Voice-placing strategies and folk ideas of L2-accented Icelandic. Perceptions of familiarity, cultural stereotypes, and phonological features

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Abstract

For a long time, Iceland has been a monoethnic and monolingual speech community, in which the Icelandic language has both served as a main element in the construction and maintenance of national identity and in which a stable evaluation system has been in place for the standard variety. Recently, however, new demographic and sociolinguistic circumstances have emerged due to increasing immigration, and, thus, rising numbers of L2 speakers of Icelandic. Against this background, it is interesting to investigate what ideas L1 speakers connect with L2 accents in Icelandic and how they link different L2 accents with the geographic origin of the L2 speaker.

Drawing on methods rooted in perceptual dialectology and folk linguistics, five focus groups with thirty-two L1-speaker participants were conducted, employing a semi-structured interview guide. The participants were presented with a voice-placing task involving six verbal guises and asked to elaborate on their choices freely, thus providing emic themes connected to their voice-placing strategies. Verbal guises were produced by one L1 speaker of Icelandic and five L2 speakers with L1 American English, Danish, Tagalog, Lithuanian, and Polish. Consistent with the folk linguistic approach taken in this study, data analysis employed concepts from grounded theory.

Results show that participants identify an L2 accent with great precision but experience difficulties locating an L2 accent. As to their voice-placing decisions, they resort to three main strategies, i. e. perceptions of familiarity with an accent, cultural stereotypes, and phonological features in L2 speech. Those strategies are further influenced by folk ideas on and perceptions of the speakers' L2 competence and accent-mimicking ability, their effort towards learning Icelandic, and perceptions of accentedness and distinct phonological features.

1 Latest demographic developments against long-standing linguistic homogeneity

Until recently, Iceland has constituted a monolingual and monoethnic speech community, in which the Icelandic language has been essential for the construction of Icelandic identity (cf. Hálfdánarson 2001; Skaptadóttir/Innes 2017). Apart from this relationship between speaking Icelandic and being an Icelander, the sociolinguistic climate has been characterized by long-

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term linguistic homogeneity, practical dialectlessness (cf. Árnason 2005b, 2017), clear conceptions of what constitutes good and bad language use, and language users' high awareness towards the L1 variety.

In its eleven-hundred-year history, the country has had "no indigenous minorities, nor has it had any sizeable immigrant communities" (Hilmarsson-Dunn/Kristinsson 2010: 207). However, there has been some immigration to Iceland over that time, especially considering that Iceland had been under Danish rule for almost half a millenium until its independence in 1944. During that period, Danish officials were moved to Iceland, but even though they had some command of Icelandic, Danish was used in public administration and trade-related contexts (for a detailed account of the impact of Danish and the perseverance of Icelandic cf. e. g. Ottósson 1990; Hilmarsson-Dunn/Kristinsson 2010; Hauksdóttir 2016). Turning to more recent history, in the same year as Iceland gained independence, the occupation by first British and then US-American troops during World War II, brought English directly into the country. In recent years, the rise of English as lingua franca has substantiated its impact, thus putting increasing pressure on the status of Icelandic as it gains more and more ground in certain domains. Today, English is regarded as a necessary "utility language in Icelandic society at all levels" (Arnbjörnsdóttir/Ingvarsdóttir 2018: 218).

Returning to immigration, in the past three decades, an increasing influx of foreign nationals has transformed the comparatively homogenous Icelandic society into a multiethnic one. As can be seen in Figure 1, in the past ten years alone, the percentage of immigrants in the total resident population in Iceland has risen from 8% to 18% (Statistics Iceland 2023).[1] Immigrants come from more than 150 L1 backgrounds, and L2-accented Icelandic can now be heard in all parts of society. As to the background of these new speakers, Poles comprise the largest immigrant group by far and account for 35.7% of all immigrants to Iceland. Lithuanians constitute the second-largest immigrant group (7.2%), whereas Ukrainians make up the third-largest immigrant group (5.6%) (Statistics Iceland 2024). As far as gender is concerned, Lithuanian men still make up the second-largest immigrant group with 6.2%, whereas the second-largest group of immigrant women comes from the Philippines (5.4%) (Statistics Iceland 2022).

As this considerable and rapid increase in immigration and L2 speakers of Icelandic occurs in a society with long-standing linguistic homogeneity, we can presume that L2 speech is met with relative inexperience and unfamiliarity by L1 language users due to a lack of long-term exposure to L2-accented Icelandic (cf. Bade 2023, 2024; Rögnvaldsson 2022: 307). Although these recent demographic changes raise questions about how L1 speakers of Icelandic react to L2-accented Icelandic, there have been few investigations into the matter so far (cf. Bade 2018, 2019, 2023, 2024). Therefore, it is still not clear how L1-Icelandic speakers approach diverse L2 accents in Icelandic and what ideas and conceptualizations they have when attempting to locate an L2 speaker's origin.

[1] According to Statistics Iceland, the following definition is valid for immigrants and people with a foreign background: "An immigrant is a person born abroad with both parents foreign born and all grandparents foreign born, whereas a second-generation immigrant is born in Iceland having immigrant parents. A person with a foreign background has one parent of foreign origin" (Statistics Iceland 2022).

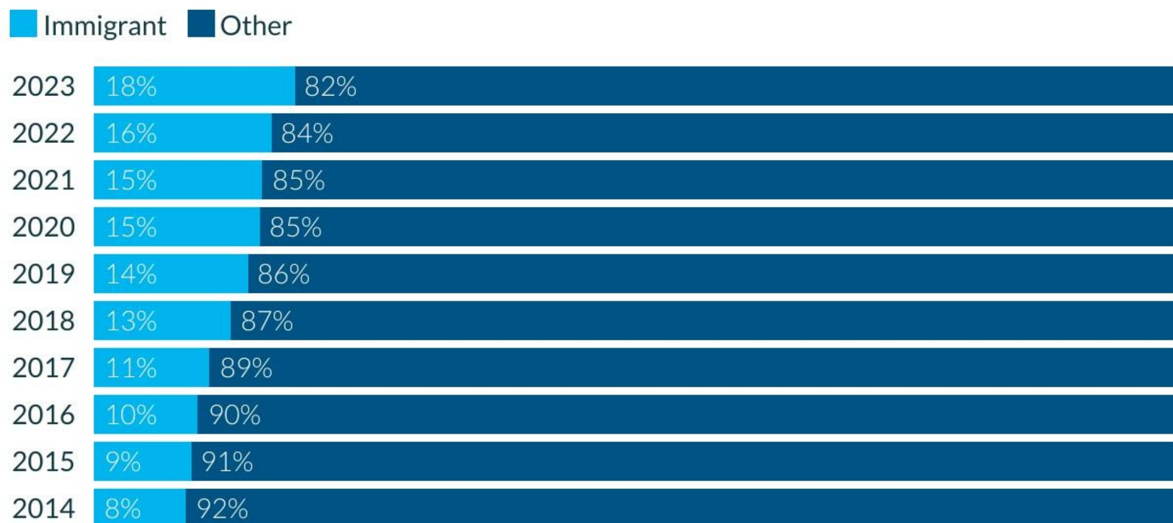

Figure 1: Percentage of immigrants in the total resident population in Iceland 2014–2023 (Statistics Iceland 2023)

Drawing on the framework provided by folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology (cf. Evans/ Benson/Stanford 2018; Niedzielski/Preston 2003; Preston 1999), the objective of this qualitative study is to explore, firstly, what voice-placing strategies ordinary L1-Icelandic speakers, i. e. folk representatives, have when perceiving an L2 accent, and secondly, what themes drive these voice-placing decisions as expressed in language user's own ideas and conceptualizations. This paper presents partial findings from a larger study employing five focus-group discussions and aims at collecting folk ideas and beliefs about L2-accented Icelandic to produce deep insights into evaluations of L2 accents in the Icelandic context. The results of the present study are displayed as L1-speaker-participants' meta-comment in response to a voice-placing task with six verbal guises, consisting of both a voice-placing task and free elaboration on placement choices.

In the following section, this paper gives a brief overview of the sociolinguistic climate in Iceland including the existing phonological variation as well as along what lines L1 language users negotiate evaluations of language use. Section 3 is dedicated to providing an overview of the framework underlying the present study, i. e. folk linguistics, and reviewing mechanisms of ascriptions of speaker origin. The fourth section briefly reviews the assessment of L2 accents, whereas Section 5 is concerned with methods used in this study as well as data analysis. Section 6 displays and discusses the results of the focus-group discussions, focussing on the three key voice-placing strategies, before the findings are summarized and concluded in Section 7.

2 Sociolinguistic circumstances and evaluation of linguistic variation

Considering the sociolinguistic climate in Iceland, there has been some consensus on its uniqueness compared with other linguistic communities (cf. e. g., Auer 2005: 31; Árnason 2005a). On the one hand, this uniqueness is partly attributed to the absence of distinct dialects, as only minimal geographically distributed phonological variation exists in the country (cf. Árnason 2005b, 2017: 27). On the other hand, the high linguistic awareness that L1 speakers of Icelandic

demonstrate towards the Icelandic language has been mentioned as somewhat special (cf. Leonard/Árnason 2011: 94; Kristiansen 2010). Prominent examples of this awareness are the vital everyday discussions on language-related matters that take place in swimming pools and private parties (cf. Kristinsson 2018: 246) as well as, lately, in the digital world in diverse groups on social media (cf. e. g., Málspjall 2022). However, this public discourse has mainly been restricted to the L1 variety, although there are indications that language users are becoming more and more aware of L2-influenced Icelandic, and of L2 speakers participating in public debate to a greater extent (cf. Bade 2023). Discussions on the potential effect of other languages on Icelandic have been controversial as views diverge depending on whether language contact and linguistic change are seen as a threat to the vitality of Icelandic (cf. Kristinsson 2017: 38–40; Rögnvaldsson 2022: 49–51) – often paired with claims of increasing impoverishment of Icelandic and narratives of verbal hygiene – or as an enrichment to the linguistic landscape (cf. Nowenstein/Sigurjónsdóttir 2024).

Considering the pronunciation of L1 Icelandic, the language's phonological inventory and prominent features are well-documented (cf. e. g., Árnason 2011). Some of the most notable features include preaspiration, i. e. aspiration before fortis plosives preceding a short vowel; /pakkɪ/ [p^hahcɪ] ('package'), devoicing of sonorants when preceding a fortis plosive; /hampʏr/ [hamp̥ʏr̥] ('hemp'), and [t]-epenthesis in the clusters /ll nn rl rn sl sn/; e. g. /varla/ [vartla] ('hardly') (examples taken from Bade/Sigurjónsdóttir 2024: 9).

As pointed out above, the existing phonological variation in L1 Icelandic is limited. The most notable differences in pronunciation are between so-called *harðmæli* ('hard speech'), the regionally bound variant found in the North of Iceland, and *linmæli* ('soft speech'), the majority variant, which is also spoken by the roughly two-thirds of inhabitants of the Greater Reykjavík area in the south-west of the country (see Figure 2). *Harðmæli* is characterized using post-aspiration of plosives in words like *sápa*, *láta*, and *strákar* ('soap', 'let', and 'boys'; examples from Árnason 2005b: 368) – which makes this variant sound "harder" – whereas *linmæli* lacks these features. Because *harðmæli* is found in speakers from the North of Iceland, it is commonly referred to as *norðlenska* ('Northlandic'), as opposed to *sunnlenksa* ('Southlandic'), which is the folk term used for *linmæli*. Likewise, the Northern variant is the most salient of the regional variation to be found in Iceland (cf. Friðriksson/Angantýsson/Bade 2024; Tómasdóttir 2024). This is also reflected in the results of allocation of speaker origin as over 90% of L1-Icelandic speakers correctly locate a speaker showing features typical for *norðlenska* in the North of Iceland (cf. Friðriksson/Angantýsson/Bade 2024: 279; cf. also Section 3). Considering evaluation, the existing phonological variation in L1 Icelandic is not socially stigmatized, but there are some indications that *harðmæli* is deemed more attractive than other ways of speaking, independent of L1-speaker origin, as demonstrated in an investigation by Guðmundsdóttir (2022, 2024). Taking the newest developments into account, traditional, regionally distributed variation appears to be largely receding (cf. Friðriksson/Angantýsson/Bade 2024), whereas new age-related variation appears to be on the rise (cf. Sigurjónsdóttir 2024).

Figure 2: Map of Iceland with North Iceland and Greater Reykjavík Area (adapted from OpenStreetMap contributors (2015)

Although evaluation of language use is less directed at pronunciation in the Icelandic context, language users of L1 Icelandic agree on what can be considered good or 'proper' (*vandað*) and bad or 'improper' (*óvandað*) language use. Therefore, L1 users of Icelandic have often been referred to as comprising a linguistic community by "participat[ing] in a set of shared norms", drawing upon Labov's (1972: 121) understanding of the term. In short, the stable evaluation system valid for L1 Icelandic is mainly characterized by the assessment of two aspects in other linguistic sub-systems than pronunciation. On the one hand, it is connected to the suitability of lexical choice according to style, communicative situation, and speaker identity (cf. Kristinsson 2017: 108, 176), which often includes the use of English words. Although there is some evidence for a growing acceptability of language use involving English non-standard forms among younger L1 speakers of Icelandic (cf. Guðmundsdóttir/Sigurjónsdóttir/Rögnvaldsson 2020; Jökulsdóttir et al. 2019), it continues to be marked by language users as 'blemishes' or 'stains' (*slettur*), which illustrates its undesirability. On the other hand, evaluations are directed at the "purity" of morphological features and vocabulary, which means that older forms are usually regarded as better and more correct. In contrast, newer forms tend to be seen as impure and incorrect (cf. Árnason 2024: 49; Leonard/Árnason 2011: 93), and a few of them are socially marked. The best-documented example is the so-called dative substitution in constructions with impersonal verbs, in which the accusative subject as the accepted form is exchanged for a dative subject (cf. e. g., Friðriksson 2008: 111–127; Þráinsson/Angantýsson/Sigurðsson 2013: 77f.). This phenomenon is regularly referred to as 'dative sickness' (*þágufallssýki*), which exemplifies the form's overt unacceptability.

This section has concentrated on describing linguistic variation in Icelandic and how language users of L1 Icelandic assess this variation. Regardless of the sparsity of phonological variation in L1 Icelandic, L1 language users have clear ideas on how to evaluate linguistic variation and use their own terminology to describe it (*norðlenska*, *þágufallssýki*). The next section provides a more detailed account of folk ideas as described within the theoretical framework of folk linguistics.

3 Folk linguistics and ascriptions of speaker origin

Folk linguistics is an approach used for investigations of and beliefs about language variation and language use employing various methods and data types, which are typically provided by language users with no background in linguistics, also referred to as the folk (cf. Evans/Benson/Stanford 2018; Niedzielski/Preston 2003; Preston 2010, 2018). By concentrating on linguistic laypeople's – or folk – perceptions "folk linguistics seeks to discover the overt categories and definitions speakers have of linguistic matters" (Niedzielski/Preston 2003: 44). In other words, uncovering what knowledge and beliefs the folk overtly mention, enables researchers to determine what variation they are aware of and what meaning they attach to it. In that way, analysing lay perceptions can help reveal underlying ideologies about linguistic matters in a distinct speech community at a certain time, which can ultimately "offer a window into speakers' cultural beliefs" (Preston 2018: xxi). In our view, there is a significant distinction between expert, or "etic", knowledge and beliefs and popular, or "emic" knowledge and beliefs. Categories considered important for language evaluation by expert linguists can differ from those deemed meaningful by the community of language users (cf. Lett 1990: 130; also Cramer 2018: 63f.).

One of the objectives of folk-linguistic studies has been to gain an understanding of how linguistic facts are linked to geographical ones in the folk mind. Therefore, many studies have focussed on folk perceptions of dialects (perceptual dialectology; cf. Preston 1999, 2010), to gain insights into what and where dialect areas exist in people's minds (cf. Garrett 2010: 183) – and how they differ from expert maps. Considering that linguistic variation is subject to evaluation, that way, we also know what language users base their judgment on (cf. Irvine/Gal 2000; Lindemann 2003; Preston 1989). To extract such folk knowledge, methods including map-drawing and voice-placing have been employed, in which study participants are usually given geographical maps. They are then asked to draw a circle around areas they think that language use differs from their own (cf. Niedzielski/Preston 2003: 46–63) or locate a voice sample showing distinct dialect features on a map (cf. Niedzielski/Preston 2003: 82–95). In the growing body of folk-linguistic studies, these methods have been adapted to various purposes and linguistic contexts as well as geographical areas (cf. e. g. Cramer 2018; Cukor-Avila et al. 2012; Hundt/Lasch/Anders 2010; Stoeckle 2012), including studies on L2 speech and multiethnolects (cf. e g. Bijvoet/Fraurud 2015; Lindemann 2005). Besides, these methods are usually employed in combination with conversational data, in which participants can elaborate on their map-drawing and placement choices.

An example of employing map-drawing and voice-placing with verbal guises for investigating language users' ideas of speech areas in a global context is a study by Lindemann (2005). She

asked the study's participants, all speakers of L1 American English, to divide the world according to their perceptions of different linguistic areas and make remarks about features they connect with the use of English by speakers of those areas. By doing so, Lindemann identified what language areas of the world are most salient to L1 speakers of US-English concerning L1 and L2 varieties of English, and how they evaluate them. As to salience of speech areas, results showed that the ten countries significant for the identification of speech areas closely corresponded to the fifteen countries with the most familiar Englishes (cf. Lindemann 2005: 196f.). These most commented-on countries were not limited to L1-English environments such as Britain and Australia, but included countries associated with L2-accented English. Interestingly, these most salient speech areas, i. e. China, Mexico, and Russia, also generated the most negative comments considering evaluation. As to the relationship between perceived geographical proximity and distance of L1 and L2 speakers, Lindemann's (2005) study found that evaluations became increasingly negative with greater distance from the US. An exception to this pattern is the findings for Mexico, as negative stereotypes towards Mexicans appear to supersede this relationship. To explore this further, a more detailed account of evaluations of L2 accents is given in the following section.

4 Evaluations of L2 accents

One of the main pillars of all sociolinguistic investigations is the supposition that perceptions of linguistic variation "can trigger beliefs about a speaker and their social group membership [...] leading to stereotypical assumptions about shared characteristics of those group members" (Garrett 2010: 33). This relationship, also known as linguistic stereotyping (cf. Kang/Rubin 2009: 442), provides the basis for the entanglement of linguistic form and speaker evaluation. Applying this to the context of assessing L2 accents[2], perception of L2 non-standard language use involves accessing social and demographic information about the speaker being judged. More specifically, research has shown that individual characteristics of a speaker and the speakers' social status (cf. Cargile/Giles 1997; Ryan/Bulik 1982), stereotypes towards certain nationalities (cf. Frumkin 2007; Kristiansen 2001; Lindemann 2005; cf. also Section 3), attitudes towards accented speech in general (cf. Lindemann 2002; Niedzielski 1999) and familiarity with an accent (cf. Carey/Mannell/Dunn 2010) can affect evaluations of L2-accented speech. In addition to this, L1 speakers rate L2-accented individuals lower than speakers of the L1 standard variety, which can pave the way for discrimination and bias towards L2 speakers (cf. e. g., Barrett/Cramer/McGowan 2022; Gluszek/Dovidio 2010; Levon/Sharma/Ilbury 2022). All these factors are built on language users' perceptual ability to distinguish easily between L1 and L2 speech (cf. Moyer 2014: 20), even with very brief speech samples (cf. Derwing/Munro 2009; Kang/Rubin 2009: 442; Moyer 2013: 85).

Returning to familiarity, research has found that a high exposure to an L2 accent – or the speaker's respective L1 – can increase the chances of correct speaker placement (cf. Adank/Hagoort/Bekkering 2010; Fraser/Kelly 2012: 86). Considering this for the Icelandic context

[2] In our understanding, an L2 accent is a non-pathological phenomenon that encompasses formal phonological features transferred from a speaker's L1 that differ from the target language's speaker norm (cf. also Munro/Derwing 1995: 289).

described in Section 1, it is interesting to see whether L1 speakers of Icelandic show awareness of L2 accents, what strategies they use to locate them, and what drives these strategies.

5 Methods and data

To gather folk ideas and conceptualizations about L2 accents and voice-placing strategies as well as connected themes, this mixed-methods study makes use of a voice-placing task (cf. Niedzielski/Preston 2003: 82–95; cf. Section 3), accompanied by a free-elaboration task (cf. Niedzielski/Preston: 2003: 63–96; cf. Section 3). The tasks were part of five focus-group discussions, lasting 90 minutes each, with 32 participants in total. All participants were L1 speakers of Icelandic. They were recruited by the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland and informed about an ongoing study on Icelandic without specifying its purpose. Each focus group consisted of four to eight participants who were divided into groups based on a broad distribution of age and gender. Just over half of the participants or 17 were women and 15 were men. The youngest participant was 21 years old at the time of the discussions and the oldest was 82. Other background variables such as participants' educational background and residency were not addressed in this study.

The voice-placing task was twofold. Firstly, participants listened to six verbal guises, which are audio recordings of different speakers reading the same text (cf. Garrett 2010: 62–65), one at a time. After that, participants were asked to draw a circle around the speaker's perceived origin on a world map with political boundaries (see Figure 3), distributed to the participants before each voice-placing task and collected directly after each listening session. Secondly, participants elaborated on their voice-placing decisions by answering open-ended questions from a semi-structured discussion guide (cf. Appendix), directly after the collection of the world maps. At this time in the focus-group discussion, and during the interview as a whole, participants were given ample opportunity to express themselves and return to elaborating on their beliefs and motivation for voice-placing (free-elaboration task). By dividing the voice-placing task, it was possible to compare map data and conversational data for correspondence in placement and guarantee that participants drew a circle around the intended area.

Figure 3: Sample of a world map used in the present study

The six verbal guises used in this study comprised five L2 speakers and one L1 speaker of Icelandic, all females and aged between 25 and 35 years, to eliminate potential influences stemming from the speakers' gender and age. To ensure a comparable level of competence in Icelandic, the five L2 speakers were in their second year of undergraduate studies in the program Icelandic as a Second Language at the University of Iceland at the time of recording. That means that they had a similar duration of organized instruction in Icelandic (cf. Flege et al. 2006; Purcell/Suter 1980). Each speaker read a grammatically and stylistically sound children's story, resulting in recording durations ranging from 18 to 24 seconds, depending on their reading speed. A read text was selected to exclude influences from linguistic sub-systems other than pronunciation and to control for comparability between participants. The L2 speakers originated from Denmark, Lithuania, the Philippines, Poland, and the US. This selection was based on the historical connections (Denmark) and contemporary significance (US) of certain L2 speakers' L1s, and the demographic significance of the three largest immigrant groups (Poland, the Philippines, and Lithuania; cf. Section 1).

A phonological analysis was performed on the L2-speaker guises measuring the phonological distance from L1 non-regional pronunciation by assessing both the frequency (quantitative) and degree (qualitative) of accentedness. This expert analysis aids with contrasting etic evaluations with emic perceptions (cf. Section 3). To prevent bias, the guises were presented in varying order across focus groups.

In line with the study's aim to gain insights into laymen's voice-placing strategies and perceptions of L2 accent as well as underlying themes, data analysis employed methods rooted in grounded theory (cf. Charmaz 2006; Glaser/Strauss 1967). This approach provides guidelines for the analysis of qualitative data through several stages, including constant comparison between sets of data to discover meaningful themes (cf. Charmaz 2006). The analysis of data was performed in Atlas.ti (cf. Atlas.ti 2000).

6 Results

Results for voice-placing strategies can be divided into three categories. The strategies emerging from data analysis rely on, firstly, perceived familiarity with accent (cf. Section 6.1), secondly, cultural stereotypes (cf. Section 6.2), and thirdly, perception of phonological features in L2 speech (cf. Section 6.3). These themes constitute superordinate themes, which often rely on further sub-themes, and do seldomly exist in isolation. In other words, the themes do, at times, overlap and relate to other sub-categories. In this section, results are exemplified with excerpts from the focus groups and discussed. These qualitative findings are supported by quantitative data from analysis of the world maps when needed.

6.1 Perceived familiarity with accent

Most participants placed the L1 speaker of Icelandic in Iceland, both according to map and interview data. As only three of the 32 participants placed this speaker elsewhere – two of them in Germany (cf. also Section 6.2), and one in Russia – results indicate that participants display great security in distinguishing between an L1 and L2 accent in Icelandic, which confirms expert knowledge (cf. Moyer 2014; Section 4).[3] In their attempts to locate the speakers on the world map, participants frequently resort to whether they are familiar with the respective pronunciation. If so, they often try to identify what kind of (L2) accent they just heard.

In the following excerpt, Emma, a participant from the fourth focus group, places the US-American speaker in Poland and gives the following reasons for her decision:[4]

(1) Emma: Já. Ég sagði Pólland. Mér fannst ég einhvern veginn bara heyrt svo mikið af svona íslensku. Var einhvern veginn svo kunnuglegt. Fannst þetta svo eðlilegt.Yes, I said Poland.
(‘,I thought that I have somehow heard so much of this kind of Icelandic. This was somehow so familiar. I found this so normal.’)

Emma mentions that she has often heard this kind of accent before, thus resorting to some kind of perceived general familiarity. Likewise, Vigdís from the fifth focus group believes the Filipina speaker to stem from Poland, as she states:

(2) Vigdís: Mér fannst þetta heldur kunnuglegt bara af því að mig rámar í þennan hreim sko.
(‘I found this to be rather familiar because I vaguely remember this accent.’)

It is worth noting that both Emma and Vigdís place the American and Filipina speakers in Poland based on perceived familiarity with the accent. So, identification via familiarity is not correct in these cases.

Let us now consider a conversation that unfolded between participants in the fifth focus group, in which participants exchanged their ideas about locating the Polish guise:

[3] In contrast, no participant placed an L2-accented speaker in Iceland.

[4] The transcriptions used in this paper contain only the speakers' utterances, without indicating pauses, hesitations etc.

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(3) Vigdís: Mér fannst hún vera pólsk.
('I thought she was Polish.')
Sunna: Já, mér líka.
('I thought so too.')
Kolfinna: Mér finnst ég hafa heyrt þetta líka, já. Merkti þarna í kringum Pólland og þar.
['I also think that I've heard this before. I marked Poland and around there.')
Vigdís: 'glúgga' [kluk:a] og hérna 'obna' [ɔpna]
('glúgga' and… 'obna')
Kolfinna: Mhm. Mér fannst ég kannast við það, það, sem mér fannst ekki með fyrstu tvö.
('Mmh, I thought I recognized that, which I didn't do with the first two [i. e., the Lithuanian and American guises].')
Atli: Já.
('Yes.')
Vigdís: Mikið af Pólverjum hérna á Íslandi sem eru, einmitt, búnir að læra íslensku. Tala nákvæmlega bara...
('There are a lot of Poles here in Iceland, who have learned Icelandic. They just speak exactly…')
Sunna: svona.
('like this')
Vigdís: Já, mér fannst þetta vera bara mjög líkt þeirra […] Við höldum auðvitað Pólland af því að það eru svo margir Pólverjar hér. Og þessi hreimur er dáldið líkur honum, þeim hreim.
('Yes, I found this to be very similar to them […]. Of course, we think that it's Poland because there are so many Poles here. And this accent is somewhat similar to it, their accent.')

Two aspects are worth considering further in this excerpt. Firstly, as already hinted at in the introductory remarks to this section, voice-placing strategies do overlap at times, and participants regularly try to tap into several strategies to identify an L2 accent. In Excerpt 3, Vigdís explicitly refers to her perception of distinct phonological features that she ascribes to L1 speakers of Polish. In her view, the vowel /u/ – which is a rounded high-mid front vowel in L1 Icelandic [ʏ] – is typically pronounced as a rounded high back vowel [u] by L1 Poles. Similarly, /p/ is perceived as unaspirated in the speech of the Polish guise [p], whereas the consonant is typically realized as preaspirated [hp] in L1 Icelandic. The phonological analysis of the Polish speaker confirms deviation from L1 speech in the words mentioned by participants. Secondly, the three excerpts show that participants draw on some knowledge that a Polish accent is more widely heard in Icelandic society than other L2 accents. We recall that Poles comprise the largest immigrant group to Iceland (cf. Section 1) and, probably, the biggest group of L2 speakers in the country. Therefore, we can assume that participants share this knowledge on demographics, which is also supported by Vigdís's comment on L1 speakers' tendency to locate L2 speakers in Poland. Considering map data, roughly one-third of participants, or ten of them, placed the Polish speaker directly in Poland, and another seven participants drew circles of different sizes around Eastern Europe including Poland. The remaining participants assumed the Polish speaker to stem from other parts of Europe. These results are similar to those found by Bade (2018), as participants in her study on covert attitudes towards L2 accents showed

great security in locating a Polish accent. Therefore, this could be indicative of a higher degree of familiarity with Polish-accented Icelandic.

Turning now from insights on perceptions of general familiarity with accents to such of a more personal nature. In the following two excerpts, Kári and Berglind give insights into the voice-placing of the Danish speaker. Let us first see what Kári has to say:

(4) Kári: Ég giskaði á Skandinavíu sko. Jafnvel. Mér finnst það hæpið að þetta sé allavega Dani því ég hef þekkt Dani sem voru búnir að vera hér í 30-40 ár og þeir kunna hvorki dönsku né íslensku.
(‚Well, I guessed Scandinavia. But I doubt that this was a Dane because I have known Danes who have lived here for 30–40 years and they can neither speak Danish nor Icelandic.')

Berglind believes the following when elaborating on placing the Danish speaker:

(5) Berglind: Svili minn er Dani, þetta var ekki danska. Nema bara, viðkomandi hefði sko bara, já verið miklu lengur hér á Íslandi heldur en hann.
('My husband's sister's husband is a Dane, and this was not Danish. Except, the person would have lived here in Iceland way longer than him.')

It is apparent from Berglind's statement that she draws on her experience with a Dane through family connections, whereas it is not clear exactly on what encounters Kári bases his knowledge. Apart from that, both participants use their knowledge, grounded in perceived familiarity – to exclude Denmark as a placing option, by resorting to (stereotypical) assumptions about Danes, i. e. their language competence in Icelandic (cf. Excerpt 4) and length of stay (cf. Excerpt 5). Considering the historical ties to Denmark, it is little surprising that stereotypes of Danes and Danish could develop, also as regards language competence in Icelandic and pronunciation. L1 speakers of Danish do usually acquire Icelandic, although to different extents. Furthermore, Icelandic spoken by Danes is a common subject of imitation and mockery, both considering accent and grammatical errors (cf. also Section 6.3). Additionally, we see from Berglind's account that there are some expectations as to increasing language competence according to how long an L2 speaker has resided in the target-language society. Unlike etic knowledge on the relationship between length of stay and linguistic competence in the L2, which distinguishes between the mere time spent in the target-language society and systematic instruction in the L2 as well as use of L2 vs. L1 (cf. Flege et al. 2006; Purcell/Suter 1980; cf. Section 5), Berglind does not discriminate between these concepts, thus providing valuable insights into folk definitions of the matter. Interestingly, she excludes Denmark as the origin of the Danish-speaker guise, referring to her own experience with a Danish national who is less advanced in Icelandic.

So far, the results have focussed on voice-placing strategies connected with perceived familiarity with an accent, with participants both drawing on general knowledge and perceptions of accents around them as well as personal experience relating to L2 speakers' language competence and stereotypical assumptions.

6.2 Cultural stereotypes

In the following section, we will have a closer look at voice-placing strategies motivated by existing cultural stereotypes.

As mentioned earlier (cf. Section 6.1), three of the study's participants located the L1 speaker of Icelandic outside of Iceland. Two of these participants, Sigurður and Ásta, placed the speaker in Germany. In the following excerpt, Sigurður provides some reasons for his decision:

(6) Sigurður: Þetta minnti mig nú á Þjóðverja sem hefði búið hér nokkuð lengi. […] Hún vandaði sig mjög áberandi fannst mér. Og það er mjög þýskt.
('This reminded me of Germans who have lived here for quite some time. […] I found it striking how much effort she put into this. And that is very German.')

Ásta elaborates on her placement decision as follows:

(7) Ásta: Ég bara skaut á Þýskaland af því að mér finnst Þjóðverjar svo andskoti duglegir að læra íslensku ef þeir vilja það.
('I just guessed Germany because I find Germans so damn efficient at learning Icelandic if they want to.')

Sigurður and Ásta locate the L1 speaker of Icelandic in Germany by drawing on stereotypical ideas about Germans and their capacity to learn or do something properly. Whereas Sigurður refers to the speaker having put a lot of effort into her reading performance, Ásta explicitly mentions her impression that she put a lot of ambition and effort into learning Icelandic. In both cases, these ascriptions are taken as a basis for locating the speaker in Germany. These two excerpts are a good example of how stereotypes can influence perceptions of L2 accents. In this case, voice-placing is affected by positive stereotypes about Germans, which leads to locating them in the L1-Icelandic environment. Considering these results in light of existing attitude research, associating Germans with high prestige is nothing new (cf. Giles 1970; Levon/Sharma/Ilbury 2022: 11; Lindemann 2005: 204). As to the Icelandic context, the investigation into covert attitudes towards L2 accents in Icelandic undertaken by Bade (2018, 2019), revealed that the German guise scored higher on all status-related traits presented to the study's informants, i. e. ambitious, intelligent, efficient, and independent, than on the solidarity-related traits, i. e. relaxed, interesting, reliable, and attractive (cf. Bade 2018: 61).

Another approach to voice-placing based on cultural stereotypes can be observed by examining Anton's reasons behind the placement of the Lithuanian speaker:

(8) Anton: Ég, sko, ég, fyrstu viðbrögð mín voru frönskumælandi, frá Frakklandi, en, en svo náttúrulega kom hún aldrei með þessa, svona, þessa steríótýpísku frönsku hljóm, þannig að ég varð efins, svo ég setti aðeins víðari, þannig að ég setti Frakkland og Sviss og Ungverjaland svona, ég var svona, var á þeim nótunum, Mið-Evrópa plus Frakkland, fyrsta tilfinning var Frakkland. En, en svo, og með það að ef hún er frönsk þá er hún búin að standa sig mjög vel.
('Well, my first reaction was French speaking, from France, but then she just didn't have those stereotypical French sounds, so I was in doubt and drew a larger circle and I marked France, Switzerland, and Hungary. I was along the lines of Central Europe plus France; the first feeling was France. But if she is French then she did a very good job.')

Anton argues for placing the speaker in France by referring to (unknown) features he believes a French accent comprises. Apart from the circumstance that he appears to have some distinct idea about how a French accent sounds – or, if we consider L1-to-L2-transfer, how an L2 accent is coloured by phonological features stemming from L1 French – Anton connects a French accent with clear stereotypical ideas about an L1-French-speaker's ability to supress a French accent. From his final remarks, we can see that he has low expectations towards the ability of L1 speakers of French to reach higher levels of language acquisition, either in an L2 in general or in Icelandic in particular.

6.3 Perceptions of phonological features in L2 speech

Let us now move on to consider participants' accounts of perceptions of phonological features in L2 speech, which is the third major strategy they employ to locate a speaker. As mentioned before, it appears that participants have little difficulty in distinguishing between an L1 and an L2 accent (cf. Section 6.1). Although this is reflective of expert knowledge on the topic (cf. Section 4), little is known about what phonological features contribute to this distinction in the Icelandic context, and what ideas and conceptualizations lie behind voice-placing within this strategy.

In the following excerpt, Freyja provides insights into her understanding of this L1/L2-dichotomy by referring to phonological features unique to L1 Icelandic as she comments on the Lithuanian speaker:

(9) Freyja: Nei, mér finnst kannski svolítið áberandi með útlendinga að það er einmitt þetta, PP og LL og NN og svona einhver blástur.
('No, I think that, maybe a little noticeable with foreigners is exactly this, PP and LL and NN and some kind of blow.')

According to Freyja, L2 speech is identifiable by a lack of realization of certain features she deems typical for L1 pronunciation. Consistent with etic descriptions of prominent features of the phonological inventory of L1 Icelandic (cf. Section 3), Freyja refers to preaspiration and t-insertion as salient features for L1 Icelandic. Because more participants in the focus groups mention these features as unique to L1-Icelandic pronunciation, L1 users of Icelandic appear to show high linguistic awareness of these, thus corroborating assumptions on laypeople's high consciousness of linguistic matters as proposed in Section 2. Other participants refer to non-linguistic factors when describing differences in speaker performances, as we can see in the following conversation about the L1 speaker of Icelandic:

(10) Steinþór: Það var líka, hún lét bara vaða sko.
('It was also, she just let go.')
Hanna: Örugg […].
('Confident […].')
Dagbjört: Hún var bara örugg í fasi.
('She was full of confidence.')

Steinþór, Hanna, and Dagbjört perceive a high level of confidence in the L1 speaker that they regard as critical for the perception of speech as performed by an L1 speaker. In contrast, we can assume that perceptions of lack of confidence can result in perceiving a speaker as an L2 speaker of Icelandic. A possible explanation for participants' perception of higher confidence

in the L1 speaker could lie in unnatural pausing, slower speech rate, and deviances in lexical stress when listening to L2 speakers. All in all, Excerpts 9 and 10 provide us with valuable insights into what features linguistic laymen deem important when trying to distinguish between L1 and L2 speech. However, this distinction alone does not provide further cues for voice-placing.

Yet, the next two excerpts illustrate that there are distinct ways of pronunciation that participants connect with a certain L1-speaker background. In excerpts 11 and 12, Hugrún and Tómas explain why they place the Danish speaker in Denmark:

(11) Hugrún: Mér datt Þýskaland í hug til að byrja með en svo þegar hún sagði 'glöð' þá fannst mér það vera Danmörk og ég skrifaði Danmörk. Hún sagði svona 'glö' [hermir eftir dönskum framburð].[5]
('I thought Germany to begin with but then she said 'glöð' ['glad'], then I felt it to be Denmark so I wrote Denmark. She said something like 'glö' [imitates a Danish accent].')

In contrast to Hugrún, Tómas tells us more about his knowledge of the feature he perceives in the Danish speaker, thus presenting us with a combination of voice-placing strategies, i. e. perceptions of phonological features and familiarity with an accent (cf. Section 6.1):

(12) Tómas: Ég er að vinna með Dana sem, hann talar eiginlega voðale, hann talar eiginlega lýtalausa íslensku, svona upp að vissu marki, missir svo alltaf þegar hann segir 'glaður', þá kemur alltaf 'glööö…' (hlær)."[6]
('I work with a Dane, and he actually speaks flawless Icelandic. Up to a point. Then he always loses it when he says 'glaður' [*glad*], then he always says 'glööö…' (laughs)')

Both Hugrún and Tómas resort to imitation when providing their folk descriptions of the sound they find idiosyncratic for L1-Danish speakers. Apart from descriptions, imitation is a valuable folk-linguistic tool, which helps researchers understand what variants are meaningful according to linguistic laypeople and what social significance they have. Considering that Kári and Berglind (cf. Excerpts 4 and 5 in Section 6.1) excluded the Danish speaker as stemming from Denmark by comparing the speech of Danes they know to the Danish speaker, it is worth contemplating whether they simply did not identify this raising of /œ/. This appears feasible because all participants who identified this feature in the Danish speaker placed her directly in Denmark. Exploring map data on the Danish guise, participants demonstrated a relatively high level of security in correctly locating the speaker. Six participants assumed Denmark as the country of origin for this speaker, and another four participants drew a circle around Denmark, and additionally, around the neighbouring countries Norway, Sweden, or Germany. Further seven participants placed the speaker in the Nordic countries Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, excluding Denmark. The remaining participants located the Danish speaker in other parts of Europe. The circumstance that many participants chose Denmark and adjacent countries as the

[5] The original transcription included information like this, i. e. imitation of accents.

[6] The phonological analysis of the Danish speaker's voice sample confirms a deviant pronunciation of the word glöð, i. e. with a raised vowel that may be reminiscent of the Danish [ø]. The typical L1-Icelandic pronunciation is a lower [œ].

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origin of the Danish speaker may not be surprising. Danish has a special status in Icelandic society (cf. Section 1), because Danish is the second mandatory foreign language after English, which Icelandic children learn in primary school. Apart from that, Icelanders are also exposed to Danish via e. g. TV and streaming services, which air Danish-language programs with Icelandic subtitles. Consequently, it can be assumed that L1-Icelandic speakers have some knowledge of L1-Danish pronunciation, which they can, possibly, access when they hear Danish-accented Icelandic. However, the question remains whether the raising of /œ/ as described by Hugrún and Tómas (cf. excerpts 12 and 13) has acquired some indexical quality within Icelandic society.

In the next and final excerpt, Björn, Jón, and Soffía exchange their beliefs about the placement of the Lithuanian speaker:

(13) Björn: Þetta er svona, einhver úralhreimur af þessu svona. Mér fannst þetta svona, mér fannst þetta dáltið dæmigert fyrir svona ýmist Pólverjana og Litháana sem eru mikið hérna í byggingabransanum.
('This is some kind of accent from the Ural area. I found this, like, I found this a bit typical for both Poles and Lithuanians who work here a lot in the construction industry.')

Jón: Já.
('Yes.')

Soffía: Já. Það eru þeir sem ég heyri í.
('Yes. It's those whom I hear speak.')

Jón. Já. Ég heyri það líka.
('Yes, I hear that too.')

Björn: Kemur mikið fram í sérhljóðaframburðinum, 'kringum', og svona áreynslukenndur sérhljóðaframburður sko.
('You hear it a lot in how they pronounce vowels, 'kringum' [kʰriŋkʊm][7], and such strained pronunciation of vowels.')

Soffía: Ég get ekki staðsett það alveg en þetta er Austur-Evrópa, hefði ég sagt strax. Ég sel iðnaðarmönnum vinnuföt, þannig að… [8]
('I cannot locate this exactly, but I would have said Eastern Europe immediately. I sell work clothes to craftsmen, and that's why.')

This account shows that participants, once again, resort to a combination of voice-placing strategies. In this case, they apply their knowledge of distinct phonological features (cf. Excerpt 3 in Section 6.1) to perceptions of familiarity with these features restricted to a certain environment. Associating the accent of the Lithuanian speaker with a distinct work environment and business sector could mean that this accent – as well as a Polish one as Björn mentions – is more recognizable and widespread in those environments. All three participants appear to share some knowledge of idiosyncratic features shared by L1 speakers from Eastern Europe, that they resort to when attempting to locate a speaker.

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[7] In this excerpt, Björn refers to the same L2 feature that Vigdís mentions in Excerpt 3 (cf. Section 6.1), i. e. the realization of ⟨u⟩ as [u] or [ʊ] instead of [ʏ]: [kʰriŋkʊm]. The phonological analysis of the Lithuanian speaker confirms some deviation in the word "kringum" with this speaker, including vowel quality.

[8] Comparing these findings to results from map data, Jón placed this speaker in Poland, Björn in Poland, Belarus and the Baltic region, and Soffía in southwest Russia.

7 Summary and conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine, firstly, what voice-placing strategies L1-Icelandic speaker folk representatives have when they perceive an L2 accent, and secondly, what folk ideas and conceptualizations lie behind these voice-placing decisions. This study has identified three main voice-placing strategies, i. e. perceived familiarity with an accent, resorting to cultural stereotypes, and perceptions of phonological features in L2 speech. The findings presented indicate that L1 speakers of Icelandic try to identify an L2 speaker's origin by resorting to whether they are familiar with the accent, and by utilizing information on the demographic composition of Icelandic society, as many participants do with the Polish speaker. Drawing on beliefs about L2 competence in Icelandic was one of the themes driving voice-placing, both considering personal experience with certain speakers as seen in the case of the unsuccessful placement of the Danish speaker (cf. Section 6.1), and cultural stereotypes. Unlike the findings in Lindemann's study (cf. Section 3), cultural stereotypes are not necessarily negative, as the case of the placement of the L1-Icelandic speaker in Germany shows, but they can blur the clarity as to the, otherwise, intact L1/L2 dichotomy. In other words, stereotypical beliefs appear to interfere with linguistic evidence (cf. Preston 2018: 11). Also, stereotypical assumptions appear to be connected with ascriptions of L2 competence in Icelandic and ideas connected with how much effort L2 speakers put into learning an L2. As to results based on perceptions of phonological features in L2 speech, L2 speakers appear to have some conceptualizations of what linguistic and para-linguistic features are idiosyncratic for L1 pronunciation. Apart from that, there is some evidence that distinct features, i. e. perception of raised /œ/ and realization of /u/ as /ʊ/ are connected with L1 speakers of Danish and Polish respectively. However, it remains to be seen whether (some) L2-accent features have the capability to acquire stereotypical quality, as *harðmæli* as an L1 variant (cf. Section 2), with respective consequences for speaker-placement.

This study has shown that, although voice-placing decisions taken by L1-Icelandic folk representatives are not necessarily reliable, they contribute to our understanding of how they approach L2 accents as a comparably new phenomenon in Icelandic society, what strategies they resort to when attempting to locate an L2 speaker, and what beliefs and conceptualizations underlie these strategies.

All in all, the findings of this study have demonstrated that folk linguistics as a theoretical framework and grounded theory as an approach to data analysis proved to be relevant tools for uncovering folk themes underlying beliefs about and evaluations of L2 accents. Future investigations will need to be undertaken to further disentangle beliefs about L2 accents and perceptions of formal features, as well as cultural stereotypes in the Icelandic context. This could also help with developing a fuller picture of the spread of L2 accents throughout Icelandic society, folk awareness towards L2-accented Icelandic, and their status in Iceland in comparison with the L1 variety.

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Appendix

The following questions were posed after participants listened to the verbal guises. Questions are displayed in the Icelandic original to the right with the English translation to the left.

1)	What are your first thoughts on what you just heard?	Hvað er það fyrsta sem ykkur dettur í hug við að hlusta á þessa manneskju tala?
1a)	Why are you saying that?	Af hverju er það?
1b)	In what way?	Hvernig þá?
2)	Is there anything especially prominent in the way the person speaks?	Er eitthvað sérstaklega áberandi í því hvernig hún talar?
2a)	What is that exactly? / Can you describe that a little more?	Hvað nákvæmlega?/ Geturðu lýst því aðeins nánar?
2b)	How do you feel about that?	Hvernig finnst ykkur það?