

VARIETIES OF ENGLISH: TAIWANESE ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Non-native speakers (NNS) of English outnumber native speakers (NS) in the 21st Century (Crystal 2003). This shift points to increasing opportunities for the speaker of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to use English to communicate not only with NS, but also with NNS of English. How does this globalised phenomenon affect people's attitudes towards the different varieties of English? This research examines the attitudes of Taiwanese people to different varieties of English: Australian English (AE), General American English (GAE), Indian English (IE), Japanese English (JE), Spanish English (SE), Standard Southern British English (SSBE) and Taiwanese English (TE). Analysis of 317 responses showed an overwhelming preference for the native variety GAE in terms of both status and solidarity, which might result from the fact that GAE is the most commonly used ELT model in Taiwan. Additionally, participants demonstrated different evaluations on the dimensions of status and solidarity: where in-group identity is concerned, TE was less stigmatized in terms of solidarity than status. This finding parallels the study of Garrett et al. (2003) who found that listener-judges seem to prefer their own variety on the solidarity dimension and native varieties with higher prestige in terms of status. I compare these findings to previous research and discuss what they might mean for the status of English in an increasingly globalized world.

1. Introduction

Situated in the 'Expanding Circle' of Kachru's (1992) concentric circle model, English is used primarily as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Taiwan (Wu & Ke 2009). However, the emergence of English as a global language has created a huge demand for communication to take place in English. This induces the continual increase and frequent usage of English in Taiwanese society (Chen 2003). With the visible number of Non-native Speakers (NNS) of English now exceeding Native Speakers (NS) (Smith 1992, Crystal 2003), current globalisation has brought increased opportunities for Taiwanese EFL speakers to be exposed to different varieties of English. That is, EFL speakers are more likely to communicate in English with NNS than NS in Taiwan. How, and in what ways, might these globalised contexts affect Taiwanese people's perceptions towards varieties of spoken English? With the application of the Verbal-Guise Test (VGT), this study will investigate attitudes towards a number of varieties of English in Taiwan.

According to Eagly & Chaiken's (1993:1) definition, 'attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour' and 'evaluating refers to all classes of evaluative responding, whether overt or covert, cognitive, affective or behavioural'. Notably, Garrett (2010:23) highlights the essentialness of assessing attitude intensity (strength), which is the extent of negative or positive feelings of the attitude subject. As attitude intensity has an effect on judgement and behaviour (Perloff 2003:56 cited in McKenzie 2010:25), McKenzie (2010:25) emphasised that attitude studies should not only 'identify one's attitude towards an object but also to measure the intensity with which it is held'. In examining attitudes towards languages, many (Fasold 1984, Baker 1992, Trudgill 1992, Garrett 2010) have noted that language attitude

studies are based on the belief that speech can evoke stereotyped reactions that reflect differentiated views of the language and its speakers. For instance, Giles & Billing (2004:202) contended that 'listeners can very quickly stereotype another person's personal and social attributes on the basis of language cues and in ways that appear to have crucial effects on important social decisions made about them'. Although language attitude is an 'umbrella term' which contains attitudes towards various aspects of the language, this study, with the aim of investigating Taiwanese attitudes towards varieties of English and the speakers who use them, concentrates on the perspective of 'attitudes to language variation, dialect and speech style', 'attitudes to language groups, communities' and 'attitudes to language preference' (Baker 1992:29).

The paper is divided into the following sections. Firstly, a review of previous research on attitudes towards the different varieties of English is introduced. The general research findings in this area will be covered, but with a main focus on findings relevant to the situation in Taiwan. Next, the methodology adopted will be explained. Lastly, the findings of this research will be discussed, along with further implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) to EFL learners in Taiwan.

2. Literature Review

The literature on attitudes towards the varieties of English is vast, but one of the main findings arising from this body of research is that native varieties tend to receive higher evaluations than their counterparts (Giles & Coupland 1991, Forde 1995, Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997, Garrett et al. 2003, Hiraga 2005, Kim 2007, McKenzie 2008, Zhang 2009). Turning to the situation in Taiwan, a number of studies (Kobayashi 2008, Wong 2011) have shown that Taiwanese listener-judges appear to prefer native varieties like American English over non-native varieties such as those spoken in the Philippines or India, despite the fact that non-native varieties are becoming more prevalent. This preference is also reflected in Taiwanese EFL speakers' tendency to favour native English-speaking teachers over non-native English-speaking teachers in the ELT industry (Cheng 2009, Wu & Ke 2009).

The phenomenon of EFL speakers preferring 'Inner Circle' (IC) varieties could be explained by applying Kachru's model (1992, 1997). Taiwan is situated in the Expanding Circle (EC) and thus the usage of English in Taiwan can be regarded as 'norm-dependent' (Kachru 1985:16-17). In Smith's (2012:228) words, 'English has been seen as having a different status from that in the inner and outer circles: learnt primarily as foreign language; and non-dependent, looking towards the inner circle for its linguistic models.' Along with Kachru's model (1992), a number of other models exist to explain English worldwide, including Moag's Life Cycle Model (1992) and Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial English (2007). Although Kachru's Circle Model (1992) has been subject to criticism in recent years (e.g. Bruthiaux 2003, Jenkins 2009:17-18), for the present purposes, it provides an adequate description of Taiwan with respect to the use of English.

The research on Taiwanese students learning English in the Philippines, Kobayashi (2008) found that participants seem to regard English spoken in IC countries, such as North America, as the standard in the process of English acquisition. That is, Taiwanese learners perceive General/Standard American English as the sole learning target. In addition, with a lesser preference for non-native varieties such as Philippines English, Taiwanese participants indicated that their main purpose in learning English is to communicate with NS from the IC countries. Similarly, a study of Taiwanese EFL children's perceptions towards teachers with native and non-native accents demonstrated that native English-speaking teachers who speak General American English are much preferred than non-native English teachers (Cheng 2009). This is supported by the finding that accent was ranked the second highest reason for

choosing a native English-speaking teacher. Interestingly, although elementary level students have only studied English for 3-4 years in school, they have already established their goal of adopting native-like accents. Parallel to the findings of Cheng (2009), when investigating Taiwanese university students' attitudes, American English was much preferred to Indian English and Mandarin-accented English (Wong 2011). Furthermore, Liou's (2010) research demonstrated that, for most Taiwanese English learners, the English of native speakers is much favoured even when the notion of English as an International Language (EIL) is concerned.

Additionally, the literature demonstrated the importance of conducting language attitude studies. For example, Ellis's (2000) study on Second Language (L2) acquisition showed a positive correlation between attitudes towards the L2 and its speakers and the level of proficiency, which indicates that learner attitudes have an impact on L2 learning. According to Garrett (2001), studies of language attitudes are important as they account essentially for language maintenance and change within the sociolinguistic spectrum. Similarly, in the study of EFL learners' attitudes to English in Brazil, Friedrich (2000) stressed the importance of language attitude studies with NNS. Specifically, as learners' attitudes towards English involve not only 'a set of formal features' but also 'feelings, stereotypes, expectations and prejudices', they contribute essentially to the understanding of sociolinguistic parameters (Friedrich 2000:222). McKenzie (2010:73) has suggested that the results of language attitude studies are beneficial to the 'choice of linguistic model' for pedagogical application. Al-Tamimi & Shuib (2009:30) have argued that a better understanding of EFL students' attitudes could help designers of the EFL curriculum to implement ELT programmes that would encourage the attitudes most beneficial to the success of EFL learners.

3. Research Question

Previous research (Kobayashi 2008, Cheng 2009, Wong 2011 among others) shows that Taiwanese speakers prefer native varieties of English when compared to non-native varieties. Given the on-going growth of exposure to non-native varieties in Taiwan, whether the attitudes of EFL speakers in Taiwan have changed is still uninvestigated. The increase in international communication makes varieties of English used widely, it is, therefore, essential to examine how they are perceived by NNS in Taiwan. This research discusses language attitudes towards the varieties of English in Taiwan and examines how different varieties of English are rated across different traits by Taiwanese NNS of English. In doing so, this study aims to answer the question 'Do EFL speakers in Taiwan prefer certain varieties of English?' Specifically, the responses of participants will help to demonstrate whether EFL speakers in Taiwan still prefer native varieties of English, as suggested in previous studies (Kobayashi 2008, Cheng 2009, Wong 2011), or whether there is an increasing acceptance of non-native varieties, along with a more positive perception of them.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Instrument: Questionnaire

The outline of the questionnaire is composed of two sections. The first part of the questionnaire investigates participants' nationality, gender and etc. The information offers a basic overview of each participant, which helps to look into the effects of certain social constraints on the variation. The second part is the semantic-differential scale of the VGT, which has been used successfully in studies that investigated attitudes towards several English varieties (cf. Bayard et al. 2001, Hiraga 2005, Kim 2007, McKenzie 2008, McGee 2009,

Zhang 2009 among others). According to Obiols (2002), VGT involves informants listening to recordings of natural speech from several anonymous speakers. They are then asked to evaluate each speaker separately on a bipolar semantic-differential scale. The application of VGT works as an indirect method to investigate participants' language attitudes (Garrett et al. 2003).

4.2. Selection of Traits

Previous studies have suggested that it is important to examine whether the traits in VGT are appropriate in terms of meaning for informants in language attitude studies (Hiraga 2005, McKenzie 2008, Zhang 2009). The six traits of 'confident', 'intelligent', 'educated', 'authoritative', 'friendly' and 'lively' were used for their validity in a pilot study, in which feedback was given from Taiwanese students studying in Glasgow. Moreover, as the on-line questionnaire was conducted in Mandarin for Taiwanese participants, the variable of translating the selected traits into Mandarin was also considered.

In this study, informants were asked to rate each speaker individually, according to the six different traits on a six point semantic-differential scale (see Table 1 for details). This study adopts a six-point bipolar rating scale: Jenkins (2007:152) has argued that the use of an even number for the semantic-differential scale will help to 'force respondents to evaluate each accent either positively or negatively and prevent them from adopting a neutral position'. By doing so, the study will indirectly get informants to state whether their evaluation of each speaker is closer to the negative or positive evaluation. For the statistical analysis, participants' positive and negative evaluations on the six traits in the VGT were arranged by the same criteria: 1 is the least favourable evaluation, 6 is the most favourable evaluation.

Table 1 Verbal Guise Test (VGT): The six-point semantic differential scale

Unconfident	1	2	3	4	5	6	Confident
Unintelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	Intelligent
Uneducated	1	2	3	4	5	6	Educated
Not Authoritative	1	2	3	4	5	6	Authoritative
Unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	Friendly
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	Lively

4.3. Selection of English Varieties

According to Kachru's three-circle model that represents the spread of English (1992, 1997), this study aims to be inclusive in that it contains both native and non-native varieties in order to give a relatively more comprehensive picture of Taiwanese EFL speakers' attitudes towards varieties of English. Kachru's model (1992, 1997) is composed of the 'Inner Circle' (IC), known as the circle of 'norm-providing' (Kachru 1985:16-17), and includes countries such as the USA or UK, which use English as a native language. These 'norm-providing' varieties, American and British English, are accepted as the mandatory 'standard' for ELT worldwide (Kachru & Nelson 2006:12). Secondly, in the 'Outer Circle' (OC), the 'norm-developing' world (Kachru 1985:16-17), English is spoken as a second language (ESL). Lastly, the 'Expanding Circle' (EC) can be seen as the 'norm-dependent' context. The rationale for the selection of each variety was as follows.

Standard Southern British English (SSBE) was chosen for inclusion as one of the reference varieties in the IC instead of Received Pronunciation (RP), spoken by elite social

classes who constitute around three percent of the British population (McArthur 1992:851). The variety of SSBE in this study refers to the broader ‘educated pronunciation’ of British English spoken in southern England that has been widely taught (Kachru & Nelson 2006:94, Bieswanger 2008:30). Since it is highly rated in terms of status (e.g. Ladegaard 1998, Ladegaard & Sachdev 2006), it is worth examining how Taiwanese listeners judge this variety in the study. It was important to include General American English (GAE), as it is the most taught model in the Taiwanese EFL classroom (Cheng 2009, Liou 2010). It will also offer potential comparisons with previous studies, which have demonstrated that Taiwanese EFL speakers have a strong preference for American English (Cheng 2009, Wong 2011, Kobayashi 2012). Australian English (AE) is also classified as a variety from the IC. AE was chosen as it has been perceived as a relatively ‘less standard variety’ among NS countries (Jenkins 2007:150). Therefore, the inclusion of AE will examine how EFL informants evaluate it when compared to GAE and SSBE. Indian English (IE) is the only OC variety of this study. However, Wong (2011) suggests that there is a large population of ESL speakers of IE; it is essential to include IE in the VGT. David Graddol once maintained that ‘no other region has been more affected by the rise of English than Europe’ (2001:47 cited in Modiano 2009:223); the inclusion of Spanish English serves the role of incorporating an English variety spoken in an European country into this experiment as English becomes a *lingua franca* in Europe (Seidlhofer et al. 2006, Modiano 2009). As the variety of Japanese English (JE) has been widely studied in language attitude studies (e.g. Chiba et al. 1995, McKenzie 2008, Eisenclas & Tsurutani 2011), JE is chosen so that comparison can be made with previous studies. The inclusion of JE in this study will also offer an insight into how Taiwanese NNS perceive this non-native variety, which is closest to them geographically. Finally, the Taiwanese variety (TE) is chosen with the purpose of discovering how participants perceive their own variety (cf. Cheng 2009, Wong 2011). For instance, Jenkins (2007) demonstrated that, with the exception of their own variety, research participants tend to hold negative perceptions towards NNS of English.

4.4. Selection of Text

The stimuli materials used in this study are taken from the Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger 2012). They are freely available and have been used in other language attitude studies (Hiraga 2005, Cheng 2009, Yook & Lindemann 2013), which provide a possibility of comparing it with previous studies. Moreover, Cheng (2009:32) has suggested that the stimulus is designed phonetically and consists of common English words but with a variety of difficult English sounds and sound sequences. This design helps to reveal each speaker’s original accent and thus make participants’ ratings of the speakers more valid. Furthermore, the text is of a suitable length for the Taiwanese listener-judges, which made the task more manageable as they will have to listen to seven recordings. The text of the passage from the Speech Accent Archive is as follows:

Please call Stella. Ask her to bring these things with her from the store: Six spoons of fresh snow peas, five thick slabs of blue cheese, and maybe a snack for her brother Bob. We also need a small plastic snake and a big toy frog for the kids. She can scoop these things into three red bags, and we will go meet her Wednesday at the train station.

Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger 2012)

4.5. Selection of Recordings

The Speech Accent Archive offers a large selection of speech recordings from various language backgrounds (Hiraga 2005). It provides detailed biographical data of each recorded sample and categorises them according to speaker's native languages. Moreover, both NS and NNS of English read the same elicitation paragraph (this paragraph is reproduced in 4.4) and their recordings are phonetically transcribed into consonant, vowel and syllable structure. Cheng (2009:31) suggests 'researchers can use the recording samples in the archive to compare and analyse the accents of different English speakers'. However, although VGT enables each authentic speaker to represent each guise, researchers have less control over other speech-related variables such as voice volume and speed. In recognition of this potential issue and following on from other studies (Hiraga 2005, McKenzie 2008, Zhang 2013), this experiment aims to select speakers who are roughly similar in voice quality to avoid bias.

Most of the recordings for this research were taken from the Speech Accent Archive website¹. The only exception was the IE variety: the recordings in the Speech Accent Archive were unsuitable, as the speakers had all lived away from India for some time. Therefore, a recording of the same text by an IE speaker was recorded in the sound laboratory of the English Language department at the University of Glasgow. This ensured uniformity of voice quality of all recordings used in this study. All recordings were male voice, to avoid any 'gender-linked language effect' as suggested by Lambert (1967) and to prevent the possibility of listener-judges' different reactions to male and female voices (Bradac et al. 2001, Zhang 2009). In addition to the seven recordings representing the seven different English varieties, an extra recording was used as a practice example of VGT. The purpose of the practice example is to help informants familiarise themselves with the instructions of the VGT. Therefore, in the practice example of the VGT, the recording is selected as a female SSBE voice to differentiate from the male voice in the other seven recordings. The recording for the practice example was also made in the same sound laboratory in Glasgow.

4.6. Research Informants

As McKenzie (2010:84) has suggested, a large number of participants in language attitude studies make research findings more likely to be 'representative of the target population'. In order to conduct multiple surveys efficiently and effectively, questionnaires were collected through a website that was designed and administered by the researcher during a three month period from June to September 2013. Student participants were mainly contacted through lecturers or teachers in Taiwanese colleges, universities and schools. Additionally, employed participants were contacted by a 'friend-of-a-friend' method (Milroy 1980). There were 317 valid questionnaires returned in total, 194 are from students and 123 from adults under employment.

4.7. Data Collection Procedure

Before answering the questionnaire, participants were given a brief introduction to the study. On an initial ethics consent page, participants were informed that the study would be completely anonymous. Participants were asked to provide background information in a basic information section before the start of the listening task of the VGT. Finally, the VGT section was divided up, with the practice example followed by the seven different speakers. Participants were given a practice example showing how to complete the evaluations on the

¹ <http://accent.gmu.edu/>

semantic-differential scale and were told of the importance of giving their intuitive impression when evaluating these seven different accents and there was no right or wrong answer. Informants were asked to listen to each recording once. When listening to the recording, informants were asked to rate the speaker on the VGT scale. Repetition of the recording was controlled on the website—it could only be played once: this forced listener-judges to give a spontaneous response. However, as participants clicked on ‘next page’ to continue answering the questionnaire at their own speed, ample time could be taken between the seven different recordings.

4.8. Data Analysis

The data was analysed using SPSS Version 20.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Following previous research (e.g. Hiraga 2005, Kim 2007, McKenzie 2010, Yook & Lindemann 2013), this study also conducted a one-way repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to assess the difference between the mean ratings of the VGT to gain an overall view of the participants’ opinions towards different varieties of English (See section 5 for details). When a repeated measures analysis is undertaken, SPSS executes ‘Mauchly’s test’, which tests the sphericity assumption that these variances are not significantly different (Kerr et al. 2002:120-121, Pallant 2010:280). If the significance value associated with Mauchly’s test is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that the sphericity assumption is met (Kerr et al. 2002:121).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Preliminary Analysis

The first step in analysing the results of the VGT is to carry out a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to examine whether the traits are clustered into different groups (Bayard et al. 2001, McKenzie 2008, Eisenclas & Tsurutani 2011). According to Miller et al. (2002:174-175), PCA is a ‘data reduction’ technique that aims to condense a larger set of variables down to a smaller number of components. The components extracted thus summarise the ‘common features’ between the variables within a dataset. Following Kaiser’s criterion (Pallant 2010:184), the analysis demonstrated the loading of 6 traits on the two components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 which together account for 81% of the variance.

Table 2 Varimax-rotated factor analysis with Kaiser normalization (N=317; loadings less than 0.5 are not listed)

Traits	Component 1 (Status 64%)	Component 2 (Solidarity 17%)
confident	0.844	
intelligent	0.885	
educated	0.862	
authoritative	0.771	
friendly		0.858
lively		0.927

Table 2 revealed that the traits ‘confident’, ‘intelligent’, ‘educated’ and ‘authoritative’ formed the ‘status’ group and the traits ‘friendly’ and ‘lively’ clustered in a ‘solidarity’ group. The result further impacted on the following ANOVA analysis in the sense that participants’

evaluations of each speaker are examined according to the two dimensions of ‘status’ and ‘solidarity’.

5.2. Evaluations according to Speaker Status and Speaker Solidarity

The rankings of the mean ratings in descending order of the seven English varieties according to speaker status and solidarity are shown in Table 3. While the status dimension consists of ‘confident’, ‘intelligent’, ‘educated’ and ‘authoritative’, the solidarity dimension is composed of ‘friendly’ and ‘lively’. A higher number indicates a greater degree of favour for each variety. Varieties of English, shown in bold, indicate where there are significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the participants’ ratings.

Table 3 Rankings according to speaker status and solidarity (in descending order of mean evaluation; N=317)

Status (Confident & Intelligent & Educated & Authoritative)		Solidarity (Friendly & Lively)	
Variety of English	Mean	Variety of English	Mean
GAE	4.29	GAE	3.75
SSBE	4.07	IE	3.48
IE	3.81	AE	3.40
AE	3.65	SSBE	3.34
JE	3.12	TE	3.28
SE	3.01	JE	3.17
TE	2.91	SE	2.71

In terms of the status dimension, participants rated standard varieties from the IC (GAE, SSBE) more positively than the OC variety (IE) and the NS variety (AE) or those varieties spoken at the EC (JE, SE and TE). The result of a one-way repeated measure of ANOVA demonstrated that Mauchly’s Test=0.821: consequently sphericity was assumed. ANOVA results indicated that there were significant differences between informants’ ratings of the seven speakers’ status: $F(6, 1896)=243.816, p < 0.05$. When the mean evaluations for speaker status were analysed in the pairwise comparison test (with Bonferroni correction), the results showed speakers of GAE, SSBE, IE and AE reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$; shown in bold, in Table 3). In other words, no significant difference was found in the mean rating of speaker status between JE&SE and SE&TE, which indicated that Taiwanese informants seem to make consistently low evaluations of these varieties.

Consequently, participants’ evaluations of the seven varieties can be divided into three distinct hierarchies. Speakers of the prestigious NS varieties (GAE, SSBE) are much preferred, followed by the variety of the OC (IE) and the variety of the IC (AE), with the NNS varieties (JE, SE and TE) least preferred. This result is similar to that of previous studies (Kobayashi 2008, Cheng 2009, Wong 2011), which demonstrated that Taiwanese participants prefer IC varieties over NNS varieties, with particular preference for GAE. As American and British English of the IC are commonly regarded as ‘legitimate’ varieties for educational purposes, this might lead to participants’ preference for GAE and SSBE in terms of status (Kachru & Nelson 2006:12). The strong preference for GAE might also be affected by the ‘high vitality of American English’ suggested by Ladegaard & Sachdev (2006:105-106). Similarly, it could be explained that familiarity with GAE as the ELT model (Cheng 2009, Liou 2010) in

pedagogical settings and increased media exposure to GAE (Bayard et al. 2001) further contribute to participants' high evaluations. This result also paralleled the argument of Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) that students who have longer exposure, and thus greater familiarity with specific English varieties, tend to give a relatively positive evaluation of this variety.

Notably, participants' own variant (TE) received the lowest evaluation. This is similar to previous findings by Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) in Austria and McKenzie (2008) in Japan, which show that the least favoured is Taiwanese participants' own variety. This might result from the notion of TE or speaking English with their own accent as having low status, which had been instilled by 'media-transmitted stereotypes' and the influence of the ELT classroom setting, as suggested by McKenzie (2008:74-75). That is, Taiwanese EFL speakers were inclined to avoid their own accent when speaking or learning English and thus aimed to pursue the prestigious varieties of the IC, especially American English, which had become the goal of English acquisition.

With regard to the solidarity dimension, the ANOVA results indicated Mauchly's Test=0.868: consequently, sphericity was assumed. There were significant differences between the informants' ratings of the seven speakers' solidarity: $F(6, 1896)=41.295, p<0.05$. When the mean evaluations for speaker solidarity were analysed in the pairwise comparison test (with Bonferroni correction), the results demonstrated that there were significant differences between GAE&IE speakers as well as JE&SE speakers ($p<0.05$; shown in bold, in Table 3). In other words, no significant differences were found in IE, AE, SSBE, TE or SE, which indicates that participants shared similar perceptions in terms of solidarity among these varieties.

Participants' evaluations of the seven varieties could be further divided into three distinct hierarchies. Firstly, the finding that an NS variety (GAE) instead of an NNS variety was the most highly rated is in contrast to the study of McKenzie (2008) in Japan but similar to the finding of Zhang (2013) in Hong Kong. It might result from 'the strong inclination and the pressure towards conformity to model native English - such as American English' found in Zhang (2013:13). In other words, this inevitably affected participants' high evaluations of the prestige varieties of GAE and the relatively less positive attitude towards participants' own accent. Secondly, the NNS variety of IE and the NS variety of AE were rated more highly than the prestigious IC variety of SSBE. This is in direct contrast to the result on the status dimension. This finding seems to confirm that of previous studies (Giles 1970, Bayard et al. 2001, Hiraga 2005) in which the evidence suggested that non-standard varieties are usually preferred to standard varieties when solidarity is concerned. Finally, varieties of TE, JE and SE of the EC were the lowest rated groups on the solidarity dimension. Lindemann's finding (2003), whereby there tends to be a close connection between participants' attitudes towards the speakers and speakers' accents, might help to explain the low rating these 'accented' varieties (TE, JE and SE) received. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, unlike its evaluations on the status dimensions, TE was not the least favoured variety in terms of solidarity when compared to the rest of the EC varieties. Similar to the finding of McKenzie (2008), this may be a result of informants' tendency to prefer, or give higher ratings to, their own varieties where the high degree of solidarity and the marker of self-identity are considered.

In summary, except for the overwhelming preference for GAE on both dimensions, participants demonstrated different attitudes on the dimensions of status and solidarity. This result revealed that, while participants preferred the standard native variety more when status is concerned, non-native or non-standard varieties received higher evaluations on the dimension of solidarity.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, the language attitudes of 317 Taiwanese participants towards native and non-native varieties of English were investigated. In general, NS varieties received higher evaluations than the less prestigious NNS varieties. For instance, the findings revealed that participants hold an overwhelming preference for GAE over EC varieties of JE, SE and TE. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated different evaluations on the dimensions of status and solidarity. For example, when in-group identity is concerned, TE was rated higher in terms of solidarity than status. Moreover, while SSBE received a higher rating than IE and AE in terms of status, it received lower evaluations in solidarity dimension than the NNS variety of IE and the NS variety which is ‘still trying to achieve legitimacy’ – AE (Kachru & Nelson 2006:12). This finding is similar to the previous studies of Giles (1970) and Hiraga (2005), which showed that, when compared to the status dimension, listener-judges rate standard varieties of English lower on the solidarity dimension. Moreover, the positive evaluation IE received in terms of both status and solidarity demonstrated an open acceptance towards non-standard varieties of the OC. Parallel to the study of Eisenclas & Tsurutani (2011) among native speakers of Australian English, this finding further indicates an increased positive attitude towards NNS varieties of English on the part of participants. The increasing self-confidence and independence of varieties like Australian English and Indian English are possibly ‘promoted by systematic linguistic descriptions and might reduce the influence of the traditional norm of standard native varieties’ (Bieswanger 2008:32).

Nevertheless, limitations are present in interpreting the results based on the VGT. Bias of this study exists in disentangling what it is exactly that listeners are reacting to when they hear different varieties of English speech. Studies have shown that accent may not be the only factor in forming listeners’ attitudes: other variables such as context, the level of speaker’s accent, fluency and message content should be taken into consideration (Cargile 1997, Cargile & Giles 1998). Moreover, possible effects of speakers’ voices on attitudes should not be underestimated. Although the recordings of the speakers representing each variety had been prudently selected, it is still challenging to control ‘prosodic and paralinguistic features of voice (such as pitch, voice quality and speech rate), as well as other aspects of reading style and expressiveness’ (Giles & Coupland 1991:34). Therefore, it would be profitable for future research to include more than one speaker to test whether the accent is representative of speakers of these varieties. As a result, the influence of the voice features and the bias of relying on one speech sample to represent a particular variety can be eliminated (Kim 2007, Zhang 2009).

Kachru & Nelson (2006: 126) once argued that the notion of IC varieties being ‘better’ than non-IC varieties is now ‘empirically invalid’ and perhaps native varieties need no longer be the sole standard in English acquisition. Researchers (Smith 1992, Friedrich 2000, Matsuda 2003, McKay 2003, Deterding 2005, Eisenclas & Tsurutani 2011) have shared similar views and maintained the importance of equipping EFL speakers with an awareness of different English varieties as this will allow them to cope with the cultural and linguistic bias that appears in both native and non-native varieties of English. Consequently, it is essential that EFL speakers be exposed to varieties of English as increasing exposure would result in familiarity and awareness of linguistic features and cultural information of different forms of English speech that would further contribute to effective international communication (Kirkpatrick 2007). This may be of particular relevance to language planners and educators in Taiwan with respect to the specific choice of linguistic models employed for ELT (Kobayashi 2012). For Taiwanese EFL speakers to communicate successfully with NS and NNS of different ‘regional, social and cultural backgrounds’ and to be ‘linguistically, sociolinguistically and pragmatically’ equipped through exposure to different varieties of

English (Bieswanger 2007:405), the findings of this study might be applicable to the development of EFL learning programmes from the perspectives of pedagogical materials (Matsuda 2003), curriculum design (Deterding 2005, Bieswanger 2008, Wong 2011), sociolinguistic training for teachers (Norrish 1997) and teacher recruitment (Kirkpatrick 2007), etc.

In terms of teaching materials, teachers can introduce speakers of varieties of English by showing movies or video clips to students (Matsuda 2003). As informants of this study demonstrated positive evaluations of AE and IE, which are not the mainstream varieties being applied in schools, it is perhaps worthwhile introducing the linguistic and pragmatic norms of AE and IE to Taiwanese EFL learners. Applying the notion to curriculum design, Wong (2011) demonstrated that, after delivering a lecture addressing the variety of Indian English from a World English perspective, the course had a positive influence on Taiwanese university students' perceptions of Indian English. This indicates that positive perceptions of different forms of English speech can be achieved through increasing their use in a classroom setting. Moreover, to provide learners of English with an education that enables optimum communicative competence, the incorporation of varieties of English with a particular focus on the linguistic analysis of pronunciation in ELT appears to be vital (Bieswanger 2008:33). For example, Görlach (1999:18 cited in Bieswanger 2008:33) maintained that learners of English, at an early stage, should be exposed to as many accents as possible, with a broad receptive training. By the same token, Deterding's study (2005) in Singapore suggested that exposing learners to different varieties of English such as Estuary English, which has become more widespread in southern England, would help students to become familiar with various styles of pronunciation. In Taiwan, the majority of the listening materials applied American accents (Jou 2010:7-8). The findings of this study exhibited that, except for GAE, positive attitudes were shown towards other varieties such as SSBE, IE and AE, which suggests the importance of introducing a variety of different accents for Taiwanese EFL students in listening exercises.

In addition, many (Kachru & Nelson 2006, Bieswanger 2008) have identified the need to address the issues related to the varieties of English in training programmes for both prospective and active teachers. Taking the teacher training programme TESOL in Malaysia for example, an understanding of the forms of Malaysian English and its development in terms of context and users is suggested (Norrish 1997). It could be applied to teacher training in Taiwan, with a focus on discussion of the local forms of Taiwanese English since this might be the variant most used by students. Moreover, Kirkpatrick (2007:196) proposed that teachers wishing to teach non-native English speakers in Asia should be able to 'analyse the specific linguistic difficulties that speakers of the non-Indo-European languages can face in the learning of English and are able to adopt strategies to help their learners overcome these difficulties'. In this case, since Taiwanese ELT teachers have experience of learning English as a foreign language, they would be better placed than native English speaking teachers in understanding the English learning problems that a student might encounter (Kirkpatrick 2007:190). Furthermore, the findings of this study demonstrate that non-native varieties such as IE and TE were better evaluated in the solidarity than the status dimension, which implies the potential acceptance of ELT teachers from the OC countries such as India where English is used dominantly as a L2. Therefore, the belief of 'native speaker fallacy' should be cautiously addressed when teacher recruitment is taking place in Taiwan (Phillipson 1992).

In conclusion, this study helps to give insight into Taiwanese attitudes towards different English varieties. The findings of this research are likely to provide implications for the language planning decisions with respect to how varieties of spoken English are perceived by Taiwanese English learners as well as future research in understanding the sociolinguistic repertoire of English in the EFL context of Taiwan.

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