

CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORLD ENGLISHES

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Abstract

Locally and globally, the position of English is uncontested, making it the most sought-after languages to be learnt today. While there is little disagreement about the need to learn English, language teaching and learning efforts are often beset by questions of which variety of English is most suitable for the classroom. This is complicated by attitudes towards varieties of English. This paper is a literature review to inform a study of attitudes towards World Englishes among Sri Lankan English teachers. It presents a critical review of existing literature that combines elements of a systematic review. Based on 50 recent studies, the paper first presents key findings in an overview of the main trends in contemporary research on attitudes towards World Englishes (AWE). It next presents a selection of findings based on a critical analysis of these studies. These findings include the proliferation of AWE studies in countries that formerly considered English a foreign language, a preference for survey methods and AWE studies in pedagogical contexts, recurring findings across studies from different parts of the world, and the researchers' engagement with the concept of attitudes. The critical analysis of the studies uncovered conceptual and methodological shortcomings that also reflect the limitations previously identified in WEs research and language attitudes research. This paper concludes with the recommendation to consider moving beyond positivist, quantitative approaches such as surveys in the study of AWEs that consider language attitudes to be fixed and measurable in order to produce generalisations. Instead, this paper advocates more inductive, qualitative approaches that focus on the individual and the subjective and consider language attitudes as unfixed, volatile, and evolving in context, which might provide new insights into the field.

Keywords: Language Attitudes, Sri Lankan English, World Englishes

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Introduction

Locally as well as globally, the position of English as a language of education, commerce and trade, and entertainment is largely uncontested. This also makes it one of the most sought-after languages today. However, while there is little disagreement about the need to learn English, language teaching efforts are often beset by questions of which variety of English is most suitable for the classroom. Language attitudes, specifically attitudes towards varieties of English, contribute significantly to this predicament. This is thrown into sharp relief in countries like Sri Lanka, where scholars have long identified a local variety, Sri Lankan English (SLE), and promoted it as the most appropriate model for teaching (Gunasekera, 2005; Parakrama, 1995). This, alongside the globally powerful varieties like Standard British English which are still considered prestigious and more suited for teaching and learning, can pose a dilemma to teachers of English as to which variety to teach.

This paper reviews recent literature on language attitudes towards World Englishes (WEs), a field of study in applied linguistics that explores the unprecedented growth and spread of English in the world today. This literature was reviewed with two objectives: to gain an in-depth understanding of the current developments in this significant area of research in World Englishes studies, and to identify a research space in order to conceptualise a study of attitudes towards SLE among teachers of English in Sri Lanka.

The justification for and the research problem of this literature review is the absence of a comprehensive overview of recent research on attitudes towards World Englishes (WEs). Although this continues to be a thriving area of research with studies conducted around the world, no study has attempted to provide an overview of this research. Therefore, for a researcher embarking on a study of attitudes among teachers of English to Sri Lankan English, it is useful and necessary to gain an overall understanding of the extent of this research area, its main findings, as well as the theoretical and methodological assumptions undergirding it in order to conceptualise a study that could make a meaningful contribution to the study of WEs.

The paper is structured as follows: it first introduces the theoretical concepts of World Englishes and language attitudes and then discusses the methodology of the literature review. Next, key findings of the literature review are presented both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, I present some conclusions that will inform the proposed study of attitudes towards SLE among English teachers in Sri Lanka.

1.1 World Englishes

The World Englishes paradigm is one of the key approaches to understanding the unprecedented growth and spread of English in the contemporary world. Aligned with this paradigm, the concentric circles model (Kachru, 1986, 1992, 1994, 1996) is widely used by researchers to describe the phenomenon of English in the world in terms of three circles (Kachru, 1992, pp. 356-357):

Table 1: The Concentric Circles Model

The three circles	Nation states	Features	Status
Inner Circle	USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand	The traditional basis of English, with populations speaking English as a 'native' language (ENL)	Norm providing
Outer Circles	Sri Lanka, India, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore etc	Institutionalised varieties of English in former British colonies, generally speaking, English as a second language (ESL)	Norm developing
Expanding circle	China, Japan, Indonesia, Egypt, Israel, Korea, USSR, Saudi Arabia etc	Regions where English is essentially used as a foreign language (EFL)	Norm dependent

As demonstrated in Table 1, the Concentric Circles model presents a global sociolinguistic profile based on nation-states, the history of English and its current position in these countries, and types of speakers and functions. Although shortcomings have been identified in the model (Canagarajah, 2013; Tupas, 2006), it continues to provide a useful framework to describe the development of World Englishes across the world today. As SLE is also generally conceptualised as a WE (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2022), this literature review will employ the term *World Englishes* to refer to the variation in Englishes. At the same time, other theoretical models and paradigms have since been proposed to study English in the contemporary world: English as a Lingua Franca, or ELF (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2018); English as an International Language, or EIL (Alsagoff et al., 2012; Matsuda, 2017; McKay, 2018); and Global Englishes (GE), or English as a Global Language (EGL) (Galloway, 2011; Rose & Galloway, 2019). These often competing ontologies address different geopolitical regions, types of speakers, language functions, and research foci. However, there is a shared interest among researchers aligned with all these paradigms to explore attitudes to varieties of English in different parts of the world and the pedagogical significance of these attitudes (De Costa, Maloney & Crowther, 2018), which is important to the present study.

In this paper, I use the terms *WEs* and *varieties of English* interchangeably to refer to the field of study and individual varieties of English (Kachru, 1996). I will also adopt the classifications of the Circles model -- Inner Circle (IC), Outer Circle (OC), and Expanding Circle (EC) -- essentially as shorthand to refer to the nations as well as their language varieties while acknowledging the limitations of these labels.

1.2 Language attitudes

The study of attitudes to World Englishes comprises a significant area in the study of language attitudes, which is traditionally based on social psychological approaches to the study of attitudes. Defined as "an evaluative orientation" and "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably" to something (Garrett et al., 2003, pp. 2-3), language attitudes comprise "any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of such evaluative reactions towards different language varieties or speakers" (Ryan & Giles, 1982, p. 7). It is thus informed by the three-dimensional affect-behaviour-cognition or the ABC model (Garrett, 2010; Ryan & Giles, 1982) that assumes a causal relationship between thoughts, emotions, and actions vis-à-

vis human attitudes. In other words, a positive attitude comprises positive emotions or thoughts which result in positive actions. Contemporary experts view language attitudes as complex and multidimensional phenomena that determine, and are determined by, many factors such as legitimacy, prestige, status, bias, awareness and familiarity (Garrett, 2010).

Methodology

Applied linguists affirm the value of literature reviews to present the "state of affairs of a research area" (Li & Wang, 2018; Rose et al., 2021). This literature review, informed by recent researchers conducting extensive scale literature reviews, identified a large number of relevant research studies to analyse, compare, and contrast (Accurso & Gebhard, 2021; Rose et al., 2021) and to evaluate their methodologies (Lee & Bligh, 2019).

The process to compile the corpus of research studies for review was as follows:

1. A search was first conducted in several research databases (Taylor and Francis, Jstor, Emerald, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press available in the University of Kelaniya online library, and the free-of-charge research database ZLibrary) using keywords: *language attitudes, world Englishes, Varieties of English*. This yielded a large number of studies spanning several decades.
2. After a preliminary scoping search (Booth et al., 2020; Chong & Plonsky, 2023) conducted by skimming titles and abstracts, the literature survey focused on publications between 2010-2019.
3. As many local studies were not found in international research databases, they were manually searched for and identified. Also, as there were several significant SLE studies published before 2010, the time frame was expanded to 2001-2019. These included publications in local journals (Fernando & Sivaji, 2014; Medawattegedera & Devendra, 2004; Samarakkody, 2001), unpublished conference papers (Fernando, 2014), and postgraduate-level dissertations. (Dissanayake, 2019; Fernando, 2007; Hediwattage, 2018), and an international journal article published prior to 2010 (Künstler et al., 2009).
4. A preliminary database of 50 research studies comprised 43 internationally published journal articles, book chapters, monographs, and seven (07) locally published and unpublished studies.
5. Several articles and book chapters that engaged with the concept, theory and methods of researching language attitudes were also consulted to obtain an in-depth understanding and to conduct an informed analysis of the 50 research studies: Brown (2016), Baird and Baird (2018); Liang, (2015); Rose and Galloway, (2019); Soukup, (2012); and the most recent text on language attitudes, Peter Garrett's seminal *Attitudes to Languages* (2010).

This study thus follows the articulated process of a systematic literature review in its initial stages of compilation and analysis (Chong & Plonsky, 2023). It thus combines elements of a systematic literature review, generally associated with an objective, deductive approach, with a more subjective, intuitive, and inductive analytical approach of a traditional narrative literature review (Macaro, 2020). In this analysis, it adopts a critical approach, engaging in a critique of tradition, authority and objectivity (Mingers, 2000) of this area of research, interrogating conventional wisdom and dominant assumptions, and recognising that knowledge creation is not necessarily value-free (Mingers, 2000; Saunders & Rojon, 2011). Additionally, scholars now affirm the importance of acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher in critical analyses (Canagarajah, 1996; McKinley, 2017). Thus, my analytical approach is subjective, reflexive of my own values, ideologies, and experiences that shape the decisions I make in my research. Particularly as I identify as a speaker of Sri Lankan English, the variety under study, my analysis is invariably affected by my own worldview.

The location(s), the research foci, the type(s) of participants, and the main findings in each study were first identified and synthesised, which provided an initial overview of the area of research. This also offered a glimpse into specific aspects of the studies that were of particular interest to me and my own study. The next stage of analysis was conducted more inductively, as specific studies in which these findings emerged were examined more closely than others. The findings below present key findings of the initial overview and some of the more specific themes relevant to my own study. They are presented sequentially as discrete themes, but their inevitable overlaps and interconnections are acknowledged.

Findings and discussion

3.1 A proliferation of studies in Expanding Circle contexts

The identification of locations in which the studies were conducted revealed the sheer number of studies conducted in various parts of the world. Early studies were primarily conducted in IC contexts such as the United Kingdom (Giles, 1970), the United States (Soukup, 2001), Australia, New Zealand (Huygens & Vaughn, 1983), and Canada as reported by Garrett (2010). At present, however, much of the research is conducted in EC contexts, as illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2: AWEs studies conducted in Expanding Circle contexts

Expanding circle country	Studies of Attitudes to World Englishes
China	Chen, Yan & Jiang (2013); Gao & Lin (2010); Liu & Deng (2013); Xu & Gao (2014); Wang (2014); Wang (2015); Wang & Gao (2015); Zheng & Gao (2017); Zhao & Chen (2013)
Japan	Galloway (2011), Ishikawa (2017), McKenzie (2008), McKenzie (2010), Sasayama (2013), Taguchi (2013), Tokumoto & Shibata (2011)
Korea	Ahn (2014), Ahn (2015), Shin & Park (2019)
Saudi Arabia	Al Asmari (2014); Almegren (2018)
Iran	Mokhtarnia & Ghafar-Samar, (2016); Rahatlou, Fazilatfar & Allami (2018), Rezaei, Khosravizadeh & Mottaghi (2018)
Thailand	McKenzie, Kitikanan & Boriboon (2015), Ploywattanawong & Trakulkasemsuk (2014)
Croatia	Margić & Širola (2014)

The multiplicity of studies conducted in EC countries reflects the current spread of English as a global language in countries where the language used to be restricted to the status of a foreign language (Strang, 1970). In contrast with the large number of studies conducted in these countries, however, there are only a few studies conducted in OC countries, particularly in South Asia. Among 43 recent AWEs studies published in international research journals between 2010 and 2020, only four studies were found to be conducted in the South Asian region (Bernaisch, 2012; Bernaisch & Koch, 2016) or foregrounded a South Asian variety (Hsu, 2019; Weekly, 2018).

3.2 Attitudes to WEs in Pedagogical Contexts

A significant finding in the initial literature survey was that much of the contemporary research on AWEs tends to focus on English language teaching and learning contexts, mostly conducted in universities and schools with teachers or students of English. These studies explore the attitudes of teachers and learners from IC, OC and EC countries to varieties in all three Circles. They thus reveal attitudes not only towards the globally dominant IC varieties traditionally preferred as the norm-providing pedagogical models but also towards many lesser-known, less prestigious varieties that teachers and students come into contact

with, within and outside the classroom. In particular, recent AWEs research conducted in multilingual pedagogical contexts like universities with a significant presence of international students underscores the importance of developing awareness of multiple WEs in the ELT classroom (Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2019). Ultimately, the continuing interest in exploring AWEs among teachers and students reaffirms the global position that English continues to occupy as the world's most preferred language to be learnt, with estimations of half a billion users and learners of English in China alone (Ahn, 2014), and a predicted growth of up to two billion learners worldwide in the decade from 2006-2026 (Graddol, 2006).

3.3 Preference for IC Englishes in Pedagogical Contexts

The growing acknowledgement of WEs in OC and EC countries has not necessarily undermined the prestige and position of IC Englishes in pedagogy. Many recent surveys of AWEs still found an abiding preference for the globally dominant IC models, Standard British English and American English, among teachers and students in China (Wang, 2014; Si, 2019) Hong Kong (Chan, 2018; Chan, 2019; Wong, 2018), Japan (Ishikawa, 2017; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011), Korea (Ahn, 2014; Ahn, 2015; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011), Iran (Mokhtarina & Ghafar-Samar, 2016; Rahatlou et al., 2018), Saudi Arabia (Al Asmari, 2014; Almegren, 2018), Thailand (McKenzie et al., 2015), Fiji (Meer et al., 2019), Croatia (Margić & Širola, 2014), India (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016), as well as in Sri Lanka (Bernaisch, 2012).

3.4 Growing positive attitudes towards OC and EC varieties

At the same time, several studies report that a positive attitude towards OC and EC varieties also appears to be developing among their speakers (Bernaisch, 2012; Bernaisch & Koch, 2016; Chan, 2018; Hansen Edwards, 2019; Hundt et al., 2015; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011; Wang, 2014). For example, Wang (2014) reported an increasing admiration among Chinese speakers of English for their own variety, China English (CE), because of the role it plays in successful international business transactions with speakers of IC varieties, despite CE being denigrated by its own speakers as inadequate and non-standard (Wang, 2014). Similarly, Künstler et al. (2009) and Bernaisch (2012) found that even though Sri Lankans, by and large, still claim to prefer British English, a positive attitude towards SLE is growing, perhaps most significantly demonstrated by the preference for SLE over American English. The proliferation of research on AWEs in multiple global contexts reflects the postmodernist globalisation of the late 20th and the first decades of the 21st century (Canagarajah & Said, 2011; Saxena & Omoniyi, 2010). The position of Englishes reflects the change from modernist globalisation, when "the local was suppressed in favour of the global" as a result of a "unilateral flow of information, knowledge, technology, finance, media, ideas, migration from centre to periphery, or from periphery to centre" (Canagarajah & Said 2011, p. 395). However, the centre-periphery dichotomy in displaced in postmodernist globalisation: "the local was not suppressed, but received increased visibility, and spread through more advanced forms of travel, production relations, business enterprises, and media communication" (Canagarajah & Said 2011, p. 395).

The spread of English, as reflected in the studies reviewed here, can thus be considered an outcome as well as a vehicle of postmodernist globalisation. The studies reviewed here demonstrate the increased visibility of local varieties that used to occupy peripheral positions in relation to the IC core of World Englishes, but nevertheless, are still in tension with powerful IC varieties in the crucial area of language pedagogy. Alongside this, the role that Englishes play in the multi-directional flows of postmodernist globalisation is illustrated in the studies that explore AWEs across and within OC and EC countries. These include attitudes to Indian English among Saudi Arabian students (Almegren, 2018) and Korean students (Ahn, 2015), Chinese students' attitudes towards Japanese and Indian varieties (Zheng & Gao, 2017), as well as attitudes within specific WEs such as Sri Lankan teachers' acceptance of their own

variety (Fernando, 2007; Fernando & Sivaji, 2014; Hediwattege, 2018; Medawattegedera & Devendra, 2004; Mendis & Rambukwella, 2010) and Chinese university students' attitudes towards China English (Wang, 2014; Wang & Gao, 2015).

3.5 Saturation in AWEs findings

The recurrent findings in many of the AWE studies discussed in sections 3.3 and 3.4 also suggest that they have perhaps reached a point of saturation. It is quite likely, given the similar conceptual assumptions and methodological approaches that reemploy the traditional tools of attitude measurement, future studies will continue to produce similar findings. This has proven true in studies of attitudes to SLE. Recent surveys of SLE acceptance, awareness and attitudes have generally revealed what early AWE researchers (Medawattegedera & Devendra, 2004; Fernando, 2007) have already confirmed: while teachers of English are aware of SLE and endorse its existence, there is a general reluctance to accept too many SLE features in the ELT classroom (Dissanayake, 2019; Hediwattege, 2018). Thus, in order to progress beyond such saturation and other limitations of large-scale quantitative studies and to gain new insights into the phenomenon of AWEs, a reevaluation of the conceptual assumptions and methodological approaches is perhaps necessary.

Based on a preliminary review of the literature, this overview identified some of the general trends and overall findings in recent AWEs research. The following sections of the paper engage critically with some of the key themes regarding the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of AWEs that emerged in the more inductive stage of analysis.

3.6 Multiple terms to describe 'attitudes'

Contemporary AWE researchers employ multiple nested, overlapping and interconnected terms such as *perceptions*, *views*, *opinions*, *responses*, *beliefs*, *awareness*, and *acceptance* in addition to the term *attitudes*. As Table 3 below demonstrates, some researchers also use them as highly interconnected, even synonymous terms such as *awareness and attitudes*, *perceptions and attitudes*, *attitudes and beliefs*, and *acceptance, perceptions and attitudes*:

Table 3: Multiple nested, overlapping, and interconnected terms for attitudes

Terms used	Studies
Perceptions	accLindemann (2017), Sadgehpour & Sharifian (2019), Sung (2014), Tsu & Chen (2014), Wetzel (2013)
Acceptance	Wang & Gao (2015)
awareness and attitudes	Ahn (2014)
attitudes and beliefs	Weekly (2018)
perceptions and preferences	Wong (2018)
acceptance, perceptions and attitudes	Si (2019)

Through the use of these multiple terms, a broadened view of the concept of attitudes emerged in the literature reviewed here. Perhaps the multiplicity of terms used by researchers is a result of the multidimensionality of the concept, acknowledging this in the study of AWEs. This reflects the complexity of the relationship between speakers and language varieties and, thus, the tendency to use the term 'attitudes' essentially as an umbrella term.

3.7 Little engagement with language attitudes as a theoretical concept

Connected to the finding above, many AWE researchers also seem to depend on an everyday meaning of the terms used to refer to attitudes, with little attempt to define them or to unpack them as theoretical

constructs (significant exceptions, however, include (Ahn, 2014; McKenzie, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2015). The specific terminology used to refer to attitudes appears to be a subjective choice made by individual researchers based on their own understanding of the terms and their own assumptions regarding their shared meaning. While this affords a certain level of freedom in meaning-making, the lack of in-depth engagement with the concept in many studies lends credence to the criticism that WEs research, in general, and AWEs research, in particular, generally lack theoretical rigour (Baird & Baird, 2018; Brown, 2016; Mahboob & Liyang, 2014; Soukup, 2012). Regrettably, despite the proliferation of studies, this has resulted in little contribution by AWE researchers to advance or reevaluate the theoretical concept of language attitudes.

3.8 A causal link assumed between attitudes, beliefs and behaviours

Experts in the study of language attitudes like Garret (2010) have pointed out that one of the key assumptions in the ABC model, the causal link between language attitudes, emotions, beliefs and behaviours, has not been satisfactorily established, and thus remains controversial (Garrett, 2010). However, the assumption that a greater awareness of a variety leads to a positive attitude or acceptance of the variety continues to undergird many of the recent AWEs studies conducted in pedagogical contexts (Ahn, 2015; Almagren, 2018; Chan, 2018; Hsu, 2019; Lee, 2019; Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2017 & 2019; Tsu & Chen, 2014; Wang, 2014). These studies often implicitly and explicitly emphasise the need to develop awareness among teachers and learners, particularly of low-prestige varieties of English, to address negative attitudes towards them, and also to temper the unquestioning demand for IC norms in the classroom.

3.9 An abiding preference for survey methods in AWE research

Some of the key themes identified in contemporary AWE research were methodological. Traditionally, the field of LA research has been dominated by large-scale surveys and a strong preference for quantitative methods (Ryan & Giles, 1982; Garrett, 2010; Garrett et al., 2003; McKenzie, 2010). Based on social psychological approaches that tend to view LAs as an internalised, stable and measurable construct (Garrett et al., 2003; Garrett, 2010; McKenzie, 2010), two survey tools in particular have evolved and become extremely popular in LA research: the Matched Guise Treatment (MGT) and the language attitudes questionnaire survey (Garrett, 2010). Despite their differences in their chosen attitudinal triggers elaborated below, both methods are based on participants choosing from a set of predetermined attitudinal stances.

The MGT, initially developed over 50 years ago by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960), became more or less synonymous with LA research (Garrett, 2010). Still widely used with minimal adaptations, it comprises several audio recordings of a speaker reading the same text with different accents, which participants then rate according to their immediate responses on semantic differential scales or Likert scales.

Thus, the prompts of the MGT comprise rating scales with oppositional traits such as friendliness, educatedness, competence, trustworthiness, and pleasantness. These traits correspond with dimensions of language attitudes such as power, competence, solidarity, and status (Garrett, 2010):

Status: sounds “intelligent”, “educated”, “competent”, “worthy of hiring” etc
Solidarity: sounds “friendly”, “trustworthy” etc
Social attractiveness: sounds “pleasant”, “charming”, etc. (Garrett, 2010)

The MGT's main adaptation, the Verbal Guise Treatment (VGT), employs multiple speakers instead of one speaker producing all the guises. The VGT evolved for practical and ethical reasons: the difficulty of identifying multidialectal speakers for all the guises and concerns of deception as the participants are made to believe that they are listening to multiple speakers (Garrett, 2010). Perhaps for this reason, recent AWE researchers have shown a marked preference for the VGT over the MGT: 13 AWE studies conducted between 2010 and 2019 employed the VGT in various forms of adaptation, while none used the MGT. These adaptations include modifications to the semantic scales in order to explore additional attitudinal dimensions such as *warmth* (Mckenzie et al., 2015), *similarity to self*, and *employability* (Goatley-Soan & Baldwin, 2018). Lindemann (2017) requested participants to spell out what they hear to analyse perceptions towards different English accents.

In contrast to the VGT, the language attitudes questionnaire survey consists of a series of written statements about a language or a language variety. This study found that LA survey instruments can vary significantly in terms of the number of statements and types of Likert scales – from six statements with five-point Likert scales ranging from *never* to *always* (Soruc, 2015), 12 statements with a six-point Likert scales (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011), to 17 statements with three response choices -- yes, no, unsure – in Edwards (2019).

The questionnaire format has lent itself to many areas of focus in AWEs research. They have been designed to elicit responses to individual WEs such as SLE, Indian English, British English, and American English (Bernaisch, 2012; Bernaisch & Koch, 2016), to statements about accents (Curren & Chern, 2017; Wang & Gao, 2015), to constructs like “native speakers”, e.g. “I think native speakers of English should be the role model for Taiwanese students (Curren & Chern, 2017, p. 141), and to specific grammatical and lexical features (Dissanayake, 2019; Fernando, 2007; Hediwattege, 2018; Wang & Gao, 2015; Wiebesiek et al, 2011).

The continuing popularity of both VGTs and LA surveys among AWEs researchers is possibly due to their ability to be administered to large groups of people, their adaptability, their tried and tested formats and methods of analysis. Indeed, surveys have been able to identify and make generalisations about attitudes and attitudinal trends among large populations. For example, Edwards (2019) explored the impact of a series of political events in Hong Kong on attitudes to Hong Kong English by conducting four surveys between 2014 and 2017.

Language attitudes surveys can also inform and assess national-level language policy and planning. Garrett and his associates have demonstrated this in their seminal work on language attitudes in Wales after the introduction of a bilingual Welsh-English education programme (Garrett, 2010). Thus, large-scale surveys have the potential to predict language learning needs and trends. For example, Bernaisch's 2012 survey, conducted soon after the launch of the English as a Life Skill project that promoted SLE as a pedagogical model in Sri Lanka, found that most participants held a positive attitude towards “British English”, confirming the findings of a much earlier study (Raheem & Gunsekera, 1994), and the anti-SLE views expressed in the public domains like newspapers at the time. Thus, despite the growing awareness and acceptance of SLE (Fernando, 2007; Mendis & Rambukwella, 2010), Bernaisch's 2012 survey findings showed the tenacity of the preference for the IC model, underscoring the need for language development programmes to address such attitudes if the policy to establish SLE as a more appropriate pedagogical model is to be effectively implemented.

The choice of surveys in AWE research, similar to LA research in general, suggests that many AWE studies aim to identify attitudinal trends among large speaker populations. This is facilitated by the positivist, quantitative approaches that inform these studies which allow researchers to view participants

as representative samples of nationally defined speech communities, and thereby make generalisations based on quantitative analyses of their responses.

While such widespread use attests to the efficiency and versatility of surveys, their shortcomings, which comprise the inherent limitations in the tools as well as weaknesses in implementation and reporting, have also been highlighted by both proponents and opponents of survey methods in AWEs research (Baird & Baird, 2018; Garrett, 2010; Rose & Galloway, 2019; Soukup, 2012). At the same time, gaining an in-depth understanding of the research instruments was difficult as most journal articles do not append questionnaires. Rose and Galloway (2019) identify this as a limitation in AWEs research that prevents researchers from assessing and improving on previously used questionnaires, perpetuating flaws in the LA and VGT surveys. In this literature review, despite some value in large-scale surveys as discussed above, significant limitations in this broad brush-strokes approach to AWEs were also identified. Two of these interconnected issues are discussed below.

3.10 Attitudes as group tendencies homogenise research participants

Primarily, large-scale studies of AWEs, due to the quantitative orientation of the method, view attitudes as group tendencies, considering participants as representative but anonymous members of large populations: “Sri Lankans” (Bernaisch, 2012; Künstler et al, 2009), “Indian English speakers” (Bernaisch, 2012; Bernaisch & Koch, 2016), “speakers of China English” (Xu, 2010), “students of English in Hong Kong” (Chan, 2018), “teachers of English in Sri Lanka” (Fernando, 2007; Hediwattege, 2018; Medawattegedera & Devendra, 2004). Researchers thus underplay the individual in attitudinal responses and instead view human participants as generalisable categories, ignoring their subjectivities even somewhat dehumanising them as “informants” (Bernaisch, 2012). While the homogenising of research participants has been questioned recently in WEs research (Edwards, 2019; Mahboob & Liang, 2014; Rose & Galloway, 2019), a critique of its effect on the field of AWEs is yet to be undertaken. However, AWEs research that engages in in-depth explorations of attitudes among participants that take into account their lived experiences, individual views and positions, will perhaps lead to new understandings of AWEs.

AWE researchers also tend to view the concept of language attitudes in terms of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ orientations. In many studies, AWEs are generally viewed in these binary terms, with the intervention and the statistical analyses of survey and MGT/VGT results designed to uncover the participants’ ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ attitudes towards various WEs. The possibility of participants’ attitudes being more complex, contradictory, unfixed, dynamic or ambiguous is generally not foregrounded in these studies.

3.11 WEs as consensual labels: shortcomings in country-based names

WEs researchers have traditionally employed country-based names to refer to diverse WEs such as SLE, Indian English, and China English. They are used as consensual labels, largely as a result of Kachru’s model that foregrounded the nation state’s name in the identification of varieties in all three Concentric Circles (1985, 1996). This naming tradition serves useful purposes, such as validating all Englishes, whether IC, OC or EC, significantly asserting the postcolonial identities of OC varieties like SLE. At the same time, researchers have questioned the oversimplifications inherent in the use of nation-based terms such as *Sri Lankan English*, *Singapore English*, and *China English* (Rose & Galloway, 2019; Leimgruber, 2013; Mahboob & Liang, 2014; Mendis & Rambukwella, 2010; Wang & Gao, 2015). For instance, Mendis and Rambukwella (2010) prefer the pluralised “Sri Lankan Englishes” as several varieties of English based on ethnoreligious, socioeducational, and regional differences exist in Sri Lanka. Rose and Galloway (2019) problematise the “hard boundaries” around varieties (p. 116) that restrict them within geopolitical boundaries. According to them, the practice of

according country-specific names is inadequate and outdated in a century that is marked by increased mobility. They thus advocate moving beyond such assumptions, and addressing the methodological limitations they engender in AWEs research.

Although their focus is not specifically on language attitudes, Mahboob and Liang (2014) probably present the harshest criticism of what they call “nation-based approaches to naming varieties of English” (p. 126). According to them, this practice has resulted in several conceptual and methodological weaknesses in WEs research. Their criticisms, based on research on China English, have been endorsed by several other researchers (Pefianco-Martin, 2014; Saraceni, 2014; Wang & Gao, 2015), suggesting that they apply to research across WEs.

Shortcomings caused by such “the country-based naming practices” (Mahboob & Liang, 2014, p 126) can indeed be observed in several AWEs studies reviewed in this paper. When researchers elicit participants’ opinions on specific WEs such as ‘SLE’, ‘Indian English’ (IE), ‘British English’ or ‘American English (AmE)’, they rarely unpack the generalisations inherent in these names, tending to use them as apolitical and consensual labels among their participants and in their own research.

For example, Bernaisch (2012) and Bernaisch and Koch (2016) unquestioningly employ the country-based terms “Sri Lankan English”, “Indian English”, “British English”, and “American English” as a prompt in their questionnaire, equating responses to these terms with attitudes to the variety. However, local researchers like Gunesequera (2005), Raheem and Gunesequera (1994), Sivapalan, Ramanan and Thiruvarangan (2010), and Thiruvarangan (2010) see the term “SLE” as carrying multiple, non-consensual, and conflicted meanings among Sri Lankans. To some Sri Lankans, “SLE” merely signals deviations and errors (Raheem & Gunesequera, 1994; Meyler, 2007) while for some others, its an assertion of their Sri Lankan identity (Fernando, 2007). For Thiruvarangan (2010), the term reflects the ethnolinguistic and socio-educational inequalities in local language politics, as descriptions of SLE present a largely Sinhala-based variety. Thus, according to local researchers, the term “SLE” is not only polysemous, meaning non-consensual and conflicted, but it is also potentially discriminatory.

While country-based names serve a descriptive purpose in WEs studies, unquestioningly employing terms such as SLE, IE and CE as consensual and apolitical labels is thus problematic. Therefore, AWEs studies will benefit from a more explicit engagement with the denotative and connotative meanings of such labels. As discussed above, a label like “Sri Lankan English” is semantically ambiguous, its meanings invariably tied to the sociopolitical, ethnolinguistic and socioeducational issues of the country. AWEs studies could benefit from an awareness and an acknowledgement of some of these complexities.

Conclusions: Research possibilities for future studies

This critical literature review was conducted to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the current research in AWEs in order to inform a proposed study of attitudes towards Sri Lankan English among English teachers. It combined elements of a systematic approach in its critical review where the researcher followed an articulated process of compiling, comparing and contrasting relevant studies to present an overview of current research. I then engaged in a more in-depth, inductive analysis of the studies. Based on critiques of tradition, authority, and objectivity as defined by Mingers (2000), I attempted to unpack powerful but potentially problematic assumptions about World Englishes, the concept of language attitudes in the context of World Englishes, and dominant methods of researching AWEs that are potentially limiting the study of AWEs.

Thus, the main takeaway from this literature review is that much of the research on AWEs, conceptually and methodologically, is overly dependent on positivist assumptions that now barely produce any new knowledge in the field. In order to advance the study of AWEs, particularly attitudes to SLE, I recommend that the field moves beyond the dominant quantitative, objectivist paradigm in survey methods that view attitudes as stable and measurable, and instead adopt qualitative, inductive approaches that value the subjectivity of individual participants through more in-depth explorations of attitudes as potentially unfixed, conflicted, and evolving in context. Future studies might gain from a greater focus on individuals, their worldviews and experiences within the specificities of their contexts. In sum, this paper proposes that rather than being generally confined to painting big pictures to produce grand narratives of AWEs through large-scale surveys, small-scale qualitative studies that present multiple, detailed pictures foregrounding individual participants might lead to more rigorous and more ethically derived understandings in the field of AWEs.

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