Faculty of Education and Natural Sciences

Ole Reigstad

Master's thesis

What is 'correct' English pronunciation for Norwegians? – A study on L2 language choices and attitudes to English accents of pupils attending vocational studies in upper secondary school

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Abstract

With the rise of English as a global language and its importance for international communication, Norwegians are exposed to and interact with it on a daily basis. As a result of the high socio-economic level, many Norwegians travel frequently and use English as a lingua franca. As more people around the world learn English, questions about 'correct' standards of English pronunciation have been raised: Should native accents of English be the standard for L2 speakers, or is pronunciation influenced by their L1 sufficient for communication?

This thesis investigates upper secondary vocational pupils in Norway: What English accent do they aim for and what are their attitudes to English accents? The main aim of the study is to extend our knowledge of pupils' views regarding English pronunciation and the implications this has for ELT in Norway. Using semi-structured interviews in focus groups, 12 pupils were interviewed.

The study found that the pupils had the most favourable attitudes to American English pronunciation. Moreover, most pupils preferred American English in their own English-production, though many noted that their actual pronunciation was closer to a Norwegian-accented English variety. The pupils did not say that they aim for a different accent outside the classroom, but some noted that they do speak differently in certain situations. The pupils did not seem to have unfavourable attitudes towards British English accents in general, but some thought they were not appropriate for non-native speakers. Attitudes towards Norwegian-accented English were also mixed. Nearly all the pupils thought American English accents were the most appropriate for Norwegian speakers, while three pupils thought Norwegian-accented English was as appropriate as American English accents.

Based on the findings of the present study, along with previous research, it is argued that they have implications for ELT in Norway and especially for the English subject curriculum: Due to the English subject curriculum's openness to interpretation, it is not clear to pupils and teachers what the standards are for English pronunciation. More explicit competence aims regarding pronunciation could help remedy this issue.

Sammendrag

Ettersom engelsk har blitt et globalt språk og er viktig for internasjonal kommunikasjon, blir nordmenn eksponert for og bruker språket på en daglig basis. Som resultat av det generelt høye sosioøkonomiske nivået reiser mange nordmenn ofte og bruker engelsk som et fellesspråk med andre som ikke har engelsk som morsmål. Etter hvert som flere lærer engelsk rundt om i verden har det blitt stilt spørsmål angående 'korrekt' standard for engelsk uttale: Burde innfødte engelske aksenter være standarden for de som lærer engelsk som andrespråk, eller er uttale som er påvirket av deres morsmål godt nok?

Denne avhandlingen undersøker elever ved yrkesfaglige linjer på videregående skole i Norge: Hvilken engelsk aksent sikter de seg inn på og hva er deres holdninger til engelske aksenter? Hovedmålet med studiet er å utvide vår forståelse av elevers syn på engelsk uttale og hvilke implikasjoner dette har for læring av engelsk i Norge. Ved bruk av semistrukturerte intervjuer i fokusgrupper ble 12 elever intervjuet.

Studien fant at elevene hadde mest positive holdninger til amerikansk engelsk uttale. Dessuten foretrakk flest elever amerikansk engelsk for deres egen uttale, selv om mange sa at deres faktiske uttale var nærmere en 'norskifisert' variant. Elevene sa at de ikke sikter seg inn på en annen aksent utenfor klasserommet, men noen sa at de snakker annerledes i noen situasjoner. Det virket ikke som elevene hadde negative holdninger til britisk-engelsk aksenter generelt sett, men noen syntes at de ikke er passende hvis man ikke har de som morsmål. Holdninger til 'norskifisert' engelsk uttale var også blandet. Nesten alle elevene mente at amerikansk-engelsk aksenter var mest passende for nordmenn; tre elever mente at 'norskifisert' engelsk uttale var like passende som amerikansk-engelsk aksenter.

Denne avhandlingen argumenterer for at funnene i studien, sammensett med tidligere forskning, har implikasjoner for læring av engelsk i Norge og spesielt for læreplanen i engelsk: Som følge av at læreplanen i engelsk er så åpen for tolkning er det ikke tydelig for elever og lærere hva standarden for engelsk uttale er. Mer eksplisitte kompetansemål angående uttale kan bidra til å rette opp dette problemet.

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List of abbreviations

EFL: English as a foreign language

ESL: English as a second language

ELT: English language teaching

GA: General American

L1:   First language

L2:   Second or additional language

RP: Received Pronunciation

UK: The United Kingdom

USA: The United States of America

1. Introduction

The desire and necessity to learn English has risen tremendously across the globe as it has become the world's language of international communication (Crystal, 2003, pp. 86-122). The English language connects countries and people, as they learn it as a second or additional language (hereafter "L2") and use it as a lingua franca. British linguist David Crystal (2003) shows how the language symbolises power, wealth and opportunity, developed through the historical dominance of English-speaking countries.

Variation and diversity are key characteristics of English's development globally, as it is appropriated in local use by L2 speakers (Rindal, 2013, p. 1). Rindal (2013, p. 1) further explains how these local appropriations have led to research of the world's 'Englishes'. While research in the area has grown significantly and is still growing, there are still angles that should be investigated and more data to be collected. The area that this study will add to is that of L2 speakers' attitudes towards varieties of English and their own language choices.

The present study examines attitudes towards English pronunciation in Norwegian upper secondary vocational pupils, as research of this group is lacking. The main aim of the present study is to contribute to the larger discussion within English didactics about what should be the goal of pronunciation teaching in English language teaching (hereafter "ELT") in Norway. The crux of the discussion is whether native accents of English should be the standard for L2 learners of English. Highly relevant to this discussion is what importance the following three aspects have for L2 pronunciation: 1. Intelligibility: Making yourself understood when speaking, 2. 'Nativeness': Speaking like a native speaker of English, 3. Identity: Creating identity through your English accent.

Studying pupils' language choices and attitudes can contribute to this discussion. By improving our understanding of what and how pupils think about English pronunciation, we can use this information to guide and improve the curriculum and teaching practice. By examining pupils' aim of English accents and their attitudes towards different accents, the present study can contribute to unveiling if there is a discrepancy between what they think is 'correct' or 'good' and what the curriculum states. If there is indeed a discrepancy, we can attempt to find out why the discrepancy is there and ultimately make changes. Hopefully, this

can result in the pupils knowing what they should aim for and the teachers knowing what they should teach and assess. Additionally, the study can provide a better understanding of accents' status among pupils in upper secondary in Norway, and more specifically, pupils attending vocational studies.

This topic interests me on several levels. As an aspiring teacher, knowledge of pupils' attitudes towards English varieties as well as general knowledge about accents and social implications of language can be helpful for structuring pronunciation teaching in the future. Moreover, with knowledge of attitudes and influences on pupils' accent choices, I am more qualified to explain and discuss with them the implications of language choices. It is important to be able to explain reasons for aiming towards one accent or another and make sure that the pupils are aware of what is expected of them from the standpoint of the curriculum.

The main reason for my initial interest, however, came from observing that people have very different experiences with how English pronunciation was evaluated in lower and upper secondary. As the following anecdotal observations show, the disparity in the experiences of fellow teacher-students, as well as friends that I attended upper secondary school with, are noteworthy: I personally attempted to change to a Received Pronunciation (hereafter "RP") accent in lower secondary. This resulted in higher grades on oral presentations. It is worth noting that this could have been due to improvement in other areas, e.g. content or vocabulary. However, the teacher did specifically complimented my pronunciation the most. A few people I have spoken to have similar experiences, while others have said that their accent did not appear to influence assessment at all. The point here is that a lack of clear criteria for pronunciation competence may result in differing practices between teachers and potentially different grades for pupils with arguably similar English competence, depending on what accents we deem to be better than others.

In order to contextualise the pupils' attitudes towards English accents, we must first understand how diverse the English language is and examine how it is spoken around the world. Once we have an understanding of how the language is used around the world, we can discuss whether we can differentiate between 'good' or 'correct' English and 'bad' or 'incorrect' English. Furthermore, we can discuss what this implies for teaching English as an

L2, specifically for Norwegian upper secondary pupils. The next five sections provide the background for the thesis, continually zooming further in towards the present study. They will cover how English is spoken around the world, its use and status in Norway, and examine the older and current version of the curriculum and what they say about English pronunciation. It is crucial to examine the curriculum, as this will let us explore whether there is a discrepancy between what pupils strive towards accomplishing in practice and what the curriculum states that they should learn.

1.1   English as a global language

Before addressing English as a global language, we must first understand what a global language is. According to Crystal (2003, p. 3), "a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognised in every country". He explains how there are two main ways a language can have a special role in a country where it is not the mother tongue: The first is by making it an official language and the other is by making the language a priority in foreign-language teaching (Crystal, 2003, pp. 4-5). The determining factor for whether a language becomes international seems to be the power of the people who speak it (Crystal, 2003, p. 9). This is certainly the case for English, with British colonisation from the 16th to 19th centuries spreading English across the globe and the United States of America's (hereafter "USA") military, economic, and cultural dominance from the 20th century to the present.

As mentioned, different varieties of the language have manifested themselves as English has spread throughout the world. While English does have many native speakers, it is the number of people using it as a second or third language that distinguishes it from other languages. Per McCarthy (2018), there are an estimated 372 million people with English as their first language (hereafter "L1") as of 2017. That number pales in comparison to Chinese, which 1,284 million have as their L1, and Spanish, which is also ahead of English with 437 million L1 speakers (McCarthy, 2018).

Estimating the actual number of English 'speakers' in the world is an impossible task, especially without a clear definition of what a 'speaker' is in terms of competence. Some L2 'speakers' may only know a few words or sentences, while others may have the repertoire of

an L1 speaker. Furthermore, with so many different varieties of English, some speakers of different varieties may not be able to understand each other, because their varieties are so different. By Crystal's (2003, p. 6) calculations, the total number of English speakers was around 1.5 billion in the early 2000's and is still increasing. Again, the numbers depend on who qualifies as a 'speaker'. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of speakers, we can clearly see how English is widely used, especially on the Internet: Statista.com has examined the top 10 million websites and found that 54 percent of them are in English (see figure 1). Only 1.7 percent are in Mandarin Chinese and 5 percent are in Spanish (McCarthy, 2019).
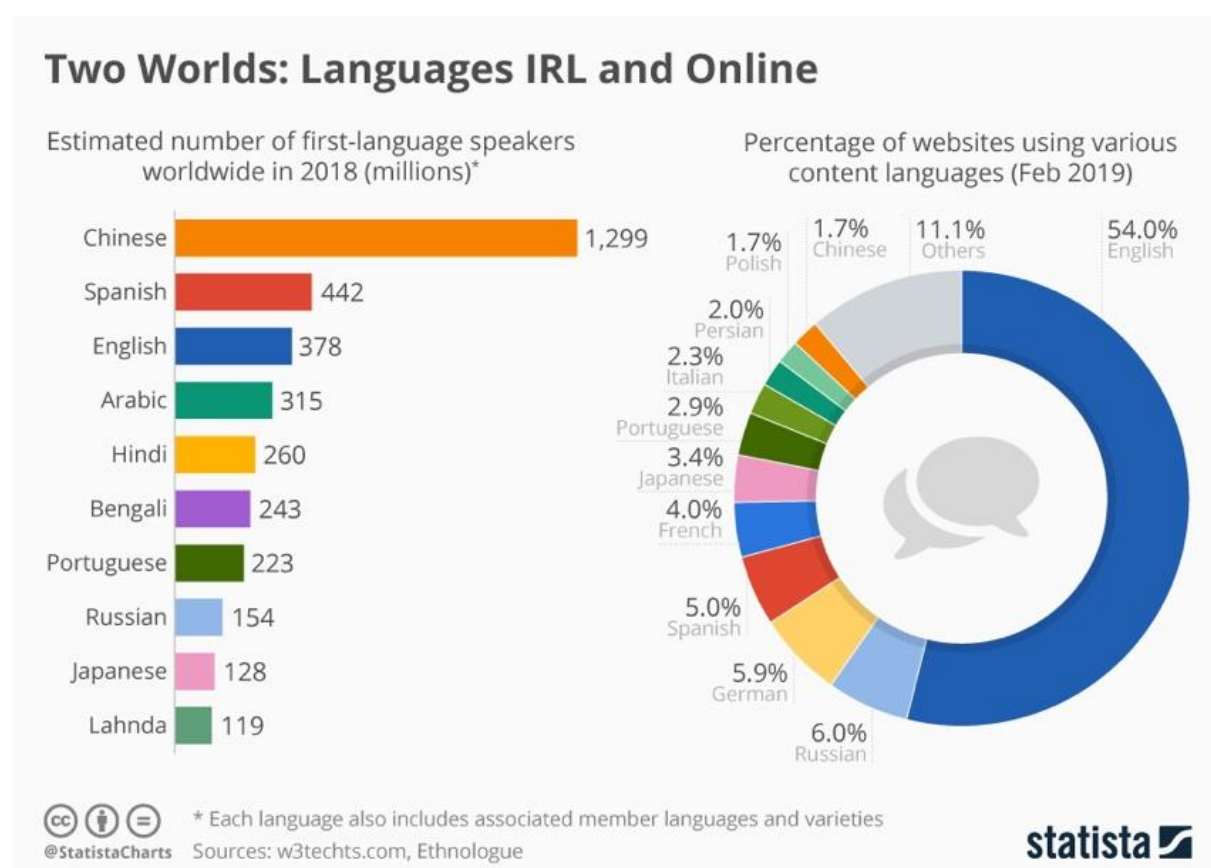
Figure 1 - Number of L1 speakers worldwide and breakdown of website languages online (McCarthy, 2019).

Despite the uncertainty regarding the actual numbers of 'speakers', it is clear that the language is learned across the world and that many people are able to speak it to different extents. As a result, English is used by L2 speakers as a lingua franca, meaning a "common language" (Crystal, 2003, p. 11): Because so many people know at least some English, they can use it to communicate even though they have different L1's. An example of this is a

person with German as their L1 using English to communicate with a person with Norwegian as their L1. In addition to the historical events that propelled English into a global language, it has another advantage over Chinese: It shares the same letters as other Germanic languages and many other Indo-European languages. Because these other languages are more similar to English, it becomes easier for most people to learn.

1.2   The circles of English

As previously mentioned, the spread of English has led to different uses of the language in different parts of the world. Likely the most influential model of the different English speakers is Indian linguist Braj Kachru's (1985) concentric circles model (see figure 2). The model groups countries into three categories, or circles, of English speakers: The inner, outer, or expanding circle. The inner circle is made up by countries where English has been the primary language for a long time, while countries in the outer circle are those connected to the early phase of English spreading as a language (Crystal, 2003, p. 60).

Countries such as Nigeria and India are placed in the outer circle and their varieties of English are examples of the previously mentioned diversity of the English language. Countries in the outer circle have typically been categorised as *English as a second language* (hereafter "ESL") contexts (Rindal, 2020, p. 26). English is also an "official second language and dominates in certain domains such as education, government and higher social classes" in these countries (Rindal, 2020, p. 26).

Norway is typically placed in the expanding circle. Countries in this circle recognise how important English is for international communication, but have not been colonised by inner circle countries (Crystal, 2003, p. 60). The expanding circle is the biggest group of English 'speakers' (Crystal, 2003, p. 61), which is a major reason why English is classified as a global language. Rindal (2020, p. 26) explains how countries in the expanding circle have typically been categorised as countries where English is a foreign language and have attempted to imitate the English of inner circle countries. They have used these varieties of English as the model, which has often been a successful method for learners in these countries (Rindal, 2020, p. 2)
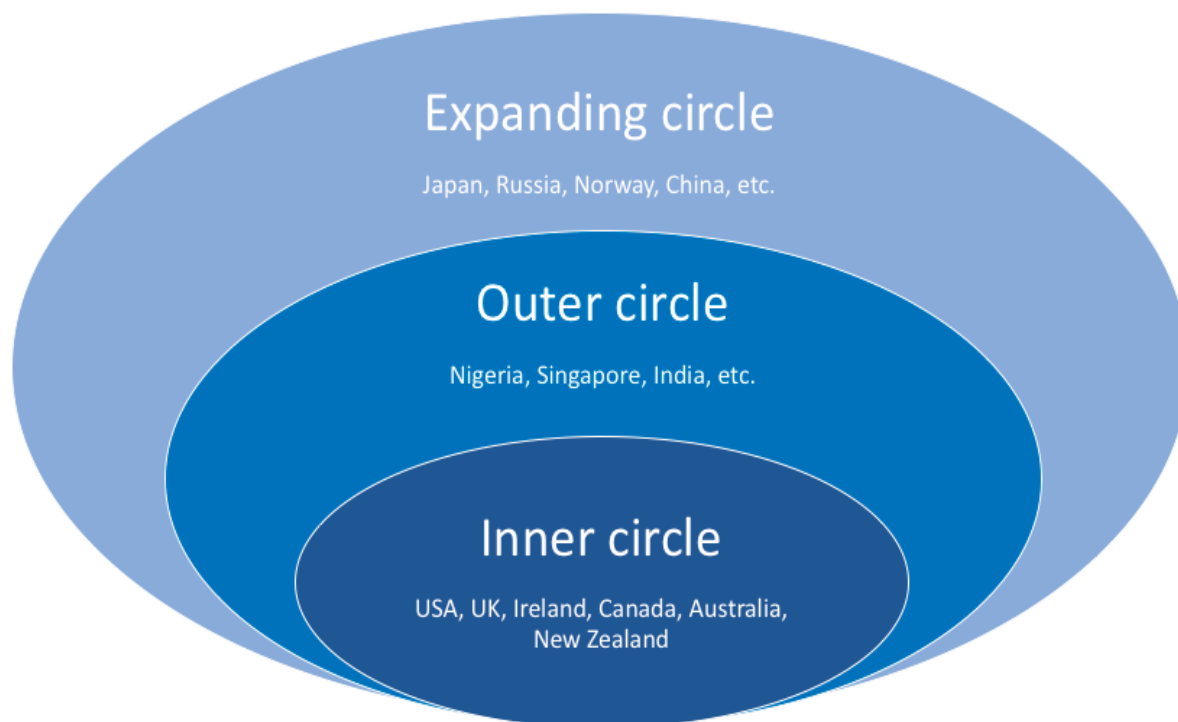
Figure 2 – Circles of English model based on Kachru (1985).

While the model has been very influential in how we view different English speakers, it has also received criticism as the status of English has evolved over the decades since its creation. Rindal (2020, pp. 26-27) lists five reasons why the model is outdated: Firstly, there is a change in language competence between the groups, as there are many speakers from the outer circle that have English as their L1. On the other hand, some native speakers are not as proficient in English as some ESL speakers. Secondly, a transition has occurred in pronunciation standards as many countries in the expanding circle are questioning the use of native speakers as their pronunciation standard.

The inner circle represents the core of the model. This places them at the top of the hierarchy of English speakers, representing "an elitist and centrist view" (Rindal, 2020, p. 27). The model also categorises entire nations into a circle. This gives a very simplified view of the reality, as there is great variation within each nation. Lastly, some *English as a foreign language* (hereafter "EFL") speakers residing in the expanding circle in the model, are becoming more like ESL speakers (Rindal, 2020, p. 27). Norway is an example of a country that does not fit any of the circles anymore. English use in Norway is nuanced and does not fit either of the EFL or ESL descriptions and does not fit either the outer or expanding circle: As

Rindal (2020, p. 31) explains, English's status in Norway, and in fact globally, is in transition. In the next section, I explore English's status and use in Norway by showing how English is not *foreign* in the slightest to Norwegians. After we have established how English is used in Norway, we can address whether we should use native accents as models.

1.3   English use in Norway

To contextualise Norwegian pupils' attitudes towards English accents, we must examine how they interact with the language in daily life, at school and outside of school. As mentioned, the use of English in Norway is in transition, and English is not foreign in the slightest to Norwegians and especially not to young pupils. As Rindal (2020, pp. 28-31) explains, Norway does not fit either EFL or ESL how they are traditionally defined: Norwegians are very proficient users of English and English is not an official second language in Norway. This section presents how English is used in Norway and explains its status based on this.

The use of English outside of school is often referred to as *extramural English* (Rindal, 2020, p. 30) and, as Speitz (2018, p. 41) notes, the influence of English continues to increase in most pupils' life with the rise of the internet and social media. Most pupils use the language on a daily basis, whether they are watching a Netflix series, listening to music, reading an English book, or reading and interacting with others on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Many Norwegians are also exposed to English in other countries, as they frequently travel and use English as a lingua franca (Rindal, 2020, p. 30). As a result of the modern environment, Norwegians' high socio-economical level, and the global status of English, Norwegian youth are exposed to it and actively use it very frequently in everyday life.

The content pupils are exposed to can influence their attitudes to varieties of English as well as their own language choices. As mentioned, pupils use services such as Netflix and YouTube on a frequent basis. While most films and TV series are American, the rise of streaming services and 'binging-culture' is contributing to more diverse content: There is a growing library of diverse series on streaming services such as Netflix, that provide a wide range of series in terms of ethnicity of the actors, settings of the story, and language variety spoken (Viruet, 2017). Moreover, there is also an increasing number of popular series that

display a cast with British English varieties, examples being *Game of Thrones, Peaky Blinders*, and *The Crown* (IMDb, 2021a; IMDb, 2021b; IMDb, 2021c).

Another influential medium is social media (Rindal, 2020, p. 30). The major social media platforms Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are all American based companies, which could lead to a larger majority of American content creators on these platforms. As a result, Norwegian youth may hear more of American English accents when they use these social media platforms. Furthermore, very much connected to social media is sports with discussions on Twitter and Facebook, and highlights on Instagram. Soccer is the most popular sport in the world with the English Premier League being one of its biggest leagues. This can be a source of British English influence, as coverage on Instagram and YouTube is dominated by British English accents. However, those who watch the Premier League on the Norwegian subscription service "TV2 Sumo", listen to Norwegian commentators during the games (Sandnes, 2021).

Another platform where some pupils are exposed to English is video games. Especially in multiplayer games online, they may be exposed to many different varieties of English: Due to the online and interactive nature of many video games, English is often used as a lingua franca to communicate with other players from all over the world. When playing games with English instructions or characters that speak English, on the other hand, there is greater exposure to native accents of English.

Research has even found that some pupils who play video games outside of school are much more proficient readers in English than their L1 (Brevik, 2016). This transference effect may not be exclusive to writing, as it is beneficial to communicate orally with other players in some games, e.g. online multiplayer games such as the *Call of Duty* series or *Grand Theft Auto V*. The influence of the other payers, then, could influence pronunciation. In addition to pupils playing video games in their free time, video games are increasingly used in teaching as well (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020).

Lastly, politics can play a role in influencing Norwegians' language attitudes as well. Norway is a member of the political and military allegiance organisation NATO, where both the USA and the United Kingdom (hereafter "UK") are also a members (NATO, 2020). As a result of

our political relationship with the USA, as well as the USA's power in the world in general, American politics is often covered in Norwegian media outlets. The UK is not left out of the media picture either. For example, the recent Brexit situation has been thoroughly covered in addition to news about the British royal family.

There is also empirical evidence of Norwegian pupils' English use: In Ahmadian's (2018, p. 62) study on how English is used by female pupils in vocational studies, she found that pupils reported using English outside of school for a range of activities. The study also found that male and female pupils differed in the extent they used English at school: Male pupils used English up to three times more in the classroom than female pupils (Ahmadian, 2018, p. 42). Moreover, male pupils used English for non-academic purposes, such as discussing with the teacher who would work together in groups and if they could write on their computer, whereas the female pupils mostly used English to talk about subject matters (Ahmadian, 2018, pp. 43-46).

Based on how English is used in Norway, it does not fit into either EFL or ESL as traditionally defined (Rindal, 2020, p. 31). Therefore, "L2" is used in this thesis: This term is used for 1. learners of English with Norwegian as their L1 and English as the second language they learn and 2. learners that do not have Norwegian as their L1, but live in Norway, learned Norwegian, and are now learning English as an additional language. In the next section, we will examine how English has been taught in Norwegian schools.

1.4 English in Norwegian schools

In 1969, English became a compulsory school subject in Norway and with the educational reform of 1997, schools were to start English lessons somewhere between years one and three. After the turn of the millennium, communication became the focus and English became part of daily life for Norwegian pupils (Speitz, 2018, p. 41). In year 2021, English is a compulsory subject from year one through 10 in primary and lower secondary school and in year one of upper secondary school (if one elects to attend upper secondary). Pupils can also choose English as a programme subject in years two and three of upper secondary in most study programmes. However, that is not an option in all vocational study programmes.

The defining characteristic of the curriculum in Norway is that teachers and schools are given tremendous freedom and, in turn, tremendous responsibility. This is because it leaves the "learning methods, the organisation of classroom instruction and the content to be decided at the local level" (Speitz, 2018, p. 42). Munden & Sandhaug (2017, p. 49) state that we should cherish this freedom as teachers. Although there are definitely many positive aspects of the freedom we are given, it does not come without cost.

One of the main reasons why pupils' attitudes towards English pronunciation and accent choices should be researched is the fact that the curriculum gives teachers so much freedom. As we will see in the next section, the curriculum being so open to interpretation could result in teachers misinterpreting it. The potential consequences of this could be a negative impact on pupils' development as English speakers, their development of their multilingual identity, and ultimately their results on tests, which impacts their academic future.

Historically, the Norwegian curriculum has favoured British English (Torgersen, 2018, p. 219). This might have resulted in current English teachers using a British English accent and even bias that accent (see section 1.6.1). Contrarily, with the influence from media content in American English, other teachers may bias that. As a result of a bias towards a certain accent, pupils could be influenced by their teachers to aim for that same accent. As is discussed throughout this thesis, this can potentially be problematic.

1.5   What constitutes 'good' English pronunciation for Norwegian speakers?

As established (see section 1.2), countries in the expanding circle, i.e. EFL contexts, have looked to native speakers for language models. Although Norwegian speakers do not fit into this context anymore, they have previously. As such, native speakers have been used as models in ELT in Norway, historically favouring British English (Torgersen, 2018, p. 219). As previously mentioned, many countries in the expanding circle have questioned whether native accents should be the gold standard for English pronunciation in L2 learners: Should these accents be what we consider 'correct' English, or is a variety influenced by their L1 good enough? We must also consider how pronunciation is being assessed by teachers. In this

section, I examine the English subject curriculum in upper secondary and research on how English teachers in Norway assess pronunciation.

The curriculum for upper secondary is currently in the process of being renewed, as new subject curricula are gradually being implemented. The revised English subject curriculum for the first year of general and vocational studies is in use starting 1st August 2020 (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). However, it is only in use for those starting upper secondary that year: In the previous version of the curriculum, the English subject is taught over two years in vocation studies and in one year in general studies. As a result, the pupils that are in their second year of vocational studies as of 1st August 2020 will still use, and be assessed based on, the previous curriculum. As is explained in section 3.2.3, this does have minor implications for the present study.

The previous version of the English subject curriculum that has now been revised, stated that after the first year of general studies and the second year of vocational studies, pupils should be able to "use patterns for pronunciation, intonation, word inflection and various types of sentences in communication" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013, p. 10). It is unclear what "patterns for pronunciation" means and it is likely that different teachers and schools interpret this differently. Norwegian linguist Eivind Torgersen (2018, p. 219) notes that "one may get the impression that any pattern is acceptable, even a strong 'Norwenglish' one, as long as the speaker is consistent in his or her usage". Norwegian-accented English may not be inferior to native accents and if that is the case, then they should be acceptable. The issue here is more so that the curriculum is unclear in regards to whether they are appropriate or not.

Bøhn (2019) investigated how teachers compare in terms of what should be the focus when assessing oral exams in English in Norway, specifically oral exams after the first year of general studies and the second year of vocational studies. He found that teachers do in fact interpret and assess pronunciation differently. Although there was agreement for the most part on what aspects should be assessed, pronunciation was one aspect where there was less clarity. Regarding the issue of 'nativeness', Bøhn (2019) found that there was a wide array of answers about whether strong a Norwegian accent should lead to marking a pupil down from a top score (see figure 3).
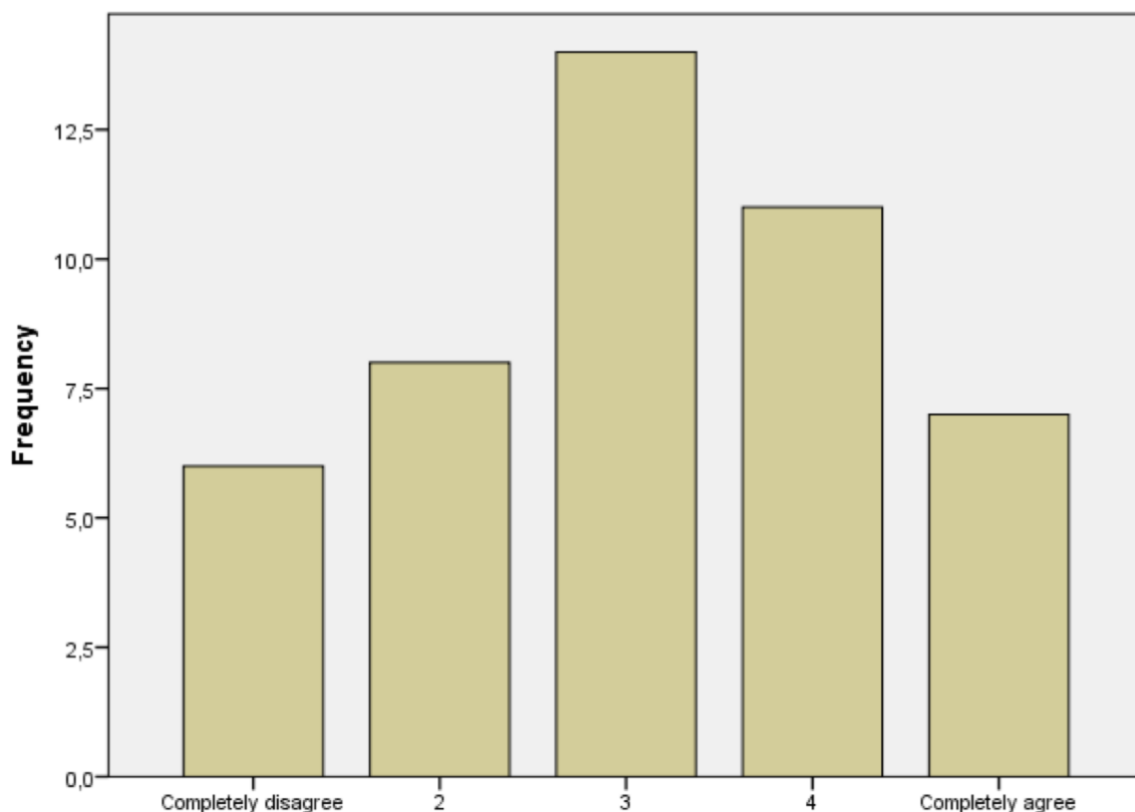
Figure 3 - From Bøhn (2019): «The distribution of responses to the item: 'A strong Norwegian accent will mark the student down from a top score'».

This leads us to the issue of intelligibility. Despite disagreement in some areas of what should be assessed in oral exams, there was "strong agreement" that intelligibility is very important (Bøhn, 2019, p. 387). The competence aims in the English subject curriculum seem to indicate that the core goal is to be able to convey meaning and being understood in oral conversations, while impersonating native accents of English is not specified. The important question to ask, however, is whether intelligibility is lower when not using a native accent and whether fluency leads to intelligibility.

Several studies have investigated whether Norwegian-accent English leads to lower intelligibility when Norwegians communicate with native speakers, with varying findings (see section 1.6.1). Although intelligibility may potentially be slightly lower for Norwegians speaking with native speakers in heavily Norwegian-accented English, it is worth noting that L2 speakers may find themselves communicating more with other L2 speakers than native speakers. The teachers' answers in Bøhn's (2019) study indicate that there is disagreement about whether a strong Norwegian accent is problematic for intelligibility, given how the

teachers agreed that intelligibility was important, but disagreed about whether a strong Norwegian accent should mark a pupil down from a top score.

There is also the issue of how teachers interpret 'fluency' and how important it is for intelligibility. In Bøhn's (2019, p. 387) study, two teachers both agreed that fluency was important, but they disagreed on whether a pupil spoke fluently in a clip they were to assess. Kachru & Smith (2008, p. 59) note that a fluent speaker of one variety of English may not be intelligible to a speaker with a different variety, including native English speakers who are not intelligible to other native English speakers. Since Bøhn's study was conducted, a revised curriculum has been released. Unfortunately, the revised curriculum is not clearer.

The revised curriculum states that after the first year of general and vocational studies, pupils should be able to use patterns of "pronunciation in communication" and "express himself or herself in a nuanced and precise manner with fluency and coherence, using idiomatic expressions and varied sentence structures adapted to the purpose, receiver and situation" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). These competence aims are very similar to those in the previous curriculum and do not explain what is meant by "patterns of pronunciation", "fluency and coherence" or "adapted to the purpose, receiver and situation". One could interpret the latter as meaning that you should be able to speak in a British English accent when speaking with someone from e.g. London and that you can change your accent when e.g. speaking with someone from Spain, using English as a lingua franca. Returning to the context of an oral exam, are the pupils supposed to show that they can speak in different ways? Again, the fundamental issue is unclarity.

Having competence aims that are as open to interpretation as the aims for pronunciation in the English subject curriculum can have consequences such as illustrated in Bøhn's (2019) study: You run the risk of teachers and pupils interpreting them differently, potentially resulting in pupils of similar competence levels being assessed differently. In addition to the importance of intelligibility, language is also social and plays a part in the construction of your identity. This is covered in section 2.3. In the next section, previous research is presented, leading to the present study's research questions, justification for the research, and the structure of the thesis.

1.6   Researching attitudes to English accents

This section presents what previous research has found and in turn what gap in the research the present study will attempt to fill. The research questions are presented in addition to justification for this research. Lastly, the section includes an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.6.1 Previous studies

Most notable within the field relevant to Norwegian (L2) speakers' attitudes is Ulrikke Rindal's (2013) research, who investigated an environment that had not received much attention:

> Very little research ha[d] focused on environments where L2 speakers are proficient enough to use English as part of their linguistic and identity repertoire, but where English does not have status as an official language or is used as a necessary language of communication. (Rindal, 2019, p. 338)

Rindal did her doctoral research here in Norway, where she explored attitudes towards English pronunciation among pupils attending Norwegian upper secondary school. Over the last decade, this area of research has gained popularity in Norway, and many MA theses have researched attitudes towards English accents, including Norwegian-accented English (Hordnes, 2013; Loftheim, 2013; Risan, 2014; Rasmussen, 2015; Haukland, 2016; Hopland, 2016; Areklett, 2017; Fossen, 2018; Trømborg, 2019). First, some of the studies are briefly presented individually, before summarising the totality of their findings.

Risan (2014) studied attitudes towards L2 accents among prospective English teachers in Norway and found that they preferred American English and British English accents. The teachers emphasised that L2 speakers do not *need* a native accent to communicate, but still favoured American English and British English, and especially found it appropriate for fellow teachers (Risan, 2014, p. iii). Norwegian-accented English was described as imperfect, although they did express acceptance of such an accent, though more so for learners than teachers (Risan, 2014, p. iii).

There has also been research conducted on L1 English speakers' attitudes towards Norwegian-accented English. Hordnes' (2013) study, which had native British speakers evaluate Norwegian-accented English, found that Norwegians can be perceived as smarter, better, and more ambitious when speaking with an accent closer to RP, rather than Norwegian-accented English. Despite a preference for an accent closer to RP, the native speakers did not evaluate Norwegian-accented English negatively (Hordnes, 2013, p. iii).

A more recent study by Haukland (2016) included Norwegians and other non-native speakers of English in addition to native speakers. He found that Norwegian listeners' attitudes are more negative towards Norwegian-accented English than non-Norwegian listeners (Haukland, 2016, p. 51). Haukland did not 'measure' intelligibility, but rather relied on what the participants reported: His findings suggest that Norwegian-accented English does not pose issues for intelligibility and that it is more an issue of aesthetics (Haukland, 2016, p. vi).

Fossen's (2018) findings on intelligibility were contrary to Haukland's (2016). She studied the intelligibility of Norwegian-accented English when used as a lingua franca and measured intelligibility more directly. The study attempted to find which phonetic aspects of Norwegian-accented English could pose problems for communications, using RP and General American (hereafter "GA") as reference points. There were 10 participants that listened to four different speakers: One native speaker from York in addition to three speakers with Norwegian-accented English of varying levels. The L1 of the participants were Polish, Spanish, Finnish, French, Hungarian, Norwegian, and English; four had English as their L1 while the other languages were represented by one speaker per language.

The participants were to "transcribe a series of semantically unpredictable phrases and fill in gaps in a longer text designed to challenge the speakers" (Fossen, 2018, p. iv). The study found that "the perceived level of segmental mistakes made by the speaker was a good indicator of their total intelligibility score" (Fossen, 2018, p. iv). Overall, lower levels of intelligibility did result from speech that differed phonetically from RP and GA; speech that differed radically from RP hindered intelligibility the most (Fossen, 2018, p. iv). Fossen (2018, p. iv) suggests that pronunciation teaching and the curriculum should be more explicit, and that pronunciation teaching should start earlier. As Fossen (2018, p. 15) mentions, the method used does have significant limitations: It does not control for the

"lexical knowledge" of participants, so they might not have recognised a word due to not knowing it, rather than it being a phonetic 'mistake' (Fossen, 2018, p. 15). Thus, it is uncertain whether the lower intelligibility was a case of correlation or causation.

The study most similar to, although much more extensive than the present one, is Rindal (2013), which investigated upper secondary pupils' English pronunciation and their evaluation of American English and British English varieties. The study featured an extensive sample, with 97 pupils across four schools in Oslo participating. The study is made up of two data sets: "Constructing identity with L2: Pronunciation and attitudes among Norwegian learners of English" (Rindal, 2010) and "Questioning English standards: Learner attitudes and L2 choices in Norway" (Rindal, 2014a). The study used a mixed methods approach with a pronunciation test, an attitude test, and lastly questionnaire and interviews.

The methods were mostly similar in both data sets, but were slightly altered in the second (Rindal, 2013, pp. 45-49): First, the participants were recorded reading a wordlist with relevant phonological variables, and in paired conversations, which were about casual topics. For the attitude test, a matched-guise test (see section 3.1) was used. In the first data set, two male speakers both produced two English varieties (RP and GA). In the second data set, nine speakers, both male and female, produced 11 voices, and Leeds English and Scottish English varieties were added. The second data set also included a *verbal-guise technique*, where there are different speakers for each variety. After listening to the recordings, participants filled out evaluation forms of their impressions of the speakers. The participants also answered a questionnaire concerning their personal linguistic background, interests, and experience with English, and were asked which accent they aim for when speaking English and why. Lastly, some of the pupils participated in interviews where their accent attitudes and aims were explored further.

The first data set featured 23 Norwegian upper secondary pupils in a city-centre school. 11 out of the 21 participants that answered the questionnaire aimed for British English, eight aimed for American English, and two did not have a specific accent aim (Rindal, 2010, p. 247). However, the participants "produced more than two thirds of the analysed tokens with an American-like pronunciation" (Rindal, 2010, p. 247). Although there was a high use of American English variants, participants' accent aims correlated with their actual

pronunciation: "ANOVA showed a highly significant effect for participants' accent aims on variant usage for all four phonological variables" (Rindal, 2010, p. 247).

In the matched guise test, RP scored higher in some categories while GA scored higher in others, RP reaching statistical significance in six categories and GA in one category (Rindal, 2010, p. 249). The categories in which RP scored significantly higher than GA were *formality, intelligence, education, politeness, model of pronunciation,* and *aesthetic quality* (Rindal, 2010, p. 249). GA scored significantly higher in *popularity.* The categories were divided into three groups, *status and competence, linguistic quality,* and *social attractiveness*. RP scored higher in the first two and GA scored higher in the latter category (Rindal, 2010, pp. 249-250).

Participants seemed to associate British English with formality and education, and saw American English as less formal (Rindal, 2010, p. 251). It seems like the participants share the same attitudes towards the accents. However, they had different opinions about whether, for example, the formality of the accents is a positive or negative aspect in regards to what is suitable for them. Participants noted that important factors influencing their accent aims are the media and their own competence; some pupils find American English 'easier' to learn (Rindal, 2010, pp. 252-253).

The second data set featured three schools, in the east, west, and centre of Oslo. As Rindal (2013, p. 43) explains:

> "The east and west areas of Oslo are traditionally separated economically and socially, as well as geographically by the Akerselva river. While the west is associated with higher economic and cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1977), the east is more dominated by working-class neighbourhoods and socialistic political orientations (Majaaland, 2011; Øia, 2007). Furthermore, the east has a higher concentration of immigrants and is considered an area with multicultural and multi-ethnic settings".

The inclusion of pupils from different backgrounds is important, because your background may impact your attitudes and accent aims. This is one reason why the present study investigates vocational pupils in a different region than Oslo, as the results may differ in different regions and different types of pupils.

This second data set includes 74 participants and the results differed slightly from the first data set. 30 of the 70 that participated in the questionnaire aimed for an American English accent, 23 aimed for a British English accent, 11 aimed for a "neutral" accent, two marked "other", and four marked "I don't care" (Rindal, 2014a, p. 325). Contrary to the first data set, most pupils aimed for American English rather than British English. Despite more pupils aiming for American English in the second data set, RP scored higher than GA in all three of the main categories in the matched guise test: *Status and competence, linguistic quality,* and *social attractiveness* (Rindal, 2014a, pp. 321-322). In the first data set, GA scored higher in *social attractiveness*. Important to note is that the female RP speakers were rated higher much than the male speakers in the second data set, leading to RP scoring higher in *social attractiveness* (Rindal, 2014a, pp. 322-323). Participants in the second data set also associated British English with formality and education (Rindal, 2014a, p. 326).

The majority of studies in Norway have found that pupils and teachers favour RP when listening over other variants (Rindal, 2013; Risan, 2014; Rasmussen, 2015; Areklett, 2017; Trømborg, 2019). However, Rindal's (2013) research seems to suggest that most pupils aim to speak with an American English accent. Moreover, the disparity was greater in the measured pronunciation of the pupils: GA influenced pronunciation was much more prominent than the accent aims would suggest (Rindal, 2013, p. 60). As presented in the background section, pupil and teacher preferences found in the research do not correlate with the trend of the curriculum, which has transitioned from favouring native accents to more open interpretations of what constitutes good pronunciation (see section 1.4 and 1.5). Despite of this trend in the curriculum, the favouring of native accents can still persist as the curriculum does not explicitly state that they are not superior.

With this shift of focus in the curriculum, studies have examined the intelligibility of non-native/L1 influenced accents compared to native accents and what accents teachers favour. Two studies (Haukland, 2016; Hordnes, 2013) suggest that Norwegian-accented English does not pose issues for communication and is not poorly received by native-speakers. Contrarily, one study (Fossen, 2018) found that a higher level of phonetic differences from RP and GA leads to lower intelligibility. Regarding teacher preference, studies by Risan (2014) and Hopland (2016) indicate that teachers still favour British English and American English accents.

Despite the rise of research in this area, very few have examined L2 speakers' choice of own accent and to the best of my knowledge, no master's or doctoral research on attitudes in Norway has been conducted specifically on pupils attending vocational studies. This thesis will attempt to extend our knowledge in this field. While Rindal's (2013) research included an extensive sample across schools with diverse economic and cultural contexts, only general studies in schools in Oslo were included. The present study aims to broaden our understanding by conducting research in another region (Innlandet county) and in vocational study programmes.

1.6.2 Research questions

The three research questions for the present study are as follows:

1. What varieties of accents do the pupils aim for when speaking English?
2. What factors influence their aims?
3. What attitudes do Norwegian upper secondary vocational pupils have towards different varieties of English pronunciation?

Based on my own informal findings about the topic, I have two intuitions about the answers to these research questions:

1. Vocational pupils will aim for and prefer American English and Norwegian-accented English over other varieties.
2. The accent preference of their teacher influences what accent they aim for.

British English has been associated with formality (e.g. Rindal, 2013) and based on my experiences, I believe that the pupils' language choices will align with an accent with less formal associations. One reason for this is that vocational programmes are not aimed at higher education and are generally associated with a less academic and a more practical route. This relates to peer pressure as much as it does the actual study programme, as a British English accent may stand out more than it would in a general study class. The second intuition is based on what previous research (see section 1.6.1) has found as well as my own informal findings from conversing with many people about the topic.

1.6.3 Relevance of attitudes in linguistic research

We have all watched a film or listened to a sound clip where we heard someone speaking and immediately found the accent either weird, funny, elegant or even downright awful to listen to. Our brain gave an immediate favourable or unfavourable response to the sound we were hearing. The question then arises as to what makes us react favourably to one manner of speaking as opposed to another? What is it about RP that makes some nod in approval and others roll their eyes in exasperation when they hear it?

We have attitudes to what we hear, which includes languages and varieties of languages. Thus, attitudes are certainty related to language, but why is there a need to study them? Baker (1992) highlights three reasons why the term "attitude" is a valuable concept within the study of bilingualism, which is relevant to the present study as it studies English use among Norwegians. The first reason is that the term is commonly used among laymen. As Baker (1992, p. 9) describes, it is not only a "jargon word" used by scientists that laymen would not understand. The fact that the term is used by laymen and scientists alike, allows for inter-communication between the public and social psychologists (Baker, 1992, p. 9).

The second reason is that attitudes towards a language or a variety of a language can impact whether that language is preserved in its original 'form' or whether it decays or even dies out completely (Baker, 1992, p. 9). Research on the public's attitudes towards language, then, can provide insight into a language's status in a community (Baker, 1992, p. 9). Also, attitudes have deeper meaning than opinions (see section 2.5). In addition to insight into how the language is perceived, a survey may also "aid understanding of social processes" (Baker, 1992, p. 10).

By investigating how the attitudes relate to their causes and effects, we may be able to provide insights into human functioning as well (Baker, 1991, p. 10). Through studying attitudes to a specific language, we can identify that language's utility going forward, which is the third reason for its relevance (Baker, 1992, p. 10). Moreover, Rindal (2019, p. 337) notes that a common understanding of linguistic forms is essential for language to be meaningful, and an effective way of accessing social meaning is by investigating language attitudes. Once we know how people feel about the language and the teaching of that language, we can better

assess its value and whether resources should be used to preserve the language and the practices.

1.6.4 Relevance of attitudes for ELT

In addition to attitudes' importance in linguistic research, they are also relevant for improving ELT. Firstly, attitudes can play a major role in pupils' accent choice because a person speaking with a certain accent can be associated with the same attributes associated with the accent. Additionally, by investigating attitudes towards accents in addition to own language choices, we can find what qualities the pupils want to be associated with. Researching this topic can also contribute to unveiling if there is a discrepancy between the pupils understanding of appropriate or 'correct' English pronunciation and what the curriculum states. For example, if we find that pupils have much more favourable attitudes to certain English accents than others and view one or more of these as superior to other accents, this has implications for ELT: This does not seem to align with the curriculum as presently formulated. Consequently, the curriculum may need to be made more explicit.

If the findings indicate that pupils have more favourable attitudes to certain accents, we must have important discussions in the classroom: Why is one accent superior, what is it about that accent that makes it superior, and what is 'wrong' about other accents? This is especially important if there is a trend of unfavourable attitudes towards a specific accent. In this case, we can use this information to make pupils aware of stereotypes. For example, some people may associate RP with formality (see section 1.6.1), even though RP is also used in informal contexts.

It is also important to provide a better understanding of accents' status among upper secondary pupils. Examining pupils' attitudes to Norwegian-accented English is likely very beneficial, as most pupils will likely have some influence of their L1 in their L2 English accent. If there are unfavourable attitudes to Norwegian-accented English, it would be beneficial to discuss this with pupils. Some pupils may be scared to speak English because they think they speak 'wrong'. Thus, it is important to establish, both in the curriculum and in classroom discussions, whether their pronunciation actually is 'wrong'. The main reason for researching attitudes for the benefit of ELT, then, is that it can provide a starting point from where we can make improvement in the curriculum and our teaching.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is made up of six chapters. The first chapter introduces and gives the background for the study, providing context for English use in Norway, explaining why we should research attitudes to English accents, and presenting previous research in the area and the present study's research questions. The second chapter provides the theoretical framework for the study. It covers what an accent is and the English accents most commonly referred to by Norwegians, the connection between language and social meaning, the effects of group pressure and how this relates to language choices, and what attitudes are. In the third chapter, the method for the study is presented. It also provides historical context regarding methods typically used in this area of research. Moreover, ethical considerations and how the data was analysed is also addressed in the third chapter. The findings from the present study are presented in the fourth chapter. In the fifth chapter, the findings are discussed, comparing them to previous research and discussing their implications. The limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research is also covered in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter concludes the thesis by answering the research questions and providing concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter will present the theoretical framework for the thesis. First, it defines the term *accent* and covers the English accents most commonly referred to by Norwegians. Next, the effect of group pressure is addressed, as it is relevant for the method of choice in the present study (see section 3.2) and for pupils' language choices. The connection between language and social meaning is also presented, before the concept *attitude* is examined with an overview of what attitudes are.

2.1   Defining *accent*

There are many definitions of the term *accent* and it is a difficult one to define. One of the simpler definitions is one in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "A way of pronouncing a language that is distinctive to a country, area, social class, or individual" (*OED*, 2021a). This is not very specific, however, as it is unclear what differentiates the "way of pronouncing". Lippi-Green (2012, p. 44) refers to a similar common way of describing accent; as a "way of speaking". However, she notes that there is no specific meaning to the term *accent* and that there is no "technical specification" for what a "way of speaking" means (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 44).

Lippi-Green (2012, pp. 44-45) does note that *accent* is used to "distinguish stress in words […] or intonation in sentences" and outlines the two elements that separates varieties of speaking: The first is *prosodic features* of speech, which are intonation, tempo, and stress patterns. The second is *segmental features* of speech, with consonants and vowels being the two major categories. In the context of this study, however, we are mostly concerned with *segmental features* and their realisations; pronunciation.

Lippi-Green (2012, p. 45) also brings up the important point that *accent* can really only be understood if you compare it to another variety. There is also a difference between L1 and L2 English accents (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 46). An L1 accent mostly refers to geography, but may be further distinguished or expanded by other factors such as race and social identities (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 46). An L2 English accent, on the other hand, is described as showing

phonological transference from the L1 to their English pronunciation (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 46).

Although it is difficult to define *accent*, it is useful for this thesis to have a working understanding of what is meant by *accent* from here on out. For the purpose of this thesis, an *accent* means *differences in segmental features of speech that distinguish one manner of speaking from another*. As *OED*'s (2021a) definition implies, this manner of speaking indicates something about where you come from and who you are, and this is especially relevant for this study. In section 2.3, we will investigate what meaning is conveyed through individual ways of speaking by way of concepts such as indexicality. Before that, we will first cover the three accents most commonly referred to by Norwegians and whether there is such a thing as not having an accent.

2.2   English accents

In order to contextualise the pupils' accent aims, we must first understand what is meant by *American English*, *British English,* and *Norwegian-accented English*. Despite GA and RP perhaps being the most prevalent accents in the media content pupils are exposed to, there is a chance that some pupils may not refer to GA and RP when they speak about *American English* and *British English*. This is one of the limitations of this study (see section 5.4). However, as Rindal (2013, p. 31) explains, Norwegians do typically mean GA when saying *American English* and RP when saying *British English.* As presented in section 1.3, it is likely that American English is most prevalent in their daily interaction with social media and media content such as film, TV series, and music. While RP may not be used by a lot of people outside or even in the UK, it is still widely used in media outlets, by politicians in the UK, and by characters in films such as the *Harry Potter* series. It is worth repeating, however, that more non-RP British English accents are appearing in media content.

Like American English and British English accents, there is also many different varieties of Norwegian accents. Norwegian-accented English, then, may be different based on a speaker's Norwegian accent. However, eastern Norwegian variants are most common and the present study is conducted in eastern Norway. Thus, it is likely that participants refer to eastern Norwegian influence in Norwegian-accented English.

Previous master theses (see Hordnes, 2013; Haukland, 2016; Fossen, 2018) that have specifically investigated Norwegian-accented English have presented the phonemic differences between Norwegian and GA and RP in depth. In this thesis, a brief description of the most salient difference is covered instead. The present study relies on the participants' own choices rather than listening to different specific accents. As previously mentioned, it is therefore somewhat uncertain exactly what variety they refer to when saying *American English* or *British English*. For the aforementioned reasons, a general overview of a few main differences is sufficient for the present study.

The consonants in RP and GA are very similar, but there are two major differences: One of the differences between RP and GA that most people will recognise is that RP does not have the voiced alveolar approximant /ɹ/ at the end of syllables (Rogers, 2013, p. 37). For example, "car" is pronounced /ka/ in RP and /kaɹ/ in GA. Another apparent distinction is the use of /t/ in some words in GA: e.g. for "city" and "matter", the /t/ sound is voiced alveolar tap (Rogers, 2013, p. 53).

Most of the differences between RP and GA are not systemic differences, but rather that they use different sounds for different words (Rogers, 2013, p. 18). The difference between the use of vowels /ɑ/ and /æ/ in e.g. "fast" is an example of having the same system, but having different sounds in specific words. GA and RP both have these two vowels, but they use them differently, as RP uses /ɑ/ to pronounce e.g. "fast", while GA uses /æ/ (Rogers, 2013, p. 18). One difference in the systems, however, is that RP has the vowel /ɒ/, which is not in GA (Rogers, 2013, p. 18).

Defining Norwegian-accented English is more difficult, because the degree to which the L1 influences the L2 accent is quite varied. Most Norwegians will likely have *some* influence of Norwegian in their English pronunciation, but the potential issues arise with a *strong* influence. Fossen (2018, p. 6) explains that RP and GA have eight consonants that do not exists in Norwegian. Here, we will focus on /z/, /tʃ/, and /v/ in addition to the two vowel phonemes /ɪ/ and /i:/.

A general difference between Norwegian and RP and GA, is that Norwegian has no voiced fricatives. As Munden & Sandhaug (2017, p. 223) explain, a common 'mistake' Norwegian

pupils make is replacing /z/ with /s/, e.g. saying "peas" instead of "peace". Some Norwegians also struggle with the consonant phoneme /tʃ/, mispronouncing it as /ʃ/, resulting in words like "chips" being pronounced like "ships" (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 223). The consonant /v/ is perhaps the one that I have observed Norwegians struggle with the most in my personal experience. It is often mispronounced as /w/ in words like "visit" (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 223). In terms of misuse of vowels, "I live" and "I leave" are words that Norwegians may struggle with. The vowels /ɪ/ and /i:/ tend to be misused, e.g. using /i:/ for "live" (Munden & Sandhaug 2017, p. 223).

2.2.1 'Standard' accent and the myth of non-accent

Many are of the opinion that they do not have an accent, meaning that they speak a 'standard' variety of English. Lippi-Green (2012, pp. 44-52) argues that *Standard English* is a myth and that everyone has an accent, even if it is not easily recognised. This relates back to our understanding of what *accent* really is. If *prosodic* and *segmental features* of speech are what make an *accent*, then everyone does have an accent because every way of speaking has *prosodic* and *segmental features*. What is understood as *Standard English* may be very different from an Irish English accent, but *Standard English* is still an accent in its own right, even if it may not be associated with a certain geographical area.

Additionally, all languages are in fact changing all the time. As Lippi-Green (2012, p. 36) explains, the only languages that do not change are so-called "dead languages", meaning languages that do not have any native speakers. In light of the constant evolution of language, Lippi-Green (2012, p. 47) poses the question: If all languages change, how can we have a *standard* variety of English? The answer to that would be that we can have a standard at any given time, but that the standard also changes. The 'real' argument, however, is that, amid the constant change and diversification of language, it may not make sense to have a standard.

As previously covered (see sections 1.1 and 1.2), the English language is used in many different places, across different cultures, and by people with different L1's. We use language not only to express what we see, feel, or hear to one another, but how we speak also says something about ourselves and our identity. In the next section, I explore how our language choices carry social meaning.

2.3   Language and social meaning

Language is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2021b) as "the system of spoken and written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure". In this definition, and in much of the early research on language variation, language is treated as a system. However, this study is concerned with language as a practice. As American sociolinguist Penelope Eckert (2019, p. 751) explains, "viewing language as practice allows us to transcend the boundaries of subdisciplines that deal with meaning and to integrate the social indexicality of variation into this larger system".

Eckert (2012) presents the evolution of variation studies as proceeding in three waves. In 1966, American sociolinguist William Labov's study of the social stratification of English in New York City found correlations between linguistic variables and social categories such as gender, ethnicity, and class (Labov, 2006). This study initiated the first wave of variation studies, as the results were replicated multiple times in different places and contexts in the coming years: Eckert (2012, p. 88) notes that "these studies established a regular pattern of socioeconomic stratification of linguistic form, with greater regional and ethnic differentiation at the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy as well as greater use of more widespread nonstandard forms".

The notion of *vernacular* was central to the theory of variation and was defined as "each speaker's first acquired and most automatic, hence maximally systematic, linguistic production" (Eckert, 2012, p. 88). This concept was also central in the second wave, as it "began with the attribution of social agency to the use of vernacular as well as standard features and a focus on the vernacular as an expression of local or class identity" (Eckert, 2012, p. 91). *Ethnographic methods* were used in the second wave to explore local categories within the broad social categories (Eckert, 2012, p. 87).

An example study within the second wave is Guyana Rickford's in 1986 on a sugar plantation: Eckert (2012, p. 91) explains how his findings indicated that the vernacular's "association with local values and practices gives it positive value on the local level", even though it "may be stigmatised at the global level". The two first waves provided an understanding of variation in both the broader social categories and at the local level.

However, as Eckert (2012, p. 93) notes, these studies treated variation as static, focusing on "static categories of speakers and equated identity with category affiliation".

Eckert (2012, p. 87) proposes a third wave, stating that the first two waves led to seeing variation as "marking social categories", whereas she argues that variation *constructs* social meaning and social change, rather than *reflecting* it. With this understanding, the variation in language is not a result of what happens in social space. Contrarily, it is the variation that causes or, as Eckert writes, *constructs* these changes in social meaning and social change. The third wave, Eckert (2012, p. 94) explains, views meaning of variation as "an essential feature of language". In a more recent article, Eckert (2019, p. 751) argues that a downfall of linguistic research has been a focus on structure, leading to a "static and modular treatment of meaning". In light of the fluidity and everchanging nature of language, given its social aspects and the change in social practice, she argues that while we can separate and study individual elements, we must look at these elements together as a whole in a broader theory of social practice (Eckert, 2019, p. 769).

At its core, language is inherently social in that it is used by people in a social setting and is very much a part of the culture prevalent in an area and assumed by a group of people. The very act of speaking to someone else is a social action. Therefore, the study of linguistic practice should be examined in light of this fact, as the social meaning of language is central to the role language plays in the world. Labov (1972) stated that he "resisted the term *sociolinguistics* for many years, since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social" (p. 13, as cited in Eckert, 2019, p. 751). It is impossible to separate social meaning from language, because the way you present yourself, including how you speak, has inherent social implications.

Stylistic practice is highly relevant to this study, as it focuses on varieties of English and Norwegian L2 speakers' attitudes towards these. Eckert (2019, p. 769) sees stylistic practice as inseparable from linguistic practice, as she argues that "social meaning is built into linguistic practice at every level of the linguistic system". This is apparent in regards to accents: People have attitudes to certain places and the types of people who live there and, as Eckert (2019, p. 752) exemplifies, speaking with a New Jersey accent lets the listener know that you likely are from New Jersey. More generally, stylistic practice lets a speaker

communicate certain things through the way they say things (Excert, 2019, p. 752). For example, yelling is more effective for expressing anger than saying "I am angry". For these stylistic practices to be effective, however, there must be a shared understanding of what they mean (Eckert, 2019, p. 753): If the person you are yelling at associates yelling with joy, it is no more effective than trying to speak to a tiger.

A relevant example for attitudes to accents is the difference in the perception of formality between RP and GA. Given the formality associated with RP (see section 1.6.1), speaking with an RP accent in the classroom could indicate to classmates and teachers that you are a devoted pupil, to whom the classroom is a formal place to be taken seriously. This relates to another relevant concept, indexicality, as the accent one uses can index certain associations to it. As Eckert (2019, p. 754) explains, "an indexical sign evokes something in the physical, temporal, or social world, and that something can evoke other things in the world". In other words, speaking with a GA accent can lead to others attributing their associations to that accent to you.

This is the reason attitudes play a major role in accent aims. If a pupils knows that RP is associated with formality and seen as "posh", they may or may not want these associations for themselves. The social stereotypes (see section 2.5.1) related to users of the accent can be transferred to the speaker. In other words, a pupil may choose an accent that indexes the attributes that they want to be associated with. This does not mean that the associations are fixed, however. Rindal (2013, p. 36) exemplifies how one accent can index formality for one speaker, while it can index something different, for example arrogance for another speaker. As she notes, "language forms possess *potential* meanings" (Rindal, 2013, p. 36). As previously mentioned (see section 2.2.1), there is no such thing as not having an accent. Thus, how you speak will index certain associations, even if you do not use an accent such as RP or GA that are easily recognised.

Canagarajah & Dovchin (2019) provide a different perspective on stylistic practice. They focused on the political implication of translingual language practice and how ordinary people may not be aware of their *linguistic resistance* in everyday life. In other words, people are resisting a change or variation of language without realising it. By examining young people's language practices in different geographical contexts through their online interactions, they

show how the young people differ in their language resistance practices. Their findings are relevant to the present study, as they show how language choices are influenced by social factors.

The first data set is on Mongolian-Kazakh youths, who experience daily discrimination by Mongolians, being bullied because they are not Mongolians and cannot write well in Mongolian (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 131). As a result, these Mongolian-Kazakh youths' use resistance strategies and their strategy was labeled as "codeswitching" (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 129): They switch between using Kazakh in private situations, such as sharing problems with fellow Kazakh's both in physical situations and online, and using Mongolian in more public and formal situations (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 132).

They also use English in daily life, as some informants said that "they feel 'empowered' by using English because they want to show Mongolians that Kazakh people can speak good English" (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 132). A parallel to the present study is how some pupils may switch between accents: They may use an accent that they personally do not prefer in class because it is socially acceptable or because their teacher prefers it. With a different group of people, either online or offline with a different group of people, they may use the accent they prefer.

In the second data set, Canagarajah & Dovchin (2019, p. 134) found that the Japanese youth's strategy is different to that of the Mongolian-Kazakh youth and was labeled as "codemeshing". Canagrajah & Dovchin (2019, pp. 133-137) explain that these students' main exposure to English is textbooks, because they are considered the most appropriate source of English. Furthermore, only 'standard' English is considered appropriate (Canagrajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 136). To promote better English skills and social media awareness, a research project was conducted at the university of Aizu.

The focus was on discourse on the Tohokyu earthquake of 2011. Instead of relying on a textbook, the students observed and analysed Facebook interactions and were to think critically about the interactions and finally write a critical essay and present the topic as well as their experience with English on Facebook (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 137). After

the project ended, the students reported that translingual English had a positive influence on them and that it opened their eyes to different and potentially better tools than the textbook (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019, p. 138). The implications of these findings for the context of the present study is the fact that a translingual approach may be beneficial in ELT. However, with the proficiency and everyday exposure to English in Norway, these benefits may not be as prevalent.

The main implication of these findings for the present study is how the participants' language choices were influenced by social factors. Pupils in upper secondary may choose a certain accent because it is socially acceptable or because their teacher values it more than other accents. The main point from this section is that our linguistic practice is part of our identity: Similarly to our haircut and how we dress, we use language to express who we are. Our language choices are also influenced by social factors. In the next section, I investigate the effects of group pressure.

2.4   Effects of group pressure

The psychology related to group pressure is important to the present study for two reasons: As the study uses focus group interviews (see section 3.2.1), it is crucial to consider how this influences the participants and their answers. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it is important for understanding pupils' language choices. Today's youth face social pressures of many types in everyday life. As such, it is important to consider how the pupils and their attitudes could influence each other's English accent aims, especially when these are discussed in a group setting.

2.4.1 Conforming to group pressure

American psychologist Solomon Asch (1951) investigated social pressure from a majority group and to what extent this can make a person conform. His experiment is viewed as one of the classic experiments within social psychology and is widely recognised. The experiment structure is fairly simple: There is one participant (hereafter "critical subject") who thinks the other participants are in fact also participants. However, the seven other participants (hereafter "the majority") are collaborating with Asch. They are given a simple task with an obvious answer (see figure 4 for example) and the majority answer the question wrong and with

"unanimous-judgements" (Asch, 1951, p. 178). This leads to the critical subject either going against the majority group by answering the task correctly or conforming to group pressure and answering it incorrectly.
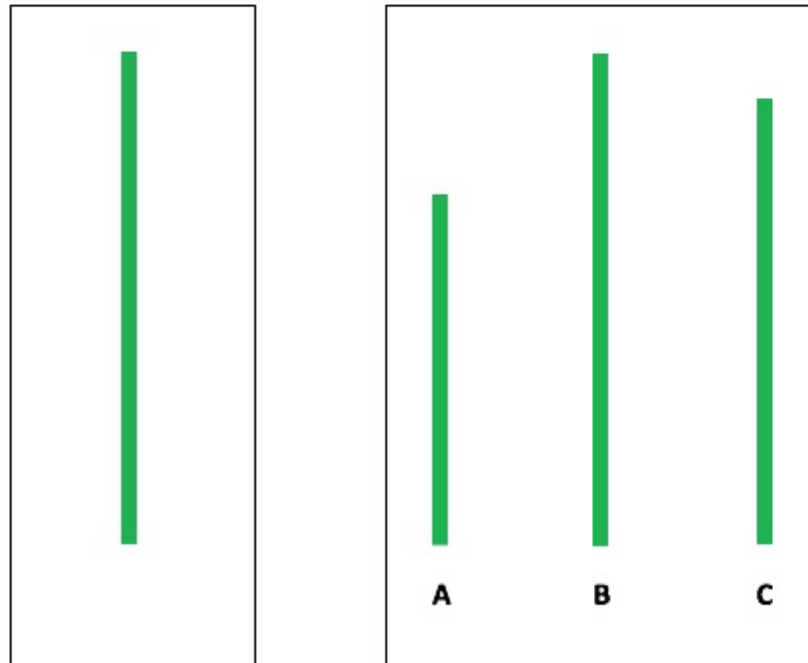
Figure 4 – Example task from Asch's (1951) studies

Participants were to choose which line of A, B or C that matched the line in the left box.

Asch (1951) used a quantitative method to measure of the effect of the majority group on the critical subject's answer. They also interviewed the critical subject with a set of questions to gauge how the majority group influenced the participant. He found that critical subjects conformed to the majority group, i.e. answered incorrectly, a third of the time. These are staggering results, considering that in the control group there was a "virtual absence of errors" (Asch, 1951, p. 181). There were great individual differences, as some critical subjects did not have a single error of 12 possible, i.e. did not conform at all. There were also some that conformed nearly all the time (Asch, 1951, p. 181).

25 percent of participants did not conform a single time and roughly 33 percent conformed in half or more of the trials (Asch, 1951, p. 182). These numbers show how big of a difference there was statistically, but there was also a big difference in terms of how the critical subjects reacted to the group pressure: Some participants were not ravelled in the slightest, while

others were faced with self-doubts and "a powerful impulse not to appear different from the majority" (Asch, 1951, p. 182). These findings are important to contextualising the findings of the present study. If two pupils in a group are very adamant that American English is inappropriate for Norwegian speakers, the third pupil may conform to the group and agree with them even if he or she is not of the same opinion.

It is important to mention that the transference of these findings to potential interview scenarios are limited by the fact that the 'fake' participants were instructed to contradict answers that had very clear answers and included a seven to one pressure dynamic. However, the magnitude of the findings is compelling and tells us how some are greatly influenced by group pressure and will conform to the majority. While this study is quite old, these experiments have been replicated many times in many places and conformity studies with Asch's method are still widely used today (e.g. Kyrlitsias, 2018). In the next section, I explore what pressures Norwegian youth face in school.

2.4.2 Pressure among teenagers in Norway

This subsection provides a brief overview of how satisfied Norwegian pupils are with life and school, and what pressures they face. With this knowledge, we can better contextualise the findings of the present study. According to the national survey *Ungdata*, Norwegian youth are mostly satisfied with their life in and out of school (Bakken, 2020, p. 2). Despite a general trend of well-being, there is still cause for concern in some areas: 15 percent of pupils in lower secondary and 21 percent of pupils in upper secondary reported that they had mental health issues in the previous week in the survey (Bakken, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, seven percent of all participants reported that they are the subject of systematic bullying from others their age (Bakken, 2020, p. 2).

Many pupils find schoolwork stressful: According to the *Ungdata* survey, 30-40 percent of male pupils and 60-75 percent of female pupils in upper secondary school are often stressed as a result of their schoolwork (see figure 5) (Bakken, 2020, p. 18). Furthermore, many pupils report that they feel pressure in everyday life to do well in school: 15 percent of pupils

reported a *very high amount of pressure*[1], 20 percent reported a *high amount pressure*, 25 percent reported a *moderate amount of pressure*, 25 percent reported *some pressure* and 15 percent reported *no pressure* (Bakken, 2020, p. 34).
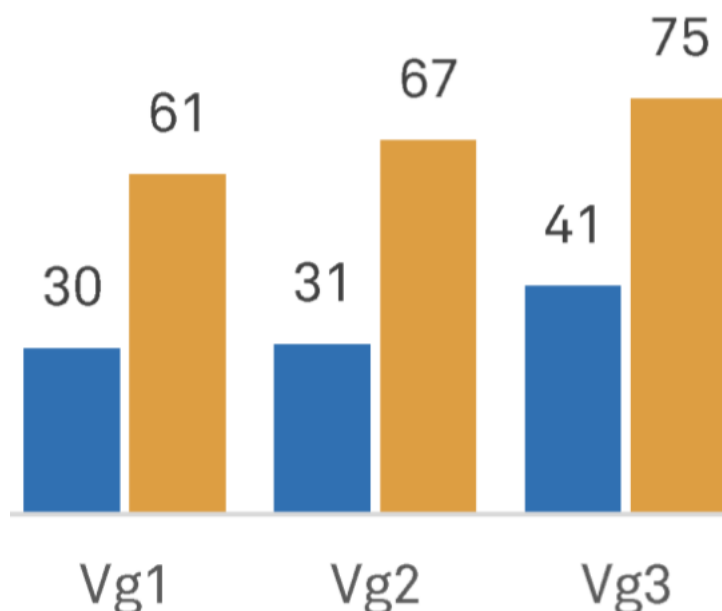
Figure 5 – Percentage of pupils often stressed by schoolwork in first, second, and third year of upper secondary in Norway. Grouped by **males** and **females** (Bakken, 2020, p. 18).

It is difficult to draw conclusions from this data about what the implications are for group pressure and more specifically for accent aims. What the data does tell us, however, is that Norwegian youth feel pressure to perform well in school. The relevance of this in our context is that accent aims and attitudes can be influenced by this pressure. For example, if a pupil knows that their teacher has a favourable attitude to a certain English accent, they may emulate that accent in an attempt to achieve a higher grade. For the context of the interviews conducted in the present study, pupils may, similarly to how they report feeling pressure regarding school performance, feel the same type of pressure among their peers in a group interview. The next section covers what *attitudes* are, which is the final section of the theoretical framework.

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[1] Own translations of 'amounts of pressure' presented in Ungdata's report (Bakken, 2020).

2.5 Attitude – what is it?

As humans, we have certain attitudes to everything we hear, see, and feel, but many do not quite understand what an attitude really is. We are very aware of our own likes and dislikes, and many of us have strong *opinions* on topics, whether it be political issues, or what foods taste best, or what TV series should remain on Netflix. One can easily mistake *opinions* and *attitudes* for synonyms, and while the terms have similar meaning, they encompass slightly different things.

Baker (1992, p. 10) states that "attitude is a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour". An opinion, on the other hand, is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (2021c) as "what or how one thinks about something; judgement or belief". A difference between the two terms is how an opinion is something specific, something that can be clearly stated. An attitude, then, is something more abstract, something that "cannot be directly observed" (Baker, 1992, p. 11).

As with many terms within intellectual fields, there is no clear consensus on a correct definition of *attitude*. There are, however, three main components fairly consistently included, being affect, thoughts or cognition, and behaviour (Garrett (2010, p. 19). One of the first definitions of attitude was that of American psychologist Louis Leon Thurstone (1931, p. 261) with "affect for or against a psychological object" as his definition. In 1954, American phycologist Gordon Allport described attitudes as "a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way" (Allport, 1954, as cited in Garrett, 2010, p. 19). In this definition, thoughts and behaviour are part of the equation, as opposed to Thurstone, who only included affect (Garrett, 2010, p. 19).

Another psychologist, Bram Oppenheim (1982, p. 39), includes not only cognitive and behavioural aspects, but also how attitudes are manifested, and argues that attitude is a psychological construct. A common denominator of these authors' understandings is that, as previously mentioned, attitudes cannot be directly observed. However, that does not mean that they should not be studied. American professor and author Richard Perloff (2003, p. 38) agrees that attitude is a psychological construct and argues that it is a mistake to think that attitudes are not as real as other behaviours because they cannot be directly observed.

A difficult aspect of attitude research and understanding is how behaviour is related to cognition and affect. Baker (1992, p. 12) explains how attitudes can be covert or overt, as "the cognitive and affective components of attitude may not always be in harmony". A person may overtly state an attitude while hiding their covert beliefs and thus the persons external behaviour may not reflect the attitude (Baker, 1992, pp. 12-13). Positive attitudes towards an accent may not lead to someone using it themselves. The present study, then, investigates both the participants attitudes towards accents and their own language choices as their choice of accent may not be the one they have most favourable attitudes towards.

There are conflicting opinions on whether attitudes are a product of heritage or environment, or a mix of the two. Allport's (1954) definition presents attitudes as something that is learned through environment, rather than inherited. Garrett (2010, p. 22) does cite research showing that hereditary factors may also influence attitudes, but notes that this is not specific to language attitudes. So while some attitudes may be inherited, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that it applies to language.

2.5.1 Influence of social stereotypes

Social stereotypes are linked to attitudes. Garrett (2010, p. 32) explains how language attitudes can be influenced by stereotypes: Stereotyping means placing people in different parts of the world into social groups, categorising them and attributing certain features to everyone in that group. As Garrett (2010, p. 32) explains, "social categorisation tends to exaggerate similarities" the people in these groups have in common and the differences between different groups. Stereotypes can either be negative or positive (Garrett, 2010, p. 32): One social group may be seen as lazy, while another may be seen as hard-working. However, the main issue here is that entire groups of people are attributed the same features, when it is rarely the case that an entire group is e.g. lazy or hard-working.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to change these stereotypes. As Garrett (2010, p. 33) notes, studies have even found that we can be *more* influenced by stereotypes as a result of trying to suppress them. Referencing Smith & Mackie (2000), Garrett (2010, p. 33) does explain how stereotypes possibly can be altered by meeting some conditions: "Instances that are inconsistent with the stereotype have to be experienced on repeated occasions across a large number of members, who, despite the inconsistency, must still be regarded as typical of their

group rather than exceptions". As is apparent, this is difficult to achieve to a great enough extent to permanently alter stereotypes.

As a result of stereotypes, attitudes towards an accent can be influenced by the stereotypes towards the people who speak it and the accent itself. Its implication for the present study, then, is that the pupils' attitudes towards certain accents and their own accent aim may be influenced by social stereotypes. For example, a study by Areklett (2017) suggests that Norwegian youth's attitudes do reflect social stereotypes.

3. Methodology

This chapter will present different methods traditionally used for the study of language attitudes, the method of choice for this study, as well as the rationale for it. The chapter will also address who the participants in the study are and how they were recruited. Lastly, the chapter addresses data collection and ethical considerations for the study.

3.1 Historical precedent of methods in language attitude research

As previously mentioned, attitudes cannot be directly observed. This makes studying attitudes a challenging proposition, and consequently the method used is very important. Many different methods have been used to study people's attitudes, including interviews, document analysis, and the matched guise technique (Baker, 1992, p. 17). Garrett (2010, pp. 37-51) outlines the three main approaches to studying attitudes, being the direct approach, the indirect approach, and the societal treatment studies approach. The difference between the direct and indirect approach is fairly simple and is implied in the terms. In a direct approach, participants are asked questions directly about their attitudes, whereas in an indirect approach, more subtle techniques are used (Garrett, 2010, pp. 39-41). When asked direct questions, participants can describe their attitudes based on how they perceive them themselves (Garrett, 2010, p. 39). With an indirect approach, on the other hand, participants can for example listen to a person speak and be asked questions about the speaker.

Societal treatment studies analyse the content of different public sources like written work or media texts to find attitudes represented in them (Garrett. 2010, p. 51). A relevant example could be to study accents used in films or TV series, such as Eken's (2017) study, where she analysed the speech of characters in the TV series *Game of Thrones* and found a trend of sympathetic characters speaking a 'non-standard' accent and unsympathetic characters speaking a 'standard' accent. As Garrett (2010, p. 51) explains, these types of studies tend to be overlooked, but can be useful for the purpose of creating an overview of associations with language and how language is treated in society. As Lippi-Green (2012, p. 101) shows, children are "exposed to a standard language ideology" through films they watch growing up.

In research on language attitudes, such as studies about attitudes to English accents, it is the matched guise technique that is used as an indirect approach (Garrett, 2010, p. 41). In matched guise studies, participants typically listen to a recording of one speaker reading the same text in different ways (Garrett, 2010, p. 41). In studies concerning attitudes towards accents, the same speaker would read the same text, but with different accents. It is also important to note that participants are not informed that the different recordings they listen to is in fact made by the same person. Participants are then, hopefully, led to think that the recordings are of different people and evaluate them according to how they speak (Garrett, 2010, p. 41). The participants' attitudes towards accents can then be measured based on differences in participants attitudes towards the 'different' speakers (Garrett, 2010, p. 41). There is a chance, however, that a participant could hear that it is the same person, which could influence the results.

With an indirect approach, participants are not asked directly about their attitudes, and therefore their real attitudes may present themselves as opposed to the attitudes the participants want to present publicly. A participant's real views on sensitive topics such as inter-ethnicity, may not be divulged when the participant is presented with a direct question (Garrett, 2010, pp. 42-43). A positive aspect of an indirect approach, then, is that you may find people's real views on sensitive topics. Moreover, attitudes the participants were not aware of may also present themselves. Nonetheless, there are ways to mitigate the risk of social desirability (see the paragraph after the next) with a direct approach, which is discussed later.

While the indirect method using the matched guise technique has certain advantages in researching attitudes, a major complication is that the present study is primarily concerned with pupils' attitudes towards *their own* pronunciation. As Rindal's (2013) research exemplifies, attitudes towards an accent when listening and speaking may differ. As this study aims to explore pupils' own aim of English accents and their attitudes towards English accents in that context, a direct method is used: The pupils are asked questions about their accent aims and what factors they perceive to have an impact on it. The study is also concerned with *why* pupils aim towards certain accents. For that reason, the study uses interviews as opposed to a questionnaire to be able to explore the pupils' thoughts further.

One of the benefits of using a direct method is that when the participants are asked specifically about their attitudes, we can explore them in greater detail. As Garrett (2010, p. 39) notes, participants are invited to articulate how they perceive their attitudes themselves. By giving the participants this control, they can elaborate and explain their attitudes and reasons for their language choices fully. There are however multiple downsides to giving participants this control. As Mann (2011, pp. 9-10) notes, it has been found that the data from a qualitative interview is a co-construction between the interviewer and the interviewees. Thus, the attitudes detected in the present study might have been constructed during the interviews rather than being present before them. Furthermore, participants may not want to reveal their real views if they are politically incorrect or not socially accepted. This is called *social desirability bias*: How people tend to phrase their answers to be more socially appropriate (Garrett, 2010, p. 44). The participants may give the answers that they believe I deem appropriate or correct.

Another potential downside to a direct approach is the issue of *acquiescence bias*, how participants may tend to agree with an item to gain the researcher's approval (Garrett, 2010, p. 45). In other words, there is a chance that a participant may try to give the answer that they think I want to hear, compared to *social desirability bias*, where the participant may answer what they think would be more socially appropriate or 'correct': What they believe they 'should' think, not what they believe the interviewer thinks.

Because of these risks of bias impacting the findings, there must be a greater focus on the interviewer (Mann, 2011, p. 10). To reduce the risk of these biases, I informed the participants that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions in the interview and assured the participants that their true answers was what I was looking for. By assuring the participants of this, they may be more relaxed and speak more truthfully as they, hopefully, do not feel pressured to answer 'correctly'.

How the questions are articulated can also help mitigate the risk by making sure they are not leading questions (King et al., 2019, p. 81). Asking open-ended questions compared to yes-no questions should also help mitigate the risk, as the participants are encouraged to explain their own thoughts on a topic. When presented with a yes-no answer question, participants may

answer what they think the researcher agrees with. The positionality of the researcher is explored further in section 3.2.2.

3.2   The present study

The present study is a qualitative study that uses semi-structured interviews in focus groups with three to four participants per group (*n*=12). The study was conducted at an upper secondary school in Innlandet county in Norway. Qualitative research has been dismissed by some researchers who see quantitative research as scientific and qualitative research as speculative (Richards, 2003, p. 8). However, as Richards (2003, pp. 8-9) outlines, there are certain aspects of research that quantitative research cannot fully explore. Quantitative research can provide a great overall picture, but with a more qualitative approach, we can dive deeper into the complexities (Richards, 2003, p. 8). This is particularly the case for this study, as it aims to understand what accents pupils aim for, but also *why* the participants may aim for and find some accents more preferable than other accents.

With a qualitative approach, we can explore these attitudes more-in-depth because more time is allotted each participant to fully explain their answers to the questions. It is a person-centred approach and by getting closer to the participants, it allows us greater understanding of patterns and purpose in their behaviour (Richards, 2003, p. 9). This study examines a certain group in society, rather than the society as a whole. While 12 pupils may not be representative of the entire population the study is concerned with, it can still provide valuable insight.

Even with a qualitative approach with only 12 participants, quantitative aspects will still be given focus. As Richards (2003, p. 11) explains, a qualitative inquiry does not mean that quantitative aspects are ignored, but rather that the main objective of the research is not to find precise figures. In the present study, then, the accent aim of the majority is presented and discussed, but the number itself is not the primary concern of the study. The final reason for a qualitative approach in this study is a matter of pragmatic concerns: Because I have been trained more in qualitative methods in my educational programme, it is beneficial to choose a method with which I have greater experience and knowledge.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews in focus groups

There are a number of different forms of interviews, all of which have distinct advantages and disadvantages, depending on the type of study. This study utilises semi-structured interviews, which is a more 'loose' form of interview (Coolican, 2019, p. 185). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher does articulate questions ahead of the interview, but can choose to ask follow-up questions or word the question differently if participants do not understand the original question or do not give a satisfactory answer (Coolican, 2019, p. 191). For example, if a participant answers that they aim for an American English accent because it feels natural, I can ask them why it feels natural, what about that accent feels natural to them, and what 'natural' means to them.

An advantage to this flexibility is that the researcher can maintain the original outline and structure of the interview while allowing for changes in the order or phrasing of the questions if appropriate (Coolican, 2019, p. 191). An important point here is that the researcher should think about potential follow-up questions in preparation for the interviews. If the researcher is not prepared to ask appropriate follow-up questions or restructure the original questions, this may cause the interview to lose the natural flow of conversation as a result of the researcher contemplating where to lead the conversation. Coolican (2019, p. 191) notes the conversations' natural flow as one of the semi-structured interview's main advantages and therefore it is important to make sure those aspects are kept intact.

There are also disadvantages to this form of interview. The main downside is that a less structured interview can cause problems with reliability and generalisability (Coolican, 2019, p. 185). With a semi-structured approach, I may not ask the same follow-up questions in each interview and there is even potential for missing out on certain topics, given different follow-up questions (Coolican, 2019, p. 185). As a result, the conclusions of the study may be less reliable and generalisable. Despite these limitation, which are inherent to qualitative research, it is worth noting that reliability and generalisability are not necessarily the goal in qualitative research.

As Tracy (2010) explains, these criteria are not as useful and neither are they as relevant in qualitative research as they are in quantitative research. Instead of the typical standards of

quantitative research, Tracy (2010) proposes eight criteria for quality in qualitative research. These are the criteria that the present study attempts to meet:

1. *A worthy topic* that is relevant and interesting.
2. *Rich rigor*: Enough data, enough time invested, enough complexity, and appropriate procedures in data collection.
3. *Sincerity*: That the study is transparent about personal biases and about the methods and limitations.
4. *Credibility*: That the research is trustworthy and plausible.
5. *Resonance*: That the research meaningfully influences the audience.
6. *Significant contribution*: That the research contributes significantly in some way, e.g. practically or conceptually.
7. *Ethical*: That the research is conducted with ethical considerations.
8. *Meaningful coherence*: That the study achieves what it was meant to achieve, with methods that are suitable for that goal. (Tracy, 2010, pp. 839-848)

King et al. (2019, p. 98) make a clear distinction between group interviews and focus group interviews: Focus groups encourage participants to interact during the interview as opposed to a nominal group technique where interaction between participants is prohibited. Coolican (2019, p. 204) explains that focus groups are a collective interview of participants that have common interests. This is congruent with King et al. (2019, p. 100), who note that "generally focus group participants will share some similar characteristics, experiences and/or demographics that will both meet the aims of the research and facilitate conversation" (King et al., 2019, p. 100). That is certainly the case for this study, as all the participants in each interview attend the same English class and therefore have a classroom relationship at minimum. Furthermore, they will also have had the same English teacher and lessons for at least a few months. It is worth noting, however, that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching had been online for periods of the school year. The three participants that attended their first year together at upper secondary (see section 3.2.3, table 1), then, might not have known each other that well at the time of the interviews.

Concerning the quality of the interview, there are advantages and disadvantages to focus group interviews as opposed to single-participant interviews. One advantage is its time-

efficiency, as more data can be collected with multiple participants per interview than with one participant per interview (Coolican, 2019, p. 204). Time-efficiency was of particular importance in this study, as it relied on teachers' willingness to give some of their precious teaching hours to the study. For a researcher with limited access to participants, focus group interviews was the option that provided the opportunity to collect richer data sets.

Another benefit of multiple interviewees is that one participant may bring up a point that another had not thought of, potentially leading to greater reflection from each participant (Coolican, 2019, p. 204). As the participants attend the same school and the same class, this may help facilitate good discussions as they are familiar with each other (King et al., 2019, p. 100). It may also be comfortable for these young pupils to have a few classmates with them in the interview as that could make the process less intimidating. A potential consequence of this, though, is that I access the group's attitudes as opposed to individuals' attitudes. *Social desirability bias* may also be more a prevalent issue in group interviews, as pupils may only give the socially acceptable answers as they may not want to have a different opinion than their classmates and therefore may agree with what another pupil says.

Some participants may be more comfortable not being the only interviewee, while others may be uncomfortable discussing issues openly with other people than the researcher. Moreover, with three or four interviewees, one or two of the participants may dominate the interview (Coolican, 2019, p. 205). Contrarily, if all participants contribute, a focus group interview has potential for fruitful discussion amongst the participants. For the present study, the advantages of focus group interviews outweigh the disadvantages. The main reason is the time and access constraints, but also the belief that the potential upside of a good discussion is greater than the potential downside of one or two pupils dominating it, as this can be monitored to a certain degree during the interviews.

3.2.2 The researcher's 'positionality' and formulating interview questions

Cohen et al. (2018, p. 302) explain how the researcher must be aware of their 'positionality' in the research process, because researchers are not neutral and "qualitative inquiry is not a neutral activity". Because I am a part of the field I am researching, I bring with me my own

thoughts and biases. These thoughts and biases can influence the participants (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 302). Richards (2003, p. 9) echoes this sentiment, noting that in quantitative research the researcher can be separated from the findings, whereas in qualitative research the researcher does not have this option.

As an aspiring teacher who is interested in how accents impact how one is perceived by others and why Norwegians aspire to speak in certain English accents, I have my own opinions on the subject. As Mann (2011, p. 9-10) explains, the interviewer inevitably plays a part in "co-constructing" the interview talk. During the research process it is important that I am aware of my own opinions and biases when handling the data and making conclusions. The findings will also be problematised with this in mind, as a different researcher may get different findings.

Despite the inability to completely remove bias as a researcher, how the questions are asked in an interview is one aspect that can be controlled and can contribute to *social desirability bias* being less of a factor. King et al. (2019, pp. 81-82) present four main mistakes to avoid when asking interviewees questions, these being leading questions, over-complex and multiple questions, judgmental responses, and failure to listen. A leading question contains wording that "suggests to the interviewee the kind of response that is anticipated" (King et al., 2019, p. 81). A simple example for this study would be that "do you prefer British English?" is more of a leading question, while "which English accent do you prefer?" would be less so. King et al. (2019, p. 81) argue that over-complex questions can cause the participant to misunderstand or not follow what the researcher is trying to ask and therefore questions should be direct and simple. They also do not advise asking multiple questions at once as it can cause confusion for the participant and they may consequently only answer one part of the question (King et al., 2019, p. 81).

There are two reasons why judgmental responses should be avoided (King et al., 2019, p. 81): The first is that it can have the same effect as a leading question, where the participant may be impacted by how the researcher responds to their answer and change it to one that is not truly their opinion. An example in this study would be if a participant says that he or she aims for Australian English and I respond with "really?", it can potentially lead to the participant

saying that they meant American English. Judgmental responses may also harm the rapport between the researcher and interviewee (King et al., 2019, p. 81).

Lastly, King et al. (2019, p. 82) explain how a researcher's failure to listen can lead to asking questions the participant already answered, which can cause frustration for the interviewee. To avoid lapses in attention as much as possible, I avoided carrying out the interviews back-to-back without breaks where possible, per recommendations by King et al.'s (2019, p. 82). The aforementioned recommendations have been used to formulate the base questions for the study's interviews as well as behaviour during them. The base questions and potential follow-up questions for the interviews are presented along with the interview guide (see appendix 1).

3.2.3 The participants

As previously mentioned, focus groups have participants with common interests or demographics, which is the case in this study. One way to gather participants for a focus group interview is to recruit a group of people that already live or work together (King et al., 2019, p. 100). That is the approach used in this study, as participants were recruited in a classroom setting and pupils attending the same class were put in the same focus group.

To recruit participants, I contacted upper secondary teachers, previous colleagues, and teaching practice teachers. I asked if I could visit one of their vocational study classes to inform the pupils about the study and ask for their participation. In total, there were 12 participants split into one group of four, two groups of three, and one group of two. One group of three pupils were from a class attending their first year of the vocational study programme *Sale, service, and tourism* [2] and the other three groups were made up of pupils that attended the second year of the vocational programme *Health and upbringing.* Because the *Health and upbringing* class is in their second year and had used the previous version of the English subject curriculum for their first year, they also used that for their second year (see section 1.5). Contrarily, the *Sale, service, and tourism* class was using the revised curriculum.

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[2] Own translations of study programmes

As illustrated in table 1, the first group of three pupils from *Sale, service, and tourism* was made up of three males, of which two were 15 years old and the third was 18 years old. The other group of three consisted of three females, of which two were 17 years old and the third was 18 years old. The third group consisted of four females, all of whom were 17 years old and finally, the group of two also were female, 16 and 17 years old, respectively. To make participants feel comfortable, they were allowed to choose whether to speak English or Norwegian during the interviews.

Group 1 - *Sale, service, and tourism* year 1			Group 2 - *Health and upbringing* year 2		
Participant	**Age (years)**	**Sex**	**Participant**	**Age (years)**	**Sex**
Pupil 1	15	Male	Pupil 1	17	Female
Pupil 2	15	Male	Pupil 2	17	Female
Pupil 3	18	Male	Pupil 3	17	Female
			Pupil 4	17	Female
Group 3 - *Health and upbringing* year 2			Group 4 - *Health and upbringing* year 2		
Participant	**Age (years)**	**Sex**	**Participant**	**Age (years)**	**Sex**
Pupil 1	17	Female	Pupil 1	17	Female
Pupil 2	16	Female	Pupil 2	17	Female
			Pupil 3	18	Female

Table 1 - Overview of participants and groups.

The setting of the interview was also considered. King et al. (2019, p. 72) explain the importance of the physical environment and that it should be comfortable for the participants. Based on recommendations from King et al. (2019, pp. 72-73), the interviews were carried out in a separate room in the school and during the interviews I chose casual clothes such as a simple white t-shirt with jeans to create a more casual and relaxed setting for the participants.

3.2.4 Data collection and ethical considerations

Before conducting the interviews, the study was reported to and approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) (see appendix 2). All participants were given an informed consent form (see appendix 3) with information about the study and what their participation implied. All participants signed the form before participating in an interview.

Participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they could drop out at any point. To preserve anonymity, participants' sex and age is the only information included in the thesis other than what county the school is located. The interviews were recorded on a mobile device with an application created by the University of Oslo, called "Diktafon". The recording is then encrypted and stored in 'Nettskjema', where only the researcher can log in and access it. The recording cannot be played on the mobile device that recorded it; it must be accessed through Nettskjema.

3.2.5 Data analysis

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim in the language used. In one interview, participants chose to speak English, while Norwegian was used in the three other interviews. The transcripts were translated by the present writer. To show how the transcription was written, an excerpt from the transcript of the second interview and its translated version are provided (see appendices 4 and 5). Because the present study is concerned with *what* the participants say, as opposed to *how* they talk, the transcripts do not include prosodic features, like stress, intonation, or pauses. Before starting the analysis, the transcripts were first read in their entirety two times and on the third read, general notes were taken, per recommendations by Coolican (2014, p. 312).

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. While there are many different approaches to analysing qualitative data (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 67), it was preferable to use a method with flexibility as there are multiple transcripts. The analysis proceeded in three steps, based on King et al.'s (2019, pp. 203-210) recommendations. First, sections of the transcripts are given descriptive codes in order to summarise the participants' answers and find sections relevant to the research questions. After finding descriptive codes, the next step is to interpret their meaning and finally define overarching themes. The process of finding descriptive and interpretive codes is completed for one transcript before moving on to the next, while the definition of themes is applied to the full data set. As Coolican (2014, p. 312) notes, qualitative analysis is not linear and one inevitably will have to change previous coding as the themes become clearer.

4. Findings

This section will present the findings from the interviews. First, the coding process is explained with examples of descriptive and interpretive codes assigned to different sections. After showing how the data was analysed, the findings are presented through the main themes that emerged. There were three main themes that emerged in the analysis and they align with the study's research questions: 1. Accent aims inside and outside the classroom, 2. Influence on accent aims, and 3. Attitudes towards varieties of English pronunciation. Each of these themes are presented individually with quotations from the transcripts, before the findings are summarised in the final section.

For ease of reading, the findings from each interview are presented one at a time within each theme, starting with the first interview and proceeding chronologically through the rest, before an overall picture of the data is summarised at the end of each section. Moreover, participants are given codes to make following easier for the reader. The codes indicate which group the participants were in and which number they were assigned (see section 3.2.3). To illustrate, the code "G2P3" refers to group number two and pupil number three within that group. Although this is a qualitative study and is mostly concerned with the qualitative aspects of the data, some quantitative aspects, such as how many pupils aimed for a certain accent, are still relevant and therefore included. Quotations from interviews held in Norwegian are translated into English by the present writer (see appendices 4 and 5 for an example of a transcript and its translation version).

4.1   The coding process

After familiarising myself with the data by reading through the transcripts two times and taking general notes the third time, the first step in the analysis was to define descriptive codes. This step helps highlight the sections of the transcripts that are most relevant to the study. Due to the nature of the questions asked in the interviews and how they relate to the study's research questions, some descriptive codes were easily assigned. The first question of the interviews was what English accent the pupils aim for in the classroom. As illustrated in figure 6, I then defined their aims with a descriptive code, e.g. "American aim" or "no accent aim". Regarding influence on accent aims, the descriptive coding was also fairly straight

forward. The sections where the pupils noted perceived influences on their accents were given codes such as "content influence" and "teacher influence" (see figure 6).

Pupil 2:	I try to aim for American, but I fail.	**Ole Reigstad** American aim
Pupil 1:	I do not have a specific aim of how I speak English, I more so speak what I hear.	**Ole Reigstad** No accent aim
Pupil 1:	That is what you hear a lot too, on Netflix and Viaplay and what you watch in English.	**Ole Reigstad** Content influence
Pupil 3:	I think it matters what teachers you had when you learned English too.	**Ole Reigstad** Teacher influence
Pupil 1:	Yeah, from when you were young.	
Pupil 3:	Yeah, so if I had, if our English teacher in primary school wanted us to speak British..	
Pupil 1:	Yeah.	
Pupil 3:	Then that would be natural for us.	

Figure 6 – Descriptive code examples of accent aims and influences. The examples are from multiple transcripts.

The sections relevant to the questions about their accent aims and what influences them required a relatively small set of descriptive codes. Regarding attitudes towards accents, the descriptive codes varied more: There were a few instances of different codes being used in each transcript, and there were more of them in each transcript. For example, there were three different descriptive codes regarding attitudes to British English in the transcription of the fourth group: "British use is annoying", "British use is trying too hard", and "weird to imitate British".

There were also multiple descriptive codes defined for sections that did not align as neatly to the research questions and these were also different in each transcript. For example, in the transcript for the second group, the participants mentioned fluency. This section was given

"fluent English" as a descriptive code (see figure 7), as the pupils perception of what fluent English is may be relevant to understanding how they view native and non-native accents.

Pupil 3:	But you can kind of, it often happens that you are outside the classroom and you speak fluent English and it is so good and when you enter classroom it is just like, yeah..
Pupil 4:	It kind of stops.
Pupil 3:	Yes.
Researcher:	But, okay so when you say fluent English, what do you mean by, if we can use the context of pronunciation what do you mean by fluent English? What kind of English or how would you describe fluent English?
Pupil 3:	Well that there is flow, or that there is no hitching and it is English pronunciation and there is no Norwegian, it is kind of American.

Ole Reigstad
Fluent English

Figure 7 – Descriptive code example: "Fluent English".

It was not necessary to 'interpret' all the descriptive codes, e.g. explicit accent aims, but all descriptive codes were grouped into an interpretive code: The function of the interpretive coding was to group descriptive codes together and, in most cases, interpret their meaning. To show how I used interpretive coding, we can use two examples of descriptive coding presented here. Firstly, the descriptive code "fluent English" can be used to illustrate how the descriptive codes were interpreted when a single code could not be grouped with another. Secondly, the three codes of attitudes to British English in the fourth group can be used to illustrate how descriptive codes were interpreted and grouped together.

The interpretive coding of the section with the descriptive code "fluent English" is "fluent English as native English". When asked to describe what fluent English is, G2P3 described it as "no hitching", "English pronunciation", "no Norwegian, and "kind of American". Thus, the interpretation was that the pupil believed that fluent English meant speaking like a native speaker, given she noted that there is "no Norwegian" when speaking "fluently". The three descriptive codes "British use is annoying", "British use is trying too hard", and "weird to

imitate British" from the fourth group were grouped into the interpretive code "unfavourable attitudes towards Norwegians using British English", as it seems like the participants did not think Norwegians should use British English (see section 4.4 for elaboration).

After grouping descriptive codes into interpretive codes and creating an overview of them, it was clear what the main themes were as they aligned with the study's research questions. As mentioned, the coding process is meant to provide an overview of the data, to understand the data, and find the most relevant sections. However, some sections not given a descriptive code are still included in the upcoming presentation of the findings. This is because they contributed to provide nuance to the main findings that were discovered in the coding process.

4.2   Accent aims inside and outside the classroom

As illustrated in table 2, there were mixed answers between groups and participants about what type of English accent they aim for. Four of the 12 pupils did not have a specific accent aim, four pupils aimed for an American English accent, four pupils said that their English accent is closest to American English, but did not explicitly say that they aimed for it, and one pupil said that she thought British was fun to try, but did not explicitly say that she aimed for it. However, all pupils noted that their actual pronunciation is more of a mix.

Accent aim	Participant code
No specific accent aim	G2P1, G2P3, G2P4, G3P1
American English aim	G1P1, G1P2, G1P3, G3P2
Indicating American English preference	G4P1, G4P2, G4P3
Indicating British English preference	G2P2

Table 2 - Overview of accent aims.

Three out of the four pupils that aimed for an American English accent were in the same group and although they aimed for an American English accent, G1P2 noted that he did not successfully speak with said accent. He stated that "I try to aim for American, but I fail […] It sounds more Norwegian than American". G1P2 and G1P3 agreed that sometimes this is the

case for them as well. They also aimed for an American English accent outside of class, G1P2 noting that "it is pretty hard to just switch accents […] You got to stick to one" and G1P3 that "it is kind of weird" to switch accents.

The pupils in the second group did not have specific aims inside or outside of class. G2P1 stated that "I more so speak what I hear […] what comes naturally. So it ends up being a nice little mix of everything". G2P2 said that she speaks "regular English", but did not elaborate much on what she meant by that other than saying that it is "kind of a mix of British and American, most American maybe". G2P2 also noted that "it is not something I do on purpose [..] that is just how I speak". Similarly, G2P3 said that "I just speak and then it just is what it is". G2P4 noted that her pronunciation becomes "Norwegian-English", but that she hears American English accents most in media content.

Another interesting finding from the second group was that they did not think the classroom was a natural setting to speak English in and thus found it easier to speak English outside of the classroom. They noted that, since everyone knows Norwegian, it is weird to speak English and that they "may joke a bit and it becomes a little Norwegian-English" (G2P4). Outside of the classroom, however, G2P3 said that they "speak fluent English and it is so good and when you enter the classroom it is just, like, yeah". G2P4 added that this perceived higher level of competence "kind of stops" when in the classroom. This may be related to both the pressure of 'performing' in the classroom as their abilities are assessed and to social pressure from peers.

As a follow-up question, the pupils in the second group were asked what they mean by "fluent" English. G2P3 said "well that there is flow, or that there is no hitching and it is English pronunciation and there is no Norwegian, it is kind of American". G2P4 said that this description "sounds about right" and G2P1 and G2P4 agreed. Based on this description, it seems like the participants thought "fluent" English meant speaking like a native speaker. As is discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3.1, this has implications for formulations in the English subject curriculum.

In the third group, G3P1 did not have an accent aim, but noted "I think I speak with Norwegian-English pronunciation". G3P2 did aim for American English, but also thought she

spoke with Norwegian-English pronunciation: "You try your best […] but it probably ends up being mostly like Norwegian-English sometimes". They did not note a change in accent aim outside of class, but rather tried to speak as simple as possible.

All three participants in the fourth group indicated that they aim for an American English accent, but did not explicitly state that they aim for it, rather that they end up using it: G4P1 said "I think I use mostly American pronunciation", G4P2 said "I prefer that more too", while G4P3 agreed with her classmates, saying "I agree with them, really, that I lean towards American". Similarly to G2P2, G4P2 mentioned "regular English", which she described as "without an accent just talking normally".

As previously mentioned (see section 2.2.1), everyone does have an accent. G4P2 might have meant speaking an accent that is closer to Norwegian-accented English pronunciation than British English or American English pronunciation: She mentioned speaking "regular English" in the context of a discussion about teachers favouring British English accents (see section 4.3). With this in mind, it is at least likely that speaking with a British English accent was not "regular English" in her view. Again, the pupils did not report any change in accent aim outside of class, but did note that the context influences how they speak. G4P2 stated that "all people do not understand English that well, like I have been to Greece a lot, […] I try to speak very simple English […] but it is not like how I speak if it is a presentation for teachers or an exam".

Although not all participants aimed for a specific accent, the majority favoured an American English accent. Most pupils seemed to end up with that they perceived as a mix of Norwegian-accented English and an American English accent, with only one of the pupils displaying aspirations of speaking with a British English accent. Moreover, participants seemed to deem American English and British English as the only viable accent aims, as no pupil mentioned another variety of native accent. This is further elaborated on in section 4.4. All pupils said that they do not have different accent aims outside the classroom, but participants in the second, third, and fourth group noted that their speech does change somewhat outside the classroom.

Also relevant to note is that the participants did not refer to any specific variety of British English or American English either, but it is likely that they meant RP and GA (see section 2.2). Some pupils mentioned "regular English", but it is somewhat unclear what they mean by this. Based on findings by Rindal (2013) and the pupils' other remarks about their pronunciation, it is likely that they either mean a mix of a British English accent and an American English accent, or Norwegian-accented English. This is elaborated on in section 4.5.

4.3   Influence on accent aims

Perceived influential factors on accent aims were fairly consistent across groups and participants. The main influences they noted were teachers, the media content they are exposed to in everyday life, social media, and the perceived difficulty of speaking and understanding the accent. The participants in the first group differed most from the other groups, as they only mentioned three reasons for their wish to speak an American English accent: A preference for the USA, the broader use of American English, and the ease of learning American English. G1P1 said "I like America and I want to go there" and that he thought "more people understand American accents than British accents […] you can use it in more countries and people can understand you". G1P3 said "I think it is hard to speak in a British accent too", which the others agreed with.

Participants in the second group also thought American English was easier to learn, G2P4 noting she felt that an American English accent "is most similar" to Norwegian pronunciation and that "there is not a lot of accent". G2P1 added that it is "pretty straight forward" and G2P3 that it is "kind of clean". G2P1 also noted that, in addition to being easier to learn for Norwegians, an American English accent is also "perhaps easiest to understand". G2P2 did say that "it is most fun to speak British", but did agree that American English is the easiest.

In addition to ease of learning, participants in the second group also mentioned that social media, media content, and teachers influence how they speak English. G2P1 stated that "all youth, all people really, are on social media […] there it is often American". Social media was perceived as being "the most powerful influence" of American English by G2P3, G2P4 adding that it is because "you may follow a lot of Americans too. Because of that, you hear it

the most". As mentioned, the second group also listed media content they are exposed to through streaming services like Netflix when asked about factors that influence their accent aims. Regarding American English accents, G2P1 said "that is what you hear a lot too, on Netflix and Viaplay and what you watch in English […] so it is natural that you mimic that a bit".

Regarding teacher influence, G2P3 explained that her accent might have been different if she had different teachers in the beginning stages of her education: "I think it matters what teachers you had when you learned English, too […] if our English teacher in primary school wanted us to speak British […] then that would have been natural for us". G2P4 noted that her teachers in primary school did focus on British words giving the example that "when we were to write we selected English, UK in Word", meaning that the spellcheck in Microsoft Word would for example correct the spelling of *favor* to *favour*. However, despite her teachers favouring British English to some degree she still leans towards American English, which she attributed to social media being "the greatest influences of American".

The two pupils in the third group also mentioned the influence of their teachers and said that they learned American English in primary school, not British English accents. Moreover, G3P2 explained how speaking with a different accent than the teacher would be more difficult:

> "We learn from them how we should speak and pronounce […] words and stuff. And so then I feel like we have to.. kind of if I want to learn British then I have to do it myself and there are not a lot of people that will do that".

In addition to the influence of the teacher, they also thought what is socially acceptable is influential, as they mentioned how other pupils in class speak. They also noted that most films they watch in class are also American. Not only do they watch mostly American films in school, but also in their free time: "We do watch YouTube and stuff like that and there it is mostly American […] in films and stuff too, it is mostly American films", G3P1 said.

The two participants in this group did not mention social media, but similarly to group one and two thought that American English is easier to learn than British English. The two pupils in this group were also the only participants that brought up the influence of fellow pupils.

G3P1 said that what other pupils do influence them: "Like if everyone else in class had spoken British then I probably would have spoken British too". G3P2 added that "because everyone speaks pretty ok English and speak normal Norwegian or American English then that becomes the standard". Their language choices, then, are influenced by what is socially acceptable in addition to their own preferences and the other influential factors.

The fourth group listed similar influential factors as the other groups: Teachers, media content, and social media. G4P2 was particularly vocal about her dislike of Norwegian speakers using British English accents (see section 4.4) and how some teachers favour this variety: "I feel like some teachers can get like okay she or he is really good at English, because they manage some of the British accent and then they become kind of the favourite pupil".

She gave an example from 10th grade where two of her classmates tried a British English accent and received more praise from the teacher than those with a different accent. She explained how those that simply tried to speak "normally" were "put more to the side even though they answered a lot of questions and got more questions right, while those that tried British answered maybe wrong but it was like 'good!' because they tried the accent". The two other participants in the group did agree that a British English accent may receive more praise. However, it is worth noting that they might have been affected by G4P2's strong opinion on the matter, as they seemed reluctant to answer until prompted to do so and were hesitant in their responses. They did add that, similar to group three, it is easier for them to speak the same accent as the teacher.

As mentioned, the fourth group also listed social media and the media content they are exposed to as influential factors. G4P2 said that she only watches TV series in English, never Norwegian, and that the TV series in English are "mostly from the USA and so I get a lot of American […] From that […] That probably influences me so that I talk more on the American side than the British". G4P1 added that "if you find something that is interesting for example on YouTube and that interests you and is in English, then you are automatically influenced by it". Soccer was also mentioned by G4P2 with the example of listening to interviews of the players and hearing the different accents they have: "People from the

Netherlands, they have a different accent than those that are from England […] so I hear a clear difference".

There seems to be a consensus among the participants that a British English accent is harder to learn than an American English accent. Moreover, the pupils seem to find it more difficult to learn an accent different from that of their teacher. All groups apart from the first listed teachers and media content exposure as influential factors for their accent, while two groups mentioned the influence of social media. Of those that did list both social media and media content exposure, it is clear that the participants believe that these spaces are dominated by American English accents. Thus, these factors naturally influence them to also use more of an American English accent. The participants' anecdotes about teachers were more mixed, as some thought their teachers preferred and favoured British pronunciations, while others said they were taught American English pronunciation early in their education.

4.4   Attitudes towards accents

As mentioned in section 4.2, participants seemed to deem American English and British English as the only viable accent aims, as no pupil mentioned other native accents. Not only did the pupils aim for an accent closer to an American English variety, but they also seemed to favour American English, primarily due to ease of understanding, and broader use. Some even disapproved of Norwegians using British English, arguing that it is only appropriate for native speakers. While some viewed a more Norwegian-accented English as appropriate for Norwegian speakers, all the pupils said that an American English accent, although also a native accent, is the most appropriate.

The data from the first group is fairly limited in terms of drawing conclusions about pupils' attitudes, although, as covered in the previous section, the participants did show a general liking of American English. The data from the second group provided more nuance to attitudes towards a British English accent, as it revealed that the participants' attitudes seemed to differ based on who was speaking the accent. The pupils actually seemed to like listening to a British English accent, but thought it was both difficult to learn, difficult to understand, and not similar enough to Norwegian pronunciation. G2P1 group noted that "I think it is nice to listen to […] But I do not think it is always easy to understand or hear what they say". As

covered in the previous section, they did find an American English accent more appropriate for Norwegians, but did not seem to dislike British English accents in general.

The two pupils in the third group thought it was weird for a Norwegian English-teacher to use a British English accent, G3P2 explaining that it is "because I think it sounds kind of wrong". They were also the only participants to associate a British English accent with formality, noting that they thought an American English accent is not as formal as a British English accent and therefore can be used in more places and situations. The fourth group also thought it was weird for Norwegians to use British English.

G4P2 noted that she thinks it is weird to imitate British English because we have a different type of English in Norway than those in the UK. However, G4P2 later said "so it becomes more suitable for Norwegians to rather go towards the American because I feel the British is kind of more for those that are from there". She explained that this is because British English is more "their own", while American English is used more broadly across the world. The same pupil noted that Norwegians do not have a "pretty" English pronunciation, which is another indication of the dislike being aimed toward Norwegian speakers using it rather than to the accent itself or to native British English speakers.

It is unclear why participants in the third and fourth group thought that a British English accent is reserved for native speakers while an American English accent, also a native accent, is appropriate for L2 speakers in Norway. It seems illogical for one native accent to be appropriate for L2 speakers across the world, while another is only appropriate for native speakers. From the pupils' comments, the reason they thought this might have been because they thought Norwegian pronunciation is more similar to American English pronunciation. Additionally, they might have thought that, because they thought British English is more unique, it should only be used by people from the UK. This was an unexpected findings and the collected data is not sufficient to draw more than tentative conclusions on this matter. Thus, this is something future studies should look more into (see section 5.4).

The participants seemed to have most favourable attitudes towards an American English accent. It was regarded as more universal, easier to understand, and more similar to Norwegian pronunciation than British English. Moreover, British English accents were

viewed by some as reserved for natives and not suitable for Norwegians. However, participants did not seem to have negative attitudes towards the accent itself, but rather towards Norwegians who attempt to use it. Participants actually seemed to like listening to a British English accent, but thought it was both difficult to learn, difficult to understand, and not similar enough to Norwegian. When asked about what accent is most appropriate for Norwegians to speak, the answer was unanimous. Across the groups, the pupils said American English is most appropriate for Norwegians, though the pupils in the first group did say that it is also okay to speak with Norwegian-accented English.

There was an additional finding in the fourth group about the appropriateness of Norwegian-accented English in formal situations. They noted that, regarding Norway's previous prime minister and current secretary general of NATO Jens Stoltenberg, he should not use Norwegian-accented English if he is giving a speech. The reason for this, they said, was that it did not seem like he cared very much and that he needs to use a form of English that everyone can understand. However, most people can understand him, and this finding adds to those by Hordnes (2013) and Haukland (2016): Norwegians have less favourable attitudes to Norwegian-accented English than native speakers or other L2 speakers of English.

4.5   Summary of the findings

The findings suggests that the pupils seemed to deem American English and British English as the only viable options for Norwegians as far as accents are concerned and that they had the most favourable attitudes towards an American English accent. For the most part, there was also a preference for American English accents for their own pronunciation: Four participants did not aim for a specific accent, four participants aimed for an American English accent, three participants indicated an American English preference, and one pupil indicated a British English preference. The participants accent aims or lack thereof where consistent both inside and outside school. However, the pupils in the second group noted that the classroom was not a natural setting to speak English in. Moreover, all groups except the first noted that they do somewhat alter how they speak in different situations, even if they do not aim for a different accent per se.

Despite a preference for American English, most participants noted that their actual pronunciation is more of a mix, many explaining that it is influenced by Norwegian at times. Some participants noted that they speak "naturally" or "regular" English. It is difficult to assess what "natural" and "regular" English means to the pupils, but Rindal (2013, p. 12) did have some interesting findings about the accent of "neutral" aimers in her study: "Neutral aimers used less of the features found in GenAm [General American] than AmE [American English] aimers, but more than BrE [British English] aimers. Neutral aimers have thus positioned themselves *in between* in the traditional BrE/AmE dichotomy". This seems to be the case for the pupils in this group also, as they describe their accent as "a mix" of different varieties.

All participants thought an American English accent is the most appropriate for Norwegian speakers, though the participants in the first group also thought Norwegian-accented English was appropriate. Participants in the fourth group implied that Norwegian-accented English was inappropriate in formal situations. Attitudes towards a British English accent were more varied, as some participants found British English pleasant to listen to and fun to try, but most participants did not think it was appropriate for Norwegian speakers. Some thought an American English accent was appropriate for Norwegian speakers, but that a British English accent was reserved for native speakers. This seems illogical given that both are native accents; this is clearly a topic for future investigation.

All participants thought British English accents were harder to learn, which was the main argument provided for not aiming towards it. In addition to the difficulty of speaking certain accents, there were four other factors the participants perceived as influencing their accent aims: Social media, their teachers' accent and preference, media content exposure in daily life, and the accents of their classmates. Three of the four groups mentioned media content exposure and teachers, two groups mentioned social media, and one group mentioned the accents of their classmates. American English accents were thought by the participants that talked about social media and media content to be prominent in these spaces.

A more general finding was that, as a result of using focus groups, this study yielded group attitudes and perhaps attitudes that are more socially accepted rather than individual attitudes (see section 3.2.1). There were similar stances in each group (see table 2), as pupils within

groups tended to agree with each other and/or be affected by what was previously stated by a pupil in the same group. Group three hinted that fellow pupils' language choices influences how they speak as well, indicating that they make language choices based on what is socially acceptable rather than speaking the accent they may personally prefer. In the following chapter, these findings are compared to that of previous research and the implication of the research is discussed.

5. Discussion

In this section, the findings of the present study are compared to that of previous research in order to contextualise them and provide an overview of what the totality of the evidence tells us thus far. The didactic implications of research on attitudes to English accents will also be discussed. How teachers can use the information, what it entails for teacher education, and its implications for formulations in later curricula is addressed. Lastly, the present study's limitations and suggestions for future research are presented and discussed.

5.1   Comparing the findings to previous research

As previously presented (see section 1.6.1), research on attitudes towards different varieties of English accents and the intelligibility of Norwegian-accented English has yielded somewhat mixed results. Furthermore, research on Norwegian pupils' choice of own English accent is limited. The majority of studies in Norway have found that pupils and teachers favour RP when listening over other varieties. However, Rindal (2013) found that most pupils aim for an American English accent and that GA influenced pronunciation was most prominent among pupils. In the present study, there was also a greater preference for American English accents. Despite a general preference for American English, most pupils self-reported that their actual accent was closer to Norwegian-accented English. It is worth noting that this might have been a result of using focus groups, as the pupils might not have wanted to say that they are able to speak a native accent in front of their classmates.

Rindal (2014b, p. 11) found that pupils thought British English was the formal and "'correct' school standard". This finding is contrary to that in the present study, where only one group brought up formality. Moreover, the pupils in the present study did not seem to deem British English as more appropriate in school for themselves or for their teachers. In fact, some pupils thought British English accents were reserved for native speakers, as it was considered weird and inappropriate for Norwegian speakers. An important distinction to make, however, was that the pupils did not seem to dislike British accents in general, but rather L2 speakers using it. Those that commented on British English accents actually had favourable attitudes towards it when used by native speakers, similarly to what previous research has shown.

The present study is not able to conclude why British English accents were deemed inappropriate for Norwegian speakers while attitudes towards native speakers of them were favourable. However, there were hints throughout the pupils' answers: All the pupils mentioned that they were exposed most to American English accents in media content. A reason for them perceiving British English accents as weird or inappropriate might have been due to not them hearing it very often. They may not have unfavourable attitudes to British accents, but may find it weird to use because they are not exposed to it and as a result it does not seem 'normal' to them. American English may seem more wide-spread and common to the pupils because they hear many people speak it, even if those people are American.

The present study's findings regarding pupils' perceived influence on accent aims were similar to Rindal's (2013). While the perceived influence of formality was more prevalent in Rindal's interviews, the participants also perceived the media, the preference of their teacher, and difficulty of the accent to be influential factors, which participants in the present study also listed. In one of the groups in the present study, Norwegian-accented English was deemed inappropriate for formal situations, with a speech by Jens Stoltenberg as an example. This is similar to findings by Hordnes (2013), Haukland (2016), and Hopland (2016), where Norwegians did not have favourable attitudes to Norwegian-accented English. It seems like the participants in the present study deemed Norwegian-accented English to be an alternative for those who are unable to speak with an American English accent. Three participants in the same group described fluent English as American English and not Norwegian, again indicating that American English accents are deemed superior to Norwegian-accented English, British English, and other native accents.

5.2   Understanding the findings

There are multiple reasons why attitudes are relevant in linguistic research and for ELT (see sections 1.6.3 and 1.6.4). Getting closer to understanding pupils' and teachers' language preferences allows us to critically evaluate whether they are in line with what the curriculum states. Furthermore, we can then evaluate the curriculum and whether its learning aims coincide with what pupils need to learn for their purposes. Another important reason is to gain insight into the status of different accents among pupils. Before we can discuss the didactic implications of the findings, we must first contextualise them in relation to the studies

previously discussed. Once we understand what my findings contribute to the totality of the research, we can use this knowledge to suggest ways to improve teaching and curricula practices.

In the present study and in Rindal's (2013) research, American English accents were preferred for pupils' own accent. However, we need more data, especially on vocational pupils, and research in different schools in different places in the country to confirm this trend. While there is still some uncertainty about whether Norwegian pupils find American English or British English more appropriate, evidence is building towards pupils considering native accents, particularly British English and American English, as what Norwegians should aim to speak. The present study indicates a particular favouring of American English accents, while Rindal's (2013) study found that pupils' preference of American English and British English was fairly close. This may be area-specific and/or a result of American influence over time, and/or chance due to small sample.

It is still unclear from previous research if Norwegian-accented English poses problems for intelligibility. If they are in fact slightly inferior in intelligibility in communication with native speakers, we still must do a cost-benefit-analysis of teaching or encouraging the aim of native accents for L2 speakers. Important questions to ask are how much Norwegians communicate with native speakers, and if the difference in intelligibility is large enough to warrant the extra time spent learning a native accent. Also, if we conclude that learning a native accent is worthwhile, which native accent should Norwegians aim for? As covered throughout this thesis, there is great variety in the use of the English language and Norwegians use English as a lingua franca with many different people, who speak different varieties. With this in mind, we must consider if spending time and effort on learning a certain variety of English is worth it for the practical benefits.

One could argue that certain accents are more appropriate for certain situations. Haukland (2016, p. 65) found that many thought this to be the case in his study. For example, speaking with an RP accent could be beneficial academically and in some work situations given the formality associated with the accent. By some Norwegians you may be perceived as trying too hard for using that accent, but it will depend on who you are speaking with and what

situation you are in. GA may be better perceived in less formal situations or by people who associate RP with being "posh".

Because different accents may be useful in different situations, one could argue that pupils should be taught the phonology and intonation of several accents. As mentioned in section 1.5, the competence aim "express himself or herself in a nuanced and precise manner with fluency and coherence, using idiomatic expressions and varied sentence structures adapted to the purpose, receiver and situation" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019) could be interpreted that way. Moreover, some textbooks used in certain schools have in fact included sections with the phonology of different accents (e.g. Balsvik et al., 2015).

In the present, the pupils did not aim for a different accent outside the classroom as opposed to inside the classroom. The three participants in the first group thought the notion of changing ones accent was "kind of weird", saying that "it is pretty hard to change accents […] you got to stick to one". One pupil in the fourth interview, however, said that she did not speak the same when on vacation in Greece as she would for a presentation in school or an exam. Similarly, the pupils in the second interview also said that they aim to speak as simple as possible outside the classroom.

Based on these remarks, some pupils in the present study did change how they spoke, such as the curriculum states, "adapted to the purpose, receiver and situation", even if they did not say that they had different aims in terms of their accent outside the classroom. Another important finding was that, based on their description of "fluent" English, participants in the second group seemed to think that it meant speaking like a native speaker, specifically American English. These three participants did not have an explicit accent aim, but noted that an American English accent is the most appropriate for Norwegian speakers. Thus, it seems like these participants might have thought American English is the 'standard' of good English pronunciation for Norwegians.

One reason why native accents of English may still be considered the gold standard is history and tradition. British English is the 'original' version of English, followed by American English, and thereby the versions that serve as the 'base' from which you try to emulate or build from. Other varieties may be considered versions that have tampered with the original

language. Additionally, Norway's connection to the UK geographically, as it is relatively close, and the USA politically, might also have influenced why we have aimed for these native varieties.

Another reason, which relates to the historical and political perspective, is the media influence. As American English and British English varieties have been most prominent in media such as films, TV series and news coverage, L2 speakers being primarily exposed to these varieties might have led to these being considered the 'correct' varieties. The pupils in the present study noted that American English was most prominent in media content. Therefore, they thought they were most influenced by American English. Furthermore, the history and culture of the USA and the UK has been prominent in school textbooks in Norway (e.g. Hellesøy et al., 2013; Balsvik et al., 2015) which could also have contributed to the persistence of these ideas. Even as the curriculum has transitioned away from focusing on these nations, teaching of them could still be ingrained in older teachers. Focusing on these nations may not necessarily be a problem in and of itself, but is more so a concern regarding differences in teaching across schools and classes.

As previously covered (see section 1.5), the current English subject curriculum does not encourage aiming for native accents. In fact, it does not give any guideline on this matter at all, which is contributing to confusion among teachers and pupils. In the next section, the didactic implications of these findings are discussed. From the totality of the research on pupils and teachers in Norway, it seems clear that American English and British English accents are still viewed as the standards for pronunciation, despite the transition in the curriculum. Thus, we must discuss benefits and drawbacks of aiming for native accents, what knowledge of these preferences entails for ELT in Norway, and potential changes in future curricula.

5.3   Didactic implications

The growing body of research on L2 language choices, intelligibility, and attitudes towards English can help us improve how we teach English and what we should focus on. In this section, I discuss how the findings of the present study and previous research can guide how we teach English pronunciation in Norway. I argue here that the curriculum should be made

more explicit, as the research indicates that teachers and pupils still consider native accents of English as superior, even though the curriculum does not explicitly state this. Moreover, based on Bøhn's (2019) findings and findings in the present study, teachers and pupils alike seem interpret it differently, "fluency" being an example where there is confusion. I also discuss what the curriculum should say about English pronunciation and implications for teaching education. Ultimately, the case is made that it is crucial that pupils are informed of what is expected of them, that teachers know what they should teach and assess, and that teaching education gives these issues the attention it needs.

5.3.1 Implications for ELT and the English subject curriculum

From the totality of the research, a major finding is the seemingly different interpretations of teachers and pupils about what constitutes 'good' or 'correct' English pronunciation for L2 learners. As currently formulated, the English subject curriculum in Norwegian upper secondary school is vague, especially regarding oral competence (see section 1.5). Thus, I argue here that the curriculum should be made more explicit in order for teachers and pupils to know what they are aiming to achieve. Firstly, a more explicit formulation of what is expected of the pupils can help make what to focus on clearer to them. It can also be more motivating working towards a clear goal.

As presented in section 1.5, Bøhn's (2019) study found that teachers interpretations and consequently assessment of pronunciation differed. As a result, two pupils with the same level of competence may be assessed differently. This differential affects both the pupils' learning outcomes and whether they achieve the necessary grades for further education. Moreover Bøhn's (2019) study showed that teachers do not agree on what "fluency" means, as their assessment differed. This finding, along with the finding in the present study of how the pupils viewed fluency, calls for a more explicit description in the curriculum of what fluency entails.

The formulations being difficult to interpret may have another consequence. Some teachers have a tendency to turn to the school's textbook to guide their teaching (Munden & Sandhaug. 2017, p. 62). A consequence of the curriculum being difficult to interpret could be that teachers turn to the textbooks because they are unsure what they are supposed to teach. In some cases, the textbook is used as if it *is* the curriculum even though it is not (Munden &

Sandhaug, 2017, p. 63). This is another issue of which pupils and teachers must be explicitly informed and reminded. While it is natural to criticise the teachers for relying on the textbooks, examining the reasons for why they do may be more beneficial. If the curriculum was clearer on what should be taught, teachers may not rely on the textbook as much.

Despite what I believe are reasonable and logical reasons for making the curriculum more explicit and detailed, there are certainty advantages to how it is currently formulated. As previously mentioned (see section 1.4), teachers are given great freedom in Norway to teach how they see fit. This is likely a good thing overall, because teachers know how to teach better than anyone. The potential issue is not how teachers choose to teach, but rather what they teach and what they value most when assessing pupils' competence.

A downside of making the curriculum more explicit is that it would likely also have to be more comprehensive, i.e. longer. There are multiple benefits of fewer competence aims and this has understandably been an aim in the latest revision of the curriculum. One benefit is that it may be easier to inform the pupils of the competence aims when there is less information to process. A long curriculum with a lot of detail may make it more difficult to convey its contents to the pupils, ultimately leaving them more confused. A potential solution to this may be to have two different sets of curricula, with one more comprehensive and one similar to the current. However, this has its own downsides, as pupils should be informed of the curriculum in its entirety. Teachers should not withhold information that could lead a pupil to not focus on a more minor aspect that the teacher values.

The findings on pupils' attitudes also have implications for ELT, particularly given the connection between attitudes and social stereotypes (see section 2.5.1). Thus, it would be beneficial that the pupils discuss stereotypes and different accents in the classroom. The key here is creating awareness. For example, you can discuss what the pupils associate with certain accents or social groups and why they associate certain things with certain people. By doing so, pupils may become more aware of social stereotyping and gain more insight into how they think about such matters.

While I do believe the suggestions presented here are valuable and would help minimise the issue of different standards across schools and teachers, no perfect solution exists. A language

simply cannot be assessed or taught in the same way as for example maths. Some subjectivity will inevitably be a part of the equation. Nonetheless, making the curriculum less open to interpretation could help make the differences less pronounced. In the end, the learning outcomes and fair assessment of the pupils are what matters.

All this is not to say that the curriculum should necessarily state that the aim is native accents, non-native accent or even one specific accent. If accents are equally appropriate or 'correct', then it should state that more explicitly. This would help teachers determine how they should assess and teach pronunciation, and it would help pupils know what they should aim for. Furthermore, it could help reduce the differences in teaching and assessment of oral competence between schools and teachers. In the next section, I discuss what the benefits and drawback of native accents as the standard are.

5.3.2 Benefits and drawbacks of native accents as the standard

As argued in the previous section, making the curriculum more explicit may remedy the issue of different teachers and pupils interpreting the competence aims differently. The next point of discussion, then, is what should be expected of Norwegians in terms of English pronunciation. There are good arguments for using a native accent as a pronunciation standard. However, as hinted at throughout this thesis, there are also some inherent issues with this idea.

Perhaps the main benefit of strict pronunciation standards is that teachers and pupils have clears goal to work towards. The first component of this is that it can make assessment easier for teachers. If GA becomes the standard, teachers could teach that and assess pronunciation based on it. Pupils would also know exactly what to work towards and be instructed on what they can improve. The benefit of using GA as the standard would be that pupils are already aware of it and are exposed to it in everyday life. Another benefit of a stricter standard is the potential for less group pressure. At least in the present study, pupils had a tendency to conform to the socially accepted opinion, which influences their language choices. Stricter standards may relieve this pressure to some degree.

These benefits are certainly worth considering. However, the drawbacks are also quite formidable. Firstly, the social pressure issue is a double-edged sword. As presented in section

2.3, language carries social meanings, and as Rindal (2013) has shown, pupils create identity with their English pronunciation. This part of how pupils express who they are with their L2 could get lost with a strict standard that everyone follows. This may be a good or bad thing: An analogy to this would be school uniforms. On one hand, they help minimise the differences in status by standardising clothing. On the other hand, they also minimise pupils' ability to express who they are.

Another drawback to stricter standards is that it may take a lot of time and may be difficult for the pupils to achieve. The hours allotted to English in upper secondary school in Norway are unfortunately very limited, especially for some vocational study programmes (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020): The minimum teaching hours of English in upper secondary is 140. In some study programmes, but not all, you can choose one or two additional years of English, also with 140 hours per year. The minimum teaching hours of Norwegian, on the other hand, is 393, with the exception of those that do apprenticeships in year three and four of vocational studies (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). Therefore, we must think about this issue with a cost-benefit approach.

Norwegians are likely to use English to communicate in many different situations and with different people. Norwegians travel a lot, both to countries where English is the L1 for many and countries where English is used as a lingua franca. Over the course of their professional and recreational life, they may find themselves speaking English with people from the USA, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, etc. Because of this, spending a lot of time 'perfecting' pronunciation in accordance with a strict standard may be a poor use of time that could have been spent on more important aspects. It is important to mention that in Haukland's (2016) study, native English speakers found Norwegian-accented English mostly unproblematic. It was Norwegians that had less favourable attitudes than native speakers. Hordnes (2013) had similar findings, although less Norwegian influence was seen as more prestigious by native speakers.

On a final note on didactic implications, I encourage teacher education programmes to spend more time on problematising and understanding the curriculum. The present study, along with Rindal (2013) and Hopland (2016) have shown that teachers can influence pupils' language choices. Therefore, an even greater focus should be put on presenting the curriculum to the

pupils and discussing their language choices with them. It is also important to address this issue as early as possible, which starts with teacher education.

As mentioned earlier (see section 1.4), teachers in Norway should cherish the freedom they are given to choose teaching methods. However, the curriculum being as open for interpretation as it is may consequently lead to major differences in both teaching and assessment of pronunciation between schools and individual teachers. Ultimately this affects pupils and can have serious repercussions for their future professional careers, as some educational programmes require top grades in nearly every subject for entry.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

It is crucial to address the limitations of the present study. Not only is it necessary in order to contextualise the findings, but also to propose suggestions for future research that can expand our knowledge in this field. As with all qualitative research, the sample size of the study is a central limitation. Moreover, all pupils in a single class were not interviewed: the first group featured three pupils that volunteered from a class of 15 pupils and the three other groups featured nine pupils from a class of 30 pupils. As the study relied on pupils volunteering to participate as opposed to entire classes participating, it might not have captured representative scope of different types of pupils.

Generally, subjectivity is a factor with the method used in this study. The researcher is part of co-constructing attitudes in interviews (see section 3.2.2). Thus, a different researcher might have gotten different results. This is especially relevant for the findings in the first interview, as I spoke English during it. My English accent, which is close to GA, although probably influenced by Norwegian to a certain degree, might have influenced the participants. As previously mentioned (see section 3.2.1), generalisability is not necessarily a goal of qualitative research, but nonetheless it is a limitation and is worth mentioning again.

This relates to another limitation, which is that three of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and translated into English. Translation is very difficult even for a well-taught and experienced translator. It is worth mentioning that I have had one course in translation during my education which was very useful, and I studied translation in my Bachelor thesis.

However, the potential for some meaning being lost or altered is present due to my relatively limited training and experience with translation.

In addition to these limitations of the methodological aspects, there were also aspects of the conducting of the interviews that could have been better. In retrospect, I should have asked more follow-up questions. For example, it would have been interesting to dive deeper into what the participants meant by "regular" English or speaking "naturally". Furthermore, as I used semi-structured interviews, the content depended to a large extent on what the participants focused on. Thus, the present study did not explore the pupils' attitudes to other varieties of English than British English and American English. The participants might also have meant different things when saying "American" or "British".

An unexpected finding in the present study was that some participants thought that British English was only appropriate for native speakers, while American English was appropriate for Norwegians. It does not make logical sense that one native accent is appropriate for non-native speakers, while another is only appropriate for native speakers. This is an interesting finding and should be examined in future research. It would also be valuable to explore what pupils mean by "regular" English and speaking "naturally". Moreover, future research should investigate why pupils may only consider American English and British English accents as the only native accents that are viable to aim for. In general, more research is required on pupils attending vocational studies. As this study is the first of its kind on vocational studies, the findings must be replicated. More research on Norwegian-accented English is also necessary, as it is still unclear if it is inferior to other accents for intelligibility. More research on how teachers interpret the aims for pronunciation in the curriculum is also encouraged.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated L2 language choices and attitudes to English among vocational pupils in Norway (*n*=12). The study used semi-structured interviews in focus groups in an attempt to answer the following research questions: *Which variety of accents do the pupils aim for when speaking English?, what factors influence their aim?,* and *what attitudes do Norwegian pupils attending vocational studies in upper secondary school have towards different varieties of English pronunciation?*. In this final chapter, I attempt to answer these questions and conclude what implications the findings have for English didactics in Norway.

6.1   Research question 1

Not all participants stated their accent aims explicitly, but there was a clear preference for American English accents: Four pupils explicitly aimed for an American English accent, three indicated a preference for American English, one pupil indicated a preference for British English and four pupils did not have a specific accent aim. The pupils said that they did not have different accent aims outside of the classroom, but some did note that they do end up speaking slightly differently in different contexts. Many pupils did note that their actual accent was influenced by Norwegian pronunciation.

6.2   Research question 2

There were differences between the groups in terms of what they perceived to influence their accent aims. All groups except the first noted that difficulty of an accent, their teachers' preferences and own accent, and the media content they are exposed to influence their accent aim. Two groups noted the influence of social media, while one group noted the influence of the accent of their classmates. There was also a consensus that a British English accent is more difficult to learn and that they are mostly influenced in the direction of an American English accent. In addition to these perceived influences by the pupils, an additional finding was that the pupils are likely influenced by what accent is socially acceptable, as accent aims were fairly consistent across groups.

6.3   Research question 3

The present study found that vocational pupils had most favourable attitudes to American English accents for their own English-production. The data also suggest that they had favourable attitudes to British English accents when they listen to spoken English, but that most had unfavourable attitudes to British English accents when spoken by Norwegians. Many participants noted that they speak with Norwegian-accented English, but only three pupils thought this was an appropriate accent for Norwegian speakers.

6.4   Implications for English didactics

The findings in the present study and the totality of the research indicate that different teachers and pupils interpret the competence aims for pronunciation differently. The curriculum being so open to interpretation can have severe consequences for the learning outcomes of pupils in addition to their academic future. It is difficult to assess whether the benefits of teaching native accents as the standard outweigh the benefits. The drawbacks of the curriculum not explicitly stating what is expected of the pupils in their English pronunciation is, however, significant. Thus, I encourage that that competence aims regarding pronunciation in the English subject curriculum be made more explicit. I also encourage teachers and teaching education to continue to problematise the curriculum. Furthermore, teachers should have discussions with their pupils about the curriculum and be explicit in what they expect from their pupils.

6.5   Concluding remarks

As the present study is the first of its kind on vocational pupils in Norway and has a small sample size ($n=12$), these findings must be replicated in order to be confirmed. However, some of the findings are similar to other studies in Norway on slightly different demographics (see section 5.1). It is argued here that these findings indicate a need to make the English subject curriculum more explicit regarding pronunciation.

In general, more research on L2 language choices and attitudes should be conducted on vocation pupils in Norway. To strengthen the findings, it would be valuable for future

research to explore why pupils may only consider American English and British English to be the only viable native accents to aim for. It is also necessary to study the intelligibility of Norwegian-accented English further, preferably with both native and non-native English listeners. I would also encourage further research on how teachers interpret the pronunciation aims in the curriculum, as the potential for different interpretations is great given how they are currently formulated.

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Appendix 1: Focus group interview guide

The following is the guide for the focus group interviews created based on recommendations from Breen (2006) and the previous discussion (see section 3.2.2). First, the participants are welcomed and thanked for their willingness to participate and the topic for the interview will be introduced. Next, the following guidelines for the interview will be presented:

1. My job is to ask the questions and guide our discussion. As you know, our conversation will be recorded.
2. Your job will be to answer my questions and be respectful to the other participants. One person speaks at a time and once that person finishes answering I will guide the discussion further. Do you all agree to that?
3. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am not looking for anything other than your honest answers to them.

After providing the guidelines, the interview will begin with these three main questions:

1. Which type of English accent do you aim for in class – Examples being American, British, Australian or a Norwegian-influenced English accent? Do you aim for a type of accent and if so, which?
   - Potential follow-up: What factors do you think have an impact on the way you speak English in class?

2. Which type of English accent do you aim for outside of class? When for example ordering food at a restaurant in a foreign country
   - Potential follow-up: What factors do you think have an impact on the way you speak English outside of class?

3. What accent, if any, do you consider most appropriate for Norwegians?
   - Potential follow-up: Why?

In the case that pupils do not fully answer a question or have trouble understanding a question, additional follow-up questions will be asked accordingly. Lastly, the participants are thanked again for their time.

Appendix 2: NSD evaluation

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

Holdninger til engelsk uttale hos elever ved norsk yrkesfaglig videregående skole

Referansenummer

696699

Registrert

29.07.2020 av Ole Martin Reigstad - 205752@stud.inn.no

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Høgskolen i Innlandet / Fakultet for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk / Institutt for pedagogikk og samfunnsfag - Hamar

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Ida Syvertsen.

Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student

Ole Martin Reigstad,

Prosjektperiode

10.08.2020 - 01.06.2021

Status

25.08.2020 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

25.08.2020 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet

med vedlegg den 25.08.2020, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER
Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:
https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET
Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 01.06.2021.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG
Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER
NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER
Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

Appendix 3: Letter with information and consent confirmation for participants

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
«Holdninger til Engelsk uttale hos elever med yrkesfaglig retning i Norsk videregående skole»?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å utforske holdninger til Engelsk uttale hos elever med yrkesfaglig retning i videregående skole. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Jeg studerer nå mitt femte og siste år for å bli lærer på videregående skole og dette prosjektet er min masteroppgave. Det er tre forskningsspørsmål som dette prosjektet skal undersøke:

1. Hvilke holdninger har Norske elever ved yrkesfaglig retning i videregående skole til forskjellige varianter av Engelsk uttale?
2. Hvilken variasjon av Engelsk uttale forsøker elevene å selv prate og hva påvirker deres valg av uttale?
3. Hva viser resultatene fra denne studien av elever ved yrkesfaglige retning sammenlignet med tidligere forskningsresultater fra elever ved studiespesialiserende retning?

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Høgskolen i Innlandet er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du får spørsmål om å delta fordi du er en elev med yrkesfaglig retning på videregående skole som dette prosjektet skal undersøke.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Metoden for dette prosjektet er intervjuer i fokusgrupper med fire elever per gruppe. Du vil altså være sammen med tre andre elever og dere vil bli stilt spørsmål knyttet til Engelsk uttale. Intervjuet/samtalen vil ta omtrent 15 minutter og vil foregå innenfor undervisningstiden i Engelsk på separat grupperom. Intervjuet er på ingen måte en del av Engelsk undervisningen og har ingen påvirkning på vurdering i Engelskfaget, men vil foregå samtidig som vanlig undervisning for å ikke bruke fritiden deres til å delta.

Samtalen vil bli tatt opp og bli transkribert – alle deltakere vil senere bli tilsendt transkriptet og hvis en deltaker mener at noe i transkriptet ikke ble sagt, ikke kom fram på den måten de ville eller for noen som helst annen grunn ikke vil at det skal være med, blir de delene slettet.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Min veileder for prosjektet, Ida Syvertsen, er den eneste utenom undertegnede som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene samlet i prosjektet. Det er jeg selv som skal transkribere lydopptaket og lydopptaket fra samtalen vil ikke bli publisert, det er bare transkriptet som vil være del av masteroppgaven som blir offentlig publisert. Enkeltpersoner som deltar blir derfor ikke gjenkjennelige i sluttproduktet som offentliggjøres.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Opplysningene anonymiseres når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er i slutten av Juni, 2021. Ved prosjektslutt vil lydopptaket bli slettet.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke. På oppdrag fra *Høgskolen i Innlandet* har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
Høgskolen i Innlandet ved Ida Syvertsen

Telefon: ▮▮▮▮▮, E-post: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Vårt personvernombud: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Telefon: ▮▮▮▮▮, E-post: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Ole Reigstad   *Ida Syvertsen (veileder)*

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *«Holdninger til Engelsk uttale hos elever med yrkesfaglig retning i Norsk videregående skole»?* og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ å delta i intervju med lydopptak.
☐ at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker og eventuelt foresatt, dato)

Appendix 4: Excerpt from the transcript of the second interview in Norwegian

Interviewer: Hva tenker du, hvordan type engelsk tenker du på da? Eller hvordan ville du beskrive flytende engelsk?

Pupil 3: Ja det er liksom en flyt da, eller at det liksom ikke hakker og det er engelsk uttale, det er ikke noe norsk, det er liksom amerikansk.

Interviewer: Amerikansk? Okei, hva tenker dere om det?

Pupil 2: Høres ganske riktig ut.

Pupil 4: Ja.

Pupil 1: Altså når det er en flyt så er det på en måte det samme som å snakke norsk, bare at det er engelsk da.

Interviewer: Mhm?

Pupil 1: At det er samme flyt og takt.

Pupil 3: Det er ofte den amerikanske engelsken..

Pupil 1: Ja.

Pupil 3: Vi bruker..

Pupil 2: Mhm.

Pupil 3: Fordi det er lettest å snakke.

Appendix 5: Excerpt from the transcript of the second interview translated into English

Interviewer:	What are you thinking of, what type of English do you mean? Or how would you describe fluent English?
Pupil 3:	Well that there is flow, or that there is no hitching and it is English pronunciation and there is no Norwegian, it is kind of American.
Interviewer:	American? Okay, what do you others think?
Pupil 2:	Sounds about right.
Pupil 4:	Yes.
Pupil 1:	When there is flow it is kind of the same as speaking Norwegian, except that it is English.
Interviewer:	Mhm?
Pupil 1:	That there is the same flow and rhythm.
Pupil 3:	It is often American English..
Pupil 1:	Yes.
Pupil 3:	We use..
Pupil 2:	Mhm.
Pupil 3:	Because it is the easiest to speak.