Inner Evaluations of Language Attitudes among Algerian EFL Students

التقييمات الداخلية للاتجاهات اللغوية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية الجزائريين

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate and understand language attitudes Algerian University students hold toward Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American Accent (GA). The focus is on the three components of attitudes: cognitive, affective and conative evaluations. To reach this target the verbal guise technique (VGT) was used to evaluate students' accents unconsciously. Fifty-six Algerian students who study English as a foreign language (EFL) received a questionnaire and were asked to rate the two accents. The findings suggested positive attitudes toward General American Accent; moreover, the obtained results of the emotion-based affective favoured GA over RP. The findings stressed the complication of language attitudes towards English accents in the Algerian context.

Keywords: English accents; EFL; language attitudes; verbal guise; GA; RP.

ملخص: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف وفهم المواقف اللغوية التي يتبناها طلاب الجامعة الجزائرية تجاه اللكنة البريطانية (RP) واللكنة الأمريكية العامة (GA). ينصب التركيز على المكونات الثلاثة للمواقف: المعرفية والعاطفية والسلوكية. للوصول إلى هذا الهدف، تم استخدام تقنية القناع اللفظي (VGT) وذلك لتقييم اللكنتين من قبل الطلاب دون وعي منهم . تلقى ستة وخمسون طالبًا جزائريًا يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) استبيانًا وطُلب منهم تقييم اللكنتين. أشارت النتائج إلى مواقف إيجابية تجاه اللهجة الأمريكية العامة. علاوة على ذلك، فإن النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها عند دراسة المكون العاطفي أعطت الأفضلية للكنة الامريكية GA في مقابل اللكنة البريطانيةRP. وهذه النتائج بينت تعقيد المواقف اللغوية تجاه اللكنات الإنجليزية في الجامعة الجزائرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللكنات الانجليزية؛EFL؛المواقف اللغوية؛ اللكنة البريطانية؛ اللكنة الامريكية.

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1. **Introduction:**

Human beings share the capacity of speaking at least one language. Generally speaking, they share positive attitudes towards their mother tongue since it possesses their identity, history and culture. Positive attitudes will not always be the case when judging others' languages and accents. According to a definition provided by Carrie (2017), language attitudes are usually defined as evaluations of speech varieties and their speakers. Several factors may influence them, including political factors, ethnic factors, race, prestige, and/or language difficulty level (Hassan, 2021).

There are several techniques to measure language attitudes. In this study, the verbal guise technique is used, which is considered able to measure the inner preferences of the participants. It is an experiment where members of the sample listen to speech stimuli that differ linguistically (Vardøy, 2021). This study attempts to measure cognitive, affective and conative responses that are the three components assumed in the mentalist view to language attitudes.

This investigation is needed because of limited research concerning the language attitudes towards English accents of EFL learners in Algeria which belongs to the expanding circle (Kachru, 1990). Second, this study can contribute to the development of teaching English. Tring to answer the following questions: Do Algerian EFL students have different language attitudes towards American and British accents. If yes, what are the differences? How do these learners rate unconsciously RP and GA?

This study aims to detect the language attitudes of EFL learners towards GA and RP accents, and which accent they prefer. Under this aim, many objectives are targeted: to highlight the hidden language attitudes of the participants towards the two reference accents and, to analyse the ratings that respondents would give them. The focus will be on the three components traditionally presented in the mentalist approach to language attitudes. Those three components are derived from the mentalists' view. According to this approach, attitudes are multicomponent, they are the combination of three components: Cognitive, Affective and Conative components. The cognitive component refers to a person's belief and knowledge about an attitude object. Whereas the affective component involves a person's feelings and emotions about an attitude object. The conative component explains how a person reacts and behaves when dealing with an attitude object.

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2. Methods and Materials

2.1 Method

To investigate language attitudes towards the two reference accents, EFL students evaluated GA and RP accents using the verbal guise Technique (VGT). This technique is an indirect method that targets to measure language attitudes. In this method, the participants were asked to evaluate two speakers based on speech recordings. In this technique, participants, judge the two speakers based only on their accents and the different speech samples can be given by different native speakers, to avoid the problem of finding perfect bilingual speakers.

2.2 Participants

The targeted sample is Algerian students who study English as a foreign language at AinTemouchent University BelhadjBouchaib. Those participants have studied English since their middle school, which offers a good understanding of English and its accents. All students of English had the same chance of answering since they were chosen randomly. By drawing a random sample from a larger population, the goal was that the sample would be representative of the larger group. Fifty-six students received a link to Google forms, which facilitated the study.

2.3 Data

The questionnaire used in this investigation was divided into two parts the first one includes the background variables such as gender and age. The second part was devoted to the measuring of the three language attitudes components: seven for the cognitive component 5 for the affective component and two for the conative component. To observe the language attitudes of the participants, adjectives and statements were given and participants were asked to answer according to the Likert scale. All data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

 To analyse the cognitive responses, participants received seven statements starting with: you think... Moreover,   to analyse affective responses, participants received five statements starting with when you listen to the speaker you feel... Finally, behavioural responses were analysed by asking: You have an accent almost similar to the speaker /you make efforts to have an accent like the speaker.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 The Five-Point Likert Scale

A method for measuring behaviours and preferences used in psychological tests, this scale was first designed by the psychologist Renes Likert (1932). It is used in questionnaires, especially in the field of statistics and samples studies. The scale depends on responses indicating the degree of approval or opposition to an opinion. The five-point scale is used to determine the degree of agreement and disagreement on an issue through expressions by presenting five options. To fix the minimum and the maximum length of the Likert scale, the range is calculated by $(5 - 1 = 4)$ then divided by five $(4 \div 5 = 0.80)$. This can be demonstrated in the following table.

Table 1. The Five-Point Likert Scale Ranges and Answers

Answers	Range/intervals	Scale
Strongly disagree	[1 , 1.8[	1
Disagree	[1.8 , 2.6[	2
Neutral	[2.6 , 3.4[	3
Agree	[3.4 , 4.2[	4
Strongly Agree	[4.2 , 5]	5

3.2 The Reliability of the Questionnaire

The Cronbach's Alpha is a coefficient that measures the Reliability (or consistency) of the questionnaire's items (questions). In other words, the ability of the instrument used in the study to measure what is intended to be measured. That is, re-applying the tool (the questionnaire, for example) in similar circumstances, the same results or conclusions are obtained. Reliability is taking values ranging from zero (0) to one (1), where the closer its value is to one (1), the higher Reliability is, and the closer to zero (0), the lower Reliability is. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α) is commonly engaged to measure the reliability in social, behavioural and education sciences (Ravinder&Saraswathi, 2020).

Referring to the following table, the questionnaire items are characterised by stability according to the Alpha Cronbach coefficient, which exceeded 0.85. The results given indicate that the questionnaire items have high stability rates, and thus the study tool has a high degree of reliability that can be used for this study.

Table 2. Alpha Cronbach Coefficient Derived From SPSS Statistics 26

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,855	28

3.3 The Background Variables

According to the obtained results, the majority of the members are mostly from the age group of 18 to 24 with a percentage of more than 76%. This is explained by the percentage of the educational level variable that suggests that the majority of the participants were undergraduate students (L1, L2, and L3) with a percentage of 64.3%.   The female component also dominated the sample members with a ratio of 67.9 %.

Table 3. The Background Variables

Age range	Frequency	Percentage
18 to 24	43	76,8 %
25 to 34	11	19,6 %
35 and more	2	3,6 %
Total	**56**	**100 %**
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	18	32,1 %
Female	38	67,9 %
Total	**56**	**100 %**
Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
L1, L2, L3	36	64,3 %
M1, M2	19	33,9 %
Doctorate student	1	1,8 %
Total	**56**	**100 %**

3.4 Speaker One (RP)

3.4.1 Cognitive Component

As mentioned before, the cognitive component measures thoughts and beliefs, the next table illustrates the questions that started with I think in the questionnaire. The Mean of the cognitive component derived from SPSS is (Mean=3.63), which is included in the range of

[3.4, 4.2[in Likert scale. The Mean found (3.63) indicates that the attitudes of the sample in this stage are Agree. This result shows that the participants hold positive thoughts and beliefs as far as the British accent RP is concerned.

Table 6. Cognitive Responses (speaker one) Derived from SPSS 26

CH01	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
Confident	5,4	5,4	19,6	55,4	14,3	3,68	0,974	Agree
Educated	3,6	7,1	25,0	35,7	28,6	3,79	1,057	Agree
Polite	7,1	3,6	16,1	37,5	35,7	3,91	1,149	Agree
Friendly	7,1	8,9	17,9	48,2	17,9	3,61	1,107	Agree
Humble	3,6	14,3	39,3	25,0	17,9	3,39	1,056	Neutral
Responsible	5,4	5,4	33,9	35,7	19,6	3,59	1,041	Agree
Smart	3,6	5,4	46,4	33,9	10,7	3,43	,892	Agree
Mean01	5,11	7,16	28,31	38,77	20,67	**3,63**	0,699	Agree

3.4.2 Affective Component

This part of the questionnaire measures the feelings of the EFL students towards RP. As it is clarified in the next table, the Mean derived from SPSS is (Mean =3.09) which is a part of the range [2.6, 3.4[. This leads to say that the attitudes of the participants towards RP are neutral when measuring their feelings.

Table 7. Affective responses (speaker one) derived from SPSS 26

CH02	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
trust	3,6	12,5	35,7	37,5	10,7	3,39	0,966	Neutral
Relaxed	5,4	16,1	35,7	32,1	10,7	3,27	1,036	Neutral
Interested	5,4	12,5	35,7	32,1	14,3	3,37	1,054	Neutral
like	5,4	14,3	46,4	26,8	7,1	3,16	0,949	Neutral
Motivated	1,8	32,2	50,0	14,3	10,7	3,09	0,940	Neutral
Mean02	4,3	17,5	40,7	28,6	10,7	**3,26**	,68400	Neutral

3.4.3 Conative Evaluations

Conative or behavioural answers are concerned with the reactions and deeds of the participants when dealing with the accent they listen to. The Mean derived (Mean=2.86) shows that the participants are neutral when reacting to RP. When they were asked if their

accent is similar to RP, the Mean (2.57) illustrates that they disagree which leads to saying that their accent is not the same as the British RP.

Table 8. Conative Responses Speaker one Derived from SPSS 26

CH03	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
Similar accent	12,5	48,2	12,5	23,2	3,6	2,57	1,039	Disagree
Accent like	17,9	17,9	12,5	35,7	16,1	3,14	1,381	Neutral
Mean02	15,20	33,05	12,50	29,45	9,85	**2,86**	0,93200	Neutral

3.4.5 The Results of the Language Attitudes for Speaker one (RP)

The next table illustrates the findings of the three components of the attitudes all together. The Mean found (3.25) is included in the range [2.6, 3.4[. This result shows that

the participants hold neutral language attitudes towards the RP accent.

Table 9. Attitudes of participants towards RP Derived from SPSS 26

speker01	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	attitudes
	8,21	19,24	27,17	32,26	13,74	**3,25**	0,68	Neutral

The members of the sample showed neutral language attitudes concerning the British accent RP. However, respondents who received the questionnaire showed positive language attitudes when dealing with thoughts and beliefs. This explains the complexities of the language attitudes when dealing with their three components.

3.5 Speaker two (GA)

3.5.1 Cognitive Component

As it is mentioned in table 10, the Mean of the answers derived from SPSS is (3.42). This Mean is included in the range [3.4, 4.2[= Agree. Adjectives like Educated, Polite, and Friendly were valued positively. These results suggest that the members of the sample evaluated GA positively when dealing with their thoughts and beliefs.

Table 10. Cognitive Responses (speaker two) Derived from SPSS 26

CH01	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
Confident	8,9	12,5	32,1	28,6	17,9	3,34	1,180	Neutral
Educated	1,8	5,4	37,5	44,6	10,7	3,57	0,828	Agree
Polite	1,8	12,5	35,7	30,4	19,6	3,54	1,008	Agree
Friendly	5,4	8,9	23,2	39,3	23,2	3,66	1,100	Agree
Humble	10,7	8,9	39,3	28,6	12,5	3,23	1,128	Neutral
Responsible	7,1	5,4	46,4	33,9	7,1	3,29	0,948	Neutral
Smart	3,6	8,9	48,2	32,1	7,1	3,30	,872	Neutral
Mean01	5,61	8,93	37,49	33,93	14,01	**3,42**	0,720	Agree

3.5.2 Affective Component

Observing the next table of affective responses, one can notice that the Mean is 3.49 which is counted in the range [3.4, 4.2[= Agree. Members of the sample ranked the GA accent positively. It is remarkable that in table 11, adjectives like relaxed, interested, and motivated gained positive feelings when listening to a speaker articulating GA accent. Thus, the participants of the questionnaire valued GA positively when measuring the affective component**.**

Table 11. Affective Responses (Speaker 2) Derived From SPSS 26

CH02	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
Trust	10,7	12,5	19,6	53,6	3,6	3,27	1,087	Neutral
Relaxed	7,1	14,3	10,7	48,2	19,6	3,59	1,172	Agree
Interested	7,1	5,4	19,6	50,0	17,9	3,66	1,066	Agree
Like	5,4	10,7	30,4	35,7	17,9	3,50	1,079	Agree
Motivated	7,1	17,9	17,9	39,3	17,9	3,44	1,189	Agree
Mean02	7,5	12,2	19,6	45,4	15,4	**3,49**	,84500	Agree

3.5.3 Conative Component

The obtained results derived from SPSS indicated that the members of the sample hold neutral attitudes when it comes to behavioural responses with the Mean=3.34, which is included in the Likert scale range [2.6, 3.4[.

Table 12. Conative Responses (Speaker 2) Derived from SPSS 26

CH03	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
Similar Accent	5,4	25	8,9	48,2	12,5	3,38	1,153	Neutral
Accent Like	8,9	19,6	26,8	32,2	21,4	3,29	1,261	Neutral
Mean	7,15	22,30	17,85	40,20	16,95	3,34	1,03600	Neutral

3.5.4 The Results of the Language Attitudes of Speaker two (GA)

The combination of the three components of the attitudes derived from SPSS indicated that the group of students treated hold positive attitudes "Agree" towards GA accent. This result is derived from the Mean 3.42 which is a part of the range [3.4, 4.2[.

Table 13. Attitudes of participants towards GA Derived from SPSS 26

Speaker 2	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
	6,75	14,46	24,99	39,83	15,45	3,42	0,73	Agree

2.6 Global Language Attitudes of the Sample

Informants received two speech samples with two accents and were asked to rate, unconsciously, these accents. The aim was to score their language attitudes that were divided into three components. The global language attitudes found in this study presented GA as an accent that gained the positive evaluations of the participants with a Mean=3.42 over RP that has a Mean=3.25. The emotion-based affective component is considered to be the strongest component in attitudes direction (Sardegna et al., 2018), which is the case in this study.

Table 14. Global Language Attitudes

Accents	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitudes
RP	8,21	19,24	27,17	32,26	13,74	**3,25**	0,68	Neutral
GA	6,75	14,46	24,99	39,83	15,45	**3,42**	0,73	Agree

4. Conclusion

The current study was planned to explore language attitudes EFL Algerian students hold towards the reference accents RP and GA. The purpose was to measure the inner evaluations using an indirect technique through a verbal guise test (VGT). The three components of attitudes were tackled. The study concludes that the participants hold positive attitudes towards GA accent but were neutral evaluating RP. The remarkable thing in this study is that the knowledge-based component gained a positive score when evaluating both accents, however, the affective component made the difference.

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