychological and sociological reasons underlying the NAE preference could only be inferred based on the existing body of literature. Researchers can employ interviews and focus groups to gain further insights into how RAs perceive these accents in the future. Moreover, future studies can examine the extent to which RAs' preferences align with their practice. Additionally, the scope of the research can be expanded to non-native accents to investigate RAs' tolerance and awareness of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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