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Correlation of Accent Aims and Accent Production of German Learners with Regards to AmE and BrE

Introduction

There are already studies, that deal with the topic of the correlation between accent aims and the actual pronunciation. Ulrikke Rindal examined this for Norwegian learners in two studies.

In her fist study *Constructing identity with L2: Pronunciation and attitudes among Norwegian learners of English* (Rindal, 2010), most of the students aimed at BrE, while two third of the analysed tokens were pronounced in AmE. The students had to rate the two varieties: BrE is higher in status and linguistic quality, but AmE has greater social attractiveness according to the students.

In her second study *Being 'neutral'? English pronunciation among Norwegian learners* (Rindal, 2013), Rindal found out that the majority of the students aimed at AmE pronunciation. This also correlated with their production, because the dominant pronunciation of all variables in question was AmE. Furthermore, she noted some intra-speaker variation as well.

The research gap to be filled is to find out about the accent aims and production of German learners regarding AmE and BrE.

Methods

The participants of the study were eight students of a Gymnasium in NRW, Germany, who were all part of an English advanced course of the 11th grade (Q1). They were aged 16-19, four of them were males, the other four females. The participants have been learning English for 8-10 years and none of them have parents whose mother tongue is English, nor have they been to an English-speaking country for more than a few weeks.

The variables of interest are all features that are pronounced differently in AmE and BrE. The focus is on the pronunciation of the BATH vowel (BrE [ɑ:], AmE [æ]) and the LOT vowel (BrE [o], AmE [ɑ:]), as well as the presence or absence of post vocalic /r/ (BrE non-rhotic, AmE rhotic) and the pronunciation of /t/ (BrE [t], AmE [r]).

First, an indirect method was used, when learners had to read out eight sentences and a word list of 14 words containing the features in question. This way, the participants started with less careful speech and then turned to more careful speech. The following direct method consisted of a questionnaire regarding accent aims, the teachers' accents, country preferences and difficulties or reasons regarding the choice of the accent.

The audio files were analysed auditorily. 50% of the learners were analysed by both coders, which led to a consistency rate of 93,18%. The speech extracts were incorporated into PRAAT text grids to isolate the phonemes from there phonetic environment. In total 176 tokens were analysed – 112 from the sentences and 64 from the word list.

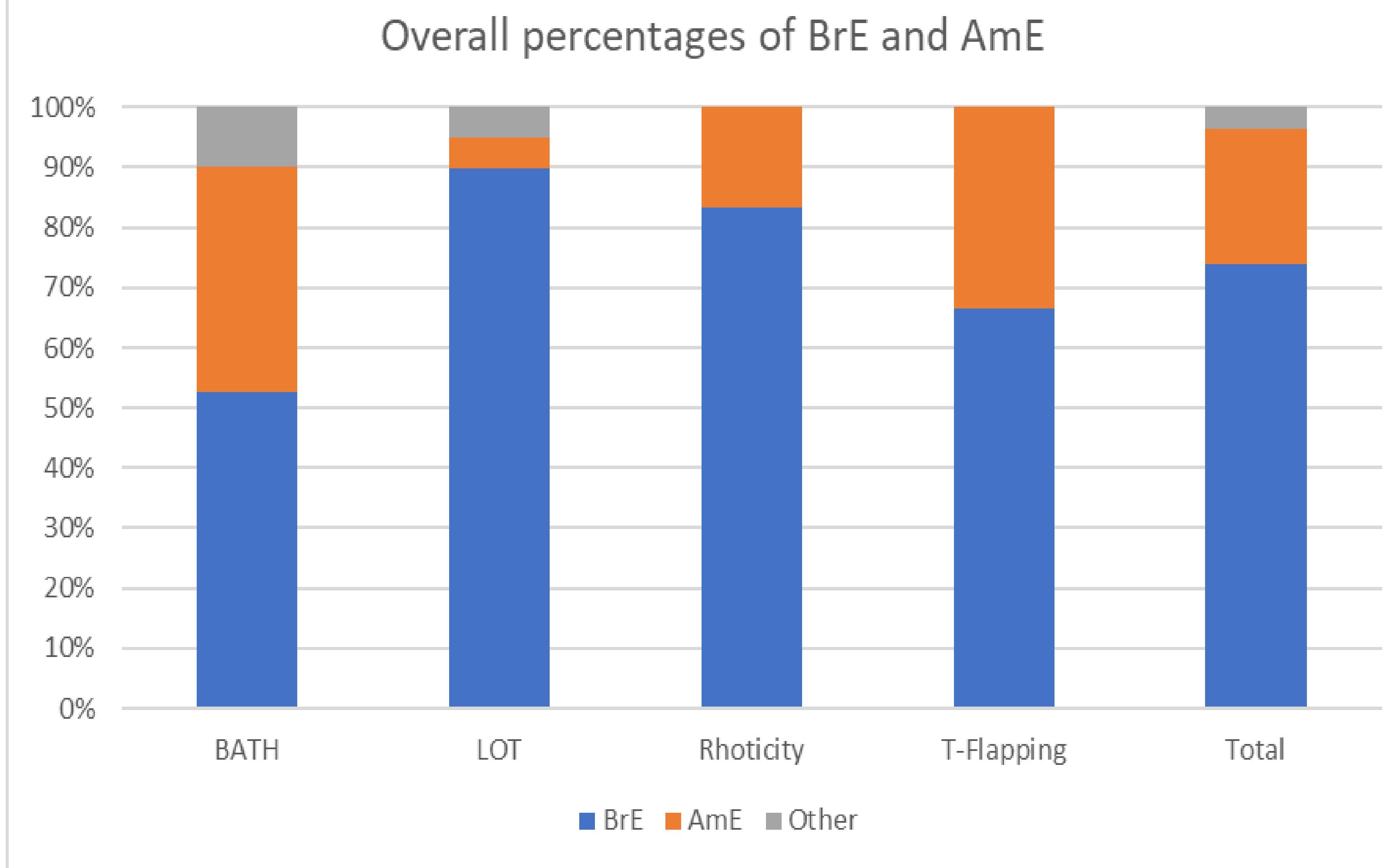
Conclusion

Most of the tokens were realised in BrE pronunciation, with percentages between 54,54% and 90,91%. With regard to the tokens in question, BrE is clearly the dominant pronunciation in this sample. There is not always a correlation between accent aims and accent production. On the one hand, learners who aim at BrE produce the majority of the tokens in BrE but on the other hand, all learners who aim at AmE also pronounce the majority of the tokens in BrE, namely between 57,14% and 90,48% of all tokens.

Four learners find BrE and three learners find AmE more difficult. Some choose to aim at the other pronunciation because of these difficulties, but some (LK C and LK G) choose the one they find more difficult anyway.

It would be interesting to look at the correlation of aims and actual accent production within a wider sample of learners in further research to get quantitative results. As for the teaching of English in schools, it would be useful to raise awareness of the varieties of English and to talk with the students about their pronunciation on a metalinguistic level to make it easier for them to reach their accent aim.

Results



Correlation of aims and production per student

Student	Aim	Difficulties/Reasons	Production
LK A	AmE	No	90,48% BrE 9,52% AmE
LK C	BrE	BrE more difficult because exposed to AmE more through the internet and because most other students speak AmE	90,91% BrE 4,55% AmE 4,55% Other
LK D	AmE	BrE more difficult, but it depends which accent you are used to	80% BrE 15% AmE 5% Other
LK J	AmE	BrE more difficult, because used to AmE	57,14% BrE 42,86% AmE
LK E	Don't care	BrE is more difficult because the pronunciation is clear	72,73% BrE 18,18% AmE 9,09% Other
LK F	BrE	Perception of AmE is more difficult	77,27% BrE 27,73% AmE
LK G	AmE	AmE is more difficult because BrE is closer to the pronunciation of German	68,18% BrE 27,27% AmE 4,55% Other
LK H	BrE	AmE is more difficult because there are many AmE accents	54,54% BrE 40,91% AmE 4,55% Other

Literature/References

Rindal, Ulrikke. "Constructing identity with L2: Pronunciation and attitudes among Norwegian learners of English." *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, vol. 14, no.2, 2010, pp. 240-261.

Rindal, Ulrikke, and Caroline Piercy. "Being 'neutral'? English pronunciation among Norwegian learners." *World Englishes*, vol. 32, no.2, 2013, pp. 211-229.