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Attitudes toward World Englishes among Iranian English language learners

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the attitudes of 140 Iranian English language learners toward World Englishes. The participants were required to listen to recordings of the same natural speech from a series of speakers with five different accents. The results showed that the participants had a more positive attitude toward American and British English. On the other hand, African-American Vernacular English received the lowest level and Persian English and Australian English were in the middle of this scale. While American English was evaluated as the most socially attractive and African-American as the least socially attractive, British and African-American accents were evaluated as of the highest and lowest social status, respectively. The results further showed that, both American and British accents have high quality. Australian English was in the middle point while Persian and African-American accents were at the end of the scale, respectively.

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1. Introduction

With the rising trend in the importance of English in academia, business, politics, and intercultural communication, English is now placed on a pedestal and is hence enjoying a high level of capital from a socioeconomic perspective. This has urged millions of people to learn English as a tool for their social and economic status par excellence. Statistics show that more than one-third of the world population can speak English either as their native tongue or as a second/foreign language which in turn has culminated in a diversity of English types known as Englishes, hence shifting the English language learning pendulum toward embracing non-native varieties of English too (Ahn, 2014). According to Kachru (1997), there are different variations of English all around the world – conceptualized in a pattern of three circles of English-speaking communities with different characteristics – subsumed under the names of Inner Circle (countries such as England), Outer Circle (countries such as India), and Expanding Circle (countries such as Iran). In spite of a growing number of publications on World Englishes in different parts of the world, there is yet room for investigating the place of different varieties of Englishes along with Persian English (Per EN) in Iran. The current researchers are hoping that the results of the survey research presented

here on the attitudes of Iranian English language learners toward World Englishes will contribute to the literature on the topic. We are further hoping that the results will be fed into teacher training courses in Iran and accordingly better tune the content of such courses embracing English varieties in Iran.

2. World Englishes and language attitudes

Attitudes play a significant role in motivation – in the quality and quantity of acquisition of a specific variety of English (Yook & Lindemann, 2013). Investigating attitudes toward varieties of English (EN) in different populations around the world is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of how the complications of globalization influence EN as a world language (Evans, 2010). In fact, the relationship between attitude and second-language acquisition seems to be very complicated and multidimensional – it may differ depending on its social context (McKenzie, 2008). The concept of World Englishes, also, is now welcoming the diversity of English in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary; however, in spite of this multiplicity of Englishes and its fair acceptance in both national and international milieus, there are still many existent controversial issues. Previous studies indicated the higher status of American English (Am EN) and British English (Br EN) as the most correct types of English, and received pronunciation (RP) as the most prestigious (see, for instance, Tsui & Bunton, 2000).

As Kachru (1997) discusses, Br EN and Am EN are the primary varieties most commonly presented in monolingual learners' dictionaries, although these two forms as standard forms are also undergoing scrutiny. Bex and Watts (1999), for instance, defined 'standard' as the variety of a language which is used by educated speakers in their speech and writing, which in turn enjoys the highest status in a specific speech community. On the other hand, 'non-standard' has been defined as a spoken or written variety which does not possess the highest prestige and is different from the standard variety in terms of pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. According to Bex and Watts, the notion of Standard English is still a controversial concept. In spite of these contradictions and disagreements, however, the most famous variety of Br EN, known as RP, is associated with the pronunciation acquired at the British public schools, is obligatory for many areas of employment in Britain, and was taught as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by the British institutes involved in teaching English in different parts of the world (Kachru, Kachru, & Nelson, 2006). According to Kretzschmar (2010), Noah Webster in 1892 proposed the notion of Standard American English for the first time, although there has never been a fixed relation between Standard American English and any American regional or social variety, and what users of English identify as Standard American English cannot be precisely codified phonologically, lexically, or syntactically; consequently, this concept only contains a set of features of Am EN at the national level. However, recent studies on native speakers' attitudes toward different regional variations of Am EN showed that the Midwest (Ohio) of the United States was rated very positively and is normally supposed by native speakers of English in the United States to be Standard American English, and corresponded to conventional and standard dialect among the US varieties (Niedzielski, 2002).

According to Hickey (2013) and Kachru et al. (2006), there is a list of 18 main dialect zones in the United States. Different dialect varieties of English in the United States can be categorized as: The North-East, with Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New

Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine; The Inland North, consisting of up-state New York, northern Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, eastern Wisconsin, and most of Michigan; The North Midland, stretching from Pennsylvania across to southern Illinois; The South Midland, nearly from Maryland across to eastern Oklahoma; and The South sides, including all states from Virginia through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia to Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana across to eastern Texas.

Furthermore, one of the main dialects in the United States is African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which is a distinguishable Am EN variety. According to Kachru et al. (2006), there have been various labels used to refer to this variety of English including Vernacular Black English, Black English, or African American Vernacular. According to Hickey (2013), the source of modern AAVE can be traced to the English spoken by the slaves in the past. Van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010) stated that AAVE has a systematic grammar, vocabulary, and phonology and is able to act as a medium of communication. It is also a subject of scholarly interest that has been investigated as a popular vernacular.

Another well-known variety of English, also investigated in the present study, is Australian English (Aus EN) – a famous Inner Circle variety of English. According to Kachru and Smith (2006), it has not been investigated very much and is not very familiar to Asian societies as Asian English language teaching specialists mostly use books and dictionaries based on the Standard American and British RP varieties for their instruction. Aus EN has some distinctive features and, due to some historical facts, has been influenced by Greek and Italian speakers over time (Kiesling, 2006).

Considering the previous studies on attitudes and the concept of World Englishes, several scholarly journals such as *World Englishes*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, and *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* have provided robust platforms for the publication of several attitudinal studies on World Englishes in different contexts. An example is Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006), who explored the attitudes of 96 language learners in Denmark using a verbal-guise technique. The focus of their study was on the attitudes of their participants toward American, RP, Australian, Scottish, and Cockney accents. The results of their study indicated that in spite of the vitality of American culture, RP variety of English was more favored by the Danish learners of English.

Within a more Expanding Circle country, Kim (2007) also conducted a study in Korea measuring attitudes toward native and non-native varieties of EN – Am EN, Br EN, Hong Kong English, Indian English, Korean-accented English, and Taiwanese-accented English. The results of Kim's study showed that Korean adults preferred non-native Englishes, contrary to initial assumptions. In addition, they could not distinguish native and non-native varieties of English, which released the need to help English learners in Korea become aware of different varieties of English. Within the same context of Korea, Ahn (2015) investigated the attitude of 204 Korean and foreign English teachers toward Singaporean, Chinese, Indian, and Japanese Englishes. The data based on a mixed-method approach including questionnaire and interview data showed that the participants had a strong negative attitude toward Asian Englishes due to their lack of awareness and exposure to these varieties. Further interesting research was conducted by Yook and Lindemann (2013) in Korea with 60 university students, who explored the attitudes toward five varieties of English (American, British, Australian, Black American, Korean) by utilizing both a verbal-guise technique and a questionnaire to elicit explicit beliefs and preferences related to learning English.

Similarly, Zhang & Hu (2008) piloted a study on the attitude of Chinese English language learners in the United States toward Am EN, Br EN, and Aus EN. The results based on the participants listening to a 69-word passage showed that accent did not have a significant effect on the participants' comprehension; however, they had a more positive attitude toward the familiar accents (i.e. Br EN and Am EN). Rindal (2010) also investigated the attitude of Norwegian adolescent English language learners toward American and British varieties of English. The results of their study indicated that the participants considered Br EN the most prestigious and Am EN the most informal type of English.

Chan (2015) also conducted a study, the ultimate aim of which was discussing the possibility of designing some tasks in Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) materials for raising language awareness for secondary school students – which claimed to be a crucial step to initiate attitude changes. In his study, Chan investigated the attitudes of 386 participants (junior secondary, senior secondary, and university students in Hong Kong) with different perceptions of English based on their prior knowledge, learning experience, and exposure to English. The study utilized a verbal-guise technique including seven speech samples from seven speakers of the Inner Circle (Britain, United States, Australia), Outer Circle (Hong Kong, India, the Philippines), and Expanding Circle (China) varieties. The reason behind the choice of these English varieties was due to their strong probability of being heard in Hong Kong. The results of his study showed that local accent (i.e. Hong Kong English) was more negatively perceived in both its status and its solidarity.

A more comprehensive study in this field, taking most of the important issues into consideration, has been conducted by McKenzie (2010). His study investigated the attitudes of 558 Japanese university students toward six varieties of English by utilizing a verbal-guise technique in addition to conceptual dialectology. The six varieties were: four Inner Circle Englishes with two varieties from the United Kingdom, namely Glasgow vernacular speech and Glasgow Standard English; and two varieties from the United States, namely Southern American English (Alabama) and Midwest American English (Ohio). In addition, two non-native varieties of English from the Expanding Circle were selected. These two included a moderately accented and a heavily accented Japanese English speaker. Interestingly, the results showed that the attitudes toward the native accents of English were positive, although, according to what McKenzie has justified, they sympathized with heavy accented Japanese speakers of English. In addition, he considered some other concerns, such as gender and self-perceived proficiency in English, which were all shown to have significant effect on the participants' attitudes. In another study, McKenzie (2015) investigated 204 Thai students' perceptions of six different varieties of English (UK, US, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and Indian English), by means of utilizing the verbal-guise technique. His results showed that attitude toward UK, US, and Thai English varieties was ranked significantly more positive than other varieties of English. Earlier than McKenzie, Cargile, Takai, and Rodríguez (2006) focused on AAVE in Japan. Their study was conducted with 113 undergraduates from two Japanese universities who listened to tape recordings of both male and female speakers of AAVE and mainstream Am EN. The questionnaire results showed that all AAVE speakers were rated significantly less favorably on all traits.

Considering the wide range of studies on the Inner Circle countries and the need for more studies on Expanding Circle countries, the present research focuses on English and World Englishes in Iran. Furthermore, due to the mass migration of Iranians to western countries such as the United States, and the active participation of Iranians on the Internet and other

social networks, some believe that there is a Persian version of English too (Sharifian, 2010). Accepting that there is a kind of Per EN, some characteristics should be highlighted and presented. According to Hickey (2010), accent and pronunciation are some concerns in language contact, which can be rooted in different sound systems of the two languages and have some consequences in the production of second language. Investigating the English used by Persian speakers, Sharifian (2010) stated that Per EN can be of two versions: the *acrolect* version that is either similar to Br EN or Am EN, depending on the second-language learning background of each speaker; and the *basilect* version, which has a different sound system, with phonetic features closer to the source language rather than the target language – for instance, /d/ is likely to be pronounced as dental rather than alveolar and the same dental /d/ may also be used to pronounce /ð/ sounds in English.

In spite of the proliferation of publications on the role of English in Iran, there are only a few studies on World Englishes and language attitudes in Iran. Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) have piloted one of them. Their study investigated Iranian EN learners' attitudes toward different varieties of English. They came to the conclusion that Iranian learners considered the American accent to be fairly more favorable to other variations of English, and furthermore associated the American accent with better English language teachers. Another interesting study on the place of English in Iran (Urmia) and the learners' attitudes toward English is that by Sadeghi and Richards (2016), who focused on the presence and use of English in different contexts. They further explored the attitudes and motivation of 115 English language learners to learn English. The results, based on attitudinal questionnaire data, revealed that Iranian English language learners have a high attitude toward English. However, they did not focus on different varieties of English. Nonetheless, the current study planned to assist and inform educators and policy-makers to choose the best linguistic model in English language teaching for Iranian English language learners by capitalizing on the findings from an audio-recorded verbal-guise attitudinal survey research. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

- What is the attitude of Iranian English language learners toward different varieties of English including British, American, African American Vernacular, Persian, and Australian English? Why?
- Which variety do they believe is socially more attractive, has higher social status, and has higher language quality?

3. English in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran, with a population of some 80 million people, has experienced a turbulent sociopolitical history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, among which the 1979 Islamic Revolution was a landmark. With the Shah of Iran being dethroned and the Ayatollah Khomeini becoming the Supreme Leader, many policies also went through drastic changes. Borjian (2013) has nicely reviewed the place and role of English language teaching in Iran from the Qajar Dynasty (1987) to the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency (2013). She has discussed how English – which was once the language of Iran's ally (i.e. the United States) – suddenly experienced a somersault after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and was frowned upon badly as the language of its foe. This further shows the policy that the Iranian government employed in different eras regarding the place of English as a foreign language

in schools and private institutions. With the Islamic revolution, the popularity of English as a language of science waned and English textbooks were cleansed of western values (Sharifian, 2010). This trend persisted until the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005), as a Reformist, when Iran experienced a more open policy to westerners. The reformist Khatami was succeeded by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a Principlist who wished to revive 1979 revolutionary principles. Although Ahmadinejad's term (2005–2013) ended with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada – as three of the Inner Circle Countries – on the one front and Iran on the other to butt heads, the Rouhani (2013–now) cabinet initiated a more amicable approach with the western powers.

In the pursuance of clinging to Islamic values and shying away from the western system of education, and more specifically because of the cultural invasion that English could bring with it, the Iranian educational system emphasized the teaching of grammar and reading in English classes and less attention was paid to communicative aspects of English. The growing dissatisfaction with this old method of teaching at schools motivated families to send their children to private institutions where more communicative approaches were utilized (see Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). Hayati and Mashhadi explain that three types of English language teaching programs exist in Iran: public schools with textbooks designed by the Ministry of Education and clearly imbued with more Islamic principles; private institutions with textbooks such as *Headway*, *New Interchange Series*, *Top Notch*, and *American English File* from western publishers; and English at universities with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) textbooks again developed by the SAMT – the Organization for Researching and Developing University Textbooks in Humanities. Of course, it should be noted that some universities and private schools also use textbooks produced by international publishers such as *ACTIVE*, *Inside Reading*, *Mosaic*, or *Select Readings*.

Iranian educational policy documents – including the National Curriculum from the Ministry of Education – have also delineated the government policies and plans regarding the teaching of English. As Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2016) have also maintained, these national documents on educational policies, which are formed and approved by the Ministry, Parliament, and expediency council *inter alia*, are replete with policies regarding the teaching of English in Iran. These documents together with the speeches delivered by top Iranian political figures form the roadmap for the dos and do nots of (English) language teaching in Iran. The most significant aspect of all these policies is the inclusion of Islamic-Iranian identity in the national curricula and textbooks. This can be also observed in the Council of Human Sciences Reform in Iran, which tries to reform all human sciences textbooks and curricula in an attempt to get the national curriculum closer to Iranian-Islamic culture and identity. The results of Mirhosseini and Khodakarami's research, however, show that there are mismatches and discrepancies between what these documents purport and what public/private schools and language institutes practice.

Considering the Iranian top officials' discourses pertaining to the place of English and other foreign languages in Iran, there are two dominant stances; namely the moderate and the fundamentalist discourses. The moderate approach is upheld by the Reformist Party in Iran, who are welcoming internationalization. On the other hand are the Principlists (or Fundamentalists), who promote a more nativized approach by relying on domestic values and principles. This tug-of-war between the two discourses has at times triggered some controversies in the country. English – which has been taught as one of the foreign languages

at schools along with Arabic as the language of Islam – has sometimes been antagonized by the fundamentalists who strongly believe in their revolutionary values. The most recent reaction to the place of English in the Iranian educational system can be attributed to the Supreme Leader's speech on 3 May 2016 when he was speaking to Iranian teachers on Teachers' Day. In that speech he shortly referred to the monopoly of English as the only foreign language at schools, and instead strongly recommended the instruction of other foreign languages – such as French, Spanish, and German. He stated that:

Persistence in promoting English language in our country is not a good deed. Yes, we should know a foreign language but foreign language is not limited to English language. The language of science is not only English. Why aren't they specifying other languages to the foreign language course [taught at schools]? What is this persistence for? ... This is the legacy of the Pahlavi Dynasty. [For instance] Spanish; today those who speak Spanish are not less than those who speak English ... French, German; why aren't they taught [at schools]. The languages of developed countries in the East. These are the languages of science too. In other countries, they intercept the influence, interference, and promotion of foreign languages. Now we are more catholic than the Pope ... We are constantly bringing them [English] down [to lower levels]; in elementary schools; and in kindergartens! Why? ... We do it on our own and free of charge to the benefits of those language owners which is their cultural identity ... Is this logical? I don't know! ... [Of course] I don't mean that you go and close English [classes] at schools tomorrow. No, that's not what I mean; I just want you to know what we are doing. We should know how they want a generation to be raised in this country and with what characteristics (Iranian Supreme Leader 3 May 2016).

In response to this speech, President Rouhani – as the advocate of more moderate and reformist beliefs – said that the Indian subcontinent has been very successful in information technology because of a command of English. He further said that English can create new jobs and businesses for our people. This response clearly shows the two different policies and discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the place of English. The importance of these two opposing discourses is that they shape the dominant attitudes toward English in the language schools and institutes; and to a very large extent affect the policies set by the Ministry of Education. This will further change the policies set by the institutes in selecting their textbooks, teaching methodology, and even their teachers' dress code and behavior. In light of all the aforementioned stances, the present research is reporting on the attitudes of Iranian English language learners toward different varieties of English to see what status English holds among its users in present-day Iran.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

A population of 140 English language learners – from upper-intermediate to advanced level of proficiency – was randomly selected to participate in this survey. The majority of the participants (74%) ranged between 18 and 25 in age, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest 53 years old. The participants were from three different backgrounds:

- (a) Group One: English language learners in a general English course at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran whose proficiency level, based on the course evaluation, ranged between pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate.

- (b) Group Two: 37 upper-intermediate English language learners from a private language institute in Tehran who were studying the upper-intermediate *English File Series*.
- (c) Group Three: undergraduate students of English translation at Islamic Azad University in Tehran who were mostly at the advanced level.

It should be noted that the researchers recruited 25 high-intermediate participants from the second group for the interview sessions.

4.2. Verbal-guise technique questionnaire

As was mentioned by Cooper and Fishman (1974), the construct of language attitudes is a complicated and intricate one and its measurement is equally complex. Utilizing questionnaires is one of the most common methods of data collection for measuring attitudes of a particular group toward a specific concept such as a language. As Mackey and Gass (2015) suggest, language attitudes should be investigated through a continuum. There should be a concern about each part of this scale and the type of studies each part requires. These questionnaires can be developed by the researchers themselves (e.g., Rezaei & Bahrami, 2016; Rezaei, Khatib, & Baleghizadeh, 2014; Rezaei, Latifi, & Nematzade, 2017) or adopted from previous studies but modified. In measuring language attitudes, the verbal-guise technique – as an indirect method – includes participants' listening to recordings of the same natural speech from a series of speakers with different accents. Then, participants are asked to evaluate each speaker mostly on a bipolar semantic-differential scale and based on different traits (McKenzie, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, a verbal-guise technique, which was administered through a listening activity along with a rating scale, was employed (see Appendix 1). The verbal-guise questionnaire and its bi-polar adjectives were borrowed from two studies conducted by Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) in Denmark and by McKenzie (2010) in Japan. These language attitude traits have been proved to reflect a range of non-overlapping characteristics on the main dimensions of 'social attractiveness', 'social status' (person-related qualities), and 'quality of language' (language-related qualities) (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; McKenzie, 2010; Zhang & Hu, 2008). The bipolar adjectives in the attitude semantic differential scale of this study are presented in Table 1.

The questionnaire was validated through a piloting phase on a group of 42 English language learners and its analysis through SPSS showed that the Cronbach's alpha was 0.80. In order to prepare the audio files, five varieties of EN (namely British, American, Australian, African American Vernacular, and Persian accented EN) were chosen. These varieties were selected from *The International Dialects of English Archive* available online (<http://www.dialectsarchive.com>) (see Appendix 2). Subsequently, a 185-word extract of the *Comma Gets a Cure* text – written by Jill McCullough and Barbara Somerville – was

Table 1. Bipolar adjectives adopted from Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006).

	Characteristic		
	Social attractiveness	Social status	Quality of language
Bi-polar adjectives	Pleasant vs. unpleasant Clear vs. unclear	Polite vs. impolite Intelligent vs. unintelligent	Fluent vs. not fluent Standard vs. non-standard

utilized for this study (see Appendix 3). The length of the revised tracks was around one minute, between 00:00:51 and 00:01:13.

4.3. Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure consisted of two main parts. In the first phase 140 participants completed the verbal-guise questionnaire, and in the second phase 25 participants were interviewed. For the first phase, one of the researchers – as the administrator of the survey – gave a very brief explanation to the participants based on a fixed protocol that was used for all of the sessions. Then, five audio tracks, representing different varieties of English, were played. After each recording, there was a two-minute time interval for the participants to fill out the semantic-definitional scale in the survey.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Research question one

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run in SPSS to uncover the attitudes toward different varieties of EN and to investigate any significant differences between the participants' attitudes toward these varieties. At first, each participant's attitude toward each variety was calculated by utilizing a semantic differential questionnaire in five different situations – that is, five different speakers. A one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to compare attitudes toward different varieties of EN. The results (i.e. $F(4,136) = 67.35$, $p < 0.05$) showed that there was a significant difference between attitudes toward different varieties of EN. Moreover, the multivariate partial eta squared was 0.66, which suggests a large effect size. Descriptive statistics (see Table 2) also revealed that attitudes toward Br EN and Am EN were more positive and Per EN and Aus EN were in the middle of this scale. Finally, AAVE received the lowest degree of attitude. The general findings can be reported accordingly as Br EN > Am EN > Per EN > Aus EN > AAVE.

In order to further solicit the attitudes of the participants toward these varieties and why they favored one variety over another, some post-survey interviews were conducted with 25 of these participants. In order to analyze the interview data, thematic analyses were run. The first investigated question was 'Why did you like some pronunciations more?' The responses from the interviews were thematically analyzed and the results were placed under three main reasons: prestige; native-like or standard; and clarity:

- (a) Prestige was one of the most recurring themes in the participants' answers to the first question. Some said that they liked some of the varieties because in their opinion they were very high class. They conveyed their opinions by means of adjectives such as high class, luxurious, and prestigious – some even used Persian words or

Table 2. Mean score and standard deviation regarding attitude toward different varieties of EN.

	Am EN	Aus EN	AAVE	Br EN	Per EN
Mean	2.78	3.7	4.62	2.70	3.57
SD	1.05	1.30	1.33	1.18	1.31

Note: 1 = highest, 7 = lowest; $N = 140$.

expressions conveying the same connotations and meanings. The following excerpts from the interview sessions show this inclination in the participants:

Interviewee 1: [I like] The third one [Br] because it was more *ba kelas* (a word in Farsi with a meaning near to prestigious). However, the last one [Am] was also good.

Interviewee 2: British is cool, Black is also cool, but I prefer to speak with Br accent because it is prestigious [laughing].

Interviewee 18: But one [Br] was better than others were; it was very high class and standard.

Interviewee 19: Four [Br] was the best. It was very luxury pronunciation.

(b) As the reason of their preference, some mentioned being native-like, beautiful, or standard:

Interviewee 17: I like all of them. They are all native speakers so they are standard.

Interviewee 7: Second one [Br] was very beautiful. It was very standard.

(c) Although only one of the participants mentioned accuracy and fluency, clarity can be named as the repeated theme (by seven participants):

Interviewee 6: Last [Per] ... Clear ...

Interviewee 15: Five [Per] [laughing]. I still think last was because it was very clear.

Interviewees 21–25: Am EN speaker. Because it was clear. [Interviewee 22 mentioned it, and others repeated it.]

The findings of the current study suggest that the Iranian EFL learners who participated in this study had a more positive attitude toward Br RP EN in comparison to other investigated varieties and Am EN was second in the ranking. These outcomes are contrary to Sadeghi and Richards (2016) and Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011), who proposed a more positive attitude toward Am EN than Br EN in their studies. This difference in results may be explained by mentioning two reasons. First, the traits investigated were not the same in these studies; besides, the participants in Pishghadam and Sabouri's study were asked about characteristics of a teacher with this accent rather than the language variety. On the other hand, in Sadeghi and Richards' study, the survey was conducted in Urmia and it was not based on listening to audio files but only filling out an attitude questionnaire. The results of Sadeghi and Richards' research showed that more than 70% of their participants favored Am EN, 20% Br EN, and only 6% liked the local variety of English.

In spite of this discrepancy, however, in some dimensions regarding general attitudes toward different varieties of EN, the findings of the current study were in line with many studies around the world such as McKenzie (2010), Evans and Imai (2011), Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011), Yook and Lindemann (2013), and Chan (2015) in that Am EN and Br EN received a more positive evaluation in comparison with Aus EN, AAVE, and the localized variety of EN. These findings may be attributed to the stereotyping of the standard EN among learners of EN all around the world (Evans, 2010). However, some unique studies suggested different conclusions. For example, Kim (2007) investigated attitudes toward some varieties of EN among Koreans. Contrary to the results of the present study, attitudes toward non-native varieties were higher than Am EN and Br EN. Another comparable study was a study by McKenzie (2010) with Japanese participants, while only two varieties were parallel to the current study, Midwest United States EN similar to Am EN of the current study, and moderately accented Japanese English, a moderated localized accent which is akin to Per EN in the Iranian context. However, general attitude results were close to the current study in that Am EN received higher evaluations than the localized variety of EN. On other hand,

in the case of some traits, the Japanese variety received a higher value. A study by Cargile et al. (2006) in Japan investigating attitudes toward AAVE among foreign learners of EN suggested that the AAVE male speakers were rated significantly less attractive compared to other speakers. These outcomes were similar to results elicited from American participants. This result concurs with the findings of the current study in that AAVE received the lowest evaluation regarding all language attitude traits. It can be inferred that in many contexts – even though learners are not aware of different varieties of EN – learners often express preference for Standard American and British EN rather than other varieties.

5.2. Research question two

As was mentioned earlier, there were three traits of language attitudes in this study: social attractiveness (i.e. is it pleasant and clear?), social status (i.e. is it polite and intelligent?), and quality of language (i.e. is it fluent and standard?). Just like the procedure run for the first research question, after estimating each participant's attitude regarding each trait a series of ANOVAs was executed to investigate these different traits. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for each of these traits.

- Social attractiveness

ANOVA results showed $F(4,136) = 58.4, p < 0.05$, referring to a great difference between social attractiveness regarding different speakers. Multivariate partial eta squared was 0.63, suggesting a large effect size. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 further show that Am EN was socially the most attractive and AAVE received the least social attractiveness. In summary, the social attractiveness of these varieties can be presented as follows: Am EN > Br EN > Per EN > Aus EN > AAVE. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics (including mean and standard deviation) for social attractiveness.

- Social status

The results of another ANOVA showed $F(4,136) = 33.8, p < 0.05$, suggesting a significant difference between different ENs regarding social status. Multivariate partial eta squared was 0.50, which was also a large effect size. Moreover, the descriptive statistics presented in Table 5 indicate that according to the participants' opinion Br EN had the highest social status

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation for each trait.

Trait	Mean (SD)				
	Am EN	Aus EN	AAVE	BR RP EN	Per EN
Pleasance	2.76 (1.3)	4.04 (1.7)	5.02 (1.83)	2.84 (1.70)	3.92 (1.95)
Clarity	3.12 (1.69)	3.77 (1.75)	5.15 (1.88)	3.08 (1.69)	2.93 (1.84)
Politeness	2.74 (1.40)	3.40 (1.68)	4.26 (1.65)	2.54 (1.34)	3.09 (1.53)
Intelligence	2.85 (1.53)	3.60 (1.73)	4.17 (1.75)	2.55 (1.42)	3.66 (1.89)
Fluency	2.54 (1.59)	3.52 (1.81)	4.21 (1.99)	2.66 (1.76)	3.76 (1.84)
Standard	2.66 (1.67)	3.87 (1.87)	4.89 (1.84)	2.54 (1.59)	4.08 (1.90)

Note: 1 = highest, 7 = lowest; N=140.

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation for social attractiveness.

	Am EN	Aus EN	AAVE	Br EN	Per EN
Mean	2.3	4.0	5.0	3.0	3.4
SD	1.28	1.55	1.66	1.54	1.61

Note: 1 = highest, 7 = lowest; $N = 140$.

Table 5. Mean and standard deviation regarding social status.

	Am EN	Aus EN	AAVE	Br EN	Per EN
Mean	2.8	3.5	4.2	2.5	3.4
SD	1.26	1.50	1.48	1.23	1.46

Note: 1 = highest, 7 = lowest; $N = 140$.

Table 6. Mean and standard deviation for quality of English.

	Am EN	Aus EN	AAVE	Br EN	Per EN
Mean	2.6	3.7	4.5	2.6	4.0
SD	1.45	1.60	1.59	1.47	1.63

Note: 1 = highest, 7 = lowest; $N = 140$.

and AAVE received the lowest social status. In summary, the results showed the following degree of social status to these varieties: Br EN > Am EN > Per EN > Aus EN > AAVE

- Quality of language

Another ANOVA showed $F(4,136) = 50.6$, $p < 0.05$, suggesting a great difference between the quality of different varieties of Englishes in the participants' opinions. Multivariate partial eta squared was also 0.60, revealing a large effect size. Descriptive statistics, as presented in Table 6, showed that Am EN and Br EN received the same number (without estimation: quality of Am EN = 2.6 and quality of Br EN = 2.6), hence suggesting that in the participants' opinion both varieties have high qualities. Interestingly, Aus EN is exactly in the middle of scale, while Per EN and AAVE are at the end of the scale. The summary of the results from the quality of language is: Br EN = Am EN > Aus EN > Per EN > AAVE.

In all cases, AAVE stayed in the last rank; however, the only trait in which Aus EN received a better place in comparison to Per EN was the quality of language. Moreover, the findings of the current study can be associated with studies from other contexts concerning language attitudes toward different traits. Am EN received a better value regarding social attractiveness between the Iranian participants of the current study. This result is similar to Jarvella, Bang, Jakobsen, and Mees (2001) in Denmark, where Am EN was more socially attractive than Br EN. The Iranian participants of the current study showed a more favorable attitude toward Br RP EN regarding its social status, which is similar to the results reported by Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) in Denmark who found that Br RP EN received the most favorable evaluation on all dimensions regarding its social status. Rindal (2010) reached the same results in Norway. In addition, Br EN was a more socially attractive variety in comparison to US EN in a study by Evans and Imai (2011). A Korean study by Yook and Lindemann (2013) also showed the same results on the social status of different ENs.

Regarding the quality of language, the findings of the current study were quite remarkable in that Br RP EN and Am EN received almost the same evaluations, showing that in the

Table 7. Summary of the findings.

General attitude	Social attractiveness	Social status	Quality of language
Br EN RP	Am EN	Br EN RP	Br EN + Am EN
Am EN	Br EN RP	Am EN	Br EN + Am EN
Per EN	Per EN	Per EN	Aus EN
Aus EN	Aus EN	Aus EN	Per EN
AAVE	AAVE	AAVE	AAVE

participants' opinions these varieties are similar in their 'standardness.' Nevertheless, in other similar studies such as Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) and Rindal (2010) the quality of the RP speaker's language was graded higher in comparison to the other varieties. Interestingly, in this study Per EN received a higher evaluation than Aus EN regarding all traits except for the quality of language. Zhang and Hu (2008), in a study with Chinese participants in the United States, received similar results that participants had more positive perceptions of Br EN and Am EN regarding the quality of language and more negative attitudes toward Aus EN. Evans and Imai (2011) suggested the same results about Aus EN in their study. The participants of their research were university students at a university in Japan who filled out an open-ended questionnaire. The results of their research showed that Aus EN was perceived as less 'standard' compared to the other varieties. Chan (2015) reported a series of outcomes for three different groups in Hong Kong. The most similar group for comparison with the results of the current study was the full-time students group. Contrary to the current study, Aus EN was socially more attractive than Br EN and Am EN in that group.

In many studies, especially Asian ones, the localized variety of EN was investigated. Likewise, this study considered an accented Per EN. According to the quantitative results of the current study, Per EN consistently received evaluations in the lower ranges regarding all attitude traits. In summary, the local variety ranked third in social attractiveness after Br EN and Am EN. It ranked third in social status after Am EN and Br EN. In the case of quality of language, it also ranked third after Aus EN (having both Br EN and Am EN in first place in all). In a study by Chan (2015) in Hong Kong, Br EN and Am EN received the highest social status and Aus EN was more favorable than the localized variety (Hong Kong EN). The local variety was also the least attractive. These results were in line with the findings of the current study except that in the present study the local variety was perceived more favorably. In general, findings from the current study concur with those obtained in most of the previously mentioned studies, the localized variety receiving lower values regarding attitude traits.

6. Conclusion

One of the most remarkable outcomes of this study was the obtained values regarding the quality of language. The participants' answers showed that both Br RP EN and Am EN were equal considering the quality of language followed by Aus EN. This suggests that Iranian EFL learners were able to recognize that they were all standard varieties of ENs and hence they were regarded more positively than Per EN as a moderate localized version of EN. The least value of this attitude trait was given to AAVE, a variety which is not a high-quality variety according to native speakers – indicating that although the Aus EN is not the most preferred variety in general, they are aware of its standard nature. These findings illustrated an unconscious awareness in Iranian EFL learners regarding the quality of languages to

which they are exposed. Table 7 summarizes all of the findings of the present study. A higher place of the speaker in this table shows a more positive attitude toward that variety.

Moreover, the reasons mentioned by the interviewee participants can yield interesting pedagogical implications especially regarding pronunciation in teacher training courses. These findings were in line with Jenkins' (2009) model of pronunciation which claimed that students should have the opportunity to choose which pronunciation variety they tend to acquire. While many EFL learners aimed at using EN in international contexts with other non-native speakers from different first languages, students should be sufficiently exposed to native and other non-native varieties of EN so that they can understand them easily. On the other hand, many students nowadays want to pass international examinations such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and they should be familiar with these varieties to be able to comprehend them. Subsequently, not being familiar with different varieties of EN and their characteristics can cause some difficulties in such examinations. As a result, it is also advisable for English language teachers, syllabus designers, and teacher trainers at all levels of decision-making to raise awareness more.

As for the limitations and delimitations of the present study, the instrument (i.e. the verbal-guise technique) utilized for measuring attitudes imposed some hardships on the researchers conducting this project. The first of which is the ability to conduct a study on a limited number of participants in some particular contexts. The segments of recorded voices (guises) imposed another limitation. Since guises had not been recorded in the same controlled isolated contexts, some uncontrolled noises could be heard in some of the tracks. On the other hand, the participants' cultural background, their mother tongue, and the length of their exposure to English were not considered in this study, although their effects can be a good topic for further studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

(A) Personal details

Education:	Date of birth: __
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diploma • Associate degree • Undergraduate student • Postgraduate student • Other: 	Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female • Male

*Would you be willing to be contacted by the researchers in order to provide more detailed information? If so, please provide your email address: (Optional!)

(B) The verbal-guise technique questionnaire

You will hear five recordings: listen to the recordings and circle where you would put each speaker on the following scale.

Speaker A:

Example, 1=very pleasant, 7=very unpleasant.

1	Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unpleasant
2	Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unclear
3	Polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Impolite
4	Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
5	Fluent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fluent
6	Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-standard
7	Where do you think the speaker comes from?								
8	Do you think it is a proper accent for an English teacher?								

Speaker B:

Example, 1=very pleasant, 7=very unpleasant.

1	Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unpleasant
2	Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unclear
3	Polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Impolite
4	Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
5	Fluent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fluent
6	Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-standard
7	Where do you think the speaker comes from?								
8	Do you think it is a proper accent for an English teacher?								

Speaker C:

Example, 1=very pleasant, 7=very unpleasant.

1	Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unpleasant
2	Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unclear
3	Polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Impolite
4	Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
5	Fluent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fluent
6	Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-standard
7	Where do you think the speaker comes from?								
8	Do you think it is a proper accent for an English teacher?								

Speaker D:

Example, 1=very pleasant, 7=very unpleasant.

1	Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unpleasant
2	Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unclear
3	Polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Impolite
4	Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
5	Fluent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fluent
6	Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-standard
7	Where do you think the speaker comes from?								
8	Do you think it is a proper accent for an English teacher?								

Speaker E:

Example, 1=very pleasant, 7=very unpleasant.

1	Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unpleasant
2	Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unclear
3	Polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Impolite
4	Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
5	Fluent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fluent
6	Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-standard
7	Where do you think the speaker comes from?								
8	Do you think it is a proper accent for an English teacher?								

Appendix 2. Speakers and speech varieties chosen for the study

Nationality	Age	Education and occupation	Place of birth and ethnicity	Length of recording	Speech variety	Description	Coded reference
American	26	BA/BS and MD, student	Lakewood, Ohio; White	00:00:51	Mid-West United States EN	Native/Inner Circle/Standard EN	Am EN
Australian	22	BA, student	Brisbane, Australia; White	00:00:59	Australian EN	Native/Inner Circle/Standard EN	Aus EN
Black-American	22	Student	Portales, New Mexico; African American	00:00:56	African American Vernacular English	Native/Inner Circle/Non-standard EN	AAVE
British	50	A-level, local government officer	Working, Surrey; White	00:00:55	RP/British EN	Native/inner circle/Standard EN RP accent	Br RP
Iranian	43	College degree	Tehran, Iran; Iranian	00:01:13	Iranian accent of EN	Non-native/Expanding Circle EN/Non-standard EN	Per EN

Appendix 3. Guise script

Comma Gets a Cure

Well, here's a story for you: Sarah Perry was a veterinary nurse who had been working daily at an old zoo in a deserted district of the territory, so she was very happy to start a new job at a superb private practice in North Square near the Duke Street Tower. That area was much nearer for her and more to her liking. Even so, on her first morning, she felt stressed. She ate a bowl of porridge, checked herself in the mirror, and washed her face in a hurry. Then she put on a plain yellow dress and a fleece jacket, picked up her kit and headed for work.

When she got there, there was a woman with a goose waiting for her. The woman gave Sarah an official letter from the vet. The letter implied that the animal could be suffering from a rare form of foot and mouth disease, which was surprising, because normally you would only expect to see it in a dog or a goat. Sarah was sentimental, so this made her feel sorry for the beautiful bird.