This study attempts to discover how native US English speakers construct social categories for people outside the US. A close look at one group’s belief system provides insights that can be used in addressing linguistic discrimination, with information on how varieties and features of varieties are perceived. Here 79 US undergraduates labeled maps with descriptions of English spoken by international students, and 208 rated the English of students from 58 countries. Familiarity and socio-political relationships with countries of origin appeared to play a role in responses. Evaluation was often central to description, with a category of stigmatized, often “broken”, English used for all non-native speakers except perhaps (Western) Europeans. Salient subgroups were: negatively evaluated “Chinese” English, somewhat negatively evaluated “Mexican” English, and “harsh” and “guttural” Russian English. Respondents had competing frameworks for classifying Indian and German English. A model of these overlapping categories and implications for addressing linguistic prejudice are suggested.

Keywords: accent evaluations, language attitudes, non-native English, perceptual dialectology, pronunciation

本研究试图探索英语为母语的美国人是如何将非美国人进行社会分类的。研究一组人群的信念系统可以提供这组人群是如何感知某种语言的不同口音和这些口音不同特征的信息。利用这些信息可进一步进行语言歧视的研究。在本研究中，笔者要求79名美国本科生在世界地图上写出他们对国际学生所说英语的感受，并要求208名美国学生对来自58个国家学生的英语进行排名。研究发现，熟悉度以及美国同国际学生所来自国家的社会政治关系在美国学生的回答中可能起着重要作用。美国学生对这些外国口音英语的描述经常是评估性的。他们对除了一些西欧国家以外的其它国家英语口音的评估都会给予一个带有侮辱性的标签——“结巴英语”。在这些外国口音英语中，他们对“中国”英语的评估最为负面，其次是“墨西哥”英语，再其次他们认为听着“刺耳”及“尖利”的俄罗斯英语。而对印度和德国英语的归类则显示美国学生的看法是相互矛盾的。为解释这些相互重叠的归类，笔者建立了一个模型，同时对如何将本研究成果用于语言偏见的研究提出了建议。

关键词: 口音评估、语言态度、非本族英语、感知方言学、发音
Introduction

With globalization and growing numbers of immigrants coming to the United States, relationships between native and non-native speakers of English are becoming an increasingly significant aspect of daily life. Native speakers’ perceptions of the language of various groups can provide insights into these relationships, as they suggest how these native speakers organize their social worlds, including information about how different groups are viewed and indeed what the groups are perceived to be. As numerous researchers have pointed out, evaluations of language varieties can be understood as evaluations of the groups who speak them rather than of language per se. Lippi-Green (1997) has argued that in terms of non-native English in the US, it is “not all foreign accents, but only accent linked to skin that isn’t white, or which signals a third-world homeland, that evokes such negative reactions” (pp. 238–9, italics in original). She has also pointed out that such ideologies in the United States are closely related to patterns of immigration; over time, the groups whose English has been most criticized have corresponded to the largest recent immigrant groups.

Such non-linguistically based reactions to non-native speech have been shown to play a role in job discrimination (Lippi-Green 1997) and in native-speaker behavior in interactions with non-natives (Lindemann 2002). Beliefs about the ethnicity of a speaker have been sufficient to trigger assessments of the speaker as non-native and have even led to lower comprehension rates (Rubin 1992). The relationship between speakers’ perceived origin and reactions to their speech is thus not only of theoretical interest, indicating patterns of social organization, but also of practical importance, relevant to fair treatment of (perceived) non-native speakers. This study pursues a better understanding of this relationship in order to be able to more effectively address issues of linguistic prejudice, both in the education of future teachers and assessors of non-native English speakers, and in the education of the wider public.

Research using the verbal guise procedure, in which listeners are asked to rate recorded speakers of different varieties on qualities such as intelligence and likeability, has shown that US listeners negatively evaluate (at least under some conditions) native speakers of Spanish (Ryan, Carranza and Moffie 1977) and German (Ryan and Bulik 1982), as well as Malaysians (Gill 1994), Chinese (Cargile 1997), Japanese (Cargile and Giles 1998), Koreans (Lindemann 2003), and Italians, Norwegians, and Eastern Europeans (Mulac, Hanley and Prigge 1974). However, to quote an important review of such work, it is “overrepresented by one-off studies in widely varying cultures, sociolinguistic conditions, situational and procedural domains. This has made it impossible to infer anything other than very general principles” (Giles and Coupland 1991: 49). Specifically, although such studies have been related to issues of discrimination, the lack of systematicity makes it difficult to predict how linguistic bias would play out in a particular situation, in turn making
Who speaks “broken English”?

It more difficult to apply our knowledge about linguistic bias to addressing specific cases of possible discrimination.

In addition, the emphasis on respondents’ rating scores in verbal guise studies has meant that we do not know whether rated descriptors mean the same things to all respondents. A particular term may be used with different meanings, and the same perceived features may be described using more neutral or more negatively loaded terms. For example, “broken” is a descriptor commonly used to describe non-native speech, but it may be used to refer to anything from speech with frequent pauses to incomprehensible or very low-proficiency speech.

Work in perceptual dialectology has the goal of uncovering the folk’s own understanding of different varieties, looking not only at evaluations of language varieties but also at how these varieties are categorized. Respondents may be asked to label maps with where different dialects are spoken, or to rate various areas (e.g. each state in the US) on how “correct” and “pleasant” the language spoken there is. Such studies have allowed more systematic investigation into beliefs about US varieties. Preston (1999) suggests that since verbal guise studies usually do not tell us who the listeners think they are hearing, asking study participants to respond to varieties based on category names may provide similar information while ensuring that the respondents are rating areas that are “cognitively real” for them. Of course, it is possible that study participants may respond differently to written tasks than to voice samples, especially if the varieties they are responding to are less familiar non-native ones. Work in folk linguistics more generally (e.g. Niedzielski and Preston 2003) has also used interviews and participant observation to get a more detailed look at folk theories about language, including beliefs about language as well as evaluations of it. Such analysis provides much more information on why community members react as they do to different varieties, what aspects of varieties are salient for them and why, and the degree to which beliefs are shared in a community.

The current study brings the methodology of perceptual dialectology to looking at folk perceptions of non-native English. The use of a country-rating task paralleling Preston’s US state-rating task offers a look at how evaluations of a large number of varieties compare to each other, allowing a more systematic investigation than has been possible using the verbal guise method. A map-labeling task gives an idea of folk frameworks for evaluating different varieties and the degree to which there is agreement on these. It helps illustrate how various non-native varieties are categorized as well as evaluated, and what areas of the world and what aspects of varieties are salient to native speakers of US English.

This detailed look at reactions to non-native English allows us to address the biases of such reactions in several ways. First of all, as Niedzielski and Preston (2003) have pointed out, we need to understand what the folk actually think about different varieties if we hope to influence folk opinion. Looking at several individual responses is helpful in order to see the degree of
agreement in reactions to speakers. Where there is less agreement, it may be somewhat easier to challenge stereotypical notions by pointing out the conflicts. Where reactions are more uniformly negative, it is particularly important to keep in mind that these opinions may be shared as self-evident background knowledge, e.g. by all parties involved in a job discrimination case, including employers, customers, judges, and juries.

Second, respondents’ comments on specific non-native features give us an idea of what is negatively stereotyped for particular varieties. This can suggest what areas language learners may wish to focus on (see Lindemann in press). Although there is some anecdotal knowledge about what features are negatively stereotyped (such as /r-l/ issues for Japanese native speakers), we should not assume that linguists, ESL teachers, and teacher-educators will necessarily notice the same features as laypeople.

Third, looking at respondents’ full descriptions gives us clues as to what they mean by various terms which we (and they) may initially take to be self-evident but about which there may not be agreement. The wide variability in possible interpretations of the term “broken English” mentioned above has clear implications for cases of possible language discrimination. It suggests, for example, that even a customer’s comment about an employee’s “broken English” shouldn’t necessarily be taken as evidence that the customer found the employee’s English to be insufficient for the job.

Finally, looking at what areas of the world are evaluated similarly and/or described as a group gives us information about how non-native Englishes are categorized and what groups are relevant to the respondents. This is of theoretical interest, giving us an idea of which nonlinguistic features may play a role in evaluations of non-native English. It is also highly relevant to applied concerns, as evaluations of one group of people bleed over into evaluations of other groups that respondents consider to be part of the same category – as was seen in the US after the destruction of the World Trade Center, when Sikhs were attacked because they were thought to be Arabs/Muslims.

Thus, looking closely at a whole system of beliefs held by one group of people can give us a better understanding of both theoretical and practical issues. We not only learn the relevant factors in reactions to language varieties, but we also get ideas on how to address discrimination arising from these reactions. The findings about this one group’s beliefs are likely to be relevant to varying degrees when looking at other groups’ reactions to speech; it is hoped that further studies looking at different groups and using a similar methodology will help clarify which factors are more general and which more specific to the population considered here.

Method

Two tasks were involved: map-labeling and country-rating. For both tasks, participants were asked to think of students who come to the university
from all over the world. For the map-labeling task, they were each given a map of the world and asked to label it with descriptions of the English spoken by these students. They could thus choose both how they described different varieties and the areas which encompassed them. The map showed country borders but no names of countries so as to allow space to write. Although respondents were encouraged to ask if they weren’t sure where an area was, a few odd descriptions (e.g. an arrow pointing to Poland with “French speaking” in the description) were probably due to their sometimes limited knowledge of geography. Where participants’ intended areas were unclear, they were asked for clarification after they completed the task. After the first 30 respondents carried out the task, the remaining participants were given a labeled political map to look at when completing their own, which improved the accuracy of responses.

For the country-rating task, respondents were given a list of 58 countries and asked to rate the English of university students from each of these countries on how correct, friendly, and pleasant they found it on a scale of 1 to 10. They were also asked to rate how familiar the English of people from each of these countries was to them using the same scale. The countries to be rated were chosen through pilot tests on a list of all countries with a population greater than two million; if most pilot participants left blanks for a particular country, it was omitted from the final country list.

A total of 213 US undergraduate students, 162 women and 51 men, participated in this study; 208 of them completed the country-rating task, and a mostly overlapping group of 79 completed the map-labeling task. All were native speakers of English who had grown up in the US speaking only English in the home. Their ages ranged from 17 to 47, with most of them at the lower end of that range (mean 20, median 19, mode 18). Participants who completed both tasks were given the map-labeling task first so that their free-response answers would not be influenced by the more overtly evaluative nature of the country-rating task. Both tasks were completed by participants in groups of two to seven people.

Results

Country ratings

Since participants were completely unfamiliar with the English of speakers from some countries, many 1s were given for the familiarity rating (1 being the lowest possible score). Some participants nevertheless were willing to make guesses about correctness, pleasantness, and friendliness; a small minority gave 1s for all unfamiliar countries. In several cases, when participants were asked further about these scores, they explained that they gave 1s on correct, pleasant, and friendly as well as on familiar to show that they were unfamiliar with the English of speakers from that country. When
it was explained that their scores would be interpreted as guesses that the English would be very incorrect, very unpleasant, and very unfriendly as well as very unfamiliar, some chose to cross out those scores. Others stated that they did in fact intend to give low ratings. The data for those respondents who gave 1s on all scores (not just familiar) for unfamiliar countries and were not asked their intent are not included in the analysis, which is therefore based on a total of 195 respondents.

Table 1 shows the fifteen countries whose English was rated highest on familiarity, together with each country’s rank and average score for each of the four characteristics. Within these there is a steep drop in familiarity, such that after the US, rated 10 (9.96) on average, no country was rated above 8.5, the most familiar non-native variety was rated 7.9, and the fifteenth most familiar, Russia, was rated only 5.1. These most familiar varieties consist of some but not all of the countries with primarily native English speakers and some with primarily non-native English speakers. They include countries whose English was rated quite low, at least on some traits, as well as countries whose English was rated very positively. Thus, although correct, pleasant, friendly, and familiar scores were closely related to each other (a factor analysis finds a single factor explaining 90% of variance, with loadings of .967, .973, .969, and .879, respectively), relatively familiar varieties of English did not necessarily translate into correct, pleasant, and friendly English. Among the most familiar Englishes were those spoken by people from China, Japan, India, and Russia, all rated below the median in at least one of the other
scores. Mexican English was the most familiar non-native variety, but this English was not rated as particularly correct or pleasant.

Groups that have been identified as non-stigmatized (e.g. by Lippi-Green 1997) were rated positively (France, Germany), at least on correctness; groups that have been described as stigmatized (Mexico, Japan, China, India) were rated as less correct. Of the countries with primarily non-native English speakers, Italy was rated the most positively overall. In general, we can see that of the countries whose non-native English was most familiar, those that are rated positively are in Western Europe, have had comparatively favorable relationships with the US during the respondents’ lifetimes, and do not have large populations of recent immigrants in the US.

Although a given country tended to have similar average scores for correct, friendly, and pleasant, there are a few cases where there is a clear difference among these. Most notably, ratings for Russian and German English on pleasant and friendly are markedly lower than their ratings for correct. The split between correctness and other scores is most obvious for Germany, which is rated fairly high on correct and below the median on pleasant and friendly; in contrast, all three scores are low for Russia. While the high correctness rating for German English is consistent with the generally non-stigmatized status of Western Europeans’ English, the lower ratings on pleasant and friendly are consistent with some stereotypes of Germans, especially those associated with World War II films.

To investigate overall patterns of evaluation, K-means cluster analyses were carried out on the correct, pleasant, and friendly ratings for all 58 countries. A number of different clusters were attempted, with four clusters proving to be the most informative. This cluster analysis, given in Table 2, shows a striking pattern of country ratings. In this table, all countries have been organized within their cluster by geographical area, showing the high degree to which English ratings are predictable based on the region of the world and to a lesser extent on familiarity. Within each geographical area, countries are listed from highest combined correct–pleasant–friendly rating to lowest. Thus Poland, in the third cluster under Central Europe, was rated the lowest of these countries, as might be expected since it could also be classed as Eastern Europe, the other countries of which fell into the lowest-rated cluster. Likewise, Egypt is the lowest rated of the African countries in the third cluster and could logically also fall with the other Middle Eastern countries in the bottom cluster.

The highest-rated group unsurprisingly consists of the six countries of primarily native English speakers that respondents rated as most familiar. The next highest cluster includes another country of primarily native speakers and South Africa (which has English as an official language), plus six Western European and three Latin American nations.

All other countries fell into the bottom two clusters. The third cluster covers the remaining countries of Latin America that were rated by respondents, including Mexico, as well as the four Asian countries that respondents rated
Table 2. K-means cluster analysis on correct (cor), pleasant (pleas), and friendly (friend) scores in 4 groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Center cor/pleas/friend</th>
<th>Countries Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.4/8.2/8.2</td>
<td><strong>Most familiar countries of primarily native English speakers</strong> (US, Canada, UK, Australia, Ireland, Jamaica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5/6.7/6.7</td>
<td><strong>Less familiar countries of primarily native English speakers / with English as official language</strong> (New Zealand, South Africa) <strong>Western Europe</strong> (Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Netherlands) <strong>Latin America</strong> (Costa Rica, Brazil, Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8/5.9/6.1</td>
<td><strong>Central Europe</strong> (Germany, Greece, Norway, Austria, Poland) <strong>Latin America</strong> (Mexico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras) <strong>Most familiar Asian countries</strong> (India, Philippines, Japan, China) <strong>Africa</strong> (Nigeria, Kenya, Central African Republic, Egypt) <strong>Israel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1/4.8/4.9</td>
<td><strong>Less familiar Asian countries</strong> (South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, North Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Pakistan) <strong>Eastern Europe</strong> (Russia, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Bosnia) <strong>Middle East</strong> (Morocco, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as most familiar (although it should be noted that the English of the Philippines had a familiarity rating of 4.0, much lower than the other three Asian countries). The few countries of Africa that were rated also fell into this group, as did Israel and several countries in Central Europe.

The lowest-rated cluster includes the remaining Asian countries, plus Eastern Europe and the Middle East. As with Alfaraz’s (2002) findings for Miami Cubans’ ratings of pre-Revolution and post-Revolution Cuban Spanish, political factors clearly play a role in these ratings, as many countries in this last group are much more easily classified in terms of political relationships with the US than in terms of recent immigrant groups. Several have had poor relations with the US within the respondents’ lifetimes, including former communist bloc countries, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. It is notable that, geographically and linguistically, Israel might be expected here, yet it is rated more highly than the Arab-ruled nations of the Middle
East. Of course, it is also possible that respondents were aware that the close relationship between the US and Israel has included migration between these two countries and considered this in giving it a somewhat higher rating. Egypt may have also fared slightly better than other Middle Eastern countries that are well known to US students as fundamentalist (Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia) or long out of favor with the US (Iraq).

Other sociopolitical factors may be relevant in the ratings of countries which are ranked more highly than this bottom group. Turning to countries of primarily Spanish speakers, we see that Spain falls in the highest cluster that includes countries of primarily non-native speakers; it is rated higher than any Latin American country, most of which fall in the next cluster down. In this case the pattern may be better explained with reference to recent patterns of immigration to the US.

Cases other than Asia where familiarity appears to play a role include Morocco, whose English had the lowest familiarity rating (2.2) except for Bulgaria. It falls in the lowest group, although it is not likely to be associated in respondents’ minds with fundamentalism or poor relations with the US. The Eastern European countries show a similar pattern, where both a more familiar traditional foe of the US (Russia) and less familiar countries (Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Bosnia) are rated lowest, with a slightly more familiar country (Poland) rated higher. The highly rated countries classed in Table 2 as “Western Europe” were likewise nearly all rated as having more familiar English than the lower-rated ones classed as “Central Europe”, except for Germany, which respondents may associate with World War II, especially through films.

In summary, it appears that sociopolitical factors and familiarity can largely explain respondents’ patterns of evaluation of the English of these countries, with countries that may be identified as adversaries of the US and less familiar countries being rated most negatively. While the number of immigrants from these countries to the US also appears to be relevant in such evaluations, as has been suggested by Lippi-Green (1997), this factor seems more important for the countries that are not rated in the bottommost group. Consideration of the factors relevant to respondents’ evaluations is revisited below in light of the qualitative data from the map-labeling task.

Map labels

Data from the map-labeling task were investigated in three major ways. First, the number of responses about different areas suggest what respondents see as speech areas and which of these are most salient to them. Second, the types of descriptors used indicate what general aspects of language are most salient to respondents. Third, the details of the actual descriptors shed light on how respondents regard different varieties and how they see these varieties compared to each other.
Respondents varied widely in the areas covered in their descriptions, including anywhere from four to twenty-six speech areas outside the US. Most respondents described a number at the lower end of this range, with ten as the average and six the most common number of areas described. Some of the apparently more detailed maps, including the two with more than twenty speech areas, use the same labels (e.g. “accented”, “broken”, or “proper”) for many of the areas, so that they still do not differentiate these varieties of non-native English. Most maps left at least some areas of the world blank.

Table 3 shows the countries that were included in more than half of the 79 respondents’ descriptions of non-US Englishes and were described individually as speech areas by at least a quarter of the respondents. For example, although Japan was described by 52 respondents, it was described as a separate speech area by only 16 respondents and so is not included in the table. Japan was usually described as part of a larger area such as “the Far East” or “Asia”, which included China (described as its own speech area by 26 respondents and therefore appearing in Table 3).

Table 3. Most commonly described countries. Actual numbers of respondents per country are given for cases where the country was included in a described area (Included) as well as cases where the country was described individually (Alone)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Included</th>
<th>Most often included with</th>
<th>Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>“Asia” (7), “Orient” (3), E or SE Asia (13), a few (varied) E or SE Asian countries (8), Japan only (6)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>New Zealand, Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea (2)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Central (20) and South America (9 + 5 excluding Brazil), Caribbean Islands (10)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Eastern Europe (3), Asia (4)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Ireland (counted here with “alone”; see text), Europe (5), Western Europe (2)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>(Northern) United States (4)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Europe (9), Central Europe (5), Western Europe (2), Italy (2), Spain (2)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>South Asia (2), Middle East (6)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Europe (9), Central Europe (5), Western Europe (2)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Europe (9), Central Europe (5), Western Europe (2), France (2)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ten countries listed in Table 3 correspond closely to the fifteen countries with the most familiar English shown in Table 1. Missing is the US, which is not considered here as respondents were not asked to describe US English, plus Ireland (except where included with the UK), Jamaica, Japan (except where included with China), and Spain (except where included with Germany, France, and/or Italy). Geography almost certainly played a role in the absence of Jamaica, which is small and tended to be confused or classed together with Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Similarly, Ireland was sometimes described separately but often circled together with Great Britain and labeled as “England” or “UK”, making it difficult to systematically distinguish respondents’ descriptions. Geography may also explain in part why countries of primarily non-native English speakers were very often described within a larger area whereas countries of primarily native English speakers were more likely to be treated separately: Australia, Great Britain, and Ireland are each surrounded by water (though the aforementioned confusion of geographical and political labels for the UK and Ireland did not allow these to be considered separately), and Canada’s only neighbor is the US. On the other hand, the English of these countries was also rated among the most familiar on the country-rating task, so we might expect respondents’ descriptions of them to be more specific.

This group of most commented-on countries includes countries of chiefly native speakers as well as countries of chiefly non-native speakers; both positively and negatively evaluated countries are represented. However, the non-native Englishes that were most often commented on were those that were also evaluated relatively negatively, namely China, Mexico, and Russia. China appears to be the major representative for Asia or the Far East, as does Mexico for all of Latin America. In contrast, no one country appears to stand for (Western) Europe; France, Germany, and Italy are described with approximately equal frequency.

No country in Africa appears among the most frequently commented-on countries, either as a part of an area typically included with one of these countries or on its own. Thirty-three respondents described the entire continent as one speech area, including one whose comment was only “I’m not really sure” and a couple who referred to “the entire country”. Nearly as many respondents (29) described African sub-areas, although only South Africa was mentioned with any frequency (14). This leaves nearly a quarter of respondents (18/79) who did not describe the English of any part of Africa.

Salient aspects of language

Table 4 provides an overview of the types of comments most often made about the countries of primarily non-native English speakers listed in Table 3 (See Hartley and Preston 1999 for a somewhat different classification of labels used by their respondents for varieties of US English.) Since many
Table 4. Number of common types of descriptions for the (mostly) non-native English speaking countries. Numbers in bold represent comments by more than 10% of total respondents, underlining more than 15%, and boxed more than 20%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>name/comparison</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grammar/lexicon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phones</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stress/intonation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smoothness/fluency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarity/comprehensibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>global evaluation/description</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
respondents made more than one type of comment about a particular speech area, the totals in some cases exceed the total number of respondents. Global evaluations such as “broken English” or “speaks English well” were by far the most common descriptors. For the countries that were highly rated on correctness – Germany, France, and Italy – no other type of comment was made as frequently, with the exception of name or comparison descriptors for Italy (e.g. “Italian accent”, or “a bit similar to English w/Spanish accent”). This descriptor type was much less common than global evaluations but was the second most frequent type of comment, followed by descriptions of specific sounds that differed and comments on clarity or comprehensibility.

In general, respondents had more to say about the countries that were rated negatively on correctness, both in terms of overall number of comments and variety of comment types. For example, comments on clarity or comprehensibility, while one of the most common types of descriptors, were only common for the countries rated negatively for correctness. The most negatively-rated of these ‘familiar’ countries, China, had large numbers of comments in several categories, and Mexico had the largest number of comments overall.

Descriptors of salient speech areas

This section turns to the qualitative analysis of the actual descriptions of various perceived speech areas. As respondents focused particularly on more negatively evaluated countries, the analysis will begin with a look at their descriptions of the English of salient negatively evaluated areas. First to be discussed is China – about which respondents made the widest variety of common comment types – followed by India, Mexico, and Russia. Germany, as an area which was highly rated on correctness but which shared some negative pleasantness-related descriptors with Russia, is described next, followed by France and Italy, the most positively described.

China

Although respondents made a wide variety of comment types about China, they showed a surprising amount of agreement. A few responses listed in full below give an idea of both the variety of comment types and the level of agreement on comment contents. (The area being described is noted in parentheses following the comment if this is not China alone or not obvious from the comment itself.)

1) Speak quickly, pronounce L’s as R’s. (similar to description by another respondent for “Oriental Countries”, indicated as China, Japan, and Korea)
2) This country speaks very fast; I don’t know how they understand each other; the only way you know if these people are cursing you is if their voice rises.
3) Asians tend to speak choppy, high toned English and often leave out predicates in sentences. (5 others mention “high” or “high pitched”)
4) China and Japan are comparable to Mexico. They speak English, but sometimes leave out some words. It also sounds very cut up. By that I mean that their words do not seem to flow.
5) Difficult to understand, hard time pronouncing many words w/r and l, many times forget to put plural “-s” on ends of words. (describing area centered on China and including southeast Asia)
6) Broken English. (identical comment from another respondent for Asia; 2 other respondents include this as part of a longer answer)

Respondents are very strikingly in agreement with (1) and (2) above that Chinese English is spoken quickly; all 14 respondents who mention speed agree on this. Likewise, all 18 who comment on smoothness/fluency agree with (3) and (4) that Chinese English is “choppy” (eight use this exact word, plus one describes it as “chopped up”). The comments by seven respondents that describe Chinese English grammar as missing unimportant words may well be referring with greater linguistic specificity to the same perceived feature as the “choppy” comments, as five of the seven mention both “choppiness” and “missing words”, although these are mentioned separately. Where the “missing words” are more specifically described, they are verbs; still more explicitly, they appear to refer to the copula: “linking verbs” and “is, are, and other small words”.

In terms of pronunciation, respondents chiefly focus on the pronunciation of /r/ and /l/ (eight respondents). Perceptions of pronunciation may also contribute to the “choppy” image, as two respondents mention specific sounds in tandem with a “choppy” impression: “words are short and cut off . . . lots of a i e e sounds” and “choppy short sounds, often forget the last consonant sound” (the latter also mentions missing “linking verbs”).

Like example (5) above, all of the comments on clarity and comprehensibility describe Chinese English as in some way unclear or difficult to understand. Interestingly, (2) above even goes to the extreme of wondering how Chinese people can understand each other. Half of the twelve respondents do not comment explicitly on difficulty of understanding but do describe the variety as “slurred, blurry”, “not enunciated”, or “heavily accented”.

Some of the global evaluations are a bit more ambivalent, however. While seven respondents describe Chinese or Asians as speaking “broken”, “poor”, or “little English”, others acknowledge that some speak English well. One uses “very broken” together with “not bad” and goes on to explain that speakers sometimes pause in the middle of sentences, apparently a comparatively benign definition of “broken”. Another respondent notes that “people from the Far East usually speak more standard English than native speakers of English”, the only positive comment lacking ambivalence. Two others suggest variation in how well Chinese students speak English.
India

India was described together with China by four respondents but was usually described as a separate speech area, even if this speech area was strikingly similar to China. In general, descriptions of Indian English showed less agreement among respondents than did descriptions of Chinese English, in some cases because even comments of the same general type referred to different aspects of the variety, and in some cases because comments on the same aspect disagreed.

7) The few people I’ve met who were raised in India seem to speak “precisely”. Maybe it has something to do with the “British” English so to me it sounds more enunciated b/c that’s the way British English also sounds to me.

8) English from here is very pronounced and seems clear/is spoken slowly.

9) Speak fast and not always clear; most would not be able to speak proper English unless educated in the language; lack proper sentence structure and only able to converse basically versus in depth. (describing the Middle East with India)

10) Very hard to understand. Not enunciated clearly enough. (describing the Middle East with India)

11) Speak choppy English – associated w/ kwicky marts.

12) I can’t understand I believe, these people speak English. Any Indian (Indonesian?) professor I’ve had could barely pernounce English so I dropped their courses.

Respondents more often named a variety associated with India or compared it with other varieties than they did with a variety associated with China. The different labels and comparisons suggest two different frameworks for understanding Indian English, perhaps explaining some of the other disagreements: seven respondents associate it with British English, whereas three associate it with “kwicky marts”, a reference to the US animated television show The Simpsons, in which an Indian character owns a convenience store by that name. While the few respondents who make the latter association do not necessarily make overtly negative comments about Indian English, none of them describe it positively. In contrast, those who associate it with British English either describe it positively or neutrally. Interestingly, one additional respondent mentions both labels: “Although this is a stereotype, we hear a lot about Indian speakers of English having the ‘Welcome to Dairy Queen’ accent. They are taught British English in school & I guess this is why we like to make fun.” She also wrote that she enjoyed British English, suggesting that perhaps it is not British English per se but the use of British English by Indian speakers that is made fun of.

The respondent in (7) associates Indian English with British English while describing both as “precise” and “more enunciated”, an association made less explicitly by another respondent who also mentions a British accent and
greater enunciation; the respondent in (8) appears to agree with the idea about the clarity of pronunciation. However, four respondents use opposite or near-opposite descriptors such as “more swallowed” and “run together”. The respondents in both (9) and (10), unlike the three respondents who found Indian English to be clearly enunciated, describe Indian English together with the Middle East, although the other two describe India only. The four remaining comments on clarity and comprehensibility are mostly more negative, including the rather extreme example (12) where the respondent is very negative about the English although not sure of the country she is describing.

Global evaluations of English spoken by Indians are also mixed. Five appear to be completely positive: one goes so far as to describe it as “eloquent” (this is a respondent who also describes it as “British English”), and others describe it as “nice”, “well spoken”, or “fairly good English surprisingly well” (this last is describing India and the Middle East). Just one gives only a negative global evaluation, “very broken English”, while four others suggest variety in how well Indians speak English.

Mexico
Respondents frequently provided a name for the English of Mexico, including “Spanish” or “Spanish-like” (11 respondents), “Mexican English” (4 respondents), and “Spanglish” (2 responses); one labeled an area around the US–Mexico border as “Tex-Mex English”. Six sample descriptions are given in their entirety in (13)–(18):

13) Mexican English seems less Romantic than Spanish English is someways. They over stress eee sounds. They don’t say “R” sounds strongly.
14) Mexicans tend to speak faster than what I think is normal and they also trill their tongues.
15) Fast.
16) Slow.
17) Most Mexicans speak English well, but have a strong Spanish accent.
18) I would say that the Mexicans speak “sloppy” English, partly because some only know phrases + no grammatical formations, but when they talk it just sounds sloppy to me!

While some respondents directly contradict others, there appear to be a number of commonalities in descriptions of areas including Mexico. In terms of pronunciation of specific phones, seven respondents refer to pronunciation of /r/. Six respondents describe vowels or a particular vowel as stressed, long, “more full-bodied”, or “dominant”.

The majority (11/18) of respondents who comment on the speed of Mexican English describe it as fast, but five describe it as slow. Two respondents suggest that perhaps the perceived problem is that the speed is just wrong; as one puts it, speakers “Talk either very quickly or very slowly”.

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Many comments on clarity and global evaluations have a modified-positive or mixed orientation, as in example (17). Six other comments on clarity are neutral or mixed, such as “English is decent – understandable but definitely short of fluent” (a full description the respondent used for several countries, including Mexico, Central and South America, Russia and Eastern Europe, West Africa, and Saudi Arabia). Six others describe the English of the area as unclear or difficult to understand, although one of these qualifies the difficult-to-understand claim by adding “if they don’t speak English well”.

While four respondents describe the English of Mexico as “broken English”, one who writes “Perhaps slightly broken English?” again suggests a somewhat less harsh evaluation of Mexican compared to Chinese English, consistent with the higher ratings of Mexican English on the country-rating task. However, three do describe it as “sloppy”, “lazy sounding”, or not “respectable” (the respondent also puts this word in quotation marks). Others describe it as “less formal” or “less Romantic than Spanish English”. Five use neutral or qualified positive statements as discussed above with the clarity comments, and one simply notes that it differs “from person to person” (this respondent mentions having been to Mexico).

Russia
The English of Russia, the remaining country that garnered a comparable number of comments, was, like China, India, and Mexico, not highly rated on correctness, although it was rated especially negatively on pleasant and friendly. It also has the largest number of global evaluation comments, many of which appear to be relevant to the low pleasant and friendly ratings. The sample descriptions below focus on those that mention clarity/comprehensibility and global evaluations, by far the most common comment types.

19) Russia: sounds “slurred”, have thick accents even once they learn a lot of English.
20) Very thick accent, hard to understand, but most have English as 2nd language; hard to get point across b/c most Americans would not understand what they were saying with such a thick accent.
21) Germany & Russia: harsh, broken, hard.
22) E. Europe & Russia: more gutteral sounding.
23) Russia: language sounds very forceful and damaging to the throat. The words seem to come directly from the throat.
24) Hard sounds, very throat-like, tough. (Russia and Germany indicated)

Most respondents (10/14) who address the issue of clarity describe a lack of it. Only one describes it as “well-articulated”; the other three are more neutral: “accented”, “English with an accent”, and (referring to a friend) “she has a definite Russian accent”.

Similarly, global evaluations are chiefly negative, although the respondent describing her Russian friend continued her comment with “her English
is very good”. The only other evaluation which could be positive is “proper sounding”. A few other evaluations are neutral to good, such as “speak okay” (2 respondents). Five respondents describe Russian English as “broken”, and three refer to English as a “struggle” or a “hard time” for Russian speakers.

Particularly noticeable among the descriptors of Russian English are those exemplified in (21)–(24), which describe it as harsh and guttural. Thirteen comments fit this mold, plus one describes Russian as “very masculine” – stereotypically consistent with the other thirteen, although “masculine” is certainly associated with other qualities as well. These descriptors were coded as global evaluation/description, which accounts for the large number of global comments for Russian English.

**Germany**

Turning to Germany, we find that, as with India, respondents appear to have two key frameworks for understanding German English. One focuses on Germany as part of Western Europe and is associated with positive evaluations of German English and probably its high rating for correctness. The other appears to separate German-influenced varieties of English from those influenced by Romance languages of Western Europe, with descriptions more in line with those of Russian English. We have seen examples of this latter association in examples (21) and (24), where German and Russian English were described together. Examples of both associations can be seen in (25)–(30).

25) When those people talk they speak like they’re angry or fighting.
26) German “Slavic” accent hard – English.
27) Central Europe → very much invaded by accents. It is hard for them (more so than Indians) to articulate “th”, and “o” (changing to “au”) sounds. Rough sentence structure if not fluent.
28) Very sophisticated, nice English w/French accent (sexy). (describing all of Europe)
29) Western Europe in general: The language of business is English so for the most part these folks have no problem and it sounds close to normal.
30) Well.

Examples (25)–(27) are consistent with the “Russian” orientation of (21) and (24), as are eight further descriptions of German English as “harsh”, “gruff”, or “guttural”. Of the more positive global evaluations exemplified in (28)–(30), only (30) describes Germany by itself; the four others all describe it as part of a larger speech area, usually either Western Europe or Europe.

The only other comment type commonly made in reference to Germany was descriptions of specific sounds. Three respondents mention difficulties with “th” sounds, three describe /w/ pronounced as /v/, two mention /r/ pronounced as /w/, and two mention “o” sounds.
Who speaks “broken English”? • 205

France
Examples (28) and (29), as well as two of the other four positive global evaluations for Germany, are applied to France and Italy as well as Germany. The remaining global evaluations assigned to France, a subset of which are shown in (31)–(36), suggest another set of competing frameworks for understanding French English.

31) Say words very poetic, sweet.
32) France: Their English sounds “prettier”/more romantic/nicer.
33) France, Italy: rough, yet clear, nice sounding.
34) Most French people don’t want to speak English, and when they do, it blends with their French.
35) Always come across as pompous and think they are too good for English.
   It [learning English] is demeaning to French speakers.
36) Speak arrogant, romantic.

As can be seen in these examples, many of the global comments about France in particular are very positive, making reference to “poetic” or “more romantic” language; another specifically describes it in contrast to this view as not romantic but “more feminine”. However, (34) and (35) suggest that the French can also be seen as arrogant and unwilling to speak English; (36) is particularly interesting in that it combines both of these perspectives.

Italy
Respondents show more agreement on Italy, the most highly rated of countries with primarily non-native speakers of English. Examples (37)–(42) show most of the types of comments made about Italy.

37) I think that Italians have an “Italian” accent when they speak English. They still use the same fluency + stresses on the English words.
38) Add “a” to end of words.
39) Italy: “sing song” melody to phrase structure.
40) Lots of emotion.
41) Accents are easily recognizable; many speakers are quite bilingual, but accent still shows. (points to Italy & Greece, each circled)
42) Associated w/mafia, “youz guys” “fuhget about it”.

The comparatively large number of people who name or compare English spoken by people from Italy tend to simply refer to an Italian accent, as in (37), although two compare it to Spanish and one to “the Hispanics”. Comments on stress and intonation take three (probably related) forms: using Italian stress on English words (two respondents); adding vowels, especially “a”, to the end of words (four respondents); and “sing song” or “musical” intonation (three respondents).
Global evaluations of Italian English are chiefly positive. Unique to Italy and likely to be related to its high ratings for friendliness are the descriptions which refer ambiguously to speakers or their language as involving “lots of emotion” or “always smiling”. Three comments describe Italian English as okay or good with a noticeable accent. Others describe it as “eloquent”, “nice sounding” (along with France, example 33), or “sophisticated . . . sexy” (along with the rest of Europe, example 28). The only (probably) negative comment about Italy itself that was unmitigated, in example (42), appears to refer to a second- or higher-generation northeast US urban population rather than the students from Italy that respondents were asked to imagine.

Discussion

Although respondents were initially asked to describe various Englishes, they tended to interpret this as a request to evaluate them, as did Preston’s (1986) respondents describing US varieties. The classification of varieties by how “good” they are in some cases leads to rather undifferentiated categories of “good” and “bad” non-native speech. The respondents’ focus on evaluation is also relevant to the salience of varieties, as the most salient non-native speech appeared to be negatively evaluated. While respondents sometimes describe specific sounds they like, they describe what non-native speakers do “wrong” in greater detail. Mexico and China were described as getting the most “wrong”; they were described the most often and in the most detail. The salience of these two countries and the larger areas they are perceived as representing is most likely related to their large immigrant populations in the US, a connection that has been suggested by Lippi-Green (1997). Areas rated highly on correctness (France, Italy, Germany) as well as less familiar negatively rated areas (India, Russia) garnered fewer and less detailed comments. The areas rated highly on correctness have not produced large numbers of immigrants recently; it is noteworthy that the one negative description of Italian English appeared to refer to (second- or higher-generation) immigrants rather than temporary visitors or students from Italy.

The relationship between negative evaluation and salience parallels Preston’s (e.g. 1996, 1999) findings for assessments of native US dialects, in which the salience of a largely undifferentiated “Southern” dialect was correlated with its perceived incorrectness. On the other hand, in the current study the most negatively rated countries tended to be rated as very unfamiliar and were not described at all, suggesting a less linear relationship between stigma and salience than that found by Preston for native varieties. Here it appears that a total lack of familiarity allowed respondents to make evaluations based completely on stereotypes, as they lacked access to counterexamples that could neutralize or soften them. They were less likely to comment unless specifically asked about those countries, however.
These US listeners appear to have multiple overlapping categories for evaluations of non-native English, schematized in Figure 1. The thicker lines in Figure 1 show the strongest associations respondents make. The native and non-native branches are thus both represented with thick lines since they are both salient categories; native/non-native may be the only distinction many respondents would be able to make reliably if they actually heard the varieties in question.

The largest category within non-native English, and for some respondents perhaps the only category, is a general one of stigmatized non-native English. Such a salient, negatively evaluated category would be consistent with findings from a verbal guise study in which listeners identified negatively evaluated Korean accents as East Asian, Indian, or Latino (Lindemann 2003). For most respondents, this stigmatized category does not include Western Europe (the English of France and Italy were never described as “broken”), but for some it appears to apply to the rest of the world with very few distinctions made. This is particularly clear for the respondents who described most of the world in just a few groups and for those who confused varieties.
Some comparisons and classifications also point to undifferentiated groupings, especially the comparison of China and Japan to Mexico and the classification of the Middle East and India together. Further evidence of this salient stigmatized non-native English category can be seen in the many references to simply “heavy accents” and “broken English”. These and many other less overtly evaluative comments (e.g. “speaks fast”) were sufficiently unspecific that some comments were similar for very different areas, suggesting an implicit general category even where varieties were separately described and not explicitly compared.

Most respondents, including those who appeared to have a “stigmatized non-native English” category, appeared to have a European or Western European category, although the countries included varied somewhat. Apparently no country was seen as representing the whole category; typically, either respondents described all or a large part of Europe or else they described multiple individual countries. France, Italy, and Spain were prototypical members, all evaluated highly on correct, pleasant, and friendly and described in non-stigmatized and in some cases even prestigious terms. German English, rated highly on correctness, was also sometimes included, although some respondents described it as harsh and guttural, categorizing it with Russian English as “Slavic”. Friendly and pleasant ratings for Germany had the highest standard deviations for any country (2.6), giving additional evidence of two conflicting categorizations rather than a more agreed-upon, moderately negative evaluation.

The most salient sub-categories of stigmatized non-native English were East Asian or “Chinese” English and Latin American or “Mexican” English. Respondents agreed that speakers from East Asia speak quickly and chopply, confuse /r/ and /l/, leave out words, enunciate poorly, and are hard to understand. Much of this description (quick, choppy, poorly enunciated, hard to understand) was often applied to India as well, but some respondents associated Indian English with convenience stores while others saw it as a more positively evaluated, British-influenced variety. Latin American English was evaluated somewhat less negatively than East Asian English, although it was seen as more casual and less prestigious than the English from Spain. Respondents described speakers from this area as speaking at a different speed than typical native US English speakers, usually faster, trilling /r/ or pronouncing it differently, and stressing vowels.

These findings suggest a more complex set of relevant factors than has typically been proposed to account for reactions to speakers of different varieties. Neither patterns of immigration (Lippi-Green 1997) nor in-group/out-group and dominant/subordinate contrasts (Ryan, Giles and Sebastian 1982) can individually explain the full range of results, specifically the multiple layers of evaluation. However, these factors appear to apply in combination with each other and with other factors. As Lippi-Green (1997) has suggested, the most salient groups are those which include the largest numbers of recent immigrants to the US: Latin Americans and East Asians. On the other
hand, an explanation based on immigration figures alone might lead us to expect the most negative evaluations of Latin American English, especially Mexican English, since US Census data (Schmidley 2001) suggest that Latin Americans account for approximately half of all the foreign-born people in the US (Mexicans accounting for half of these), with Asians as the next largest group, accounting for a quarter of those born outside the US. It appears that while negative evaluation is connected with salience, and salience with immigration demographics, the most negatively evaluated varieties are not necessarily the most salient, as discussed above.

A number of explanations are possible for the more negative evaluations of Asian English in comparison to Latin American English. One is that while all non-native speakers may be considered out-group in comparison to native speakers, when non-native varieties are considered together, Latin American speakers are in-group compared to the Asian speakers. In fact, descriptions of Latin American English as “more casual” English corresponds somewhat to descriptions of Southern US English, which may be rated highly on friendliness if not correctness (Preston 1999). Asians, on the other hand, may be perceived as exhibiting greater cultural, linguistic, or even physical differences. Such a “comparative in-group-ness” factor was found by Abrams and Hogg (1987) for native varieties of English in Scotland: respondents from Dundee preferred their own dialect to that of Glasgow but preferred both their own and the Glasgow dialects to RP.

The more negative evaluations of Asian English may also stem from experiences that are more particular to the group investigated here. For example, for the college students surveyed in this study, experiences with non-native teaching assistants may be especially relevant. East Asians may be particularly likely to be teaching assistants in required difficult courses, and Orth (1982, cited in Rubin 1992) found a relationship between the grades students expected and their assessment of the instructor’s English. Thus, respondents may be more likely to rate the English of East Asians negatively because they have done poorly in classes taught by them.

Reactions to the less salient negatively evaluated groups are probably based on images of these groups in the popular media, since respondents are likely to have fewer first-hand experiences with them. For example, most respondents are unlikely to know anyone at all from Iraq; they may associate it only with Saddam Hussein. Although English varieties from Russia, Germany, and India are probably more familiar to respondents, reactions to these varieties also appear to be influenced by media images. Respondents describing India in some cases made references to a popular TV show character, and more general media images of TV and movie “bad guys” are hypothesized to be relevant to evaluations of Russian English and German English.

The various categories of non-native English are of interest for verbal guise research, in which both non-native speech and stigmatized native speech have been compared to non-stigmatized native dialects. In such research, non-native varieties are often treated as another non-standard variety, but
the current findings suggest that there may be qualitative differences between non-native and non-standard. As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998) have noted, US English has no real prestigious varieties, only stigmatized and non-stigmatized ones. A few prestige-oriented descriptors such as “eloquent” used by respondents in the current study suggest that at least some US English speakers may consider some non-native varieties to be prestigious. Even if they are not seen as prestige varieties, varieties of English spoken by Western Europeans tended to be viewed more positively than stigmatized native US dialects.

Another difference between stigmatized native dialects and non-native English is the lesser degree of familiarity with non-native varieties, which appears to be related to the looser connection between salience and perceived incorrectness. It may also result in different evaluations of a variety and the relevance of different explanatory ideologies depending on whether a voice sample or variety label is provided. A comparison of reactions to voice samples and to variety labels would illuminate the relationship between the categories used in identifying varieties and reactions to those varieties.

**Addressing language discrimination**

The patterns of responses based on familiarity, immigration trends, and sociopolitical relationships (especially as portrayed in the popular media) suggest what expectations these US undergraduates are likely to have of non-native English speakers from all over the world. Of course, these expectations may play out in different ways: the belief that someone is from a particular part of the world may trigger the perception of a “foreign” accent where none exists (Rubin 1992), or such a belief may lead to a positive evaluation because the speaker’s English is better than expected (Brown 1992). While further research is needed into how expectations translate into evaluations of actual speakers, knowledge about the expectations themselves is an important step towards addressing language discrimination in several ways. For example, educating the public about the close ties between sociopolitical relationships and expectations about English helps bring to light the prejudicial nature of such expectations, while knowledge about general linguistic biases may provide important background information for addressing specific cases of possible discrimination.

The lack of specificity in respondents’ classifications, descriptions, and evaluations of non-native English also has clear implications for addressing language prejudice, as many undergraduate respondents describe most (hypothetical) international students’ non-native English as simply “broken” or “bad”. On the other hand, further investigation of folk linguistic ways of describing and understanding non-native speech is clearly needed. While “broken” is typically taken as a generic, very negative evaluation, for some respondents it appeared to be somewhat less negative and was used to refer
Who speaks “broken English”? • 211

to specific features, such as frequent pauses or possibly copula omission. A
description of speech as “broken English” thus need not automatically be
taken as an indication that the describer believes the speaker’s English is
inadequate. Likewise, terms such as “accented” may have different meanings
for different respondents. Other general terms such as “choppy”, often used
to describe Asian-accented English, can give an idea of what features
respondents are most likely to react negatively to, such as final consonant
omission, which can be tested later in an experimental study and used to
inform pronunciation teaching.

Finally, further study is needed to discover how the biases of these college
students compare to those of other populations, and the degree to which
they apply to different non-native speaker groups. Respondents were asked
to describe the English of international students, whom we might expect to
have higher proficiency than the more general immigrant population.
However, it was not always clear that respondents were imagining students.
This suggests both a possible type of bias (non-native speakers may not
typically be imagined as college students) and an area for further study.

Notes

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2. These descriptors have been used in previous studies (e.g. Preston 1996, 1999).
Both friendly and pleasant were used here, as differences have been found between
ratings of friendly and a descriptor similar to pleasant (‘nice to listen to’) for Korean
English (Lindemann 2003).

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