A Study of saudi EFL Students' Attitudes Toward American and British English

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Abstract. Identifying the attitudes learners have toward a language, a language variety, or an accent in which that language is spoken is an essential part in language teaching in particular and language programs deign in general. The results of previous studies show that positive attitudes contribute significantly to successful language learning. Taking this importance into account, this study was conducted to examine the attitudes of a sample of Saudi learners of English as a foreign language toward both British and American accents. The attitudes shown by the 112 Saudi learners of English as a foreign language who participated in this study indicate that Saudis, especially young generations, prefer American English to British English. The outcomes of this study suggest that more emphasis should be directed toward using American English in all educational sectors in Saudi Arabia. Because of the significance of language attitudes in facilitating language learning, those who are responsible for setting up language education policies in Saudi Arabia are highly encouraged to take into account the favorable attitudes Saudi learners have toward American English.
Keywords: Attitudes, Saudi EFL Learners, American English, British English

1. Introduction

Attitudes toward a language are proved to represent a significant factor in facilitating the learning of a foreign language, and therefore constitute a major variable in establishing the foundations of language planning and policy within any context (Gaies and Beebe, 1991; Ellis, 1997; Holmes, 1992; McGroarty, 1996; Noss, 1994; and Tse, 1997). Vassberg (1993) states that the attitudes towards different varieties of a language "play a crucial role in the psychology of individual speakers and their use of language" (p. 146). According to Gardner (1979; 1985), second language learning is indirectly influenced by language attitudes. The rich history of research in this area clearly indicates that success in learning a foreign language can be enhanced by the positive attitude towards that language (Dornyei, Csizer and Nemeth 2006; Ellis, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; and Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000). Appreciating the role language attitudes play in foreign language learning requires understanding of what the term 'language attitude' means. Historically, the concept of language attitudes has been viewed from two different positions: mentalist and behaviorist (Agheyisi and Fishman, 1970). According to Faosld (1984), most "language-attitude work is based on a mentalist view of attitude as state of readiness; an intervening variable between a stimulus affecting a person and that person's response" (p. 147). The mentalist position indicates that attitudes are not directly observable but are inferred from the subject's introspection. On the other hand, the behaviorist position defines attitudes in terms of the actual behavior or overt response to social situations.

The different views of attitudes indicate the difficulty to give a precise definition of language attitudes. Lambert & Lambert (1964) define attitude as "an organized and consistent manner of thinking, feeling, and reacting with regard to people, groups, social issues, or, more generally, any event in one's environment" (p. 50). As for language attitudes, it is important, according to Gardner (1985), to be aware of the fact that these attitudes make up a complex concept of which "many definitions have been proposed" (p. 8). In other words, it is difficult to find a single definition of language attitudes upon which all researchers agree (Cargile, Giles, Rayan, & Bradac, 1994).

Fasold (1984) defines language attitudes as the views held about language usage and/or about the language user. To Hammerly (1982), language attitudes are "beliefs, feelings, and intentions affecting behavior toward a social object" (p. 108). Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian (1982) approach language attitudes as "any affective, cognitive, or behavioral index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or their speakers" (p. 7). To Preston (1989), these attitudes are related to "the personal, ethnic, national, gender, class, role, age and other identities of speakers" (p. 50).

Due to their multidimensional nature, language attitudes constitute a concept that "is not one about which there has been a universal agreement" (Edwards, 1985, p. 139). By dimensional nature it is meant that language attitudes are cognitive because they entail beliefs about the world, such as French is a useful language to know, or English people are refined. Attitudes are affective because they involve feeling towards an attitude object, such as a passion for Irish poetry, or an awful taste in the mouth of Georgians when speaking Russian. And lastly, attitudes are behavioral because they encourage certain actions, such as enrolling in a Japanese language course, or hiring a prestige accented speaker for a job (Cargile et al, 1994, p. 221).

Baker (1988) lists the following characteristics of attitudes:

1. They are cognitive and affective.
2. They are dimensional rather than bipolar.
3. They predispose the person to act in a certain way.
4. They are learnt not inherited.
5. They tend to persist but they can be modified thorough experience.

Taking all of these definitions in consideration, it is safe to assume that language attitudes are represented by the reactions learners have towards a particular language and it speakers. Such reactions are strongly shaped by the beliefs, emotions, and opinions these learners have (McGroarty, 1996).

In order to evaluate the attitudes toward language variation in different cultures and different contexts, cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes need to be understood. Recognizing the nature of language attitudes contribute to a better understanding of the way in which these attitudes affect foreign language learning and the possibility for modifying and changing such attitudes. These attitudes may also reflect possible social changes and can be used as an instrument to reflect personal opinions and beliefs that members of one culture have about another culture. Moreover, identifying the components of language attitudes contributes to the possibility of shaping the way in which these attitudes are measured. As a result, the concept of language attitudes has been the focus on numerous studies with the last five decades.

Literature Review

Research in the area of language attitudes has "a rich history that stretches across several decades and social scientific disciplines" (Cargile & Giles, 1997, p. 195). Different disciplines such as the social psychology of language, sociology of language, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, communication, and discourse, have played a role in shedding light on the field of language attitudes (Cargile et al. 1994).

The beginning of modern research on language attitudes is rooted in the 1930's and 1940's when studies were conducted inside Britain and the United States of America investigating the accuracy of judgments subjects make about speakers' characteristics on the basis of the speech of those speakers (Cargile et al, 1994; Cargile & Giles, 1997). Much of the research on language attitudes has been directed toward linguistic inferiority. That is people evaluating one language, or one language variety, as better than the others. The other focus of the research in this area has been on finding a correlation between particular linguistic features and socioeconomic or social status. According to Fishman and Agheyisi (1970), there are three major categories of attitude studies:

1. those dealing with language-oriented or language-directed attitudes;
2. those dealing with community-wide stereotyped impressions toward particular language or language varieties;
3. those concerned with the implementation of different types of language attitudes (p. 141).

The work by Lambert et al. (1960) represents a pioneer study that contributed significantly to many different aspects of the research on language attitudes. This study investigated attitudes toward English and French among bilingual students in Montreal, Canada: "the purpose of the study was to determine how French and English speaking Montrealers view one another" (Lambert & Lambert, 1964, p. 55). In this study, French speaking evaluators rated English guises to be more favorable than French guises "for the following 10 traits: Height, Good looks, Leadership, Intelligence, Self-confidence, Dependability, Ambition, Sociability, Character, and Likability (Lambert et al, 1960, pp. 86-87). This landmark study gave some indications about a possible positive relationship between success in second language learning and favorable attitudes toward a particular language. This result was supported by follow-up studies such as Gardner & Lambert (1972); and Lambert, Gardner, Olton, & Tunstall (1968). Moreover, as a result of this study, the matched-guise technique has been a mainstay of language attitude research. According to Gaies and Beebe (1997), this technique has been applied to different issues in sociolinguistics, social psychology, and education. The linguistic bases of teacher prejudice and the phenomena of convergence and divergence are all examples of such issues.

In their study on school girls from age nine to eighteen, Lambert, Frankel, and Tucker (1966) asked the participants to evaluate the personalities of French and English speakers. Twelve years was found to be the age when a definite preference for English began to emerge. The studies by Lambert and others were extended to cover language groups inside the United States and in the Philippines (Stern, 1983). Preston (1963) conducted a study in which personality characteristics were judged not only along the lines of the particular language (French or English) spoken, but with the added dimension of the gender of the speaker. Preston (1963) found that French speaking women were judged to be more confident, intelligent, and ambitious than English speaking women.

Lambert, Anisfeld, and Yeni-Komshian (1965) did a study in which they asked Arabic and Hebrew groups to evaluate language samples of both languages. Unlike the responses to the early Canadian studies, subjects responded favorably to their own language and unfavorably to the other. Each group thought that their own language group was more friendly, reliable, and attractive.

Preston (1989) points out that the work by Tucker and Lambert (1969) reflects the interest that emerged in studying attitudes about different dialects instead of only studying attitudes about different languages. In this study, Tucker and Lambert attempted to study the reactions of northern White, southern White, and southern Black College students toward speech samples of six groups of speaker types. The six categories were: Network, Educated White, educated Southern Negro, Mississippi Peer, Howard University, and New York Alumni. The results showed that judgements made by listeners were influenced by differences in the dialects. According to Preston (1989), "such studies show that nonlinguists differentiate among varieties and have stereotyped attitudes toward them" (p. 51).

Language attitude research related to blingualism has largely involved the attitudes toward acquiring a second or foreign language. Two of the first major studies were conducted in Montreal when English speaking students, who were studying French, were assessed for verbal intelligence, language-learning aptitude, and motivation to learn French as well as attitudes toward the French community (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1966). These studies were the first in a 12-year period of time in which Lambert and other researchers investigated attitudes toward second, or foreign language learning.

From the research over this span of time, Gardner and Lambert (1972) have suggested what might be called a socio-psychological theory of second language learning. At the center of this theory is the notion that the person learning a second language must be mentally prepared to adapt certain characteristics that reflect the behavior of the target language group. Ethnocentric tendencies, as well as people's attitudes toward the other group, seem to be a prime factor in language learning.

Defining the motive for acquiring the second language indirectly refers to ethnocentric tendencies and attitudes that an individual has toward the target language group. The terms integrative and instrumental are frequently used to in this definition (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Integrative indicates a desire to learn the language in order to become part of the whole cultural milieu surrounding the language. Instrumental motivation refers to the necessity for acquiring the language. In this case a language learner could actually feel a great deal of hostility toward the target language group, but still have more positive attitudes with regard to the language they use (Ortego, 1971). This is due to the fact the second language learner is forced to learn the target language to succeed.

Giles (1971) conducted a study in which speakers evaluated the standard speech forms that were considered higher than their own. Giles found differences among British school children in their evaluations of RP English and regional dialects and foreign accents. This study by Giles (1971) is a typical example of research that was

conducted in order to investigate linguistic stereotypes and their implications on language choices.

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the language attitudes toward the speech of Mexican Americans. Using the matched-guise technique to elicit the reactions of students from third through twelfth grade to the speech of Mexican-Americans, Politzer and Ramirez (1973) found that Mexican-American students were consistent in their evaluations of high status for English, while Anglos differed in that females and older students rated Spanish more favorably.

Fishman and Cooper (1977) conducted an extensive language attitude study in Israel in order to investigate the attitudes of Hebrew-speaking Israeli students toward English acquisition. Results from this study found proficiency in English to be good, attitudes toward learning English to be positive, and attitudes toward American immigrants to be positive. Fishman and Cooper's study is important for two reasons: it provides useful information about the perception of English as an important, if not necessary, language to learn (Fisman & Cooper, 1977); and, it employs extensive methodological procedures (matched-guise technique and questionnaire) to elicit attitude information.

Giles and Smith's study (1979), in which British reactions to a Canadian speaker were investigated, is another example of the many studies conducted to investigate language attitudes.   The significance of this study lies in the development of the Accommodation Theory to present an explanation for language differences. "According to this theory, speech shift occurs in conversation, resulting either in convergence in which speakers modify their speech to become more similar to their listeners, or in divergence through which linguistic differences are maintained or emphasized between interlocutors" (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997, pp.179-180). This theory has given rise to many empirical studies that were conducted in order to determine the significance of accommodation in interpersonal relationships in the use of language.

What characterizes research in the area of language attitudes is that many studies habe been conducted to language attitudes in different contexts. The outcomes of most of these studies recognized the important role played by language attitudes in second/foreign language learning and language planning (Cargile et al, 1994; Edwards, 1985; Fasold, 1984; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997; Preston, 1989; Ryan, & Giles, 1982; Cirsmore, Ngew, & Soo, 1996). The work by Gardner (1979), for example, is a good illustration of research conducted on the relationship between language attitudes and language learning.   In this study, Gardner claimed that second language acquisition is affected, indirectly, by language attitudes.

In a somewhat recent study, Alford and Strother (1990) conducted a study to investigate the attitudes of both L1 and L2 listners toward specific regional accents of American English and make a comparison between these attitudes. The 97 subjects were exposed to the Southern (South Carolina), Northern (New York), and Midwestern (Illinois) accents. "The results indicate that the judgments of L2 subjects differed from those of L1 subjects and that L2 subjects were able to perceive differences in regional accents of U.S. English" (Alford & Strother, 1990, p. 479).

Crismore, Ngew, and Soo (1996) conducted a study that aimed at investigating the attitudes of 60 teachers and 439 students toward Malaysian English. Using a 16-item Liker questionnaire, the researchers found that "Malaysian speakers of English accept the functionality of Malaysian English, but are, nevertheless, determined to learn Standard English because they regard Malaysian English as 'wrong' English" (Crismore, Ngew, & Soo, 1996, p. 319).

Locally, some studies were conducted to explore the attitudes of Saudi students towards learning English language. Congreve (2005) examined the attitudes of Saudi students towards English and Arabic in Saudi Arabia. An attitude questionnaire was prepared and administered to 197 second language students at King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. In general, Saudi students studying English at KFUPM showed a very positive attitude towards the utility of English, which would tend to promote instrumental motivation. In contrast, students' motivation towards Arabic is more integrative and permanent.

In a survey-based study, Alhuqbani (2009) investigated the motivations and attitudes of students with an ESP context. Replicating previous studies, Alhuqbani (2009) investigated the motivational and attitudinal variables involved in the learning of English for Specific Purpose by a total of 206 Saudi police officers police officers. Although the overall results indicated that Saudi police officers are both instrumentally and integratively motivated to learn English as a foreign language, "they were more instrumentally motivated to learn English" (p. 31). The findings of the study also showed that military ranks and security sectors had some significant effects on the "officers' motivation and attitudes towards English learning and its culture"(p.31). Overall, the findings of the study support come in line with previous research findings foreign language and ESP contexts that showed that language learners are motivated either integratively or instrumentally or both to learn the target language.

Al-Zahrani (2008) reports the findings of a study in which a 25—item questionnaire was employed to collects data from 320 Saudi ESL secondary students, who are all male, about their attitudes towards English as a foreign language and towards learning English. The findings suggest that "the students' attitudes are generally positive, if not very positive" (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 36). On the basis of such findings, Al-Zahrani (2008) calls for more investigation of other factors that hinder the appropriate and successful teaching of English in Saudi pre-university schools.

Al-Qurashi (2009) investigated the attitudes of Saudi college students towards group work when learning writing. He used a survey with 24 male students to collect data about h   they would "respond to response techniques introduced in composition classrooms"(Al-Quraishi, 2009, p. 57). The findings showed that the participants had positive attitudes towards both giving comments and advice to peer writers and receiving comments and advice from peer writers. Al-Qurashi (2009) recommends that "current teaching methods in composition classrooms in Saudi Arabia show be updated to meet the trend of adopting the process approach in teaching composition"(p. 62).

The extensive research I this area reveals that different types of language attitudes can affect each other. Spolsky (1969) states that "in a typical language learning situation, there are a number of people whose attitudes to each other can be significant: the learner,

the teacher, the learner's peers and parents, and the speakers of the language.   Each relationship might well be shown to be a factor controlling the learner's motivation to acquire the language" (p. 237).

Learner's attitudes could represent the first and most significant type of language attitudes.   This type of language attitudes may by subdivided into the following subcategories: (1) attitudes toward the target language, (2) attitudes toward target language speakers, and (3) attitudes toward the target language culture (Ellis, 1995). The attitudes of learners toward the target language are believed to "affect not only motivation for learning or acquiring the language but also for using it in various communicative, symbolic, and record-keeping functions" (Noss, 1994, p. 3).

Ellis (1994) identifies the following types of attitudes: "(1) attitudes towards the target language; (2) attitudes towards the target language speakers; (3) attitudes towards the target-language culture; (4) attitudes towards the social value of learning the target language; (5) attitudes towards the particular uses of the target language; and (6) attitudes the learners have towards themselves as members of their own culture.

According to Vassberg (1993), attitudes toward a language and language varieties can "have profound effects on language usage".   Ellis (1995) believes that "positive attitudes toward the L2, its speakers, and its culture can be expected to enhance learning and negative attitudes to impede learning" (p. 200). Larsen-Freeman and Long (1997) address different studies that indicate that there is a relationship between success in second language learning and the positive attitudes toward the target language. The study by Scherer and Wertheimer (1964) is one example of such studies. The results of the study showed the positive attitudes American college students have toward German were related to their proficiency in German.

Learners' attitudes toward the speakers of the target language have been, according to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1997), the most extensively researched type. It is believed that learners' attitudes toward the speakers of the target language are important for efficient learning of that language (MacFarlane & Wesche, 1995; Keilen, 1995). Gardner (1979) states that the learner's attitudes toward "the other group are believed to determine his success in learning the new language" (p. 194).

As for the attitudes of teachers, Tucker and Lambert (1973) believe that such attitudes play a significant role in influencing the outcomes of instructed second language learning. Gere and White (1979) believe in the important effect of teachers' language attitudes on students' learning.   Teachers' attitudes reflect not only what they, as individuals believe about linguistic variability, but also what society at large believes.

The last type of attitudes to be taken into account is the attitudes of parents. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1997) state that the study by Gardner (1960) "showed that Anglophone students learning French as a second language in Montreal possessed attitudes which were reflective of their parents' attitudes towards the French Canadians" (p. 178). Thus, Pakin (1994) believes that parents' attitudes should be surveyed because of their importance into the education system.

Other types of language attitudes may influence second/foreign language learning. The attitudes toward the learning situation and the teachers are two examples of such attitudes (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997). Successful language planning and effective language teaching cannot be accomplished unless all of these attitudes are taken into

consideration. Thus, it is of significant importance to thoroughly examine language learner attitudes.

Methods of Measuring Language Attitudes

Generally speaking, the different methods that are used in studying language attitudes can be either direct or indirect (Ellis, 1994; Fasold, 1984). The direct method is based on the use of direct questions. Participants are asked to evaluate the language or the language variety, to choose a language they prefer, to give the reasons for studying a particular language, to evaluate a social group that uses a certain language or language variety, and to express their opinions about language use and language programs (Ryan, Giles, & Sebastain, 1982). Open and close questionnaires, interviews, and observations are also examples of the direct method (Ellis, 1994; Fasold, 1984; & Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997).

On the other hand, the indirect method is based on eliciting responses in an indirect way. This method is designed to "keep the subject from knowing that her language attitudes were being investigated" (Fasold, 1984, p. 149). The semantic differential rating which "involves the evaluation of a concept or stimulus by rating it on scales comprised of adjectival opposites" (Preston 1989, p.114) is an example of the indirect method. Within this technique, the learner is presented with a list of antonyms (for example, useful-useless; ugly-beautiful) and are asked to evaluate a given phenomenon (for example, a language or a speakers' accent) on each dimension" (Ellis, 1994, p. 199). This method is used within the matched guise technique.

The matched guise technique can be defined as the "use of recorded voices of people speaking first in one dialect or language and then in another; that is, in two guises. The recordings are played to listeners who do not know that the two samples of speech are from the same person and who judge the two guises of the same speaker as though they were judging two separate speakers" (Gaies & Beebe, 1991, p. 157). Alford and Strother (1990) define the matched guise technique as "a subjective reaction test used to reveal how people feel about characteristics of other based on tape-recorded speech of individuals who are bilingual or bidialectal" (p. 484).

Lieberman (1975) believes that the matched guise is "one of the most structured techniques which has proved useful for measuring community-wide stereotyped impressions of language, and it has been widely employed in cross-cultural investigations" (p. 473). According to Wardhaugh (1997), the matched guise technique was developed by Lambert to examine the reactions of listeners to different features in speech. According to Fasold (1984), this technique combines the characteristics of both the direct and indirect methods. It is "direct in the sense that the listeners are explicitly asked to give their opinions of the speaker's characteristics. It is indirect in the sense that listeners are asked to react to speakers, not languages, and they are not aware of that they are hearing the same person in each guise" (Fasold, 1984, p.150).

Two purposes justify the use of the matched guise technique. The first reason is "to elicit reactions to particular codes by having subjects respond to samples of those codes, rather than by having subjects express opinions about the codes themselves"

(Gaies & Beebe, 1991, p. 157). The second purpose is giving the researchers the ability to control all variables except the code (Fasold, 1984).

Fasold (1984) addresses some of the drawbacks that are encountered with the use of this technique. One is that the speakers may be judged on the basis of their reading performance. In such a case, the evaluations made by subjects are not limited to the variable of language.

The other problem is related to the content of the guises, which may lead to some incompatibility between the language and the topic. "If the two 'guises' happen to be the High and Low forms in a diglossic community, it is easy to see that a topic that is appropriate in one variety might be completely wrong for the other.   Respondents might then give low evaluations to one guise, not because they have a negative opinion of the language form itself, but because they think that language forms should not be used to discuss that particular topic" (Fasold, 1984, p.153).

Edwards (1985) points out that although the matched-guise technique has been criticized for its alleged artificiality, it is still the most widely used technique in eliciting stereotyped reactions to a language or language variety. The validity of the matched-guise technique is the information collected by this technique can be confirmed by other means, such as questionnaires and interviews. Thus, the researcher decided to use the matched-guise technique in this study because of its apparent usefulness and reliability in tapping the attitudes of the subjects who participated in this study.

Language Attitudes and Second /Foreign Language Learning

Historically, researchers in the area of language attitudes have been more concerned with recognizing the attitudes that learners might have toward a language or varieties of a language than with investigating the mechanism by which these attitudes operate (Cargile & Giles, 1997). Thus, most studies failed to offer an explanation for a direct relationship (if any) between attitudes and second language learning. Pēnalosa (1981) states that research conducted in this domain focuses mainly on the judgments of the subjects about a language or language variety. It is safe to assume that researchers on language attitudes seem to be cautious not to define the exact nature of the relationship between language attitudes and second language learning and how this relationship operates, in spite of the richness of literature on this aspect (Ellis, 1995). However, some studies suggest that it is possible that some role is played by attitudinal factors in facilitating second language learning and development. Still, it is difficult to recognize the exact nature and the mechanism of the relationship between language attitudes and second or foreign language learning (Edwards, 1985; Ellis, 1995; Fishman, 1977; Gaies & Beebe, 1991; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997; Loveday, 1982; Pēnalosa, 1981; Stern, 1983).

Research in this area suggests that the following four features characterize the relationship between language attitudes and second language achievement. First, the influence that attitudes might have on the achievement in learning a second language seems to be indirect in its nature. What attitudes do is trigger motivation, which by itself affects the success in learning a second language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997; Spolsky, 1989). Gardner (1979) states that " the motivation to learn a second language

has been conceptualized as a combination of a positive attitude [desire] to learn the language and effort expended in that direction" (p. 205).

Second, many studies, especially those conducted by Lambert and others, indicate that "there is a positive association between measured learning outcomes and attitudes toward the target group and the language" (Stern, 1983, p. 237). The best description of the positive relationship between positive attitudes and proficiency in language learning is offered by Gardner (1985), in which he states that

"in the language learning situation, if the student's attitudes are favorable, it is reasonable to predict, other things being equal, that the experience with the language will be pleasant, and the students will be encouraged to continue. Simply, favorable attitudes tend to cause the experience to be perceived positively. If, on the other hand, attitudes are negative, the experiences will tend to be perceived unfavorably" (p. 8).

Third, some researchers suggest that progress in second language learning can modify the type of attitudes learners have about the language they learn. Stern (1983) points out that the results of some studies suggests that successful learning of the target language contributes to creating more positive attitudes toward the target language.

Hammerly (1982) goes further to state that it is very possible that the study of a second language can improve the attitudes that learners have about the speakers of the target language. As will be seen in the third section of this paper, this possibility is not supported by the outcomes of the present study. However, MacFarlane & Wesche (1995) point out that "more positive attitudes were only evident at the beginning levels of immersion programs and were not maintained over time, so that attitudes of immersion students who had been in the program for a number of years were not very different from those of nonparticipants" (p. 252). MacFarlane & Wesche (1995) assert that most of the studies that were conducted within immersion programs focused on the elementary level students. Therefore, it is not safe to assume that the same results will be found among higher levels.

That the positive influence attitudes might have on the success in learning a second language is more apparent among adults than among children is the fourth feature of the relationship between language attitudes and second language learning. Keilen, (1995); and Larsen-Freeman & Long (1997) believe that an explanation for such assumption is represented by the fact that attitudes are not developed fully among children.

To conclude, language attitudes are believed to be of significance in the development of second language proficiency. Gaies and Beebe (1991) assert that some of the second language acquisition theories such as the Acculturation Model and the Accommodation Theory assign a central role to language attitudes in learning a second language. However, it is surprising that most of the studies conducted within the area of language attitudes "have tended to measure evaluations of 'the English language', conceptualised as a single entity" (McKenzie, 2008, p. 66). Taking into account the significance of attitudes towards language variation in studying second language acquisition, building the sociolinguistic theory, and meeting the actual need of foreign language learners, he researcher conducted this study (Garrett, Coupland and Williams,

2003; & McKenzie, 2008). The ultimate goal is obtaining some valuable information that could guide language policy makers in Saudi Arabia.

Methodology

112 Saudi male students participated in this pilot study. All of them are enrolled in the Intensive English Program at Riyadh College of Technology, Saudi Arabia. Every student who is admitted to this college is required to enroll in this intensive English program before he takes any other courses. Within this sample are students who are less than twenty years old and students who are older than forty years. One reason for choosing the subjects from this college is due to the wide range of ages this sample covers, which provided the researcher with the opportunity to investigate the attitudes of Saudi learners representing a wide range of age. As will be seen later, some of the students who participated in this pilot study were taught American English. On the other hand, older participants mainly learned British English.

Table 1 shows the number of participants and their distribution according to age. From this figure it can be seen that 87.49% of the participants are 30 years of age or younger whereas 12.51% of subjects are 31 years of age or older. These two age groups are important to this study because they mean that 87.49% of participants have been learning American English during their intermediate and high education. The remaining group of participants (12.5%) was exposed to predominantly British English.

Table 1.Distribution of subjects according to their age

	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	Total
Number of Subjects	2	70	26	12	2	112
Percentage	1.79%	62.5%	23.2%	10.72%	1.79%	100%

Instrument

The matched guise technique, accompanied with a questionnaire, was employed in the current study. The selected reading passage that was used in the guises was an excerpt of approximately fifty-seconds. The selection of this passage was based on its richness in words whose pronunciation differs clearly in the British and American accents. Two male speakers were asked to read the passage.

The first speaker was an American teacher who was, at the time this study was conducted, working at the College of Technology, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Since he was born in Iowa, the first speaker talks with a Midwestern American accent. The researcher had to be sure that this American speaker did not teach any of the students who participated in this study for the sake of reliability of the results. It was possible that the sample of subjects could have included students whom this teacher taught which means they may have been able to identify his American nationality.

The second speaker was a British teacher who worked at the British Council in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This speaker was chosen to read the passage because of the

southern England accent he spoke with. This accent is clearly distinct from the American English accent of his counterpart.

The use of two speakers means that a modified version of the matched-guise technique was employed in this study. This modified version was based on the use of two different guises that were produced by two different speakers instead of one speaker who speaks in two different dialects. Three reasons justify the modification of the matched guise technique. The first reason was to "utilize natural rather than counterfeit accents, which may only represent actual stereotypes of the speakers. This also prevents speakers from varying their voice quality and style in an attempt to distinguish among the various accents" (Alford & Strother, 1990, p. 484). Other studies, such as Anisfeld, Bogo, and Lambert (1962); Markel, Eisler, and Resse (1967); Tucker and Lambert (1969); and Ryan and Carranz (1975), have employed this modified version of the matched-guise technique.

Second, the most important goal of this study was to investigate the attitudes that Saudi students have toward not only toward the two codes, but also the speakers and the cultures of American and British English. The third reason was a practical one. At the time this study was designed, the research couldn't find a person who could produce two guises in both codes.

The original questionnaire that was designed for use in this study contained the following eleven questions: (1) whether the speaker is British or American; (2) whether the person speaks in a friendly manner or not; (3) whether the accent in which the speaker speaks is understandable or not; (4) whether the speaker is smart or not; (5) whether the accent is likable or not; (6) whether the accent is attractive or not; (7) whether the speaker is a good person or a bad person; (8) whether the accent is formal or informal; (9) whether the accent is positive or negative; (10) whether the person speaks clearly or not; and, finally (11) whether the accent is easy or difficult to learn. The full questionnaire is found in appendix A.

The questionnaire was written in Arabic, the mother tongue of the participants. In order to refine the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a pilot study on group consisting of 12 students. On the basis of the pilot study, questions (4) and (7) were deleted in the final version of the questionnaire because students complained that they were unable to judge the personality of the speaker.

Procedures

The 112 students who participated in this study were divided into four groups. Each group consisted of twenty-eight students. The same procedures were employed with each of the four groups. Because the collection of data was administered to each group separately, data collection took four days to complete.

With each group, students were told that they would listen first to the same passage from two different speakers. After listening to the two speakers, students were told that they would listen to the first speaker, after which they would be asked to fill a questionnaire about the language of the speaker. It was decided that the first speaker would be the British one.   The choice of the British guise to be the first heard by

students, instead of listening to American guise, represented one of the limitations of the study.

The pilot study would have been more reliable if the four groups had been divided by two. Two of the four groups would then have been initially exposed to the American speaker. The other two should then have been exposed to the British speaker. In this way, the pilot study may have yielded more valid results. After finishing with the British speaker, the same procedures were employed with the tape of the American speaker.

Results

1. Ability to recognize the language variety:

Table 2 shows the number of participants who were able to correctly identify the American speaker. The table indicates that 100 participants (out of 112) recognized the American accent. In other words, 89.3% of them were able to correctly recognize that the speaker to whom they listened was American. Table 3, on the other hand, shows that 83% of participants were able to recognize the British speaker, compared to a percentage of 89.3% with the American speaker.

The high percentage of participants' ability to correctly distinguish the English variation which they have listened to is significant. The exposure to a language variation can shape the attitudes towards that variety. The table also shows that the youngest group of participants was not able to correctly identify either variety. That could be attributed to the fact that they were exposed mostly to the American variety. Listening to two different varieties could have caused confusion among this group of participants.

Table 2. The participants who correctly identified the American speaker

Age of subjects (in years)	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	Total number of subjects
Number of Subjects	0	62	26	10	2	100
Percentage	0%	55.36%	23.22%	8.99%	1.79%	89.3%

Table 3. The ability of subjects to identify the British Speaker

Age of subjects (in years)	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	Total number of subjects
Number of Subjects	0	61	24	6	2	93

| Percentage | 0% | 54.46% | 21.43% | 5.38% | 1.79% | 83% |

2. Participants' Attitudes towards British English

Table 4 shows the different attitudes the participants in this study had toward British English. In general, it shows the trend among participants (87.5% of them are 30 years old or younger) to have negative attitudes about British English. 69.6% of subjects thought that British English was not friendly. 58% of them reported that British English was unlikable and negative.

The table, nonetheless, clearly shows that the age group made a significant difference in regard to the overall attitudes the participants had about the British speaker. Participants who were 31 years of age or older had more positive attitudes towards British English in comparison to younger participants. The table shows that 11 subjects out of 14 who were 31 or older (78.57%) thought that British English was friendly and positive. Out of the 14 subjects, 12 of them (85.7%) considered British English to be attractive and easy to learn. Moreover, 100% of them believed in the clarity of the British accent. On the other hand, younger learners, from 16 to 30 years old, showed some interesting attitudes toward British English. When they were asked about whether British English was likable and friendly, younger learners believed that it was not. 65.3% of them (64 out of 98) reported that British English was unlikable and 76.5% of them (75 out of 98) thought it was unfriendly.

However, when it came to the issue of learning, the participants showed somewhat different attitudes. More than 53.7% of them believed in the ease of learning British English. 54 out of the 112 subjects (48.2%) considered it to be easy to understand. Moreover, 58% of the participants found that British people speak with clear accent. This outcome was applicable to both age groups. Participants who represented the 30 years old or younger group were almost divided in regard to the ease of learning British English. Only 51% of them considered British English to be difficult to learn. Moreover, almost 43% of this age group saw no difficulty in understanding this variation of English.

Lastly, it was the issue of formality upon which a high percentage of participants belonging to both age groups agreed upon. Overall, 68.8% of all participants thought that British English is formal. 67 participants belonging to the 16 to 30 years old group (68.4%) believed in the formality of British English.

Table 4. The different attitudes toward the British Speaker

	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	Total
Friendly	1	14	8	9	2	34
Unfriendly	1	56	18	3	0	78
Easy to learn	0	37	11	10	2	60
Difficult to learn	2	33	15	2	0	52

Likable	1	24	9	11	2	47
Unlikable	1	46	17	1	0	65
Attractive	0	28	12	10	2	52
Unattractive	2	42	14	2	0	60
Formal	1	43	23	8	2	77
Informal	1	27	3	4	0	35
Positive	1	25	10	9	2	47
Negative	1	45	16	3	0	65
Clear accent	0	36	15	12	2	65
Unclear accent	2	34	11	0	0	47
Easy to understand	2	29	11	10	2	54
Difficult to understand	0	41	15	2	0	58

2. **Participants' Attitudes towards American English**

The attitudes toward American English (shown in table 2) revealed somewhat a negative view older learners had about American English. For 78.6% and 85.7% of those belonging to the 31-40 years old group, American English was, respectively, unfriendly and unclear. Moreover, 10 of the 14 subjects (71.4%) thought that American English was unlikable, and 13 of them (92.9%) considered this English variation difficult to learn.

Table 4. The different attitudes toward the American Speaker

	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	Total
Friendly	2	59	23	3	0	87
Unfriendly	0	11	3	9	2	25
Easy to Learn	2	61	24	2	1	90
Difficult to Learn	0	9	2	10	1	22
Likable	2	56	20	2	1	81
Unlikable	0	14	6	10	1	31
Attractive	2	59	21	8	0	90
Unattractive	0	11	5	4	2	22
Formal	1	20	5	0	0	28
Informal	1	50	21	12	2	86
Positive	1	52	21	4	1	79
Negative	1	18	5	8	1	33
Clear accent	0	48	18	1	0	67
Unclear accent	2	22	8	11	2	45
Easy to understand	1	51	21	10	0	83
Difficult to understand	1	19	5	2	2	29

For the same group of students whose age range from 16 to 30 years, American English tends to be related to the positive adjectives. 85.7% and 88.8% of them think that American English is friendly and likable. 90 out of 98 (91%) think that American English is easy to learn. Lastly, 84 out of 98 (84.7%) believe in the attractiveness of this dialect.

It is the issue of formality that seems to be agreed upon among all participants. 76.8% of participants think that American English is informal. Out of 112, 77 participants (68.75%) believe that the British English is more formal.

Conclusion

The high percentage of subjects who recognized the American speaker (89.3%), compared to 83% in the case of the British speaker, can be accounted for by at least two facts. First, most of the subjects grew up learning American English in schools. Secondly, there exists a pervasive American military and economic presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Although there is a difference between the two percentages, it is still a small one. This indicates the high degree of familiarity to both dialects among all subjects. The high percentage of students who were able to recognize the British speaker reflects the continuing presence of British English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The British Council in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia has been well known for its high reputation in teaching English.

That 100% of subjects who are 31 years of age and older believe in the clarity of British English is an expected result since these participants had been exposed to British English in their intermediate and secondary schools. The results of the study also indicate that this age group has a somewhat negative attitude toward American English. 10 of the 14 subjects constituting this group (41.3%) believe that American English is unlikable. This observation seems to contradict the suggestion offered by some researchers, which claims that learning a language, or a language variety, can improve the attitudes toward this language or variety.

The outcomes of the present study indicate a clear difference between the attitudes of younger and older Saudi learners of English as a foreign language. Younger learners show favorable attitudes toward American English. Older learners, on the other hand, believe in the superiority of British English to American English. Another difference lies in the fact that while younger learners show some degree of positive attitudes toward British English, older learners seem to reject any attempt to appreciate American English.

The rejection of American English among students who are older than 30 years can be attributed to the belief of these participants that this variation of English is nothing more than one aspect of westernization. They may reject American English as a result of a political position. For example, some may believe that the USA deals with the Arab world and the State of Israel in a way that serves or benefits Israel (Samadi and Al Haq, 1996). Thus, language attitudes here may be seen as a reflection of the different feelings a group of people might have toward a particular culture or country.

This kind of rejection could be used as an evidence of the difficulty to modify or change attitudes among older learners with more exposure to and learning of the target code. This hypothesis also supports the findings to which MacFarlane & Wesche (1995) point. MacFarlane & Wesche (1995) assert the fact that most of the studies which talked about the possibility of changing attitudes with more proficiency in the second language are held among the beginning level students in immersion programs.

The tendency to fully reject the other dialect is not found among younger learners. Contrary to what the researcher was expecting, a good percentage of participants, who range from 21 to 25 in age, seem to have some positive attitudes about British English. 34.3% of them, for example, think that British English is likable.

The appreciation of American English among the younger generation of Saudis is related to the belief that this variation represents a prestige code. In the late seventies and the early eighties, many Saudis had the opportunity to pursue their graduate studies in the United States. When they returned to their homeland, they spoke with an accent different from the British accent Saudis used to hear. The American accent became the prestigious code that characterized highly educated people. The important question, which needs an answer, is whether the use of the code young Saudis prefer made a difference in improving proficiency in English. There is a need for further research to examine a possible effect of attitudes on learning English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1997) point out that most studies that are carried out in this field took place in contexts where there was "more of an opportunity for contact between learners and TL speakers than in a foreign language context where the opportunities are more limited" (p. 177).

One issue to be focused on is the fact that these participants might influence the attitudes of their children toward American English. It is believed that the attitudes of parents can play a significant role in learning a second language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1997; Ellis, 1995). It would be interesting if future research were conducted to investigate whether the positive attitudes younger generations of Saudis have toward American English might change due to of the influence of their parents' negative attitudes toward this dialect.

Another important issue should be raised at the end of this description of the results. The participants, whose ages range from 26 to 30 years, show considerable variation in responses. This variation can be attributed to the fact that some of them did not have the opportunity to be introduced to American English in their intermediate and high school education. The factor of age came again to be significant in the interpretation of the results in this study.

Concluding Remarks

The outcomes of this study indicate the appreciation the younger generation of Saudis has toward American English. The English language used to be considered as difficult as mathematics and physics. There has been a lot of argument about the best solutions that can be used to make learning English a pleasant experience for Saudis. The Saudi government adopted American English in the curricula used in intermediate and high schooling. This decision seems to be a successful attempt to adopt a more accessible and learnable English.

That the attitudes of learners toward English are positive is an indication that Saudi learners do not perceive English to be as difficult as they once did. There is a need, however, for more research on whether these attitudes influence the achievement of Saudis when learning English as a foreign language. The interpretation of the results should not be limited to the field of language teaching. They can also be used to investigate possible changes in the way Saudis deal with and think of westernization. The present study shows a considerable difference among Saudis in the way they perceive and think of American culture.

To sum up, I believe that more research should be carried out to follow up on the results of this study. It is clear that young Saudis have positive attitudes about American English. However, the question is whether these favorable attitudes contribute to more proficiency in English among these students.

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Appendix A

The Questionnaire

Part A

Dear Student:

At the beginning you will listen to two different persons reading the same excerpt in English but with two different accents. Try to concentrate while listening.

After finishing listening to the following two passages, you will be asked to listen to one of the two passages again. Then you will be asked to answer some questions concerning the accent you have just heard. After completing the above, you will be asked to listen to the second passage again. Then you will be asked to answer some questions concerning the accent you have just heard

At this time, all you have to do is to specify your age:

( ) from 16 to 20 years.

( ) from 21 to 25 years.

( ) from 26 to 30 years.

( ) from 31 to 35 years.

( ) from 36 to 40 years.

( ) older than 40 years.

Part B

After you have listened to the two passages at one time, you will listen now to the first passage. After you finish listening, answer the following questions:

1. What is the nationality of the speaker? Is he:
( ) British   ( ) American
2. This person speaks:
( ) Friendly   ( ) Unfriendly
3. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Easy to understand   ( ) Difficult to understand
4. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Likable   ( ) Unlikable
5. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Attractive   ( ) Unattractive
6. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Formal   ( ) Informal
7. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Positive   ( ) Negative
8. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Clear   ( ) Not clear
9. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Easy to learn   ( ) Difficult to learn

Part C

Now you will listen to the second passage. After you finish listening, answer the following questions:

1. What is the nationality of the speaker? Is he:
( ) British   ( ) American

2. This person speaks:
( ) Friendly   ( ) Unfriendly

3. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Easy to understand   ( ) Difficult to understand

4. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Likable   ( ) Unlikable

5. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Attractive   ( ) Unattractive

6. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Formal   ( ) Informal

7. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Positive   ( ) Negative

8. The accent in which the person speaks is
( ) Clear   ( ) Not clear

9. The accent in which the person speaks is:
( ) Easy to learn   ( ) Difficult to learn