Language Attitudes

The Effect of Language Proficiency and Target Accent

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that a listener creates an image of a speaker based on their accent (Jenkins, 2007, Bayard et al., 2001). These so-called language attitudes are based on notions of standardness and non-standardness, as well as stereotypes, and can influence relationships and communication. According to previous research, the language attitudes towards different accents may be influenced by the language proficiency of a listener, as well as their target accent. The current study focuses on the language attitudes of listeners whose native language is Dutch, towards different English accents, and answers the question whether these language attitudes are dependent on the English proficiency, as well as the English target accent of the listeners. This is done by means of an online survey containing audio files and attitude-related questions, as well as questions about English proficiency and target accent. The study concludes that, even though some trends can be seen in the overall language attitudes, the language attitudes are not dependent on the English proficiency or target accent of the listeners. The results of the current study provides perspectives for the field of language attitude research, and give suggestions for future research.

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1. Introduction

Previous research has shown that the accent of a speaker has a large influence on the image a listener creates of a speaker (Jenkins, 2007). Bayard et al. (2001) show that a listener makes assumptions about a speaker's personality, about their age, ethnicity, educational level, income, occupation, and social class, all based on their accent. This shows that the way a person speaks has a large impact on how a listener views a speaker. These so-called language attitudes influence the relationship between a speaker and a listener, and may impact communication. In order to diminish the impact of language attitudes, listeners need to be aware of the attitudes they have. In order to do this, the language attitudes of listeners need to be studied. The current study focuses on the language attitudes of native speakers of Dutch, towards different English accents, and answers whether these language attitudes are dependent on the English proficiency of the participants as well as their target accent.

2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter an overview will be given of previous studies in language attitude research, in order to demonstrate the relevance and importance as well as the purpose of the current study. The chapter also defines some relevant concepts.

Over the years, the English language has become increasingly important in communication internationally. Not only is English used by native speakers of the language, it is also used by second language speakers, and foreign language speakers of English. In World Englishes research, the so-called Three Circles Model (Kachru, 1985) makes a distinction between different speakers of English, by introducing three concentric circles representing the function of English across countries and linguistic domains. Kachru (1985) introduces these circles as the inner circle, the outer, or extended, circle, and the expanding circle. Within the inner circle, English is used in the most traditional context, where it is the primary language of the country, and the native language of the majority of the inhabitants (Kachru, 1985). In the outer, or extended, circle, the English language has become important through a process of colonisation. In the countries of the outer circle, English is a part of the linguistic and cultural history, and has been institutionalised. In these countries, for example Nigeria, Singapore, or India, English is one of more official languages (Kachru, 1985). The third circle, the expanding circle, consists of countries that do not have a history of colonisation, but in which English is used as an international language, and is spoken by a vast number of inhabitants. The use of English in these countries has resulted in numerous different varieties of English as a foreign language (Kachru, 1985).

According to Kachru (1985), these three circles are linked to three normative functions. The first circle, the inner circle, is norm-providing. This means that the varieties of English that are spoken within this circle, are traditionally seen as the model varieties of English, since they are used by native speakers. The second circle, the outer or extended circle, is norm-developing. These regions are both endonormative as well as exonormative, meaning that they create their own norms, as well as depend on the norms provided by the inner circle. Lastly, the expanding circle is norm-dependent and exonormative, meaning that they are fully dependent on the norms of the inner circle, and use the inner circle varieties as models (Kachru, 1985). Since the role of English within the outer circle and expanding circle countries changes continuously, a clear distinction between these two circles cannot be made. In addition, the English language is also used as a lingua franca by speakers of different native languages: it is used as an international common language by speakers who do not

speak each other's native language. The different contexts in which English is used as well as the different varieties of English that have emerged over time have caused different standards and norms for the use of English. Some second language speakers of English are exonormative, and strive for a native-like English accent, whereas others are endonormative, and prefer to use their own, 'local', variety of English.

The different varieties of English are also known as dialects and accents. A dialect is a way of speaking that is specific to a region. Dialects are part of a language, and differ in terms of lexicon, syntax and pronunciation. An accent is, similarly to a dialect, part of a language, but only concerns the pronunciation of a speaker (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). The accent a person speaks with, is their individual version of a dialect, and identifies them as belonging to a particular group of people (Bauer, 2002). The group of people that use a distinctive accent may be based on regional, national or cultural identity, as well as age, social class, or ethnicity (Beinhoff, 2013). The accent of a speaker of a second language is also influenced by their native language. The current study will include three different English accents: Standard General American English, an American English accent that is not typically Northern, Southern, or Eastern, but relatively neutral; Standard Southern British English, or what used to be known as Received Pronunciation; Dutch English, a variety of English spoken by native speakers of Dutch.

Accents are not only used by speakers to signal belonging to a certain group of people, but are also used by listeners to recognise which group a speaker belongs to, and to create an image of the speaker. Accents are thus used to signal social identity and to distinguish groups of people from each other (Beinhoff, 2013). The evaluations that a listener makes based on the accent of the speaker are called language attitudes.

An important concept within the field of language attitudes is the notion of standardness and non-standardness. The standard variety of a language is the variety that has been codified and institutionalised, and often symbolises an identity, whether social, ethnic, or religious (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Even though some regional variation might be present within the standard variety, social variation is less acceptable. The standard accent has a close connection to education, which goes both ways. The standard accent is the accent that is used by the most educated people, and those people are considered to be educated because they use the standard accent (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). The standard accent is also the most powerful accent. Because of its history, it is resistant to change, and intertwined with economic, political, and cultural aspects of its region. It is also an accent that gives prestige to its speakers, causing a division between speakers that use the standard accent and

those who do not. This also causes the standard accent to become the idealised norm for native speakers who use a non-standard accent, and second language speakers (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Contrary to the standard variety of a language, a non-standard variety of a language is the variety that differs from the norm. It is the less prestigious accent, that has not been institutionalised.

Language attitudes are highly dependent on the notion of standardness and non-standardness. Because language attitudes are dependent on social norms, they are closely linked with how standard the accent of a speaker is. Since the standard accent of a language has the most prestige, the attitudes towards this accent will be better than the attitudes towards an accent that is further away from the standard. For example, pronouncing a word that ends in -ing as either [ɪn] or [ɪŋ] has a big impact on the amount of respect that is assigned to the speaker. In the case of this example, a speaker pronouncing an -ing ending as [ɪn], as in 'runnin', would generally be given less respect than a speaker pronouncing 'running' with [ɪŋ], since the former pronunciation is less standard (Jenkins, 2007). This shows that the amount of prestige that is assigned to the standard accent will influence the attitudes that a listener has towards a speaker using that accent.

Another concept that is closely connected to standardness and non-standardness is the concept of stereotyping. Accents are closely related to social identity, and signal to a listener which social group a speaker belongs to. When it is clear to a listener that a speaker is part of a certain social group, he or she assigns all the characteristics of that social group to the individual speaker. In order to distinguish themselves from the speaker if the listener is not part of the same social group, the listener will exaggerate the differences between the characteristics of the social groups of the listener, and his or her own social group. When the listener is however part of the same social group as the speaker, he or she will minimise the differences between the speaker and him or herself. This process of stereotyping takes place in the mind of the listener during perception, and causes all members of a certain social group to be assigned the same characteristics (Beinhoff, 2013). Accents are related to social norms and social groups, they are perceived as standard or non-standard by listeners, and based on this, they are associated with certain stereotypes that should be applicable to all speakers of that accent. To follow the example of Jenkins (2007), the pronunciation of an -ing ending as [ɪn], as in runnin', is a characteristic of a non-standard accent, is less prestigious, and is therefore associated with stereotypes like less educated, or is assigned less respect.

These findings show that the accent of a speaker has a large influence on the image a listener creates of this speaker. Since this image is based on standardness and non-

standardness, and the stereotypes associated with the social group the speaker belongs to, the image often differs from the true personality of the speaker. This may lead to unrealistic attitudes towards the speaker, and cause prejudice. This can in turn impact social or work-related relationships, and can influence communication. In order to minimise the impact of these language attitudes on the relationship and communication between speaker and listener, the listener needs to be aware of their attitudes about the speaker. In order for listeners to be aware of these attitudes, they first need to be studied, to see which language attitudes are present, and how they are linked to the listener themselves. The current study explores the language attitudes towards different English accents, being Standard General American English, Standard Southern British English, and Dutch English.

Regarding native-speaker accents of English, earlier research shows that standard accents are preferred to non-standard accents (Jenkins, 2007, p. 33). Some of the earlier research into language attitudes also suggests that in general, a British English accent is preferred above any other native-speaker accent (Jenkins, 2007, p.79). This is also supported by more recent studies like that of Pilus (2013), which concludes that Malay L2 speakers of English showed an overall preference for British English. Other studies however, like that of Bayard et al. (2001) show that speakers of Australian English, New Zealand English and American English all evaluated American English as the most favourable. These findings show that, even though listeners have an overall preference for standard accents, L2 speakers of English may show different preferences than L1 speakers of English, and there is no clear overall preference for one specific native-speaker accent.

Previous research has not only focussed on attitudes towards different native accents but also towards non-native accents. For example, Van den Doel (2006), as well as Hendriks et al. (2017) and Nejjari et al. (2012) studied the effect of the degree of Dutch-accentedness on English listeners' attitudes. The latter two conclude that speakers with a strong Dutch accent were evaluated as less competent than speakers with a native accent or a weak Dutch accent. These findings show that native speakers of English prefer more native-like accents to a very distinctively non-native Dutch accent. The attitudes of Dutch L2 speakers of English towards different English accents, in comparison with Dutch English, however, need to be studied further.

Within the Netherlands, English is a prominent and important language. Edwards (2016) shows that among the Dutch population, English is seen as a useful and attractive language, and that it is not seen as a threat to the Dutch language. Even though the most popular target accent among Dutch L2 speakers is British English, only 37 percent of people

also use that variety when speaking English. The most often used English accent within the Netherlands is Dutch English, which more than a quarter of the speakers use (Edwards, 2016). Even though the target accent within the Netherlands is in general British English (Edwards, 2016), both American English and the local model Dutch English are also present as target accents. The results of the study by Edwards (2016) show clear patterns in the attitudes of Dutch speakers of L2 English towards English in general. A difference could be seen between younger participants, who had more positive attitudes, and older participants, who had more negative attitudes. She furthermore found that participants under the age of 25 had more negative attitudes, which they suggest could be linked to the developing English proficiency of these participants. Edwards (2016) also shows that participants who encountered a large amount of English during their higher education were more likely to choose a native English accent as their target accent, as well as their performance accent, and that they had more positive attitudes towards native English accents than towards Dutch English. The opposite was also found: people who were less confident or educated in English were more likely to accept the local variety of Dutch English. These findings show a correlation between the English proficiency of a listener and their language attitudes. Both the education the participant has received, as well as the confidence they have in using English, have an effect on the way they perceive English. These findings also suggest a correlation between target accent and language attitudes, since the preferred target accent, British English, was also the most positively evaluated accent. Other research, like that of Scales et al. (2006) supports these findings, by showing that there are correlations between the accent that speakers find easiest to understand, the target accent of speakers, and the preferred accent of speakers.

That there is a relationship between language proficiency and language attitudes has been shown in other studies. Dragojevic & Giles (2016), for example, show that, apart from the influence of stereotypes, language attitudes are also influenced by the processing fluency of the listener. This is the difficulty the listener has with processing the speech of a speaker of a particular accent. A slow processing fluency may be caused by the quality of the audio, white noise, or how clear a person speaks, but also by the accent the speaker uses. Dragojevic & Giles (2016) conclude that the harder a speaker is to understand, the more negative the attitudes of the listener will be. In other words, they suggest that the reason why foreign-accented speakers are evaluated more negatively, might simply be because they are harder to understand. This links to the findings of Edwards (2016) as well as Scales et al. (2006), that suggest that the language proficiency of a listener influences their language attitudes. The

higher the proficiency of the listener is, the easier it is for them to process the speech of a native speaker, the higher their language attitudes towards the speaker will be.

Overall, the findings of previous research suggest that the English proficiency and the target accent of speakers may influence the language attitudes they have towards different native or non-native English accents. The current study will focus on the language attitudes of Dutch L2 speakers of English towards different English accents, and will try to relate those attitudes to the English proficiency as well as the target accent of the listeners.

3. Research Question and Hypothesis

3.1 Research question

Even though language attitudes, and specifically attitudes towards English accents, have been studied before, the correlation between language attitudes towards specific accents, language proficiency, and target accent has not been studied extensively before.

The current research focuses on the attitudes of native speakers of Dutch who speak English as their second language, towards different native English accents, and towards the non-native English accent Dutch English. It furthermore aims to link these attitudes to the English proficiency and the target accent of the participants. The research question the current study tries to answer is: What are the attitudes of Dutch L2 speakers of English towards different native English accents, and towards Dutch English, are these attitudes dependent on the English proficiency of the listener, and are these attitudes dependent on the English target accent of the listener?

3.2 Hypothesis

Based on previous literature, the first hypothesis is that Dutch L2 speakers of English will have an overall preference for the native English accents, over the Dutch English accent. This is based on the findings of Edwards (2016), but also on the findings of Van den Doel & Walpot (2021) who conclude that non-native speakers of English evaluate the speakers that have the same first language as themselves, more negatively. Based on Edwards (2016), Scales et al. (2006) and Dragojevic & Giles (2016), it is expected that both English proficiency and target accent will influence the attitudes of the participants. It is expected that the higher the English proficiency of the speaker is, the more positive attitudes this speaker will have towards the native English accents. Lastly, it is hypothesised that listeners will have more positive attitudes towards the accent that is their own target accent, than towards other accents.

4. Methodology

Dutch L2 speakers of English evaluated American and British English, as well as Dutch English, using the Verbal Guise Technique. This technique is a commonly used method for studying language attitudes. Using this technique means that the participants are asked to evaluate different speakers based on audio fragments. Even though the participants are led to believe that they will be evaluating people, they are in fact judging the speaker based on linguistic cues, and thereby evaluating the accent that is used by the speaker (Jenkins, 2007). Instead of using the voice of one speaker under different guises, like in the Matched Guise Technique, the audio fragments for the current study were provided by authentic speakers of each accent.

4.1 Materials

The audio fragments were collected from the Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger, 2015). The audio fragments were selected based on the English accent of the speakers. Speaker sex was kept constant, and speaker age as constant as possible, to make sure that evaluations were made based on the accent itself instead of based on the sex or age of the speaker. For the native English accents, speakers with a standard accent, either Standard General American English or Standard Southern British English, were selected. The speakers of these accents were first of all selected based on their region of origin, which was the region that was most closely associated with the accents. They were also selected based on the phonological characteristics of the accent of the speakers, which were as standard and non-regional as possible. For Dutch English, the audio fragments were selected based on the sex and age of the speaker, as well as the age of onset of their English language acquisition, their residence in an English-speaking country, and the setting of their language acquisition. All these characteristics of the different speakers were kept as similar as possible. For each accent two different audio fragments were used in the survey, to minimise any attitudes based on the voice or intelligibility of a speaker, or the quality of the audio. The different audio fragments of the same accent were selected in such a way that all speakers originated from the same region within the country, so regional differences were kept to minimum. This way, if any large differences between the audio fragments of one accent were present in the results, it could be assumed that voice quality or other characteristics, rather than the accent, had an influence on the results. The audio fragments were furthermore checked beforehand, to ensure intelligibility and similarity between the audio fragments of one accent.

4.2 Participants

The participants were all native speakers of Dutch and second language speakers of English. The participants were approached personally, through social media or through email invitations. The current study consisted of 29 participants, of which 16 were male, and 13 were female. The participants were between the ages of 17 and 81, with a mean age of 31 years old.

4.3 Instrumentation

The data were gathered trough an online questionnaire containing audio fragments of different English accents, and attitude related questions. The participants first heard an audio fragment, after which they were asked to answer the attitude related questions about that speaker, before moving on to the next audio fragment. The questionnaire was created using Qualtrics (2021). The questions regarding attitudes were divided into three categories; STATUS, COMPETENCE, and AFFECT, following Hendriks et al. (2017). The construct of STATUS contained the items *controlling, authoritative, dominant, assertive, self-assured*, and *a strong voice*. The construct of COMPETENCE contained the items *reliable, intelligent, competent, hardworking, ambitious*, and *an educated voice*. The construct of AFFECT contained the items *cheerful, friendly, warm,* and *humorous*. Each question was presented as follows: ''in my opinion this person is/has'', after which a 6-point Likert scale was presented ranging from ''totally disagree'' (1) to ''totally agree'' (6).

The attitude related questions were followed by questions about the English proficiency of the participants. These questions were about the English education of the participant, the use of English in day-to-day life, and included a self-evaluation of different English language skills. The participants were asked to rate their own language skills on a scale from ''very low'' (1) to ''very high'' (10). These skills were writing skills, reading skills, speaking skills, listening skills, and total English language skills.

In addition to these questions about English proficiency, the participants also answered questions on whether they consciously have a target accent, and if so, which accent that is. The full survey can be found in Appendix 1.

After having gathered the data, they were analysed using the programme SPSS. The answers for the different items within each construct were combined into a total attitude score for each construct. Since all statements were phrased positively, the lowest value (1) always meant ''totally disagree'', and the highest value (6) always meant ''totally agree'', and no

results needed to be converted. By combining the answers to the different items within each construct into a total score, each participant received an overall language attitude score per construct, from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). These scores showed how high or low a participant scored a speaker. The self-evaluation questions regarding English proficiency were also combined into a total score between 1 (very low) to 10 (very high). The questions about English language use and education were assigned a score from 1 (*almost never / never*, and *primary education*, respectively) to 5 (*daily*, and *higher education: specific courses about the English language*, respectively). The question about the presence of a target accent was given a score of 1 (yes) or 2 (no). The question regarding which target accent the participants use was given a score of 1 (American English), 2 (British English), 3 (Dutch English), or 4 (other).

5. Results

The data that were gathered through the online survey were exported to SPSS to be analysed. The incomplete answers were removed from the dataset, as well as one answer from a participant whose native language was not Dutch. In order to further analyse the data, mean total scores were calculated for some of the survey questions.

First of all, the attitude-related questions were analysed and combined into a total attitude score per attitude construct for each audio fragment. In order to make sure the attitude questions for each construct (STATUS, COMPETENCE and AFFECT) measured the same construct, reliability analyses were done for the questions within each attitude category, separated by audio fragments. These reliability analyses show that the Cronbach's Alpha was high for each attitude construct and each audio fragment (see Table 1).

Table 1:

Reliability analysis of items per construct per audio fragment (Cronbach's Alpha).

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	.868	.831	.804
American 2	.923	.875	.910
British 1	.897	.825	.857
British 2	.905	.918	.933
Dutch 1	.945	.911	.914
Dutch 2	.934	.903	.903

Even though some results showed that the Cronbach's Alpha would have been higher if one of the items was removed, the effect of removing one out of 4 or 6 questions was at most an increase of .03, and the Cronbach's Alpha was high already, so it was decided not to remove any questions from the further analyses. Since the positive outcome of the reliability analyses showed that the questions within each category measured the same construct, the results of the separate questions within each category were combined into a total attitude score per construct per audio fragment (see Table 2).

Table 2:

Means (and Standard Deviations) on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree) for each attitude construct per audio fragment (N = 29).

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	2.86 (1.01)	3.37 (0.84)	2.52 (0.86)
American 2	3.38 (0.98)	3.60 (0.79)	3.21 (0.96)
British 1	3.43 (0.94)	3.79 (0.78)	3.51 (1.00)
British 2	3.77 (1.07)	3.94 (0.90)	3.34 (1.19)
Dutch 1	3.05 (1.22)	3.28 (1.08)	3.16 (1.18)
Dutch 2	3.61 (1.18)	3.67 (1.00)	3.33 (1.24)

After creating a total score per construct for each audio fragment, reliability analyses were done in order to see whether the score of the two audio fragments per accent could be combined into a total score per accent. These reliability analyses however show that the Cronbach's Alpha was low for almost all constructs and audio fragments (see Table 3).

Table 3:

Reliability analysis of categories per accent (Cronbach's Alpha).

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1 and 2	.533	.554	.636
British 1 and 2	.598	.750	.413
Dutch 1 and 2	.587	.763	.575

This shows that the same categories for the two different audio fragments did not measure the same construct, and that significant differences were present between the scores of the first and the second audio fragment for each accent. Since the reliability analyses showed a low Cronbach's Alpha for all but two constructs, it was not possible to combine all the construct scores for every two audio fragments of the same accent into a total construct score per accent. For this reason, in the further analyses, results will be analysed, as well as presented, per audio fragment, and not per accent.

Other than the attitude-related questions, the scores for the English proficiency of the participants were also combined into a total proficiency score. A reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach's Alpha for the self-evaluation questions was high ($\alpha = .969$). This shows

that the different self-evaluation questions all measured the same construct of language proficiency. Based on this reliability analysis the results for the self-evaluation questions were combined into a total self-evaluation score on a scale from 1 (very low) to 10 (very high).

In order to answer the research question, the analysis of the results will be split into separate topics. Firstly, the language attitudes of the listeners will be analysed. These results will show whether the listeners have an overall preference for a certain accent as well as whether this preference differs per attitude construct. Secondly, the results will discuss whether the language attitudes are dependent on the English proficiency of the listener, and lastly, whether the language attitudes are dependent on the English target accent of the listener.

5.1 Language attitudes per construct

Figures 1, 2, and 3, show boxplots of the attitude scores per audio fragment for each of the attitude constructs. Figure 1 shows that both the second British speaker and the second Dutch speaker were assigned the highest STATUS by the participants. The first American speaker however scored the lowest on the construct of STATUS. The first Dutch speaker received the most variable scores from the participants, with answers ranging from 1 to 5.5.

Figure 1:

Boxplot of attitude scores for the construct 'STATUS', divided by audio fragment.
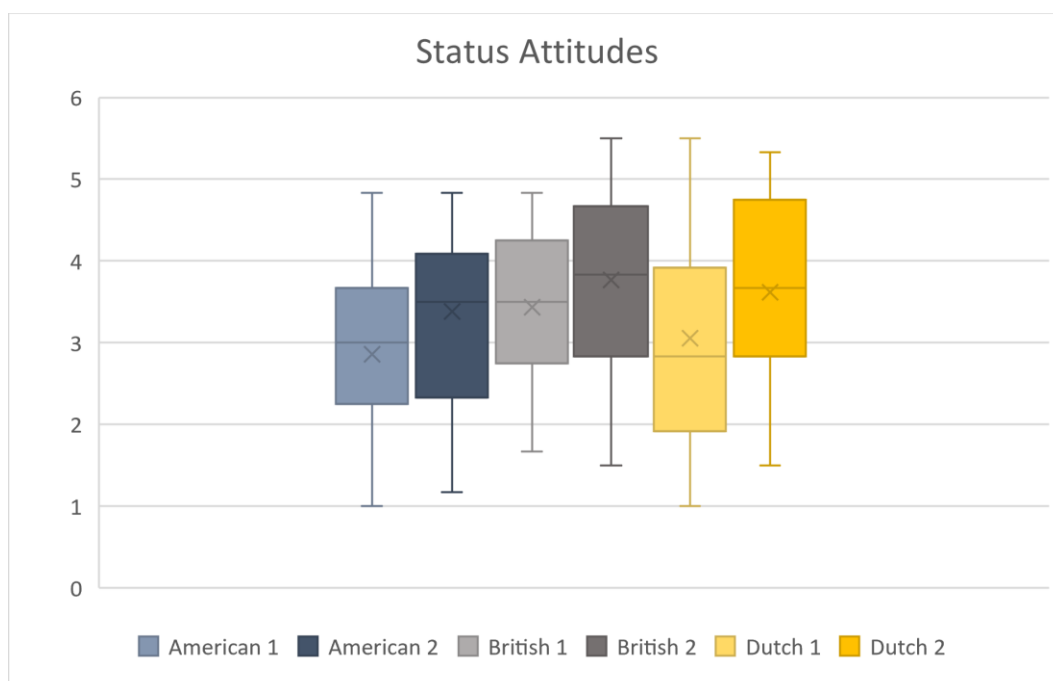
Figure 2 shows that for the construct of COMPETENCE, little to no differences are visible between the attitudes of the participants towards the different audio fragments. The results however seem to show that overall, the highest scores were given to the speakers of the British accent, whereas the lowest score was given to the second Dutch speaker.

Figure 2:

Boxplot of attitude scores for the construct 'COMPETENCE', divided by audio fragment.
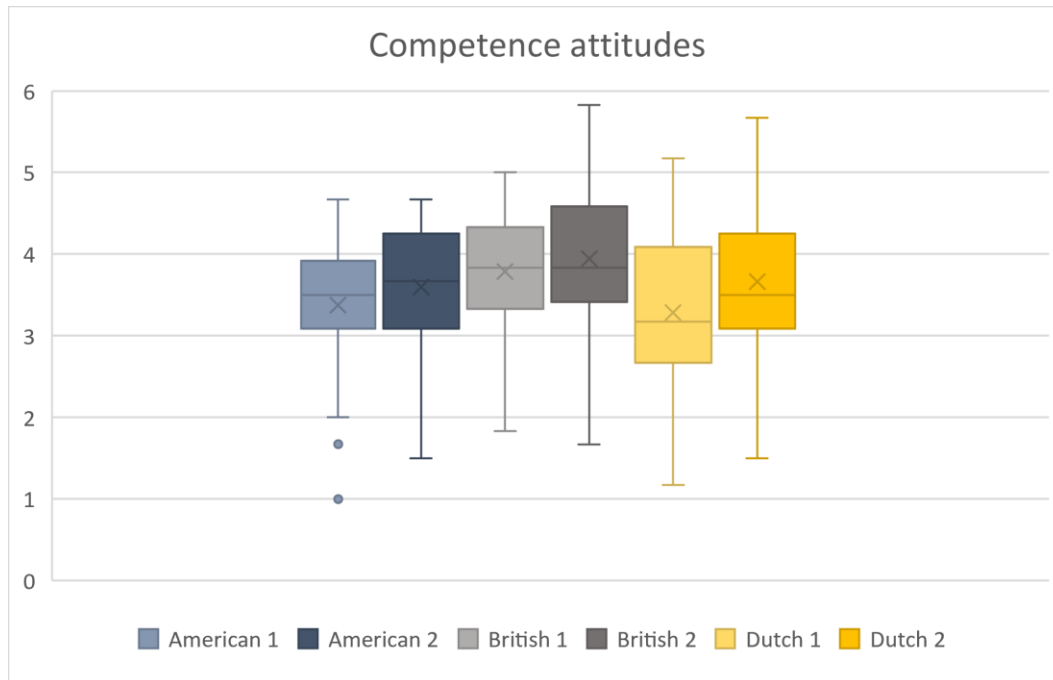

Figure 3 shows that for the construct of AFFECT the first British speaker was given the highest score, and the first American speaker was given the lowest score. Within the scores given to second British speaker, as well as the first Dutch speaker, a lot of variation is visible, with answers ranging from 1 to 6 for the former, and with a lot of variation around the median for the latter.

Figure 3:

Boxplot of attitude scores for the construct 'AFFECT', divided by audio fragment.
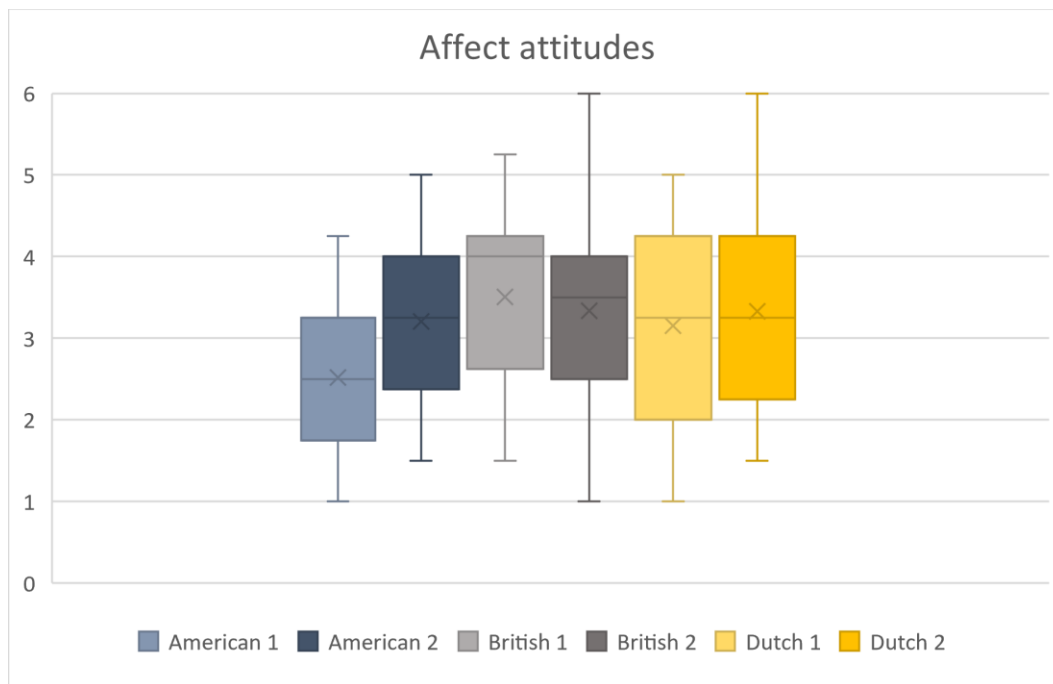
Overall, the results of the attitude questions show no clear preferences for one speaker or accent. Even though the results for the different attitude constructs show that there are differences in the scores that were given to the different speakers, these differences are not clearly significant. The results however do seem to show that overall, the first American speaker received the lowest scores. The results also show that the scores that were given to the two separate speakers of one accent contain a lot of variation. Overall, the differences between the two speakers of one accent outweighed the differences between the speakers of the different accents, which is why no overall preference for one specific accent can be seen.

5.2 English proficiency

As for the question whether the language attitudes are dependent on the English proficiency of the listeners, the results show that the participants had a mean total English language proficiency score of 7.04, with a standard deviation of 1.87. In order to analyse the dependence of the attitude scores on the English proficiency of the participants, the total proficiency score of the participants was split into two different categories, being a low proficiency (a score between 0 and 5.5), and a high proficiency (a score between 5.5 and 10). An independent samples t-test showed that none of the attitude scores were dependent on the English proficiency of the participants (see table 4). This means that the attitude scores that

were given by the participants were not dependent on whether they had a high or a low English proficiency.

Table 4:

Independent samples t-test results for the effect of English proficiency on attitude scores.

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	(t (27) = -.58, p = .57)	(t (27) = -.57, p = .57)	(t (27) = .82, p = .42)
American 2	(t (27) = .59, p = .56)	(t (27) =.91, p = .37)	(t (27) = .92, p = .37)
British 1	(t (27) = 1.49, p = .15)	(t (27) = -.19, p = .85)	(t (27) = -.03, p = .98)
British 2	(t (27) = .31, p = .76)	(t (27) = .35, p = .73)	(t (27) = .60, p = .56)
Dutch 1	(t (27) = .58, p = .57)	(t (27) = .74, p = .47)	(t (27) = -.15, p = .88)
Dutch 2	(t (27) = -.23, p = .82)	(t (27) = .24, p = .83)	(t (27) = 1.16, p = .26)

The participants on average started learning English at the age of 9.55, with a standard deviation of 3. In order to analyse the influence of the age of acquisition of the English language of the participants on the attitudes scores, the ages were divided into three categories: 3 to 7 years old (N=7), 7 to 11 years old (N=13), and 11 to 15 years old (N=9). A one-way Anova showed that the majority of attitude scores were not dependent on the age of acquisition of the participants (see table 5). There was a statistically significant effect of age of acquisition on the attitude scores for the second British speaker for the AFFECT construct ($F_{(2, 26)} = 5.0$, p = .02). A post-hoc Tukey test showed that the attitude scores of the participants with an age of acquisition between 3 and 7 years old (2.86 ± 0.78, $p = .04$) and those with an age of acquisition between 7 and 11 years old (2.96 ± 1.17, $p = .02$), were lower than the attitude score of the participants with an age of acquisition between 11 and 15 years old (4.25 ± 1.03). There was no difference between the attitude scores of the participants with an age of acquisition between 3 and 7 years old and those with an age of acquisition between 7 and 11 years old ($p = .98$).

Table 5:

One-way Anova results for the effect of age of acquisition on attitude scores.

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	$(F (2, 26) = .05, p = .96)$	$(F (2, 26) = .16, p = .85)$	$(F (2, 26) = .80, p = .46)$
American 2	$(F (2, 26) = 1.81, p = .18)$	$(F (2, 26) = .01, p = .99)$	$(F (2, 26) = .10, p = .91)$
British 1	$(F (2, 26) = .20, p = .82)$	$(F (2, 26) = .16, p = .85)$	$(F (2, 26) = .99, p = .38)$
British 2	$(F (2, 26) = .46, p = .64)$	$(F (2, 26) = 1.54, p = .23)$	$(F (2, 26) = 5.0, p = .02)$
Dutch 1	$(F (2, 26) = 1.12, p = .34)$	$(F (2, 26) = 3.25, p = .06)$	$(F (2, 26) = 1.83, p = .18)$
Dutch 2	$(F (2, 26) = .11, p = .90)$	$(F (2, 26) = .27, p = .77)$	$(F (2, 26) = 1.13, p = .34)$

As for the context in which the participants mostly learnt English, the results show that 79.3% of the participants learnt English in an academic context, and 20.7% in a naturalistic context (see table 6).

Table 6:

Means (and Standard Deviations) on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree) for each attitude construct, split by learning context (N = 29).

	STATUS		COMPETENCE		AFFECT	
	Naturalistic (N=23)	Academic (N=6)	Naturalistic (N=23)	Academic (N=6)	Naturalistic (N=23)	Academic (N=6)
American 1	3.17 (1.45)	2.78 (0.90)	3.56 (0.68)	3.33 (0.88)	2.17 (0.86)	2.61 (0.86)
American 2	3.03 (1.43)	3.47 (0.85)	3.08 (1.06)	3.73 (0.67)	3.38 (1.08)	3.16 (0.95)
British 1	3.36 (0.94)	3.45 (0.99)	3.97 (0.25)	3.74 (0.87)	3.25 (0.61)	3.58 (1.08)
British 2	4.08 (0.74)	3.69 (1.14)	4.03 (0.44)	3.92 (1.00)	2.79 (0.94)	3.48 (1.22)
Dutch 1	2.42 (1.08)	3.22 (1.22)	2.83 (1.15)	3.40 (1.06)	2.83 (1.45)	3.24 (1.12)
Dutch 2	3.89 (1.44)	3.54 (1.12)	3.53 (0.49)	3.70 (1.10)	2.88 (0.72)	3.45 (1.33)

An independent samples t-test showed that the language attitudes are not dependent on the context of acquisition of English (see table 7). The results, however, seem to show that, generally, for the construct of AFFECT, the participants who learnt English in an academic context scored the speakers higher.

Table 7:

Independent samples t-test results for the effect of learning context on attitude scores.

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	(t (27) = .82, p = .42)	(t (27) = .59, p = .56)	(t (27) = -1.13, p = .27)
American 2	(t (27) = -.99, p = .33)	(t (27) = -1.87, p = .07)	(t (27) = .47, p = .64)
British 1	(t (27) = -.20, p = .84)	(t (27) = .65, p = .53)	(t (27) = -.70, p = .49)
British 2	(t (27) = .80, p = .43)	(t (27) = .25, p = .80)	(t (27) = -1.28, p = .21)
Dutch 1	(t (27) = -1.46, p = .16)	(t (27) = -1.15, p = .26)	(t (27) = -.74, p = .46)
Dutch 2	(t (27) = .63, p = .53)	(t (27) = -.38, p = .71)	(t (27) = -1.00, p = .33)

For most of the participants, the highest level of English education they received was higher education, during which they followed courses that used English as the main language of communication (see Table 8).

Table 8:

The participants' highest level of English education.

	Frequency (and percentage)
Primary education	0
Secondary education: the subject English	9 (31%)
Secondary education: courses with English as the main language	3 (10.3%)
Higher education: courses with English as the main language	11 (37.9%)
Higher education: courses on the English language	6 (20.7%)

A one-way Anova based on the categories present in table 7 showed that the language attitudes of the participants were not dependent on their highest level of English education (see table 9).

Table 9:

One-way Anova results for the effect of highest level of English education on attitude scores.

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	$(F(3, 25) = .33, p = 0.81)$	$(F(3, 25) = 1.60, p = 0.21)$	$(F(3, 25) = 1.76, p = 0.18)$
American 2	$(F(3, 25) = .39, p = 0.76)$	$(F(3, 25) = 1.47, p = 0.25)$	$(F(3, 25) = 2.41, p = 0.09)$
British 1	$(F(3, 25) = 1.16, p = 0.34)$	$(F(3, 25) = .82, p = 0.50)$	$(F(3, 25) = .63, p = 0.60)$
British 2	$(F(3, 25) = .31, p = 0.82)$	$(F(3, 25) = .24, p = 0.87)$	$(F(3, 25) = .75, p = 0.53)$
Dutch 1	$(F(3, 25) = .87, p = 0.47)$	$(F(3, 25) = .94, p = 0.44)$	$(F(3, 25) = .40, p = 0.76)$
Dutch 2	$(F(3, 25) = .20, p = 0.90)$	$(F(3, 25) = 1.68, p = 0.20)$	$(F(3, 25) = .26, p = 0.85)$

Most of the participants use the English language every day (see Table 10).

Table 10:

The participants' use of English

	Frequency (and percentage)
Almost never / never	4 (13.8%)
A few times a year	3 (10.3%)
A few times a month	4 (13.8%)
Every week	2 (6.9%)
Every day	16 (55.2%)

Based on the categories present in table 9, a one-way Anova was conducted, which showed that the language attitudes of the participants were not dependent on their use of English in their everyday lives (see table 11).

Table 11:

One-way Anova results for the effect of use of English on attitude scores.

	STATUS	COMPETENCE	AFFECT
American 1	$(F (4, 24) = .34, p = 0.85)$	$(F (4, 24) = .15, p = 0.96)$	$(F (4, 24) = .72, p = 0.59)$
American 2	$(F (4, 24) = 1.39, p = 0.27)$	$(F (4, 24) = 2.60, p = 0.06)$	$(F (4, 24) = .55, p = 0.70)$
British 1	$(F (4, 24) = .39, p = 0.84)$	$(F (4, 24) = 2.15, p = 0.11)$	$(F (4, 24) = 2.09, p = 0.11)$
British 2	$(F (4, 24) = 1.75, p = 0.17)$	$(F (4, 24) = .75, p = 0.57)$	$(F (4, 24) = 1.19, p = 0.34)$
Dutch 1	$(F (4, 24) = 2.19, p = 0.10)$	$(F (4, 24) = 2.33, p = 0.09)$	$(F (4, 24) = .88, p = 0.49)$
Dutch 2	$(F (4, 24) = .21, p = 0.93)$	$(F (4, 24) = 1.64, p = 0.20)$	$(F (4, 24) = .36, p = 0.83)$

In general, it can be concluded that the attitude scores per attitude construct and audio fragment were not dependent on the English proficiency of the participants, the age of acquisition of English, the context in which they learnt English, the highest level of English education, or the everyday use of English of the participants.

5.3 Target accent

As for the dependence of the attitude scores on the use of a target accent while speaking English, no conclusions could be made based on the current results. Of the participants, only three answered that they use a certain accent when speaking English in their everyday life. Of these three, one uses American English, one British English and one Dutch English. Since so few participants have a target accent, no further analyses could be done.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the current study, contrary to previous research and the hypotheses, did not show an overall preference for one specific accent, or of native English accents over the Dutch English accent. An overall preference for a specific accent may still exist, but further research needs to be done in order to draw more definitive conclusions. The current results also do not show an influence of either the English proficiency of the participants, or the presence of a target accent, on the language attitudes of the participants. The difference between the conclusions of previous research and the results of the current research may be due to a number of limitations of the current study.

6.1 Sample size and distribution

A first limitation of the current study was the sample size. The number of participants of the current study was 29, which means that the differences between the scores for each accent would have had to be bigger to show significant results (Cohen, 1992). Variation within the group of participants may have also played a role: the participants were between the ages of 17 and 81. On the one hand, this diversity was necessary in order to have diversity in terms of English proficiency, and use of English, among the participants. On the other hand, this diversity may have influenced the results in other ways than was accounted for in the survey questions. This way, other factors than proficiency or target accent could have influenced the results of the current study. Future research among participants within the same age category is necessary in order to conclude whether the age of the participant plays a role in language attitudes.

      Another factor that played a role in the difference between previous research and the current results is the fact that for some of the survey questions, the vast majority of the participants answered the same. Contrary to the issue with the participant's ages, this shows a lack of diversity for the important independent variables. This was the case for both the question about the context of the acquisition of English, and the question about whether the participants had a target accent. On the former question, 6 participants answered that they had learnt English in a naturalistic setting, whereas 23 participants had learnt English in an academic setting. On the latter question, only 3 participants answered that they have a target accent, whereas 26 participants do not have a target accent. Because of the small number of participants that answered a certain way on these questions, no statistical analyses could be done. In future research, it is necessary to use directed data collection to make sure that the

distribution of participants is more equal for the important independent variables. In other words, it is necessary to focus on an equal number of participants who learnt English in a natural setting and in an academic setting, and who do and do not have a target accent, to draw valid conclusions about the influence of these factors on language attitudes.

6.2 Methodology

Another limitation of the current study is the methodology, and specifically the online survey through which the data were gathered. While gathering the data, it became apparent that only half of the responses to the online survey were completed by the participants. A possible cause for this is that the survey was too long. The participants were asked to listen to 6 audio fragments, after each of which they had to answer the same questions about their language attitudes. Based on the fact that half of the respondents completed the survey, it can be expected that the length of the survey also had an influence on the results of the participants who did complete the survey. A number of participants indicated that some of the terms that were used in the attitude-related questions to describe the speakers, were hard to understand, and could be interpreted in different ways. This may also have influenced the answers of the participants on these questions.

6.3 Audio fragments

Another aspect of the current study that may have influenced the results is the choice of audio fragments. The results show that there were great differences between the results on the two different audio fragments of one accent. Even though the audio fragments were carefully selected and checked beforehand, this shows that differences were present between the two audio fragments of one accent. For this reason, it was not possible to combine the two audio fragments into one score per accent, making it impossible to show an overall preference for one accent. The differences between the individual speakers were greater than the differences between the different accents, causing the effect of the former to cancel out any effect of the latter. In future research, a way of solving this issue is to include more than two speakers of the same accent in the study.

6.4 Conclusion

The current study tried to examine language attitudes of native speakers of Dutch towards different English accents. It also studied whether these language attitudes were dependent on

the English proficiency of the participants, and the presence of a target accent. This was done using an online survey containing audio files and attitude-related questions, as well as questions regarding English language proficiency and target accent.

In conclusion, the results of the current study were not in line with the results of previous research, and the null hypothesis could not be rejected. Contrary to expectation, the current results did not show an overall preference for a specific accent. They also did not show an influence of either the English proficiency or the presence of a target accent on the language attitudes of the participants. Even though the current results differ from previous research, the current study does provide perspectives for future research in language attitudes. While increasing sample size may be enough to overcome most of the limitations of the current study, it may also be necessary to explore other methods of studying language attitudes.

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Appendix 1: Survey

Personal information:
1. What is your sex?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Other
2. Wat is your age?
3. What is your native language?
    a. Dutch
    b. Other

Attitude questions (on a scale from 1(totally disagree) to 6(totally disagree))
Status
1. In my opinion, this speaker is/has…
    a. Controlling
    b. Authoritative
    c. Dominant
    d. Assertive
    e. Self-assured
    f. A strong voice
Competence
1. In my opinion, this speaker is/has…
    a. Reliable
    b. Intelligent
    c. Competent
    d. Hardworking
    e. Ambitious
    f. An educated voice
Affect
1. In my opinion, this person is…
    a. Cheerful
    b. Friendly
    c. Warm
    d. Humorous

English use
1. At which age did you start learning English?
2. In which context did you mostly learn English?
    a. A naturalistic context: from input from parents/at home
    b. An academic context: at school
3. What is the highest level of English education you received?
    a. Primary education
    b. Secondary education: the course English
    c. Secondary education: courses with English as the language of communication
    d. Higher education: courses with English as the language of communication
    e. Higher education: specific courses about the English language

4. How often do you use English in your everyday life (work, school, social media, etc.)?
   a. Daily
   b. Every week
   c. A few times a month
   d. A few times a year
   e. Almost never / never

Self-evaluation of English language proficiency (on a scale from 1 (very low) to 10 (very high))
   1. What is the level of your English writing skills?
   2. What is the level of your English reading skills?
   3. What is the level of your English speaking skills?
   4. What is the level of your English listening skills?
   5. What is the level of your English language skills in general?

Target accent
   1. When speaking English, do you choose to use a specific accent?
      a. No, I do not choose to use a specific accent
      b. Yes, I choose to use a native-like accent
      c. Yes, I choose to use a non-native accent
   2. If yes, what is your target accent?
      a. American English
      b. British English
      c. Dutch English
      d. Other…