

A Bibliometric Analysis of the Research on Language Attitudes towards English accents

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ABSTRACT

A bibliometric analysis was undertaken to chart the development of publications on language attitudes towards English accents in SCOPUS-indexed journals. Publication data were collected from SCOPUS for 1974–2021, and by-hand pre-processing of the data was undertaken to identify reviews and original research articles. VOSviewer was used to create bibliometric networks from 468 articles. The United States published the most articles on language attitudes towards English accents (119, 25.4%), followed by the United Kingdom (54, 11.5%) Australia (35, 7.5%), and Hong Kong (24, 5.13%). In comparison, few have studied the attitudes of non-native English speakers towards English varieties and accents in the Asian region. Although China has the largest English-speaking population in the world, citation numbers for publications on attitude towards English accent in China is low. However, the visualisation of time map on countries/regions of publications identifies China, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Thailand, and Turkey as emerging regions where research on attitudes towards English accent is growing. Analysis of publication sources showed that Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, World Englishes and Asian Englishes were the most frequent publishers of articles on attitudes towards English accents. The mapping revealed that the top five authors publishing on attitudes towards English accent are from inner-circle countries, particularly, the United States and the United Kingdom. In terms of research area, the bibliometric analysis revealed a concomitant shift from interest in native speaker perceptions to non-native speaker perceptions of comprehensibility of different English varieties and self-identity consciousness of English language learners.

Keywords: bibliometric; language attitudes; English accents; SCOPUS

INTRODUCTION

The research on language attitudes has maintained momentum for decades because language attitudes penetrate our lives in a low-key, unconscious but tenacious way (Huang & Hashim, 2020). In sociolinguistic studies, language attitudes have been described as the perception and value judgments that people ascribe to language varieties (Hidalgo 1986) and the speakers of these varieties (Anderson & Almeida, 2007; Fasold, 1987; Galindo, 1995). Attitude towards languages is an important indicator for revealing language vitality and understanding current community thoughts, beliefs and preferences (Baker, 1992, p. 9). Language attitude is considered to affect speakers' language behaviour and the national decision-making to implement, maintain and promote particular language policies (Errihani, 2008). Gardner (1985) believes that attitudes influence the success of another language acquisition.

Research in this field emerged in the 1940s and 1950s and became popular in the 1960s. Since then, the body of work has become extremely rich because approximately 700 publications with the term “language attitude(s)” in titles and/or abstracts have been included in the LLBA database (Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts–ProQuest) in the past 20 years (Soukup, 2012). The study of language attitude is favoured by scholars for the following

reasons. First, language attitude is considered to reflect the attitude towards the group speaking the language. Second, language attitude is considered to affect second language learning. Third, language attitude is considered to reflect the rise and fall of language (Fasold, 1987, p. 148).

However, surprisingly, although the study of language attitude has a history of more than half a century, to date, to our knowledge, there has not been any bibliometric study on it being conducted. Consequently, little is known about the trends in publications on language attitudes such as areas of language attitudes that have been extensively and less researched as well as evolution in lines of inquiry over the years. Bibliometric analysis is a useful way to assess the history, current and future publications of a certain field. Bibliometric analysis can also evaluate publications from a certain country, institution and author by the number of papers, influencing factors and h-index citation frequency. Bibliometrics can provide information to help researchers write guidelines and make decisions. Bibliometric analysis is conducted using VOSviewer, a Java program made by Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands. VOSviewer is a software tool for creating maps based on bibliographic data. VOSviewer is used for analysing and visualising co-references and co-occurrences of keywords (Huang et al., 2020).

This paper focuses on research on attitudes towards English accents because of the role of English as an international language. With the continuous growth of connectivity and globalisation around the world, English has become the fastest-growing language in the modern world and occupies a dominant position as the global language (Rao, 2019). Therefore, in the field of language attitude research, the study of English attitude is the most extensive. The spread of English in non-native countries has experienced a process of localisation, resulting in the emergence of different English varieties (Kachru, 1988). One obvious manifestation of these varieties is the “local” accent that is ascribed to these varieties of English (Kaur, 2014). For instance, people from China and Malaysia speak English with a distinctive accent, which makes them identifiable as citizens of these countries. Accent usually refers to phonetic and intonation features, which convey unique geographical and social influences (Huang & Hashim, 2020). One distinctive intonation feature of Malaysian English is the stress-timed intonation which gives a staccato effect, compared with the syllable-timed intonation of the English spoken by native speakers. The study of attitudes towards accent not only helps to understand person perception but also helps to understand language-based stereotypes and social evaluation (Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013). Studies have shown that English native-speaker accents are more appreciated than non-native speaker accents, and native-speaker norms are always conformed to in the teaching of English as a second language or English as a foreign language (Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020; Tan & Tan, 2008; Yang & Liu, 2016). Furthermore, researchers have also found that Received Pronunciation (RP) is the most prestigious variety (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). English speakers who can speak with an RP accent are often considered more attractive and of a higher status by subjects (El-Dash & Busnardo, 2001; Evans, 2010; Hiraga, 2005). With the emergence of different English varieties (Kachru, 1988) and the growing population of non-native speakers, it is important to examine whether researchers have investigated attitudes towards English accents and, if they have, what areas of research are more extensive and what the research gaps are for further investigation.

The purpose of the bibliometric analysis is to map out trends in publications on attitudes towards English accents from 1974 to 2021.

DATA SOURCE AND SEARCH METHOD

Publication data were collected from SCOPUS, “the largest single abstract and indexing database ever built” (Burnham, 2006). SCOPUS is an abstract and citation database with over 25,100 titles from more than 5,000 international publishers, which delivers the most

comprehensive overview of the world’s research output in the fields of science, technology, medicine, social science, and arts and humanities. In this study, the SCOPUS database was used to search for literature on attitudes towards English. The keywords used for the search used were (English AND attitudes) AND (accent). The subject category was set as “Social Sciences” and “Arts and Humanities” and “Psychology”, and document type was limited to “article”. All languages were selected. The year range was set as 1974–2021. The data collection was conducted in May 2021.

Altogether, 469 document results were extracted and imported to Microsoft Excel 2016 and VOSviewer. After rough browsing, an article which is not closely related to the retrieval content was deleted, and the remaining 468 articles were analysed. This process was performed by two authors independently, and the differences were discussed until consensus was reached. The recorded information included Citation information, Bibliographical information, Abstract & keywords and Funding details.

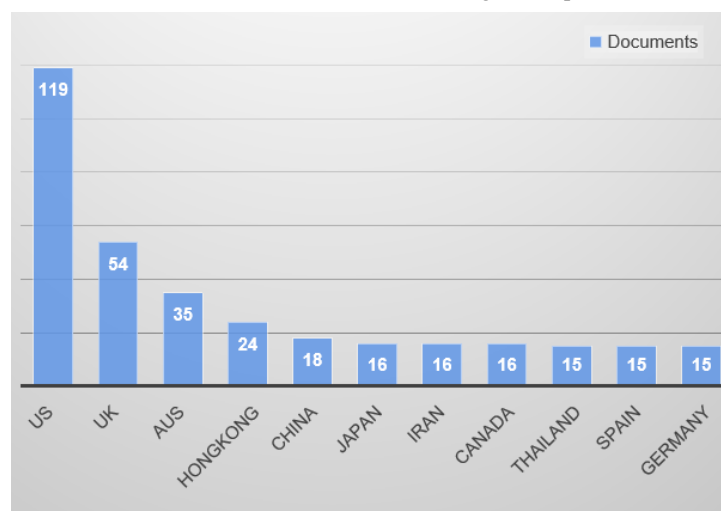
RESULTS

OVERVIEW OF PUBLICATIONS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH ACCENTS

COUNTRIES/REGIONS OF PUBLICATIONS

The bibliometric analysis identified 468 publications on language attitudes towards English accents from nine clusters involving 67 countries. A minimum of five publications was set as the threshold. Out of the 67 countries, 25 countries met the threshold. The United States published the most articles (119, 25.4%), followed by the United Kingdom (54, 11.5%). Australia published 35 articles and accounted for 7.5% of the publications (Figure 1). Hong Kong ranked fourth with 24 articles.

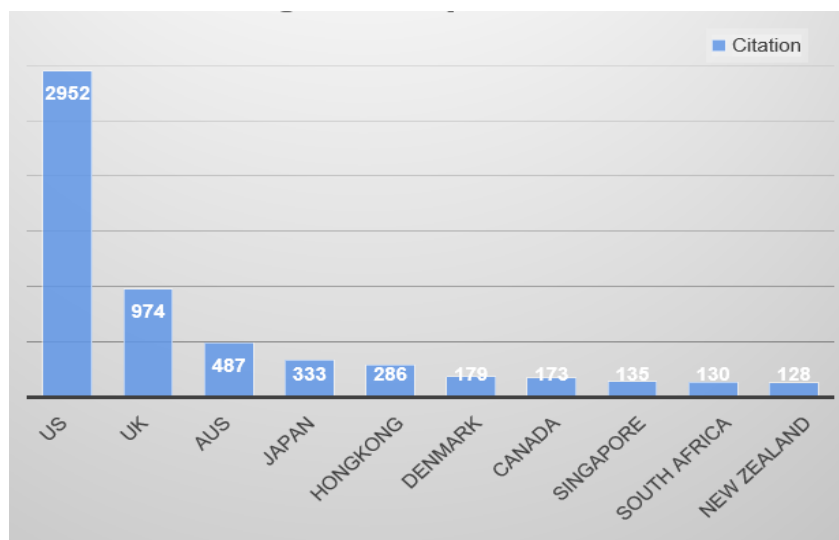
FIGURE 1. Document numbers of countries/regions of publications



As for citations, the rank ordering of the countries is similar to the number of publications on attitudes towards English accents (Figure 2). Publications from the United States were cited 2,952 times, and ranked first, followed by United Kingdom (974 times) and Australia (487 times). Japan has published 16 articles with 333 citations, ranking fourth in the number of citations, surpassing Hong Kong, which has the fifth largest number of publications. However, China has the largest English-speaking population in the world (He & Zhang, 2010), but

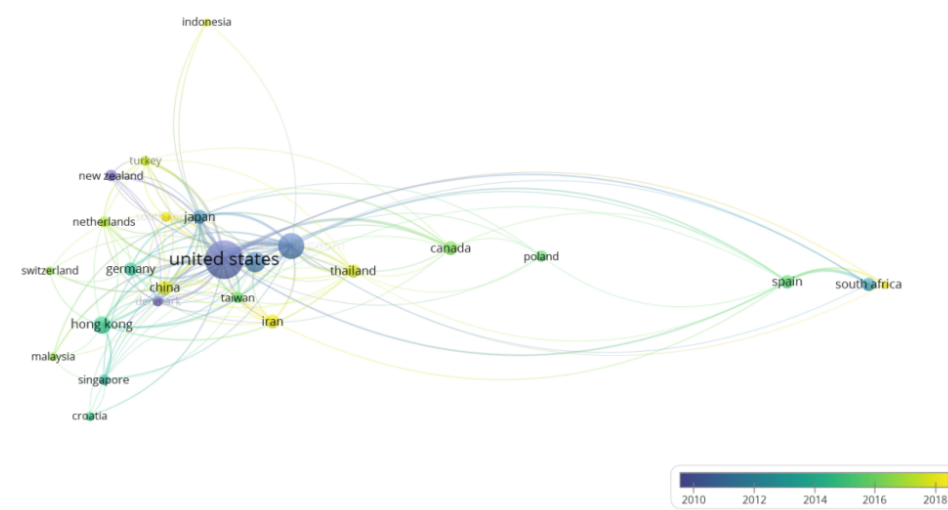
citation numbers for publications on attitude towards English accent in China remain very low.

FIGURE 2. Citation numbers of countries/regions of publications



Next, the time sequence of countries or regions interested in attitude towards English accent is shown in Figure 3. The time map visualisation on countries/regions of publications shows that the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Japan have published large numbers in this field in 2010, but interest in this research area seems to be waning. Kachru (1992) considers the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia as the inner circle, where English is used as the primary language and the mother tongue (p. 356). Recently, interest in attitudes towards English accent grew in the outer and expanding circles. The visualisation of time map on countries/regions of publications identifies China, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Thailand, and Turkey as emerging regions where research on attitudes towards English accent is growing.

FIGURE 3. Visualisation of time map on countries/regions of publications

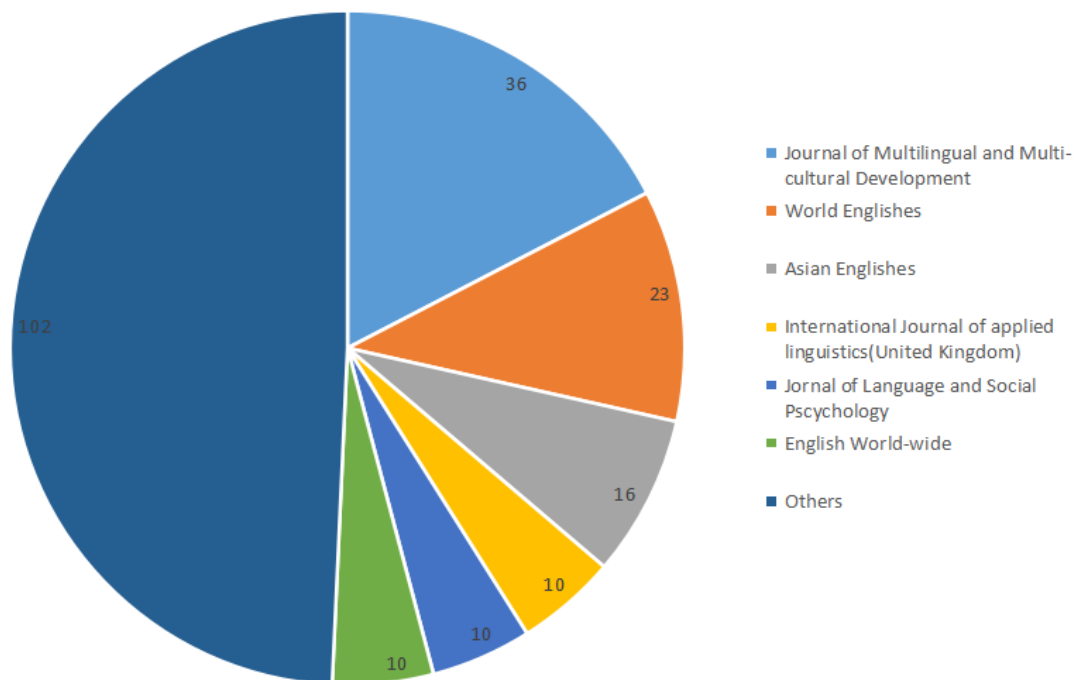


SOURCES OF PUBLICATIONS

The analysis showed 207 sources of publications. Of these, 22 journals were found to have published at least five articles related to attitudes towards English accents. Figure 4 shows the

top five journals, which published 105 articles or 50.72% of articles on attitudes towards English accents. Among the journals, the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (36 publications or 17.39%) published the most articles on attitudes towards English accents, followed by *World Englishes* (23 publications or 11.11%) and *Asian Englishes* (16 publications or 7.73%).

FIGURE 4. Source quantity of publications on attitudes towards English accent



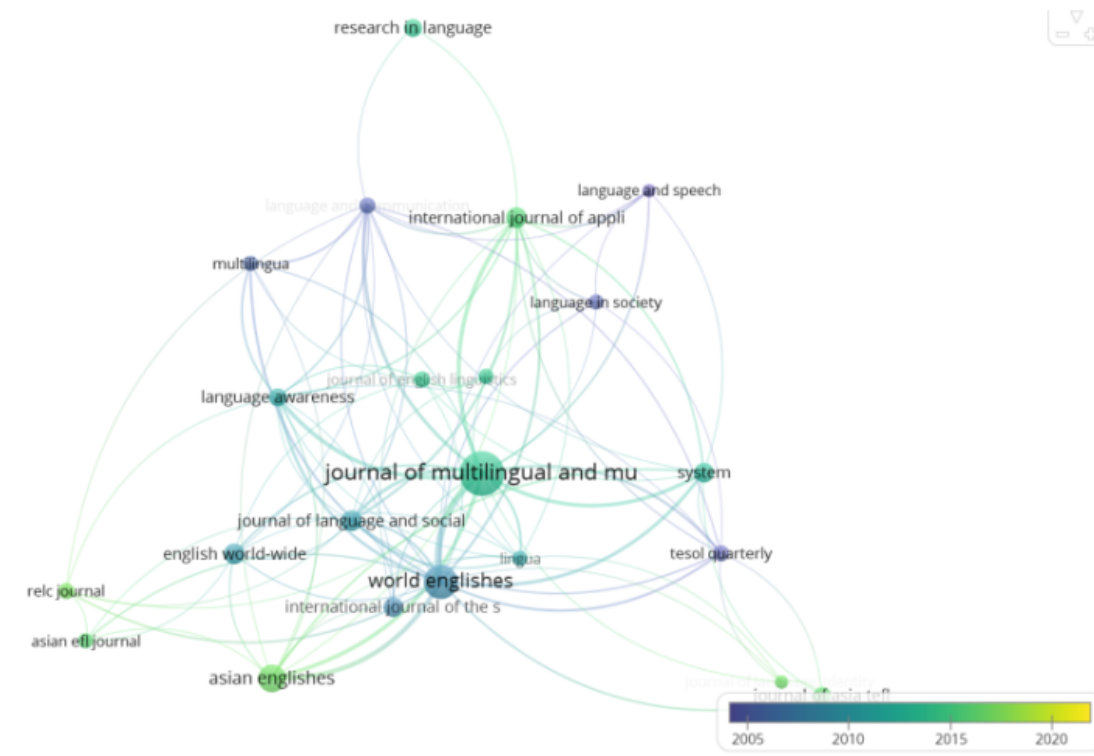
The top three productive journals published more than one in three articles (Figure 4). This result is to be expected because of the scope of the journals. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* focuses on sociology and social psychology of language, and language and cultural policy. *World Englishes* is a journal focusing on theoretical and applied studies of language, literature and English teaching, with an emphasis on cross-cultural identities and perspectives. *Asian Englishes* focuses on the various issues involved in the spread and diversification of English in the Asia Pacific region. It aims to promote a better understanding of the nature of English and its role in Asia and internationally. *English World-Wide* ranks six in the search on the source quantity of publications on attitudes towards English accent.

Figure 5 shows the time map visualisation on citation sources of publications on attitudes towards English accents. This was obtained by setting “the analysis type” to be “Citation” and “counting method to be “Sources”. The closer the colour is to blue, the earlier the publication, starting approximately in 2005. The prominent journals that published on attitudes towards English accents were *Multilingua*, *TESOL Quarterly*, *Language and Communication*, *English World-Wide*, and the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. However, the journal that published the most articles on language attitudes towards English accents was *World Englishes*, as shown by the large blue circle.

In the visualisation of time map of publications on language attitudes towards English accents, the closer the colour is to yellow, the closer the time is to the present. Figure 5 does not show any yellow circles. On the basis of the green circles, the main journals which

published articles related to this topic in 2015 are *Asian Englishes*, *Asian EFL Journal*, *Regional English Language Centre (RELC) Journal*, *Journal of Asia TEFL* and *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*. Although these journals do not publish as many papers on attitudes towards English accents, compared to *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* and *World Englishes*, they are emerging as new sources of publication in this research area.

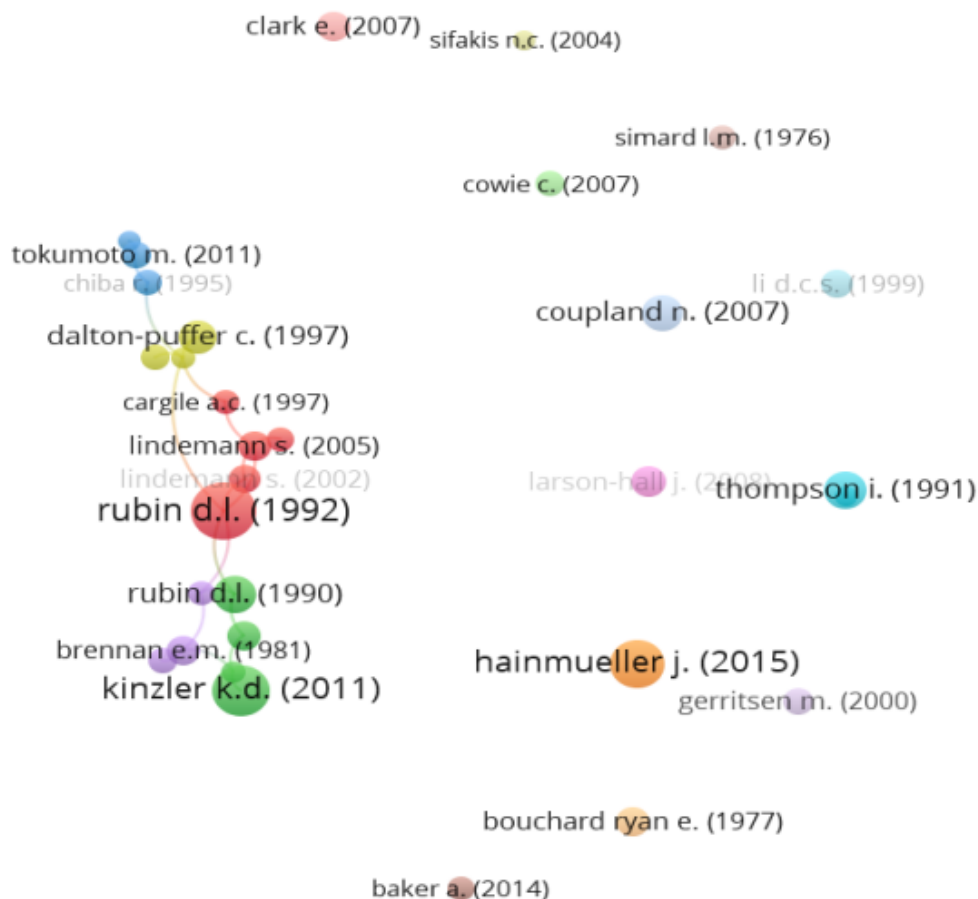
FIGURE 5. Visualisation of time map on citation sources of publications on attitudes towards English accent



CITATION OF PUBLICATIONS

Figure 6 shows the mapping on the ranking of authors of publications on attitudes towards English accent. The relevant search terms appear in their titles, abstracts, or keywords. The mapping identifies researchers who are highly cited and have substantially affected research in the area. Among all the 468 retrieved articles, 31 journals were cited more than 50 times. Rubin (1992) was cited 270 times, ranking first, followed by Kinzler (2011), who was cited 222 times, and Hainmueller (2015), who ranked third, was cited 199 times. Rubin (1992) studied the non-verbal factors influencing the judgment towards non-native English teaching assistants. Kinzler (2011) demonstrated preschool-aged children’s selective learning of non-linguistic information from native-accented rather than foreign-accented speakers. Hainmueller (2015) studied the attitude of Americans towards domestic immigrants. The findings of these researchers have influenced the subsequent research of other researchers in the field, and they can be considered leaders in charting the trajectory of research on attitudes towards English accents.

FIGURE 6. Mapping on ranking of authors of publications on attitudes towards English accent



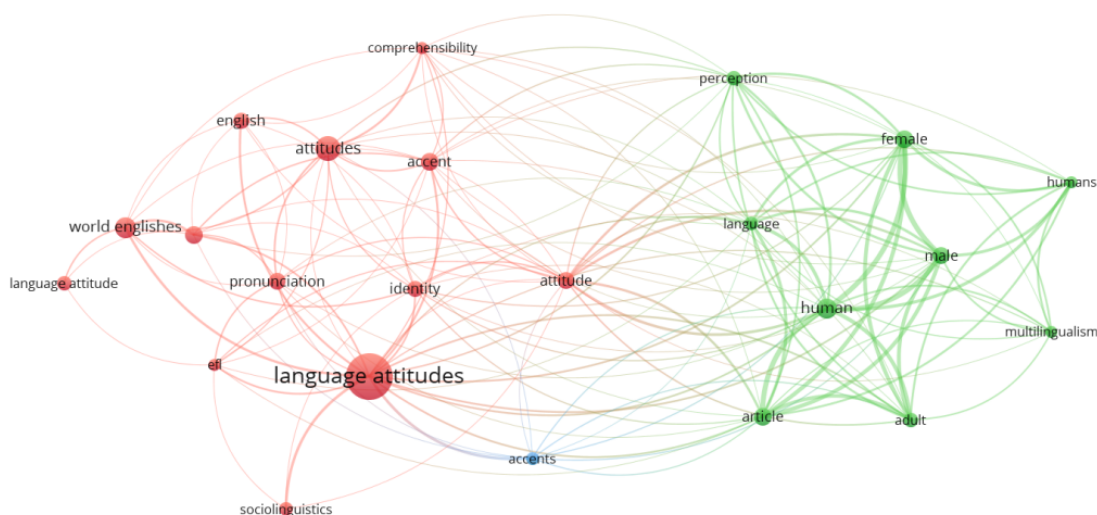
Next, the results on the ranking of authors based on the number of citations are described for authors with the rank of 50 to 100. Although not as highly cited, Coupland (2007) and Cargile (1997) were also identified in the mapping on citation documents, and their findings have been cited by researchers interested in the socio-psychological aspects of language attitudes pertaining to accommodation in communication and indirect measures of language attitudes, respectively. For example, Coupland and Bishop (2007) reported quantitative results from a large online survey of 5,010 U.K. informants' reactions to 34 different accents of English. Cargile (1997) elicited the response of Anglo- and Asian Americans to a Chinese-accented male speaker by the matched-guise technique. Lindemann (2005) explored US undergraduates' perceptions of non-native English. Brennan and Brennan (1981) investigated native speakers' evaluation of Mexican American speakers' English accents. These four researchers (groups of researchers) focused on attitudes towards English accents in the inner-circle countries, namely, the United States and the United Kingdom.

By contrast, some other researchers focused on European speakers' English accents. Thompson (1991) studied native speakers' evaluation of Russian accented English speakers. Dalton-Puffer (1997) tested attitudes to native and non-native varieties of English in Austria. Ryan et al. (1977) investigated college students' attitudes towards different degrees of accents of Spanish English bilinguals. Most of the representative studies in this field have studied the attitude of native English speakers towards non-native English accents among Caucasians and these key publications were before 2010. In comparison, few have studied the attitudes of non-native English speakers towards English varieties and accents in the Asian region.

OVERVIEW OF KEYWORDS RELATED TO ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH ACCENT IN PUBLICATIONS

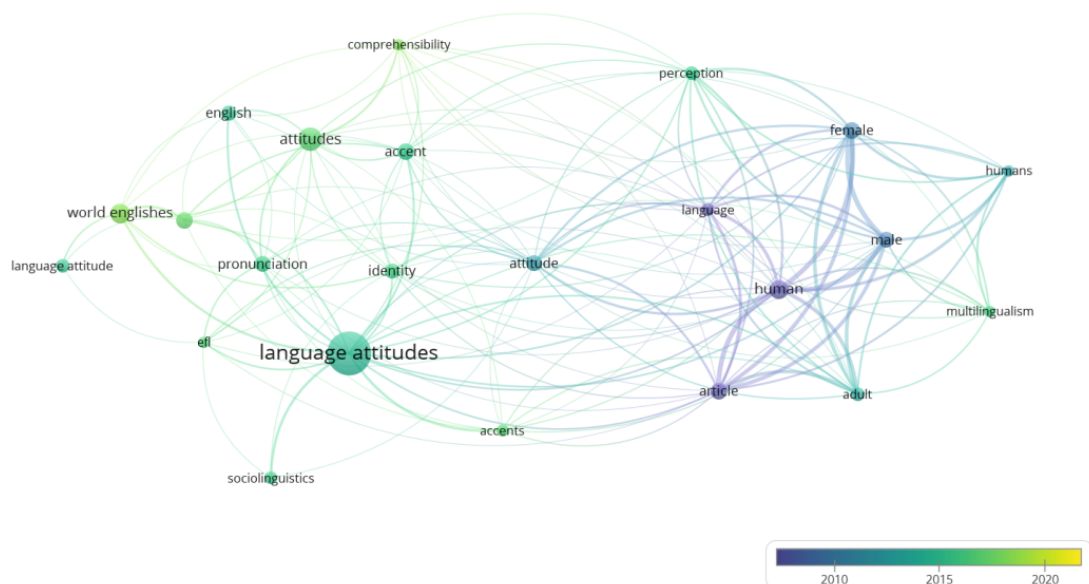
Keywords related to attitudes toward English were analysed by VOSviewer and shown in Figure 7. The threshold set was that these keywords must appear at least 10 times out of 1,299 keywords. A total of 23 keywords met the condition. The size of a point represents the frequency of the keywords. The most frequent keyword was language attitude, which appeared 102 times. This result is to be expected because “language attitudes” was one of the search terms. Lines between two points show the co-occurrence of both keywords.

FIGURE 7. Mapping on co-occurrence of keywords related to attitudes toward English accent.



“Language attitudes” was found to co-occur with “world Englishes”, “pronunciation”, “accent”, “comprehensibility”, and “sociolinguistics” (shown by red lines linking them). This shows that the study of language attitude is often regarded as a part of sociolinguistics, and the world Englishes model is often regarded as the theoretical basis of this study. Researchers usually study attitudes towards different English accents and pronunciation to judge raters’ identity and comprehensibility of different English accents. In addition, “language attitudes” also co-occur with “identity”, “gender” and “multilingualism” (shown by green lines). Gender, age and multilingualism of speakers are important research variables, but Figure 8 reveals that research attention on these demographic variables has waned (denoted by blue circles) since 2010. The possible reason for this decrease is the consistency of findings such as the more positive attitudes of women and younger speakers towards standard varieties.

FIGURE 8. Visualisation of time map on co-occurrence of keywords related to attitudes toward English accent



The colours in Figure 8 show that the research interest in this field has been on the decline for demographic influences on language attitudes in the past 10 years, as shown by the few small blue circles (language, female, male, human, article). However, research on world Englishes, attitudes and comprehensibility (denoted by yellowish green circles) is increasing after 2015. When we compare this result with Figure 5 (visualisation of time map on citation sources of publications), it can be surmised that the recent publications appear in *RELC Journal*, *Journal of Asian EFL* and *Asian Englishes*. *RELC Journal* is based in Singapore. Interest in attitudes towards English accents in the Asian region is clearly growing, particularly on the comprehensibility of English varieties of learners of English as a foreign language and their self-identity consciousness.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The bibliometric analysis of publications on language attitudes towards English in SCOPUS shows an evolution in the epicentre of research in this area. The highest number of publications and citations on attitudes towards English accents are from the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. Therefore, unsurprisingly, Brennan and Brennan (1981), Cargile (1997), Coupland and Bishop (2007), Dalton-Puffer (1997), Lindemann (2005) and Ryan et al. (1977) are the leading researchers in the field.

The bibliometric analysis on language attitudes toward English accents has shown that the main countries studying this field have shifted from the inner circle to the outer and expanding circles. Publications on attitudes towards English accents from researchers in Asian countries are making an impact in the field because Hong Kong ranks fourth in number of publications and Japan ranked fourth in number of citations. The time map visualisation reveals that researchers in China, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Thailand and Turkey are increasing their publications on attitudes towards English accent in the last ten years, reflective of the growing importance of English as an international language of communication for countries in the outer circle and expanding circle. According to Kachru (1990), Malaysia and Singapore belong to the outer circle, while China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Taiwan belong to the expanding circle. The publication country/region visualisation shows that these countries are conducting research on English accent and attitudes, but other countries which belong to the outer circle (such as the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Kenya) and some

countries which belong to the expanding circle (such as Russia, Egypt and Israel) are not in the visualisation map. However, the mapping on the ranking of authors of publications on attitudes towards English accent does not feature researchers from Hong Kong and Japan, indicating that they do not have a strong impact in the field. The leading researchers with high citation numbers and impact are still mostly from the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

The bibliometric analysis revealed the sites of the leading publications on language attitudes towards English accents. The top three productive journals on this topic are *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *World Englishes* and *Asian Englishes*, indicating that more studies on this topic will be published in these journals. Authors interested in attitudes towards English should pay more attention to these journals. Having said that, *Asian Englishes*, *Asian EFL Journal*, *RELC Journal*, *Journal of Asia TEFL* and *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* are emerging sites for publications, particularly with the interest in English accents shifting from the inner circle to the outer circle and expanding circle in the Asian region. A concomitant shift from interest in native speaker perceptions to non-native speaker perceptions of comprehensibility of different English varieties and self-identity consciousness of English language learners is also occurring.

This study has uncovered valuable information which can predict the trend of research on attitudes towards English accent in the future based on analysis of the most representative countries or regions in this field, the most representative published journals, the large amount of cited literature, the popular research issues and the research development trends in recent years. However, although this study is relatively objective and comprehensive, some limitations remain. Articles published in journals which are not included in the SCOPUS database were not analysed in this study. The bibliometric analysis was conducted in May 2021, and with time, different conclusions may be reached. Future research in the form of longitudinal studies can be conducted on the trends of publications on language attitudes towards accent to find out if the journals and researchers on the periphery emerge in prominence in the future.

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