Admiring and acquiring?: Linking language attitudes and language variation

Erin Carrie
Manchester Metropolitan University

Introduction

Research has shown that L2 speakers of English hold different attitudes towards different accents of the language (e.g., Ladegaard 1998, Rindal 2010) and vary in their acquisition of features of L2 accents (e.g., Rindal 2010, Drummond 2012). Both their attitudes and behaviour indicate a preference for those varieties of inner-circle Englishes that are widely used as reference accents: Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GenAm). Although social-psychological processes are likely to help explain sociolinguistic phenomena, previous research has tended not to investigate the links between language attitudes and language use. This study responds to calls for 'a more direct elicitation of the interrelationship between attitudinal and behavioural components' (Ladegaard 2000: 216) which is able to 'predict linguistic behaviour […] by employing and testing an expectancy-value model' (McKenzie 2010: 172). It adopts and adapts Ajzen's (2005) *theory of planned behaviour* (TPB) model for testing attitude-behaviour relations in language.

Research Questions

1. Is there a link between L2 speakers' attitudes towards RP and GenAm and their own language use?
2. Do any other social and psychological factors mediate this link?

Methods

Data were collected from 71 students learning English at the Universities of Salamanca and Valladolid in Spain.

Questionnaire

1. Social and psychological variables.
2. Verbal guise experiment: evaluations of 4 speakers (female RP, male RP, female GenAm and male GenAm) on cognitive, affective and conative traits (Figure 1).
3. Measures relating to the TPB model (Figure 2).

Semi-structured interviews

Paired interviews were conducted, using speech production tasks to elicit speakers' production of four phonological variables (Table 1).
1. Reading task containing 13 sentences.
2. Conversational task including 6 topics.
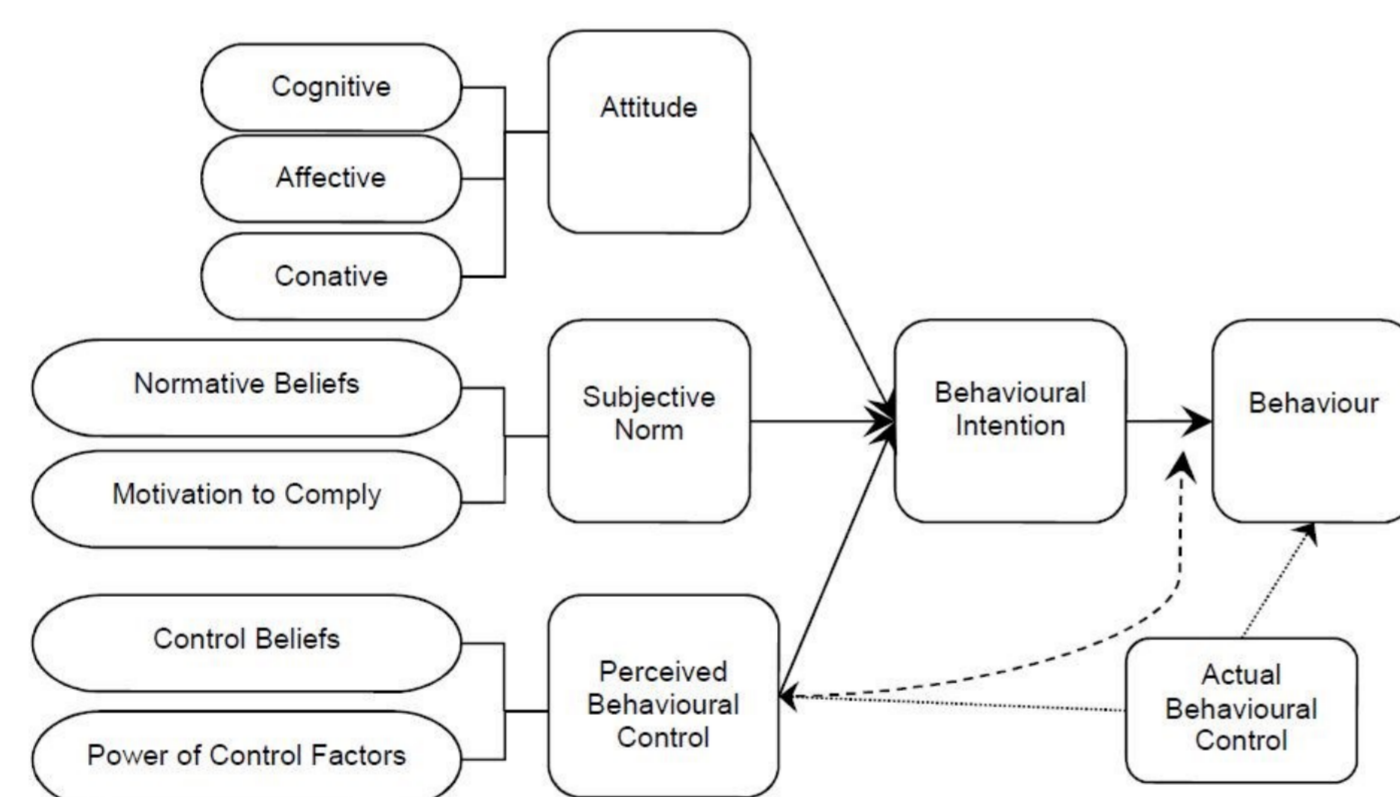

Figure 1. Cognitive, affective and conative traits

Figure 2. Adapted theory of planned behaviour model

Analysis

Principal components analysis (PCA) was used to test for underlying dimensions in the evaluative data. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to test for differences between speaker evaluations. Scores were calculated from scalar data for each of the components of the TPB model. *Behavioural intention* scores functioned as predictions of use and speakers were categorised as 'GB aimers' or 'US aimers' (Rindal 2010). Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) tested for attitude-behaviour relations using both direct and indirect measures. Auditory analyses were conducted on 4203 tokens of the variants produced in the reading task (1994) and conversational task (2029).

Variable	GenAm variant	RP variant	Examples
intervocalic /t/	[ɾ]	[t]	*attitude, city, it is*
postvocalic /r/	[ɹ]	[Ø]	*speaker, verse, share*
post-consonantal /u/	[uː]	[juː]	*due, nuclear, stew*
low back vowel	[ɑː]	[ɒ]	*lot, poppy, response*

Table 1. Phonological variables

Results

Attitudes

PCA revealed two underlying dimensions that are consistent with the findings of previous research: *social attractiveness* (solidarity) and *competence* (status/prestige). RP speakers were rated more positively overall but especially for competence, suggesting that it is still the 'unsurpassed prestige variety' (Ladegaard 1998: 265), though GenAm competes on the dimension of social attractiveness (Rindal 2010). Social attractiveness appears to be linked with the affective attitudinal component, with participants feeling more positively towards speakers they deemed to be socially attractive. Measures of the conative component revealed that participants believed themselves to have similar accents to the speakers they felt positively towards and deemed to be socially attractive, yet strived towards an RP accent and sought L1 contact and media exposure accordingly.

Variable	Mean overall use of GenAm variant (%)	Mean overall use of RP variant (%)	N
intervocalic /t/	28.5	71.5	1081
postvocalic /r/	86.5	13.5	1420
post-consonantal /u/	16.5	83.5	688
low back vowel	8.5	91.5	834
all variables	**35**	**65**	**4023**

Table 2. Participants' language use

Use

Results demonstrate a preference for RP variants, except for use of /r/ (Table 2). This can be partly attributed to the influences of orthography and L1 phonology (Rindal 2010; Janicka *et al.* 2008):

'I think American it's [sic] easier to achieve for a Spanish speaker'

Most participants produced the features variably, exhibiting a hybrid 'learner' accent by selecting or experimenting with particular variants.

Attitude-behaviour relations

MANOVAs determined whether language use differed between aimer groups, using both indirect and direct measures. There was a significant link between behavioural intention and use of /t/, with 'US aimers' producing more tokens of [ɾ] ($F_{(1,33)}$=4.788, $p<0.05$, partial eta squared=0.127) and 'GB aimers' producing more tokens of [t] ($F_{(1,33)}$=4.815, $p<0.05$, partial eta squared=0.127). Measures of preferred accent better predicted the use of all variables except /r/ in casual speech ($F_{(4,30)}$=4.243, $p<0.01$, Wilks' lambda=0.639, partial eta squared=0.361).

Learner orientation

Learners with instrumental orientations were more likely to use RP variants and those with integrative orientations were more likely to use GenAm variants.

Intention to become an English-language teacher

Learners intending to become English-language teachers were more likely to use RP variants and those not planning to become teachers were more likely to use GenAm variants.

Conclusions

RP speech has formal and functional associations and GenAm has informal and interpersonal associations. The results suggest a relationship between attitudes and L2 language use that is mediated by several factors, including normative beliefs, control beliefs, learner orientation and intention to become an English-language teacher. The TPB model can be usefully applied in the testing of attitude-behaviour relations in language, though direct measures often do so more reliably.

References

Ajzen, I. (2005). Attitudes, Personality and Behavior (2nd ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Drummond, R. (2012). 'Aspects of identity in a second language: ING variation in the speech of Polish migrants living in Manchester, UK'. Language Variation and Change, 24, 107-133.

Janicka, K., Kul, M. & Weckwerth, J. (2008). 'Polish students' attitudes to native English accents as models for EFL pronunciation'. In K. Dziubalska-Kolaczyk & J. Przedlacka (eds.). English pronunciation models: A changing scene (2nd ed.). Peter Lang.

Ladegaard, H. J. (1998). 'National stereotypes and language attitudes: the perception of British, American and Australian language and culture in Denmark'. Language and Communication, 18, 251-274.

Ladegaard, H. J. (2000). 'Language attitudes and sociolinguistic behaviour: Exploring attitude-behaviour relations in language'. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 4(2), 214-233.

McKenzie, R. M. (2010). The social psychology of English as a global language: Attitudes, awareness and identity in the Japanese context. London: Springer.

Rindal, U. (2010). 'Constructing identity with L2: Pronunciation and attitudes among Norwegian learners of English'. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 14(2), 240-261.