

# American versus British English

## Dutch attitudes towards Standard American English and Received Pronunciation

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# Abstract

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The English language has an increasingly important role in the Netherlands, for example in governmental communication. The two varieties of English that are most prominent in Dutch society are British English and American English. Even though these language varieties are very visible in the Netherlands, it is unclear what attitudes Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of these English language variations when it comes to their status and social attractiveness. Knowing more about this is interesting and relevant for the Dutch government and companies, as insight in these attitudes can advise them in determining what English variety to use. Therefore, this study aimed to answer the following research question: *What attitudes do Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of Standard American English and Received Pronunciation?* Furthermore, the relation between the gender of the speaker and the attributed attitudes was studied. This is relevant because little research into gender in combination with language attitudes was done. This study made use of a mixed subject design with two independent variables: variety of English and gender. Both of these variables had two levels, Received Pronunciation (RP) and Standard American English (SAE), and male and female, respectively. The dependent variables were status and social attractiveness. In an experiment, participants were asked to listen to two sound fragments, either of a male or female speaker of SAE or RP, and answer questions about the social attractiveness and status of the speakers. The results indicate that Dutch citizens attribute more social attractiveness to speakers of RP than to speakers SAE. Furthermore, the participants attributed more social attractiveness to male speakers than to female speakers. These results are deviant from results found in earlier studies in the field of language attitudes. In the discussion of this thesis, possible explanations for these deviant results are given.

# Introduction

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In the Netherlands, the use of English has increased exponentially over the last decades (Gerritsen, Van Meurs, Planken, Korzilius, 2016). Several varieties of English are visible in different aspects of Dutch society. American English, for example, can be heard on television, in popular music, and is visible on social media. British English is omnipresent in education and in official communication from the Dutch government. This clear presence of English language variations in Dutch society raises questions about what attitudes Dutch citizens have about these language variations.

People's perceptions of others are partly influenced by the use of language. Different social attributes or supposed capabilities are attributed by others to a person on the basis of their accent, dialect or language. Some languages or language variations can also be regarded as superior to others. The multidisciplinary field that engages in research into the different attributions that are made on the basis of language behaviours is called the study of language attitudes (Cargile, Giles, Ryan & Bradac, 1994).

In the field of language attitudes, language is not the only factor that can have an influence on attitudes people have about others. Other factors that can have an influence on attitudes are for example the gender of both the listener and the speaker, or pre-existing stereotypes about a language variety. However, there is still a lot unclear about what attitudes people have about language, why people attribute certain attitudes, and what influences these attitudes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine what attitudes Dutch citizens attribute to different varieties of English, while taking into account the possible influence of the gender of the speaker.

## **The study of language attitudes**

It is estimated that there are approximately 7000 languages in the world. Most languages have a standard variety, but also have dialects and accents (Lewis, 2009; Dunn, Greenhill, Levinson & Gray, 2011). Dialects and accents are important concepts in the field of language attitudes. The terms dialect and accent are very often used interchangeably, but they do actually have different meanings. In the linguistic field, a variation of a language is called an accent when only the pronunciation differs from the standard language. For example, the English spoken by a native Dutch person is considered to have an accent. In a dialect, the

pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are different from the standard language, but speakers of different dialects of the standard language are still able to mostly understand each other. An accent is therefore sometimes considered to be a special element of a dialect (Upton & Widdowson, 2006). Examples of English dialects are American English and Australian English, as they differ from the standard variety of English not only in pronunciation, but also in vocabulary and grammar. Dialects also exist within a country (Huang, Hansen & Angkitittrakul, 2007). In the United Kingdom, for example, there are several local dialects such as Scottish and Irish (Upton et al., 2006). However, there is an ongoing discussion about when to call a language variety a dialect or an accent, which leads to interchangeable use of the concepts in research (Huang, Hansen & Angkitittrakul, 2007). In the present study, the term accent will be used to indicate variations of a language.

Attitudes toward languages are as old as language itself, but research into language attitudes has gained more interest and attention since the 1950s and 1960s (Webber, 1979). From the 1950s until the 1980s the theoretical framework was developed that still guides many current experiments in language attitude studies (Ladegaard, 1998a). One of the leading questions that guided this theoretical research on language attitudes was about the reason as to why some languages or language variations evoke stereotypes or are regarded as superior or inferior to others. Edwards (1982) states that there were two main hypotheses that could serve as an answer to this question. The first hypothesis, also called the inherent value hypothesis, points out that language attitudes are caused by intrinsic aesthetic differences and linguistic inferiorities or superiorities (Giles, Bourhis & Davies, 1974). However, there is no evidence to support the claim that some forms of a language are better, or more aesthetically pleasing than others. The second hypothesis is called the imposed norm hypothesis and states that stereotyped reactions because of language are caused by social conventions and preferences (Giles, Bourhis & Davies, 1974). Both Giles, Bourhis and Davies (1974) and Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill and Lewis (1974) support this imposed norm hypothesis after performing several experiments. It is therefore likely that language variations acquire their position, whether it is superior or inferior, through the existence of cultural norms.

Further research into the imposed norm hypothesis showed that stereotypes and evaluation patterns of languages are very uniform across cultures (Bradac, 1990; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Ladegaard, 1998a). The most consistent finding in language attitudinal studies is that social groups attribute competence and a high social status to the standard variety of a language. The standard variety of a language is considered to be the language spoken by the educated members of society, at schools, and in the media (Edwards, 1982).

The regional dialects of a language elicit attributions of social attractiveness and solidarity (Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982). Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill and Lewis (1974) provide a historical explanation of the prestige of a standard language variety. They demonstrate this with the example of Standard British English: Received Pronunciation (RP). RP has been the accent of the English governmental bodies since the Middle Ages and consequently the social connotation that is connected to this accent is high prestige.

Another important concept in the field of language attitudes is stereotyping because the concepts stereotyping and attitude are often used interchangeably. However, there is a fine distinction between them. Attitude is defined as “a tendency to evaluate an entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989, p. 543). In the context of language attitudes, this entity that is evaluated can be a language or one person that is speaking a language. Stereotyping, on the other hand, has a more negative connotation. It is defined by Lippman as “a mental concept, picture in our heads which governs the process of perception” (qtd. in Ladegaard, 1998a, p. 251). Lippman (1922) argues that stereotyping is not necessarily negative, as it is necessary for our understanding and categorization of the world. By stereotyping, people are able to form images of other people by linking a personality trait or concept to a connecting picture in their heads. Stereotypes are closely related to social and cultural values, as those social and cultural values partly influence and determine what kind of stereotype is formed about another group (Ladegaard, 1998a). Therefore, stereotypes play an important role in the field of language attitudes because people often connect the attitude towards a language or a person that is speaking a certain language to the stereotype that they have about a social group.

Different kinds of attitudes can be studied. Attitudes that people have about a language, dialect, or accent of others can be divided into three categories: cognition, affect, and behavior (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). The cognitive category encompasses the thoughts that people have about an attitude object. This attitude object is usually a person speaking a certain language, dialect, or accent. The affective category encompasses the emotions or feelings that people have about an attitude object. Finally, the behavioral category encompasses people’s actions towards an attitude object (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). The cognitive and the affective categories are very often investigated in attitude studies. Walsh (2015), for example, measured whether French adolescents had a positive or negative attitude towards the use of English words. Similarly, Bernaisch and Koch (2016) studied the affective attitudes of Indians towards different varieties of English. In the study by Ladegaard (1998a), the cognitive attitudes about varieties of English were observed by measuring different

components of attitude: the perceived status, competence, personal integrity and social attractiveness of the speaker.

### **English in language attitude studies**

English is one of the most studied languages in the field of language attitudes (Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982). A possible explanation for this is that English is spoken by approximately 400 million native speakers, and many more speak English as a foreign language (Crystal, 2006). Therefore, there are many English accents and dialects that can be studied. Both American English dialects and British English dialects have been studied extensively. Bailey (2003), for example, studied the attitudes and perceptions towards different American dialects. Ladegaard (1998a) studied the attitudes towards several British dialects, such as Cockney and Scottish, and compared these to several other variations of English.

Additionally, the standard variety of English, British English, and the regional variety of English, American English, have been studied extensively because these are varieties that are present or taught in large portions of the world (e.g. Ladegaard, 1998a; Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois & Pittam, 2001). British English is considered to be the standard variety of English because the standard variety of a language is the language historically spoken by the educated members of society, at schools, and in the media (Edwards, 1982). The standard variety of British English is called 'Received Pronunciation', or RP, but is also often referred to as 'BBC English' or 'the Queen's English' as this particular dialect is mostly spoken on television and by members of the royal family. The standardized form of American English is usually called 'Standard American English', or SAE, but it is sometimes also referred to as 'General American' or 'Network Standard' (Kövecses, 2000). Received Pronunciation and Standard American English are language varieties that are only spoken by a very small portion of the population, but these language varieties do reach large audiences as they are spoken on television and taught in schools.

For researchers with an interest in attitudes towards English, the Netherlands is an interesting country to study, for several reasons. Firstly, Dutch citizens are increasingly exposed to English in their daily lives. The English language, especially American English, is omnipresent on Dutch television in commercials, (subtitled) drama series and movies, and in radio commercials (Gerritsen, Korzilius, Van Meurs & Gijssbers, 2000). Secondly, the variety of English that is taught most to Dutch students in secondary schools and universities is Received Pronunciation. This means that both RP English and American English dialects are omnipresent in the Netherlands (Nejjari, Gerritsen, Van Der Haagen, & Korzilius, 2012).

It is however unclear what social traits or capabilities Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of Standard American English and Received Pronunciation. There are several studies that touch upon parts of this question. Ladegaard (1998a) studied the national stereotypes and language attitudes of Danish citizens towards British, American and Australian English. This study is relevant because Denmark resembles the Netherlands when it comes to the use of varieties of English in their society. In Ladegaard's study, RP was rated highest in both status and competence dimensions. Besides status and competence, Ladegaard also studied the personal integrity, social attractiveness, and linguistic attractiveness for the English language varieties. American and Australian English scored higher on those variables than RP. In a study by Nejari et al. (2012) the responses of native British English speakers to speakers of both Dutch-accented English and RP were investigated. Again, RP evoked more status than the other variety, in this case Dutch-accented English. Finally, Bayard et al. (2001) tested the attitudes of students from Australia, New-Zealand and the United States towards New-Zealand English, Australian English, American English, and RP. The results of this study are interesting because the results were not in line with the previously mentioned studies, as RP did not receive the highest status in the evaluations. In this study, American English was rated highest on status and power. Bayard et al. (2001) believe that because of the widespread exposure of American English, it is well on its way to replace RP as both standard and preferred variety.

The conflicting findings mean that it is unclear whether RP or SAE is considered to have a higher status. We also do not have conclusive evidence about what variety is considered the most socially attractive. Importantly, we do not know whether previous findings of RP and SAE also apply to the Netherlands; a country in which English is not the native language.

### **Gender in language attitude studies**

A topic that has received much attention in research fields such as linguistics, sociology, and psychology is the difference in language use between men and women. Several studies have found differences in the language of men and women when it comes to vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and conversational features (e.g. Haas, 1964; Ladegaard, 1998b; Zimmerman & West, 1975). The difference in the language use of men and women raises questions about whether different attitudes are attributed to speakers of a different sex. However, in the field of language attitudes, gender has received relatively little attention. In Ladegaard (1998a) and Nejari et al. (2012) for example, the speakers are all of the same

gender, but there is no further information in these studies about possible effects if both male and female speakers would have been used.

There are some language attitudinal studies in which gender receives more attention. Bayard et al. (2001), for example, use both male and female speakers of New Zealand English, Australian English, Standard American English, and Received Pronunciation. The participants in this study, students from New Zealand, Australia and the United States, were asked to rate both the male and female speakers of the different language varieties. There were clear attitude differences between the male and female speakers. The female speakers of New Zealand English, for example, were attributed significantly higher levels of status, power, solidarity and competence than the male speakers of New Zealand English. However, male speakers of RP were rated higher on status and power than their female counterparts.

In the study by Bayard et al. (2001), differences between the gender of the *speakers* were studied. There are also language attitudinal studies that focus on the differences in the gender of the *listeners* who attribute attitudes to the speakers. An example of this can be found in the study by Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010). They studied whether the gender, age, and education of the listeners affected their attitudes about variations of Dutch. Their results indicated that demographic variation, in which gender is included, has only modest effects on the attitudes about variations of Dutch.

The results of Grondelaers et al. (2010) show that the gender of the listener does not have a big influence in language attitude studies. Bayard et al. (2001) show that the gender of the speaker does matter. However, not much other research has been done on the gender of the speaker, and the research that is available lacks conclusive results. Importantly, there are also no specific comparisons done between RP and SAE.

### **The present study**

The studies outlined above have shown that people have different attitudes towards speakers of RP than to speakers of other varieties of English. However, no studies to date have investigated the attitudes that Dutch citizens attribute to native speakers of RP and Standard American English. This is surprising because the Dutch attitudes towards these two language varieties can have many practical implications in different fields. For example, public policy of education could be affected if one variety of English receives a higher status than the other variety. There could also be implications for marketers and PR specialists if one variety of English is preferred over the other on the basis of social attractiveness, as this may affect the

language variant used in commercials or PR efforts. Therefore, the research question that guides this study is:

*RQ 1: What attitudes do Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of Standard American English and Received Pronunciation?*

Attitudes can consist of different components. In this research the focus will be on the status and social attractiveness that Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of SAE and RP. Several studies report that people attribute a higher status to RP speakers than to speakers of other varieties of English. This effect was visible in studies that compared attitudes towards variations of English within the UK (e.g. Giles, 1971), and in studies that compared both English variations from the UK with English in other regions of the world (e.g. Ladegaard, 1998a). Giles (1971), for example, investigated the reactions to RP, South Welsh and Somerset accents and found that RP received the highest ratings in terms of competence and status. In the study by Ladegaard (1998a) attitudes towards English variations from the UK were compared with attitudes towards American English and Australian English. RP was again awarded with the highest status. Therefore, the following hypothesis was established:

*H1: Dutch citizens will attribute a higher status to speakers of Received Pronunciation than to speakers of Standard American English.*

While RP usually scores high on status, it does not get rated highly on social attractiveness. Social attractiveness consists of attributions such as friendliness, helpfulness and reliability. In general, people attribute more social attractiveness to regional varieties of English than to RP (e.g. Giles, 1971; Ladegaard, 1998a; Bayard, 2001). Bayard et al. (2001), for example, show that New-Zealand English, Australian English and American English all score higher on social attractiveness than RP. Therefore, the following hypothesis was established:

*H2: Dutch citizens will attribute more social attractiveness to speakers of Standard American English than to speakers of Received Pronunciation.*

Besides the effect of the different varieties of English, the effect of the gender of the speaker will also be investigated in this language attitude study. There have been some studies

that studied the language attitudes towards male and female speakers of several varieties of English (e.g. Bayard, 2001; Ladegaard, 1998b), with mixed results. Also, there have been no studies to date that look into possible differences in the attitudes of Dutch citizens towards male and female speakers of Standard American English and speakers of Received Pronunciation. This means that there is a gap in the scientific literature. The effect of gender is also an important topic to investigate, as there could be practical implications for marketing and PR communications. Therefore the following research question is proposed:

*RQ2: What is the effect of the gender of the speakers of Standard American English and Received Pronunciation on the attitudes that Dutch citizens attribute to those speakers?*

There is also a possibility that gender and the variety of English, SAE and RP, interact. Therefore the following research question was established:

*RQ3: Is there an interaction between the variety of English and gender of the speaker on the attitudes that Dutch citizens attribute to those speakers?*

# Method

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Language attitudes can be measured in several ways, but the methodological approach that is most often used in this field is the ‘speaker evaluation paradigm,’ sometimes also referred to as the ‘matched-guise technique’ (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960; Soukop, 2012). In this approach, participants are asked to evaluate and fill out questions about an audio taped speaker about whom no social labels are given. The speaker used in a matched guise experiment usually speaks multiple languages or accents (Ryan, Giles, & Hewstone, 1988). The matched guise technique was utilized in several experiments, for example by Ladegaard (1998a) and Nejjari et al. (2012).

The aim of this study was to examine what attitudes Dutch citizens have about the status and social attractiveness of male and female speakers of Received Pronunciation and Standard American English.

## Materials

To measure the two dependent variables, status and social attractiveness, four sound fragments were used in this experiment. Two sound fragments consisted of a male or a female speaker speaking RP. In the other two sound fragments, a male or a female speaker spoke SAE. The sound fragments were all approximately one minute long. They were composed of existing material, recorded between 2013 and 2017, of the *BBC* for the speakers of Received Pronunciation, and *CNN* for the speakers of Standard American English. These fragments were taken from the *BBC* and *CNN* weather broadcasts to be able to ensure that the topics of the sound fragments were as similar and as neutral as possible. The speakers had the following characteristics:

Male speaker RP: This speaker was born in Plymouth, South West England in 1987 and has lived in Devon, Birmingham and London. He works as a meteorologist for the BBC and was 28 years old when he presented the weather segment that was used for the sound fragment.

Excerpt from the transcript of the sound fragment:

*‘Hello there. We’ve been building to it for a few days now, but our heat wave has reached its peak today. Now temperatures have actually dropped off a little bit compared to the recent days across Spain and Portugal and France up into the thirties here just recently. Already*

*today we've seen 34 degrees well across South East England as the heat is pumped in our direction.'*

Female speaker RP: This speaker was born in East Sussex in 1982 and has lived in Durham, Exeter and London. She works as a meteorologist for the BBC and was 34 years old when she presented the weather segment that was used for the sound fragment.

Excerpt from the transcript of the sound fragment:

*'Good afternoon. Well, it was quite a chilly start to December, but over the last week or so temperatures have been on the rise. We've seen much milder conditions that have been working in. Today it is not quite as mild as it has been over the recent days. Through the remainder of the afternoon things should stay mostly dry and there is some pleasant sunshine out there too, particularly across the Southern half of the country.'*

Male speaker SAE: This speaker was born in Buffalo, NY, in 1965 and has lived in Nebraska, Michigan, and New York. He works as a meteorologist for CNN and was 48 years old when he presented the weather segment that was used for the sound fragment.

Excerpt from the transcript of the sound fragment:

*'A cold front pushes through Chicago, through Detroit, through Minneapolis taking a lot of heat and humidity and the chance for showers with it. Rain all the way to the deep South. Some of it could be heavy, for example the coast of the Carolina's, right on down to Louisiana. More showers popping up very close to Atlanta, Hartsfield-Jackson's airport. That could cause airport delays.'*

Female speaker SAE: This speaker was born in Shreveport, LA, in 1981 and has lived in Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida and Georgia. She works as a meteorologist for CNN and was 32 years old when she presented the weather segment that was used for the sound fragment .

Excerpt from the transcript of the sound fragment:

*'Temperatures are actually going to warm up briefly, only a couple of days though. We have a tiny window that temperatures are going to rise above freezing in the North. It is 38 in Detroit right now, and actually Syracuse finally hitting freezing at 32, and temperatures are*

*going to stay just a little bit warmer for the next couple of days. Look, Burlington finally hitting 36 by Saturday, but then on Sunday back to 32.'*

The participants were randomly attributed to hear the speakers of Received Pronunciation; the first and second sound fragments, or the speakers of Standard American English; the third and fourth sound fragments. As there were multiple speakers in this experiment, it was not a traditional matched guise technique. However, as the participants were asked to rate the speakers without any knowledge about their social status or label it can be considered a variety of the matched guise technique.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were both male and female adults with Dutch as their native language. This led to a sample of 102 participants, 51 in each condition. The sample of the participants who were presented with the language variety RP consisted of 27 men and 24 females with ages ranging from 18 to 57 ( $M = 34.16$ ). The sample of the participants who were presented with the language variety SAE consisted of 25 men and 26 females with ages ranging from 20 to 62 ( $M = 34.88$ ). The educational level of the participants ranged from a high school degree to a university Master's degree, but most participants indicated that they had a university Bachelor's degree. The participants were also asked to rate their English proficiency in writing ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = .84$ ), understanding ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = .65$ ), speaking ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = .79$ ), and reading ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) on a scale from 1-5 (very bad – very good) to ensure that they would have the ability to understand what was being said in the sound fragments. Participants who scored their proficiency in understanding English as very bad or bad would not have been included in this research. However, no participants rated their proficiency in understanding English as very bad or bad.

A Chi-square test showed that the distribution of gender of the participants that listened to the speakers of RP did not significantly differ from the distribution of gender of the participants that listened to the speakers of SAE ( $t(100) = .393$ ,  $p = .695$ ). There was also no significant difference between the participants that listened to speakers of RP or speakers of SAE on the basis of their age ( $\chi^2(37) = 43.55$ ,  $p = .213$ ) or educational level ( $\chi^2(4) = 5.94$ ,  $p = .204$ ).

## Design

The study was a mixed design. There were two independent variables with two levels. The first independent variable was the variety of English that was spoken by the speakers. This between subjects variable had two levels: Standard American English and Received Pronunciation. The second independent variable was gender. The two levels in this within subject variable were male and female. The dependent variables were status and social attractiveness.

## Instruments

The dependent variables status and social attractiveness were measured by using a questionnaire which consisted of questions that measured the attitudes of the participants towards the speakers. The participants were asked to rate five statements about the status of the speaker, and five statements about the social attractiveness of the speaker. These questions were based on the studies by Ladegaard (1998a), and Bayard et al. (2001). The questionnaire was totally in Dutch, to make it as clear as possible for the native Dutch participants. For status, participants were asked to rate the intelligence, education, leadership, self-confidence and social status of the speaker on a scale of 1-6 (not at all – very much). An example of a translated statement is: *'the speaker is intelligent.'* Consequently, for social attractiveness, participants were asked to rate the reliability, friendliness, helpfulness, humor of the speaker, and level of identification with the speaker. An example of a translated statement is: *'the speaker is reliable.'* Because there were five statements for both status and social attractiveness, and the participants were asked to listen to two speakers, for each participant there were twenty attitude statements that had to be rated. All the statements can be found in appendix A. The clarity of the questions and the sound fragments was tested by a pre-test. Five native Dutch adults tested whether the experiment was clear and understandable. The feedback from the five pre-testers was positive. Therefore no changes were made to the experiment.

As the variables status and social attractiveness were measured with several items, the reliability of the scales was measured by calculating Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . The scales to measure the status of the female ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ) and male RP speaker ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ), the social attractiveness of the male RP speaker ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ), the status of the female ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and male SAE speaker ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and the social attractiveness of the female ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and male ( $\alpha = .83$ ) SAE speaker were rated as reliable. The scale to measure the social attractiveness of the female RP speaker was rated as less reliable than the other scales ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ). However, deleting one of the scale-

components did not increase the reliability. Therefore, the results for the social attractiveness of the female RP need to be interpreted with care. For the analysis of the results, one variable per condition was computed.

### **Procedure**

The participants were randomly assigned to the sound fragments of one language variety, RP or SAE, by using an online survey tool. The participants filled out the survey individually. The participants were instructed to listen to the first sound fragment and answer the questions afterwards. They were then instructed to listen to the second sound fragment and answer questions again. The goal of the research was not explained in the introduction, as we did not want the participants to focus on the language variety of the speakers. Finally, the participants were asked questions about their English language proficiency, and several personal questions about their gender, age and education. Filling out the questionnaire took the participants approximately ten minutes. Because it was a relatively short experiment, there was no incentive given for filling out the survey.

### **Statistical treatment**

The statistical analysis consisted of repeated measures ANOVA's.

# Results

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## Status

A repeated measures analysis for status with as within subject factor the gender of the speaker in the sound fragments and as between subjects factor language variety (RP or SAE) did not show a significant main effect of language variety ( $F(1, 100) = .42, p = .516, \eta^2 = .004$ ). The respondents did not attribute a significantly higher status to speakers of RP ( $M = 4.14, SD = .62$ ) than to speakers of SAE ( $M = 4.06, SD = 0.65$ ). There was also no significant main effect of gender of the speaker ( $F(1, 100) = 0.75, p = .785, \eta^2 = .001$ ). Male speakers ( $M = 4.09, SD = 0.74$ ) did not score significantly lower than females speakers ( $M = 4.11, SD = 0.72$ ) with regard to status. Finally, there was no significant interaction between gender of the speaker and the language variety ( $F(1, 100) = 0.30, p = .586, \eta^2 = .003$ ).

## Social attractiveness

A repeated measures analysis for social attractiveness with as within subject factor the gender of the speakers in the sound fragments and as between subjects factor language variety (RP or SAE) showed a significant main effect of language variety ( $F(1, 100) = 5.17, p = .025, \eta^2 = .049$ ). The respondents found the speakers of RP ( $M = 3.88, SD = 0.57$ ) significantly more socially attractive than the speakers of SAE ( $M = 3.60, SD = 0.67$ ). There was also a significant main effect of gender of the speakers in the sound fragment ( $F(1, 100) = 20.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .167$ ). In this research, the male speakers ( $M = 3.93, SD = 0.77$ ) were rated as more socially attractive than females ( $M = 3.56, SD = 0.75$ ). Specifically, the male speakers of RP ( $M = 4.04, SD = 0.74$ ) were rated as more socially attractive than the male speakers of SAE ( $M = 3.82, SD = 0.80$ ), than the female speakers of RP ( $M = 3.73, SD = 0.64$ ), and the female speakers of SAE ( $M = 3.38, SD = 0.81$ ), as can be observed in table 1 and figure 2. There was no significant interaction between gender of the speakers and the language variety ( $F(1, 100) = 0.69, p = .408, \eta^2 = .007$ ) as can be observed in figure 2.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for social attractiveness of male and female speakers per language variety (1 = not at all, 6 = very much)

	Received Pronunciation n = 51 <i>M (SD)</i>	Standard American English n = 51 <i>M (SD)</i>	Mean total <i>M (SD)</i>
Male	4.04 (0.74)	3.82 (0.80)	3.93 (0.77)
Female	3.73 (0.64)	3.38 (0.81)	3.56 (0.75)
Mean total	3.88 (0.57)	3.60 (0.67)	

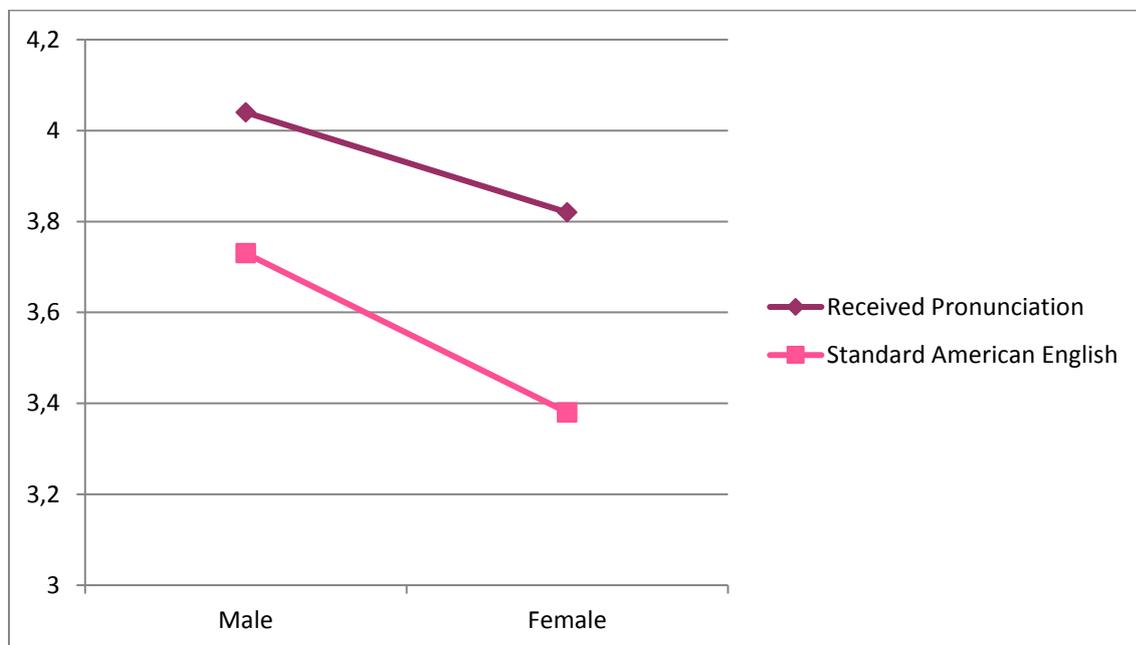


Figure 2. Means for social attractiveness of male and female speakers per language variety (1 = not at all, 6 = very much).

# Discussion and conclusion

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This study contributes to the field of language attitudes, by studying what attitudes Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of two language varieties of English: Received Pronunciation and Standard American English. More specifically, the attitudes of Dutch citizens about the status and social attractiveness of male and female speakers of RP and SAE were observed. The research questions focused on the attitudes that Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of RP and SAE, the effect of gender of the speakers on those attitudes, and on the possible interaction effect between gender and language variety. Firstly, the results related to the dependent variable status will be discussed, followed by the results concerning the dependent variable social attractiveness. Subsequently, possible explanations for these results, limitations and practical implications will be discussed.

## **Status**

The first research question concerned the attitudes that Dutch citizens attribute to speakers of RP and SAE. The attitudes about the status and social attractiveness were measured by doing an experiment. In earlier research, a higher social status was assigned to speakers of Received Pronunciation than to speakers of other varieties of English (Edwards, 1982; Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982). However, the findings of this study show that there is no significant difference in the attributed social status to speakers of RP and SAE by Dutch citizens. In relation to the first research question, it is impossible to state that Dutch citizens attribute more or less social status to speakers of RP than to speakers of SAE. Consequently, *H1* is therefore neither supported nor rejected.

The second research question concerned the role of the gender of the speakers of RP and SAE in the attribution of attitudes. In Bayard et al. (2001) there were significant differences in attributed status between male and female speakers of Received Pronunciation, Australian English, Standard American English, and New Zealand English, but the findings of the present study show that there is no significant difference in the attributed social status of male or female speakers of RP and SAE. Therefore, to answer research question 2, it is not proven in this study that the gender of the speaker influences the attitude of the listener about the status of the speaker.

## **Social attractiveness**

More surprising results can be observed for the dependent variable social attractiveness. Dutch citizens found the speakers of RP significantly more socially attractive than the speakers of SAE. This means that *H2* is not supported, as it was hypothesized that SAE would be regarded as more socially attractive than RP by Dutch citizens. This result is deviant from most studies since the 1960s, as non-standard varieties of English were mostly rated higher on social attractiveness (Cargile et al., 1994). For example, in Ladegaard (1998a) RP scored lower on social attractiveness than the non-standard varieties SAE, Australian, Cockney and Scottish.

Additionally, there was also a significant difference between the Dutch attitudes about social attractiveness of male and female speakers. To answer research question 2, this means that the effect of gender is that male speakers are rated higher on social attractiveness than female speakers by Dutch citizens. More specifically, male speakers of RP are rated highest on social attractiveness, followed by male speakers of SAE. Female speakers of RP are rated higher on social attractiveness than female speakers of SAE. These results imply that, regardless of what English language variation one speaks, male speakers are rated higher than female speakers with regard to social attractiveness. Interestingly, these results differ from the results observed in Bayard et al. (2001). In the study by Bayard et al. (2001) female speakers are rated higher than their male counterparts, both in RP and in SAE.

A possible explanation for these different attitudes towards male and female speakers of language variations could be found in the participants of both studies. In this present study, native speakers of Dutch attributed social attractiveness to the speakers, while in Bayard et al. (2001) native speakers of different varieties of English attributed social attractiveness to the speakers. This non-nativeness of the participants of the current study with regard to the sound fragments they had to rate might have had an influence on the attributed gender attitudes. As there is limited research available about the role of gender in language attitudes, further research is required to investigate the explanations for differences in attitudes towards males and females.

The attitudes of Dutch citizens about the social attractiveness of speakers of RP and SAE are different from the attitudes of citizens of other countries that have been observed in earlier studies (e.g. Ladegaard, 1998a; Bayard et al., 2001). An explanation for these results is difficult to provide. It can be expected that the language variety which is most present in the social sphere, would rate the highest social on attractiveness. However, the results from the present study imply that this is not the case in the Netherlands, as most of the English that

Dutch citizens are exposed to in the social sphere, such as on television and radio, is Standard American English (Edwards, 2016).

An explanation for this difference is not readily available, as there is very limited research done into the language attitudes of Dutch natives. However, there are several possible explanations that could clarify the deviant results. For example, a large proportion of the theoretical framework in language attitudinal studies dates back to the 1950s until the 1980s (e.g. Edwards, 1982). Many experiments, implementing this theoretical framework, date back to the 1990s (e.g. Ladegaard, 1998a; Ladegaard, 1998b). Because the studies are older, the recent developments that stimulate interlingual connections, for example (social) media or international partnerships, could have influenced and changed the language attitudes of Dutch citizens.

Another possible explanation for the results with regard to social attractiveness could be that the notion that Received Pronunciation is the standard variety of English and Standard American English is considered to be a non-standard variety is outdated. In many studies the standard variety of English mostly rates lower on social attractiveness than the non standard variety (Cargile et al., 1994). RP is considered to be the standard form of English because historically it was the accent of governmental bodies. This means that SAE is considered to be a non-standard variety of English. In the Netherlands, however, RP is omnipresent in education and governmental communication, while SAE is present in the media and on social media (Gerritsen et al, 2016; Edwards, 2016). Because SAE is also very present in Dutch society, it might be that Dutch citizens consider SAE as the standard variety of English, or consider both RP and SAE as standard varieties of English. This means that the notion of non-standard variety over standard variety for level of social attractiveness does not apply in this situation.

A factor to keep in mind when reviewing the results of this study is that the reliability of the scale to measure the social attractiveness of the female speaker of RP is quite low ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ). This could have slightly influenced the results. However, as the social attractiveness of the females speaker of SAE was measured with the same scale, which had a high reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ), we expect that the influence of the lower reliability of the scale is small.

Another factor that is important when reviewing the results for the dependent variable social attractiveness is the difference in score between RP and SAE. It was observed that Dutch citizens found the speakers of RP significantly more socially attractive than the speakers of SAE. However, the mean score for social attractiveness of speakers of RP did not differ greatly from the mean score for social attractiveness of speakers of SAE. Even though

there is a significant difference between the attributed social attractiveness of speakers of RP and SAE, the small difference in mean scores may indicate that Dutch citizens have a positive attitude about the social attractiveness of speakers of both language varieties.

### **Interaction**

Finally, research question 3 focused on the possible interaction between gender and the language varieties of English. There was no significant interaction between the gender of the speakers and the language variety in relation to status and social attractiveness. Consequently, this means that this study does not provide proof that the gender of the speaker and the language variety that they speak interact with regard to status or social attractiveness.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study was a first step towards a clear insight in the attitudes of Dutch citizens about native speakers of RP and SAE, but it does have some limitations. For example, the method used in this study differed slightly from similar previous work. In the present study, a variety of the matched guise technique was utilized in which 4 speakers, two males and two females, spoke RP or SAE. In other studies, for example in Ball (1982), one speaker was used to record multiple accents. The use of a variety of the matched guise technique could have influenced the attitudes of the listeners. However, as this study also tested the influence of the gender of the speaker, two different speakers (of different genders) were required.

Furthermore, the experimental variety with more than one speaker was also used in similar studies, for example in Nejjari et al. (2012) and Ladegaard (1998a). Future research will have to provide further support as to whether the attitudes from the present study are characteristic for Dutch citizens when it comes to variations of English or whether the experimental design influenced the attributed attitudes.

Additionally, the content of the sound fragments could have had an influence on the attitudes that Dutch speakers attributed and this could be a limitation of this research. The sound fragments were composed of fragments of the weather reports of the *BBC* and the *CNN*. These weather reports were chosen because of its neutral subject. Even though the content of these fragments was fairly similar, all were weather forecasts, there were some differences between the fragments. For example, the names of cities and areas were mentioned, which could have triggered a stereotype or attitude in the listeners (Ladegaard, 1998a). Furthermore, the speakers had different speaking styles. These differed in pace of

speaking, length of the sentences, and flow of the story. In future research it should be tested what content has the least influence on the attitudes of the listeners.

Lastly, an interesting area to research in continuation of this study is the motivation for the attributed attitudes. From this present study it is clear that Dutch citizens attribute more social attractiveness to male speakers and to speakers of RP, than to female speakers and to speakers of SAE, but it is not clear *why* they attribute these different attitudes. A (qualitative) study of the motivations behind attitudes would possibly clarify why the attitudes of the Dutch citizens are what they are.

### **Practical implications**

This present study has contributed to the field of language attitudes because it questions the current division of standard and non-standard language variations. This does have practical implications for the use of English in the Netherlands. Currently, RP is used in official governmental communication and education, while SAE is used more in media (Edwards, 2016). A change in the division between standard and non-standard language variations could influence the used variety of English in different sectors in the Netherlands.

### **Conclusion**

Concluding, this study shows that Dutch citizens attributed more social attractiveness to speakers of Received Pronunciation than to speakers of Standard American English. Also, the participants attributed more social attractiveness to male speakers than to female speakers. The results for social attractiveness prove that the divide between standard and non-standard language variations and the accompanying attitudes may not be not as clear cut as earlier research portrays it. However, given that these findings are not in line with earlier studies, the study also leaves questions as to why the attitudes of Dutch citizens are the way they are. Therefore, the field of language attitudes might need to consider whether attitudes about language varieties are uniform, or whether there are attitudinal differences between groups of people because of culture, geographical placement, or (non-)standardness of a language variety.

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# Appendix A

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## Statements used in the experiment

### Status:

#### *Dutch*

- |   |   |                                      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. De spreker is intelligent                | - | The speaker is intelligent           |
| 2. De spreker is hoogopgeleid               | - | The speaker is educated              |
| 3. De spreker heeft leiderschapskwaliteiten | - | The speaker is a leader              |
| 4. De spreker heeft zelfvertrouwen          | - | The speaker is confident             |
| 5. De spreker heeft een hoge sociale status | - | The speaker has a high social status |

#### *English translation*

### Social Attractiveness

#### *Dutch*

- |                                      |   |                             |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. De spreker is betrouwbaar         | - | The speaker is reliable     |
| 2. De spreker is vriendelijk         | - | The speaker is friendly     |
| 3. De spreker is behulpzaam          | - | The speaker is helpful      |
| 4. De spreker heeft humor            | - | The speaker has humor       |
| 5. Ik identificeer me met de spreker | - | I identify with the speaker |

#### *English translation*