"**L2 [Second Language] Accent and Ethics: Issues that Merit Attention**" by Derwing, Fraser, Kang and Thompson, from June 2014. Link: L2_Accent_and_Ethics_Issues.

"Although most teachers of English are well aware that their students may sometimes experience discrimination … they may not realize the extensive range of factors that contribute to negative consequences for individuals with foreign accents; ... We examine … the relationship of accent and intelligibility [understanding meaning] and will discuss state legislation that seems to conflate the concepts. We then describe methods used …for determination of origin of refugee claimants [Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin] (LADO) … In a review of accent reduction programs, we expose … opportunists … [and then] address the responsibility of the interlocutor in ESL settings, and how communication with and attitudes towards L2 speakers may be enhanced."

One issue they discuss is how research after research has demonstrated that there is not a direct relationship between intelligibility and accents. Heavily accented people can be very intelligible. They have several interesting examples of how Native Speakers (NSs) see the accent as the problem of, for example, not understanding professors but the problem is resolved without addressing the accent. One experiment has an American accented male deliver two 4-min excerpts of an astronomy lecture; during the first part an American face is on the screen, during the second, an Asian face is on the screen. Many NSs related that the second part was more accented, even though they were both delivered by the same speaker.

The authors discuss the Arizona law dictating that only NSs are allowed to teach ESL, conflating accent with intelligibility. The opportunism of "accent reduction" is interesting. What the authors imply is that there are certain aspects of an accent that make it difficult to be understood, but it is not about sounding like native speakers, is about addressing those specific issues. That is why some people with heavy accents are easier to understand.

One of the most interesting issues for me was how familiarity and education helped the NSs better understand of NNSs (Non-Native Speakers). By specifically teaching NSs how to listen to accented NNSs or by using the contact hypothesis of prejudice reduction, meaning preceding ITAs (International Teaching Assistants) class interactions with enjoyable nonthreatening shared tasks, the accent issues were significantly diminished.

One of the most dangerous issues presented is LADO, where untrained government personnel decides whether a person asking for asylum is from where they say they are. Experiments show that accuracy in accent identification is low, and more importantly, they show poor correlation between confidence and accuracy, meaning you can be very confident and wrong. This misidentification could mean life or death for asylum seekers.

All this has implications "for language teacher education programs, language teachers, governments, employers, and most importantly, for L2 accented speakers."

*** I imagine it is obvious why this is relevant to me. I have experienced discrimination because of my accent; mostly people thinking I am dumb, uneducated and poor. Also, almost 100% of my students are ELLs, and I see the discrimination they experience as well. The main learning I would like you to take from this article is, like the authors mention, that communication goes two-ways and NSs also carry some responsibility for their communication with accented NNSs. The main ethical issue as I see it is how research is ignored in favor of prejudicial beliefs when it comes to L2 accented individuals. Simple bias.