

# Assessing spoken EFL in Norway: How native-speaker centred?

WORK IN PROGRESS

Henrik Bøhn and Gro-Anita Myklevold

# 1. Background

- Aspects of **accent** (pronunciation, prosodic features) are typically judged in spoken L2 assessment (ETS, 2004; Sato, 2012)
- **Accentedness** (deviation from a language norm) is sometimes included as a criterion in such assessment (Moyer, 2013)
- The discourse regarding accentedness seems to have changed;
  - e.g. from native-speaker models to English as a Lingua Franca
- Teaching and assessment practices seem more resistant to change (Seidelhofer, 2011, p. 13);

## 2. The situation in Norway (upper secondary level)

- National curriculum: competence based
  - Criteria need to be developed for assessment and testing
- Assessment: mainly overall achievement marks
  - 20% of the students randomly selected for written exams
  - 5% of the students randomly selected for oral exams
- Written exams: administered on the national level
- Oral exams: administered on the local level (county governors)

## 2. (cont.)

- No common (national) rating scales exist on the local level;
- Studies show variation in the creation and use of assessment criteria generally (Bøhn, 2014; Yildiz, 2011)
- No studies of the assessment of accent have been carried out, but Hansen (2011) showed that a majority of teachers show a preference for the native speaker model generally

### 3. Research questions

1. What kind of aspects of accent do EFL teachers in Norway pay attention to in the assessment of performance at the oral exam at the upper secondary level?
2. Which aspects of accent are seen as salient?
3. To what extent do Norwegian teachers apply a native speaker norm in the judgment of student accent at the upper secondary oral English exam?

# 4. Method

- **Mixed-methods design**

1. Semi-structured interview

- Originally designed for the Bøhn (2014) study
- 24 teacher informants
- Prompt: video-clip of student taking the oral English exam
- Informants asked to assess the video-clip and explain their score
- Additional questions concerning general assessment criteria of oral EFL + teachers' orientations towards the native speaker norm

# 4. (cont.)

## 2. Questionnaire

- 34 respondents (so far)
- Prompt: video-clip of student taking an oral English exam
- Questions partly developed from the findings in the interview data
- Specifically targeting the teachers' orientations towards aspects of accent and the native speaker norm (accentedness)
- Respondents were presented with a number of statements that they were asked to evaluate using a five-point Likert scale

## 4. (cont.)

- **Analysis**

- Interview was analysed using QSR NVivo
- Content Analysis was applied in the coding of the data (Krippendorf, 2013; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)
- Analysis of questionnaire was conducted using SPSS to provide descriptive statistics



# 5. Results

## 5.1 Research question 1: What kind of aspects of accent do the informants say that they pay attention to?

(Data from Interview)

Category: Accent		
Aspect of performance	Number of informants	Number of counts
Pronunciation	22	47
Intonation	9	15
Stress	3	3
Rhythm	1	1
Pauses	1	1
	(N = 24)	Sum = 67

## 5.1 (cont.)

### Typical statements:

- *I would say that her pronunciation is average. She struggles a bit when reading some technical words and expressions, and then she makes mistakes like “woman» (/wʊmən/) when she is supposed to pronounce «women» (/wɪmɪn/), really.*
- *And she [...] pronounces “headache” incorrectly, /headertʃ/ or something [...]*
- *She has a bit of a choppy pronunciation*

## 5.1 (cont.)

*- And the pronunciation was comprehensible. There were no errors in grammar or pronunciation which hindered communication*

*- Yes [...] because the candidate's pronunciation and intonation is very Norwegian, I would say. I have written down that "she has a comprehensible pronunciation, by and large". You understand most of what she is saying, and I also think that a native English speaker would understand it.*

*- I notice several times that she places stress incorrectly in some common words [...] "DEvelop" (/ɪ'devələp/) rather than "develop" (/dɪ'vələp/)*

## 5.1 (cont.)

### **Preliminary conclusions from interview study:**

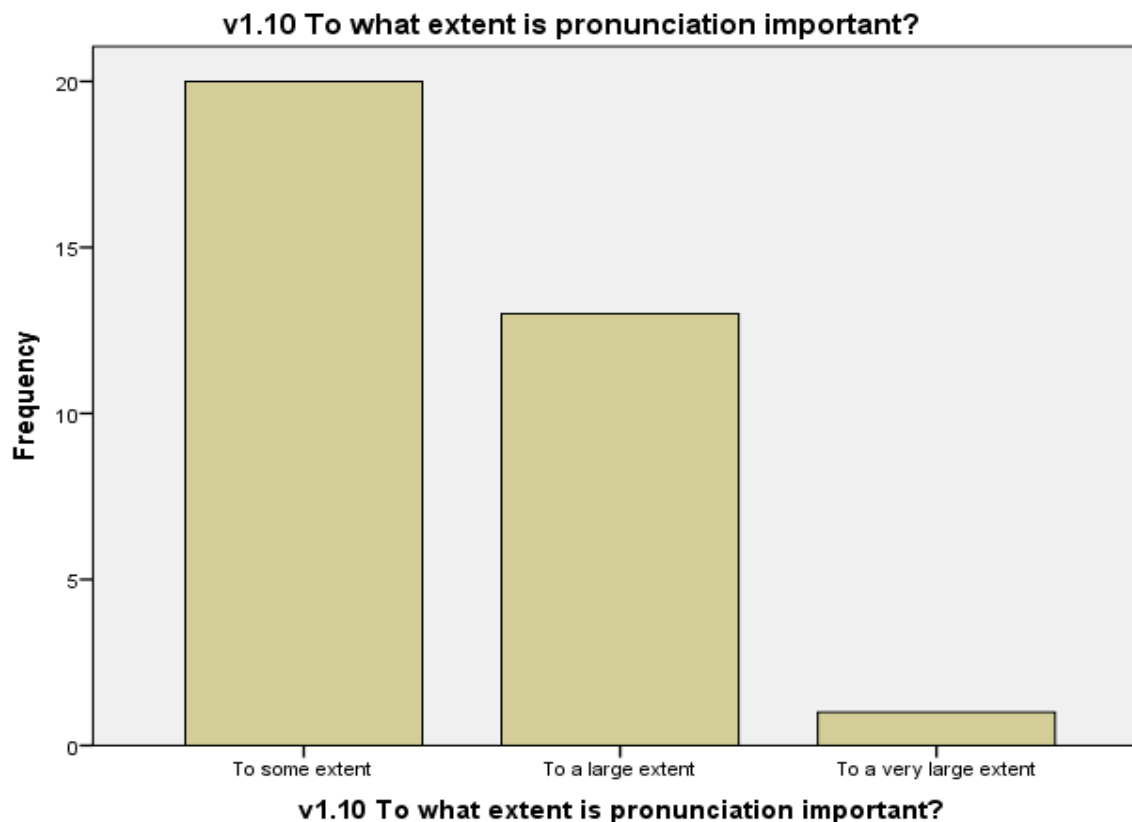
Overall, the teachers seem to be concerned with:

- «Correctness»
- Comprehensibility
- Accentedness

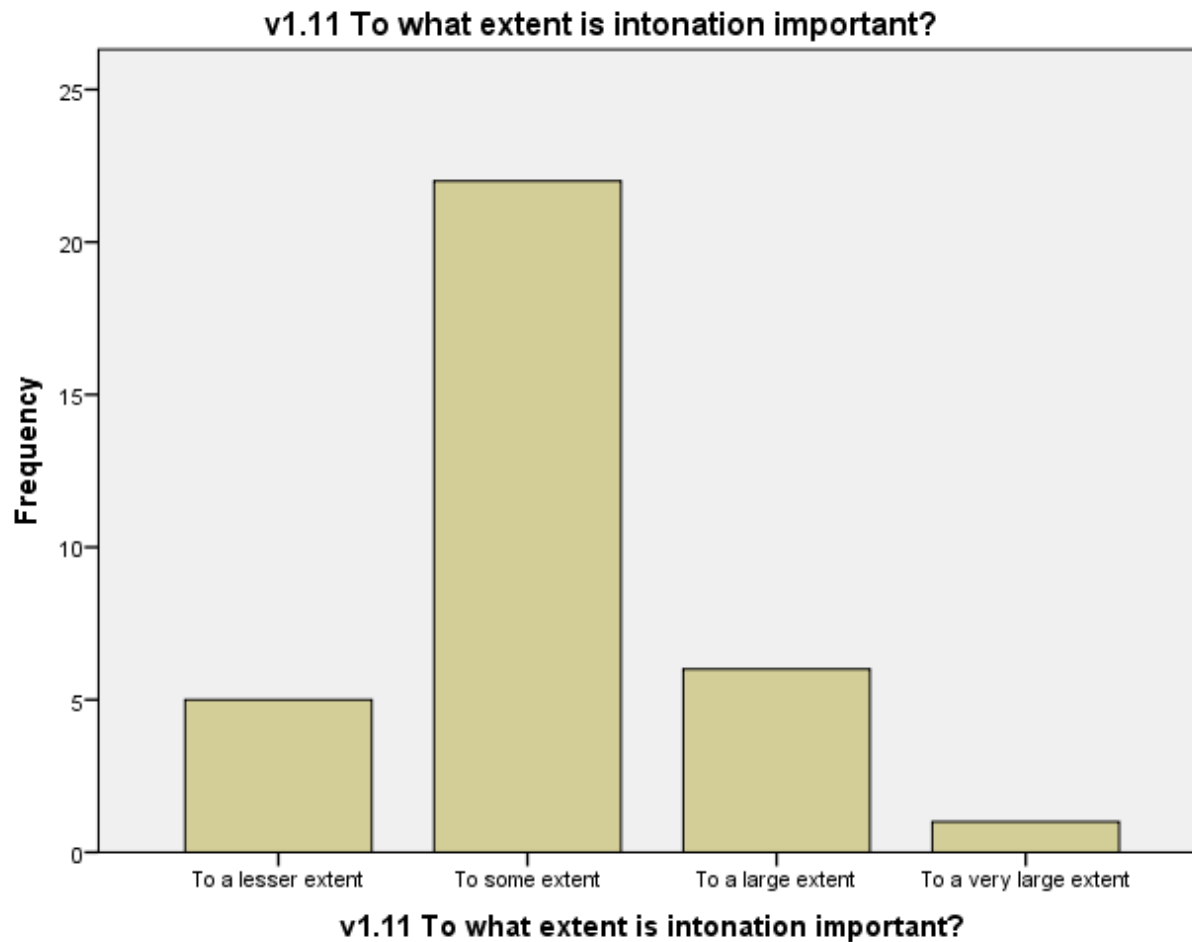
## 5.2 Research question 2: To what extent is the different aspects of accent important?

(Data from questionnaire)

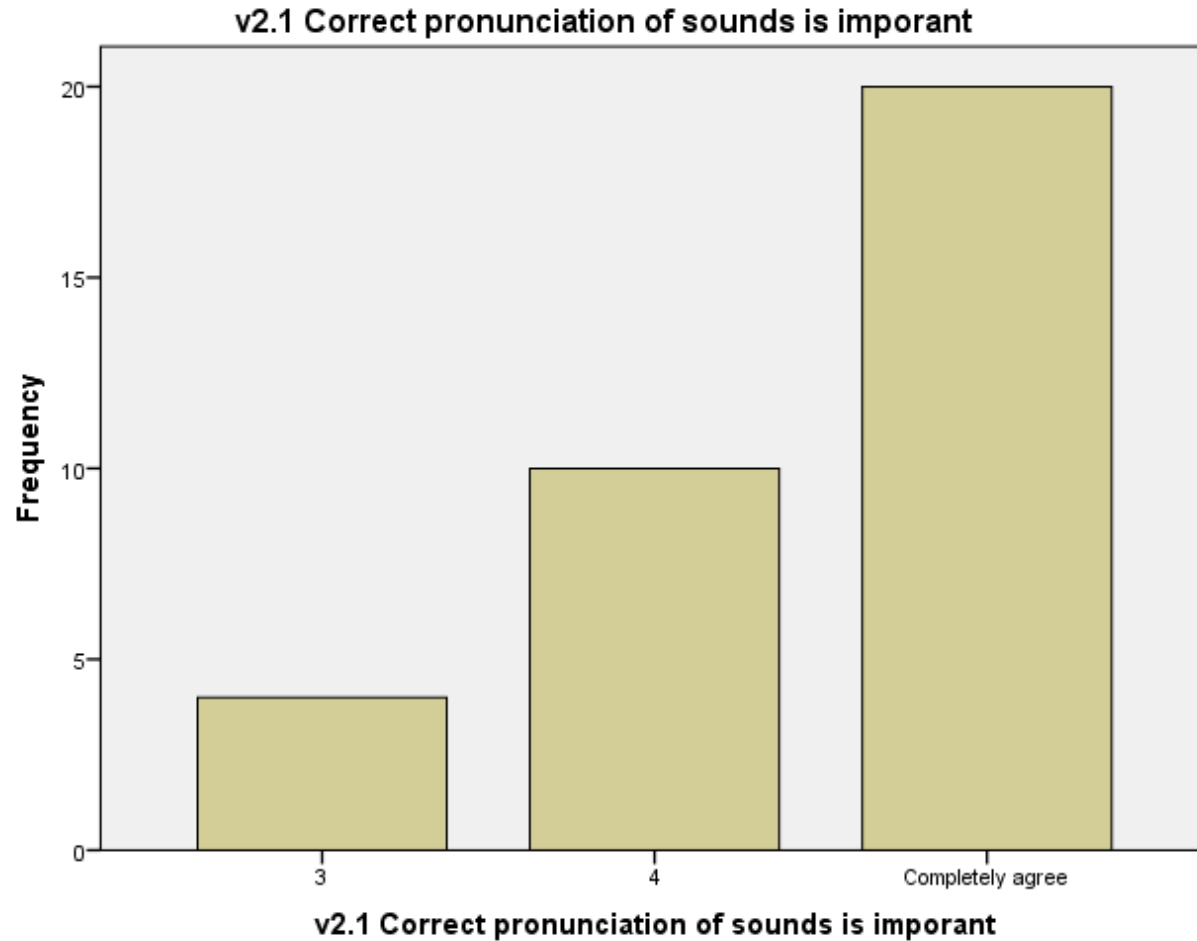
### 5.2.1 Pronunciation - generally



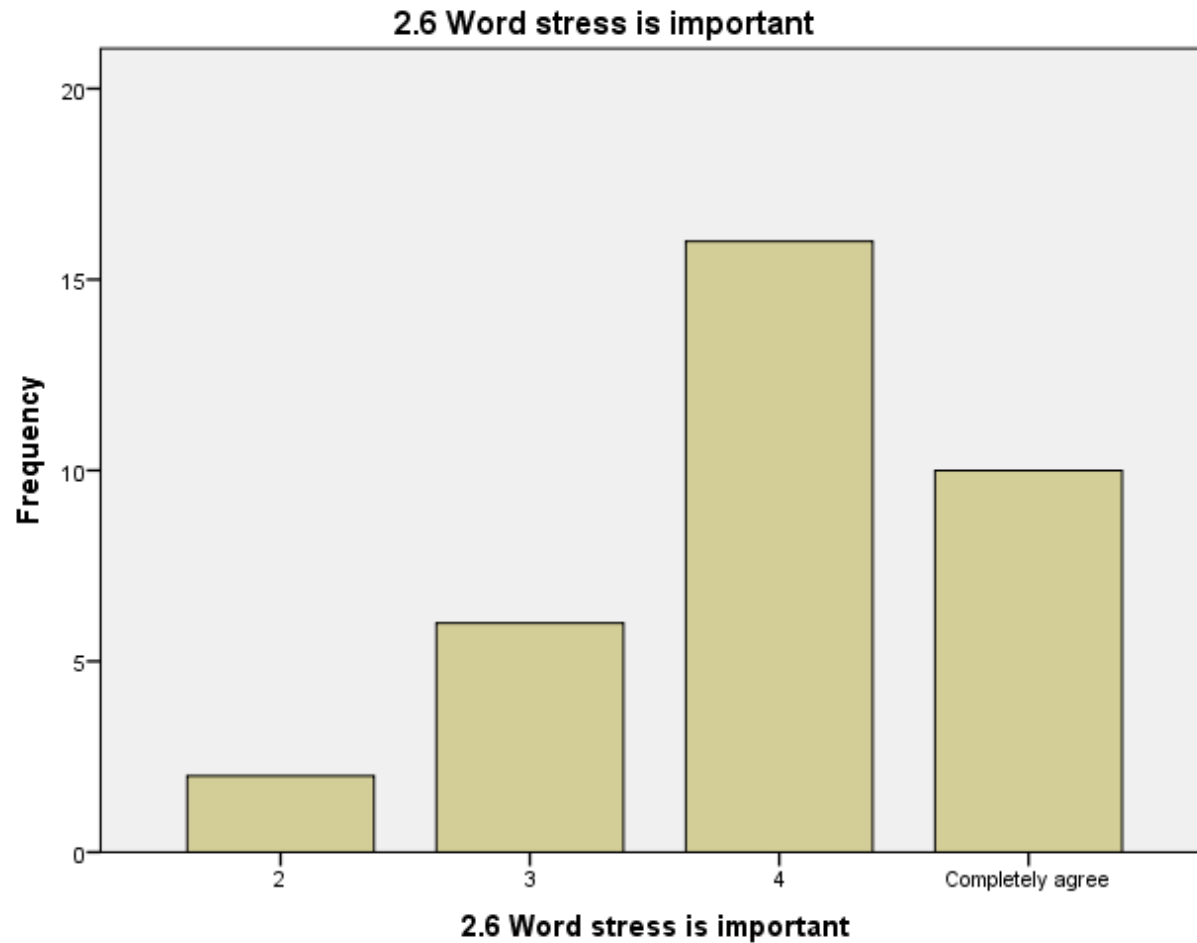
## 5.2.2 Intonation - generally



## 5.2.3 Pronunciation - correctness

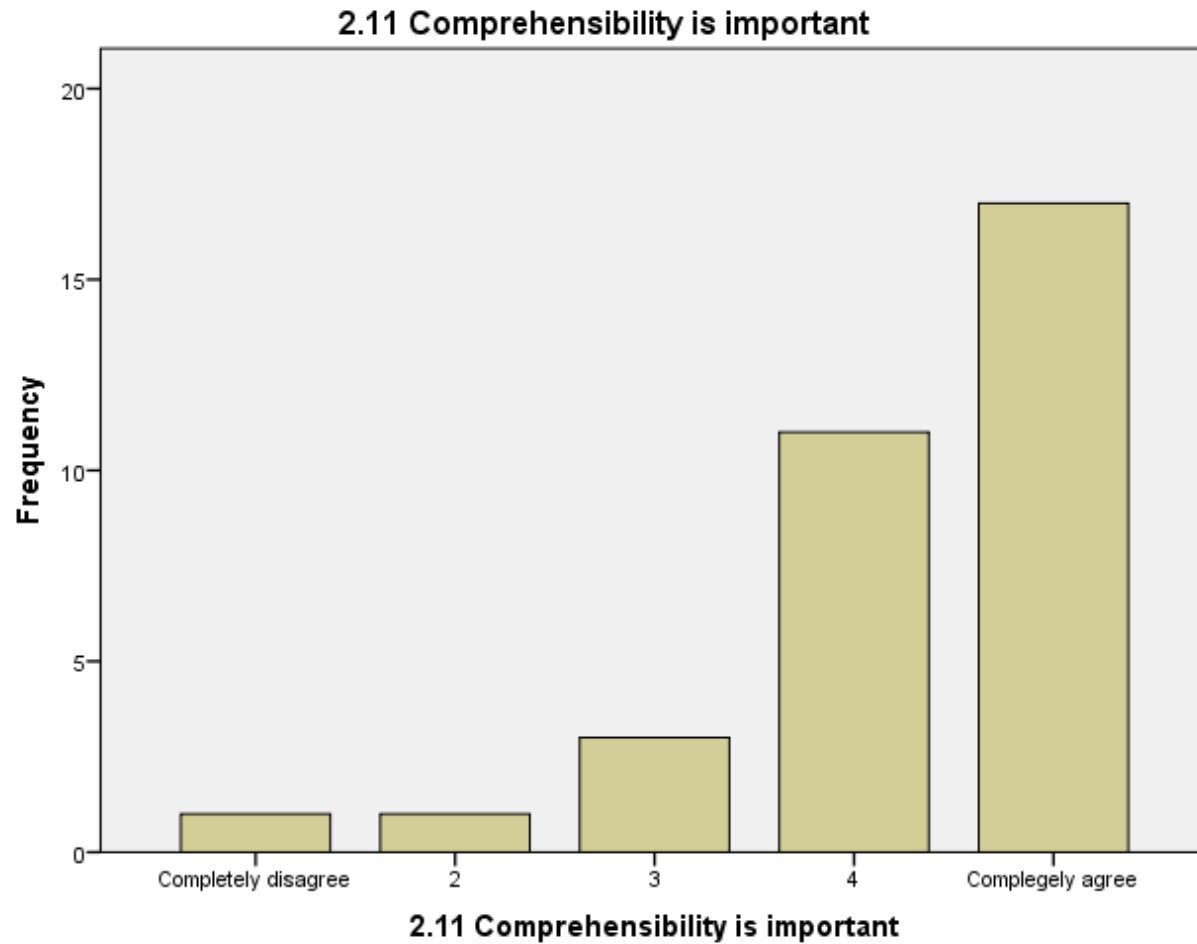


## 5.2.4 Stress - generally





## 5.2.5 Comprehensibility



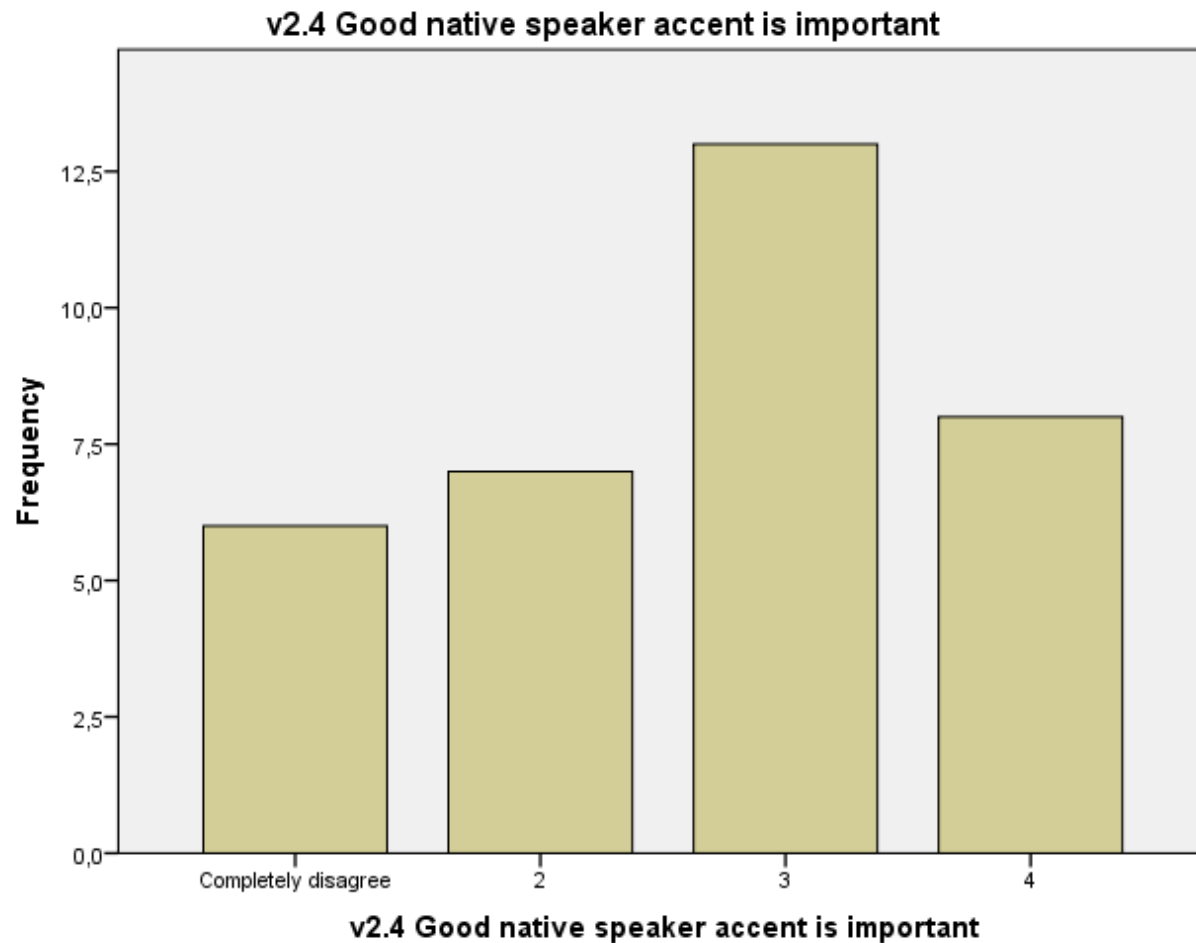
### 5.3 Research question 3: To what extent is the native speaker norm important?

(Data from interview):

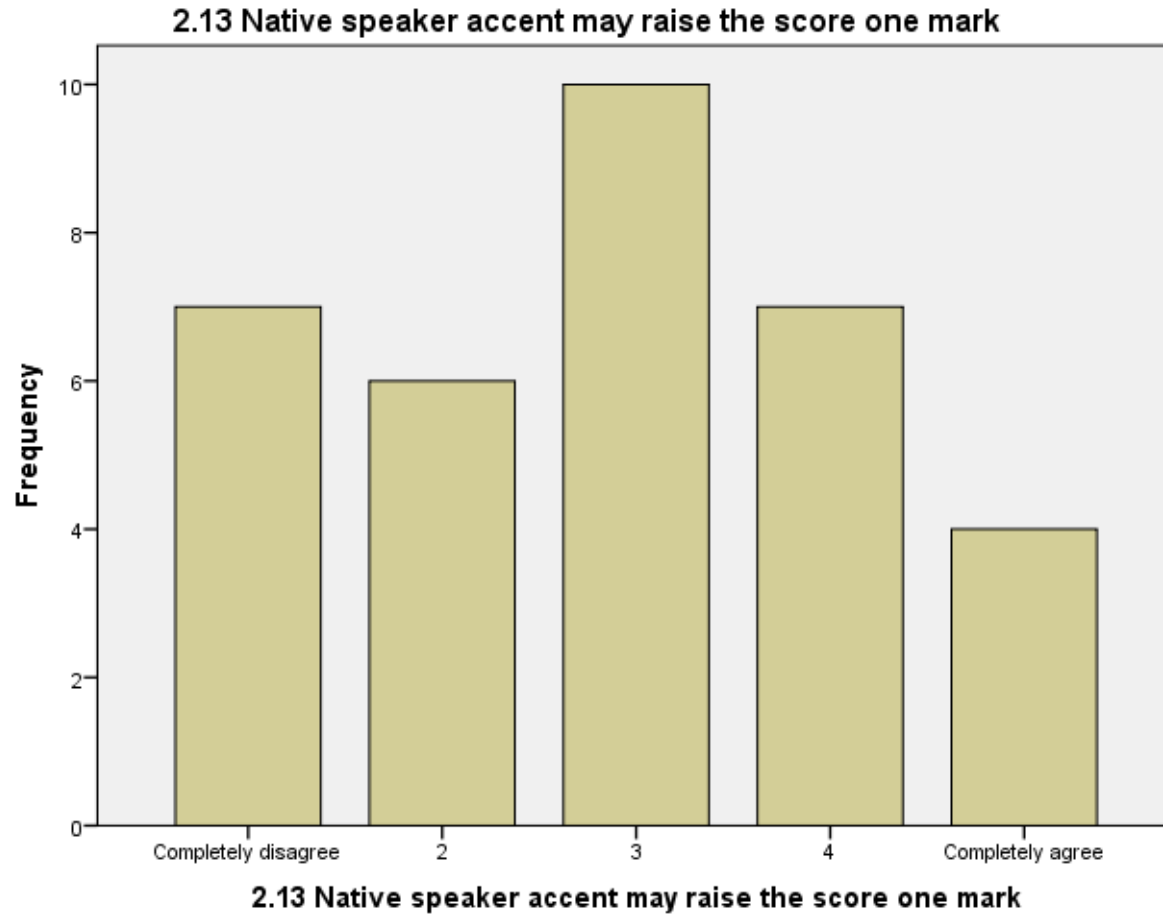
Interview question: *To what extent does the student need a native or near-native accent in order to obtain a top score?*

Not at all		To a lesser extent		To some extent		To a large extent	
Informants	Counts	Informants	Counts	Informants	Counts	Informants	Counts
4	5	10	13	5	9	5	7
N= 24							

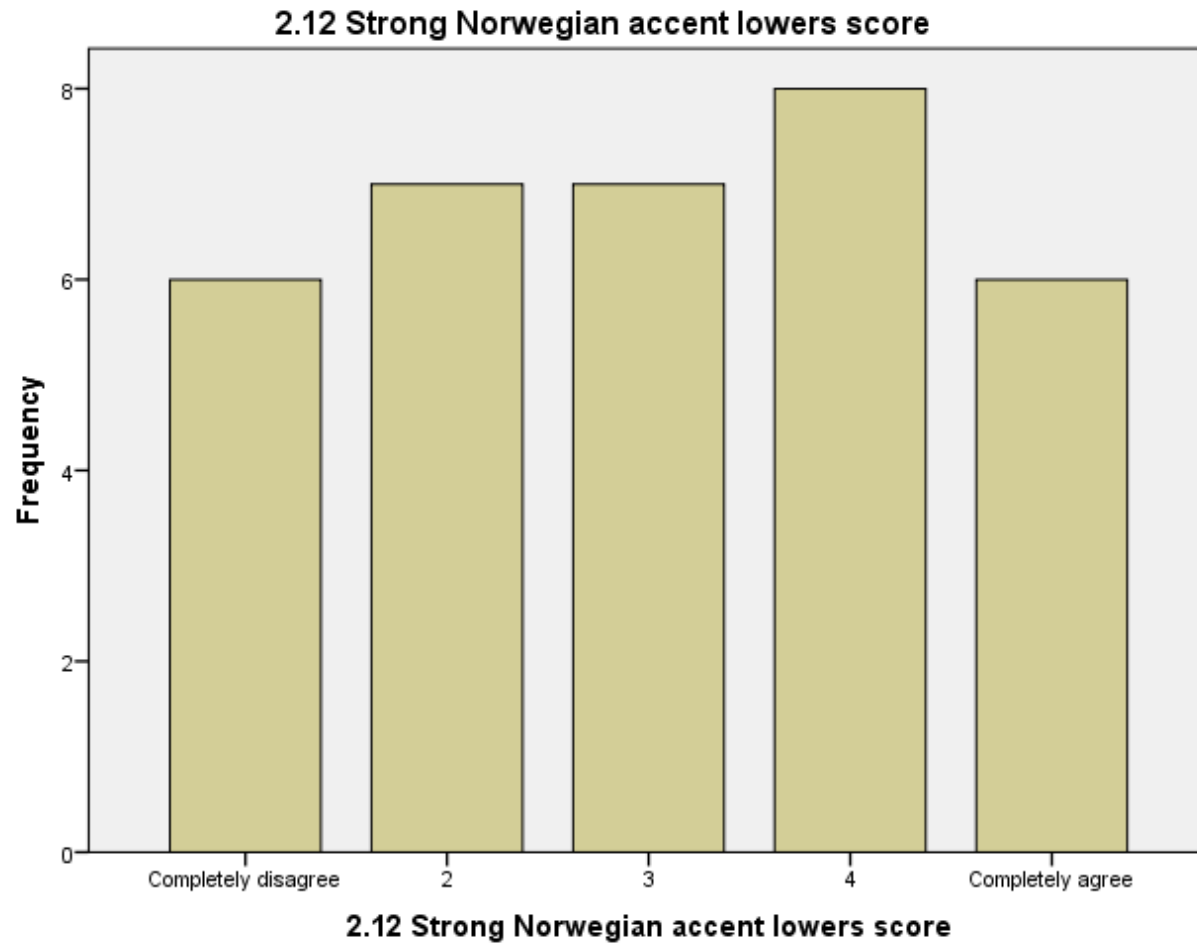
## 5.3 (cont.) (Data from questionnaire)



## 5.3 (cont.)



## 5.3 (cont.)



# 6. Discussion

## 6.1 Research questions 1 & 2: Which features of accent?

The teachers' responses indicate concern for two dimensions related to accent:

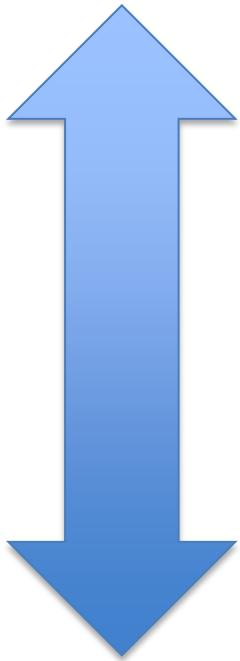
- A correct-incorrect dimension
- A comprehensible-incomprehensible dimension

## 6.1.1 The correct-incorrect dimension

**Correct**

**pronunciation (stress)**

/wɪmɪn/ /dɪ'veləp/ /hedeɪk/



«Good pronunciation»

«Acceptable pronunciation»

«Sloppy pronunciation»

«Errors in pronunciation»

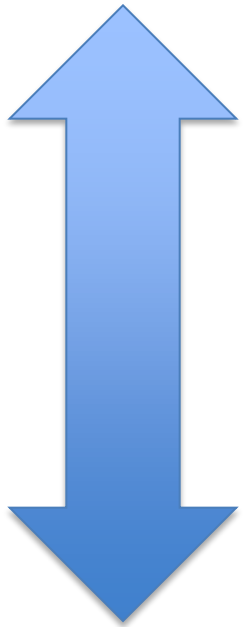
**Incorrect**

**pronunciation (stress)**

/wʊmən/ /ɪ'devələp/ /hedeɪtʃ/

## 6.1.2 The comprehensible-incomprehensible dimension

**Completely  
comprehensible**



«The pronunciation was comprehensible»

«You understand most of what she is saying»

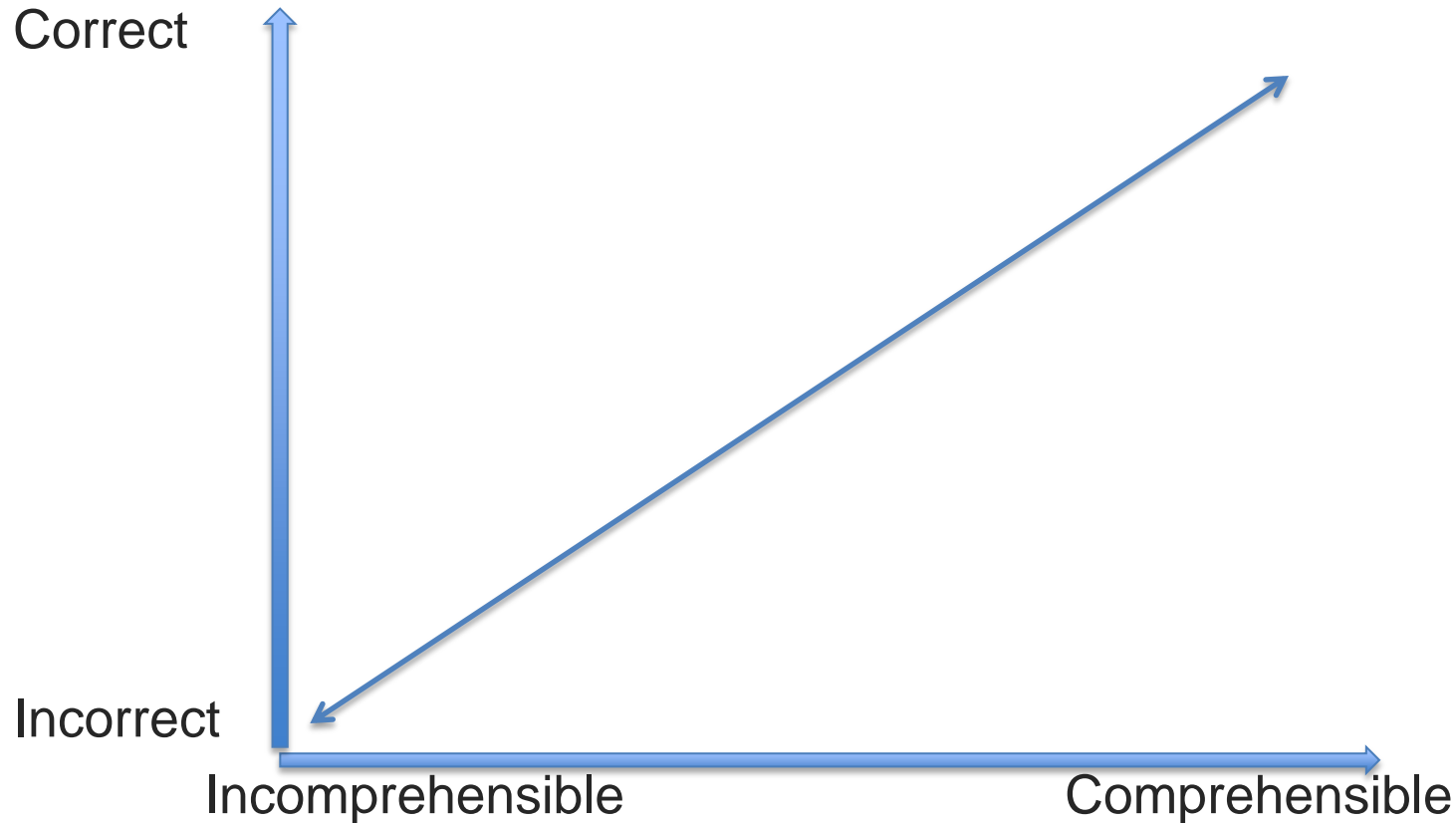
«Sometimes it is difficult to follow her»

«I had to struggle to understand»

**Completely  
incomprehensible**



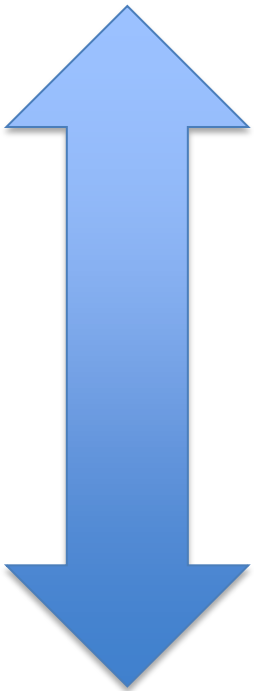
## 6.1.3 Connecting the correct-incorrect and the comprehensibility-incomprehensibility dimensions



## 6.2 Research question 3: native speaker norm

**Native speaker (NS)**

**accent**



«They shouldn't be too far away from it»

«They should at least approach a NS accent»

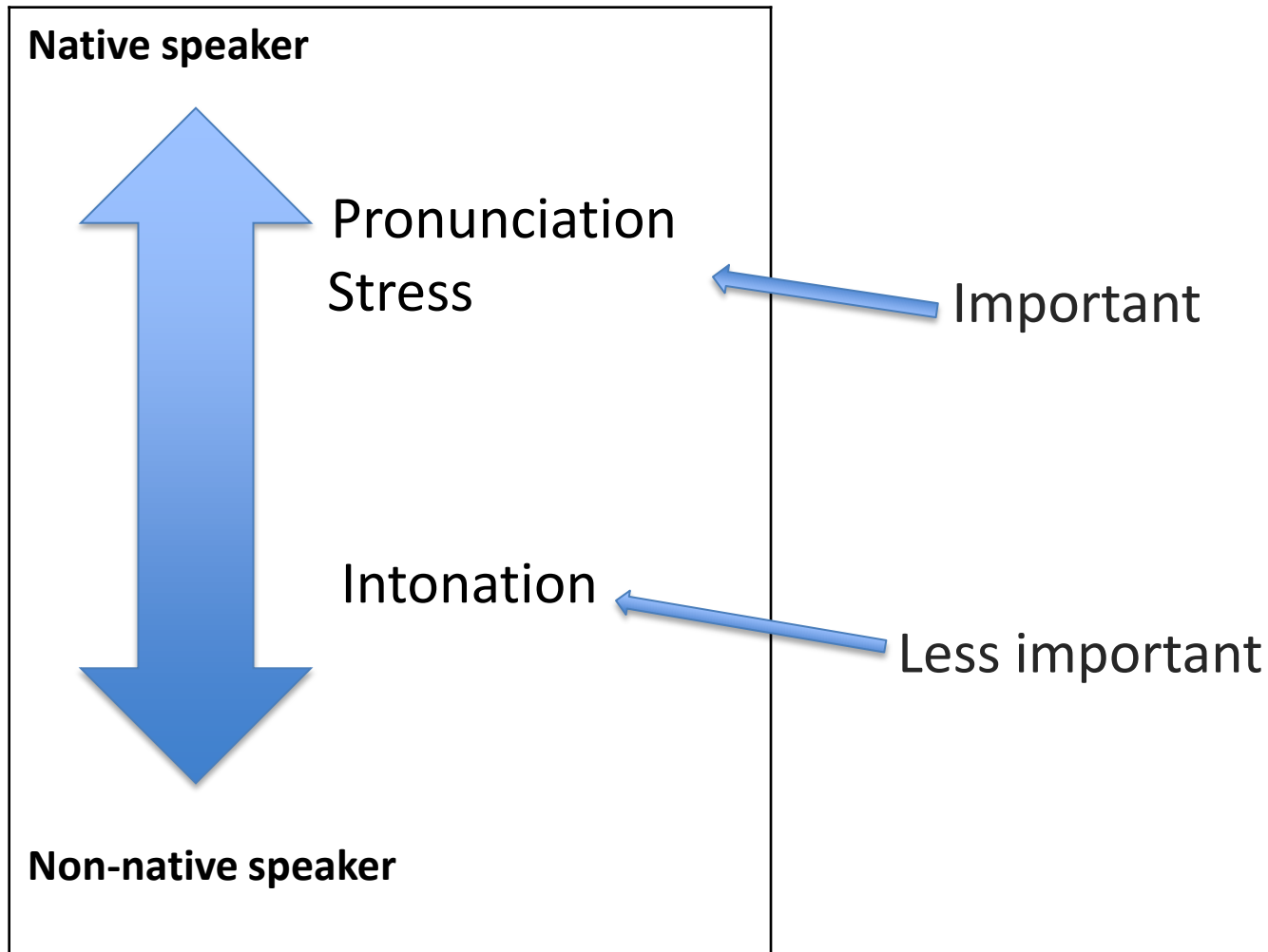
«You won't be penalized for having a NS accent»

«No, that's not important at all»

**Non-native speaker**

**accent**

## 6.3 Important and less important aspects of the NS norm



**Contact details:**

**henrik.bohn@hiof.no**

## References

- Bøhn, H. (2014). Where no common rating scale exists :Teachers' conceptions of salient criteria in the assessment of oral English in an upper secondary school context. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- ETS. (2004). TOEFL iBT Scoring Guide (Rubrics) for Speaking Responses. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Hansen, T. (2011). *Speaker Models and the English Classroom: The Impact of the Intercultural Speaker Model in Norway*. (Master thesis). Halden: Østfold University College.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. doi: DOI: 10.1177/1049732305276687.
- Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content Analysis* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Moyer, A. (2013). *The Phenomenon of Non-Native Speech*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## References (cont.)

- Sato, T. (2012). The contribution of test-takers' speech content to scores on an English oral proficiency test. *Language Testing*, 29(2), pp. 223-241.
- Seidelhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yildiz, L. M. (2011). *English VG1 level oral examinations: how are they designed, conducted and assessed?* (Master's thesis). Oslo: University of Oslo.