

Hong Kong People's Attitudes Towards Varieties of English

QI ZHANG

Abstract

This paper examines the attitudes of Hong Kong inhabitants to eight varieties of English: RP, Tyneside English, General American English, Australian English, Philippine English, Mandarin-accented English, and two local Hong Kong varieties of English, one with a broad accent and the other with an educated one. According to previous studies (Giles 1970, Ryan et al. 1984, Giles et al. 1995, Garrett et al. 2003, Hiraga 2005), informants tend to have more positive attitudes towards types of English which have a prestigious status. Nevertheless, varieties of English used in their immediate environs are often rated higher in terms of solidarity. Several studies have been conducted to explore this attitudinal pattern as it relates to East Asian varieties of English (Cargile 1997, Lindemann 2003, Chiba et al. 1995, McKenzie 2008). As a new variety of English, the variants used in Hong Kong have rarely been investigated to the same extent in the field of language attitude studies. As a result, the study described here is novel in its application of the verbal-guise technique to uncover language attitudes in the Hong Kong region; it systematically examines how different Englishes (local and global) are rated by a sub-section of the population of Hong Kong.

Contrary to the research hypothesis suggested by the findings from previous works on what Kachru (1992) terms the 'inner circle' countries, results to date have shown that two varieties of Hong Kong English were, in fact, not favoured on either status or solidarity scale. Thus, RP, General American and Australian - all of which are varieties from the 'inner circle' were, in fact, usually ranked higher than either of the local Hong Kong variants. However, the varieties of Hong Kong English are not rated equally in that there is a favouring effect associated with the educated variety not enjoyed by the broad one. This finding makes important indications about the future vitality of different types of Hong Kong English, particularly in the light of my finding that speakers in the sample prefer Mandarin-accented English to either of the local types.



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