

Saudi Students' Attitude towards World Englishes

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ABSTRACT

In order to create and adopt better educational and pedagogic policies, it is important to understand students' attitude towards the varieties of English. This study aims to investigate young Saudi EFL learners' attitude towards the concept of World Englishes. It also explores Saudi learners' preference of one English variety over the others. This study is significant since few studies have been done on the awareness of World Englishes among Saudi EFL learners and the present research is designed to fill this gap. The present study will help apply the concept of World Englishes to the teaching of English language in a sample Saudi educational environment. In addition, it will help develop a positive attitude towards cultural understanding and cultural diversity in Saudi Arabia. This study has three objectives: to examine and understand how EFL learners see World Englishes, and varieties of English as a second language in particular, in the Saudi Arabian context; to find out how Saudi EFL learners view the apparent domination of one variety of English over others; and to investigate the reasons why one variety of English is preferred to others. The study uses both direct and indirect techniques of measuring the attitude through interviews and a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained both open-ended and close-ended questions, one of which was a verbal guise test. The samples were obtained from the two largest public educational institutes in Saudi Arabia with both male and female adult students. The findings indicate that Saudi students are aware of some varieties of the English language, though they seem to have varied attitudes towards the diverse varieties of World Englishes. Students generally viewed American and British English as the standard English varieties and did not accept other varieties of World Englishes as standard. The results also showed that in spite of the fact that most of the students generally considered a 'native' teacher's English as superior, they principally favored a Saudi teacher to teach them.

Key words: EFL, World Englishes, Attitude, Saudi, Native English Varieties, Non-Native English Varieties

INTRODUCTION

It is important to investigate, and raise learners' awareness concerning, the varieties of World Englishes. Such studies are needed to be carried out in a positive environment in order to achieve the intended results. Young Saudi learners seem to be interested in acquiring knowledge of diverse varieties of English, rather than the standard version. There are few studies on the awareness of World Englishes. This study aims to address this issue and, moreover, examine young Saudi learners' perception of the concept of World Englishes. It also aims to examine Saudi learners' preference of one variety of English over the others and, furthermore, identify the reasons for this preference.

The relatively new global awareness about the varieties of World Englishes, along with the researcher's intensive readings in this field, motivated this study. Also, observing the overall attitude of students, as a longtime lecturer of speaking and listening courses, led to the inception of the

idea of this research. According to Kachru (1985), English enjoys an inimitable linguistic diversity and heterogeneity as well as cultural pluralism. Therefore, it is important to know English in all its diverse varieties.

The main purpose of this research is to study the attitude of Saudi students towards the concept of World Englishes, as perceived in the context of their culture.

The objectives of the research are:

1. To understand how EFL students view the varieties of World Englishes in Saudi Arabia.
2. To find out if a particular variety of English dominates others, according to Saudi EFL students.
3. To investigate the possible explanations for this preference.

Literature Review

In almost all educational institutes in Saudi Arabia, English is taught as the main foreign language. More emphasis on

the English language seems to be needed since the country is experiencing high economic development and more and more workers are coming to the country from around the globe for various professions. Therefore, the country needs to address all the issues that could potentially impede language learning, as doing this will assist the nation to communicate efficiently with other citizens of the world.

In their study, Mahboob and Elyas (2014) have documented the history of English language teaching, and learning, in Saudi Arabia. The study also examines how the English language can be "localized" to meet the local needs. The work of scholars who had studied in western countries led to the establishment of the primary English language school known as the Scholarship Preparation School in Makkah in 1936. Although the school exclusively enrolled students who were to study abroad, English language gained a lot of economic importance in the country in its wake and was subsequently introduced in the secondary education system. According to Mahboob and Elyas, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia depended on big overseas companies to facilitate its development and, consequently, the ministry of education was obliged to prepare the Saudis to interact with foreigners.

The Saudi government later bought the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) which was formerly owned, and largely operated, by the United States government. For this reason, the Saudis came to associate the English language with oil, which later came to be known as "petro-linguistics". The association of a language with a specific kind of economic activity influenced people's perception of the English language since oil only allowed for certain political, economic, and social elements to be offered as fertile ground for developing English.

Other researchers and scholars in the field of sociolinguistic (e.g. Crystal, 2003; Phillipson, 2003; and Saviile-Troike, 2006) have also discussed the concept of World Englishes. According to them, English has not only become the international language of the twenty-first-century but it has also given rise, and influenced, the internationalization of communication and the phenomenon of globalization. According to Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey (2011), globalization has made the world locally, regionally, and globally interconnected, thus accelerating the flow of languages, people, and cultures. A common language seems to be an essential tool for establishing and maintaining this flow. Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey consider the English language the main, and the most appropriate, linguistic tool capable of making this flow possible.

The field of world englishes

Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008) refer to the new and emergent varieties of English as "World Englishes". The use of the plural form "Englishes", rather than the singular "English", has become common, for it stresses the diversity inherent to the language and that no particular English enjoys individual, centralized authority anymore. The term 'World Englishes' explains evolving indigenized or localized English varieties, especially those which have been created under the influence of the United States or the United Kingdom. According to Bolton (2005), the research on global Englishes is all

about assessing how connections of capacity, sociolinguistic histories, and multicultural foundations influence the use of English in many parts of the world. It involves identifying the English varieties that are employed as part of countless sociolinguistic backgrounds. This concern with global Englishes first started in 1978 and soon English became the international language by the merit of its legitimized interpretability, intelligibility, and propriety. According to Bolton (2005), new English varieties are constantly created and, thus, determining the exact number of World Englishes is a difficult task.

Kachru (1985) argues that many students from expanding and outer circles learn English in order to be able to communicate with native and non-native speakers of the English language. Therefore, there is the need to raise awareness concerning the varieties of English language in the world so that the students do not face unsurmountable challenges while interacting with native English speakers. The reason is that the English language they speak is almost similar to native English, which is in their view the standard English.

According to Kim (2007), acceptance and awareness of varieties of outer circle English bring about positive changes to non-native English speakers. Kim concludes that participants prefer to use American English as the standard English and do not show any particular preference for different non-native and native versions of English. Participants displayed a positive attitude towards the different varieties of non-native English language because they were willing to pursue their learning programs in the "outer circle" countries.

From a social point of view, the term 'standard English' may be defined as a language spoken widely throughout the world. For some students, the English language is a standard language used by a higher social class. Therefore, the socially standard English is not only satisfactory but preferred and desired all around the world. When Saudi Arabian students were asked whether they considered themselves able to understand all of the different varieties of the English language, if they chose either the British or the American English, they responded in the affirmative believing that they would be able to communicate comfortably with the speakers of other Englishes.

Language Attitude Studies

According to Bayard et al. (2001), the United States English is the most popular and favoured choice of students in Australia, the USA, and New Zealand. The study was conducted to examine the participants' attitudes and reactions to these varieties and concluded that there were specific variances in the relative evaluations of these types of United States English. After the period of political upheaval in the United States in 2001, Garrett et al. (2005) re-examined these attitudes in the same countries and applied a research methodology harmonized with folk-linguistic methods to the study of positions. The researcher selected the sample from undergraduate native speakers in universities in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The participants were asked to list the nations that spoke English as their first language, apart from their countries, and imme-

diately write their first reactions to those varieties.

Non-Americans seemed to view American English negatively, potentially due to the political implications, associations, and connotations of the American English, though there were overenthusiastic and overzealous participants in all of the groups as well. The researchers argued that since they had collected their data between late 2002 and early 2003, in the time of military actions and operations during the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the participants' attitudes could have been possibly influenced, as opposed to the results of the study of Bayard et al. (2001). Furthermore, although the respondents did not directly mention any particular reasons, they, in general, hinted at the hegemonic power of the USA and its belligerent, imperialistic, and warlike policies. Morphosyntactic or lexical, as well as spoken, variations in phonology were also observed in this study. The participants seemed to have the ability to separate the context and the content of language reactions by having a good command of vocalized English as a first language rather than their nations.

Method and Design of Research

Few studies have been conducted on the Saudi EFL learners' perceptions, attitudes, and awareness towards World Englishes. The present study aims to address this issue and investigate young Saudi learners' attitudes towards the notion of 'World Englishes', as understood in the context of their culture.

The current research employs direct and indirect methods of attitude measurement. According to Ryan and Giles (1982), when doing research on a population, researchers should use both direct and indirect methods. Edward (1982) believes that the best method for the assessment of attitudes towards a language is the one based on an eclectic approach, in which the researcher uses a combination of various direct and indirect methods to have a precise measurement of language attitudes. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), this method makes possible the examination of diverse components of the phenomenon being investigated. Moreover, research questions are conveniently answered from different perspectives and an in-depth analysis of the results is provided. In order to meet these criteria, and as there are no perfect and flawless measurements of any aspect of a language, the data in this study were collected using both interviews and questionnaires.

To have both a direct and an indirect measurement of the participants' awareness, this study employed a 'verbal guise test' questionnaire that contained both open and close-ended questions.

Data Collection Tools

This study has four parts:

1. Part 1: This part includes the history of personal language use, for instance students' proficiency level in English and how long they have studied English. It also includes demographic questions.

1. Part 2: This part includes five audio recordings obtained from reliable speakers of different varieties of world

Englishes reading the same text. These English varieties consisted of speakers from Malaysia, the Philippines, India, Scotland, and England. 'Accent Impression' is a bipolar scale application that followed the listening exercise modified from Rousseau (2012). Based on the experience of previous research on the attitude, the researcher decided to use this scale, which coincided with language varieties. In addition, the researcher grouped the adjectives that were used based on the criteria of quality, solidarity, and status. The researcher further classified the adjectives from the viewpoint of being 'stereotypical' or 'non-stereotypical'. The respondents were required to determine the speech they heard as instances of either bad or good English.

3. A survey on Direct World Englishes constitutes the third part of the questionnaire. Rousseau (2012) devised a six-point Likert scale, including statements on language attitude, to investigate whether the respondents had a negative or a positive attitude towards the English language and its varieties. This survey uses a direct method of extracting linguistic attitudes and investigates them using a test of verbal pretext. This method was eventually selected because it is a successful method for quantifying attitudes. Also, since efficiently understanding the participants' awareness concerning the world Englishes was of paramount importance to the researcher, using such close-ended questions was essential. Then, questions were asked in order to quantify the perceptions of Saudi respondents on the varieties of native and non-native Englishes.

4. In part 4, an indirect technique is used to explore the respondents' awareness of the varieties of world Englishes. The researcher provided the respondents with the names of various countries including South Africa, Kenya, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Singapore, Canada, France, India, and Britain as well as two blank spaces where they were supposed to identify the two languages that they thought had the official status, or were widely spoken, in those countries. The researcher also asked the respondents to specify the country whose English they liked to use for communication and to justify their answers. The reason for the latter part was that justifying the answers would actually measure their awareness of world Englishes. The ability to adequately justify an answer generally shows a person's awareness level.

Interviews were conducted with some of the participants who had filled the questionnaires. The interview questions were adopted, and modified, from the sixteen-item questionnaires of Tien (2008). The researcher selected these questions in particular because they were precise and comprehensive and sought to understand and measure the respondent's awareness of world Englishes, as well as their daily use of English. Furthermore, through the use of Tien's questionnaire the researcher was able to examine the respondents' attitudes towards English. The interviews were conducted in order to have further quantitative data.

Part one and two of the questionnaire

In the first part of the questionnaire, questions on students' proficiency level in English and how long they had studied English, as well as their demographic information includ-

ing gender, nationality, and age, were presented. The second part consisted of five audio recordings obtained from reliable speakers of different varieties of world Englishes reading the same text. According to Ryan and Giles (1982), the researcher should ask the speakers to read shorter texts in order to be able to successfully control different confusing variables.

The researcher selected the speakers based on their background in English languages which included Malaysian, Filipino, Indian, Scottish, and English. Each variety of English was chosen for a specific reason. Filipino and Indian, for instance, were selected because the Saudi respondents regularly interact with the speakers of these languages in their daily activities and lives in professions such as middle-class workers, receptionists, drivers, and homemakers. Scottish and Malaysian, on the other hand, were selected since the speakers of these languages have minimal communication and interaction with Saudi Arabians. British English was also included because it is considered the standard or model English in the Saudi education curriculum. Australian, Canadian, and American English were not included since the study had already established Scottish as the second language variety of English and this variety was sufficient for the purpose of this study. Furthermore, since the American English variety could have skewed the participant's attitudes for being more interested in it than other varieties, it was excluded to avoid such biases. In addition, to avoid false results, the researcher avoided too much recording which could potentially lead to the participants' possible loss of attention.

A bipolar scale application known as "Accent Impression" was used to follow the listening exercise in this study. The scale is based on previous attitudinal work on language varieties. Similar to Rousseau's grouping (2012), the used adjectives were classified based on 'quality', involving criteria such as being comprehensible and fluent as well as the status such as the benefits of acquiring a job. Classification of quality and condition is similar to the classification based on stereotypical (the benefit of receiving a job) and non-stereotypical (comprehensibility and fluency) traits. The respondents were also asked to assess the speech sample as an instance of an either good or bad English Model. Close-ended questions were chosen to analyze the replies after listening to the recorded sound clips. Close-ended questions were used because they required direct, straightforward responses.

Selected scale

The Likert scale demonstrates the individual decision of factors by assigning values to them and also offers a sense of variety instead of complete divisions. According to Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2009), the Likert scale is considered the best and most widely accepted and used tool for measuring the quantitative responses of respondents in the social sciences. The participants responded to the sound clips they listened to using the Likert scale. By using the Likert scale, attitudes towards a topic can also be determined and evaluated. The Likert Scale shows whether the participants have a negative or a positive attitude towards the area of study. In simple terms, lower scores indicate participants' low interest in the study area while higher scores show more

interest. After all of the scores are calculated, a full understanding of respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards the questions asked is reached.

The selected scale of the study denotes the purposive scale of the study as a subordinated variable. This gives the implication that the total score calculation is based on the dispersal of other discrete scores. Achievement tests in psychology are a case in point. In this part of the research, the hexagon scale was selected for analyzing the responses. There were six categories from which the respondents were required to choose the right one. The six categories included 'very much', 'much', 'fairly little', 'very little' and 'not at all'.

The hexagon scale includes two types of scales, i.e. the positive scale and the negative scale. The negative scale consists of negative items with a negative perception that describe the topic under discussion. It reflects negative attitudes towards a topic. As such, the negative hexagon scale shows the respondents' opposing or critical views. The respondents' replies may reveal how negative attitudes towards a topic is formed.

On the other hand, the respondents' positive attitudes are represented using the positive hexagon Likert scale. The positive Likert hexagon scale shows the participants' positive attitude towards the study area. Hexagon Likert scale was selected based on six scores representing the diverse degree of attitude regarding the area under study. Scores in the scale start with negative attitudes and conclude with positive and/or optimistic attitudes. The lowest score represents the negative scale. When the participants choose number 1, for example, it means they have a negative attitude and higher scores indicate an optimistic attitude.

Part three and four– direct and indirect world englishes survey

Rousseau (2012) developed the survey known as the Direct World Englishes. This survey is used in the third part of this study. It consists of statements regarding attitudes towards the language on a 6-point Likert scale designed to determine the respondents' either positive or negative attitudes (Table 1).

Table 1: Direct World Englishes Survey

The format: Respondents were required to choose the item that showed their agreement with any of the six items from 6 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

6. Strongly agree, 5. Agree, 4. Slightly agree, 3. Slightly disagree, 2. Disagree, 1. Strongly disagree

1. It is considered incorrect when one speaks English differently from British or American English.
2. I am embarrassed when speaking English with my Saudi accent; therefore, I am trying to end it.
3. English is important for entering a decent school and finding a good job.
4. I am learning English so that I can communicate with native English speakers.
5. I am learning English to be able to communicate with non-native English speakers.
6. I am stressed when communicating with native English speakers.
7. I am stressed when communicating with non-native English speakers.

8. Do you prefer a native or a non-native teacher to teach English? Yes, I prefer a non-native teacher (/)No, I prefer a native teacher (/)It depends (/) Explain your reasons:

The above survey can be used as a direct method to obtain the participants' attitudes. It was chosen because it is considered one of the most powerful and most effective methods for measuring attitudes. In order to adequately measure the respondents' awareness of global English varieties, closed-ended questions need to be used. Thus, the researcher used these statements to determine how Saudi respondents viewed non-native and native English. Also, due to the potential limitations of the interviews, using this survey enabled the researcher to reach a better understanding of the respondents' awareness.

Part 4 includes another tool designed to examine awareness of global Englishes. The researcher listed the names of several countries and the respondents were requested to list the two languages they thought were officially or extensively spoken there, as well as name the country they preferred and justify their choices. After the data were collected, SPSS Statistics software was used to evaluate the data with the help of an SPSS specialist. They were then interpreted.

Interview questions

The questions had the following structure:

1. Questions 1-5 were concerned with the teaching and learning of English in Saudi Arabia. The questions aimed at finding out how the participants perceived English, how they viewed the system in which they did the learning, and also to enable analysis of the responses they already provided.
2. Question 6 dealt with the materials used in teaching the English language, which assisted in evaluating participants' views regarding variations in the English language.
3. Question 7 was concerned with the everyday use of the English language, which is essential in finding out whether the preferred use of specific varieties was a result of their everyday interaction with these varieties or not.
4. Questions 8-12 were concerned with the awareness level of the English language.
5. Question 13 dealt with the issue of the ownership of the English language.
6. Questions 14 and 15 were about the participants' attitude towards different varieties of the English language.
7. Question 16 was on the intelligibility of the different varieties of the English language.

The participants of the interview included 20 female students who were randomly selected to examine their responses regarding different varieties of English. Only females were interviewed because of the cultural considerations involved in interviewing male participants. The interviewees were requested to answer six questions before the start of the interview. The interview took fifteen minutes. Before the interview, the participants were to read and sign a special form that allowed the researcher to record the interview and informed the participants that the recordings would not be

revealed to a third party. The data obtained during the interview were transcribed, thus enabling the researcher to procure, and later interpret, the participants' attitudes towards the different varieties of the English language.

The aim of the interviews was to support some of the results of the quantitative survey and the questions were chosen in a way so as to provide extensive findings. The questions were translated into Arabic as well to ensure that the participants had fully understood the questions and remove the obstacles that may have prevented them from expressing themselves freely.

Questionnaire Reliability and Validity

The consistency test and the validity test were conducted using Cronbach's Alpha and the Pearson correlation coefficient to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaires.

The Pearson correlation test was conducted in order to determine the internal validity of the 'verbal guise' questionnaires used during the study. Higher positive values of +1.00 indicated higher correlation in the scale and the items as well as an internal consistency. Negative values of -1.00, on the other hand, indicated the inverse relationship between the variables under study. There were no questionnaires with negative values in this study. The Pearson correlation coefficient confirmed a significantly high validity (Table 2).

Internal consistency between the items and the scale further confirms the reliability and validity of the methods used in this research. Another indicator that the research yielded satisfactory results is the positive internal consistency. Data are considered to be internally consistent if there is a high positive correlation between the items and the scale. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to further test the internal consistency. The Alpha values were found out to be within the range of 0.784 and 0.917. Given that Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is not precisely a statistical tool, however, it is useful as a coefficient of reliability. The results show that the selected Accent Impression scale in the questionnaires, as well as its bipolar scale, displayed a positive correlation, which is a clear indication that the questionnaires were pertinent and successful in following the objectives of the research.

Study Population

The population of this study consists of female and male students from the largest educational institutes in Saudi Arabia, a total of 33 female students from Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University and 35 male students from Al-Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University. All were students in English and translation departments in these higher education institutes. All of the students completed the questionnaires but some were removed, leaving a total of 25 males and 25 females. The sample, thus, came to have an identical number of students for both genders, which is generally considered a good representation. 20 female participants were selected for the interview while the rest left of their own accord. Students were selected from different levels (5 – 9) to ensure a more precise representation of the student body.

Table 2. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient of the Accent Impression Scale

Accent impression scale	Not at all	Very little	Fairly little	Fairly much	Much	Very much
Unintelligent/Intelligent	.729**	.624**	.749**	.834**	.715**	.388*
Incomprehensible/Comprehensible	.689**	.340*	.507**	.800**	.573**	.538**
Untrustworthy/Trustworthy	.820**	.666**	.615**	.844**	.756**	.411**
Unconfident/Confident	.732**	.484**	.696**	.822**	.767**	.568**
Unfriendly/Friendly	.527**	.432**	.619**	.686**	.611**	.465**
Disadvantageous/Advantageous for job seeking	.624**	.325*	.702**	.831**	.672**	.446**
Not fluent in English/Fluent in English	.361*	.378*	.549**	.802**	.737**	.437**
Bad model of English/Good model of English	.656**	.455**	.703**	.790**	.741**	

* Medium correlation 0.3 - 0.5
 ** High correlation 0.5 - 1.0

Findings and Discussion

The research findings, based on the three objectives, is discussed in the following.

Young Saudis' perception of world Englishes

The results of this research indicate that Saudi Arabian students are in general aware of the varieties that exist in the English language. However, their attitudes towards these various Englishes were varied. While the students regarded American and British English as the standard English, they could not accept the non-native variants of English as such. When asked about the varieties of English language they considered standard, the students responded with either American or British English.

Furthermore, it was found that students seemed hesitant when speaking American or British English out of the fear that they might speak it incorrectly. As a result, while non-native English is unacceptable to them, they preferred communicating with non-native English speakers. According to Kachru (1985), many students from expanding and outer circle countries decide to learn English so that they can communicate with non-native or native English language speakers. There is, therefore, the need to raise awareness of the existence of different varieties of English language in the world so that the students do not face challenges while interacting with native English speakers. The reason is that the English they speak is almost similar to the native English, which according to them is the standard English.

The term 'standard English' may be defined as the language spoken widely throughout the world. In the eyes of the students, the English language constitutes an instance of the standard language used by a higher social class. Therefore, socially standard English is generally favored, desired, and preferred at the global level. When asked whether they thought they would understand all varieties of the English language if they chose either British or American English, Saudi students responded in the affirmative believing that they would be able to communicate comfortably with native English speakers.

Unfortunately, a biased view of the varieties of native English language hinders the learning of English language. Therefore, students should be exposed to different varieties of English when they are still young. An awareness of the different varieties of English languages is essential since these varieties contain various accents and dialects as well as intelligibility factors and other English codes. English is regarded as a lingua franca by both native and non-native speakers of English. One reason for the existence of different English varieties throughout the world is the fact that English languages were translated to fit diverse cultures. Different English varieties then fit into the cultures where they have been introduced (Mydans 2001). Therefore, individuals need to start understanding Englishes in terms of their accents and their diverse cultures.

In today's world, chances of getting employed are directly linked with a candidate's accent. This is supported by the data obtained during the study. That is, if an applicant has a good command of either American or British English, a positive image of the candidate will prevail during the interview (Alenazi, 2012). However, such a decision and/or judgment depends on how the employer perceives and views an English accent. If an employer/interviewer has adequate knowledge of the varieties of English language, s/he will not be biased against applicants during interviews.

The same conclusion was drawn from the participants when asked about the importance of English when deciding to enter a good school or get a job; they responded that the English language was important in these two matters. Their responses might have been guided by what they had encountered or observed in the past. Attitudes towards the English language as a means of communication, however, may be changed. According to Rousseau (2012), there is a great advantage in enhancing awareness of the varieties of English language as the official means of communication. Rousseau also noticed positive changes in the attitude towards different varieties of English language in classroom teaching.

According to Kim (2007), acceptance and awareness of varieties of outer circle English bring about positive changes to non-native English speakers. Kim concluded that participants preferred to use American English as a guiding mod-

el and did not show any preference for different native and non-native types of English. They demonstrated a positive attitude towards different varieties of “exotic” English because they intended to pursue their learning programs in the “outer circle” countries.

In modern times, the credibility and trustworthiness of a person is often based on the way they speak. If they speak fluent American or British English, non-native English speakers regard whatever they are trying to communicate as credible and authentic. The approval, in its turn, makes the individual leave a positive impression on listeners. In many countries, including Saudi Arabia, proficiency in the English language is attributed to one’s accent. If a speaker has a good accent, s/he is considered to have a good command of the language. Other factors regarding linguistic codes are always considered inconsequential.

Similarly, the Saudi students who participated in this study were asked to rate different speakers against specific factors, including trustworthy/untrustworthy, advantageous/disadvantageous, confident/unconfident, friendly/unfriendly, unintelligent/intelligent, comprehensible/incomprehensible, and (for job-seekers) fluent/non-fluent in English. These dualities served as the foundation for understanding the identities created by the use of accents in the speakers.

A large number of students were unable to identify the countries from which the speakers originated once the sound recordings were played. Many of the participants, however, were able to recognize the country of origin of the speakers from America, India, and Britain. This shows that the participants were, in general, only able to recognize and distinguish American, Indian, and English accents. However, the interaction level between the speakers from Malaysia and Scotland, for instance, was minimal compared to how they interacted with the Indians or the British.

Furthermore, the impression of Saudi participants towards the speakers of other Englishes differs considerably. For example, the participants could not identify the Malaysian speaker though they were able to recognize that he originated from a country in Asia, to be specific Eastern Asia. This approach caused a negative impression in the speakers because their argument was influenced by the social attitude of many people in Saudi Arabia. The main reason for such a reaction was probably because the Saudi students were not fully aware of different varieties of the English language. Besides, exposure to American and British English is higher compared to the other varieties of English.

Students proved to be reserved when it came to speaking to native or non-native English speakers. The reason might be that the participants think their English is not good enough and/or their accent is unsatisfactory. In the third part of the survey on different varieties of the English language, the students were asked to respond to the statement “I am ashamed of my English accent and always try to get rid of it.” The majority of participants agreed with it, pointing out the fact that they were not impressed by their accent irrespective of the fact that they were speaking correctly. Most of them try to adopt American or British accents because they firmly believe it will help them make a good impression on their listeners.

Certain factors constitute a language that differ from one country to another. These factors include pronunciation, accent, intonation, intelligibility, phrase sentences, and comprehensibility. According to Tien (2008), the intelligibility of a particular language is restricted to the linguistic codes including pronunciation, sounds, and accent. In addition, non-native English speakers are not in general familiar with other factors that could potentially affect intelligibility, such as the pragmatics and culture. The reason for this is that American and British English are supported by teachers who have been trained against a background in which native speech is considered central and standard. Tien went on to add that teaching the English language is filled with commercially fashioned English from these two countries and some of the materials are actually directly imported from these two countries.

In this study, the students were presented with recordings of speakers from different countries. The countries of origin were not disclosed. The students were required to listen to the recordings, rate the speakers with regard to the elements of the language and the objectives, and then try to identify the speakers’ country of origin. The research demonstrated that students’ perception of a speaker relied primarily on the accent, and not on the elements suggested by Tien. Students were generally able to recognize the speakers from Scotland and England when their recordings were played. The speaker from Scotland was not clearly identified by the students but he left a clear impression in the minds of the listeners. The reason is that the speaker used a fluent and comprehensible English, or the standard English. The participants were also able to identify that English was the native language of the speaker.

When the participants were presented with the recordings of other non-native English speakers, they were not able to identify the speakers’ country of origin. However, they could identify the continent from which the speakers originated. Although the country of origin of the speaker was not identified, the speakers’ impression regarding the continent was developed using factors such as fluency and accent, as well as the fact that they were non-native.

Domination of one English variety over the others

The research shows that students prefer to be taught using American or British English because these varieties seem like the ‘right’ variety of the English language. Their responses included the following: the university should use American English; British English should be used in schools; and universities should adopt British and American English as they are an excellent means of teaching. Since in Saudi Arabia English is treated as a foreign language, instructions are given in the standard British and/or American varieties. Besides, students also favoured British and American English when they were asked about their preference in the choice of training materials.

Students also believed that the materials used in teaching should be designed according to the standards of British English. Saudi Arabian students seemed to prefer language teaching centers and institutes that adopted American and

British learning styles because they planned to learn according to the standards of American or British English. It is a remarkable fact that non-native English speakers generally tend to know that English did not originate from one specific country and, by the same token, there is no 'right' English variety. According to Widdowson (1994), English cannot be owned by a particular country but is an international language used by many people to communicate. Saudi students were asked whether they thought native English speakers including Canadian, British, Australian, and American teachers were better English teachers than their Saudi counterparts. Their almost unanimous response was that native teachers of English were better teachers than the Saudi teachers, for they had better command of the English language.

The results of the studies of Buckingham (2014), Garrett et al. (2005), and Bayard et al. (2001) were confirmed by the findings of this study. Native English is not only dominant but the most preferred variety as well. The results also confirm the fourth fallacy put forward by Kachru (1992). This fallacy states that the international (non-native) varieties of English have made a huge effort to reach the status of the native language and thus, native English is the standard and the most reliable model of the English language. However, Kachru (1992) argues in favour of non-native Englishes stating that the speakers of non-native Englishes have the freedom to choose from a variety of options and have the further tendency to embrace and welcome globalization. However, the findings of this study do not wholly coincide with the findings of Kachru's research. The reason might be that the participants of this study hold the belief that the native variety is not only the dominant but the most correct and preferred variety of the English language. This argument needs to be further explored in future research.

Sahgal and Kachru (both quoted in Bhatt and Mesthrie, 2008) found that British English was the most favoured means of instruction in India, but as time went by students started using the Indian English model. According to Phillipson (2003), nobody owns the English language or any of its varieties. English forms a global resource that all individuals and communities are free to use and 'native' English cannot be the dominant and/or superior variety to non-native varieties of the English language.

Reasons behind the preference of one variety over the others

This study aims to understand why the participants preferred native rather than non-native varieties of English. When the participants were asked the question "What variety of English(es) is/are considered the best?", they responded as follows: First American, then British; First British, then American; American, then British, then Australian, then Canadian; British then American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand.

Based on their answers, native English seemed to be the preferred model of the English language. No respondent mentioned Sri Lankan, Indian, or other varieties including Arab English varieties. The findings also showed that 'accented' English was not acceptable to the Saudi students un-

less it was one of the varieties of the standard American or British English.

However, the findings and the conclusions obtained from the Saudi students in this study are in contrast with those of the study of Khan and Al-Asmary (2014) who concluded that Saudi students showed an interest in learning other varieties of the English language along with the standard English varieties.

One reason why students prefer a specific variety could be the qualities that a native English speaker/teacher brings into the classroom. Native English is also preferred since the native speaker/teacher is generally considered more appealing. The reason for such preference might be that native speakers use more up-to-date teaching techniques and tactics, convey information without the use of the Arabic language, and support a rigorous practice and application of the language. In addition, the teacher is generally more sympathetic and more tolerant of learner mistakes, encourages them to use English instead of Arabic, teaches learners more new vocabularies, and students learn more about a foreign culture through its language and have a better chance of picking up a standard English accent. Learners also mentioned native teacher's excellent pronunciation, greater fluency, broader vocabulary, and higher competence as further reasons.

In general, most of the participants prefer native English teachers to non-native teachers. However, some of the reasons given for such a preference might be found in non-native English teachers as well. Such reasons were given only when native teachers were involved. For instance, some students believed that native English teachers employed the most accurate and appropriate pronunciation, which they believed would help them learn better and more efficiently. In addition, 16% of the participants preferred non-native teachers because the students understood them better as they were believed to share the same background. 34% of the respondents stated that some factors needed to be further considered including fluency and proficiency, the type of the course, pronunciation and the accent of the teacher, and the teacher's level of competency.

Some of the participants in the study stayed neutral on their preferred choice of English teacher. One participant, in particular, responded by saying that there was no difference between a native and a non-native teacher in how they presented instructions to students. However, for most of the students, the pronunciation and accent of the teacher remained important. 4% of the male participants preferred non-native teachers while 52% preferred native teachers. 44% of the male participants believed that the features and qualities enumerated above needed to be considered before arriving at a decision on choosing the right English teacher. 28% of the female participants preferred non-natives while 48% preferred native English teachers. 24 % of the females who participated in the study also emphasized the conditions mentioned and explained above.

The results indicate that native teachers of the English language are preferred to non-native teachers due to their presumably better and superior pronunciation, accent, command of the language, and the tactics they use in their teaching careers. Native teachers help motivate learners to acquire

the language and knowledge that will be useful in their future career. Some students, on the other hand, had a neutral stance towards this issue. While accent may be a significant aspect of establishing the attributes of the teacher, it may be different in various cultures.

CONCLUSION

Data analysis showed the perception of young Saudi students regarding the varieties of World Englishes. The participants almost unanimously favored the US and UK Englishes, which can be attributed to an absence of awareness of the varieties of World Englishes on their side. Cultural influence can also play an important role as native speakers generally make a better impression than non-native teachers who speak English as a foreign or second language. In addition, the data and responses show that Scottish, British, and American Englishes are considered superior to Indian, Malaysian, and Filipino Englishes, apparently for the fact that the former speak English as a 'native' language. The Saudis prefer the English of Britain and the United States to other varieties of English for a number of reasons including their accent, origin, acceptance, and so on. However, the main reason is that in their learning they are almost exclusively exposed to the native varieties. The study also demonstrated that the greatest challenge in Saudi Arabia in terms of language learning is that most learners prefer a native teacher to a non-native one, which is again due to their limited exposure to World Englishes.

The study offers a significant contribution to the field of World Englishes as its findings illustrate Saudi foreign language learners' degree of awareness of global English varieties. In its examination of cultural and linguistic factors that influence the preference of one variety over another, the study looked beyond the common literature. It also succeeded in identifying the contextual understanding and knowledge shared by students concerning certain English varieties. This is an outstanding achievement because no study has been done on the role of Saudi authors of educational curricula to raise and teach awareness of a substantial number of English varieties in the world. This study, therefore, has made an important contribution in this regard. The study also helped learners explore the concept of World Englishes as well as their understanding and perception of the notion of English as a foreign language. As such, it will contribute to the promotion of supportive attitudes and awareness by inspiring a positive attitude and cultural understanding towards other cultures.

LIMITATIONS

The small number of participants, or the small sample size, was one of the limitations of the current study. The scope of this study was also limited in that it only evaluated a sample of Saudi university students with an advanced English level. Another limitation of this study was that, due to cultural considerations, only female learners were interviewed. Therefore, this study could be biased in that even though it analyzed the quantitative data of male participants, no male respondent was actually interviewed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the small number of participants constituted one of the main limitations of the current research, future research should consider increasing that number. Furthermore, future studies should consider including a bigger population of respondents with diverse demographics rather than exclusively university students who already have an advanced level of English. Upcoming research should also consider collecting qualitative data on male students to avoid bias. Since there were disagreements and contradictions between the findings of the current research and some other previous studies, they should be further explored in future research.

The findings of the current research could open avenues for future studies as it is focused on, and addresses, a specific question. It is also recommended to conduct longitudinal studies in future research to quantify respondents' attitudes before and after attending courses on world Englishes. Their reactions and viewpoints should then be re-examined in the succeeding year to determine whether their attitude is temporary or permanent. It is also recommended that in future studies the focus should be on regions and cities other than Riyadh in Saudi Arabia so that the global awareness of Englishes is measured properly. Future research should also consider including different and varied age groups, for instance middle or secondary school learners, in their examination of the awareness level. Moreover, since Saudis and the citizens of other Arabian Gulf countries share many common traits, future research should also consider addressing the paucity of practical studies on World Englishes in this region. Also, as most students seem to prefer and favour 'native' English teachers, more studies need to be done on the motivating techniques for learners in Saudi Arabia. Research can also be done in which native and non-native English educators collaborate and the findings of such collaborations can be used for further enlightenment.

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