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## **Role models in language learning: Results of a large-scale international survey**

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### **Abstract**

Role models can exert considerable influence in shaping individuals' values, attitudes and beliefs. A large body of work in the social sciences has investigated the influence of celebrity role models, and in the context of education several disciplines have a rich research history in this area (e.g. medical education). However, in the context of second language acquisition, research centred on role models has largely remained on the periphery. This study presents a large-scale international survey investigating the role models of English language learners. With data collected from 8,472 participants, analysis investigated whether these learners had English language role models, who the role models were and what characteristics learners valued in them, and investigated systematic variation among subgroups. Results showed that 68% of respondents reported having an English language role model, and four key role model dimensions emerged: overall command of English, paralinguistic features, personal attributes and accent/variety of English. We argue that role modelling may be a highly influential

component of the psychological context of SLA, and conclude by highlighting several valuable areas for future research.

## **Keywords**

Role model, second language acquisition, English language learning/teaching

## **Introduction**

Role models of all kinds can exert considerable influence in shaping our values, attitudes and beliefs. Individuals, both young and old, can develop what they perceive to be strong and intimate relationships with celebrity role models (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Cashmore, 2006), and it is well documented that these virtual bonds can result “in powerful forms of personal and social transformation” (Fraser & Brown, 2002, p. 200). Although role models are often discussed in the context of renowned or celebrated personalities, people who we meet in our daily lives can also function as role models, and role models can even be fictional or animated characters that we watch or read about.

Role models can affect change through multiple processes. The process which is arguably most relevant to educational contexts is that of ‘vicarious learning’ (also referred to as observational learning). The notion of vicarious learning is a well-established principle in psychology, and, in his seminal book on social learning theory, Bandura (1977) submits that “virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experience occur on a vicarious basis by observing other people’s behaviour and its consequences for them” (p. 12). People continually and actively search for models they perceive as representative of what they wish

to achieve, and in doing so, Bandura concludes, this “guides and motivates self-development” (1997, p. 88).

However, owing to the everyday familiarity of the term it has been argued that the “conventional wisdom of role models” (Solomon, 1997, p. 396) has curtailed their rigorous empirical investigation. For example, Carrington and Skelton (2003) submit that government policies with regards to teachers’ roles as sex- and race-specific models for students have been “legitimated by an appeal to common-sense notions about the salience of ‘role models’ in socialization” (p. 253), rather than solid empirical results. Criticism has highlighted the fact that studies are sometimes loosely grounded in theory (Turner & Shepherd, 1999), and findings are further complicated by the fact that in the social sciences the term ‘role model’ has been “inconsistently used and loosely defined” (Gibson, 2004, p. 135). Partly for these reasons, the potentials of role modelling have not yet been fully exploited across educational domains, and this is even truer of the field of second language acquisition (SLA). This paper addresses this paucity of research by presenting the findings of the first large-scale international study of the role models of learners of English, offering a baseline dataset that researchers will be able to draw on as an important reference point.

We recruited participants globally, and the primary aims of this exploratory study were to map out whether, and which, participants reported having English language role models, and who these role models were. We were further interested to understand the specific characteristics that participants reported valuing in their role models, and whether there was systematic variation in responses among discrete participant subgroups. We begin by offering a brief overview of relevant literature, before laying out the methodology of the study. We go on to present the results, and discuss their implications both with regards theory

and pedagogy. We conclude by highlighting the limitations of the study and by highlighting what we believe to be fruitful areas for future research.

### **Theoretical foundations of role modelling**

At the heart of this paper is the educational significance of role modelling which, as noted above, has its roots in Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. This posits that the vicarious experience of observing models involves four key processes. First, behaviour will only be learned from models to whom individuals *pay attention*. Within an individual's immediate context the availability of models may be limited, but this can be expanded through the mediated frame of the press and the mass media, providing important models with "high status, competence, and power" (p. 88).

The second and third processes – *retention* and *motor reproduction* – highlight the importance of the way the observed stimulus is processed and stored, involving first the strengthening of this information by repeated exposure, and then various forms of practice through which these 'symbolic representations' can be converted into action. The final aspect relates to accompanying *motivational processes*, as people are more likely to enact a modelled action if they observe the action resulting in positive consequences. Indeed, Bandura (1977, p. 87) emphasised that "Seeing or visualising people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities". We should also note caution that these processes may not always be successful – that is, not all observed behaviour will be modelled – for reasons including weaknesses or gaps in any of the above stages, physical inability or a lack of sufficient incentives.

More recent investigations of vicarious experience have involved assessing the potential for learning without direct observation through discussion or dialogues (Cox et al., 1999; Northedge, 2003), through utilising students' imagination as well as "the vicarious experience afforded through good fiction" (Fox, 2003, p. 99), and through storytelling (Krietemayer & Heiney, 1992; Spouse, 2003). As Roberts (2010) explains, exposure to such discourses "enables students to develop concepts of themselves in different roles" (p. 14). Ibarra (1999) refers to this process as the construction of *provisional selves*, thereby allowing individuals to 'try on' possible identities before they are required to act them out.

### **Role modelling in education and SLA**

Given the close links of role modelling with social learning, the notion has been explored in multiple areas of education. Medical education has a particularly rich history, and the cumulative body of research amassed in this context lends support to the conclusion that role models have distinct educational relevance (cf. Althouse et al., 1999; Paice et al., 2002; Perry, 2009; Wright et al., 1997).

In SLA, role models have been most directly investigated in the context of 'near peer role modelling' (see below), but it is fair to conclude that discussion of role models has largely been on the periphery of other research objectives. In research on language learning motivation, role models have been identified as an important impetus for the creation and refinement of an Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014), and as able to help learners conceptualise 'roadmaps to success' along with effective strategies to realise these possible selves (see Thompson & Vasquez, 2015). The notion of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which underpins the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), links these theories indirectly yet inherently with the notion of role modelling. An intriguing variation on

these principles is ‘video self-modelling’ (see Collier-Meek et al., 2012, for a detailed overview of the procedure; and Adolphs et al., 2018, for a further innovative approach with regards visualisation and technology). Video self-modelling involves first producing a ‘success video montage’ made up of edited clips of a person performing a target behaviour well, and then asking the person to regularly watch these images of him/herself. In this way, the participant serves as his/her *own* role model. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) have argued that this technique lends itself particularly well to being utilised in language learning contexts.

### ***Near peer role models***

Murphey and Arao (2001, p. 1) define ‘near peer role models’ as “people who might be ‘near’ to us in several ways: age, ethnicity, sex, interests, past or present experiences, and also in proximity and in frequency of social contact”. Findings in the context of SLA have confirmed that exposure to near peer role models can result in immediate benefits relating to student motivation and excitement, risk taking and the amount of English used (Murphey & Murakami, 1998). Evidence has also suggested that these positive changes can be long-lasting (Murphey & Arao, 2001), that relatively little class time is required to achieve them (30 minutes in Murphey & Murakami’s 1998 study) and that a conscious emphasis on near peer role models in the L2 classroom can lead not only to student change, but also to positive teacher development (Murphey & Arao, 2001). Moreover, when non-native speaker teachers are positioned as representing desirable language models for their students – significantly, with knowledge of more than one language system – they can also represent a powerful form of near peer role model (Barkhuizen, 2016; Duff & Uchida, 1997; He & Zhang, 2010; Nemtchinova, 2005).

### ***Related research in SLA***

We have noted above the lack of research into role models in the field of SLA. However, we would be remiss not to recognise several bodies of research which touch on the same core issues, even if they do not draw on the same terminology. For example, Bonny Norton and her colleagues' work on the notion of identity, investment and imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) exemplifies this. To use their words: "a learner's hopes for the future (or their children's future) are integral to a language learner's identity" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 415). Drawing also on the notion of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), Pavlenko and Norton (2007) submit that as humans, we "are capable, through our imagination, of perceiving a connection with people beyond our immediate social networks" (p. 670). They go on to argue that "For both Wenger [1998; situated learning theory] and Markus and Nurius, possible selves, linked to memberships in imagined communities, shape individuals' present and future decisions and behaviors and provide an evaluative and interpretive context for such decisions, behaviors, and their outcomes" (ibid.). Social comparison processes (Festinger, 1954), whether upward or downward, therefore also have clear links with our discussion of English language learner role models (see e.g. Henry, 2015, for a discussion of the dynamic, real time revisions of learners' ideal L2 selves).

Research has also investigated changes in students' L2 goals, motivations and in the perceptions of their target language community during periods of study abroad (see e.g. Kinginger, 2008), and processes of second language socialisation are also rooted in the existence of clear L2 cultural and linguistic models (Duff, 2007). Even when students do not or are not able to travel, teaching materials and other resources can help learners develop imagined transnational networks and identities, through imagining themselves engaging in communication with communities worldwide (Curdt-Christiansen & Wening, 2015; Duff,

2015). These approaches doubtless all have links to the core principles of role modelling, and we return to expand this discussion in exploring the implications of our study.

### **Research questions and aims of this study**

The previous overview suggests that role modelling occurs daily in classrooms around the world, yet research in the field of SLA has not yet examined the scope and the nature of the process in a systematic manner. Drawing on a large-scale online questionnaire survey of learners of English, the current exploratory study strives to begin addressing this gap by seeking answers to the following five research questions:

1. How common is having a language learning role model?
2. Who are participants' role models?
3. Are there any salient role model archetypes?
4. Is there any systematic variation in role models described by specific participant subgroups?
5. What characteristics do participants value in their English language role models?

### **Methods**

#### ***Participants***

Participants for this study were 8,472 English language learners from 155 L1 backgrounds (see Table 1 for the eight most frequent). The male/female split was 54.5%/44.2% (with 1.3% of participants opting not to say), more than 60% of participants were under the age of 30, and over 80% under the age of 40. Most participants (57.7%) self-reported having an English language proficiency level of upper-intermediate and above, and 28.2% an intermediate level. Participants were from a wide range of teaching and learning contexts (see Table 2), and a

special feature of the dataset was the large number of participants who were English language teachers (N = 1,189/14.0%). In order to aid analysis, five broad geographical groupings were created from the largest participant clusters in terms of their mother tongue and reflecting their nationality/the place that they call home: Chinese (all dialects; N = 1038); Russian (N = 576); languages spoken in India (N = 898); languages spoken in the EU (N = 1799); and languages spoken in Central and South America (N = 1134).

<b>L1</b>	<b>N (% of respondents)</b>
Chinese	1042 (12.3%)
Spanish	938 (11.1%)
Arabic	603 (7.1%)
Portuguese	591 (7.0%)
Russian	577 (6.8%)
Hindi	463 (5.5%)
Vietnamese	436 (5.1%)
Turkish	326 (3.8%)

*Table 1: Eight most common participant L1s*

	<b>N (%)</b>
Studying at a private language school	794 (9.4%)
Studying at school	833 (9.8%)
Studying at university	1648 (19.5%)
Studying on a year abroad	137 (1.6%)
Studying on my own	3871 (45.7%)
I am a teacher	1189 (14.0%)

*Table 2: Participants' learner/teacher status and context*

### ***Instruments and procedures***

This study was part of a collaboration between the University of Nottingham and Cambridge University Press. The two institutions have a long-standing relationship, and Cambridge University Press did not have any financial stake in the results of the study. Ethical approval

was sought and gained from both institutions and fully complied with. Participants were given the opportunity to participate in a prize draw to win a single £200 Amazon voucher. Contact details were drawn for this at random after data collection ended, and these participant emails were then immediately deleted. The link to a bespoke questionnaire (see Appendix A) was placed on the Cambridge Online Dictionaries website, and data was gathered over the course of 21 days from 15 February to 7 March 2017.

The questionnaire was split into three sections. In the first, participants were asked if they had an English language learning role model, and those who did were invited to share details of up to two such models. Participants were asked to indicate the sex of their role models (with a separate option for e.g. a fictional character/animation); whether they were native English speakers and whether they were the same nationality as them; whether the role models were younger, of a similar age or older than them; and whether they worked in a similar field/profession. Finally, participants were also invited to identify their role models by name (e.g. ‘Barack Obama – former US president’ or ‘my grandmother’; note that these examples were only given after participants had answered these initial questions describing their chosen role model). This section was introduced with a brief description of a ‘role model’, and examples of role models in a different context:

*“A role model is someone that you respect and that you want to become more like – for example, if you are sportsman/sportswoman, your sporting role models might be Muhammad Ali or Serena Williams. We would like you to think about your English language role model: it might be a teacher, a famous actor or singer, a politician, a friend...but it could be anyone who speaks or writes in English!”*

In the second section, participants were asked to rate a set of characteristics in terms of how important they considered them, either regarding their existing English language role

model(s), or for a role model if they were to choose one. These characteristics were drawn from a previous study which identified a set of features and attributes highlighted as important by English language learners (Adolphs et al., 2018). They included, for example, accent, fluency, use of gestures and the perceived ‘naturalness’ of the role models’ English usage. Participants were asked to indicate their responses on five-point Likert scales, and were also given the opportunity to share additional characteristics that they valued in an open-ended question.

The third section of the questionnaire collected background information concerning participants’ pronunciation goals, the variety of English they wanted to learn, and various demographic details as well as their current and intended future patterns of English use (some of which is not analysed in the current paper).

### ***Data analysis***

In order to develop a detailed picture of the role models described by the participants, comprehensive descriptive statistics were collated and Chi-square analyses were conducted to interrogate the data. Drawing on the acknowledged self-organising capacity of systems – a core tenet of complex dynamics systems theory (CDST) – we sought to identify key role model archetypes nested within the vast dataset (Dörnyei, 2014). Exploratory factor analysis was also used to examine the underlying factor structure of the role model characteristics that the participants were asked to rate, first computed with the whole dataset and subsequently separately with key participant subgroups (male/female, teachers/students and by geographical grouping). Qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions was interrogated through thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017): once the initial coding had been completed, wider themes were identified with the coding categories reviewed and refined

through an ongoing iterative process. Owing to the size of the dataset it was not double-coded in its entirety. Coding was completed by the first author, coding categories and examples were discussed in detail with the second and third authors, and adjustments and re-coding was completed as necessary to achieve consensus. This was an iterative process, and these discussions took place at regular points throughout the process of analysis, with an aim to collaboratively find the best fit with the data.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Research Question 1: How common is having an English language learning role model?***

5,767 participants reported having an English language role model, 68.1% of respondents. Of these, 2,582 also described a second English language learning role model, leading to a dataset comprised of 8,349 role model descriptions. In evaluating this proportion, we must take into consideration that our respondents constituted a self-selected sample, leading to the likely inflation of the proportion of positive responses: one could rightly argue that people who completed the questionnaire were interested because they felt they had something substantial to contribute. We likewise note that participants were users of the Cambridge Online Dictionaries website, possibly a reflection of a high motivation to study. Curiously, the best evidence of the fact the participant sample was not entirely biased is the large number of learners (38.1%) who completed the survey even though they did not have a role model. This suggests that the call for participation was attractive enough to a wide range of language learners, and further evidence of the general appeal of the survey is provided by the unexpectedly large sample that was recruited during the short period the link was active.

Thus, although some systematic bias in favour of those who had role models is inevitable, the above considerations suggest that the main attraction of the survey was not

restricted to this aspect. This is indicative that the investigation of role models is indeed a worthy topic for the field of SLA. While the proportion of English language learners with role models may not turn out to match the figures reported in other educational disciplines (for example over 90% as noted by Wright et al., 1997, in the context of medical education), further research will clarify the pedagogical potential rooted in L2 role models. The wider relevance of L2 role models is further supported by the international spread of the respondent sample, with the exact figures exhibiting natural variation reflecting differences in these learners' wider cultural contexts (see Table 3 & Research Question 4 for further discussion of these results). Overall, we feel confident in arguing that role modelling may be a highly influential component of the psychological context of SLA.

	N (%)
Chinese	612 (59.0%)
Russian	396 (68.8%)
India	641 (71.4%)
EU	1181 (65.5%)
Central & South America	831 (73.3%)

*Table 3: Number of participants with role models from different geographical groupings*

***Research Question 2: Who are participants' role models?***

Let us start characterising the role models that our participants described with some demographic statistics. Of the 8,349 role models in our dataset, 4,980 (59.6%) were male and 3,140 (37.6%) female; 229 role models belonged to the 'Other' category, for example animated or fictional characters. Most role models described were English native speakers (64.2%) and most role models (78%) were older than participants. 37.8% of the role models

were personally known by the participants (see Table 4), and 55% were famous (i.e., not personally known; see Table 5).

	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage of personally known role models</b>	<b>Percentage of all role models</b>
<i>All known role models</i>	3,156	100.0	37.8
• Teacher/professor	1,848	58.6	22.1
• Friend/classmate	588	18.6	7.0
• Family member	275	8.7	3.3
• Boss/colleague	252	8.0	3.0
• Partner/spouse (current or ex)	99	3.1	1.2

*Table 4: Top five categories of personally known role models*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage of famous role models</b>	<b>Percentage of all role models</b>
<i>All famous role models</i>	4,590	100.0	55.0
• Film/TV industry	1,170	25.3	13.9
• Politics	728	15.9	8.7
• Author/poet	493	10.7	5.9
• Singer/musician	448	9.8	5.4
• YouTuber/vlogger (ELT related)	263	5.7	3.2

*Table 5: Top five categories of famous role models*

Most participants reported wanting to learn British English (see Table 6), likely influenced by the fact that data was collected from visitors to the Cambridge Online Dictionaries website. This was reflected in the fact that the majority of the most frequently mentioned famous role models were also British (see Table 7). It is significant that there was a substantial category of personally known role models made up of teachers and professors (see Table 4), highlighting the potentially large role modelling impact of educators.

It is also noteworthy that the two most popular role models, Barack Obama and Emma Watson, are both personalities well known for their social activism (Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 and Watson was appointed as a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador in 2014). Although we cannot know whether participants were aware of this, there is an interesting connection here with our qualitative data, which highlighted role models' character, ethics and moral stance as important factors contributing to their selection (see Research Question 5). We should note, however, that in the context of the overall sample size the frequency numbers attached to named celebrities are very small, indicating significant variation. Even Barack Obama only accounted for 3.2% of all role models described, and we acknowledge that the example of "*Barack Obama – US president*" was given to participants at the end of Section 1 when participants were invited to write the full name of their role model (along with e.g. "*'my grandmother' or 'my first English teacher'*"; while this may have influenced participants to volunteer Obama as a second role model, the vast number of mentions of Obama –  $n = 199$  of 267 total mentions – can be found as a first role model described by participants). The overall variation in responses is doubtless considerable.

<b>Variety</b>	<b>N</b>
British English	5,471
American/Canadian English	3,691
It is not important to me	2,453
Australian/New Zealander English	1,073
A specific variety of English (e.g. Chinese English/Chinglish)	345
Other	232

Table 6: "What variety of English would you like to learn?" (Participants were able to tick multiple responses)

	N (%)
Barack Obama	267 (3.2%)
Emma Watson	125 (1.5%)
Benedict Cumberbatch	113 (1.4%)
J.K. Rowling	70 (.8%)
Stephen Fry	58 (.7%)
Queen Elizabeth II	54 (.6%)
Michelle Obama	48 (.6%)
Adele	46 (.6%)

*Table 7: Top eight most frequently reported famous role models*

### ***Research Question 3: Are there salient role model archetypes?***

It appears that just as individual tastes differ, so do individual preferences regarding role models. This would imply that role models display a virtually unlimited variety, yet, a principle of complex dynamic systems theory is that the self-organisation capacity of systems works to reduce variation, almost always resulting in a finite number of archetypes (Dörnyei, 2014). Therefore, we examined our role model pool to identify any templates for role model archetypes that were particularly frequent. In order to capture robust tendencies without becoming lost in the richness of detail that characterises such vast datasets, we formed five dichotomies from the basic role model rubrics given to participants in Section 1 of the questionnaire:

- 1) *Sex*: male vs. female
- 2) *L1*: native English speaker vs. non-native English speaker
- 3) *Relationship to participant*: famous vs. personally known
- 4) *Job*: same job vs. different job
- 5) *Nationality*: same nationality vs. different nationality

The permutations of these primary categories provided 32 possible combinations (e.g. famous + male + native speaker + different job + different nationality), and we began the

analysis by computing the frequency of role model occurrences for each combination. Because we were interested in salient trends, we discounted the combinations which yielded the lowest frequency numbers ( $N < 2\%$ ). The two tables we enclose in Appendix B include a full summary of the remaining archetypes (Table B1 summarising famous role models, and Table B2 summarising personally known role models), and the frequency statistics relevant to the current discussion can be found presented in the first column of these tables.

Although participants described almost 50% more famous than personally known role models, the substantial frequency of the latter ( $N > 3,100$ ) underlines their significance. Within the ‘famous’ category, the primary role model archetype is a male NS in a job different to that of the respondent. This category represents 34% of all the role models reported in our study, and the most popular named role model, Barack Obama, is a prime example of this. The second most endorsed archetype is the female counterpart of the first, epitomised by the second most popular named role model, Emma Watson. Interestingly, a third famous archetype also emerges different from the first two types in that that it involves a NNS of English of the respondent’s nationality (that is, a local celebrity).

The primary archetype in the personally known subgroup was a female non-native speaker of the same nationality as the respondent, representing roughly 12% of the total number of role models reported. The second archetype in this category was its male counterpart, and as we might expect these two NNS role model archetypes are roughly twice as common as the corresponding personally known NS speaker archetypes.

Thus, we *can* identify a small set of role model archetypes that explain a significant proportion of the variance in the overall pool of role models reported. The next section continues this discussion by examining their interaction with discrete respondent subgroups.

***Research Question 4: Is there any systematic variation in role models described by specific participant subgroups?***

It is clear that the characteristics of a person choosing a role model is in a dynamic relationship with the characteristics of the role model chosen. In order to explore any systematic variation in this respect, we divided the respondents into basic subgroups according to their sex, status (student/teacher), geographical grouping and age group. When we displayed the frequency data on a comprehensive spreadsheet, some robust patterns became detectable. We then examined the occurrence of the 32 role model types identified in the previous section across these participant subgroups, computing the relevant frequencies and adding these into the two tables included in Appendix B in new columns.

In some areas various subgroups do not represent unique variation, as certain role model types are equally relevant across the subgroups. However, a closer look at the figures did reveal some systematic variation, indicating interesting and possibly fruitful areas for further research. After analysing the frequency data in a visual manner and identifying possible trends (an established approach in qualitative research to processing “display data”; see e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 11), we verified our observations through Chi-square statistics. Let us look at findings from the four participant subgroups separately.

*Variation stemming from participant sex*

Famous NS role models were a key archetype for both male and female participants, with this archetype accounting for 49% and 43% of all role models described by men and women respectively. A 3x3 Chi-square analysis (including participant sex ‘prefer not to say’ and role model ‘other’ e.g. animated character) confirmed a significant relationship between the sex of participants and their English language role models, with male respondents more likely to

describe male role models, and female participants female models,  $\chi^2 (4, n = 8349) = 652.6, p < .001$ . Concordant with research in other disciplines, the reporting of other-sex role models was more marked for female participants, and female participants in fact described more male famous NS role models than female famous NS role models (24% versus 19%). Nevertheless, many male respondents did have female role models: while 494 (45.2%) of these models were famous, there was also a substantial number of female role models personally known to male participants ( $N = 539/49.3\%$ ), most of whom ( $N = 319/29.2\%$ ) were their teachers/professors.

A 2x3 Chi-square analysis further confirmed a significant relationship between the participants' sex and whether or not they reported NS role models, with men more likely to describe NSs and women NNSs,  $\chi^2 (2, 8349) = 7.866, p < .05$ . Importantly, a 3x3 Chi-square analysis also confirmed a significant relationship between the participants' sex and their relationship with their role model, with male participants more likely to describe a famous role model and women a model personally known,  $\chi^2 (4, 8349) = 79.96, p < .001$ .

### *Teacher and student role model archetypes*

The most common role model archetypes described by both teachers and students reflected the overall primary archetypes (male and female NS celebrities), and the third most common archetype – personally known female NNS – may be explained in light of the fact that 62% of the teachers in our sample were female. 2x3 Chi-square analyses also indicated significant differences between teachers and students with regards whether their role models were famous/personally known and whether they were in a similar job to them: teachers were more likely to report personally known role models,  $\chi^2 (2, 8349) = 31.255, p < .001$ , and role models in a similar profession to themselves,  $\chi^2 (2, 8349) = 243.61, p < .001$ .

### *Variation across different geographical groupings*

Chi-square analyses also indicated significant and intriguing differences across the geographical/mother tongue clusters, with two superordinate clusters emerging: (a) Central & South America, EU and Russia, and (b) China and India. The distinction between them concerned whether the selected role models were L1 English speakers, whether they were the same nationality as respondents and whether they were personally known. A 2x5 Chi-square analysis confirmed that the second cluster – China and India – were more likely to describe NNSs than the first,  $\chi^2(4, 5310) = 343.49, p < .001$ . This was particularly marked for India (for which 59.1% of all role models described were NNSs), and was further underscored by the self-reported pronunciation goals which indicated that Chinese and Indian learners valued communicative ability over native-like pronunciation (see Table 8). A 2x5 Chi-square analysis confirmed that China and India were more likely to report on role models of the same nationality as them,  $\chi^2(4, 5310) = 533.61, p < .001$ , as well as on personally known role models,  $\chi^2(8, 5310) = 68.35, p < .001$ . These consistent differences indicate the importance the two most populous ethnolinguistic communities of the world place on ‘local heroes’ over western celebrities. The particularly high figures in India are also likely to be due to the large number of Indian speakers of English who can be considered native-like having been brought up and educated in English. In the context of this exploratory study, we asked participants themselves to make the judgement as to whether they perceived their role model to be a native or a non-native speaker of English, and have likewise not been able to delve as deeply as we would like in our analysis into issues surrounding ‘accent’ (both of role models themselves, and with regards participants’ personal L2 goals). The initial findings we present here therefore highlight a fascinating area for future research.

	“Sounding like a native speaker is important to me, even though it is hard”	“Being able to communicate is a more important goal to me than to sound like a native speaker”
Central & South America	500 (44.1%)	468 (41.3%)
EU	781 (43.4%)	652 (36.2%)
Russian L1	297 (51.6%)	181 (31.4%)
Chinese L1	436 (42.0%)	450 (43.4%)
India	278 (31.0%)	551 (61.4%)

*Table 8: Pronunciation goals reported by different geographical groupings*

#### *Variation across participant age groups*

Multiple Chi-square analyses indicated significant differences between the age of participants, the nationality and L1 of their role models, and their relationship with them. A 5x2 Chi-square analysis confirmed that younger participants were more likely to report role models that were NNSs,  $\chi^2(4, 8349) = 93.40, p < .000$ ; a 5x3 Chi-square analysis confirmed that younger participants were more likely to report on role models that were personally known,  $\chi^2(8, 8349) = 26.07, p < .001$ ; and a 5x2 Chi-square analysis confirmed that younger participants were more likely to report on role models of the same nationality,  $\chi^2(4, 8349) = 87.17, p < .000$ . Although we might have expected the opposite (namely, that younger participants would turn to popular celebrity culture for English language role models), our results suggest the draw of younger learners towards ‘near peer role models’ (we also note that this may be because younger learners, more likely to be still be in formal education, may be more likely to be surrounded by near peers than their older counterparts).

#### *Interim summary*

There is evidence of systematic variation between role model choice and characteristics of the various subgroups. However, to some extent the overall archetypes interfere with this. For

example, even though a same-sex preference in choosing role models was found for virtually all role model types, the absolute figure of male celebrity role models chosen by female respondents was higher than that of female famous role models. Similarly, while we observed a preference for younger respondents to choose personally known NNS role models, here, too, the absolute frequency figure for celebrity NS role models remained higher.

***Research Question 5: What characteristics do participants value in their English language role models?***

In order to investigate the basis on which participants selected their role models, the survey asked respondents to rate 19 potential role model characteristics/features. To assess the underlying factor structure of their evaluations, we submitted their responses to exploratory factor analysis. The data was ideally suited to exploratory factor analysis: the ratio of subjects to items is over 400, and the sample size likewise appropriate (1000 participants or more is considered excellent by Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Maximum likelihood extraction with oblimin rotation produced a four-factor solution (Table 9; see Appendix C for means and standard deviations of each item), which explained 54.1% of the variance. There was only one item that did not load onto a factor at a level of at least .3 (*“Their rate of speech”*), and the factor matrix was likewise clear in the sense that there were no cross-loadings. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant (<.000), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was well above the necessary .6 threshold (.856; see Pallant, 2005). The clarity of the picture presented by the factor matrix offers strong support for the claim that all respondents conceptualised their role models along the following four main dimensions: *overall command of English; paralinguistic features; demographic features; and accent/variety of English.*

	<b>Factor</b>			
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
The size of their vocabulary	.729			
Their ability to explain themselves	.682			
Their spoken fluency	.682			
Their grammatical accuracy	.677			
Their ability to adapt their English for different contexts (at a business meeting, dinner with friends)	.645			
Their written English	.614			
Their confidence when they speak English	.530			
Their reaction when they don't understand/know a word in English	.363			
Their understanding and use of humour (telling jokes)	.344			
How 'natural' they look when they speak English	.305			
Their rate of speech (how fast they talk)				
Their facial expressions (eye contact, smile, etc.)		.852		
Their gestures (how they use their hands and arms when they talk)		.813		
Their personality more generally (if they are friendly, patient or nice, for example)		.321		
Their age			.762	
Their job/profession			.624	
Their nationality			.609	
Their accent				-.730
The type of English they speak (American English, British English, etc.)				-.660

*Table 9: Factor analysis of the role model characteristics in the whole sample (maximum likelihood extraction; oblimin rotation; loadings under .30 deleted)*

To further investigate the claim that these four dimensions were representative of the way in which participants conceptualised their role models, additional exploratory factor analyses were conducted for key subsamples: male and female participants, teachers and students, and each of the five created geographical/mother tongue clusters. For all of these subgroups, a four-factor solution produced factor structures similar to the above, lending further support to this underlying structure. However, quantitative analyses are inevitably

limited by the restricted number of pre-determined items that are included in a questionnaire, and with this in mind participants were invited to list further characteristics that they felt were important in their English language role models. 1,872 participants responded, and after excluding responses that were unclear, too broad or irrelevant, a pool of over 1,600 responses remained.

Thematic analysis identified 29 categories underlying this qualitative dataset. In Appendix D we include the full mapping of these categories onto the four dimensions described above (Table D1). The qualitative data offers a rich illustration of the content of these dimensions, and we include this detailed information here so that it can be drawn upon in future research. The mapping exercise also helped to identify a key aspect of the role models concerning their *personality and appearance* that was not covered by the questionnaire data, for example including attributes such as role models' charisma, general demeanour, personal appearance and integrity/ethics (a full overview of these results and sample data for each category can likewise be found in Appendix D, see Table D2). This can be viewed as complementary to the *demographic factors* emerged from the factor analysis, thereby forming a broader dimension that we have labelled *personal attributes*. We can thus answer the fifth research question by concluding that the role models reported in our study were evaluated by participants according to four broad dimensions: *overall command of English, paralinguistic features, personal attributes* and *accent/variety of English*.

## **Implications and limitations**

### *Theoretical implications*

The findings of this study lend strong support to the claim that role modelling is thoroughly deserving of more systematic and detailed investigation within the field of SLA. The variation identified among geographical groupings highlights the importance of local context, and the interaction of this with the international and transnational networks that students directly engage in, or that they imagine themselves to be a member of. Other theoretical links can be made to the notion of social capital and interesting questions surround, for example, the description of other-sex role models, particularly men describing female role models. There may be little coincidence that over three quarters of the female role models described by men in this study were in positions with influence or high social capital, often their teachers/professors (see Bandura, 1986; Gibson & Cordova, 1999). Investigation of changes in language learners' role models over time is a further key area for future research, both related to learners' increasing proficiency in the L2 (see e.g. Gibson, 2003, for discussion in the context of investment banking and management consulting documenting the changing descriptions of individuals' role models at different stages in participants' careers), and changes stemming from experience and exposure to different networks and communities (Duff, 2015; Kinginger, 2008).

Linked to this, research is also needed to investigate variation in learners' construal of their L2 role models (cf. Trope & Liberman, 2010). For example, in what contexts/situations do learners interact with or imagine their role models, and in what types of communicative encounters? Investigation of the frequency of any form of contact (real or imagined) of learners with their L2 role models is likewise critical. The implications with regards L2

development (or on intermediary variables such as motivation) are clear: if learners have a L2 role model but rarely meet/imagine them, their existence is likely to have little relevance. This might be investigated, for example, in relation to motivation, engagement (Mercer & Dörnyei, in press), discrete aspects of L2 development (see Ushioda, 2016), or learner emotions. The latter is particularly timely considering the recent emphasis in the field of SLA on positive emotions (MacIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer, 2016), and research investigating the types of emotions triggered by L2 role models (both positive and negative) and their varying impact would be an interesting line of inquiry.

### ***Pedagogical implications***

The immediate practical implication of this study implies that teachers might capitalise on the fact that so many of their students may already have L2 role models. For example, they may help students to build links with them, whether in person or – more likely – virtually, via tailored textbook or other classroom resources, through various mediums of technology or via learners’ imaginations. Darvin and Norton’s (2015, 2017) work highlights the shifting technological landscape, and “the capacity of both learners and teachers to move fluidly across both time and space in an increasingly digital world” (2017, p. 227). In fact, a classroom environment that cannot accommodate learners’ role models may lead to significant negative consequences, as underscored by Norton’s (2001, 2013) related research on student non-participation. As Pavlenko and Norton (2007, p. 678) explain, and as may be equally true with regards the recognition and inclusion of language learner role models, “If we do not acknowledge the imagined communities of the learners, we may exacerbate their

non-participation and impact their learning trajectories in negative ways”, leading even to withdrawal from study.

Pavlenko and Norton further highlight Kanno’s (2003) work, emphasising the importance of not only the future visions of learners’ themselves, but also the visions that schools have for their learners, and the impact of this on students’ identity and academic development (see also Darwin & Norton, 2017, for a discussion of the importance of the language learning environment in affording learners opportunities to enact their identity, and to fully invest in the language learning process). This again underlines the importance of adopting a *person-in-context-relational-view* (Ushioda, 2009), and of Ushioda’s call to understand and engage in the classroom all aspects of learners’ transportable identities (2011): to include and acknowledge their visions for the future and the role models they hold dear with regards their L2 goals and aspirations.

As has been discussed in the context of the motivational potential of learners’ ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014), so is it likely that there are a specific set of conditions that must be met before any pedagogical value from L2 role models might be realised. As a starting point, we propose that it is highly likely that many of the conditions identified in relation to the former are equally relevant to the latter. For example, conditions relating to the *perceived plausibility* of reaching competence similar to that of learners’ role models, or understanding *how* they might achieve this (i.e., the existence of a roadmap of relevant plans and strategies). In considering potential pedagogical applications, research investigating this supposition is needed, and also in relation to the varying levels of importance of each condition. In the context of ideal L2 selves there has been little research emphasis on this important question, yet one interesting study has found, for example, that the *frequency* with

which an ideal L2 self is imagined is strongly associated with participants' motivation to attain it (Hessel, 2015).

Finally, we wish to highlight the pedagogical relevance of role models not only to students, but also *teachers*. The large subgroup of data collected from English teachers in this study has clearly provided an initial demonstration of relevance, and pedagogical implications with regards teacher training may stand as a further line of research that could prove to be particularly fruitful. This may link, for example, to the importance of L2 teacher role models in the development of specialised 'craft knowledge' that cannot be learned from textbooks (in the context of medical education see e.g. Perry, 2009, for discussion of the importance of this with regards learning to use silence as an effective communicative tool).

### ***Limitations***

Our study has several limitations, the most serious arguably being that the pervasiveness of the term "role model" in everyday parlance may have overridden the definition given to participants: some participants may have described mentors rather than role models, or have mixed up role models with English speakers they looked up to but whom they did not necessarily try to imitate. Moreover, the number of role models was capped at two, and it is not clear whether participants described current or past role models.

Further limitations pertain to the online questionnaire format. We have not been able to account for participants completing the questionnaire more than once, the likelihood of which may have increased due to the prize-draw offered. This may also have occurred from participants wishing to describe more than the two role models the questionnaire design allowed for. With regards the former, we believe it is unlikely that if some participants did

complete the questionnaire more than once that this will have impacted significantly on the results of this exploratory study, particularly because our analysis focused on identifying broad trends. With regards the latter, we feel participants would have been discouraged from doing this because of the additional information they would have needed to complete in the questionnaire prior to resubmitting. We further acknowledge that we cannot verify that the background information given by the participants was correct.

A final source of limitation concerns the fact that no variables were included that allowed for investigation of the *impact* of these role models on either participants' motivation or other learning behaviours, yet this can be accounted for in the design of this study as an initial exploratory investigation into these issues. Existing research on role models in other disciplines has been criticised for not offering sufficient evidence that the attitudinal influences role models exert are translated into actual attainment, and research has suggested that the primary influences of sex- and race-specific role models might be exerted more broadly and indirectly, for example in the creation of a more inclusive school environment (Carrington & Skelton, 2003). This again highlights clear links between role modelling and notions of identity, investment and of possible selves. In order to usefully utilise the concept of role modelling in SLA, future research must address this directly by including a broad range of criterion measures (both behavioural and attitudinal).

## **Conclusion**

Our research project was motivated by the initial belief that role models play an important part in language learning, an assumption supported by investigations elsewhere in the field of education as well as across other disciplines. We conducted an exploratory study to establish

the main parameters of the subject and to address the fundamental questions of how widespread role models are and what characteristic features people highlight about them. We aimed to present an extensive baseline dataset that can act as a useful reference point and springboard for future work in this area. Based on the results, we have outlined a four-component framework of the underlying structure of role model appraisal – *overall command of English, paralinguistic features, personal attributes* and *accent/variety of English* – and in Appendix D have provided rich qualitative illustrations of the content of each dimension.

We believe that our findings offer sufficient evidence for the importance of L2 role models within the process of mastering an L2, and that our initial findings warrant further, more focused investigations. An important question to be answered by future research is whether role modelling is gradable; that is, are there weaker and stronger role models? Although this issue was not addressed directly in our study, the information we have gathered suggests that role models exert variable influence, and if this indeed turns out to be the case, it may be an interesting research programme to identify correlations between aspects of role models' behaviour and the impact they have on others. Related to this question, Bandura (1977) has suggested that some people are more likely to be susceptible to modelling influences than others, and it may well be the case that there is a dynamic interaction between certain types of role models and recipients. This received indirect evidence from the fact that certain participant subgroups in our study displayed marked preferences for certain role model types. Finally, future research might also examine any possible barriers that stop an individual from considering someone a role model, such as negative stereotypes or clashes with other possible selves (see e.g. Buck et al., 2002). In sum, investigations into the intriguing subject of L2 role modelling are likely to bring forth several, as yet untapped seams to be mined.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Full questionnaire

#### *Introduction*

Hello!

Are you currently studying English as another language? If so, we – here at the University of Nottingham and Cambridge University Press – would like to ask for your help with an exciting new project!

In this project, we're trying to understand more about your *English language role models*. A role model is someone that you respect and that you want to become more like – for example, if you are sportsman/sportswoman, your sporting role models might be Muhammad Ali or Serena Williams. We would like you to think about your *English language role model*: it might be a teacher, a famous actor or singer, a politician, a friend...but it could be anyone who speaks or writes in English!

We would be very grateful if you could please spend a few minutes completing this short questionnaire. To say thank you, we will be offering a £200 Amazon voucher to one lucky participant (we will contact you by 12 March 2017 if you are the winner!)

(If you have any questions about our research or would like to know more, please contact Dr Christine Muir via email at: [christine.muir@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:christine.muir@nottingham.ac.uk))

1. Before beginning, please choose one of the following two options

*I am under 18 [Response: Unfortunately, we are not able to accept questionnaires from anyone under the age of 18. We are very sorry but we are unable to invite you to continue.]*

*I am 18 or over*

**Section 1:**

We would like to begin by asking you to think about your *English language role models*.

Remember, they might be a teacher, a famous actor/singer, a politician, a friend...but it could be anyone who speaks or writes in English!

2. Do you have anyone specific (or maybe more than one person) in mind as your English language role model(s)?

*Yes*

*No [If no, participant routed to the start of Section 2]*

First of all, we would like to ask you to give us some basic information about him/her.

If you are thinking of more than one *English language role model*, that's great! You will be able to tell us about a maximum of 2 *English language role models* (at the end of this page, we will ask you if you would like to do this). Or, if you prefer, you can just choose the one that is most important to you.

Your first *English language role model*:

3. What sex is he/she?

*Male*

*Female*

*Other (e.g. fictional character, animation)*

- 3.a. If you selected 'Other', could you please tell us why?

4. Is he/she a native speaker of English (is English their first language)?

*Yes*

*No*

5. Is he/she the same nationality as you?

*Yes*

*No*

5.a. If they are a different nationality to you, what nationality are they?

6. Is he/she the same age as you?

(I think) they are about the same age as me

(I think) they are older than me

(I think) they are younger than me

7. Does he/she work in a similar job to you (or that you would like to do in the future)?

*Yes*

*No*

*Their job is not relevant to why he/she is my English language role model*

7.a. If you ticked 'No', what job do they do?

7.b. If you ticked 'Their job is not relevant', could you please explain why?

It would be very interested to know who you have been describing.

If he/she is famous, we would be grateful if you could please tell us his/her name and their job (for example, 'Barack Obama - former US president'). If he/she is not famous, it would be very useful if you could please tell us how you know him/her (for example, 'my grandmother' or 'my first English teacher').

Thank you!

8. The person I have been describing is...
9. Before we move on, would you like to tell us about a second English language role model?

*Yes please! [If yes, participants complete the information in Section 1 again –*

*Questions 10-15]*

*No thank you! [If no, participants continue to Section 2]*

### **Section 2:**

We would like to understand more about the characteristics and features that make your *English language role models* so attractive to you.

If you can't think of an *English language role model* or if you don't have one, don't worry, please just tell us what characteristics you think would be important to you in choosing one.

16. How important are each of the following characteristic when you think about an *English language role model*?

	Not important at all	Not very important	So so	Quite important	Very important
The type of English they speak (American English, British English, etc.)					
Their accent					
Their gestures (how they use their hands and arms when they talk)					

Their facial expressions (eye contact, smile, etc.)
Their grammatical accuracy
The size of their vocabulary
Their spoken fluency
Their nationality
Their rate of speech (how fast they talk)
Their written English
Their ability to adapt their English for different contexts (at a business meeting, dinner with friends)
Their ability to explain themselves
Their personality more generally (if they are friendly, patient or nice, for example)
Their reaction when they don't understand/know a word in English
Their confidence when they speak English
Their age
How 'natural' they look when they speak English
Their understanding and use of humour (telling jokes)
Their job/profession

17. Are there any other characteristics you think are important that are not in this list?

Please use this space to add anything you think we have forgotten!

That's great, thank you! To help us understand your answers, next we would like to ask you some general questions about your English learning.

18. Who do you most often use English with? (Tick as many answers as apply to you)

*Friends*

*Family and romantic relationships (for example your wife or boyfriend)*

*Teachers or lecturers*

*Work colleagues*

*Students*

*People you have daily contact with (waiters, shop assistants, etc.)*

*Homestay parents and family*

*Other*

18.a. If you selected 'Other', who else do you often use English with?

19. Where do you most often use English? (Tick as many answers as apply to you)

*At home*

*At school*

*At work*

*Online shopping*

*'Out and about' (shops, cafes, etc.)*

*When I travel to different countries or go on holiday*

*Reading in English (for example books or novels)*

*On social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)*

*In online gaming (World of Warcraft, etc.)*

*Elsewhere on the internet (Google, news websites, etc.)*

*Other*

19.a. If you selected 'Other', where else do you often use English?

20. What variety of English would you like to learn? (Tick as many as apply to you)

It is not important to me, English is English!

American/Canadian English

British English

Australian/New Zealander English

A specific variety of English (Chinese English/Chinglish, Singaporean English/Singlish, etc.)

Other

20.a. If you selected 'Other', please tell us what variety of English you would like to learn:

21. Please choose the option below which is most true for you:

*Sounding like a native speaker is an important goal for me, even though it is difficult to achieve*

*Sounding like a native speaking is an important goal for me, but I don't think I will be able to achieve this*

*Being able to communicate is a more important goal to me than to sound like a native speaker*

*Other*

21.a. If you selected 'Other', could you please explain why?

We would like you to think now about how you might use English in the future (you can tick as many answers as apply to you)

22. Who do you think you will most often use English with...

	...in 2 years	...in 10 years
Friends		
Family and romantic relationships (for example your wife or boyfriend)		
Teachers or lecturers		
Work colleagues		
Students		
People you have daily contact with e.g. waiters, shop assistants, etc.		
Homestay parents and family		
I will definitely not be using English at this time		
I don't know if I will still be using English!		
Other		

22.a. If you selected 'Other', who do you want to add?

23. And, where do you think you will most often be using English...

	...in 2 years	...in 10 years
At home		
At school/university		
At work		
Online shopping		
'Out and about' (in shops, cafes, etc.)		
When I travel to different countries or go on holiday		
Reading in English (for example books or novels)		
On social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)		
In online gaming (World of Warcraft, etc.)		

---

Elsewhere on the internet (Google, news websites, etc.)

---

I will definitely not still be using English at this time

---

I don't know if I will still be using English at this time!

---

Other

---

23.a If you selected 'Other', where do you want to add?

***Section 3:***

Thank you very much! Finally, we just need to ask you a few questions about yourself. These questions are very important so that we can understand your previous answers.

Remember, everything is confidential and anonymous (no one will be able to recognise you from your answers)

24. What country do you call home?

25. What is your first language?

26. How old are you?

*18-21*

*22-29*

*30-39*

*40-49*

*50-59*

*60 and over*

27. What sex are you?

*Male*

*Female*

*Rather not say*

28. What is your profession? (e.g. student, homemaker, volunteer, engineer, etc.)

29. Please tick the statement that is most appropriate to you:

*I am studying English at school*

*I am studying English at university*

*I am studying English on my own*

*I am studying English at a private language school*

*I am studying English on a year abroad*

*I am an English teacher/lecturer*

30. How would you describe your level of English?

*Post-beginner level (I am able to hold simple conversations such as greetings and introducing someone, read simply materials, and write a simply passage in elementary English)*

*Lower intermediate level (I am able to talk about familiar daily topics, read materials about familiar everyday topics, and write simple letters)*

*Intermediate level (I am able to talk about general matters of daily life, read general materials related to daily life, and write simple passages)*

*Upper intermediate level and over (I am able to talk about general matters of daily life and topics of my speciality, grasp the gist of lectures and broadcasts, read high-level material such as newspapers, and write about personal ideas)*

By submitting this questionnaire you agree that your answers, which you have given voluntarily, can be used anonymously for research purposes.

By ticking "Yes" you confirm that: (a) you have understood the purpose of this study, (b) all data are anonymous and that there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data, (c) you understand there are no known risks or hazards associated participating in this study, and (d) you have read and understood the attached Informed Consent and Terms & Conditions. [*Note: the underlined were direct links from which participants could download these documents directly*]

31. Are you happy for us to use your answers?

*Yes, I am happy for you to use my answers*

*No*

32. Thank you! If you would like to enter into the £200 Amazon voucher prize draw, please write your email address in the box below. (We will not use it for any other purpose, and will delete it immediately after the draw takes place). We will contact you by 12 March 2017 if you are the winner!

33. If you would be interested in hearing about the results of this study, please write your email address in the box below:

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire, your answers will be very useful to us.

And, if you entered into the £200 Amazon voucher prize draw, good luck!

**Appendix B. Full overview of salient role model archetypes emerged (see Research Questions 3 & 4)**

FAMOUS ROLE MODELS	Frequency (% of whole sample)	Frequency (% of role model archetype in each subgroup)													
		Male	Female	Teacher	Student	Chinese L1	Russian L1	India	EU	C & S Am.	18-21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50+
<b>Male-NS</b>	<b>2,650</b>	<b>1702</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>2257</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>687</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>220</b>
	<b>32%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>42%</b>
Male-NS-diff nationality	2,582	1652	905	390	2192	221	223	177	658	455	664	745	654	312	207
	31%	38%	23%	30%	31%	25%	40%	20%	38%	37%	28%	28%	34%	35%	39%
Male-NS-diff. nationality-diff. job	1,868	1160	699	290	1578	187	172	110	486	326	458	514	495	247	154
	22%	26%	18%	22%	22%	21%	31%	12%	28%	26%	19%	19%	26%	28%	29%
Male-NS-diff. nationality-same job	461	324	126	63	398	17	32	38	106	94	132	160	96	40	33
	6%	7%	3%	5%	6%	2%	6%	4%	6%	8%	6%	6%	5%	4%	6%
<b>Female-NS</b>	<b>1,193</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>70</b>
	<b>14%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Female-NS-diff nationality	1,163	409	738	188	975	136	82	67	252	217	317	388	258	133	67
	14%	9%	19%	14%	14%	15%	15%	7%	15%	18%	13%	15%	13%	15%	13%
Female-NS-diff. nationality-diff. job	891	331	550	150	741	110	62	48	190	169	218	305	211	103	54
	11%	8%	14%	11%	11%	12%	11%	5%	11%	14%	9%	11%	11%	12%	10%

Female-NS-diff. nationality-same job	153 2%	46 1%	103 3%	28 2%	125 2%	11 1%	11 2%	10 1%	32 2%	34 3%	57 2%	51 2%	23 1%	19 2%	3 <1%
<b>Male-NNS</b>	<b>476</b> <b>6%</b>	<b>341</b> <b>8%</b>	<b>132</b> <b>3%</b>	<b>35</b> <b>3%</b>	<b>441</b> <b>6%</b>	<b>44</b> <b>5%</b>	<b>16</b> <b>3%</b>	<b>140</b> <b>16%</b>	<b>48</b> <b>3%</b>	<b>36</b> <b>3%</b>	<b>145</b> <b>6%</b>	<b>169</b> <b>6%</b>	<b>103</b> <b>5%</b>	<b>36</b> <b>4%</b>	<b>23</b> <b>4%</b>
Male-NNS-diff nationality	160 2%	111 3%	47 1%	13 <1%	147 2%	12 1%	12 2%	12 1%	30 2%	23 2%	60 3%	41 2%	32 2%	16 2%	11 2%
Male-NNS-same nationality	316 4%	230 5%	85 2%	22 2%	294 4%	32 4%	4 <1%	128 14%	18 1%	13 1%	85 4%	128 5%	71 4%	20 2%	12 2%
Male-NNS-same nationality-diff. job	215 3%	157 4%	58 1%	9 <1%	206 3%	20 2%	3 <1%	95 11%	14 <1%	8 <1%	58 2%	90 3%	43 2%	13 1%	11 2%
<b>Female-NNS</b>	<b>213</b> <b>3%</b>	74 2%	136 4%	21 2%	192 3%	27 3%	5 <1%	35 4%	26 2%	28 2%	67 3%	85 3%	33 2%	20 2%	8 2%

Table B1: Salient famous role model archetypes in the whole sample and broken down by key subgroups

PERSONALLY KNOWN ROLE MODELS	Frequency (% in whole sample)	Frequency (% of role model archetype in each subgroup)													
		Male	Female	Teacher	Student	Chinese L1	Russian L1	India	EU	C & S Am.	18-21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50+
<b>Male-NS</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Male-NS-diff nationality	541	271	269	98	443	63	40	15	136	84	122	167	145	70	37
	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	7%	7%	2%	8%	7%	5%	6%	8%	8%	7%
Male-NS-diff. nationality-diff. job	283	138	144	18	265	40	26	8	64	34	80	85	62	33	23
	3%	3%	4%	1%	4%	5%	5%	<1%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Male-NS-diff. nationality-same job	202	110	92	71	131	17	12	4	53	42	31	64	71	27	9
	2%	3%	2%	5%	2%	2%	2%	<1%	3%	3%	1%	2%	4%	3%	2%
<b>Female-NS</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>37</b>
	<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Female-NS-diff nationality	356	133	219	75	281	35	25	8	103	64	90	102	96	34	34
	4%	3%	6%	6%	4%	4%	6%	<1%	6%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	6%
Female-NS-diff. nationality-diff. job	165	69	94	14	151	18	10	4	42	28	45	46	43	17	14
	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	<1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%

Female-NS-diff. nationality-same job	144 2%	49 1%	95 2%	53 4%	91 1%	13 1%	12 2%	2 <1%	45 3%	29 2%	33 1%	43 2%	39 2%	17 2%	12 2%
<b>Male-NNS</b>	<b>946</b> <b>11%</b>	<b>594</b> <b>14%</b>	<b>348</b> <b>9%</b>	<b>159</b> <b>12%</b>	<b>787</b> <b>11%</b>	<b>77</b> <b>9%</b>	<b>33</b> <b>6%</b>	<b>163</b> <b>18%</b>	<b>121</b> <b>7%</b>	<b>130</b> <b>10%</b>	<b>286</b> <b>12%</b>	<b>336</b> <b>13%</b>	<b>191</b> <b>10%</b>	<b>78</b> <b>9%</b>	<b>55</b> <b>10%</b>
Male-NNS-same nationality	836 10%	532 12%	300 8%	143 11%	693 10%	69 8%	23 4%	160 18%	110 6%	119 10%	257 11%	304 11%	157 8%	69 8%	49 9%
Male-NNS-same nationality-diff. job	388 5%	266 6%	121 3%	25 2%	363 5%	28 3%	11 2%	93 10%	41 2%	10 <1%	127 5%	137 5%	71 4%	35 4%	18 3%
Male-NNS-same nationality-same job	380 5%	225 5%	155 4%	114 9%	266 4%	34 4%	11 2%	52 6%	61 4%	73 6%	106 5%	142 5%	78 4%	28 3%	26 5%
<b>Female-NNS</b>	<b>112,7</b> <b>13%</b>	<b>371</b> <b>8%</b>	<b>742</b> <b>19%</b>	<b>239</b> <b>18%</b>	<b>888</b> <b>13%</b>	<b>129</b> <b>15%</b>	<b>77</b> <b>14%</b>	<b>139</b> <b>15%</b>	<b>244</b> <b>14%</b>	<b>133</b> <b>11%</b>	<b>374</b> <b>16%</b>	<b>375</b> <b>14%</b>	<b>244</b> <b>13%</b>	<b>105</b> <b>12%</b>	<b>29</b> <b>6%</b>
Female-NNS-same nationality	1005 12%	322 7%	671 17%	218 16%	787 11%	118 13%	68 12%	133 15%	221 13%	114 9%	341 15%	333 12%	216 11%	94 11%	21 4%
Female-NNS- same nationality- diff. job	422 5%	178 4%	260 7%	26 2%	416 6%	65 7%	20 4%	80 9%	76 4%	28 2%	161 7%	154 6%	81 4%	36 4%	10 2%
Female-NNS- same nationality- same job	521 6%	132 3%	385 10%	188 14%	333 5%	47 5%	45 8%	51 6%	131 8%	85 7%	162 7%	166 6%	129 7%	53 6%	11 2%

Table B2: Salient personally known role model archetypes in the whole sample and broken down by key subgroups

**Appendix C. Descriptive statistics related to the exploratory factor analysis (see Research Question 5)**

Participants rated these items on a five-point Likert scale, answering the question “*How important are each of the following characteristic when you think about an English language role model?*” Response options ranged from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*).

<b>Factor/Item</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<i>Factor 1. Overall command of English</i>	4.15	.63
<i>Factor 2. Paralinguistic features</i>	3.52	1.09
<i>Factor 3. Demographic features</i>	2.26	1.00
<i>Factor 4. Accent/Variety of English</i>	3.69	1.10
The size of their vocabulary	4.34	.91
Their ability to explain themselves	4.43	.86
Their spoken fluency	4.54	.80
Their grammatical accuracy	4.35	.91
Their ability to adapt their English for different contexts (at a business meeting, dinner with friends)	4.16	1.01
Their written English	3.94	1.17
Their confidence when they speak English	4.38	.90
Their reaction when they don't understand/know a word in English	3.57	1.18
Their understanding and use of humour (telling jokes)	3.94	1.05
How ‘natural’ they look when they speak English	3.84	1.17

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Their rate of speech (how fast they talk)	3.57	1.09
Their facial expressions (eye contact, smile, etc.)	3.74	1.15
Their gestures (how they use their hands and arms when they talk)	3.30	1.24
Their personality more generally (if they are friendly, patient or nice, for example)	3.98	1.07
Their age	1.90	1.11
Their job/profession	2.61	1.38
Their nationality	2.27	1.32
Their accent	3.91	1.18
The type of English they speak (American English, British English, etc.)	3.47	1.34

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**Appendix D. Full overview of the qualitative dataset (see Research Question 5)**

		<i>N</i>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Overall command of English (N=664)</b>	Ability to give concisely and clearly explain things or ideas	86	<i>“ability to explain nuances of English language” “ability to make accurate and lively descriptions”</i>
	Clarity of articulation	81	<i>“articulation, not mouthing words” “clarity in speaking of each word is so important”</i>
	General pronunciation, intonation	71	<i>“excellent pronunciation” “their pronunciation not necessarily the accent”</i>
	Fluency, eloquence and (perceived) confidence	60	<i>“confidence and relaxed nature of speech” “freeness of speech”</i>
	Idioms, modernisms, colloquialisms, etc.	49	<i>“using idioms and phrases” “being up to date about casual English”</i>
	Vocabulary	43	<i>“ability to choose the particular word at certain situation” “vocabulary must be vast and must use it in appropriate place”</i>
	Creative use of language	37	<i>“ability to play with words” “capacity to play with the language”</i>
	Listening, comprehension skills	34	<i>“how much they can adapt to different English accent” “ability to listen to and hear other people are crucial”</i>
	Humour, wit	25	<i>“funny and sense of humour” “i would just emphasise the importance of humour skills”</i>
	Good writer	22	<i>“a direct and easy way for transmitting the message in written papers” “ability of writing a fictional work”</i>
	Public speaking	21	<i>“good public speaker” “how professionally they speak in public”</i>

	Register	21	<i>“if they speak in formal or informal way” “able to use formal language”</i>
	Persuasion, negotiation	14	<i>“convincing the sceptical” “persuasive speaker”</i>
	Accuracy	10	<i>“good at grammar” “they both consider using the English language correctly (spoken and written) something extremely important”</i>
	Strategic competence – ability to continue after a fall	6	<i>“ability to solve unexpected problems in speaking” “their reaction when they lost a word in public, that’s really important”</i>
<b>Paralinguistic features (n=98)</b>	Tone-timbre of their voice	74	<i>“how gentle, smoky or warm someone’s voice is” “their voice tone”</i>
	Non-verbal language – body language, mannerisms	14	<i>“their gestures” “their body language”</i>
	Eye contact	10	<i>“looking at listener while speaking” “eye contact”</i>
<b>Demographic factors (n=328)</b>	Basic characteristics (including age, sex, nationality/cultural background, job and marital status)	41	<i>“their career” “the person being single or married”</i>
	Language(s) spoken	82	
	• <i>Multilingual<sup>1</sup></i>	31	<i>“knowledge of a second language” “bilingual or even multilingual abilities”</i>
	• <i>Native English speaker<sup>1</sup></i>	6	<i>“English native speakers” “if they are original and speak with some dialect”</i>
	• <i>Non-native English speaker<sup>1</sup></i>	45	<i>“for me it is very important that it is not native language nevertheless the speaker is completely fluent” “being fine with not ‘passing as’ a native English speaker all of the time”</i>
	Education & social capital	205	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cultural knowledge</i></li> </ul>	33	<i>“cultural awareness during communication” “knowledge of the target culture”</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>‘Smart’, knowledgeable, good academic qualifications</i></li> </ul>	127	<i>“educational back ground and how many research paper he has written” “intelligence”</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Influential, successful</i></li> </ul>	45	<i>“how well what they say impacts” “social status”</i>
<b>English type/variety (n=20)</b>	Specific accent, variety or dialect	20	<i>“British accent” “cockney accent”</i>

*Table D1: Role model characteristics identified by participants*

<sup>1</sup> *These three categories all fall within the broader ‘Language(s) spoken’ category. We have further broken this down to reflect the different ways in which participants stressed the importance of this factor to their experiences. For example, in responses coded as ‘multilingual’ participants stressed the fact their role models could speak multiple languages, for responses coded as ‘non-native English speaker’ participants foregrounded a focus on their role model’s status as L2 English speakers. Such specific breakdowns may not be warranted in future research.*

	<i>N</i>	<b>Example</b>
General demeanour (friendly, kind, polite)	130	<i>“being modest, considerate, helpful and generous” “absolutely fantastic people”</i>
Approach to communicating with NNSs	108	<i>“does not discriminate a non-English speaking person” “how they perceive and interact with people who are not fluently at speaking English”</i>
Personal integrity, ethics	77	<i>“adherence to moral standards” “character, honesty and conviction”</i>
Motivational, inspirational	64	<i>“ability to inspire” “inspiration, motivational”</i>
Physical appearance	62	<i>“appearance-beautiful/not very” “dressing and comportment. neatness”</i>
Engaging, interesting (subjective personal connection, e.g. through hobbies)	53	<i>“interesting topics, their point of view of life/relationship/family” “how interesting when they speak”</i>
Charismatic	46	<i>“gotta have charisma” “how cool he acted”</i>
Willingness to share knowledge and help others	40	<i>“their ability to impart the knowledge to others” “ready to help others to get better in English”</i>
Willingness to learn, openness to new ideas	36	<i>“attitude about learning, showing an eagerness about expanding capabilities” “if they are open-minded”</i>
Love of English	24	<i>“love about English (and other languages as well)” “surely, the passion for the English language itself”</i>
Other	203	<i>e.g. “often they show up in public or how often I can see them” “an obvious advantage which English skills brought to her\his life” “health status”</i>

*Table D2: Additional role model characteristics related to personality and appearance*