Robert M. McKenzie*

UK university students’ folk perceptions of spoken variation in English: the role of explicit and implicit attitudes

DOI 10.1515/ijsl-2015-0020

Abstract: Non-linguists’ attitudes towards language diversity are important since they reflect preferences and levels of prestige associated with particular speech communities. However, few studies measuring native-speaker attitudes towards both L1 and L2 English have been conducted, including amongst UK-born students. This is surprising in light of recent internationalisation policies adopted by many UK universities and the resultant increase in overseas students. The present study utilises implicit and explicit attitude measures to investigate 194 students’ perceptions of six English speech varieties. The results demonstrated that whilst explicit attitudes towards linguistic variation were generally favourable, when presented with speech samples, listeners’ implicit evaluations of UK English varieties were significantly more positive, on both status and solidarity dimensions, when compared to forms of Asian English. The findings are discussed in relation to the internationalisation agenda within UK universities and the methodological investigation into the relationship between explicit and implicit attitudes towards language variation.

Keywords: language attitudes, folklinguistics, explicit vs. implicit attitudes, internationalisation, native vs. non-native speakers

1 Introduction

Although there was some earlier interest amongst linguists regarding public perceptions of linguistic variation, for example, Abercrombie’s discussion of the accent bar in the early 1950s (Abercrombie 1965), it was not until Hoenigswald delivered his proposal for the study of folklinguistics at the landmark 1964 UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference (Hoenigswald 1966) that the investigation of non-linguists’ perceptions of language diversity became a central focus for researchers working in the field of sociolinguistics. Indeed, it has
been claimed that the techniques and methods of analysis developed in language attitude research, the most developed operationalization of folklinguistic investigation, conducted from the late 1960s onwards, helped establish sociolinguistics and, by extension, the social psychology of language and the sociology of language, as genuine and distinct fields of study (Joseph 2004; McKenzie and Osthus 2011). The use of the matched-guise technique (MGT) (Lambert et al. 1960), as an indirect measurement of public attitudes towards varieties of given language involving listeners’ evaluating the speech of the same individual speaking in different “guises” on a number of personality traits, was particularly influential in demonstrating that language variation carries complex social meaning for so-called “naïve” listeners. Specifically, the results from these studies demonstrated clearly that native users of a given language can differentiate between different varieties and, in addition to forming impressions of the physical characteristics of the speakers concerned (e.g., gender, age, health status), are also willing to make judgements regarding their personal characteristics and have stereotypical attitudes towards them. The findings from the accumulation of language attitude research, conducted in a wide range of contexts and mostly examining native speaker evaluations, has repeatedly and consistently replicated that native speakers of varieties perceived as “standard” tend to be rated more highly in terms of status/prestige traits (e.g., education, wealth). In contrast, individuals deemed to speak non-standard forms of the language under consideration are likely to be rated more favourably in terms of social attractiveness/solidarity traits (e.g., friendliness, trustworthiness) (for an overview of research conducted with listener-judges from the British Isles, see Coupland and Bishop 2007; Garrett 2010; Giles 1970).

The high degree of consistency found from the results of these studies points to evaluations of language diversity as reflections of the social connotations of the listeners, i.e., the speech indexes listener attitudes towards the speakers of the specific language varieties under consideration. It is for precisely this reason that language attitude research can uncover underlying prejudices, or preferences, which listeners may not be willing, or are unable to access, more directly; for example, in relation to conscious evaluations of individuals of a particular race, ethnic group, gender or socioeconomic status. Interestingly, despite the wealth of language attitude research confirming the link between speaker ratings and stereotypes of the wider speech community, non-linguists generally do not differentiate between the perceived grammaticality and the communicative effectiveness of spoken utterances and tend to adhere to prescriptivist notions that some languages and language varieties are more, or less, inherently correct or logical than others and/or that different linguistic forms vary intrinsically in their aesthetic qualities.
Criticisms, nevertheless, have been made regarding the methodological assumptions behind the MGT, most especially regarding the practical implausibility of finding a speaker who can convincingly produce authentic speech samples of the language varieties presented for evaluation as well as the provision of a limited number of divisions for listener responses on the bipolar semantic-differential scale (see also Garrett et al. 2003). As a result of these criticisms, and because the MGT became virtually synonymous with language attitude research more broadly, following the initial burst of language attitude research conducted between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, many sociolinguists subsequently turned their attention away from the study of perceptions of linguistic diversity and more fully towards the investigation of patterns of language use, most especially with regards to the documentation of socially stratified linguistic variation and language change. This shift in emphasis is perhaps surprising considering Labov’s (1972) seminal definition of the speech community as based upon shared evaluative norms of language variation as opposed to actual linguistic behaviour. In recent years, however, sociolinguists have again begun to examine social evaluations of language diversity amongst the general public. For instance, much of the current research undertaken under the paradigm of “third wave” variationist sociolinguistics places listeners’ perceptions as central, most especially through the examination of the indexical properties of speech (Silverstein 2003) and, relatedly, through the investigation of the ways in which specific linguistic features become enregistered within speech communities (Agha 2003). Similarly, recent work examining broader linguistic issues amongst particular groups of speakers, such as language ideology (e.g., Milroy 2001) and more individual concerns, such as language and identity (e.g., Edwards 2009) and linguistic agency (e.g., Joseph 2006), clearly overlap with the objectives of folklinguistic research. Within a cognitive linguistic framework too, the growing employment of usage-based approaches to investigate the social nature of (linguistic) meaning, including linguistic variation, has also resulted in an increased interest in folk perceptions of language diversity (e.g., Speelman et al. 2013). Furthermore, the recent rise of research undertaken from a social constructionist approach throughout the social sciences has led to the development of more contextually-dependent, discourse analysis methods of language attitude investigation. Although space precludes a detailed discussion of these methods, and whilst research is in its infancy, the initial findings from the limited number of studies undertaken are promising and suggest that the employment of more explicit interaction-based measures have much to offer sociolinguists’ understanding of public perceptions of language diversity (Liebscher and Daily-O-Cain 2009; Giles and Rakic 2014).
However, despite some recent theoretical and methodological broadening of the study of social evaluations of language variation, to help better understand the complex ways in which language attitudes, language use and identity interact, it would seem worthwhile for sociolinguists to take greater note of recent advances in attitude theory and methodological investigation within social psychology, and especially social cognition, where the study of perception continues to be a principal concern. Contemporary attitude research conducted within these fields remains overwhelmingly experimental, with an increasing focus upon the empirical investigation of the seemingly dual nature of attitudes, i.e., explicit attitudes (i.e., conscious and deliberative), developed through the individual’s conscious awareness and acknowledgement of the attitude object, and implicit attitudes (i.e., unconscious and/or automatic), formed through the individual’s repeated exposure to the attitude object and subsequent positive/negative valence responses (see Petty et al. 2009). In order to investigate the strength of the empirical relationship between explicit and implicit attitudes towards a range of stimuli, social psychologists have developed a range of innovative instruments, including sophisticated self-report measures (explicit attitudes) and priming measures, such as the Implicit Association Test (implicit attitudes) (Greenwald et al. 1998).

As indicated above, much of the previous language attitude research, whether employing explicit or implicit measures, has investigated social evaluations of L1 forms of English amongst native speakers and, to a lesser extent, amongst speakers of English as an L2. It is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to compare listeners’ evaluations of non-native as well as native forms of English, and mostly within the US context. The results of these studies, employing qualitative and/or quantitative tools of data collection and analysis, have indicated that native speakers of English in the US do not evaluate L1 and L2 speech equally. More specifically, there is some evidence to show that forms of L2 English spoken by “Europeans” are rated most highly in terms of prestige/correctness (and rated similarly to standard varieties of US English). Conversely, “Latin American English”/“Latino English” and “Asian English” speech is frequently denigrated in terms of status (Lindemann 2003; Lippi-Green 2012). The very use of such linguistic nomenclature is interesting in itself since these broad terms mask the substantial phonetic, lexical and morph-syntactic differences which exist within the English spoken within these broad geographical areas and, in turn, likely contributes to the stereotyping of large numbers of individuals deemed “more foreign” than those of European descent (Cargile et al. 2010) and allows for the trivialisation of their English as “amusing” or “broken” (Lindemann 2005). Cargile et al. (2010) note that the evaluations of speech varieties on the grounds of perceived national or ethnic distinctions is consistent
with long-standing historical prejudices in the United States against those groups of individuals who are not of European descent – and it is precisely these groups who, independent of level of language proficiency in English, continue to suffer the most discrimination – for instance, in relation to access to higher status employment, the allocation of government housing or the equal payment for the work they do (Zhao et al. 2006; Lippi-Green 2012).

In the US higher educational context, the results of recent studies conducted by educationalists have indicated that overseas students, and those from Asian nations in particular, suffer from greater levels of stress (Wilton and Constantine 2003) and report greater levels of overt and covert discrimination inside and outwith the classroom when compared to domestic students (Lee and Rice 2007). Research has also indicated that “white” students enrolled at US universities express a clear preference for graduate instructors and faculty teachers from the United States and Western Europe than from East Asia or Latin America – regardless of the educator’s level of proficiency in English – again suggesting those students’ attitudes towards the individual speech communities, rather than the communicative competence of the speakers or the linguistic features of the speech varieties they employ, were responsible for listener evaluations (de Oliveira et al. 2009; Rubin 1992).

It is perhaps surprising that there has been relatively little research measuring native speaker attitudes towards non-native as well as native forms of English in the UK and no examples involving the evaluations of British-born university students. This is especially the case considering the global spread of English over recent decades and the increase in the use of English as a lingua franca both in the UK and internationally. Moreover, in light of recent internationalisation policies adopted by many UK higher educational institutions, and the resultant increase in numbers of overseas students who speak English as an L2, it seems of considerable value to measure UK-born students’ perceptions of forms of English spoken by international students. Furthermore, the above discussion also highlights the value of investigating implicit as well as explicit attitudes towards spoken varieties of English in the UK context. It would seem particularly profitable to conduct in-depth research measuring implicit attitudes amongst UK-born university students towards non-native as well as native forms of English speech and in turn, to investigate the strength of any relationship between explicit attitudes towards language diversity in English and students’ implicit evaluations of particular varieties of English speech.

Since misidentification of the speech varieties presented for evaluation may render language attitude data more difficult to interpret (McKenzie 2008a), the present study also attempts to measure how consistently UK-born university students can identify specific varieties of English and to analyse the potential
effect, if any, which attitudes towards English language variation are determined by the perceived nationality/L1 of the speaker. In this way, it is hoped that measurement of categorisation accuracy, together with analysis of the patterns of identification and misidentification, may reveal more about the participants wider ideological frameworks concerning linguistic variation in English (see also McKenzie 2015).

2 Method

2.1 Participants

One-hundred and ninety-four UK-born undergraduate students from a university located in the Tyneside area of the north-east of England took part in the study. All participants reported their native language to be English. The great majority stated they grew up in the north-east of England and were thus considered to be familiar with Tyneside English speech. The age range of the sample was between 18 and 47, with the vast majority between 18 and 21 (mean = 20.2, SD = 4.6).

2.2 Research instrument

2.2.1 Implicit attitude measures

To investigate students’ implicit attitudes towards varieties of English speech, the verbal-guise technique (VGT) was employed. The VGT involves participants’ listening to and evaluating recordings of spontaneous speech of different speakers on a number of personality traits and was developed in an attempt to overcome methodological concerns associated with the MGT, most especially regarding issues surrounding the authenticity of the speech varieties selected for evaluation. In accordance with recent studies of a similar nature (e.g., Clark and Schleef 2010; McKenzie 2010), a semantic-differential scale was specially constructed. This decision was made because there is strong evidence to suggest that the results of attitude research involving listeners’ ratings of traits on different scales are most valid when the adjectives chosen are salient for members of the particular (speech) community in question (Jowell et al. 2007; McKenzie 2008b). In order to generate traits which were meaningful, a pilot study was conducted amongst undergraduates studying at the same university, considered comparable to the students who took part in the main study. The
pilot study involved requesting students listen to and provide descriptions of the speech stimulus. To form the semantic-differential scale the eight most frequent adjectives (along with their bi-polar opposites) were collected and subsequently positioned in a randomised manner, thus avoiding any potential left-right bias.

As described above, attitude researchers have tended to employ a semantic-differential scale with a limited number of divisions, usually consisting of either five or seven points. However, following Clark and Schleef (2010), and drawing upon the principles of magnitude estimation, a technique first employed in psychophysics to determine subjective estimates of the proportions of physical stimuli (Sorace 2010; Stevens 1971), participants in the present study were requested to mark speaker evaluations on a line consisting of 80 dashes. In this way, the instrument was felt to provide a more fine-grained measurement of listener ratings (see Appendix A).

Speech stimulus: A large database of digital recordings was made of female speakers of six varieties of English. From this database, sample recordings of each of the varieties were selected for comparable speech rates. Whilst it is acknowledged that each of the speech samples selected for evaluation is but one example of the particular variety in question, and other speakers from the same area or with the same age or gender will not speak identically, all six speech samples were validated as authentic and representative by other speakers of each of the varieties. To maintain the validity of the study, more lengthy spontaneous speech recordings were presented. Thus, whilst it quite clearly would have been worthwhile to include a greater range of varieties for evaluation, listener-fatigue may have been a problem if a larger number than six samples were utilised. To control for “topic” as a potentially confounding factor, and to ensure no information regarding the speakers’ socioeconomic status, age or nationality was disclosed, speakers were recorded giving directions on the same fictitious map, i.e., a map task (see McKenzie 2010). In this way, it was felt that the spoken texts remained as “factually neutral” as possible (see Heaton and Nygaard 2011 for evidence of the potential effect of passage content upon listener attitudes).

Recordings of two UK varieties of English were included. Tyneside English was chosen because it was felt that the participants would be most familiar with this local form of speech. Scottish Standard English (SSE) was included since previous attitude research has indicated that speakers of this variety tend to be rated very positively, by native and non-native speakers of English alike, on both status and social attractiveness dimensions, even in comparison with other “regional” UK standards (McKenzie 2010; Milroy 1999; Zwickl 2002). Moreover, since Newcastle is located close to the Scottish border, approximately 35 miles to the north, it is likely that Scottish Standard English is a more salient standard variety of UK English for Tyneside residents than other forms of standard English
spoken elsewhere in the British Isles, such as in Wales or southern England. Recordings were also made of English speakers from India, China, Japan and Thailand. It was decided to present speech samples of individuals from these four countries because, at the time of the data collection, they represented the largest groups of overseas students attending the university in question and, thus, in all likelihood, home students would have had the most contact with individuals from these particular communities of international students. Each of the non-native English speakers chosen for the study was extremely fluent in the language and had previously attained a university degree taught in English at a UK university, where strict admission policies are in place regarding English language proficiency levels for L2 English-speaking applicants; thus ensuring that listeners were reacting to linguistic differentiation between the speech varieties as opposed to disparities in overall English language proficiency.

A variety recognition element was also incorporated into the design of the research instrument to ascertain the extent to which the participants could correctly identify the speech of the varieties selected for evaluation and thus, to help determine the validity of the data collected in the VGT study (see also above). The participants were requested to choose the country they perceived each of the speakers to come from and to state their reasons for making their choices (see McKenzie 2015).

### 2.2.2 Explicit attitude measures

The other section of the research instrument attempted to measure participants’ explicit attitudes towards diversity within the English language. The specific question employed was adapted from a previous investigation conducted by Coupland and Bishop (2007) examining British nationals’ explicit attitudes towards varieties of English spoken in the UK. A second direct measurement of participants’ evaluations of international English was incorporated to examine the strength of any correlation between explicit attitudes towards L2 English and implicit attitudes towards the four spoken forms of L2 English speech presented in the VGT study. See Figure 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like to hear a range of English accents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like to hear international English speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1:** Explicit attitude measurements: diversity in English and International English.
2.3 Procedure

The data collection was carried out amongst groups of UK-born students at the university between 2011 and 2012. To contextualise the speech for the participants, prior to listening, they were informed about the topic, i.e., giving directions. All other data collection procedures were standardised as far as possible.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Implicit attitudes

The initial analysis involved the calculation of mean values of the participants’ evaluations of the six speakers for each of the eight traits, comprising approximately 10,000 responses. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was subsequently performed to determine any underlying dimensions amongst the eight traits which may account for the variance between evaluative responses. Varimax rotation of the loading matrix confirmed the existence of two distinct evaluative dimensions with eigen values in excess of 1.0, which together accounted for 59.9 % of the variance. Table 1 indicates that the pleasant, friendly, honest, interesting and educated traits loaded strongly on component one (30.1% of the variance) and the fluent, clear, confident and educated traits loaded strongly on component two (29.8% of the variance). Since the educated trait loaded on both component one and component two, following Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the trait was suppressed and not included in the subsequent analysis. The trait loadings of the two components, on distinct dimensions of

Table 1: Principal components analysis: the rotated component matrix
(N = 194).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative trait</th>
<th>Component 1</th>
<th>Component 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>0.363</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>(0.618)</td>
<td>(0.447)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.648</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
social attractiveness (component one) and status (component two), are consistent with the components extracted in previous language attitude research involving both native and non-native listener evaluations of L1 English speech.

Mean evaluations and standard deviations for status and social attractiveness for each of the six speakers were then calculated. To assess the statistical significance of the differences in mean ratings of the speakers, analysis of variance (ANOVA) (and follow-up Bonferroni post-hoc comparison tests) was subsequently undertaken. Tables 2 and 3 display the mean rankings and standard deviations for each of the speakers, in descending order of evaluation, for both status and social attractiveness. As a reminder to the reader, the range of evaluations on the semantic differential scale spans 1–80, with the highest scores, i.e., those closest to 80, representing more positive speaker ratings. The presence of a line between varieties marks a significant difference ($p < 0.0001$) between speaker evaluations.

**Table 2:** Mean evaluations and standard deviations for *speaker status* ($N = 194$) $F(5, 189) = 398.58, p < 0.0001; \eta^2 = 0.91$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker variety</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyneside English</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Standard English</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese English</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai English</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian English</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese English</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Underlining marks a significant difference ($p < 0.0001$) between speaker evaluations below.

**Table 3:** Mean evaluations and standard deviations for *speaker social attractiveness* ($N = 194$) $F(5, 189) = 50.27, p < 0.0001; \eta^2 = 0.57$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker variety</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Standard English</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyneside English</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian English</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese English</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese English</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai English</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Underlining marks a significant difference ($p < 0.0001$) between speaker evaluations below.
Table 2 indicates that in terms of status, UK-born university students rated native English speakers more positively when compared with the four Asian speakers of English. This native/non-native evaluational hierarchy for speaker status mirrors the results of the limited number of recent similar studies in the United States, where evidence was also found suggesting that US-born listeners were significantly more positive towards standard US varieties of English than non-native English (e.g., Kinzler et al. 2009; Lev-Ari and Keyser 2010), and were especially negative towards English perceived to be spoken by Asians (e.g., Cargile et al. 2010; Lindemann 2003). Interestingly, the local Tyneside English speaker was evaluated significantly more positively in terms of status than the Scottish Standard English speaker, suggesting local Tyneside speech is perceived to be a local standard and/or SSE is not generally classified as a high prestige variety of UK English for this particular cohort of university students based in north-east England.

The results also indicate, in addition to rating native speech more positively than non-native speech, that UK-born students’ can also distinguish between forms of L2 and evaluate their speakers differently. The rankings for the different forms of English spoken in Asia demonstrate that Chinese English was evaluated significantly more positively than either Thai English or Indian English, with the Japanese English speech most downgraded in terms of prestige. Given that of the four Asian nations represented in the study, Japan has by far the greatest GDP, the relatively low ranking of the Japanese speaker of English in terms of status suggests that the perceived prestige of those forms of English spoken in Asia is not determined by economic prosperity.

The rankings detailed in Table 3 demonstrate that when the evaluations for the social attractiveness of speakers of UK and Asian forms of English are compared, a preference is again expressed for the UK varieties. It is reasonable to assume this is because informants are most familiar with forms of English spoken in northern Britain, and thus, may express greater levels of solidarity with the speakers of Scottish English and Tyneside English in comparison with speakers from Asian countries. However, the difference between evaluations of the Tyneside English and the Indian English speaker was not found to be significant, which may also indicate a familiarity with Indian English (see also Section 3.2). In contrast to the results for status, and whilst none of the 194 participants stated they came from Scotland, the Scottish Standard English speaker was rated significantly more favourably than the local Tyneside speaker. This finding is intriguing since it suggests that the solidarity expressed for the regional standard north of the border, found in previous studies involving informants from Scotland (Coupland and Bishop 2007) and Northern Ireland (Zwickl 2002), is also articulated amongst students based in the north-east of
England, and indeed, this solidarity significantly outweighs any ingroup loyalty for the local Tyneside variety of English. Differences in evaluations were also found between the Asian speakers where, in contrast to the findings for speaker status, both Indian English and Japanese English were rated significantly more favourably than either Chinese English or Thai English.

To summarise, the results of the implicit attitude study demonstrate that UK-born students, based in the north-east of England, evaluate varieties of English spoken in the north of the UK more positively, and express solidarity with those speakers to a much greater extent, when compared to forms of English spoken in East Asia and South Asia. Nonetheless, when the rankings for the forms of L1 speech and the L2 speech are examined separately, students’ implicit attitudes towards linguistic diversity seem considerably more complex. For instance, whilst Tyneside English is evaluated significantly more highly in terms of status, Scottish Standard English was rated significantly more favourably in terms of social attractiveness, suggesting a discrepancy between different implicit attitudinal components. Similarly, those Asian forms of speech rated most positively in terms of status, i.e., Chinese English and Thai English, were most downgraded in relation to social attractiveness, whereas those forms of Asian speech evaluated most favourably in terms of social attractiveness, i.e., Indian English and Japanese English, were rated the least prestigious.

These findings indicate that whilst UK-born students express a clear preference for native varieties of English spoken in the country, when the informants’ ratings of the L1 and the L2 English speech forms included in the study were considered independently, the inconsistencies found point to the different attitude components of status and social attractiveness to be highly complex and in opposition. Hence, given the complexity and contradictory nature of UK-born students implicit attitudes towards linguistic diversity in both native and non-native spoken English, it is possible to infer that the participants, listening to and evaluating the recordings, are reacting emotionally as well as cognitively to each of the speech samples, and that these affective and cognitive components are particularly contradictory when the most fine-grained judgements are required (see Greifender et al. 2011), i.e., beyond simple comparisons between L1 and L2 English speech.

### 3.2 Variety identification and implicit attitudes

Analysis of the data collected from the separate variety identification task of the six speech forms (see Appendix B; McKenzie 2015) demonstrated the UK-born students had little difficulty recognising the local Tyneside English speech
Likewise, a high proportion of listeners were also able to recognise the place of origin of the speaker of Scottish Standard English (96.9%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, listeners were also generally able to accurately categorise both individuals as native English speakers (99.5% respectively in both cases). The great majority of participants were also able to accurately classify the provenance of the Indian speaker of English (93.3%), and Indian English as L2 speech more broadly (99.5%). It is worth noting that many listeners indicated that they had some previous contact with speakers of English from India. Nevertheless, despite the high recognition rate, informants evaluated the Indian English speaker significantly less positively, most especially in terms of status.

In contrast, participants demonstrated considerable difficulty in terms of the recognition of the place of origin of the Japanese (26.3%), Chinese (11.9%) and Thai (6.7%) speakers. Nonetheless, they were generally able to classify the speech as non-native English (99.5%, 94.8% and 87.6% respectively). Follow-up comments detailing their reasons for their choice of speech as L1 or L2 English (see Section 2.2.1) indicated that categorisations tended to be based upon the perceived grammatical and pronunciation errors the speakers made (for a more detailed discussion, see McKenzie 2015). Moreover, a large number of listeners classified the provenance of the Japanese, Chinese and Thai speakers to come from other countries in the Far East and, whilst technically incorrect, points to awareness of the speech more broadly as “East Asian English”. Whilst very different evaluational patterns for the four Asian speakers were found in the implicit attitude study, the above pattern of misidentifications points to the overt stereotyping of overseas students from very different countries in the south-east and east of Asia as one broadly homogeneous group and thus ignores the vast linguistic and cultural differences which exist between distinct nations, and languages, within this large geographical area. The somewhat crude labelling of these speakers is a likely reflection of the negligible exposure afforded to the different forms of English spoken in Asia within the UK broadcast media, outwith the Indian subcontinent, as well as the minimal personal contact between UK-born university students and fluent speakers of English from Japan, China and Thailand, both outside and inside the university setting. In terms of the latter, the finding is somewhat surprising considering the relatively large numbers of overseas students from these three countries studying at the institution where the fieldwork was undertaken.

Further MANOVA analysis was conducted to investigate the potential effect of the differences found between correct and incorrect classifications upon implicit evaluations of the speech (see Appendix B). Whilst no clear overall pattern emerges, and the only significant effect found was between correct recognition of the provenance of the Chinese speaker and more positive status
ratings $F(1, 192) = 4.35, p < 0.05$, eta squared $= 0.022$, it is interesting to note that the informants’ hit-rates for the identification of the place of origin mirror the social attractiveness rankings for each of the speakers, strongly suggesting that the listeners’ familiarity with the forms of spoken English presented helps determine the level of solidarity expressed with the individual speakers. Moreover, since the speakers of Tyneside English and Scottish Standard English were the most positively rated in terms of both status and social attractiveness traits (see Section 3.1), it follows that categorisation of the speech as L1 English has a positive effect upon language attitudes. Conversely, it appears to be precisely because the speakers of Japanese, Chinese, Indian and Thai English are categorised as non-native that they are downgraded in terms of both status and social attractiveness. This explanation is partly supported by the findings of a similar study by McKenzie (2008a) involving Japanese university students, where it was found that listeners tended to rate speakers of English significantly more positively in terms of status (though not social attractiveness) when they were categorised as native users of the language.

### 3.3 Explicit attitudes: direct questioning

The first stage of the analysis involved the calculation of mean values, together with standard deviations, of the attitude ratings for English language diversity and international English.

**Table 4:** Mean evaluations and standard deviations for English language diversity and international English speech ($N = 194$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech forms</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language diversity</td>
<td>67.20</td>
<td>13.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International English</td>
<td>51.77</td>
<td>19.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of Table 4, where again $80 = \text{the most positive and } 1 = \text{the least positive evaluation}$, demonstrate that the UK-born students, when questioned directly, were generally positive towards variation within the English language and towards international English speech. Differences in ratings for the two explicit attitudinal objects were found to be significantly more positive for language diversity than international English $t(1, 193) = 10.52, p < 0.0001$, eta squared $= 0.364$. However, it was also found that there was a significant positive
correlation between the two explicit measures ($r = 0.261, p < 0.0001$), demonstrating that those students who rated English language diversity highly also tended to be positive, albeit to a lesser extent, towards international English.

The most plausible explanation for these two seemingly contradictory findings is that when questioned directly the participants’ responses reflect a conscious awareness of, and familiarity with, variation between L1 forms of the English language. That is to say, the students who constitute the sample, born and raised in the UK, receive a great deal of exposure to different varieties of English spoken in the British Isles, and to a lesser extent in North America, Australia and New Zealand, through personal contact with speakers and dissemination through television, radio, cinema and the internet, and are thus likely to associate “English language diversity” with native forms of English speech. In contrast, participants’ perceptions of “international English”, perhaps as a result of the very nomenclature of the term, appear much more likely to encompass those forms of English spoken as an L2. Hence, whilst direct questioning revealed that explicit attitudes towards English language variation were generally positive, fine-grained analysis provides additional evidence that UK-born students are especially favourable towards standard and non-standard varieties of English spoken as a first language.

Further correlation analysis was subsequently conducted to investigate the strength of the relationship between the participants’ explicit attitudes towards English language diversity and international English speech (Table 4) and the implicit attitudes towards the status and social attractiveness dimensions of the six native and non-native speech varieties presented for evaluation in the verbal-guise study (Tables 2 and 3). Only very weak correlations were found between explicit attitudes towards English language diversity (mean = 67.20) and implicit attitudes towards the six forms of English speech, both in terms of status (mean = 44.12) ($r = 0.048, p > 0.05, p = 0.505$) and social attractiveness (mean = 52.05) ($r = 0.006, p > 0.05, p = 0.928$). This result indicates that although, when asked directly, UK-born students tend to be positive towards linguistic diversity in English, on the presentation of actual speech samples, listeners’ judgements are less favourable. Likewise, correlations between explicit attitudes towards international English (mean = 51.7) and implicit attitudes towards the four non-native (i.e., international) forms of English were also found to be small, although statistically significant, for status (mean = 33.49) ($r = 0.179, p < 0.05$) and social attractiveness (mean = 49.26) ($r = 0.269, p < 0.01$).

The above findings are consistent with previous research undertaken by social psychologists investigating racial attitudes, where weak explicit-implicit
correlations have also been found (e.g., Cunningham et al. 2001; Payne et al. 2008). There is some evidence to show that a major reason for the divergence between explicit and implicit attitudes, towards a range of objects and topics, is that individuals’ can hold dual/multiple conscious and unconscious attitudes at the same time, and which can consist of complex and potentially conflicting cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Such attitude ambivalence may also be an indication of attitude change in progress, where newer more explicit attitudes are layered above more established unconscious attitudes. It seems likely that individuals also hold ambivalent attitudes regarding linguistic diversity and indeed, about language more broadly. For instance, a speaker of a minority language may believe that the use of the dominant language(s) leads to increased employment opportunities whilst, at the same time, dislike many of its speakers. Access to the measurement of such attitude ambivalence is likely to be available to researchers only through the employment of both explicit and implicit attitude instruments.

Nevertheless, since the analysis revealed that participants’ ratings on explicit attitude measures for both language diversity and international English were consistently higher than their implicit attitude ratings for the speech samples, it is also possible that social desirability bias played a major role. From this viewpoint, under direct questioning, participants possessed a greater explicit awareness of the attitudinal object (i.e., language diversity and international English) and accordingly, were better able to edit their responses. In turn, to be viewed as less prejudiced, the temptation may have been for the students to be more positive towards language variation. In contrast, because implicit attitude measures tap into unconscious/automatic evaluations, the results of the verbal-guise study are less susceptible to any such halo effect.

Recent research undertaken by social psychologists has also demonstrated that the most negative attitudes tend to be measurable by both explicit and implicit methods (see Hoffmann et al. 2005). When we consider that the results of the present study show the least favourable explicit and implicit attitudes were reserved for participants’ evaluations of non-native English speech, it may well be that an absence of social desirability bias may help explain the relatively strong positive correlations found between the students’ self-reportable responses to international English and their implicit evaluations of the four forms of Asian English speech. This explanation is broadly compatible with the findings of Labov’s (1966) study of New York English where it was demonstrated that since participants’ evaluations of the speech of New Yorkers were so intensely negative, the researcher was able to uncover negative attitudes even under direct questioning.
4 Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate the employment of implicit measures to investigate language attitudes can reveal underlying prejudices amongst UK-born students which might not, or cannot, be otherwise revealed through the use of explicit measures. Whilst a degree of congruence was found to exist between the positive ratings afforded to the native speech varieties presented in the implicit verbal-guise study and the favourable explicit attitudes expressed towards linguistic diversity under direct questioning, the results of the larger implicit attitude study show clearly that UK-born students based in the north-east of England evaluate English varieties spoken in the north of the UK more highly in terms of prestige, and express greater levels of solidarity with those speakers, when compared to forms of English spoken in East Asia and South Asia. For this reason, the results of the study also add to the findings of Coupland and Bishop’s (2007) large-scale investigation into UK nationals’ perceptions of English language diversity in the British Isles (see Section 1), where it was found that “speaking properly” was an important issue for many participants, by indicating in the present study that prescriptive notions of correct and incorrect language, or what Cameron (2012) terms “verbal hygiene”, are particularly pertinent when considering UK-born students’ evaluations of speakers of English as an L2.

The disparities found between UK-born students’ ratings for L1 and L2 forms of English speech, on both status and social attractiveness dimensions, undoubtedly has implications for those higher educational institutions in the UK who have invested so heavily in the success of the internationalisation agenda and claim to be internationally engaged and to be actively internationalising their curriculums (Maringe and Foskett 2010). Indeed, since UK-born students’ attitudes towards non-native forms of English are likely to reflect their stereotypes and levels of acceptance (or not) of specific groups of overseas students, the findings point to their active outgrouping of international students as well as general perceptions concerning their inferior status within the university – thus contributing to a lack of integration into the “domestic” cohort amongst (Asian) overseas students – and the resultant increase in feelings of stress and disappointment those individuals are likely to experience more broadly (see Jones 2010; Pritchard and Skinner 2002). It is notable, at least as far as the UK higher educational context is concerned, the responsibility to adapt, integrate into and, ultimately, cope with university life is firmly placed upon the overseas students themselves, with lower levels of accountability for the institutions in question (Li and Kaye 1998). The findings of the present
study seem particularly disappointing given that international students, from Asia and elsewhere, the majority of whom speak L2 forms of English, whilst providing valuable revenue for UK Universities, also undoubtedly bring a range of skills and knowledge to the higher education sector in the UK and, if integrated more fully, can potentially offer home students and staff opportunities for increased appreciation and (socio)linguistic awareness of other cultures and other nations.

As indicated above, the results of the present study involving UK-born university students, together with the previous investigations of a similar nature conducted in the US, have demonstrated that student attitudes towards language diversity have important implications. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. In particular, there is clearly further scope to examine student perceptions, whether in the UK, US or elsewhere, of other forms of L1 and L2 English speech. The results of such research will help validate (or not) the findings obtained in existing studies as well as provide valuable information regarding home students’ attitudes towards overseas students and, in turn, acceptance of the internationalisation agenda in other higher educational contexts. Indeed, in light of recent initiatives undertaken by the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT 2010), where a growing number of universities in Japan offer degree programs taught entirely in English as a means of attracting greater numbers of English-speaking overseas students, mainly from elsewhere in Asia (McKenzie 2013), a large-scale study investigating Japanese university students’ implicit and explicit attitudes towards UK, US and East Asian forms of English is currently underway (see McKenzie and Gilmore forthcoming). Whilst the project has yet to be completed, preliminary analysis of the data collected thus far suggests Japanese students’ underlying evaluations of forms of English spoken in specific Asian countries, besides Japan, are also broadly unfavourable. When completed, the findings of this study are likely to provide a useful comparison of the attitudes of “home” students in Japan and the UK towards (speakers of) specific forms of L1 and L2 English speech.

Moreover, because professional linguists’ understanding of the role of explicit attitudes and implicit attitudes towards language diversity is in its infancy, the present study should be looked upon as both preliminary and exploratory. In particular, given the potential issues surrounding the of the VGT as a valid measurement of indirect/implicit attitudes towards language variation, most especially regarding the selection of speech stimuli as representative of a specific language variety, where possible, it would seem profitable for researchers to incorporate newer instruments of implicit attitude measurement developed within
social psychology into the design of future folklinguistic studies. It is hoped that the results of such research, perhaps in conjunction with the findings from research involving more explicit discourse analysis methods, would also help refine the investigation of language attitudes more broadly. Most especially, since public attitudes towards language diversity are often shaped below the level of individual consciousness or, at the very least, not always expressed by informants through direct questioning by sociolinguists (see Campbell-Kibler 2012; Kristiansen 2010; Pantos and Perkins 2013), further innovative and robust folklinguistic research investigating implicit attitudes towards language variation, for example examining the effects of newly developed priming tasks on evaluations, would seem especially worthwhile. It would also, for instance, be useful to develop language attitude instruments which can uncover which specific linguistic features influence implicit attitudes towards particular varieties. Indeed, whilst there has been a historical tendency amongst sociolinguists to assume the most conscious/salient linguistic marker(s) or most frequently produced variants trigger the most differentiated responses (Edwards 2011; Foulkes and Docherty 2006), the findings of more finely-tuned folklinguistic research investigating implicit language attitudes may provide more detailed information regarding the linguistic cues upon which listeners base their social evaluations upon as well as reveal more about the seemingly complex interactions between specific morpho-syntactic, phonological and lexical features which constitute recognition and, in turn, index evaluation of the speech variety under consideration, and which are likely to operate below the level of individual consciousness.

Finally, since non-linguists’ notions about language variation help them make sense of their complex sociolinguistic world and are likely to have a range of social implications for members of the evaluated speech communities, it seems imperative for professional linguists to take folk perceptions of language diversity more seriously than appears to the case at present. It does not seem particularly enlightening, above all, for linguists to treat non-linguists’ narratives about language variation as outdated, misguided or merely incorrect (Milroy and Milroy 2012). It is only through a process of sensitive engagement with the general public, including listening to the opinions, and taking into account the concerns, of non-linguists about language diversity and language change, however discriminatory they may seem, that linguists interested in the social implications of stratified language variation will be able to bring ideological aspects of language to a wider consciousness and ultimately to better understand why non-linguists hold the complex, often contradictory, and frequently prescriptive views about language diversity that they do.
Appendix A: Specifically constructed semantic-differential scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pleasant</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>not pleasant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not clear</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>clear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confident</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>not confident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sincere</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>insincere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unfriendly</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educated</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>not educated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not gentle</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>gentle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not fluent</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B: Mean evaluations (and standard deviations) for speaker status and speaker social attractiveness according to correct and incorrect identifications \(N = 194\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Social attractiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>Incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ScotStE</td>
<td>63.9 (11.4)</td>
<td>65.2 (5.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TyneE</td>
<td>67.1 (67.1)</td>
<td>61.3 (11.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IndE</td>
<td>32.3 (12.7)</td>
<td>33.8 (13.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JapanE</td>
<td>24.3 (12.4)</td>
<td>26.2 (11.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChinE</td>
<td>43.1 (15.7)</td>
<td>39.5 (14.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThaiE</td>
<td>31.1 (15.8)</td>
<td>36.2 (15.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 80 = most positive evaluation, 1 = least positive evaluation.
References


