



ATTITUDES OF SLOVENE L2 SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH TO SIX NATIVE VARIETIES OF ENGLISH¹

1 INTRODUCTION

Linguists have been interested in the attitudes towards the English language and English speakers ever since the second half of the 20th century when the English language started being increasingly used for communication by more and more people around the world, which has gradually led to the present-day status of English as *lingua franca* or English as international language (EIL). This increased interest in learning English and using it in international settings has resulted in a large number of non-native varieties of English which are nowadays commonly referred to as varieties of English as Lingua Franca (ELF). The linguistic studies of ELF are on increase and there have also been attempts for codification of ELF pronunciation (see Jenkins, 2000). The supporters of ELF claim that because there are more than three quarters of English users in the world who are non-native speakers of English and use English to communicate with other non-native speakers of English the teaching goals should change particularly on the level of pronunciation: the key concept in teaching English pronunciation is international intelligibility and not acquiring a native-speaker accent (Walker & Low & Setter 2021). They make a clear distinction between English as a foreign language (EFL) – English taught to non-native speakers of English so that they can communicate with native speakers – and English as international language (EIL), also referred to as English as *lingua franca* (ELF) – English taught to non-native speakers so that they can communicate mainly with other non-native speakers in the global world (Walker & Low & Setter 2021: 33).

Looking at this new status of English as *lingua franca* from the perspective of a non-native speaker who wants to learn English, an important question arises: which variety of English to choose as a teaching and learning model – the once dominant British English or the more widely spread and omnipresent American English or even English as international language or *lingua franca* (EIL/ELF).

A large number of recent studies (see Lewandowski 2017; Carrie 2017; Ladegaard & Sachdev 2006; Rindal 2010) on attitudes towards English focusing on the attitudes of foreign speakers of English towards the two main standard varieties have reached the same conclusion: foreign learners of English are fond of American English because

1 The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0218).

it sounds more relaxed and friendly but prefer British English as a teaching model because it is more prestigious, correct, posh and beautiful.

The purpose of this paper is neither to discuss the advantages or disadvantages of EIL/ELF nor to prescribe the most appropriate variety for the teaching of English in the Slovene context. Our purpose is to find and analyse the attitudes of Slovene students of English towards different varieties of English, not only the two main standard varieties (British and General American). It is the Slovene contribution to the studies of language attitudes towards the two standard English varieties (British English – RP, and General American – GA), as well as four other native varieties of English (Scottish English – ScE, Irish English – IrE, Australian English – AusE and New Zealand English – NZE). The main reason for the addition of ScE, IrE, AusE and NZE to the study is to test how these four less familiar varieties are perceived by Slovene students of English. The results of the study may serve as an indicator for future teaching of English varieties at the university level.

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 presents theoretical background on language attitudes; section 3 presents the study of Slovene university students of English towards six native varieties of English; section 4 details the results of the questionnaire and section 5 is the discussion of the results.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Language Attitudes

The main purpose of studies on language attitudes is to analyse different evaluative reactions to languages and language varieties which are held by different groups of people. In other words, language attitudes are feelings that people have about their own language or about a foreign language. Studying language attitudes isolated from a larger context of interaction is practically impossible since they always reflect social categorization and cultural stereotypes. Understanding language attitudes as evaluative beliefs, we have to take into consideration that they can either refer to a language variety or to a speaker of that variety. As pointed out by Dragojevic et al. (2021: 62), “beliefs about language structure correlate strongly with beliefs about speakers’ status, whereas beliefs about language sound correlate strongly with beliefs about speakers’ solidarity.” In other words, a competent or well-educated speaker (status) is someone whose language is well-structured on all linguistic levels and conforms to the context in which it is used. On the other hand, a speaker of a soft-sounding language is often regarded as warm and kind (solidarity).

Most studies on language attitudes have focused on different language varieties – standard varieties, regional varieties, ethnic and social group varieties, as well as foreign varieties of a particular language – and the evaluation of speakers who use them. The findings suggest a close correlation between socio-economic dominance of speakers and high prestige of the linguistic variety they use (Milroy & Milroy 1999). Furthermore, speakers of high prestige varieties are regularly rated more favourably than speakers of low prestige varieties. All this leads to the creation of numerous stereotypes about speakers of different linguistic varieties.

In the context of foreign language teaching, prestigious varieties are the target teaching and learning varieties. This is the case with English but also with other languages, such as Spanish. Ortiz Jiménez (2019) has studied the attitudes of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language in Spain and in Australia towards eight varieties of Spanish. She has found out that although the teachers exhibit a lot of tolerance and positive attitudes towards all eight varieties of Spanish, they value the standard Castilian (Peninsular) Spanish as the most prestigious, whereas Andalusian and Caribbean varieties of Spanish are least prestigious. She concludes that L2 teachers of Spanish should encourage the linguistic diversity instead of insisting on the hierarchical approach which puts the Castilian Spanish on the top of the scale and regards it as the only acceptable norm.

Most studies on language attitudes have employed the mentalist approach which views attitudes as an “internal state of readiness, which when aroused by stimulation of some sort will affect the responses of the individual” (McKenzie 2010: 21). According to the mentalist approach, attitudes have a tripartite structure. It consists of cognitive, affective and conative components. Cognitive components of an attitude are thoughts and beliefs that an individual has about the entity² under inspection and may lead to the construction of stereotypes. Affective components of an attitude are feelings and emotional responses that an individual has about the entity under evaluation. The conative components of an attitude reveal an individual’s behavioural tendencies or a predisposition to behave in a certain way towards the entity. The main advantage of the mentalist tripartite model is that it tries to explain ambivalent attitudes that people have towards a language variety or speakers of a particular variety. This ambivalence results from inconsistency or conflict among the three component elements of the model (McKenzie 2010: 24).

The seminal work on language attitudes was a study by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960) who exposed French and English-speaking Canadians to recordings in both languages and asked them to evaluate the speakers according to different traits (physical, mental and emotional). Their method of research has become known as matched guise technique whose main principle is to use the same speaker producing two (or more) different varieties as authentically as possible with the evaluators not knowing that they are listening to the same speaker. The purpose of the study was to elicit prejudices towards the two languages and their speakers. Their study, as well as a number of other studies which followed and used the matched guise technique, have come to the same conclusion: people are able to recognise and differentiate among language varieties and they also have stereotyped attitudes towards them.

2.2 Attitudes Towards English

Studies on the attitudes towards English varieties are numerous and can be divided into three groups: studies which investigate the attitudes of L1 English speakers towards varieties of English; and studies which examine the attitudes of L2 English speakers

2 The term entity refers to a language variety in the most general sense, that is from standard to non-standard varieties, from regional varieties to sociolects.

towards different varieties of English; and studies in which participants, native and non-native speakers of English, evaluate their attitudes to English as Lingua Franca (ELF).

The findings of the studies which investigate the attitudes of L1 English speakers to varieties of English show that the English accents which are more associated with standard English are favoured in prestige and attractiveness, whereas some urban UK working-class vernaculars and ethnic minorities' accents are awarded less prestige (Coupland and Bishop 2007; Levon et al. 2020). In addition, speakers of standard varieties are more competent, intelligent and have better jobs, while speakers of non-standard varieties tend to be friendly, warm and trustworthy. The participants in most studies are adults of different age who have already developed certain stereotypical attitudes towards different language varieties³. Coupland and Bishop (2007) and Levon et al. (2020) all observe that younger participants exhibit more tolerance towards non-standard varieties than the older ones. Hiraga (2005) examines the attitudes of the British towards six varieties of English in the USA and Britain and finds that the standard American – also referred to as Network American – has a special status among British people. The variety gains high scores in status and solidarity dimensions, whereas Received Pronunciation (RP) gains high scores only in the dimension of status. Interestingly, the British express equally negative attitudes towards urban American and urban British varieties. Hirago (2005, 306) concludes that “what is important for British people is how ‘prestigious’ the variety is”, and not who the speakers are.

Studies which examine the attitudes of L2 speakers towards English are numerous and focus mainly on the two standard varieties of English: Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA). The participants in these studies are mainly students of English and the researchers try to explain their attitudes in the wider scope of teaching English as a foreign language (see Lewandowski 2017, Carrie 2017, Ladegaard & Sachdev 2006, Rindal 2010). The results of these studies suggest that RP is professional and prestigious, whereas GA is urban and informal. On the other hand, a recent study by Barrata & Halenko (2022) on attitudes towards regional British accents in EFL teaching shows that although the teachers' regional accents are difficult to understand, they are nonetheless appreciated by the learners who find the accents amusing and inspiring.

More recent studies on the topic of language attitudes of L2 speakers research not only the two main standard varieties of English but also English as Lingua Franca (ELF) (see Stanojević & Josipović Smojver 2011, Stanojević, Kabalin Borenić & Josipović Smojver 2012, Groom 2012, Kaur 2014). The results obtained in these studies show that L2 learners of English give priority to standard English varieties, find them better and more appropriate for teaching and learning English than ELF.

3 The study by Kinzler and DeJesus (2013) has found that children develop stereotypical attitudes towards different American accents around the age of ten and tend to keep them as they grow up.

2.3 Slovene Studies

The tradition of learning English in Slovenia is long. English courses were officially introduced in secondary schools immediately after the World War II (1945/1946) when it was taught alongside with French and Russian, whereas their introduction in elementary school curricula followed five years later in 1950. (Skela 2019: 14). Since 1955 English has been taught as the first or second foreign language in secondary schools (Skela & Sešek 2012: 65). Since then, the popularity and the desire to learn and speak English have been conditioned by the economic, political, technical and cultural changes in Europe and the world. Today, English is the first foreign language whose instruction begins in the beginning of elementary school (learners at the age of 6) and continues throughout the secondary school.

The English proficiency level for secondary school graduates is B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001; henceforth CEFR). This level of proficiency is targeted in the secondary school curriculum for English. The learners are required to understand and use one standard variety of English (Eržen *et al.* 2008) – in Slovenia, this variety has traditionally been the British standard variety, commonly referred to as Received Pronunciation (RP). The secondary school graduates who want to study English at the university level have to pass the national examination (Slo. *matura*) – no special entrance examination is required.

In agreement with the legislation, the instruction of foreign languages and literatures at the university level in Slovenia is carried out in the foreign language. Hence the instruction at the English department, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana is in BA and MA programmes English. The curriculum of the BA programme consists of a number of language and literature lectures, seminars and practical classes. The courses are taught mainly by Slovene lecturers whose English proficiency level is C2 according to CEFR⁴. The exposure of students to different varieties of English mainly depends on the course. For example, in lectures and practical classes on English phonetics and phonology (1st year BA programme) and English prosody (2nd year, BA programme) the students are systematically made aware of the differences between the standard British English pronunciation features and General American, as well as other regional varieties within the United Kingdom and beyond.

Studies analysing the attitudes of Slovene learners of English towards different L1 English varieties are practically non-existent. There is one study by Šabec (2000) in which she analyses the attitudes of students of English at the University of Maribor towards British and American English. Her findings are similar to the findings of the above-mentioned studies (see 2.2): British English is “more sophisticated, more difficult to pronounce and more complex than AmE, which is, ..., simpler, easier and sounds more natural and familiar” (2000: 75). Furthermore, Received Pronunciation is considered a model for pronunciation, prestigious, desirable and useful whereas American English is viewed as relaxed by the majority of respondents (2000: 76).

4 Currently, there are three native English lecturers who teach in the department: two are native speakers of British English and teach language courses, one is a native speaker of Canadian English who teaches Canadian literature.

Stopar (2015: 113) looks into the stereotypes that students of English at the University of Ljubljana hold towards Americans. The respondents mention five adjectives that are most representative of Americans: *patriotic*, *materialistic*, *ambitious*, *competitive* and *ignorant*, of which only *materialistic* and *ignorant* are negatively evaluated, the remaining three have either neutral (*patriotic*) or positive (*ambitious* and *competitive*) evaluations.

3 THE STUDY

3.1 Participants

Sixty-five Slovene students enrolled in the 2nd and 3rd year of the BA university programme in English language and literature at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana participated in the testing, which was carried out in May 2022. Their average age was 21.8. Fifty-five students were female (84.6%) and 10 students were male (15.4%). These percentages are in agreement with the gender structure of students of English at the department. The years of learning English ranged from 12 to 17, the average being 12.8, which corresponds to the years of learning English in schools (elementary and secondary) in Slovenia for this generation of students⁵. None of the participants lived or spent a longer period of time in an English speaking country, and none of them had native speakers of English as parents.

3.2 Instruments and Procedure

The participants were presented with a three-part questionnaire. In the first part, they had to provide information about their nationality, gender, age, years of learning English, time spent in an English-speaking country and if the native language of their parents was English.

In the second part, they were requested to rate, on a four-point Likert scale, three statements about the cognitive and affective traits of the speaker, and two statements concerning the linguistic traits which they believed contributed most to their attitudes to a particular variety. The range of scores was: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), strongly agree (4). The last task was to recognize the variety in question. The tasks in the second part of the questionnaire were the same for all six varieties.

In the third part of the questionnaire, the respondents had to range the six tested varieties according to their preference, familiarity and appropriateness for teaching to Slovene learners of English.

For the execution of the second part of the questionnaire a verbal guise technique (VGT) was used. VGT is a modification of the classic MGT (matched guise technique) in that it uses multiple speakers to provide sound recordings of either read or spontaneous speech instead of only one bilingual speaker usually reading a prepared text in their native varieties. Although VGT has received some criticism (see Chan 2021), it has made its way into modern studies on World Englishes and attitudes towards them. For our study we employed six different speakers reading the same text in their native

5 Since the school year 2016/2017 learning English has been introduced in the 2nd year of the elementary school.

English variety. The audio clips for the six tested varieties were obtained from the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA – International Dialects of English Archive (dialectsarchive.com)). All the speakers were female and they read the first two paragraphs of the text *Comma Gets a Cure* which is the text used by IDEA for examining the pronunciation of different varieties of English spoken around the world. The text was written by Jill McCullough and Barbara Somerville and edited by Douglas N. Honorof (Comma Gets A Cure | IDEA: International Dialects of English Archive (dialectsarchive.com)). The audio clips of the six varieties were each one minute long and were presented to the respondents in the following order: AusE English (AusE) – the speaker was from Sydney, General American (GA), ScE English (ScE) – the speaker was from Edinburgh, Received Pronunciation (RP), NZE English (NZE) – the speaker was from South Auckland and IrE English (IrE) – the speaker was from Dublin. After each audio clip, the respondents were asked to rate the statements presented in the second part of the questionnaire and to recognize the variety in question.

Having heard and rated all six varieties, the respondents moved to the third part of the questionnaire. The whole testing lasted 20 minutes.

3.3 Research Questions

The purpose of our study was to answer the below four research questions:

RQ1: Which cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits are most frequently associated with a variety under investigation?

RQ2: What is the correlation between the pronunciation features and intelligibility of a variety under investigation?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between the familiarity with a variety and its recognition?

RQ4: Is there a correlation between the preference, familiarity and appropriateness for teaching the tested varieties to Slovene learners of English?

4 RESULTS

4.1 Evaluation of Cognitive Traits

In order to test the cognitive traits attributed to a variety, the respondents had to decide if the speakers sounded: friendly, boring, well-educated, confident and serious. Summing up the strongly disagree and disagree categories in disagreement (D), as well as strongly agree and agree in agreement (A), provided a more general picture of the respondents' evaluations as positive or negative. Where significant, the strongly disagree and strongly agree scores were provided.

All respondents evaluated the speakers of all varieties as friendly with ScE and IrE ranking at the top of the scale (96.9%). There is a difference between them in the number of strong agreements (ScE 60%, IrE 47.7%). Following ScE and IrE, are GA (92.3%), NZE (89.2%), RP (87.6%) and AusE (53.8%).

The respondents also agreed that all speakers sounded confident with GA scoring highest (98.4%) and immediately followed by RP (95.3%). The remaining varieties followed: ScE (76.8%), IrE (67.7%), NZE (64.6%) and AusE (63%).

The respondents evaluated the speakers of five varieties as well-educated. The speaker of RP scored highest (96.9%), followed by the speaker of GA (86.1%). The speakers of ScE (63%), AusE (61%) and IrE (57%) were regarded as well-educated but to a smaller degree. Interestingly, the speaker of NZE sounded not well-educated in the opinion of 86.2% respondents of whom 47.7 % strongly disagreed with the statement that the speaker sounded well-educated.

Five varieties were not regarded as boring with IrE being at the top of the scale (95.4%), closely followed by GA and ScE (90.7% both), NZE (86.2%) and lastly RP (79.9%). The speaker of AusE was recognized as boring by 63% of respondents.

As to the seriousness of the speakers, the results are more divided. The speakers of AusE English (82.5%) and RP (70.7%) were evaluated as serious, whereas the speakers of the remaining four varieties were not. The least serious was the speaker of GA (70.7%), followed by the NZE (63%), ScE (58.2%) and IrE (52.3%) speakers. Table 1 presents the ranking of the varieties in terms of disagreement and agreement regarding the five cognitive traits.

Table 1. Cognitive traits: “The speaker of this clip sounds ...”

| | friendly | boring | well-educated | confident | serious |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| D | | IrE (95.4%) GA (90.7%) ScE (90.7%) NZE (86.2%) RP (79.9%) | NZE (86.2%) | | GA(70.7%) NZE (63%) ScE (58.4%) IrE (52.3%) |
| A | ScE (96.9%) IrE (96.9%) GA (92.3%) NZE (89.2%) RP (87.6%) AusE (53.8%) | AusE (63%) | RP (96.9%) GA (86.1%) ScE (63%) AusE (61%) IrE (57%) | GA (98.4%) RP (95.3%) ScE (76.8%) IrE (67.7%) NZE (64.6%) AusE (63%) | AusE (82.5%) RP (70.7%) |

4.2 Evaluation of Affective Traits

With the purpose of evaluating affective traits that the varieties triggered, the respondents had to evaluate the statement: “When I listen to this speaker, I trust her/like her/fell irritated/am amused/feel intimidated”. Similarly, as with the results of cognitive traits, we summed up both positive and negative scores into disagreement and agreement, respectively.

All the respondents trusted the six speakers. The most trustworthy was the ScE speaker (93.8%), closely followed by the IrE speaker (90.8%) and the speaker of GA (90.7%). Speakers of RP (84.6%), NZE (78.5%) and AusE (63%) ranked in the second half of the scale.

Similarly, all the respondents liked all six speakers. Most liked were the speakers of GA and ScE (both 90.7%), the difference between them being in the percentage of agreement (GA 46.2%, ScE 27.7%) and strong agreement (GA 44.6%, ScE 63.1%). The speakers of the remaining varieties followed: IrE (89.2%), NZE (83.1%), RP (80%) and AusE (50.7%).

None of the respondents found the speakers irritating. Least irritating was the speaker of ScE (95.4%), followed by the speaker of RP (93.8%), the speaker of GA (93.7%), the IrE speaker (89.2%), the speaker of NZE (86.2%) and the speaker of AusE (70.8%).

Similarly, none of the respondents felt intimidated by the speakers with the speakers of GA and IrE at the top of the scale (both 98.5%), the difference between them being in the percentage of strong agreement (GA 86.2%, IrE 78.5%). The speakers who followed were from New Zealand and Scotland (both 96.9%), with the difference in strong disagreement (NZE 83.1%, ScE 75.4%). The last two on the scale were speakers of RP (81%) and AusE (80%).

The fifth affective trait referred to the amusing quality of the variety where the respondents scored between 50% and 75% either in agreement or disagreement with the statement. Nonetheless, the respondents found speakers of two varieties as amusing: the ScE speaker (63%) and the speaker of GA (55.3%). The speakers of the remaining four varieties were not found amusing. The respondents were least amused with the speaker of AusE (75%), followed by the speakers of RP (67.7%), IrE (60%) and NZE (50.8%). The ranking of the varieties in terms of disagreement and agreement regarding the five affective traits is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Affective traits: “When I listen to this speaker, I ...”

| | trust her | like her | feel irritated | am amused | feel intimidated |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| D | | | ScE (95.4%) RP (93.8%) GA (93.7%) IrE (89.2%) NZE (86.2%) AusE (70.8%) | AusE (75%) RP (67.7%) IrE (60%) NZE (50.8%) | GA (98.5%) IrE (98.5%) NZE (96.9%) ScE (96.9%) RP (81%) AusE (80%) |
| A | ScE (93.8%) IrE (90.8%) GA (90.7%) RP (84.6%) NZE (78.5%) AusE (63%) | GA (90.7%) ScE (90.7%) IrE (89.2%) NZE (83.1%) RP (80%) AusE (50.7%) | | ScE (63%) GA (55.3%) | |

4.3 Evaluation of Aesthetic Traits

For the evaluation of aesthetic traits of the six varieties (RQ3), the respondents had to decide if the accent was beautiful, posh, prestigious, old-fashioned and funny.

The results indicate that none of the varieties was regarded as old-fashioned. The respondents all disagreed that GA was old-fashioned (83.1% of them strongly disagreed). The varieties which followed were: NZE (89.3%), IrE (75.4%), ScE (72.3%), RP (64.6%) and AusE (60%).

The respondents agreed that the only prestigious variety was RP (78.5%). The remaining five varieties were not prestigious, with ScE being at the top of the scale with 93.8% of which 57% represented strong disagreement. Varieties which followed were AusE (92.3%), IrE (90.8%), NZE (87.8%) and GA (83.1%).

Similarly as above, the respondents agreed that only RP was posh (86.2%). The rest of the varieties were not, with NZE and ScE at the top of the scale (both 89.2%), the difference between them in the percentage of strong disagreement (NZE 53.8%, ScE 67.7%). GA (87.7%), IrE and AusE (both 77%) scored in the second half of the scale.

The respondents regarded five varieties as beautiful, with RP scoring highest (89.2%), and being followed by ScE (77%). Varieties which followed were NZE (69.2%), IrE (67.9%) and GA (60%). The scores for AusE were 10.8% of strong disagreement and 44.6% of disagreement (together 55.4%), and 41.5% of agreement and 3.1% of strong agreement (together 44.6%), which places AusE by a margin into the category of not being beautiful.

The respondents found five varieties as not funny: RP (93.8%), GA (89.3%), AusE (77.9%), IrE (72.3%) and NZE (70.8%). The only variety which was marginally funny was ScE (52.3%). Table 3 presents the ranking of the varieties in terms of disagreement and agreement regarding the five aesthetic traits.

Table 3. Aesthetic traits: “This accent is ...”

| | beautiful | posh | prestigious | old-fashioned | funny |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| D | AusE (55.4%) | NZE (89.2%) ScE (89.2%) GA (87.7%) IrE (77%) AusE (77%) | ScE (93.8%) AusE (92.3%) IrE (90.8%) NZE (87.8%) GA (83.1%) | GA (100%) NZE (89.3%) IrE (75.4%) ScE (72.3%) RP (64.6%) AusE (60%) | RP (93.8%) GA (89.3%) AusE (77.9%) IrE (72.3%) NZE (70.8%) |
| A | RP (89.2%) ScE (77%) NZE (69.2%) IrE (67.9%) GA (60%) | RP (86.2%) | RP (78.5%) | | ScE (52.3%) |

4.4 Evaluation of Linguistic Traits

Questions 4 and 5 in the questionnaire tested the participants’ awareness of phonetic and prosodic features which ease or hinder the understanding of the variety under investigation. In question 4 they had to evaluate the statement, “I find the

pronunciation easy/intonation familiar/rhythm difficult. They found the pronunciation of all varieties except ScE easy, the intonation of all varieties, with the exception of NZE and IrE, familiar, and the rhythm of all varieties not difficult at all. Table 4 presents the ranking of the varieties according to the percentage of scores showing agreement in cases of pronunciation and intonation and disagreement in the case of rhythm. It has to be pointed out that in case of GA and RP the respondents' prevailing scores were strong agreement in the categories of pronunciation (GA 98.5%, RP 72.3%) and intonation (GA 95.3%, RP 70.8%), and strong disagreement with the category of rhythm being difficult (GA 87.7%, RP 75.4%). For the remaining varieties the respondents opted mostly for the scores of agreement and disagreement. The only three varieties whose pronunciation and intonation the respondents did not find easy or familiar were ScE (pronunciation), as well as NZE and IrE (intonation).

Table 4. Linguistic features: "I find ...

| | pronunciation easy | intonation familiar | rhythm difficult |
|---|--|---|---|
| D | ScE (35.4%) | NZE (61.5%) IrE (52.4%) | GA (95.4%) RP (89.2%) AusE (75.4%) ScE (73.9%) NZE (57%) IrE (50.8%) |
| A | GA (98.5%) RP (96.9%) AusE (78.5%) NZE (66.2%) IrE (53.8%) | RP (98.5%) GA (98.5%) AusE (67.7%) ScE (60%) | |

Question 5 required the respondents to evaluate the reasons for the lack of intelligibility of the speakers. The given categories were vowels, consonants, speed, rhythm and melody. Most of the respondents disagreed that the five categories had hindered intelligibility of GA and RP. Similarly as with question 4, they chose strong disagreement for GA vowels (87.7%), consonants (89.2%), speed (49.2%), rhythm (78.5%) and melody (73.8%), as well as for RP vowels (70.8%), consonants (70.8%), speed (55.4%), rhythm (61.5%) and melody (64.6%). Table 5 presents the scores that respondents attributed to the five pronunciation categories which hinder or ease the intelligibility of the varieties.

Table 5. Linguistic features: “The reasons for the lack of intelligibility of this speaker are ...”

| | vowels | consonants | speed | rhythm | melody |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| D | GA (95.4%) RP (84.6%) | GA (93.8%) RP (90.8%) AusE (77%) NZE (75.4%) IrE (55.4%) | GA (81.5%) ScE (80%) RP (73.9%) AusE (70.8%) | GA (95.4%) RP (87.7%) AusE 61.5%) ScE (60%) | GA (92.3%) RP (92.3%) IrE (57%) ScE (55.4%) |
| A | ScE (76.9%) NZE (63.1%) IrE (61.5%) AusE (57%) | ScE (52.3%) | IrE (63.1%) NZE (50.8%) | IrE (52.3%) NZE (50.8%) | AusE (55.3%) NZE (52.3%) |

4.5 Recognition of the Varieties

Task 6 in the questionnaire required the respondents to recognize the variety under investigation. The respondents were most successful in the recognition of GA (95.4%) and RP (95.4%). ScE and IrE were recognized by only a half of the respondents (ScE 50.8%, IrE 55.4%), whereas the rest of them confused them: IrE was recognized as ScE (32.3%), and ScE as IrE (47.7%). Similar was true with NZE and AusE. The former was correctly recognized by 49.2% and confused with AusE by 43.1% of respondents, whereas the latter was correctly recognized by 40% and confused with NZE by 35% of respondents. Table 6 presents the results for the recognition of the varieties.

Table 6. Recognition of the varieties

| | AusE | GA | ScE | RP | NZE | IrE |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| AusE | 40% | | 6.2% | 13.8% | 35% | 5% |
| GA | | 95.4% | | 4.6% | | |
| ScE | 1.5% | | 50.8% | | | 47.7% |
| RP | | 4.6% | | 95.4% | | |
| NZE | 43.1% | | | 7.7% | 49.2% | |
| IrE | | 12.3% | 32.3% | | | 55.4% |

4.6 Popularity, Familiarity and Appropriateness for Teaching

In the third part of the questionnaire, the respondents had to rank the six varieties of English according to their popularity, familiarity and appropriateness for teaching English to Slovene learners. The respondents found RP most favourite variety, as well as most appropriate for teaching English to Slovene learners. On the other hand, they were most familiar with GA. Least favourite, familiar and appropriate varieties were NZE and ScE. Table 7 presents the rankings of the varieties according to the above categories.

Table 7. Popularity, familiarity and appropriateness for teaching

| popularity | | | familiarity | | | appropriateness for teaching | | |
|------------|---------|------|-------------|---------|------|------------------------------|---------|------|
| rank | variety | mode | rank | variety | mode | rank | variety | mode |
| 1. | RP | 2.5 | 1. | GA | 1.5 | 1. | RP | 1.4 |
| 2. | IrE | 3.0 | 2. | RP | 1.7 | 2. | GA | 1.8 |
| 3. | AusE | 3.4 | 3. | AusE | 3.8 | 3. | AusE | 3.7 |
| 4. | GA | 3.6 | 4. | IrE | 4.2 | 4. | IrE | 4.2 |
| 5. | ScE | 3.7 | 5. | ScE | 4.6 | 5. | ScE | 4.8 |
| 6. | NZE | 4.7 | 6. | NZE | 5.3 | 6. | NZE | 5.0 |

5 DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that some cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits were more frequently associated with some varieties than with others (RQ1). Table 8 presents the selection of most frequently scored cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits in the six studied varieties.

Table 8. Association of the cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits with different varieties

| variety | cognitive traits | affective traits | aesthetic traits |
|---------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| RP | friendly most well-educated confident serious | trustworthy liked not amusing | most beautiful posh prestigious not old-fashioned not funny at all |
| GA | friendly well-educated confident not serious at all least boring | trustworthy most liked amusing | least beautiful not posh not prestigious not old-fashioned not funny |
| IrE | very friendly least boring marginally well-educated marginally confident | trustworthy liked not amusing | not posh not prestigious not old-fashioned not funny |

| | | | |
|------|---|---|--|
| ScE | most friendly least boring not serious | most trustworthy most liked amusing | beautiful not posh least prestigious not old-fashioned funny |
| AusE | least friendly boring not well-educated least confident serious | least trustworthy least liked not amusing | not beautiful not posh least prestigious not old-fashioned not funny |
| NZE | friendly not boring not well-educated not serious | trustworthy liked not amusing | least posh not prestigious not old-fashioned |

We can conclude that the speakers of all varieties sounded friendly, confident, trustworthy and were liked. None of the speakers irritated or intimidated the respondents. As far as the aesthetic traits are concerned, the respondents agreed that none of the varieties was old-fashioned. RP was the only variety which they found prestigious and posh, but also the most beautiful one. Surprisingly, GA, on the other hand, was evaluated just the opposite: neither posh nor prestigious but also not beautiful. Interestingly, ScE was the only variety which the respondents found funny. Analysing the scores associated with AusE, we can observe rather negative attitudes to the variety in all three categories of traits. There are two possible explanations for this: first, the AusE speaker read the text in a very slow rhythm and flat intonation, and second, the respondents may have been least familiar with the AusE variety.

The results also indicate that there is a correlation between cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits associated with some of the varieties. The speaker of RP was serious, did not trigger amusement in the respondents, and the variety was not funny. The speaker of ScE English was most friendly, least boring and not serious, as well as most trustworthy and liked. The ScE variety, although not posh and least prestigious, was rated beautiful and funny. As stated above, respondents were also consistent in evaluating, rather negatively, AusE English. We can find consistency among cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits also with NZE and IrE English, which received similar scores in all three categories of traits. There is also a correlation between cognitive and affective traits that the speaker of GA received – the respondents found her friendly, well-educated, confident, not serious and least boring, as well as trustworthy, most liked and amusing. There is little correlation between cognitive and affective traits on the one hand, and aesthetic traits on the other – the GA variety was found least beautiful, not posh or prestigious, and not funny. At this point it is difficult to find an explanation for such a discrepancy, yet the most plausible one could be that the respondents evaluated the appeal of the speaker with cognitive and affective traits, and followed their pre-established, perhaps stereotypical opinion about GA variety when evaluating its aesthetic traits.

The purpose of our study was also to find out if the participants were aware of the linguistic features which ease or hinder understanding of a particular variety (RQ2). First we checked their awareness of the difficulty of pronunciation, familiarity of intonation and difficulty of rhythm. The respondents found the three features of RP and GA easiest and most familiar – which was not surprising as the two varieties are the ones they were most exposed to (through different media) and studied (particularly RP). As to other varieties, the pronunciation of ScE was difficult, intonation of NZE and IrE unfamiliar, and their rhythm rather difficult. We further asked the respondents to evaluate which of the five pronunciation features were responsible for the lack of intelligibility (vowels, consonants, speed, rhythm and melody). Similarly as above, none of the features caused any intelligibility problems with RP and GA. Since the varieties exhibit most variation in the vocalic system, it was not surprising to find the vowels hindering the intelligibility of ScE, NZE and IrE most. The consonants seem to have hindered intelligibility of ScE only. The three prosodic features (speed, rhythm and melody) affected the intelligibility of IrE, NZE and AusE (only melody).

In our study we also wanted to find out if there was a correlation between the familiarity with a variety and its recognition (RQ3). The results suggested that the respondents were most familiar with GA and RP (see Table 7), which they also correctly identified. They were less familiar with AusE, IrE, ScE and NZE but their correct recognition does not reflect this order. The two European varieties (ScE and IrE) were more correctly recognized than AusE and NZE. In addition, the most frequent faulty recognition – confusion of one variety with the other - occurred between IrE and ScE, as well as NZE and AusE. We can conclude that the least familiar variety is least correctly recognized.

Comparison of orders in which the respondents ranked the varieties according to their popularity, familiarity and appropriateness for teaching to Slovene learners (RQ4) shows that the most favourite variety and the most appropriate one for teaching is RP, whereas the most familiar variety is GA, immediately followed by RP (see Table 7). It is interesting to find a correlation between the popularity of GA (ranked fourth) and the aesthetic value of beauty where GA was evaluated as least beautiful. The ranking of RP, GA, AusE and IrE on the first four places on all three scales is not surprising and can be explained by the curriculum where students can attend literature and language courses dealing with the four varieties. ScE and NZE are least familiar to the respondents and as such also least favourite and least appropriate for teaching English to Slovene learners of English.

6 CONCLUSION

The paper presents the results of a study on attitudes of Slovene university students of English towards six L1 varieties of English. The findings show that there is a correlation between cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits associated with most of the varieties, with the exception of GA, which although it is perceived as friendly, well-educated, confident, trustworthy and liked (affective and cognitive traits) it is also least beautiful, not posh or prestigious and not funny (aesthetic traits). Similar to other studies, the

participants find RP prestigious, most well-educated, beautiful, as well as trustworthy and liked. This is also the reason why most of them believe that RP is the right variety for teaching English to Slovene L2 learners.

The study also shows that the participants are mainly aware of the pronunciation features which are responsible for (mis)understanding of an English variety. It seems that the recognition of a variety depends on how different it is from one of the two main standard varieties (RP or GA), as well as how much exposure to the variety in question the participants have had: less familiarity with a variety and more phonetic variation from the standard variety lead to a less successful recognition. This is an important finding which should also be considered from the pedagogical perspective. We believe that in the period of English as a global language university students should be taught to develop an objective and educated stance toward different standard and non-standard varieties of English, including English as Lingua Franca (ELF) or English as international language (EIL). In practice this means that literary, linguistic and pedagogical courses should focus on specific features of all varieties of English and encourage students to recognize them and take a stance towards them⁶.

To substantiate our findings, additional research is necessary – for example, a study among different age and occupational groups of Slovene L2 speakers of English; it should address not only the two prevailing standard varieties of English (RP and GA) but also different ELF varieties. It would be interesting to find the attitudes of Slovene speakers of English as a foreign language towards the present trend to teach English as international language (EIL) or English as *lingua franca* (ELF) pronunciation instead of either of the two native standard pronunciations (RP and GA).

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6 For example, when studying the poetry of the Scottish romantic poet Robert Burns, who wrote in the Scots language and Scottish English, students can be encouraged to discuss the language and to understand the motivation behind its usage. There are plenty of recordings of his poetry available on the Internet read in the Scottish English which the students can listen to and discuss the linguistic features.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire seeks your opinions and attitudes to different native accents of English. It consists of three parts. The research is anonymous. Your answers will be kept confidential and used for analysis purposes only.

PART 1. Please fill in the below slots:

| |
|--|
| <p>Gender: _____</p> <p>Age: _____</p> <p>Nationality: _____</p> <p>Years of learning/studying English:</p> <p>I have lived in an English speaking country _____ (please specify) for _____ (please specify).</p> <p>One or both of my parents are native speakers of English (please circle the answer):</p> <p style="text-align: center;">yes no</p> <p>If your answer is yes, please specify their native English variety: _____</p> |
|--|

PART 2.

You will hear six audio clips. After each clip, you will fill in the below questions. For each clip, the questions are the same.

On a scale from 1 to 4, circle the number which best describes your attitude:

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: agree, 4: strongly agree.

NOW READ THE QUESTIONS.

1. The speaker of this clip sounds:

| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|
| friendly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| boring | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| well educated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| confident | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| serious | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

2. When I listen to this speaker, I

| | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|
| trust her | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| like her | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| feel irritated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| am amused | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| feel intimidated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

3. This accent is

| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|
| beautiful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| posh | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| prestigious. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| old-fashioned | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| funny | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

4. I find

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| the pronunciation of this speaker easy to understand. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| the intonation of this speaker familiar . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| the rhythm of this speaker difficult to follow. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

5. The reasons for the lack of intelligibility of this speaker are:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| pronunciation of vowels | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| pronunciation of consonants | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| speed of delivery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| rhythm of delivery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| melody/intonation of delivery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

6. I recognize the speaker's accent as (please circle the variety):

RP Scottish New Zealand Australian General American Irish

PART 3.

Range the below varieties of English: **1: topmost, 6 bottommost.**

1. My favourite varieties of English are:

RP ____
 General American ____
 Scottish English ____
 Irish English ____
 Australian English ____
 New Zealand English ____

2. **I am most familiar with:**

RP ____
General American ____
Scottish English ____
Irish English ____
Australian English ____
New Zealand English ____

3. **The most appropriate variety for teaching English to Slovene learners of English is:**

RP ____
General American ____
Scottish English ____
Irish English ____
Australian English ____
New Zealand English ____

Abstract
ATTITUDES OF SLOVENE L2 SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH TO SIX NATIVE
VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

The paper presents the results of an experiment whose purpose was to study the attitudes towards six L1 varieties of English by Slovene students of English. Using the verbal guise test, the participants were exposed to audio clips of Received Pronunciation (RP), General American (GA), Scottish English (ScE), Irish English (IrE), Australian English (AusE) and New Zealand English (NZE). They were required to complete a two-part questionnaire. In part one, they were asked to rate, on four-point Likert scale, statements about the cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits of the speakers, as well as the linguistic traits which they believed contributed most to their attitudes to a particular variety. In part two, they had to rank the six tested varieties indicating their general order of preference, their relative familiarity with the varieties and the appropriateness of the varieties for teaching to Slovene learners of English.

The results of the study confirm the findings of numerous other similar studies in giving preference to the two best-known global standard varieties (RP and GA) over the other varieties.

Keywords: varieties of English, language attitudes, verbal guise test, IDEA (International Dialects of English Archive)

Povzetek
ODNOS SLOVENSKIH GOVORCEV ANGLEŠČINE DO ŠESTIH MATERNIH
VARIANT ANGLEŠČINE

V članku predstavljamo rezultate študije, katere namen je bil preučiti odnos slovenskih študentov angleščine do šestih maternih variant angleščine. Udeleženci so slišali zvočne posnetke standardne britanske, standardne ameriške, škotske, irske, avstralske in novozelandske angleščine. Izpolniti so morali dvodelni vprašalnik. V prvem delu so morali na štiristopenjski Likertovi lestvici ovrednotiti kognitivne, afektivne in estetske lastnosti vsake variante. Opredeliti so se morali tudi do jezikovnih lastnosti, ki najbolj vplivajo na njihovo percepcijo variante. V drugem delu vprašalnika so morali preučevane variante razvrstiti glede na njihovo priljubljenost, prepoznavnost in primernost za poučevanje angleščine slovenskih govorcev.

Rezultati študije so potrdili ugotovitve številnih drugih podobnih študij v tem, da tudi slovenski študentje angleščine dajejo prednost standardnima variantama (britanski in ameriški) pred ostalimi variantami angleščine.

Ključne besede: variante angleškega jezika, jezikovni odnosi, test verbalne preobleke, IDEA (International Dialects of English Archive)