

Attitudes of Yemeni EFL Students at Hadhramout University Towards American and British Accents

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Abstract

The present study investigates the attitudes of Yemeni EFL students at Hadhramout University (henceforth, HU) towards American (henceforth, AE) and British (henceforth, BE) accents. A quantitative survey approach is employed in order to collect numerical data from students. The researcher adopted the verbal guise questionnaire to collect the data. Ninety Yemeni EFL senior students from two HU colleges were selected as convenience sampling (nonprobability sampling) to fill in the questionnaire. The study reveals that: firstly, the majority of Yemeni EFL students have a preference towards the AE accent rather than the BE one. Secondly, Yemeni EFL students hold positive attitudes towards both accents in terms of status and solidarity, although they hold more positive attitudes towards the AE accent in terms of status. Finally, the majority of the students were able to identify both accents. The study suggests that the familiarity with the AE accent and the powerful impact of American media around the world are the main factors for preferring the AE accent over the BE accent.

Key words: accent, language attitude, EFL, verbal guise test

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is widely utilized and it is currently being acquired globally. According to Kachru (1985, 1992), Yemen is classified within the expanding circle as an 'English as a Foreign Language' (EFL) country, situated within the influential World English Model. Although there is no official status for the English language in Yemen, it impacts nearly all facets of Yemeni society significantly (Kachru, 1985, 1992). English is taught as a foreign language through formal classroom instruction, where educators typically employ a spoken variant of the language. This spoken form is predominantly represented by one of the two principal standardized English reference accents: British English (BE) or American English (AE) (Rashid, 2011). However, not many Yemeni EFL learners can communicate fluently in

English due to the focus on the written skills at the expense of oral skills as well as the lack of motivation (Ahmed, 2018). Furthermore, Al-Ageeli (2013) states that the weak performance of Yemeni EFL learners in the spoken skills is related to the teaching of pronunciation. In the context of global integration, the significance of English in professional environments is increasingly recognized, leading to heightened focus on its instruction in educational institutions. Consequently, individuals are presented with numerous opportunities to encounter diverse English accents, which contributes to varying perceptions of different English varieties. The learners' attitudes have been the subject of extensive research within the realm of sociolinguistics, as evidenced by the work of scholars and researchers such as Lambert et al. (1960), Osgood (1964), Carranza & Ryan (1975), and Matsuura et al. (1994). However, no previous studies have ever been conducted in the Republic of Yemen to find out the Yemeni EFL students' attitudes towards AE and BE accents. Therefore, the current study investigates Yemeni EFL learners' evaluation of British and American accents using the Verbal Guise Technique to explore their preferences. The findings provide valuable insights into the status of English, assisting university students in identifying their motivations, objectives, and preferences regarding accents. Additionally, this study presents significant pedagogical implications for teaching pronunciation.

Various approaches have been proposed to investigate language attitudes. Among these, the Verbal Guise Technique (VGT) stands out as the most effective method, having been developed from the Matched Guise Technique (MGT). VGT serves as the optimal tool as it uncovers the underlying reasons for the preference of one accent over another. The primary questions guiding this study are as follows:

- 1- Which accent do EFL students at the Department of English Language at HU prefer to model and use: AE or BE?
- 2- What are the attitudes of the EFL students at the Department of English Language at HU towards AE and BE accents?
- 3- Are Yemeni EFL students who speak Arabic as their first language able to identify varieties of English speech (AE or BE accents), or not?

2- LITERATURE REVIEW

The Matched Guise Technique and Verbal Guise Technique:

Since the introduction of the Matched Guise Technique (MGT; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960), the study of language attitudes—defined as “speaker-internal psychological

tendencies which are expressed by evaluating particular entities (e.g. a dialect or an ethnic group) with a degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken 1993, p. 1)—has garnered significant scholarly attention. The pioneering study by Lambert et al. (1960) examined English and French speakers in Quebec, Canada. To reduce the influence of voice and content, thereby allowing for a clearer assessment of the listeners’ attitudes towards the speakers of the respective languages, proficient French–English bilinguals were recorded reading an identical neutral text in both languages. Subsequently, English and French-speaking participants evaluated each guise on various characteristics, under the impression that they were listening to different speakers. The results indicated that both English-speaking and French-speaking participants rated the English-speaking guises more favorably regarding traits such as appearance, intelligence, dependability, ambition, and character. Conversely, each language group rated its own language guises more positively in terms of kindness. Beyond its application in comparing attitudes towards distinct languages, such as French and English in Quebec (Lambert et al., 1960; Lambert, Frankel, & Tucker, 1966; Genesee & Holobow, 1989) and Hebrew and Arabic in the Middle East (Lambert et al. 1965), the matched guise technique has also been employed to assess attitudes towards standard versus non-standard varieties of the same language, including African American English (Hensley, 1972; Johnson & Buttny, 1982) and Chicano English (Arthur, Farrar, & Bradford, 1974; Bouchard-Ryan & Carranza, 1975; Bouchard-Ryan, Carranza, & Moffie, 1977).

A notable drawback of MGT is its reliance on the availability of perfectly bilingual or bidialectal speakers to produce the necessary stimuli. Such speakers can be challenging, if not impossible, to locate for certain language and dialect combinations. This limitation led to the creation of the Verbal Guise Technique (VGT; Cooper & Fishman, 1974), which mirrors the MGT but utilizes recordings from various speakers for the stimuli. Both the MGT and VGT serve as indirect methods for assessing participants' attitudes towards different groups and are particularly valuable as they can uncover biases that may not be articulated in other settings (McKenzie, 2008, p. 65).

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Attitudes regarding a specific language or language variety can significantly influence alterations in the phonetic system, shape speech communities, and impact individuals' engagement in various educational and professional settings (McKenzie, 2008). Furthermore, such attitudes are crucial for the evolution of a language, thereby affecting its potential for

restoration, preservation, decline, or extinction (Baker, 1992). The attitude is particularly vital in the context of second language acquisition, as it largely dictates the learners' behaviors, including the actions they undertake and the efforts they invest throughout their learning journey (Alkaff, 2013).

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Research into the language attitudes of diverse groups has been conducted since the early 1960s. A substantial body of work exists regarding attitudes toward various languages (Marley 2004, Balcazar 2003, Villa 2002, Malallah 2000), as well as attitudes toward different varieties of English and other languages (McKenzie 2008, Zhou 2002, Alenezy 2015, Rashid 2011, Berkling 2001, Chiba et al., 1995; Flaitz, 1993; Benson, 1991, Grabe 1998b, Starkes & Paltridge 1994, Matsuura et al., 1994, Hensley, 1972; Johnson & Buttny, 1982, Cooper and Fishman 1977, Gattet, Coupland, and Williams, 2003). Additionally, researchers have explored learners' beliefs regarding language acquisition (Sakui and Gaies 1999). Various dimensions of language attitudes have also been examined, including the connection between attitudes and motivation (Altamimi & Shuib, 2009) and attitudes toward learning English (Alkaff, 2013).

These investigations have significantly enhanced our understanding of how the general populace views various languages and dialects, while also providing valuable insights into the origins and levels of linguistic security and insecurity, as well as the concept of covert prestige. Although numerous studies have been conducted internationally regarding language attitudes towards different varieties of English, there is a scarcity of research in the Arab countries focused on non-native speakers' attitudes towards these varieties (Al-Dosari; 2016, Alenezy 2015; Buckingham 2014; Alfuhaydi 2011 & Rashid, 2011). To the best of our knowledge, no study has been carried out in Yemen to explore the attitudes of Yemeni EFL students towards specific varieties of English, particularly American English (AE) and British English (BE) accents. Consequently, this study aims to be the first to examine the attitudes of Yemeni EFL students at HU regarding AE and BE accents.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In alignment with the Verbal Guise Technique (VGT; Cooper & Fishman, 1974), each of the stimulus recordings was generated by distinct speakers: seven native English speakers, five females and two males. Each speaker represents one variety of accents. All the seven speakers who performed the speech sample were chosen from the British council website. This website provides a recording of several native American and British speakers representing different

genders, including a short description of the accent that each speaker produces and where they are from. However, the website does not provide any information on the speakers' name and age. All of these speakers read only one text with a variety of their own American and British accents. They were carefully selected according to the quality of their voice. To control the potential influence of the paralinguistic variables, and since the Speaker's sex has emerged as one of the most important social factors in the quantitative study of phonological variation (Eckert, 1989), two male and five female speakers were involved. The reason for choosing more female speakers over males was because women produce language closer to the standard form than men (Wright, 2002). The speakers were three American native speakers, one male and two females, and four British speakers, one male and three females.

Research Design

A quantitative survey design approach is employed in order to achieve the objectives of the current study which are: 1) to identify Yemeni EFL students' accents preferences (BE or AE), 2) to clarify their hidden attitude towards these two accents and 3) to test their ability to distinguish between them. According to Creswell (2012, p. 376) "surveys help identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals". The VGT questionnaire employed (see Appendix 2) in this study as designed by Yang (2011) consists of two parts. The first part typically consists of seven personal questions; however, the researcher removed four of the initial seven questions and added another question to the three remaining questions. The reason for removing these four questions is because they were not consistent or relevant to the current study. The second part consists of the VGT questionnaire which includes a list of semantic-differential scale for the measurement of attitudes. Participants were requested to rate each speaker individually, according to the ten different traits on a six-point semantic-differential scale. This study adopts a six-point bipolar rating scale instead of seven-point (Yang, 2011).

Sample Population and Participant Selection

Since this study investigates the attitudes of Yemeni EFL students at HU towards AE and BE accents, participants were selected as convenience sampling (nonprobability sampling). The reasons for selecting the participants as convenience sampling are: first, the participants were willing and available to be studied. Second, the participants can provide useful information for answering the questions of the study (Creswell, 2012). The participants in this study were 90 students who were studying English in the fourth level of the academic year 2018-2019 at the Department of English Language of two colleges (College of Arts and College of Women) at

HU. The participants were divided into two groups, the first group was 49 Yemeni females between the age of 21 and 23 who were students of the fourth level at the Department of English Language, College of Women. All students who study at the College of Women are female students, no male students study at this college. The second group consists of 25 Yemeni male and 16 females between the age of 21 and 23 who were students of the fourth level at the Department of English Language, College of Arts. It was attempted to maintain the participants' group as homogenous as possible in order to obtain representative results since, as McKenzie (2008) underlines, "social variation within the population can account for variations in attitudes towards forms of English speech". The reasons for selecting the fourth level students of the English department as participants are as follow: first, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of Yemeni EFL students who speak Arabic as their first language and who study English language as a major. Second, the fourth English language level students are willing and available to be studied (Creswell, 2012). Third, these students are studying English in the fourth year which is the last year before completing their bachelor degree in English according to their university system, so they have studied English for a long time. Finally, these students can provide useful information for answering the questions of the questionnaire of this study (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection Procedures

In October, 2018, the researcher started to collect data using the VGT questionnaire at the Department of English Language of two HU colleges. The researcher started to collect data first from the students at the College of Women. After collecting the data at the College of Women, the researcher moved to the College of Arts to collect data using the same questionnaire. The following sub-section presents the procedures used in the study. Before distributing the questionnaire, the students were informed of the objectives and significance of the research. They were also requested to state their true and honest responses. In addition, the subjects were informed to ask for any clarifications they might have. Then, the questionnaire was distributed. At the beginning, the participants were asked to fill in the first part of the VGT questionnaire (see Appendix 2): Personal Information. This part included their age, gender, the English learning history and their favorite accent (BE or AE). Students were also asked to justify their preference for this accent over the other. No other favorite-accent options were officially available, making it a sort of forced-choice question. In the second part of the questionnaire, participants were informed that they would hear a recording of seven NESs all reading the same passage and were asked to identify and evaluate each of the speech samples they had heard on

a six-point scale on the two dimensions of status and solidarity (Yang, 2011). The rating scales were 6-points, whose endpoint labels consisted of the 10 traits that consist of the positive and negative forms of those traits (e.g., intelligent – not intelligent; see Appendix 2). The points from 1 to 3 present the positive traits while the points from 4 to 6 present the negative traits. They were also asked to guess each speaker's accent, whether AE or BE. The instructions given to them were as follows: "As you listen to the speaker, please try to form an impression of them in your mind. Then, indicate where you would put them on each of the scales below, and also try to guess their English accents". The speech sample was played to the participants on a Dell computer attached with speakers that had a fairly good sound system, which ensured that all the participants could hear the recordings clearly. Following each recording, the students were given three minutes to write down their impressions of each speaker on the six-point scale, and guess the speaker's accent (AE or BE). Lastly, each of the seven recordings was played again, in the same order, and participants were asked to identify each speaker's accent as either BE or AE. During this task, participants were given 30 seconds after each recording was played. After all the seven recordings had been presented, the participants were thanked for participating in the study and the papers were collected. To address the possibility of order effects, the seven recordings were presented in a different order in each of the two classes. Moreover, to ensure a reliable outcome the left and right rating scale endpoints were reversed on half of the rating forms (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analyses

The researcher analyzed the data collected, regarding students' attitudes, preferences and identification of the accents using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Following previous research (e.g. Hiraga 2005, Chien 2014, & McKenzie 2010), this study also conducted a one-sample T test to compare the mean ratings of all the accents on the ten traits. Bivariate Correlations (Pearson) was also carried out to check if there is connection between participants' ability to identify both accents and their accents' preferences. In addition, descriptive statistics (Percentages and Frequencies) are used in the analysis of two parts of the questionnaire.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues such as permission, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were respected by the researcher. The researcher had consent from the Dean of College of Women

and the Dean of College of Arts. In addition, the researcher had consent from the Head of the Department of English Language, from the teachers and from the students.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants' personal information was obtained. The participants number was 90 (25 males and 65 female) their age ranged from 21 to 23. All the participants had filled in the first part of the questionnaire correctly. Regarding the period of learning English, 6 out of the 90 participants claimed that they had been learning English language for more than 10 years. Only 4 participants had been learning English for 7 years. The average duration of learning English of all the 90 participants was 10 years.

Regarding the accent's preferences, 58 male and female students preferred the AE accent while 32 male and female students preferred the BE accent. In terms of gender 18 male students preferred AE accent while only 7 male students preferred BE accent. 42 female students preferred AE accent and 23 female students preferred BE accent.

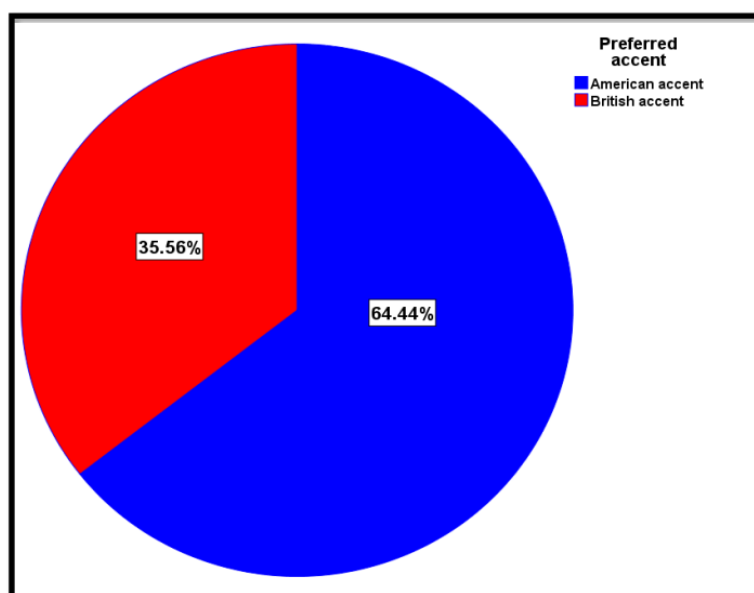


Figure 1 The Participants' Result for their Accents' Preferences

The data in figure (1) was taken from the first part of the questionnaire which is a question directed for the participants to know what accent they prefer to use and why. The participants

prefer AE accent over BE accent, with a percentage of 64.4% favoring AE accent and 35.6% favoring BE accent. The data was analyzed using the descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages).

Figure (2) presents the gender-based percentages of the participants' preferences of AE and BE accents. The data was analyzed in terms of frequency and percentages. Comparing the rate of percentages between male students, 18 male students preferred AE accent with a high percentage of 17.78% while only 7 male students preferred BE accent with a percentage of 7.78%. At the same time, 42 female students preferred AE accent with the highest rate of percentage among all the students, with 46.67%, while 23 female students preferred BE accent with a percentage of 27.78%.

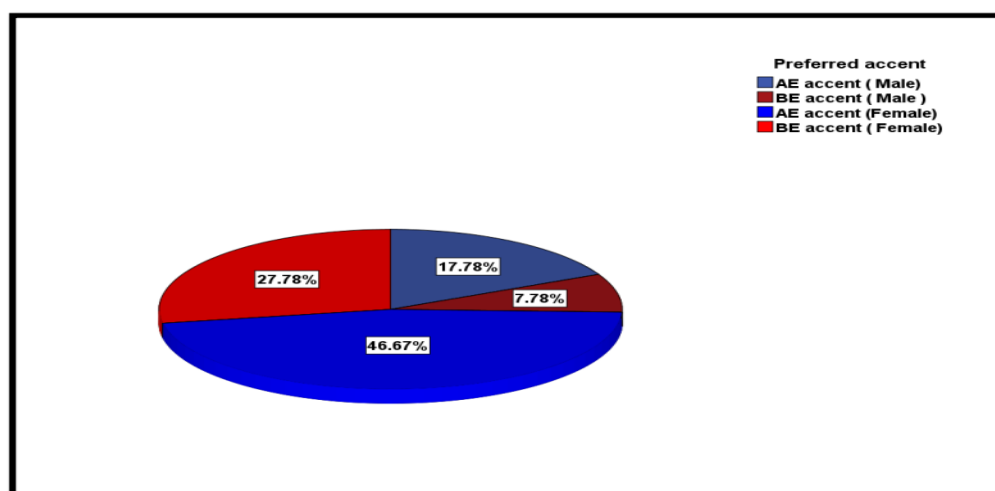


Figure 2 The Percentages of Male/Female Students' Accents Preferences

Tables (1) and (2) present the students' reasons for preferring AE and BE accents. The data was analyzed by using the frequencies and percentages which are based on the students' responses of why they preferred AE accent over BE accent and vice versa. All of the students justified their preferences of each accent within a variety of similar reasons such as: easy to understand, very clear, very popular, easy to pronounce, familiar, formal, more people use it, available on TV and upper class accent. However, the response “easy to understand” was the most frequent answer, with a percentage of 22.2% for AE accent and 16.7% for BE accent among the other responses as can be seen in table (1) and (2) below. The second frequent response was “very popular” with a percentage of 16.7 % for AE accent and 4.4% for BE accent. The popularity of the American media in the world might explains the highest rate of AE accent over BE accent

as it is rated as the second frequent response. The third frequent response was “very clear” with a percentage of 11.1% for AE accent and 6.7 % for BE accent. Five students justified their preference of AE accent by stating that it is “easier to pronounce” than the BE accent. Other four students stated that they preferred AE accent over BE because AE is more available in movies than BE. While the other four students stated that they preferred AE because more people from other countries use or imitate it when they speak English than BE accent.

Table (1): Students' reasons for preferring AE accent

Accent	Reasons of preferences	N	Frequency	Percent %	Valid percent
AE accent	1) Because it is easy to understand	58	20	22.2	22.5
	2) Because it is very clear	58	10	11.1	11.2
	3) Because it is very popular	58	15	16.7	16.9
	4) Easier to pronounce than BE accent	58	5	5.6	5.6
	5) More available in movies than BE accent	58	4	4.4	4.4
	6) More people from other countries use it than BE accent	58	4	4.4	4.4

Accent	Reasons of preferences	N	Frequency	Percent %	Valid percent
BE accent	1) Because it is easy to understand	32	15	16.7	16.9
	2) Because it is very clear	32	6	6.7	6.7
	3) Because it is very popular	32	4	4.4	4.5

Table (2):

4) It is familiar due to the curriculum used to teach in primary and high schools	32	2	2.2	2.2
5) It is formal	32	4	4.4	4.4
6) It is the accent used by the upper class	32	1	1.1	1.1

Students' reasons for preferring BE accent

The finding is consistent with McKenzie (2010) whose students gave AE accent the highest rate in clarity. This apparently reinforces the idea that the students see AE accent as the most common and popular English accent due to the powerful impact of the American media around the world. Furthermore, this data generally shows that students wish to understand accents originating from strong or important countries such as the U.S.

In addition, the strong preference for the AE accent might also be affected by the high vitality of AE suggested by Ladegaard & Sachdev (2006). Similarly, it could be explained that familiarity with the AE accent (Cheng 2009, Liou 2010) in pedagogical settings and increased media exposure to such accent (Bayard et al. 2001) further contribute to the participants' high

evaluations. This result also paralleled Dalton-Puffer et al.'s argument (1997) that students who have longer exposure, and thus greater familiarity with specific English varieties, tend to give a relatively positive evaluation of this variety.

Another important aspect regarding students' accent preferences is pronunciation, as stated in their justification for preferring the AE accent, e.g. some students justified that the AE accent is easier to pronounce than the BE accent; also, more people from other countries prefer to speak with AE accent rather than BE. Another response came from a student who prefers the BE accent over the AE, stating that "I like the British accent but the pronunciation is so difficult for me". The reason behind their justification could be the exposure or influence of the popular American movies and soap opera on television. This conclusion is similar to Ladegaard's (1998) view that students in Denmark are influenced by the American media much more than British media.

Participants' Evaluation on Ten Personality Traits

Table (3) below is a descriptive presentation of the participants' overall ratings of the seven speakers on the ten traits.

Table (3): Mean ratings of the seven speakers on the ten semantic differential scale traits (N=90)

The Ten Traits											
Main Accent	Speaker	intelligent	Confident	Fluent	Sociable	Clear	Funny	Friendly	Pleasant	Modest	Sincere
BE	RP	1.44	1.19	1.50	1.53	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.96
	SCOTS	1.22	1.17	1.39	1.27	1.78	1.94	1.44	1.93	1.94	1.19
	C	1.20	1.20	1.28	1.31	1.72	1.89	1.57	1.96	1.22	1.14
	ST	1.39	1.30	1.21	1.19	1.72	1.90	1.99	1.56	1.08	1.07
Overall Mean Rating of BE		1.312	1.215	1.345	1.325	1.805	1.93	1.75	1.862	1.56	1.34
AE	GA	1.06	1.08	1.08	1.10	1.00	1.90	1.39	1.78	1.12	1.13
	ALA	1.14	1.22	1.17	1.14	1.18	1.93	1.43	1.48	1.19	1.09
	NY	1.09	1.19	1.16	1.10	1.28	1.96	1.28	1.21	1.82	1.61
Overall Mean Rating of AE		1.096	1.163	1.136	1.113	1.153	1.93	1.36	1.49	1.376	1.276

In each category, the lowest rating 1.00 is the most positive and favorable evaluation. In general, the analysis of the ten traits revealed preferences for both the AE accent and the BE accent. However, the preferences for each accent varied in these ten traits, for example, AE accent

scored the highest in terms of the trait “clear” with a rating of 1.00 while the BE accent scored the lowest on “clear” with a rating 2.00. In addition, AE accent scored high in terms of the traits “intelligent” and “confident” with a rating of 1.06 and 1.08 while BE accent scored low in these traits with a rating of 1.22 and 1.17.

Table (4) below demonstrates the rankings of the differences in attitude among the seven varieties as a whole. The participants' evaluation of the ten traits has not been categorized into two dimensions of status and solidarity. To compare the mean ratings of all the accents on the ten traits a one-sample T test was carried out to analyze the data. The standard deviations suggest the Yemeni EFL participants' attitudes were consistent. When the overall differences of the participants' ratings are compared, a clear hierarchy appears, where Yemeni EFL students ranked the AE accent more positively than the BE accent. The overall findings suggest that there were more positive attitudes towards the AE accent rather than the BE accent. Furthermore, Yemeni EFL students have particular preference towards GA accent, which is in conformity with the studies of Chen (2003), Yang (2011) and Zhou et al. (2008), in which Taiwanese and Chinese students had more positive attitudes towards the AE accent than the BE accent.

The Status Rating of Each English Accent

In the current study, the traits of status dimension were “intelligent”, “confident”, “fluent”, “clear”, and “sociable”. The status rating was thus generated from the mean ratings of only these five traits. It can be seen from the mean ratings in table (4) that the participants hold positive attitudes in terms of status towards both AE and BE accents. However, the varieties of AE accents ranked as the higher ones compared to the varieties of BE accents. This finding might be related to the students' background in terms of the teaching textbooks or the English pronunciation they are frequently exposed to, especially in private institutions and schools. These private institutions or schools provide American text books which are based on a communicative approach along with audio and videos (Jib reel, 2015). Within the same vein, Motair and Abdulwahab (2018) confirm that the use of communicative approach has rapidly motivated Yemeni students to enhance their speaking and listening skills. On the other hand, governmental schools in Yemen provide British textbooks (Crescent English course for Yemen) with audio and video materials, although these visual aids are not used in classrooms by teachers (Ahmed, 2018). Another factor worth mentioning is the clarity of the American phonological features, as can be concluded from their justification for preferring the AE accent. This finding

is supported by Barrett (2009, p.56) as she stated that "second language learners place high value on native American teachers in the areas of speaking skills, pronunciation, accent and knowledge of American culture".

Table (4): Status rating and standard deviations of the seven varieties of English

Ranking	Speech Variety	N	Mean	Standard deviation
1	NY	90	3.84	1.728
2	GA	90	3.87	1.677
3	SCOTS	90	4.00	2.183
4	ALA	90	4.18	1.745
5	RP	90	4.38	2.086
6	C	90	4.44	1.967
7	ST	90	4.44	1.967

(Score 3.80 = the most favorable evaluation)

The Solidarity Rating of Each English Accent

The solidarity rating was generated from the other five traits selected in this study: funny, friendly, pleasant, modest, and sincere (see table 5 below). The mean rating of the solidarity dimension revealed that Yemeni EFL students hold divergent attitudes towards the varieties of AE and BE accents where ST, NY and SCOTS accents ranked higher than the other four accents with the ratings of 5.04, 5.22 and 5.63. What is more, RP was the lowest among the other accents with a 6.00 rating which is regarded as the least favorable evaluation. When comparing the standard deviations of all the accents in terms of the solidarity dimension, the data revealed that ST and SCOTS, which are varieties of the BE accent along with NY, which is a variety of the AE accent were in consistency than the other five accents with a standard deviation of 1.669, 1.482 and 1.116, respectively. In other words, ST, SCOTS and NY accents were more favorable than ALA, C, GA and RP accents (see table 5 below).

Both accents received positive attitudes towards four traits such as “friendly”, “pleasant”, “modest” and “sincere”. The AE accent received positive attitudes for only two traits, “friendly” and “pleasant”, and negative attitudes for qualities like “modest” and “sincere”. While the BE accent received positive attitudes for traits such as “modest” and “sincere” it received negative attitudes for “friendly and pleasant”. However, both accents received negative attitudes for the trait “funny”. This finding is similar in some ways to Chien (2014); Cruz & Cazorla (2008). Cruz & Cazorla state that "students link American English with positive adjectives such as “pleasant” and “nice”" (p.72).

Having positive attitudes towards AE accent in terms of friendliness and pleasantness might be linked to their motivation due to the powerful impact of the American culture around the world. According to Gardner (1985), attitudes are components of motivation in language learning. Al-tamimi and Shuib (2009, p. 46) state that "Yemeni students showed interest in the culture of the English speaking world as represented by English-language films, this interest might be the result of social tendencies which is affected by globalization".

Zughoul (2003) as cited in Al-tamimi and Shuib (2009) noted that, in the Arab world in particular, the imposed Western (American) cultural influence as represented in all its forms like fashion, music, youth culture, fast food, entertainment, businesses transactions, internet cafes, television and Western lifestyle is noticeable in every Arab urban center. Another interesting fact worth mentioning is that in many countries with colonial past the language of the colonizer is often resisted (Phillipson, 1992). Regarding the positive attitudes towards the BE accent, students gave the highest rate for BE accent over the AE one in terms of “modesty” and “sincerity”. This finding is consistent with the conclusion drawn by Cruz & Cazorla (2008), namely that students think that British men and women tend to be more polite and conservative than American citizens. This case might be similar to the current study when one participant states that BE accent is an upper class accent.

Ranking	Speech Variety	N	Mean	Standard deviation
1	ST	90	5.04	1.669
2	NY	90	5.22	1.482
3	SCOTS	90	5.63	1.116
4	ALA	90	5.77	.520

Table (5) rating and deviations of varieties of	5	C	90	5.84	.495	Solidarity standard the seven English
	6	GA	90	5.89	.608	
	7	RP	90	6.00	.000	

(Score 6.00 = the least favorable evaluation)

The Participants' Identification of the Speakers' Accents

Participants were required to determine the speakers' accent after the evaluation of each speaker in the VGT experiment. The result showed that the accuracy of listeners' identifications of the seven speakers' accents was high, and the distinction between AE accent and BE accent appeared to be quite salient for these listeners.

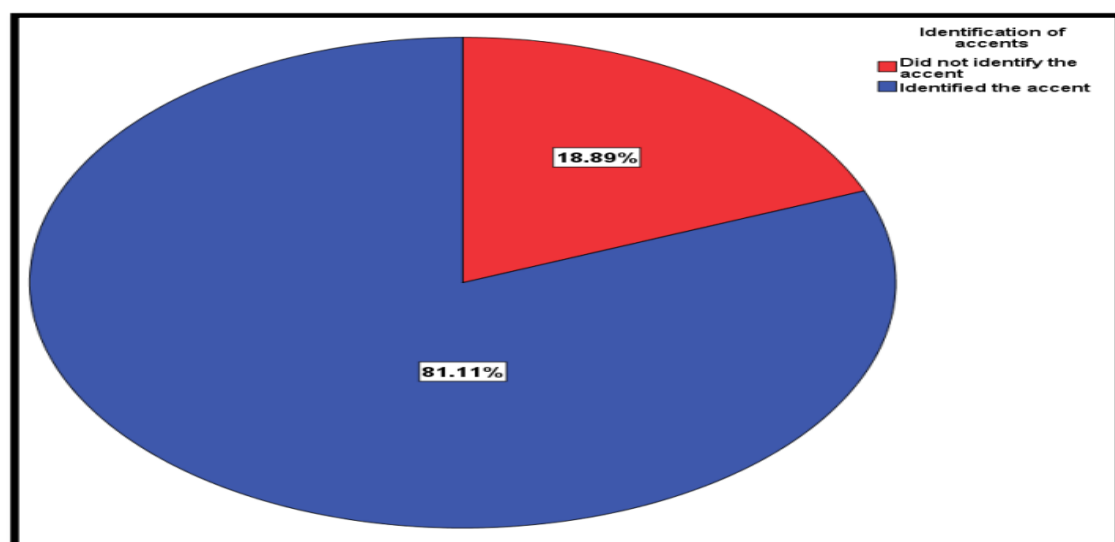


Figure 3 The Percentages Rate of the Listeners' Identifications of the Speakers' Accents.

As is illustrated in figure (3) above, 73 out of the 90 participants identified the accents with the highest accuracy rate of 81.11% while 17 out of the 90 participants could not identify the accents with a rating of 18.89%. This apparently reinforces the idea that the students identified

the accents previously, on the rating of the ten semantic differential scale due to the familiarity and popularity of the American culture in particular. Furthermore, to ensure the validity of the data above, Bivariate Correlations (Pearson) was implemented to check if there is any connection between the participants' ability to identify both accents and their accents' preferences. The result indicated that there is a significant correlation between participants' identification of the accents and their accents' preferences with 0.01. According to Pearson Correlations the number 0.01 indicates a strong connection between these two variables. Table (6) below illustrates this correlation.

Table (6): The correlations between participants' identification and preferences of the accents

Pearson Correlation	N	Preferred accents	Identification of the accents
	90	1	.650
	90	.650	1

This finding is in accordance with Alfuhaydi's view (2016, p. 52) that students attach positive attitudes to the AE accent due to the popularity of the American culture, especially in KSA, and the powerful position the US holds in the world. She concluded that attitudes are found to be influenced by different factors, such as the respondents' age, surrounding environment or culture, and previous exposure to different accents. Familiarity with certain accents was usually found to affect the participants' evaluations, but this effect was not always a positive one (ibid). This finding is also in accordance with Ladegaard's view (2006, p. 260) that AE is the most successfully identified accent due to the American movies, documentaries and soap operas which have a dominating position in the media.

Another explanation regarding the students' ability to distinguish both accents is the different pronunciation of both accents in many aspects. For example, in terms of the phonological and phonetic features, the AE accent is a rhetoric accent while the BE is not. The letter /t/ is pronounced /d/ when it comes between two vowels in the AE accent while it pronounced /t/ in BE (Wells, 1982). In English in general, the short /o/, which usually occurs within a stressed syllable with a single /o/ like in "dog" or "model", is pronounced as an open back rounded short sound [ɒ] in BE accent, but is pronounced as an open back unrounded long sound [a:] in AE accent (Gomez, 2009). AE and BE accents also differ in what word stress is concerned. For example, Americans typically place the stress on the last syllable while the British place it on

an earlier syllable (Gomez, 2009). Finally, the AE accent as mentioned in Evans's (2004) survey is loud while the BE accent is soft.

With reference to previous researches, it has been noted that while the present findings are consistent with some studies, they are at variance with others. For example, the present study showed that the majority of the students identified both accents while few students did not. This is in harmony with similar results reached by Alfuhaydi (2016), Ahmed (2013) and Ladegaard (2006). On the other hand, the findings of this study were different from Alenzey's (2015) and Pilus's (2013).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the attitudes towards the AE and BE accents manifested by Yemeni EFL students at the English Language Department at HU Faculties of Arts and Women. Seven varieties of AE and BE accents were included, namely, RP, SCOTS, C, ST, GA, ALA and NY. Note that no specific BE or AE accent was targeted in this study, as the aim was simply to investigate the Yemeni EFL students' attitudes towards these accents in general. A VGT was employed to elicit the participants' covert attitudes. Participants were asked to state their preferred accent, and to evaluate each speaker on ten semantic-differential scale. They were also asked to guess each speakers' accent after each recording. The participants were 4th level English language undergraduate students at HU.

The overall findings revealed that the majority of students preferred the AE accent over the BE accent. The results showed that their preference of the AE accent over the BE is based on many factors such as clarity, popularity and the powerful impact of the American culture and media, in particular TV series and movies. Regarding their attitudes towards these two accents, the results showed that the students held positive attitudes towards both accents, although they held more positive attitudes towards the AE accent which was ranked higher in terms of status. In terms of solidarity, students held positive attitudes towards both accents. As for the identification of the speech varieties of the AE and BE accents, the majority of the students were able to identify both accents, AE and BE. The result showed that they are able to identify the two accents because of their familiarity with these accents, since they are considered as SE. Another factor that enables them to identify these two accents is the different phonetics and phonological features that each of these two accents has.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the current study is an attempt to investigate the attitudes of Yemeni EFL students at HU towards the AE and BE accents, the researcher recommends further future studies to investigate the Yemeni students' attitudes towards these accents in different colleges at HU in order to get a better understanding of their facilitating accent. In addition, further future studies should not be limited to universities only but should also include governmental and private schools in the region of Hadhramout in order to find out which of these accents is more understandable and easy for students. A final recommendation is to conduct more studies such as this in many different parts of Yemen since language attitudes studies are gaining more weight with the shift towards education for intercultural communication.

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