Balogh Erzsébet

Hungarian Students' Language Attitudes towards Regional American English Accent Varieties[1]

1. Introduction

By the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century interaction among people has become more and more complex. Indeed, in today's world we interact and communicate with a great number of people day by day, in general personally but in some cases also via other means of communications, most often through the media, the Internet or mobile phones. As these people all have different personalities, in order to form a picture of them we often grasp back to our (pre)conceptions that we have developed on the basis of our interactions with people we know well. Besides, we tend to simplify these conceptions; therefore, most often what we develop of other people is a generally common stereotype rather than an accurate picture (Wells 1982a, 28).

In personal, face to face interactions, not only physical appearance but also speech plays a major role in our perception of others. Nevertheless, when we are not able to see the speakers themselves, the only means that may help us to form a picture of them is the way they sound; therefore, the language or dialect other people speak affects to a great extent how we judge them. Indeed, in most cases it is other people's accents that lead us to create a stereotypical picture of the speaker. On the basis of their accents, first we attempt to identify where the speakers come from or where they live at present; second, with the help of stereotypes we place them into different categories where we immediately attribute to them characteristics that we associate with the categories in question. This way, even if we cannot see the speakers, for example, when we are talking on the telephone, their speech serves as a ground for forming an attitude towards them, that is, solely on the basis of what we hear, we feel that we can safely judge the others' beauty or handsomeness, or their intelligence or honesty (Wells 1982a, 29).

The question might arise whether the above described process works this way regardless of what accent we hear. In the last few decades, language attitude research has proved that we are able to form our attitudes on the basis of other people's accent when it is part of our native language. An example for this is provided by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998, 34), who claim that American people form attitudes towards other Americans on the basis of their accent. In other words:

> When listeners hear a Southern accent, they identify the speaker as being from a Southern dialect region and they may automatically assign (perhaps unconsciously) a set of character traits to the speaker. These traits may range from such positive qualities as warmth and hospitality to such negative attitudes as poverty and lack of intelligence.

However, it is very well possible that when non-native (non-American and non-English speaker) listeners hear the same Southern accent, they do not attribute any characteristics to the speakers. Unfortunately, the amount of research about non-native speakers' language attitudes towards

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their second or foreign language accents and speakers has been quite limited so far. A few studies in this field have found that listeners who do not speak or know a language cannot identify and judge its speakers (Simpson 2001, 297). Yet, as, for example, Alford and Strother (1990, 492) claim in their article about native and non-native speakers' attitudes towards selected regional accents of American English, non-native speakers of English also have „strong opinions of U.S. accents".

All in all, when our native language and its accent varieties are concerned, in general we base our judgments about other people on concepts we inherited and share with our community. Therefore, if we hear somebody speaking with an accent that is a variety in our native language, most probably we will be able to identify the accent as well as assign certain character traits to its speaker. However, we do not know whether the same happens when we hear accent varieties that do not belong to our native but to a second or foreign language. This phenomenon is interesting especially for two reasons. First, since in a controlled language learning process language learners face situations where a great emphasis is placed on paying attention to accents. That is, learners' pronunciation is continuously corrected, and, at the same time, they are requested to produce native-like pronunciation and avoid speaking with a foreign accent. Apart from that, the majority of the teaching materials teachers utilize, for example, in listening comprehension exercises, are based on standard-accented speech. These two issues might lead to non-native speakers developing stereotypical attitudes towards native speakers of their second or foreign language who do not speak with the accent non-native speakers are accustomed to (Preston 1989, 88–94).

In this paper, after a theoretical overview of language attitude and language attitude studies, I attempt to investigate whether non-native speakers are able to develop similar attitudes towards speakers of accent varieties of their foreign language as its native speakers do. In particular, using a questionnaire, I examine whether there is a difference between how non-native speakers of English, specifically, Hungarian students who have been learning English as a foreign language in Hungary, and native speakers, that is, American students whose native language is English, differentiate between and evaluate two American English regional accent varieties. Furthermore, my aim is to investigate and contrast the attitudes native and non-native speakers of English have towards speakers of two regional American English accent varieties, that is, towards Southern and General American English accents. I believe that since in foreign language teaching it is not common to use teaching materials with various accents in the classroom in listening comprehension practice, and foreign language learners are often corrected whenever their pronunciation is not similar to standard pronunciation, they develop stereotypical attitudes towards different English accent varieties and their speakers. These attitudes might be similar to native speakers' attitudes even though the reasons behind them may certainly be very diverse.

2. Literature review

2.1. Language attitudes

Attitude is an interdisciplinary term that is widely used not only in sociology and social psychology, but it has also become a term in linguistics, in particular in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics (Borbély 1995/1996, 311). In sociology and social psychology, attitude is defined in general as one's action or reaction in a certain manner, often as a positive or negative evaluation, to anything which is capable of being the object of an attitude, for example, a human being, a group, an institution or any abstract notion (Oppenheim 1973, 106; Bainbridge 2001, 82). In fact, this action or reaction is composed of three elements, i.e. feelings towards the objects of the

attitudes, beliefs connected to them, and the behavior that accompanies the (re)action given to the attitude-objects. Thus, when attitudes are investigated, it is essential to be able to separate these action/reaction-components from the attitudes themselves, that is, to be aware that, for example, feelings are solely the parts and not the equivalents of attitudes (Edwards 1982, 20).

Within the realm of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, the object of attitudes to which the general public may (re)act in a positive or negative way is language; therefore, in psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic studies the term language attitude is applied. Language attitude has been defined in various ways by sociolinguistic researchers but most of them agree that the definition of language attitude has two dimensions. On the one hand, it refers to people's attitudes towards a certain language itself (Fasold 1984, 147). However, these attitudes towards languages should not be confused with the beliefs that are connected to the languages in question. For example, people might believe that one language or another is beneficial for their career; yet, at the same time, they may detest this language (Edwards 1982, 20). On the other hand, language attitudes show not only people's attitudes towards one or another language, but they also reveal what attitudes people have towards the speakers of that particular language (Fasold 1984, 147). Since, beyond other factors that enable us to judge other people's character traits, it is unquestionably language that plays the most important role in such evaluations (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 35).

In the next sections of this paper, these two dimensions of the definition of language attitudes will be elaborated on in detail to have an even more precise picture of the nature of language attitudes.

2.2. Language attitude studies

According to the definition, literally, language attitudes refer primarily to people's attitudes towards certain languages (Fasold 1984, 147). Nevertheless, language attitude studies do not only involve different languages as the object of their investigation, but also different dialects and accents. In fact, originally, in the 1950s, language attitude studies were developed to study attitudes to different languages. These were mainly bilingual studies where researchers wanted to examine to what degree attitudes towards two different languages differ in the case of native versus non-native speakers. However, after early studies of attitudes to different languages, monolingual studies rapidly spread, and interest in attitudes towards different dialects and accents emerged among researchers (Preston 1989, 11).

The results of these studies have shown that, on the one hand, most of the time respondents clearly differentiate, beside languages, between particular dialects and accents as well; on the other hand, they have stereotyped attitudes towards most of these languages, dialects or accents (Preston 1989, 51). According to Honey (1997, 99), solely the fact that people realize the differences between, for instance, certain dialects, carries in itself the potential for positive or negative evaluations. Even though people are generally not aware of making such evaluations, they are fairly widespread among the general public. What is more, since often only simplified general characteristics of certain speech forms are taken into consideration by the evaluation, they are, in fact, inaccurate. In the linguistic literature, these socially shared evaluations which describe certain languages (dialects or accents) in an oversimplified manner are called linguistic stereotypes[2] (De Klerk and Bosch 1995, 18).

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[2]   These linguistic stereotypes are not equivalents of the linguistic stereotypes that are connected to Labov's name (Labov 1994:77–78).

In this part of the paper, beyond investigating each of the attitude objects of language attitude studies in detail, a brief overview will be given of the nature of linguistic stereotypes that are attached to the particular languages, dialects and accents in question.

2.2.1. Language

Several language attitude studies examine attitudes towards whole languages. In the case of these studies, the actual objects of attitude are different languages that are considered as single entities (Chambers and Trudgill 1998, 5), such as, for example, French, Italian or English. In these studies, subjects are asked if they consider certain languages "beautiful", "ugly", "sweet sounding" or "harsh" (Fasold 1984, 148).

The first language attitude study of this kind was carried out by Lambert in the late 1950s (Lambert et al. 1960, cited in Preston 1989, 50). In this study, the researchers wanted to examine to what degree native speaker French Canadians' and native speaker English Canadians' attitudes differ towards two different languages, towards Canadian French and English. The results of this study showed that both French and English Canadians had stereotyped attitudes towards these languages since they gave higher ratings to English than to French in many categories.

Subsequent language attitude studies of the same nature have provided evidence that stereotypes exist not only towards French and English but towards other languages as well. In fact, the public view that some languages are clearer and/or easier and/or more aesthetically pleasing than others is held commonly worldwide (Lodge 1998, 28; Andersson 1998, 50). For example, many people think that Italian is a "musical" language (Lodge 1998, 29), or that it is "elegant" and "sophisticated" (Giles and Niedzielski 1998, 85), or that it is "beautiful", whereas other languages are "ugly" or "harsh" (Honey 1997, 99).

2.2.2. Dialect

Besides investigating different languages, attitude studies might also be monolingual and focus on dialects, that is, on different varieties of a particular language that diverge from each other in morphological, syntactic, and/or lexical structures (Lippi-Green 1997, 43). Although several language attitude studies have examined attitudes towards dialects of particular languages, such as, for example, Dutch (van Bezooijen 2002), Turkish (Demirci 2002), and, in many cases, Hungarian (Kontra 1997; Fodor and Huszár 1998; Veress 2000; and Sándor 2001); the vast majority of monolingual research has been conducted in the United Kingdom and in the United States towards varieties of English (Cheshire 1991, 26).

As a matter of fact, in the United States a great amount of attitudinal dialect research has been carried out to measure attitudes towards regional dialects, that is, dialects that can be associated with the speech characteristics of a geographical area (Wolfram and Fasold 1998, 95; Mesthrie et al. 2000, 45). Among others, Preston in his Hawaii study reports on attitudes towards regional dialects (1993, 344–347). In this study, residents of different US states were asked first to draw the dialect map of the United States, and then rank these dialect regions. The results showed that respondents, even though they did not have the same opinion of the physical boundaries of the regional dialects, distinguished between the speech areas and assigned positive and negative labels to them. Whereas midwestern and inland northern dialects were evaluated with such stereotypical labels as "standard", "normal" but, at the same time, "snobby" and "very distinguished", southern dialects were labeled as "nonstandard", "incorrect" but "friendly" and "down-home".

Other than regional dialects, attitudinal dialect research has also examined attitudes towards social dialects, that is, dialects that can be associated with a group of people defined by their social, occupational or ethnic background (Wolfram and Fasold 1998, 95; Mesthrie et al. 2000, 45). Such social dialectal experiments in the United States often focus, for example, on African

American Vernacular English (AAVE). In one such study (Trudgill 1994, 39–40) respondents were asked to listen to two different sets of speakers, and decide which set of speakers was White and which one was Black. In most cases, the identification of the speakers was correct, which shows that Americans can assign speakers to one of the two ethnic groups on the basis of their speech. In subsequent studies, participants were not asked to identify but rather to evaluate the speakers of AAVE (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 12). The results of these studies showed that some features of AAVE are socially stigmatized by mainstream American culture.

All in all, as the results of the above mentioned studies show, American people are able to distinguish between most American English dialects. Furthermore, similarly to languages, stereotypical values such as "nonstandard" or "familiar" are assigned to American English dialects (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 7).

2.2.3. Accent

Generally, dialects are associated with a regionally or socially defined group of people (Wolfram et al. 1999, 1–3). In fact, this phenomenon can be observed in connection with accents as well; namely, accent features are also distributed over geographic, socioeconomic or ethnic space (Lippi-Green 1997, 42; Finegan 2004, 26–27). However, literature on language attitude studies clearly differentiates between the terms dialect and accent. According to the simplest explanation of this distinction, the difference lies in the concept that dialects may involve all subsystems of language, while accents involve only pronunciation (Wells 1982a, 1). In other words, whereas the term dialect, in general, is utilized to refer to varieties which are grammatically, lexically and phonologically different from other varieties, the term accent, in particular, refers to how people pronounce a variety which is phonetically and/or phonologically different from other varieties (Chambers and Trudgill 1998, 5).

In linguistic research, accent is generally used as a complex term comprising segmental features, that is, speech sounds and their combinatorial possibilities (Simpson 2001, 293), and prosodic elements, that is, patterns of intonation, pitch contours, stress and tempo of speaking (Lippi-Green 1997, 42). Yet, attitudinal studies, where attitudes towards different accent varieties are investigated, apply the term accent as a synonym of a pattern of pronunciation (Wells 1982a, 1).

Since research started in this field, the actual objects of most accent evaluation studies have been accent varieties of English, particularly of American English. In fact, an immense amount of English accent variation exists (Cheshire 1991, 7), of which the majority is regional, that is, associated with special geographical areas. For example, in the case of the United States or Australia or Canada, we can identify American, Australian and Canadian accents of English, respectively. Constituting the largest accent region of the world, American English accents have always provided the widest ground for investigation in accent evaluation research (Simpson 2001, 294).

Among others, Wells (1982b, 470), Simpson (2001, 294) and Finegan (2004, 26–27) claim that within American English further distinctions can be made. According to Finegan (2004, 26–27), American English accents can be divided into ethnic, socioeconomic and regional varieties where ethnic varieties refer to the accents of diverse ethnic groups in the United States, such as, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans. Further, socioeconomic accent varieties are formed by accents of the different socioeconomic status groups of the United States. For example, lower-ranked socioeconomic groups, such as working-class Americans, pronounce [d] instead of [d] in *this* and *brother* or [t] instead of [θ] in words like *think* or *with* more often than higher-ranked socioeconomic groups, such as middle-class Americans.

Eventually, taking geographical features into consideration, American English accents can be grouped into three main regional accent varieties that form the Eastern, the Southern and the General American accent regions (Wells 1982b, 470; Simpson 2001, 294). Thus, according to both Wells and Simpson, Main, New Hampshire, and the eastern parts of Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut belong to the Eastern accent region; the Southern states form the Southern accent region; and the rest of the Union belongs to the General American accent region. These three accent regions and a few salient phonological features that are characteristic of the majority of varieties belonging to these regions will be described in detail in the next section of this paper.

2.2.3.1. Regional American English accent features

As a matter of fact, General American accent, which is sometimes also referred to as Network English, is, by no means, a single unified accent (Wells 1982b, 470). Essentially, it reveals no marked regional features, in other words, it does not comprise either eastern or southern characteristics (Wells 1982a, 10). For example, in contrast to most Eastern and Southern accent varieties where /r/ is usually dropped in words like *far, mark,* or *card,* General American pronounces /r/ when it occurs after a vowel in the same syllable (Finegan 2004, 23). With regard to this, to be able to constitute a more accurate representation of the General American accent, the Eastern and the Southern American accents ought to be examined further on.

Accent varieties of the Eastern American region usually entail r-less accents (Wells 1982b, 470). In other words, one of the most important phonological features of the region is that /r/ is not pronounced after vowels in words like *car* or *far.* In addition, the tendency to monophthongize the diphthongs is the strongest in this region (Wells 1982b, 531); thus, it occurs most often in the Eastern American accent region that diphthongs are turned into monophthongs (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 70). Finally, in this region, the vowels of *cot* and *caught* are merged, so that *Don* and *Dawn, wok* and *walk* are homophones, that is, they are pronounced indistinguishably (Finegan 2004, 24).

In southern American English, several characteristic features can be found that make the Southern accent easily distinguishable both from the General American and the Eastern American accents. In connection with vowels, one of the key features of this accent is the *pin—pen* merger, in which merger the vowel [e] is raised to [I] before nasals so that words like *pin* and *pen* sound both very much like *pin* (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 71; Tottie 2002, 211; Finegan 2004, 25). Furthermore, Southerners often pronounce diphthongs as monophthongs, and say, for example, [a] instead of [ai] as in *fine* or *time,* leaving off the [i] glide from the [ai] diphthong (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 70), or pronounce *tie* and *toy* so that they sound like *tah* and *taw,* respectively (Finegan 2004, 25). Nevertheless, at the same time, in Southern accent varieties, several monophthongal vowels are realized as diphthongs. For example, a glide is regularly added to vowels which are not typically glided in other varieties, such as in *bed* and *Bill* so that the words sound almost as two-syllable sequences, that is, *beyud* [bɛyəd] for 'bed' and *Biyul* [biyʊl] for 'Bill' (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 73). Another example is the [ɔ] vowel in the words *thought* and *small,* which is quite often diphthongized and pronounced as [ɒʊ] in the Southern accent variety (Wells 1982b, 540). Indeed, according to Wells (1982b, 531), in words such as *sing* or *thing,* where most accents have [I], southern speech might have [i], [eI] or even [æI] plus [ŋ]. Another interesting phenomenon that provides the Southern speech a typical characteristic feature is the Southern drawl. It indicates, first of all, a recognizably slower speech; second, it shows the lengthening of vowels, especially in stressed, accented syllables. Sometimes the accented syllables are even accompanied by diphthongization and other modifications (Tottie 2002, 211; Wells 1982b, 529). Regarding consonants, there are three features that are widespread in the whole Southern region and characterize Southern accents as such. The first element is the

non-rhoticity of the Southern accent (Wells 1982b, 470; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 69). Second, before [r], for example, in *shrink,* instead of [ʃ] often [s] is pronounced. Finally, most of the time the words *isn't* or *wasn't* are realized with [d] rather than with [z] in Southern speech (Wells 1982b, 553).

2.2.3.2. *Attitudes towards American English accents*

Researchers started investigating the general public's attitudes towards the different American English accents in the 1960s, and since then a great number of accent evaluation research has been conducted. One of the first studies in this field was carried out by Labov in the 1960s on the social stratification of English in New York City (Labov 1973). His survey focused on how native speaker Americans of diverse social class backgrounds rated varieties of New York English that differed only in some phonological variables. Labov found that non-rhotic pronunciation was generally rated much lower by the respondents. Beyond Labov, Tucker and Lambert (1969), Fraser (1973) and Rey (1977) carried out further research and examined attitudes toward different accent varieties of American English. Tucker and Lambert (1969, cited in Preston 1989, 50–51), for example, investigated the attitudes of Northern White, Southern White and Southern Black male and female students to taped voice samples of different American accents. Moreover, Fraser (1973, cited in Cheshire 1991, 26) investigated attitudes towards Network English, Black English and a number of regional American accents. In addition, Rey (1977, cited in Preston 1989, 85) analyzed potential employers' attitudes towards White and Black accents. All of these studies showed that the less accented varieties were preferred while the more heavily accented varieties were downgraded by respondents.

Whereas the above mentioned studies focused exclusively on native English speakers' attitudes towards the different accent varieties of American English, subsequent research in the 1980s started concentrating on non-native speakers' reactions to the various American English accent varieties. Eisenstein and Verdi (1985, cited in Alford and Strother 1990, 483) investigated whether nonnative speakers of English could perceive differences among Network English, New York English and Black English. They found that the respondents were able to recognize the differences among these varieties even in the early stages of their English acquisition. Subsequently, Strother and Alford (1988, cited in Alford and Strother 1990, 483) examined whether there was a connection between how well non-native speakers scored on an English pronunciation test and their ability to differentiate among regional American accents. The results showed that there was no significant correlation between the respondents' pronunciation and their ratings of the individual accents. In Alford and Strother's next research (1990), native and non-native speakers' attitudes were compared towards various regional varieties of American English. In this study, the subjects listened to and rated taped samples of southern, northern and midwestern American English accents. On the basis of the study the researchers concluded that non-native speakers, in general, rated all three regional accents higher than native speakers did. What is more, whereas native speakers rated southern accents slightly higher than midwestern accents, non-native speakers reacted to these accents just the opposite way, that is, they ranked midwestern accents higher than southern ones.

Of the studies that have recently been conducted regarding attitudes towards American accents, three are related to my current research. One of these studies was carried out by Bayard and his colleagues (Bayard et al. 2001) where New Zealand, Australian and American students' attitudes were examined towards New Zealand, Australian and American English. A relevant finding of this study is, besides that all three nationalities found the American accent variety the most favorable, that already one phonologically different accent feature may imply a significant difference in the evaluations (Bayard et al. 2001, 40). In two other studies Hiraga (2005) and Soukup (2001) examined British and American people's attitudes towards regional accent vari-

eties of American English. They both found that, in general, Network American was significantly more favored than other regional American varieties; moreover, the Southern US accent was marked negatively by the respondents.

On the whole, these studies reveal what attitudes the general public conveys towards accents in general, and towards American accents in particular. As a matter of fact, people generally disregard the linguistic point of view that every speaker of a language has some accent or other (Simpson 2001, 295). Indeed, they judge other people who speak with an accent that has a special position, that is, considered correct at a given time and place, as being accent-free (Wells 1982a, 33). However, when a speaker's accent is far from this "correct" variety or from their own, people recognize at once that accents exist (Derwing 2003, 568). In addition, contrary to the linguistic claim that all accents are of equal value (Simpson 2001, 295), in most cases, as the above cited studies also vindicate, people attach positive as well as negative stereotypes to the accents and mark them with such labels as "beautiful" or "good" or "incorrect" (Preston 1989, 94). Furthermore, the majority of attitude research claims that the degree of accent affects the evaluation; in other words, the broader the accent seems than the variety that is considered to be correct, the less favorably it is judged by the hearers (Cheshire 1991, 26–27). All in all, in connection with American English accents, Hiraga (2005, 304) and Soukup (2001, 66) found that whereas the respondents' attitudes – regardless of whether they are British or American – are significantly more positive towards the General American accent, and, at the same time, they are rather negative towards Southern American English. Regarding non-native speakers of English, Alford and Strother (1990, 492) concluded that they generally evaluated the American accents higher than native speakers did.

2.3. Characteristic traits attributed to speakers

When people hear other people speaking with an accent that is different from theirs, first of all, they attempt to identify where the speaker comes from: where s/he grew up or where s/he lives at present (Wells 1982a, 8). At the same time, the accent people hear evokes simplified and standardized stereotypes in them, which are formed by the often inaccurate common knowledge of their community or society (Wells 1982a, 29). As a consequence, the hearers judge these accents as "good" or "incorrect" or "snobbish" (Simpson 2001, 295). What is more, on the basis of the preconceived stereotypes, they assign, most of the time unconsciously, all kinds of characteristic traits to the speaker. For example, on the basis of the speaker's accent, hearers might form an opinion about the speaker's political view, their mental abilities, or reliability (Wells 1982a, 30). Indeed, this refers to the phenomenon that is defined as the other dimension of language attitudes, that is, not only languages, dialects or accents are evaluated by the general public, but people's judgments also extend to the speakers of these languages, dialects and accents (Fasold 1984, 147), whereby different character traits are attached to these speakers (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, 35).

Indeed, language attitude studies, beside investigating people's attitudes towards various languages, dialects or accents, are concerned with how people evaluate the speakers of the languages, dialects or accents in question (Ryan et al. 1982, 9). Regarding this aspect of language attitude studies, two major issues have to be taken into consideration in connection with research in this field. First, it needs to be specified which methods and techniques enable researchers to measure people's attitudes towards other people based on their speech; second, the evaluative dimensions have to be selected along which the hearers judge the speakers and assign characteristic traits to them. In the next sections of this paper, these two issues will be elaborated on in detail.

2.3.1. Measurement of language attitudes

According to Ryan et al. (1982, 7–8), language attitude research employs three types of measurement techniques in general. First, language attitudes can be inferred by analyzing the societal treatment of the different varieties of languages, dialects or accents. This technique involves studying, for example, official language policies as well as autobiographies; in other words, cases that do not explicitly ask respondents to express their reactions. Second, people can be directly asked questions about their attitudes, for example, how they evaluate the different varieties of languages, dialects or accents or their speakers. Nonetheless, in most cases, direct questioning is an unsuitable method to elicit attitudes; first because people might respond in a way that is expected of them, thus not reveal their prejudice even if they have some (Preston 1989, 11); second, the outcome of studies applying the direct method mirrors rather the respondents' beliefs than their attitudes. The third method for observing language attitudes attempts to obtain people's actual attitudes towards the speech characteristics of language, dialect and accent varieties and towards their speakers in an indirect way, that is, without them knowing that their language attitudes are being investigated (Ryan et al. 1982, 8).

In the field of sociolinguistics, one of the most common indirect methods measuring language attitudes is the matched-guise technique (Fasold 1984, 149–150). This technique was introduced by Lambert and his associates (Lambert et al. 1960) to examine how people react to speakers reading the same passage in different languages or with different accents. In fact, the challenge in this method is that researchers aim to keep all, except speech, variables constant; therefore, they try to eliminate speakers' individual voice characteristics (Preston 1989, 12) by choosing speakers who are able to speak fluently in at least two clearly diverse ways. The procedure of such studies is the following: the speakers are asked to read out a brief text in the two languages or with the two diverse accents they are capable of speaking. The speech samples are tape-recorded and played to the respondents as if they came from two different persons. The respondents associate each recorded voice with an image of a different speaker (Bailey 2003, 134), and judge the speaker's social and linguistic characteristics on the basis of the voice sample (Wells 1982a, 30; Bainbridge 2001, 82). As the same person provides both samples, respondents, in fact, react to the speakers themselves (Fasold 1984, 150).

Although the matched-guise technique is applied across the world as the most frequent method to investigate language attitudes, it has often been criticized by researchers (Cheshire 1991, 27). The basic problems that occur in utilizing the matched-guise technique are reviewed by Fasold (1984, 152–154). He claims that the matched-guise technique has, first of all, validity problems, that is, it might not really measure what it is supposed to measure since listeners might evaluate the speakers on the basis of their reading performance and not on the basis of the variety they use. Furthermore, it is rather artificial to ask people to judge others only by voice samples.

As a consequence, current studies and papers suggest and endeavor new ways in language attitude research both in selecting language varieties and in collecting the data (Garrett 2001, 627). For example, instead of utilizing guises who could read the same passage with two different accents, Hiraga (2005, 295–302; see also subsection 2.2.3.2.) decided to use one speech sample from each accent by different speakers whose accent is representative of that particular variety. This way, he might not be able to control all the variables; nevertheless, it decreases the artificiality of the study. Furthermore, he collected data about the respondents' language attitudes in three ways: (1) rating speech samples as usual in matched-guise studies, (2) filling in a questionnaire with open and closed questions, and (3) a debate among the subjects on the reasons for their answers in the questionnaire. All in all, utilizing more methods to measure attitudes, the study is likely to provide a more precise picture of the respondents' language attitudes than any previous research did.

2.3.2. Evaluative dimensions

In fact, language attitude studies concentrating on attitudes towards languages, dialects or accents ask respondents which variety of languages, dialects or accents they prefer; what is more, they are asked to judge the varieties as "correct", "beautiful", "good" or "bad". Besides, when the focus of language attitude research is on attitudes towards the speakers of certain languages, dialects or accents, respondents rate speakers with the help of semantic differential pairs, that is, they have to opt for which character trait they find more appropriate regarding the speaker, for example, from the "friendly-unfriendly" or "polite-impolite" semantic pair (Preston 1989, 11–12). The semantic pairs constitute a semantic scale with the opposite character traits at either end with numbers from 1 to 7 or with five or seven empty spaces between them. Thus, if listeners find the speaker unfriendly or intelligent, they mark the scale close to the word "unfriendly" or "intelligent", respectively. As a result, the mean evaluation number of the individual character traits indicates to what degree the speaker is judged to be unfriendly or intelligent (Fasold 1984, 150–151).

In the early days of language attitude research a pattern evolved in respondents' ratings on semantic differential scales. Namely, they clearly separated the speakers, and rated them higher or lower on the character traits of two dimensions, that is, on social status and group solidarity (Ryan et al. 1982, 8) where social status includes qualities such as, for example, ambition, wealth, success, and education; and such qualities as, for instance, kindness, likeability, friendliness and goodness belong to solidarity (Chambers 1995, 225). Since then numerous studies have proved that this classical pattern exists, whereby prestige dialects or accents are rated high on the status but low on the solidarity dimension; and local/regional dialects or accents score high on solidarity but low on status dimensions (Giles and Ryan 1982; Bayard et al. 2001, 23).

Despite the evidence of this two dimensional pattern, there have always been attempts among researchers to rearrange the character traits along more than two dimensions, and thus analyze the results this way. For example, Lambert (1967, cited in De Klerk and Bosch 1995, 24) categorized the character traits along three dimensions: competence *(intelligent, educated, effective, rich)*, personal integrity *(honest, helpful, reliable, polite, rigorous)*, and social attractiveness *(friendly, attractive, kind)*. Along these dimensions, an overall finding of research is that speakers of prestige varieties are evaluated in general higher on competence but lower on personal integrity traits than speakers of non-prestige varieties. At the same time, non-prestige speakers are rated more favorably in terms of personal integrity and social attractiveness (Giles 2003, 389).

Beyond Lambert (1967), there have been several attempts to provide further dimension-structures. For example, Zahn and Hopper (1985, cited in Garrett 2001, 630) applied a superiority *(intelligent, rich, prestigious)* – social attractiveness *(likable, honest)* – dynamism *(enthusiastic, confident)* tripartite structure of dimensions for their research. Moreover, Giles (2003, 388) describes the character traits employed in attitude research again along different dimensions than the previously mentioned studies, namely, along competence, solidarity and dynamism. Apart from that, Garrett (2001) claims that there are even more dimensions than three, however, he does not specify them in more detail.

Most of the research on native speakers' attitudes cited in subsection 2.2.3.2 investigated people's attitudes not only towards varieties of regional American English accents, but, with the help of semantic differential scales, also towards the speakers of these varieties. On the whole, these studies claim that speakers from the Southern US regions, for example, from Louisiana or Georgia, are rated more negatively than speakers from Boston (Cukor-Avila and Markley 2000). In particular, these studies have found that in the United States, when American listeners hear other Americans speaking with a southern accent, a picture of a "poorly educated" and "barefoot" person comes into their minds; that is, they evaluate the speaker rather negatively in terms of traits related to competence. Besides, although northern accents evoke rather posi-

tive judgments on the competence dimension, in other words, people speaking with such accents are considered to be more intelligent and more educated, at the same time, they are rated more "impersonal", "unfriendly" and "dishonest" than their southern counterparts (Preston 1989, 93). Nonetheless, as studies on non-native speakers' attitudes towards speakers of diverse regional American English accent varieties have not analyzed non-native speakers' judgments along the above mentioned evaluative dimensions, it cannot be stated whether non-native speakers assess Americans speaking with a southern or another regional accent the same way as native speakers do.

3. The research questions

In general, the purpose of this present study is to examine and compare the attitudes of native and non-native English speakers towards speakers of selected regional American English accents. First of all, I intend to investigate whether American students display the same patterns of attitudes that have been presented in the previous subsections, namely, whether they also consider Americans speaking with southern accents in overall more negatively than speakers who have a General American accent. More specifically, I am interested in whether General American accent speakers are rated more positively on competence traits and more negatively on personal integrity and attractiveness traits than their southern counterparts.

Furthermore, I would like to observe whether Hungarian students for whom English is a foreign language are able to differentiate between the different regional American English, that is, between the Southern and General American, accents. What is more, my aim is to examine what attitudes non-native English speakers have towards the speakers of these accent varieties. Finally, I would like to compare and contrast the attitudes of the native and non-native English students to see if their evaluations display similar or different patterns in the overall speakers evaluation and the speakers' judgments along the evaluative dimensions of competence, personal integrity and attractiveness.

4. Methodology

4.1. Subjects

The non-native respondents included 75 Hungarian students, all of whom were first-year English and/or American Studies majors at the University of Szeged. They have been learning English as a foreign language on average for 9.27 years, and the average age of the predominantly female (70%) group was 19.8 years. Of the 75 only three had spent more than four weeks in an English-speaking country; two of them had been to Canada for 2 and 5 months, respectively, and one of the subjects had spent 9 months in London.

The native control group consisted of 7 American undergraduate students who had come from the United States to Hungary for five months as exchange students. So, at the time of the research, they had been studying at the Hungarian and East-Central European Studies Center at the University of Szeged. Five of them were females, and two of them males. The average age of the group was 20.6. Two of them came from Oregon, and five of them from Wisconsin.

4.2. Data collection

Despite the several methods that exist in language attitude research, in this study one relatively simple attitude measurement technique was utilized to gain information about the subjects' language attitudes. Namely, a questionnaire was designed (see Appendix A), and four speech samples (see Transcripts in Appendix B) were taped and played to the respondents who were requested to evaluate the speakers on the basis of the speech samples along the semantic differential scales of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first three questions asked participants to provide some personal data, such as, for example, their age and nationality. The second part consisted of questions from four to six, designed in the first place for the Hungarian respondents to compile information about their experience with different English accent varieties, that is, whether they spent a longer time in an English-speaking country, and what kind of connections they had with native English speakers, if any. The last section, (Question 7) provided the semantic differential scales for the informants on the basis of which they had to evaluate the speakers.

The semantic differential scale consisted of a six-point scale and nine semantic differential pairs that were selected along three dimensions to conform with Lambert's categories (1967, cited in De Klerk and Bosch 1995, 24). The semantic differential pairs comprised nine opposite character trait pairs along three categories: *intelligent, educated* and *rich* of the competence dimension; *honest, reliable* and *polite* of the personal integrity category; and *friendly, attractive* and *entertaining* of the social attractiveness dimension. The nine trait pairs were randomly ordered in the questionnaire. The speakers were requested to judge the speakers in terms of nine character traits on a scale of one to six. Generally, five or seven point scales are applied in language attitude research; yet, I chose six since I wanted the respondents to choose between a negative and a positive evaluation of the speakers unequivocally.

For the speech samples, four speakers were selected from a database on the Internet, from *The Speech Accent Archive* (2005), who all read the same short paragraph fluently (see Appendix C). All four speakers were males, aged between 52 and 67 years. Two of them came from the North and two of them from the South: from Arcadia, Wisconsin, and Detroit, Michigan; and Atlanta, Georgia, and Pine Bluff, Arkansas, respectively.

In fact, the four speakers were chosen to be the representatives of two varieties of regional American English accents. Speakers 1 and 3 were representatives of the Southern variety, and Speakers 2 and 4 of the General variety of American English accents. Whereas the speech samples of Speakers 2 and 4 revealed no marked regional features, Speakers 1 and 3 spoke in a very broad accent, Speaker 1 displaying 7, Speaker 3 about 15 characteristic features of the Southern variety of American English accent that made them easily distinguishable from the General American accent speech samples[3].

4.3. Procedure

The data was collected at the University of Szeged; the speech samples were taped and played to the respondents who listened to the samples and filled in the questionnaire in three groups. Before listening to the samples, all the American and Hungarian students were asked to fill in Questions 0 to 3 or Questions 0 to 6 about their background, respectively (see Subsection 4.2).

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[3]   Among other phonological features, some characteristics for the Southern accents in this study are the following: the vowel [e] is raised to [I] before [d] in *Wednesday;* [a] is pronounced instead of [ai] in *five;* the [ɔ] vowel in the words *small* and *call* is diphthongized and pronounced as [ɒʊ]; and [eɪ] is pronounced in *think* instead of [I].

Afterwards, the subjects were instructed clearly about the task in their native language, that is, in Hungarian for Hungarian students and in English for American students. They were told that they would hear four people reading the same passage, and they were asked to listen carefully to the voices and rate each of the four speakers on a scale of 1 to 6 in terms of the descriptions they see in Question 7 but leave out any categories where they feel unable to evaluate the speaker. Once respondents filled in the first part of the questionnaire, the speech samples were played to them. After each sample, though, the tape was stopped to enable the respondents to have enough time to make the judgments. The fact that there was no preset time for the breaks turned out to be the appropriate procedure since whereas the American students were ready with their evaluations by the end of each passage, and therefore the next sample could be immediately played, Hungarian students needed sometimes a minute or more to go through all the adjectives and fill in the questionnaire with their judgments.

The respondents participated in the study in three groups. In the first group there were 40 Hungarian students who were listening to the speech samples with the help of a tape-recorder according to the original design of the study. However, my attention was drawn to the fact that this way the respondents had difficulties with the perception of the speech samples because of the echo in the classroom and of the rather poor quality of the tape recorder. Therefore, the rest of the data was collected in one of the language laboratories of the University, where respondents were able to put on earphones and listen to the speech samples under excellent conditions. The second group consisted of 35 Hungarian, and the third group of the 7 American students who all provided the data in the language laboratory on two subsequent weeks.

5. Results

After the respondents rated the four speakers on the 6-point scale, the original ratings were encoded using values from 1 to 6 – higher ratings being closer to the positive adjective pole (intelligent, attractive, etc.). The mean values were then calculated, and presented in forms of tables and figures.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 display the results according to the groups of respondents with a rating of 1 being the highest and the most positive. In each category, the highest, that is, the most positive scores are in bold, and the lowest, the most negative ones are italicized.

Besides, the results are also presented in Figures 1 and 2 showing respondents' scores along three dimensions, that is, competence, personal integrity and attractiveness, where *competence* includes the mean values of the traits *intelligent, educated* and *rich; personal integrity* involves the traits *honest, reliable* and *polite;* and *attractiveness* summons the main values of the character traits *friendly, attractive,* and *entertaining.* Also in this case, higher scores signify more positive and lower scores more negative evaluations.

5.1. American students' evaluations

Table 1 shows American respondents' ratings of the speakers' characteristics. In a summary rating, American students rated Speaker 4 the most positively, scoring him a mean value of 4.25. Speaker 3 was rated the most negatively receiving the lowest score of 2.13. The two other speakers were judged nearly equally, that is, Speaker 1 received 2.99 and Speaker 2 2.92. In particular, Speaker 4 was ranked most favorably in education, intelligence, politeness and reliability, and the least favorably in being entertaining, attractive, rich and honest. All in all, he was rated rather positively in all except one trait, that is, in the *entertaining* category. Speaker 3

was rated the most negatively in every category, and specifically negatively in attractiveness, scoring the lowest mark 1 that none of the other speakers received in the study. Apart from that, his entertaining ability, his wealth and intelligence were also rated rather negatively. The highest scores he received in politeness, reliability and honesty; however, these ratings are still more negative than other speakers' mean values on these traits. Speakers 1 and 2 received similar ratings, though, Speaker 1 was rated more positively in friendliness, honesty, wealth, and being entertaining than Speaker 2. At the same time, Speaker 2 was judged more favorably in attractiveness, politeness, and reliability than Speaker 1.

TABLE 1
American Respondents' Mean Ratings of Speakers of Regional Varieties of American English (n = 7)

Characteristics	Speakers			
	Speaker 1 (Southern)	Speaker 2 (General)	Speaker 3 (Southern)	Speaker 4 (General)
attractive	1.40	2.16	*1.00*	**3.85**
polite	3.42	3.71	*2.71*	**4.57**
reliable	3.28	3.57	*2.71*	**4.57**
rich	2.28	2.00	*1.85*	**4.00**
entertaining	3.83	2.71	*1.42*	**3.14**
intelligent	2.50	2.57	*2.00*	**4.85**
educated	2.57	2.57	*2.42*	**5.00**
friendly	3.85	3.57	*2.42*	**4.33**
honest	3.85	3.42	*2.71*	**4.00**
m	2.99	2.92	*2.13*	**4.25**

Figure 1 below shows how the four speakers were evaluated along three dimensions, that is, competence, personal integrity and attractiveness. As it can be seen from the graphs, Speaker 4 has a rather different pattern from the other speakers. Namely, he is judged most negatively along the attractiveness and most positively along the competence dimension. At the same time, Speakers 1, 2 and 3 were evaluated the most favorably on the personal integrity dimension. The pattern is similar in case of the first two speakers, in other words, Speakers 1 and 2 are both rated the least favorably on competence traits; whereas, Speaker 3 was judged the most negatively on the attractiveness dimension.
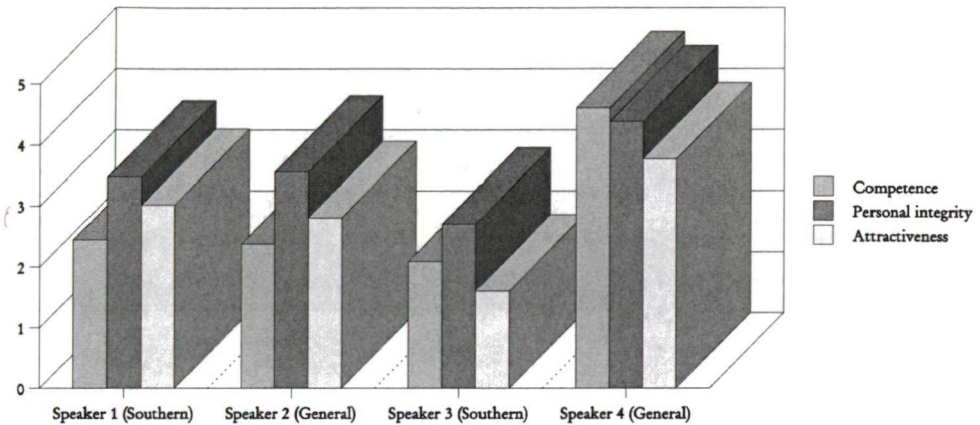
Figure 1: American students' evaluation of four regional American accent speakers along three dimensions.

5. 2. Hungarian students' evaluations

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the two Hungarian groups, where Group 1 listened to the four speakers from a tape recorder, and Group 2 in the language laboratory. The results of the two groups show exactly the same patterns although they display slight differences in the individual ratings on the character traits as well as in the mean values. On the whole, Hungarian students rated Speaker 4 the most positively on every character trait and with mean values of 4.34 and 4.62. Speaker 2 was judged as the second most positive by both groups with mean values of 3.48 and 3.61. Speakers 1 and 3 were rated nearly the same by the Hungarian respondents, namely, Group 1 scored them 2.99 and 2.98, and Group 2 3.03 and 2.94, respectively. With these ratings, Hungarian students judged Speakers 1 and 3 the most negatively of the four speakers.

TABLE 2
Hungarian Respondents' Mean Ratings of Speakers of Regional Varieties of American English (using a tape recorder)
(n = 40)

| Characteristics | Speakers | | | |
	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4
attractive	2.45	3.15	2.55	4.25
polite	3.35	3.92	3.22	4.62
reliable	3.43	3.69	3.23	4.42
rich	2.97	3.48	3.15	4.31
entertaining	2.07	2.70	2.47	3.95
intelligent	3.41	4.05	3.35	4.74
educated	3.20	3.87	3.50	4.60
friendly	2.72	3.00	2.57	4.36
honest	3.34	3.52	3.25	3.81
m	2.99	3.48	3.03	4.34

TABLE 3
Hungarian Respondents' Mean Ratings of Speakers of Regional Varieties of American English
(using earphones)
(n = 35)

Characteristics	Speakers			
	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4
attractive	2.65	3.08	2.75	4.71
polite	2.97	3.74	3.00	4.80
reliable	3.28	4.38	3.22	4.43
rich	2.70	3.48	3.51	4.46
entertaining	2.11	2.68	1.94	4.28
intelligent	3.51	3.94	3.09	4.85
educated	3.57	3.92	3.38	5.02
friendly	2.79	3.25	2.27	4.60
honest	3.31	4.09	3.35	4.43
m	2.98	3.61	2.94	4.62

Figure 2 below shows how the four speakers were evaluated along the three dimensions by all
the Hungarian students. As the pattern of evaluation along the three dimensions is proven to
be the same by both Hungarian groups, the results are presented this time consolidated in one
figure. The graphs display that Speakers 1 and 2, and Speakers 3 and 4 have similar patterns. In
other words, Speakers 1 and 2 are evaluated most positively along the personal integrity and
most negatively on the attractiveness dimension, whereas Speakers 3 and 4 are judged most un-
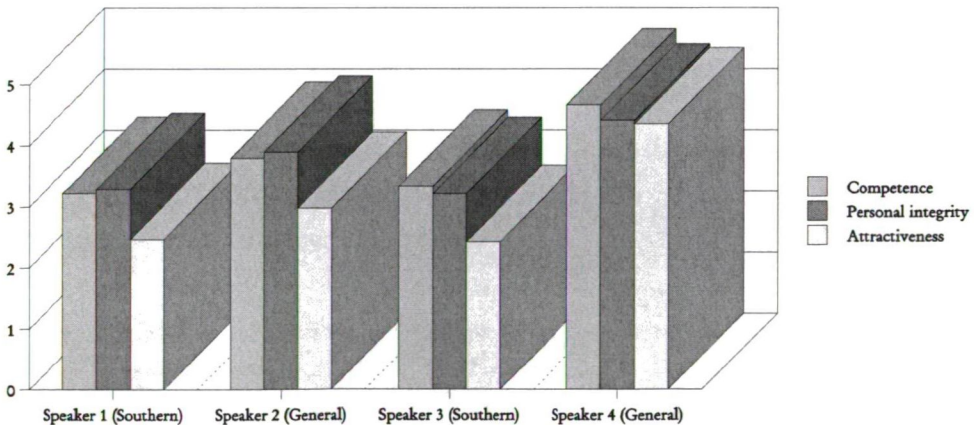favorably on the attractiveness and most favorably on the competence traits.

Figure 2: Hungarian students' evaluation of four regional American accent speakers along three
dimensions

6. Analysis of the Results

At the core of the data analysis are, on the one hand, comparisons of the mean values provided by the American and Hungarian students. On the other hand, the results are contrasted with each other and with the results of previous studies in order to answer the research questions.

6.1. American students' attitudes towards regional American English accent varieties

As mentioned before, one purpose of this study has been to examine what attitudes American students have towards Southern and General American English accent varieties and their speakers. In particular, the study has had the aim to examine whether American students' evaluations display the same patterns of attitudes that have been demonstrated in previous language attitude studies; that is, first, whether they judge Southerners, in general, more negatively than speakers of other American English dialects; and second, whether they evaluate Southerners more negatively on competence traits and more positively on personal integrity and social attractiveness traits than they evaluate other speakers who have a General American accent.

All in all, American respondents' judgments in this study seem to support only partially the findings of previous research in this domain. First, Soukup (2001) claims in her study that the Southern US accent is marked more negatively by Americans than other American English accent varieties. This outcome has been supported by the present study as well, since, in the overall speaker evaluation, the two Southerners together (Speakers 1 and 3) were rated more unfavorably than Speakers 2 and 4 who had General American accents. Nevertheless, this result has been induced solely by the evaluations of Speakers 3 and 4 since, as the results in Table 1 and Figure 1 show, Speaker 1, who has a Southern accent, and Speaker 2 with General American accent, were rated nearly equally. What is more, they were ranked lower than Speaker 4, one of the General American accent speaker, who was judged the most favorably of the four speakers; and, at the same time, they were evaluated higher than Speaker 3, one of the Southerners, who was assessed the most unfavorably by the respondents. In fact, these ratings contradict Bayard and his colleagues' results (Bayard et al. 2001), according to which already one phonologically different accent feature may imply a significant difference in the evaluations, as in this study, Speaker 1, a Southerner whose accent did not incorporate more than 7 distinctive phonological features, was not evaluated as negatively as Speaker 3, another Southerner who had a Southern accent with about 15 distinctive features.

Nonetheless, the outcome of the present study seems to corroborate Cheshire's study (1991), on the basis of which she claims that the broader an accent is, the less favorably it is judged by the respondents, since Speaker 3 with the broadest Southern accent was rated the most negatively; Speaker 1 with less Southern characteristic accent features was judged slightly more positively, and one of the General American English accent speakers, that is, Speaker 4, was evaluated the most favorably. Speaker 2 appears to be an exception in this case since although he is a General American accent speaker, he was not judged more positively than one of the Southerners.

Second, Lambert and other linguists' finding in connection with evaluative dimensions (Lambert 1967, cited in De Klerk and Bosch 1995; Giles 2003), according to which speakers who have a General American English accent are judged more positively on competence and more negatively on personal integrity and social attractiveness traits than their Southern counterparts, does not seem to be confirmed in the present study since the evaluations of Southerners and their counterparts with General American accent do not display this pattern. Instead, one of the Southerners (Speaker 1) and one of the General American accent speakers (Speaker 2) show the above mentioned structure, that is, they, and exclusively they, were rated more positively on

personal integrity and social attractiveness than on competence traits. Interestingly, Speakers 3 and 4 show different patterns; in other words, apart from the fact that they are both judged the most unfavorably on the attractiveness traits, Speaker 3 was evaluated the most positively on personal integrity, whereas Speaker 4 was judged the most favorably on competence traits.

On the whole, the results of the current study point out that those American students who participated in the study have rather negative attitudes towards a Southerner with a very broad Southern accent, and, at the same time, more positive attitudes towards another Southerner who speaks with an accent that shows fewer Southern features. However, their attitudes towards the two other speakers whose accents are without any Southern features are rather ambiguous. That is, although they reveal the most positive attitudes towards one of the General American accent speakers, they plainly do not distinguish in the evaluations between a Southerner with less broad accent (Speaker 1) and the other General American accent speaker (Speaker 2) since they assess both speakers equally. The possible reasons for this phenomenon might lie, on the one hand, in the order of the speech samples, that is, the fact that Speaker 2 is placed between two Southerners may lead to him being more negatively evaluated than expected because of the influence Southerners' unfavorable rankings exerted on his evaluation. On the other hand, Americans might be unable to differentiate between the various regional American English accents unless these accents have a greater number of phonological features that distinguish one variety from the others. What is more, even if they are able to recognize the individual regional accent varieties, it is very well possible that they will not assess speakers of one variety more negatively if this variety has solely some distinctive features that mark it different from other varieties. Nonetheless, as the results were inferred from seven American students' judgments, this phenomenon cannot be generalized for the entire American population.

6.2. Hungarian students' attitudes towards regional American English accent varieties

Beyond examining native speakers' attitudes towards Southern and General American English accent varieties and their speakers, the main goal of the study has been to focus on and investigate what attitudes non-native, specifically Hungarian students have towards these accent varieties and their speakers.

The results of this study will first be analyzed by contrasting them to and comparing them with findings of previous research about non-native speakers' attitudes towards their foreign language. In general, the results in Tables 2 and 3 and in Figure 2 confirm fully the outcomes that have been concluded by Eisenstein and Verdi (1985, cited in Alford and Strother 1990) and Alford and Strother (1990) in their previous studies about non-native speakers' attitudes towards their foreign language, that is, English. According to Eisenstein and Verdi (1985, cited in Alford and Strother 1990), non-native speakers are able to recognize the differences between accent varieties of their foreign language. As the results of this study also show, Hungarian respondents plainly separated the two regional American accent varieties, and evaluated the speakers differently on the basis of their accents. In particular, in the overall speaker evaluation the two Southerners, Speakers 1 and 3, were both judged equally, and, at the same time, the most negatively by the Hungarian respondents. Speaker 4, that is, one of the General American accent speakers was rated the most positively of the four speakers, whereas Speaker 2, the other General American accent speaker, was evaluated half way between Speaker 4 and the most negatively ranked Speakers 1 and 3. In addition, Alford and Strother (1990) claim in their research about native and non-native speakers' attitudes towards various regional varieties of American English that non-native speakers rank all regional accents in general more positively than native speakers do. This finding has also been verified by the present study since Hungarian respondents evaluated all four speakers distinctly more favorably than American respondents did. Even

though there is no significant difference (0.01) between American and Hungarian students' mean values of Speaker 1, the scores of the three other speakers' mean values demonstrate a greater difference between the evaluations, that is, the difference between the mean values is 0.62, 0.85 and 0.23 in the case of Speakers 2, 3 and 4, respectively. All in all, Hungarian respondents assessed each of the four speakers more favorably than their American counterparts by providing higher scores in the assessments of the speakers.

As a matter of fact, a great number of previous research on native speakers' attitudes towards regional American English accent varieties and their speakers has analyzed the respondents' rankings along the various evaluative dimensions, that is, on competence, personal integrity and attractiveness traits. These studies found that speakers of prestige varieties are evaluated in general more positively on competence traits than speakers of non-prestige varieties. At the same time, non-prestige speakers are rated more favorably in terms of personal integrity and social attractiveness (Lambert 1967, cited in De Klerk and Bosch 1995). Investigating the Hungarian students' evaluations of the four speakers along the three dimensions of the character traits in the present study, the previously mentioned pattern appears not to hold since, first, all four speakers are evaluated by the Hungarian respondents the most negatively on the attractiveness dimension. Moreover, Speakers 1 and 2, and Speakers 3 and 4 display the same structure in the further evaluation. In other words, whereas Speakers 1 and 2 were rated the most favorably on the personal integrity trait, and they were evaluated the most unfavorably on the attractiveness dimension, Speakers 3 and 4 were judged the most positively on the competence dimension, and the most negatively on the attractiveness traits. On the whole, in comparison with former research results, in this study the two Southerners were not judged more positively on competence traits than the two speakers of the General American English accent varieties. Simultaneously, General American speakers were not rated more favorably in terms of personal integrity and social attractiveness than the speakers with Southern accents.

Even though in this study neither of the American and Hungarian respondent groups' evaluation patterns display similarities to previous studies' evaluative patterns, at this point, their ranking models ought to be contrasted in order to find out whether their patterns are different or similar to each other. In fact, Hungarian students' overall evaluation patterns of three speakers are different from the American students' evaluative dimension patterns while it is similar in the case of Speaker 4. That is, American students rated one Southerner (Speaker 1) and one General American accent speaker (Speaker 2) more positively on personal integrity and social attractiveness than on competence traits, and judged both the other Southerner (Speaker 3) and the other General American accent speaker (Speaker 4) the most unfavorably on the attractiveness traits, yet, they were evaluated the most positively on personal integrity, and on competence traits, respectively. Similarly to the American respondents' assessments, Hungarian students evaluated Speakers 1 and 2 the more positively on personal integrity traits, however, in contrast to the American respondents, they rated them the most negatively on the social attractiveness traits. What is more, although Speakers 3 and 4 show a similar pattern in the Hungarian students' evaluation, one of these patterns is fairly different from the American respondents' evaluations. In other words, even though Speaker 4 was assessed similarly by both respondent groups, namely, the most positively on the competence and the most negatively on the attractiveness dimension; Speaker 3 was evaluated differently by the American and Hungarian respondents. In fact, whereas Speaker 3 was generally judged the most unfavorably on the attractiveness traits by both respondent groups, American respondents judged him the most favorably on the personal integrity, and Hungarian respondents evaluated him the most favorably on the competence traits.

To sum up, we can see from the results that also Hungarian students, similarly to native and other non-native speakers of English, have stereotypical attitudes towards Southern and General American accents and their speakers. In fact, their attitudes towards Southerners and their accents are less positive than their attitudes towards General American speakers and their accents. This phenomenon might be explained by various reasons. First of all, these foreign language learners are trained consistently and almost exclusively, both in perception and production, on English accents varieties that are considered standard in British and American English. In other words, it occurs rather rarely that in the classroom, for example in listening exercises, Hungarian students are exposed to texts with accents different from those that are considered standard. In addition, not only in the classroom but also in the framework of language exams, learners are urged to pay constant attention to correct pronunciation.

Nevertheless, as Strother and Alford's analysis (1988, cited in Alford and Strother 1990) and the current study also reveal, in itself the perception and production of accents that are considered correct will not contribute to the phenomenon that learners of English develop negative attitudes towards speakers whose accents are different from the standard. In other words, Strother and Alford (1988) found that there is no significant correlation between how well non-native speakers score on English pronunciation tests and their ability to differentiate among regional American accents. Furthermore, the results of this study show that those Hungarian students who regularly listen to diversely accented speakers express the same negative attitudes towards Southerners as students who are almost never exposed to variously accented speech. Therefore, beyond Hungarian students' having a good pronunciation and listening to standard varieties, there have to be other reasons why they have rather negative attitudes towards Southern American English accent and its speakers.

Besides, a further explanation for Hungarian students' negative attitudes towards Southern accents and their speakers might be that the concept and development of stereotypes and negative attitudes that are originally embedded in their native language are transferred to their foreign language. That is, the notion of stereotyping and stigmatizing exists already in people's native language; therefore, Hungarian students are also able to make judgments about other Hungarian speakers' physical appearance and mental abilities on the basis of their speech, even if they cannot see these speakers. Afterwards, in the English language classroom, they might face the same notion; this time in connection with their foreign language, since the curriculum and the teachers can make them recognize that "correct" and "incorrect" varieties are present in their foreign language as well. As a consequence, they will be able to differentiate between speakers with standard and non-standard accents; furthermore, they might attach the stereotypes derived from their native language to the foreign language, and thus consider non-standard, particularly, Southern accents more unfavorably than accent varieties that are closer to the standard. Naturally, native and non-native speakers' negative attitudes might root in diverse backgrounds since whereas native speakers' negative attitudes are likely to be directed towards Southerners themselves, non-native speakers can associate their negative attitudes with all speakers who speak with a non-standard accent.

7. Limitations of the study

The results of this study should not be overgeneralized because (a) there was a specifically small sample size in the case of the American respondents, and (b) the methodology utilized in the study was solely a modified version of the matched guise technique despite the fact that different types of methods ought to be employed to gain a more precise picture of the respondents' language attitudes.

As a matter of fact, a relatively small number of Americans study in Szeged, therefore, it was rather problematic to form a control group of American respondents with a suitable size for the study. Nevertheless, the great amount of research that has been conducted recently on American people's attitudes towards regional American English accent varieties has enabled me to take the outcome of these studies in consideration as one basis of argumentation, and form a fairly clear picture of Americans' attitudes on the different accent varieties from the previous studies in this field.

In subsection 2.3.1 of this paper, a detailed argumentation serves the purpose to introduce and analyze the most appropriate methodology that is applied, in general, in attitude studies. However, because of certain restrictions, the methodology employed in this study was modified into a less sophisticated version. Indeed, the limitations of the methodology of this study are twofold. First, as it was unfortunately hopeless to find guises in Hungary who could manage to speak with two regional American English accents authentically, the matched guise technique was altered in a way that there were no guises among the selected speech samples. Instead, four different speakers' speech samples were utilized, who were representatives of the Southern and General American accent varieties, and every effort was made to control for age, background, and voice quality in addition to the accents being used. Second, solely one type of measurement technique, a questionnaire, has been used although to gain a more precise picture of the respondents' language attitudes, additional techniques ought to be applied, such as, for example, interviews or debates. This offers ground for further research for which this study can provide the basis.

8. Conclusion and implications

Nowadays, more and more language attitude studies are being carried out in order to identify the linguistic stereotypes people have about language. These studies are most often conducted on attitudes people have towards different varieties of their native language, concentrating most often on the various dialect or accent varieties of the language in question. At the same time, although a significant number of attitude research has investigated foreign language learners' motivations and preferences in connection with foreign languages, language learners' attitudes towards dialect or accent varieties of the foreign language they learn and towards their speakers have rarely been analyzed.

In brief, the aim of this study has been to fill this gap and examine foreign language learners' attitudes towards certain accent varieties of their foreign language. In particular, I have attempted to find out what attitudes Hungarian students have towards two accent varieties of the foreign language they learn, that is, towards Southern and General American English accent varieties, and how their attitudes compare to the attitudes of native speakers of American English. Specifically, I have collected data about how American and Hungarian students evaluate two Southern and two General American English accent speakers on nine character traits.

Then, I have contrasted the respondents' judgments to each other as well as to the outcome of previous research in this domain whereby the results confirm virtually all findings of previous studies. On the basis of this I claim that negative attitudes towards non-standard speakers and the accent variety they speak, in this case, towards the Southern accent variety of American English and its speakers, exist not only among native language speakers but also among foreign language learners.

In fact, one of the reasons why Hungarian students have rather negative attitudes towards more heavy accents might be attributed to the fact that, in the foreign language classroom, stu-

dents of English are most often exposed only to the standard accents of the foreign language. So, when they hear a different accent, they downgrade it and consider it "bad" or "incorrect". Indeed, knowing how students react to language features that might not be part of the foreign language curriculum clearly indicates that there is a need for teachers to handle in favor of widening the scope of teaching materials and including all sorts of accent materials in the foreign language classroom. In addition, beyond drawing attention to and making students aware of the fact that these biases exist, counteractions might be significantly easier.

The study has addressed the attitudes English learners have towards American English accent varieties spoken by native speakers of American English. Nevertheless, as Hungarian students are most likely to face English speakers in a European context, it would be interesting for further research to gain insight into their attitudes towards the different foreign accents of English and their speakers, and to find the stereotypes Hungarians might have about these non-native English speakers, and could, this way, lessen the negative attitudes Hungarians have towards other nations.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

I need the following data for my sociolinguistic research about language attitudes. I treat the data confidentially. If there is a question you do not want to answer, please, skip it and go on. Thank you very much for your time and contribution.

0. Date:
1. You are: (a) female   (b) male
2. Your age:
3. Your nationality:
4. For how long have you been learning English?
5. Have you spent a longer time (more than 4 weeks) in an English-speaking country?
          (a) yes   (b) no
    5.1. If yes, in which country were you and for how long?
6. Do you usually listen to native speakers of English (teachers, friends, in the media)?
          (a) yes   (b) no
    6.1. If yes, what nationality are they?

7. Now, listen carefully to the following voices, and rate each of the four speakers on a scale of 1 to 6 in terms of the following descriptions. Make ratings only where you feel that you can make judgements confidently.

Speaker 1

attractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	unattractive
polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	impolite
reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	unreliable
rich	1	2	3	4	5	6	poor
entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	boring
intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	unintelligent
educated	1	2	3	4	5	6	uneducated
friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	unfriendly
honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	dishonest

Speaker 2

attractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	unattractive
polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	impolite
reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	unreliable
rich	1	2	3	4	5	6	poor
entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	boring
intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	unintelligent
educated	1	2	3	4	5	6	uneducated
friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	unfriendly
honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	dishonest

Speaker 3

attractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	unattractive
polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	impolite
reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	unreliable
rich	1	2	3	4	5	6	poor
entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	boring
intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	unintelligent
educated	1	2	3	4	5	6	uneducated
friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	unfriendly
honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	dishonest

Speaker 4

attractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	unattractive
polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	impolite
reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	unreliable
rich	1	2	3	4	5	6	poor
entertaining	1	2	3	4	5	6	boring
intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	unintelligent
educated	1	2	3	4	5	6	uneducated
friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	unfriendly
honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	dishonest

Appendix B

Transcripts from the Speech Accent Archive (2005)

Speaker 1 (male, 57, from Atlanta, Georgia):

[pʰļiz kaʊlˠ stɛlʌ æsk hɚ ɹə bɹɪŋ ðiːʐ θɛɪŋz wɪð hɚ fɹʌm ɳ̊ðə stoəɹ sɪks spuːnz ʌf fɹɛʃ snoʊ pʰiːz faːv θɪk slæːbz ʌ bluː ʧiːz ɛn meɪbi ə snæk˺ foɹ hɚ bɹʌðɚ baːb wi also nid eɪ smaʊlˠ pʰ̩læstɪk sneɪk ʌ bɪg˺ tɔɪ frog˺ fɚ ðə kʰɪədʒ ʃi kĩn skup˺ ðiːs θɛ̃ŋz ɪntũ θri: ɹed˺ bæːgʒ ɛn wi wɪlˠ goʊ miːt hɚ wĩnzdi æt ðə ɹ̥eĩn steɪʃɪn]

Speaker 2 (male, 60, from Arcadia, Wisconsin):

[pliːʐ kolˠ stɛlʌ æsk ɚ rə̃ bɹ̃ɪŋ ɳiːs θĩŋz wɪθ hɚ fɹʌm ɳə stoɹ sɪks spũːnz ʌv fɹɛʃ snoʊ piːʐ faɪv θɪk slæːbz ʌb bluː ʧiːz ɛn meɪbi ə snæk˺ fəɹ hɚ bɹʌðɚ baːb wɪ olˠsoʊ̆ nidʌ smolˠ plæstɪk sneɪk ɛ̃nə bɪg tɔɪ fɹɔːg fɚ rə̃ kɪədz ʃi kɑ̃ skup ɖiːz θĩŋz ˈɪntə θɹi: ɹed bæːgʒ ɛ̃n wi wɪl goʊ̆ miːt hɚ wɛ̃nʐdeɪ æt̪ ɖə ɹ̥eĩn steɪʃə̃n]

Speaker 3 (male, 52, from Pine Bluff, Arkansas):

[pliz kɑʊl stɛːlʌ æsk hɑɹ tʉ bɹɲ
ðəiz̥ sθeŋz wɪθ hɑɹ fɹʌm ðə
stowɑɹ sɪks spəunz əv fɹɛʃ snəo
pɑɪz faːv θɪk slæ̃əbz ə bləu ʧəiz
ẽn mɛɪbi ə snæ̆kˑ fɚ hɚ bɹʌðɚ
bɑːb wi ᶐlsoo nəid e smɑol
plæstɪk snəɹk æ̃n e bɪg tʰɔɪ fɹɑog
fɚ ðə kɪədz ʃi kẽn skʊp ðiːz θeˑ̃ŋz
ɪndə θɹiː ɹɛ̞d bæːgz ẽn wɪ wəl
goo tə miːt hɑɹ wĩnz̥deɪ æt ðə
tɹáĩn steɪʃən]

Speaker 4 (male, 67, from Detroit, Michigan):

[pʰļiz kɑːlˠ stɛlʌ hɑɹ rə
bɹɪŋ ðis sθẽŋz wɪθ hɚ fɹʌm ðə
stoːɹ sɪks spʉːnz ʌf fɹɛʃ snoŏ
pʰiːz faɪv θɪk slæːbz ʌf bluː
ʧiːz ẽn meɪbi ə snækˑ fɔɹ hɚ
bɹʌðɚ bɑːb wi ɑlso nid ə
smɑːlˠ pʰļæstɪk sneɪk ẽn ə bɪgˑ
tʰɔɪ frɔgˑ fɚ ðə kʰɹdz çi kæ̃n
skʊpˑ ðiːs θĩŋz ɪntʉ θriː ɹɛdˑ
bæːgz æ̃n wi wɪlˠ goʊ miːʇ hɑɹ
wɛ̃zdeɪ æt ðə tɹéĩn steɪʃə̃n]

Appendix C

The text the four speakers read out

Please call Stella. Ask her to bring these things with her from the store: Six spoons of fresh snow peas, five thick slabs of blue cheese, and maybe a snack for her brother Bob. We also need a small plastic snake and a big toy frog for the kids. She can scoop these things into three red bags, and we will go meet her Wednesday at the train station.

Balogh Erzsébet
**Hungarian Students' Language Attitudes towards
Regional American English Accent Varieties**

In spite of the fact that attitudes of native speakers of English towards various regional varieties of US English have been investigated thoroughly in the past decades, the number of studies that have been carried out to examine non-native speakers' attitudes towards regional accents is rather limited. This paper intends to fill this gap and, after an overview of language attitude research in general and in this particular context, it examines what attitudes non-native speakers have, in comparison to native speakers, towards specific regional accents of U.S. English. The respondents in the current study were American and Hungarian students from the University of Szeged who, with the help of a modified version of the matched guise technique, listened to tapes of the same passage read by four male native speakers, of whom two were from the southern and two from the general American accent groups. Respondents then judged the speakers along nine character traits; the evaluations were compared and contrasted to each other and to the outcome of previous research in this field. The results confirm the findings of previous language attitude studies, whereby the current study first indicates that Hungarian students are able to perceive differences in regional accents of U.S. English; second, it points out that both the actual values and the patterns of the judgments of the Hungarian students differ from those of the American students.