Attitudes Towards Accented Speech

1. Introduction

Accents have been a topic of discussion and research in many fields of linguistics, including phonetics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, second language acquisition, and language education. Many non-native speakers take positive attitudes and show a great potential to master an accent while adapting themselves to English-speaking environments. Nonetheless, it has been an area of controversy among students and workers to be classified based on their accented speech. That is why accents have been more favourable and a speech feature among English speakers over the past few years.

Since this paper brings ideas and attitudes of several different English speakers in the UAE (United Arab Emirates) towards accented speech, I consider it really important to highlight the definition of accent in the context of a branch of linguistics, that is, phonetics. Not only that, but I will explain how non-native English speakers look at accents in different aspects. I chose different categories of people in the UAE to consider their attitudes towards accented speech and see how insatiable they desire to speak either of the two major accents, British and American. Furthermore, I was interested to collaborate with my fellow students to decide which accent is spoken the most among our previous schools, and what our attitudes are towards our speech each one on their own when we were at school, and how it has now changed.

I will also provide a comprehensive clarification of how the concept of accent has been defined in phonetics and treated among non-native speakers as that forms a fundamental part of the research paper based on the relation between accented speech and accent definition of phonetics. Following that, I will narrow my major study target by gradually describing the key region of accented speech and people's attitudes that I aimed to examine in depth.

2. Literature Review

We very much know that accents are numerous nowadays, but our recognition, as L2 English Speakers, of them varies. Our attitudes, not a specific limit, are instantaneous and different since the types of training materials we depend on or listen to are not the same.

Erin Carrie in "Attitudes towards English Reference Accents in Spain, 2016" says that GenAm (General American) and RP (Received Pronunciation) are the most easily recognisable due to the plethora of audio materials, textbooks, pronunciation manuals, and websites. This applies to non-native environments, including the Arab World. Another paper" Attitudes

Towards English as Lingua Franca, 2014" gathered a number of non-native speakers' attitudes towards different English accents. Unsurprisingly, most of their results went the way of the standard accents of the UK and USA (RP and GenAm). Understandably, speakers of the UK accent leave negative comments on the American the same as speakers of GenAm do. The stat was clear in terms of why RP is more preferred as it has been described as normal and easy to understand other than GenAm. "Perceptions of Accented English in a multilingual environment, 2011." Indicates that a listener can easily familiarise themselves with a new accent even if they face difficulties at the beginning of a conversation.

Whether a person speaks with an accent or not, it has been a priority now to understand different accents. The popularity of GenAm and RP is expected and the positive attitudes are a proof of the results in several previous research studies in favour of the two accents. It goes different reasons why a person loves this particular accent, but cultural and social backgrounds are most likely to be the reason. Now it is probably a need rather than a feature to have or master an accent as it has been thought of as a criterion to stand out from the crowd.

3. Methods and Data

To figure out the attitudes of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in the UAE towards different accents, especially RP and GenAm, an in-depth comprehensive survey was conducted. The survey was designed for four categories of respondents: students, teachers, parents, and principals. The inclusion of principals and teachers was to make an integrated relationship among all groups to react towards accented speech either positively or negatively. It also included various specific questions based on each selected set of the above-mentioned categories. I was determined to ask a number of 6-8 questions that covered the topic in detail starting from the recognition of different accents to preferences.

I also took five respondents of each category to express their thoughts as much as possible about each one. Members of one category are not from the same geographical region or cultural background, even their ages are not similar to each other, consequently, my research paper explains many accent differences and covers a large area of non-native speakers' cultures. This has expectedly widened the horizons of possible attitude changes among those native speakers because many people find it hard to deal with people with different accents across the UAE.

The method of making a survey was helpful and productive because it gave a considerable space of freedom to these non-native speakers to take an attitude towards accented speech. That is why taking a quantitative method was a good step to make this research paper possible. In addition to that, the questions, not to a specific limit, let the respondents determine what accent they feel they suit the most since it was shocking that a

few of them were not able to distinguish between the most two famous accents RP and GenAm (The UK and USA accents).

4. Analysis

The Data was collected utilizing a questionnaire. Each participant was asked to answer the questions individually and give reasons for their answers. My observed pattern was diverting enough to cover the interest area of the respondents as it thoroughly explained what the UAE students think concerning the majority of people's accents. I relied on separating the backgrounds of each category to assure that the results were collected in a widely known way quite similar to other research papers.

Within the frame of time, the survey had taken to be well-done, each member of a category demonstrated a different level of interest in each question compared with others. This proved to me that accents are like food meals, each one of us doesn't necessarily love the same kind of food another one loves. I was keen on asking multiple questions that could be much of a help for this research paper. The questions were mainly about the recognition and preferences of accents in the UAE as well as the views of these respondents towards accented speech and whether they reckon an accent is an advantage or disadvantage.

The survey was done in relation to the variety of accents in the UAE, so I prioritised the environment of the school to be the key to my survey since many adult learners find difficulties in picking up or understanding an accent. The reason behind that is particularly about the growing belief in non-native environments that encourages and motivates educational systems or institutions to employ various accented-speech speaking people to help broaden the thoughts of young students from an early age to recognise and adapt to different English accents. Studies have indicated that as children reach the age of five, they are more likely to talk with the accents they are exposed to at school. This predominantly matches my next plans in teaching English when I graduate from university. It is a subsequent, inspirational, and helpful guide to apply, and significantly approving my methods of teaching in schools after graduation is essential. That's why it is highly recommendable and advisable to bring foreign-accented speech to schools in environments like the UAE.

The patterns I used were typical to gather information from a solid point of view of others. It was important to figure out the knowledge pool of each respondent which made it much easier to gauge whether accents are favourable in the UAE. Alongside the survey, I tried to make it immaculate by selecting students who come from different backgrounds, for example, a student was born in Al Ain City then raised in Abu Dhabi and moved to Dubai in grade 9th and learned from different teachers with different accents across different schools, what accent would they speak? That is a question I didn't write in the survey, but it was fundamental to answer this question in somewhat a contrasting way sliding away from any emotional or

instinctive answers. This doesn't count on background since it was internationally presented in worldwide universities. Here, it was surprising to find such rational and wonderful answers for such a question joining two points in one. I mean there were no absolute answers. Consequently, the research paper I contemplated is quite clear, rigorous, and comprehensively informative.

5. Discussion

EFL learners cannot ignore the importance of accents in English. Numbers are in a sequential increase of learners who try their very best to master one of the most famous accents in the world. A huge percentage of these learners in the UAE say that an accent cannot be acquired very easily. It needs so much practice and intense follow-up with practical and profound materials. It is unlike travelling abroad to a foreign country like the UK or the USA to practice English. Furthermore, their capacity of recognising an accent exceeds their expectations, as a result of their great adaptation to various students. Understandably, most non-native countries across the globe put GenAm and RP as their favourite choices. That is what most studies have explored in these countries over the previous years.

Erin Carrie, in the International Journal of Applied Linguistics, wrote about the attitudes towards English reference accents in Spain, and as expected, found that both the British and American accents are the most easily recognisable due to many reasons, of which is the materials that comprise so much British and American English. My finding in the UAE schools was the same since many students are urged to watch movies or listen to songs by their teachers, and unquestionably, most films and songs are done by British and American actors or singers. Another reason is the number of American and British teachers across the social media platforms who promptly embellish these two accents in the eyes of so many English learners. On the other hand, many researchers believe that the essence of this accent spread is the powerful political and economic situation in these two countries. They substantiate that by launching creative and independent methods of English teaching that include other English accents than GenAm and RP, and unfortunately, it didn't pay off. This study was almost similar to the Study of Perceptions of Accented Speech in a Multilingual Environment in 2011. Parents, principals, and teachers are, in fact, massive supporters of the aforementioned study results. Teachers show strong proof of the study results by revealing their inside secrets of applying British or American English to their own teaching plans in previous studies. Palestinian English Language Teacher Asaad Elkurd has been asked about his astounding success in prep schools, he answered" I always try to make a combination of different accents in class. As I speak distinctive British and American, students find it enthralling to love either of them." The UAE teachers might amazingly imitate the Palestinian teacher but think they find it hard to work out well from

the beginning. Principals and parents are in favour of letting their children or students learn either British or American.

The other study "Attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca" corresponds with me and Erin because many respondents prefer either the American or British accent. Moreover, the disagreement rumbles on, even among these respondents in this study, who take negative and sharp attitudes towards the accent they don't love, for example, the research study found out that many students, who love the British accent, react negatively towards the American accent and vice versa. I drew a conclusion based on my findings that most students, in the UAE, don't express negative attitudes towards the accents they are indifferent to despite they don't show a strong will to get to know them. Consequently, my research paper was accurately and scientifically developed to present areas of a long discussion in the Middle East in general and the UAE in particular.

6. Conclusion

Of 20 respondents divided into four groups or categories, students, teachers, parents, and principals, I found many multiple different answers from each one on their own. Questions vary between the recognition of an accent, consideration of accents among learners, and preference of accents. As mentioned above, the number of questions was about 6-8 questions; they were very critical and analytical ones to get to the basic point of research. The figures completely show the findings.

Of the five students, four responded with yes and displayed a great level of recognition of native speakers' accents while one didn't see it from the same angle. On the other hand, non-native speakers' accents had a less recognition percentage as three students did accept the fact meanwhile two went all the way opposite. In terms of accent preferences, most students (four) prefer picking out a native teacher for themselves and one was neutral and preferred not to answer. Within the same topic, the five students believe it is a big advantage for an English teacher to speak with an accent. Also, the five students were not in the same bracket of relying on a native or non-native teacher considering methods interactivity. Three loved to be taught by a non-native with boring teaching methods thinking that a non-native teacher helps much more than a native one despite the boring nature of their methods. The opposite goes exactly with the other two.

For parents, the answers to the questions were not similar to the students' answers. The recognition of native speakers' accents was fluctuating as 3 and 2 joined different paths of recognition. The second one, which is the opposite of the first, was represented by a ratio of 3:2. All Parents would rather have their children under the supervision of native English

teachers as they think an accent is a good advantage of an English teacher. Parents were also asked about other qualities of a perfect English teacher from their perspective. One of their main concerns was about how much engagement and knowledge their children can get from these teachers.

All English Teachers were expected to have a high capacity and immense familiarity when it comes to recognising accents either of native or non-native speakers. Teachers and principals are inextricably linked, so the findings indicated the same results regarding the recognition of native or non-native speakers' accents. It was a common finding among all the categories to back the option of assigning native teachers to teach English instead of non-native speakers. The incisive remarks the English teachers demonstrated about the advantage of speaking with an accent don't typically let them have the same positive feeling provided they feel they're disadvantaged according to their responses in the survey. The teachers also think it is a privilege to work in schools and teach English accents to students, but my findings, from this category, were unbiased as four of them suspected a native English speaker to have the same employability opportunities. Four teachers disagreed with the opinion that claims an accent matters more than a degree or experience whilst the remaining one agreed. Principals didn't ignore the thought, that is, speaking with an accent is an advantage for English teachers as the whole figure of principals' agreement varied between" strongly agree" and "agree". The final tailored question for them was to decide what kind of teachers they prefer to hire. There was a barely equal result among the principals since two strongly agree with recruiting native teachers and three are neutral and don't see a difference between both types.

Based on my survey and study, I found the following:

1- All categories have a great ability to recognise accents, native or non-native speakers' accents.

2- Most Emirati educational systems employers remain keen on mastering only one accent rather than being distracted by other accents as they say.

3- Students are encouraged to learn accents from an early age, particularly at school.

4- The British and American accents(RP and GenAm) are the most famous in the UAE.

5- "Accent is a good advantage." is a popular attitude among all the categories.

6- Principals and teachers fantastically control their educational plans at school and try to apply creative methods with non-stop ideas.

7- Teachers believe there's no difference in the prospects of getting a better job between native and non-native teachers.

8- Among all the categories, attitudes were clinically positive. Each one answered the survey transparently and gave enough shreds of evidence to prove their answers.

7. References and Resources

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