

University students' and teachers' perceptions of China English and world Englishes: Language attitudes and pedagogic implications

Deyuan He

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

This article explores and compares Chinese university students' and teachers' perceptions of China English and world Englishes in the context of English being the uncontested world language. Although the global spread of English and the relationship between standardized English and local varieties of Englishes have been discussed abundantly, the voices of learners and teachers of English have not been sufficiently reported, especially from the perspective of the differences in view between these two parties. This article attempts to address the issue. It drew upon a comprehensive data base from 984 university students and their teachers at four universities in China. With two cross-validated research methods, the article found that the student participants were comparatively positive to China English whereas the teacher participants thought standardized English was preferable. The results suggest that the well codified features of China English should be incorporated into the native-speaker-based teaching model. Teacher-student differences in their language attitudes are worthy of close attention so that a more practical and efficient pedagogic model could be developed.

Keywords: China English; world Englishes; language attitudes; pedagogic implications; teacher-student differences

Introduction

In an era of world Englishes, there has been an increasing discussion on the acculturation and nativization of English in China, that is, the emergence and existence of China English (e.g., He & Li, 2009; Hu, 2004; R. Wang, 1991). In spite of the nationwide promotion of Putonghua (the spoken form of Mandarin Chinese) in China, the importance of English cannot be underestimated in terms of the functioning of language policy on the nation's economic prosperity and ever-increasing global influence.

As a nation with the largest English-learning and -using population in the world (Crystal, 2008; He & Zhang, 2010), China is well-known for its people's desire to acquire English, which can be reflected by the following salient points:

- The Ministry of Education (MOE) of China requires English to be offered as a compulsory course from Grade-3 of primary school till post-graduate level. Indeed, the desire to learn English is even sweeping Chinese kindergartens in the form of the so-called bilingual kindergartens (Jiang, 2003). Therefore, "English learners are increasing in number and decreasing in age" in China (Graddol, 2006, p. 10).
- The Chinese government at all levels has encouraged its civil servants and ordinary people to learn English for the promotion of economic development

and various other reasons, such as in Shanghai for the 2010 World Expo, in Beijing for the 2014 APEC Summit and in many other cities for their city image. In reality, “in the minds of many inside China, English seems inextricably linked to the nation’s continued economic growth” (Bolton, 2002, p. 182).

- Besides their formal curricula, university students in China now learn English through multiple means such as the internet, television series, variety shows, movies and music, among others (Bolton, 2013). They use English in their physical world as well as in their imaginary on-line world (Bolton, 2012; Botha, 2014).
- English language teaching has now grown into an industry which generates millions of dollars for state-owned schools and universities as well as many private language schools, such as the New Oriental School, and individuals, like Li Yang (famous for his “Crazy English”).

The desire for English is of special significance in China when we take into account that English has become the global lingua franca. However, studies about China English and world Englishes have seldom reported the voices of English learners and teachers who are typical English users in China. The research reported in this paper is an attempt to redress the balance.

Literature review

English language education policy in China

The educational system in China is centralized, and English language teaching across different levels is guided nation-wide by the following four official documents which describe English teaching requirements and objectives:

- The Standard of English Courses for 9-Year Compulsory Education (for both primary and junior secondary students)
- The Standard of English Courses for Senior Secondary Schools
- College English Curriculum Requirements (for non-English majors)
- English Teaching Syllabus for Tertiary English Majors

All these documents emphasize the development of cultural knowledge and awareness and cross-cultural communication abilities as one of the teaching objectives/principles. Nevertheless, none of them deals with issues related to teaching English as a global lingua franca (Wen, 2012).

As the most widely used foreign language, English is a required course from Primary 3 until post-graduate level. At the level of higher education all students will take one of two programmes:

1. The BA programme for English majors: It provides about 14 periods per week (50 minutes per period) and 2000 periods in total throughout the four-year study (Teaching Advisory Committee for Tertiary English Majors, 2000).
2. College English for non-English majors: It usually provides four periods per week during the first two years of tertiary study. Non-English majors are encouraged to learn English by themselves during the rest of their university study to continually increase their ability in using the language (Department of Higher Education of the MOE, 2004).

Despite receiving at least 12 years of formal English instruction throughout their education, most non-English major graduates demonstrate considerable English learning deficiencies such as “mute English” (He, 2013; Tsang, 2001). There may be many reasons for the gap between the quantity of instruction and the results achieved, and the pedagogic model may be one of them.

China English in the context of world Englishes

English travelled from Britain to other English-as-native-language countries (the Inner Circle), then to the English-as-second-language countries (the Outer Circle), and then to the English-as-foreign-language countries (the Expanding Circle) and has become the undisputable world language (Kachru, 1985). Consequently, today’s non-native speakers of English outnumber its native speakers by three or four times (Jenkins, 2015). However, the non-native speakers do not passively receive English, instead, they tend to make English their own in the process of language contact, and thus their Englishes may have experienced some or all of the five phases proposed by Schneider’s (2014) dynamic model of new Englishes (i.e. foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization, and differentiation).

Increasingly, sociolinguists and writers from non-English-speaking countries like Japan and Pakistan have declared their English to be independent and standard. For example, the Pakistani novelist Sidhwa (1996) wrote “English...is no longer the monopoly of the British. We the excolonized have subjugated the language, beaten it on its head and made it ours” (p. 231). This is also true of countries which regard English as the official language or one of the official languages, such as India, Singapore, and Nigeria. In reality, “various cultures throughout the world have adopted and re-invented English” (Davis, 2010, p. 26).

Within the context of Asia, it is clear that the official status of the local English has facilitated the promotion, acceptability, and popularity of these varieties such as Indian English, Singaporean English, and Malaysian English. Singaporean English, for example, although evidently not the same as the English used in traditional English-speaking countries like Britain or the USA, has been accepted as an official language alongside Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. It is widely used in education, administration, law, mass media, science and technology, trade and commerce. The English-knowing population has increased from 1.8 percent of the total population in 1957 to virtually all young Singaporeans (Deterding, 2007).

Some Chinese scholars and researchers argue that China English can also be considered as an independent variety of English (e.g., Hu, 2005; Jiang, 2002; R. Wang, 1991; Xu, 2010). This argument is supported, at least, by the fact that by 2008 there were between 440 to 650 million people learning and using English in China (Crystal, 2008) with cross-linguistic influences from the Chinese language (He & Li, 2009; Xu, 2010). Although an up-to-date number of English learners and users in China is unavailable, the number receiving formal classroom instruction was 223.48 million in 2013 (MOE, 2013).

China English in the debate of pedagogic model

For a long time, the standardized varieties of British and American English were accepted and promoted as the only internationally acceptable pedagogic model for English language teaching (e.g., Bolton, 2003). In recent years, however, this has been challenged by world Englishes scholars (e.g., Jenkins, 2015; Kachru, 2005; Kirkpatrick,

2007; Seidlhofer, 2004). Within this framework, the question arises about which variety of English (i.e. native or non-native) should be selected as the pedagogic model in Outer and Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1985). This question has been a subject of debate for more than two decades (e.g., He & Zhang, 2010; Kachru, 1992).

In China, British English was adopted as the only pedagogic model between 1949 and the mid-1970s. With the improvement of the Sino-American relationship in the late 1970s, a good many American English textbooks and audio materials were imported into China together with the arrival of American experts and teachers. Gradually, American English became popular and was also used as a pedagogic model, which results in today's co-existence of British and American English as pedagogic models in China (Lam, 2005). Although there is general agreement on the role of English as a global lingua franca in China, pedagogic decisions about what to teach and the goals of teaching English as a global lingua franca have not been transparent nor explicitly stated (Wen, 2012).

Research questions

Based on the above review of China English and the related background of English language education in China, it can be seen that there was a long-term adoption of a native-speaker-based pedagogic model and this may have contributed to students' less-than-satisfactory learning proficiency. It can also be seen that researchers are acknowledging and discussing the existence of China English but little has been heard from students and classroom teachers. Teachers and students are most deeply involved in the daily teaching and learning of English in China. Their views about China English and world Englishes are vital in exploring the future development of China English. This research compares the views of university students and their English teachers in Mainland China. The guiding research questions are:

1. What are Chinese students' and teachers' attitudes towards various aspects of China English and world Englishes?
2. Are there any differences in their viewpoints?
3. What are the pedagogic implications of their attitudes and the differences (if any)?

Methodology¹

Participants

The participants were 795 Chinese students aged 17 to 25 ($M = 20.6$) and 189 Chinese teachers of English in the age range of 22 to 65 ($M = 34.4$) with between five months and 42 years of English teaching experience ($M = 10.6$). Data were collected in four universities situated in northern, western, eastern and central China. The student participants were majoring in Arts, Law, Business or Engineering. The majority of the teachers (113) taught non-English majors only, while 76 taught both English majors and non-English majors. With such a large and diverse group of students and teachers it is believed that the study is representative of the teaching and learning of English among non-English majors throughout China's universities.

Methods

This research is based on two studies each with a different instrument. Study 1 used a questionnaire containing 23 items, 19 items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1

(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and four used a 2-point scale². Before the participants answered the questionnaire they were provided with a detailed explanation of China/Chinese English and its salient linguistic features to ensure their comprehension of the term. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to explore the potential significant differences between teachers' and students' responses to the items.

Study 2 used the matched-guise technique (MGT) to investigate whether participants perceived any differences between qualities of accents when listening to English. Participants listened to a recording of paragraph being read out loud in a typical China English accent and then again in a near-native accent. The reader was the same in both cases although participants were not informed of this. The MGT procedure assumes that recognition of speech style triggers social categorizations that lead to group-related traits (Giles & Coupland, 1991). The responses elicited are considered stereotypical reactions towards different languages, dialects or varieties of a language and their related groups, rather than towards the voices (Edwards, 1994).

To assure the quality of the near-native recording, seven English teachers (four native and three non-native speakers) listened to it. Five teachers verified the native-like quality of the accent and two rated it as highly proficient. A pilot study with 6 teachers and 24 students demonstrated they could distinguish between the two accents. Data was collected by asking participants to rate the two accents on a response sheet using 14 positive and 2 negative traits (Table 1) and five rating criteria (Table 2). MANOVA was conducted to compare teachers' and students' perceptions of the two accents.

Table 1. Accent traits

1. Friendly	5. Competent	9. Approachable	13. Trendy
2. Intelligent	6. Industrious	10. Considerate	14. Patient
3. Educated	7. Sincere	11. Trustworthy	15. Powerful
4. Arrogant	8. Aggressive	12. Wealthy	16. Confident

Table 2. Rating criteria

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1. The voice does not match with the given trait at all
 2. The voice does not match with the given trait so well
 3. I do not know whether the voice matches with the given trait or not
 4. The voice matches with the given trait well
 5. The voice matches with the given trait very well

Results

Study 1 – questionnaire survey

MANOVA analysis showed that teachers and students held similar views on nearly half (11) of the 23 items and significantly different views on the other 12 (Table 3). By examining the items displaying no significant differences, the two groups were found to be in general agreement that China should and will have its own variety of English and it should be called China English. According to the participants, although China English cannot replace British English and American English as a pedagogic model in China, it could be accepted as part of the model together with standardized English if it were well codified and became a well-established variety of English.

Table 3. Means of the questionnaire items in Study 1 and teacher-student differences

Items	Means		
	Students	Teachers	Difference
1. I have heard of world Englishes.	.41	.51	.10*
2. I have heard of China English.	.50	.63	.13**
3. I have heard of Chinese English.	.83	.95	.12**
4. British English and American English are the major varieties of English used in our textbooks.	4.01	4.34	-.33**
5. We should adopt a native-speaker model of English (e.g. British or American English) for teaching and learning.	3.53	3.77	-.24*
6. When I speak English, I want to sound like a native speaker.	4.20	4.43	-.23*
7. When I speak English, I want to be identified clearly as Chinese.	2.61	2.27	.34**
8. In international communication, intelligibility with accent is acceptable for oral English.	4.28	4.42	-.14
9. The non-native speakers can also speak standardized English.	4.11	4.47	-.36**
10. Most Chinese need English to communicate mainly with native speakers.	3.27	2.99	.28*
11. Most Chinese need English to communicate mainly with other non-native speakers.	3.45	3.47	-.02
12. There are many standardized Englishes.	3.41	3.81	-.40**
13. There will be a variety of English in China one day.	3.50	3.61	-.11
14. Like Singaporean English, China should have its own variety of English.	3.41	3.50	-.09
15. If there will be a variety of English in China like Singaporean English, it should be called China English.	3.04	3.25	-.21*
16. If there will be a variety of English in China like Singaporean English, it should be called Chinese English.	3.03	2.92	.11
17. Chinese English and China English are the same.	2.04	2.15	-.09
18. The variety of English in China is bound to be influenced by the Chinese language.	4.27	4.20	.07
19. The variety of English in China should have its own linguistic features at the levels of phonology, lexis, syntax and discourse.	3.80	3.77	.03
20. Only the variety of English in China can express content ideas specific to Chinese culture adequately.	3.50	3.57	-.07
21. The variety of English in China can replace the existing teaching model.	2.72	2.83	-.11
22. Students should learn the characteristics of China English and other varieties of English in addition to American and British English in college English.	3.62	3.59	.03
23. I would prefer (my students) to be like Student A/B.	.59	.42	.17**

Key: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

As for the items on which students showed significant differences from teachers, it was found that the latter were more positive to standardized English while the former were less negative about China English. A closer scrutiny of the differences on Items 1, 2, and 3 found that there were considerably more teachers who had heard of the three items: world Englishes, China English, and Chinese English. The differences on Items 4 and 5 showed that teachers tended to agree more than students that it is necessary and practical to go on adopting British or American English as the model for the teaching of college English in China. Meanwhile, the group differences on Items 6, 7, and 23 demonstrated that teachers aspired more to standardized English while students did not mind speaking English with Chinese accents. Participants' responses to Item 9 showed remarkably more teachers believing that non-native speakers can also speak standardized English. This was echoed in teachers' belief that there are many standardized Englishes (Item 12). From the participants' responses to Items 15 and 16, it can be concluded that China English is a more acceptable name for the variety of English in China for teachers but for students the term might be either China English or Chinese English.

Table 4. Differences between students and teachers regarding China English and standardized English

Traits	China English (means)			standardized English (means)		
	Student	Teacher	Difference	Student	Teacher	Difference
1. Friendly	2.97	2.85	.12*	3.25	3.56	-.31**
2. Intelligent	2.85	2.73	.12*	3.12	3.35	-.23**
3. Educated	2.88	2.84	.14*	3.17	3.26	-.09
4. Arrogant	3.02	2.96	.06	2.62	2.58	.04
5. Competent	2.81	2.77	.04	3.37	3.50	-.13*
6. Industrious	2.94	2.92	.02	3.05	3.21	-.16*
7. Sincere	2.99	3.00	-.01	3.13	3.22	-.09
8. Aggressive	3.03	3.12	-.09	2.69	2.51	.18*
9. Approachable	2.79	2.82	-.03	3.11	3.29	-.18*
10. Considerate	2.86	2.83	.03	2.97	3.10	-.13*
11. Trustworthy	2.93	2.97	-.04	3.10	3.17	-.07
12. Wealthy	2.78	2.76	.02	3.01	3.27	-.26**
13. Trendy	2.72	2.75	-.03	3.16	3.36	-.20**
14. Patient	3.13	3.16	-.03	3.02	3.16	-.14*
15. Powerful	2.75	2.76	-.01	3.30	3.49	-.19*
16. Confident	2.80	2.78	.02	3.60	3.77	-.17*

Key: ** p< .01, * p< .05

Study 2 – matched-guise technique

On the whole, the findings of the MGT are consistent with the results of the questionnaire survey reported above. It can be seen from Table 4 that MANOVA revealed significant differences between students and teachers on three traits of China English (i.e. Friendly, Intelligent, and Educated), and as many as 12 traits of standardized English with the most noticeable differences lying in four of them (i.e. Friendly, Intelligent, Wealthy, and Trendy). It is interesting to see that the traits of Friendly and Intelligent account for the greatest teacher-student differences when taking together China English and standardized English, though both teachers and students scored higher means on these two traits concerning standardized English.

In addition, students are found to score higher means on eight positive traits of China English, and teachers score higher than students on all the 14 positive traits of standardized English. Based on these differences, it can be tentatively concluded that students were generally more positive towards China English than their teachers who typically showed a much greater preference for standardized English. Thus, teachers seemed less positive towards China English than towards standardized English (cf. D. C. S. Li, 2006). A possible reason for this is that because they had learnt and then taught standardized English for many years teachers had developed ingrained favouritism of standardized English. Students, on the other hand, were still struggling to master the language and so may have identified with China English. More research is needed to identify reasons for such teacher-student disparity.

Discussion

The findings of this research resonate with the point made by Kachru and Smith (1985) 30 years ago, in that English learners and users in China may now be facing the need to use English as an additional language in its localized form. In spite of the fact that Chinese is one of the most important languages in terms of the number of speakers (Dalby, 2001), there is a huge number of learners and users of English in China and, as Li Yang of Crazy English said, they hope to “make the voice of China be widely heard all over the world” through English (Bolton, 2003, p. 257).

As English is learnt and used more widely in China, the calls for the recognition and promotion of China English are repeatedly heard (e.g., Du & Jiang, 2001; He & Miller, 2011; Hu, 2004; Jin, 2003; Wen, 2012). The majority of participants in this research demonstrated positive attitudes towards China English as an emerging variety of English. The students’ comparative preference for China English to some extent reflects the necessity of the recognition and promotion of China English. This accords with Kirkpatrick’s (2006) observation that well-trained local Chinese teachers of English will be more intelligible to learners who speak the same mother tongue than native English-speaking teachers who do not. Cheung and Braine (2007) made a similar argument in explaining why university students in Hong Kong (especially final year students) held a favourable attitude towards their non-native English-speaking teachers.

However, it should also be noted that standardized varieties of English are still used as almost the only source of learning materials in China except for the pioneering efforts concerning cultural contents in a few textbooks. This is primarily because “there is no clear and feasible answer to what could be used as a model” for English learners in China if standardized varieties of English are not (Wen, 2012, p. 85). Therefore, issues associated with teaching native-speaker-based English versus teaching English as a global lingua franca “need to be clarified if concrete changes are to be brought about in the way English is portrayed, valued, and taught in Expanding Circle countries where it

is not the native language of the majority or an official language” (Matsuda, 2003, p. 719). To be consistent with the value sociolinguists and applied linguists place on world Englishes and learners’ needs for global communication, appropriate curricular goals and pedagogic models need to be developed.

In their article on a curriculum blueprint for teaching English as an international language, Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) proposed three options for pedagogic model(s): an international variety of English, the speakers’ own variety of English, and an established variety of English (not limited to British English and American English), with advantages and disadvantages associated with each of them. They believe at present the third approach, with one of the established varieties as the dominant model supplemented with other varieties, “perhaps better reflects the reality of Englishes and is at the same time implementable in various contexts” (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011, p. 336). What is found and discussed in the present study resonates with their third approach, in which the primary determiner for the pedagogic model is the goal of the course and the needs of the students.

Few studies have compared students’ and teachers’ perceptions of different varieties of Englishes. The group differences in the language attitudes towards China English and world Englishes call for mutual understanding and communication between students and teachers so that they can be better informed of each other’s viewpoints. As put by Beishuizen, Hof, Van Putten, Bouwmeester, and Asscher (2001), “misunderstandings about mutual views of teachers and students may harm the efficacy and efficiency of teaching and learning” (p186). Therefore, one attempt worth making for future researchers is to identify the reasons behind the teacher-student disparities, which may be of great practical importance for the teaching of college English in China.

The knowledge of group differences may also help teachers to understand their students’ attitudes towards China English and world Englishes, and may further enable the teachers to adopt a more practical and efficient pedagogic model. Likewise, school administrators may need to develop an awareness of their students’ perceptions as reported in this research and try to include more features of China English and world Englishes into the present native-speaker-based pedagogic model.

Conclusion

As reviewed earlier, the acculturation of English has facilitated the promotion and acceptability of the new varieties of the language in other Asian countries like Singapore, India, and Malaysia. The data in the present research also suggest that English learners and users in China will develop a stronger sense of ownership of English and feel more confident while using English if the legitimacy of China English can be recognized on a par with a native-speaker-based pedagogic model. The legitimacy and recognition may become a reality since English is already “being shaped, in its international uses, at least as much by its non-native speakers as its native speakers” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7) and “variation in English is inevitable in any society where it is widely used” (Deterding & Sharbawi, 2013, p. 7). However, as a prerequisite for acceptance of non-native English norms (Bamgbose, 1998), the systematic identification and codification of the salient linguistic features of China English will be a painstaking process, and this may be a direction for future research. It should be pointed out that some researchers have already given this a start by identifying features of China English at the levels of phonology (e.g., Ao & Low, 2012; Deterding, 2006; S. Li & Sewell, 2012), lexis (e.g., Xu, 2010), syntax (e.g., Xu, 2010), and discourse-pragmatics (e.g., He & Li, 2009; M. Wang & Li, 1993).

The results of this study are likely to provide insightful implications for China's tertiary English education. The two groups of participants generally agreed that China should and will have its own variety of English. Meanwhile, we should bear in mind that models and standards have always been of the utmost importance to Chinese culture (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002). When it comes to learning English, Chinese people will often rely heavily on standardized varieties of English for pedagogic norms and models, which have been long established in the specific sociolinguistic contexts in China. In this sense, China English at present cannot replace the native-speaker-based pedagogic model, but it could be incorporated as part of the model if it were well codified and accepted as a well-developed variety of English. Accordingly, English teaching in China will include models from standardized varieties of English as the common core and the features of China English and other non-native varieties of English as the periphery. This practice will help English learners in China communicate effectively with both native speakers and non-native speakers of English in the sense that, as Seidlhofer (2006) puts it, "some awareness of the global roles of English should be achieved by all English users in the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles alike" for the sake of global communication (p. 48).

The student participants' comparatively favourable attitudes towards China English are understandable, yet some English educators or researchers may have a worry that such findings may imply a disservice to Chinese learners and put them on an unequal footing with native speakers. However, it should be noted that the pure insistence on a native-speaker-based model will inevitably disadvantage English learners in China, especially in this era of world Englishes when learners should necessarily develop some awareness and knowledge of other varieties of English for the ease of cross-cultural communication. In addition, the tremendous differences between the Chinese and English languages will make this model unattainable by them (Honna & Takeshita, 2000). The findings also cast doubts on the possibility and necessity for English-as-foreign-language speakers in China to speak English like a native speaker. The selection of British or American English as a pedagogic model is often taken for granted, that is, they are selected "simply because that is the way it has been, and their appropriateness for a particular course of action in some contexts is rarely questioned" (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011, p. 338). Indeed, what has been increasingly emphasized in English teaching worldwide is the accommodation of the real needs of learners, rather than rigid adherence to native-speaker-based models (Deterding & Sharbawi, 2013; Walker, 2010). The findings in this study do suggest that it is possible to incorporate the salient and well-attested linguistic features of China English and world Englishes into the college English curriculum in China.

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Notes

1. The methodology employed in this paper is somewhat similar to three other papers (He & Li, 2009; He & Miller, 2011; He & Zhang, 2010) which, with this paper, are part of a series of research articles emanating from a single research project. However, the data in the current paper are presented, interpreted, and discussed from a completely new perspective, that is, the perspective of differences of view between students and teachers.

2. For the purposes of statistical analysis, Items 1, 2, 3, and 23 were treated as 2-point Likert scale items with answers *Yes* or *A* being coded as 0, and answers *No* and *B* coded as 1.

About the author

Deyuan HE is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Universiti Brunei Darussalam. His research interests include World Englishes, foreign language anxiety, and EFL teaching and learning. He has published in journals like TESOL Quarterly, World Englishes, and Educational Studies.

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