1 An Introduction to Language Attitudes Research

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Language attitudes have been of great interest to researchers in the behavioural and social sciences as well as the humanities since at least the early 1930s (e.g. Pear 1931; Bloomfield 1933). Since then, they have become an integral part of the social psychology of language, the sociology of language, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and communication studies. As Howard Giles’ Foreword to this volume shows, recent decades have seen a remarkable proliferation of language attitudes studies – and in the current context of rapidly increasing globalisation and migration, where contact with different linguistic groups is becoming the norm for more and more individuals and communities, such research is gaining even greater importance. Given the highly interdisciplinary nature of the study of language attitudes, one of the most notable trends in recent years has been the growing agreement among researchers that ‘cross-fertilization is desirable’ in both theory and practice (Dewaele 2009: 186).

This book thus aims to encourage language attitudes research and facilitate interdisciplinary exchanges by providing a comprehensive overview of the three types of methods by means of which language attitudes can be investigated: the analysis of the societal treatment of language (Part 1), direct methods of attitude elicitation (Part 2), and indirect methods of attitude elicitation (Part 3). Some of the methods included here have previously been discussed in other publications from one discipline or another, but with different degrees of detail and varying amounts of instruction (e.g. Oppenheim 2000; Garrett et al. 2003; Garrett 2010); for others, this book constitutes the very first time they are being considered from a methodological point of view. For all of these methods, it is the first time they are brought together in the form of a volume like this, which focuses exclusively on language attitudes, encompasses all three types of methods, and offers extensive instructions on data collection and analysis techniques. Moreover, this book is novel in that it includes an entire section that covers the most significant overarching issues in language attitudes research, thereby presenting key practical guidance which goes beyond individual methods (Part 4).

To ensure a thorough theoretical grounding, this chapter introduces key aspects of language attitude theory as well as providing an overview of the most relevant previous research that has elucidated the nature of language attitudes. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to attitude theory in general, including definitions of attitudes, the main frameworks in which they have been studied, and their components. This is followed by information about language
attitudes more specifically – namely their definition, the notion of language attitudes as reflections of social norms, the related issue of language attitude change, and the difference between (and inter-relatedness of) language attitudes and ideologies. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the implications and consequences that language attitudes can have at the individual and the societal level before summarising the main socio-structural, socio-demographic, and situational variables that have been shown to affect language attitudes. This is followed by a discussion of the primary evaluative dimensions of language attitudes, status and solidarity. The chapter concludes with an overview of the different types of methods that can be used to investigate language attitudes, which also serves to outline the structure of this book.

1.1 Attitudes

The classic definition of an attitude is that by Allport (1935: 810), who describes it as ‘a mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related’. Another commonly referenced definition is that by Ajzen (1988: 4), according to whom an attitude is ‘a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event’. Eagly and Chaiken’s (1993: 1) definition of an attitude as ‘a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor’ is also cited frequently. The commonality of these definitions is that they hint at one of the main challenges of investigating attitudes: namely that attitudes are states of readiness, dispositions, or tendencies – and therefore have no overt substance. This entails methodological difficulties in determining the right kinds of data from which attitudes can be inferred (Agheyisi and Fishman 1970; see also Garrett 2010). Consequently, ‘[t]he translation of the notion “attitude” from the subjective domain into something objectively measurable […] is a common problem in any research that involves social categorization and judgements’ (Romaine 1995: 288). The methods discussed in this book demonstrate different manners in which this problem can be addressed when investigating attitudes with a focus on language.

It is widely accepted that the main function of attitudes is to organise and structure stimuli in an otherwise ambiguous informational environment in order to enable individuals to adapt to this environment (e.g. Eagly and Chaiken 1998). As Allport (1935: 806) puts it:

Without guiding attitudes the individual is confused and baffled. Some kind of preparation is essential before [they] can make a satisfactory observation, pass suitable judgement, or make any but the most primitive reflex type of response. Attitudes determine for each individual what [they] will see and hear, what [they] will think and what [they] will do.
Attitudes thus exert selective effects on information processing in favour of what is congruent with one’s existing attitudes (Eagly and Chaiken 1998). This is of particular relevance in intergroup situations, where the attitudes that individuals hold – especially of outgroups – are often not even moderated by their experiences with group members who do not match the individuals’ expectations (Rothbart 2001). Tajfel (1981: 156) explains this as follows:

> encounters with negative or disconfirming instances would not just require a change in the interpretation of the attributes assumed to be characteristic of a social category. Much more importantly, the acceptance of such disconfirming instances threatens or endangers the value system on which is based the differentiation between the groups.

While much less research has been dedicated to the formation of attitudes than to their functions, it is widely acknowledged that attitudes in general (as well as language attitudes in particular) are socially constructed and learned from experience. This usually happens early in life and the sources of attitudes may range from caregivers, friends, and neighbours to individuals one has never even met in person, such as online acquaintances, newspaper journalists, and people who appear on television (e.g. Banaji and Heiphetz 2010). Attitudes are also frequently engendered and reinforced in education institutions (e.g. Karatsareas 2018). They can be transmitted in various ways, which in the case of language attitudes include not only explicit language criticism (e.g. Walsh 2014) but also subtle linguistic biases (e.g. Beukeboom 2014) and media portrayals (e.g. Dragojevic et al. 2016).

There are two main theoretical frameworks for researching attitudes: behaviourism and mentalism. Behaviourism, the earlier approach, considers attitudes to be located directly in people’s behavioural responses to various stimuli (e.g. Bain 1928; Osgood et al. 1957). Over time, however, it has become apparent that behaviour tends not to be consistent across contexts: ‘Every particular instance of human action is […] determined by a unique set of factors. Any change in circumstances, be it ever so slight, might produce a different reaction’ (Ajzen 1988: 45). A person’s actual behaviour in a particular situation thus depends not only on their attitudes but also on numerous other factors, including the target their action is directed at, the context, the time and occasion, and the immediate consequences the behaviour can be expected to have. Hence, the fact that a person behaves in a particular way in one specific situation is by no means a guarantee that they will behave in the same manner again, which makes single instances of behaviour rather unreliable indicators of attitudes in general (e.g. Gross 1999; Banaji and Heiphetz 2010). This lack of a direct, predictive relationship between attitude and behaviour poses a major problem to the behaviourist framework. In line with a more general paradigmatic shift within the behavioural and social sciences, the behaviourist framework has therefore become viewed as rather outdated, and for some time now, most contemporary research has adopted a mentalist approach instead. Corresponding to the
definitions provided above, the mentalist framework considers attitudes to be dispositions or tendencies to respond in certain ways to certain stimuli – that is, attitudes are assumed to influence individuals’ behaviour, rather than fully determine it (e.g. Gardner 1982).

While early behaviourist research deemed attitudes to be unitary constructs, equating them with overt behaviour, nowadays it is widely agreed that attitudes have a multiple componential structure. Numerous more or less complex componential models of attitude structures have been devised by various scholars working within the mentalist framework (see e.g. Agheyisi and Fishman 1970 for an overview). The most prevalent model is one that posits three different components: affect – the feelings elicited by an attitude object; cognition – the beliefs held about the attitude object; and conation – behavioural intentions as well as actual behaviour directed at the attitude object (e.g. Rosenberg and Hovland 1960; Baker 1992; Garrett 2010). Studies such as Breckler’s (1984) notorious snake experiments have substantiated the validity of this tripartite model and indicate strong support for affect, cognition, and conation as distinct attitude components. Some researchers argue for the primacy of the affective component (e.g. Banaji and Heiphetz 2010) because certain studies suggest that this component may be more readily accessible than the others (Verplanken et al. 1998) and that it is a stronger predictor of behaviour than the cognitive component (Lavine et al. 1998). Be that as it may, it is generally agreed that ‘[a] at the individual level, attitudes influence perception, thinking and behaviour’, and ‘[a]t the intergroup level, attitudes towards one’s own group and other groups are the core of intergroup cooperation and conflict’ (Bohner 2001: 240, emphasis in original text). The importance of attitudes at the intergroup level is due to the fact that all intergroup relations are characterised by positive as well as negative prejudices (feelings), stereotypes (beliefs), and discrimination (behaviour; Bourhis and Maass 2005).

1.2 Language Attitudes

Based on this understanding of the multiple componential structure of attitudes in general, language attitudes are traditionally defined as ‘any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different varieties and their speakers’ – or, more inclusively, their users (Ryan et al. 1982: 7). It is important to note, however, that there may be inconsistencies between the three components. For instance, with reference to the Canadian province of Quebec, Oakes (2010) explains that it is far from uncommon for young Francophone Quebecers to hold a stronger emotional attachment to French than to English (feelings) while nevertheless recognising the importance of English in this day and age of globalisation (beliefs), and therefore learning and using English for socio-economic reasons (behaviour).
While Ryan et al.’s classic definition only makes reference to attitudes towards entire varieties (i.e. languages, dialects, accents), there is in fact also a growing body of research regarding attitudes towards particular linguistic features and phenomena, including attitudes towards quotatives (Buchstaller 2006), vocal fry (e.g. Yuasa 2010), code-switching (Dewaele and Wei 2014), forms of address (Moyna and Loureiro-Rodríguez 2017), and multilingualism (Kircher et al. 2022). These also fall under the remit of language attitudes.

The inclusion of the language users in the definition of language attitudes is due to the close link between language and social identity – that is, those parts of an individual’s self-concept that are linked to their membership in particular social groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Each individual has multiple social group memberships (based on e.g. their age, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, skin colour, and mother tongue) and therefore also a repertoire of numerous social identities that vary in their overall importance to the self-concept (e.g. Hogg 1995). As Tajfel and Turner (1986) point out, not all intergroup differences actually have evaluative significance, and those that do may vary from group to group. Yet, based on a large body of research evidence, it has long been acknowledged that language is one of the most important symbols of social identity, ‘an emblem of group membership’, in language communities around the globe (Grosjean 1982: 117; see also e.g. Edwards 1994). The symbolic nature of language naturally finds expression in the attitudes that people hold towards varieties and their users: ‘If language has social meaning, people will evaluate it in relation to the social status of its users. Their language attitudes will be social attitudes’ (Appel and Muysken 1987: 12).

Attitudes towards particular varieties therefore reflect the attitudes that people hold towards their users (e.g. Ryan et al. 1982; Hill 2015a; Dragojevic et al. 2021). There are two key cognitive processes at play that account for this: categorisation and stereotyping. Upon first encountering someone new, individuals use language cues to make inferences about the other person’s social group membership(s) – and then, in turn, attribute to the new person those traits that are stereotypically associated with their inferred social group(s) (Dragojevic and Giles 2016; see also e.g. Lambert 1967; Ryan 1983; Dragojevic et al. 2018). The fact that language provides ‘a critical, and potentially primary way in which we divide the social world’ (Kinzler et al. 2010: 584) has important implications, which are discussed in detail below.

Since language attitudes are reflections of people’s attitudes towards the corresponding language users, it follows that language attitudes do not indicate either linguistic or aesthetic quality per se. Instead, they are always contingent upon knowledge of the social connotations that specific varieties hold for those who are familiar with them, upon ‘the levels of status, prestige, or appropriateness that they are conventionally associated with in particular speech communities’ (Cargile et al. 1994: 227). This was evidenced by the experiments carried out by Giles and colleagues to disprove the ‘inherent value’ hypothesis and prove the ‘imposed norm’ hypothesis (Giles et al. 1974, 1979). Language attitudes
should therefore be considered as ‘expressions of social convention and preference which, in turn, reflect an awareness of the status and prestige accorded to the [users] of these varieties’ (Edwards 1982: 21).

From this, in turn, it follows that language attitudes are not static but that they can change when the status and prestige of the language users change – even if such change takes time (e.g. Dewaele 2009; Garrett 2010). This may happen, for example, as a result of sustained social and cultural developments, as illustrated by Willemyns’ (1997; 2006) account of the altered intergroup relations between the Flemings and the Walloons in Belgium due to shifts in industry, which led to corresponding changes in attitudes towards Flemish and French. It may also happen as a result of concerted language planning efforts, as demonstrated by Lambert et al. (1960), Genesee and Holobow (1989), and Kircher (2014a), whose work traces the amelioration of attitudes towards French in Quebec in the wake of language legislation that promoted the francisation of the province. Moreover, language attitudes may also change more dynamically as the frame of reference for categorisation and social identification is altered, which is discussed in more detail below.

Language attitudes are sometimes equated with language ideologies – and the two certainly share several important characteristics. For instance, like language attitudes, ideologies are never about language alone, and the linkage of linguistic features (such as spelling and grammar) with non-linguistic features (such as a language user’s social background or personality traits) is highly pervasive (e.g. Vessey 2016). As Woolard (1998: 3) notes, language ideologies ‘envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group’. However, there are key differences between attitudes and ideologies with regard to their structure and the extent of their prevalence. One of the earliest definitions of language ideologies characterises them as ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’ (Silverstein 1976: 193). To this day, there remains a consensus that ideologies consist of ‘systematically-held beliefs about language that are shared throughout a community’ (Vessey 2013: 660). Frequently, these sets of beliefs even become naturalised to the extent that community members perceive them as ‘common sense’ (Milroy 2001). As indicated by these definitions, one of the key differences between language ideologies and language attitudes is that ideologies constitute a community-level phenomenon – while attitudes are affected by a broad range of factors relating to specific individuals (which are outlined below) in addition to the sets of beliefs that are held at the community level (see also Oakes 2021). As Dragojevic et al. (2013: 11) put it: ‘Language ideologies represent broad, socio-cultural schemas that shape the development of intrapersonal attitudes towards particular language varieties and their speakers’. A further key difference is that, in addition to the sets of beliefs that make up ideologies, the structure of attitudes also comprises feelings and behaviours, as
1.3 Implications and Consequences of Language Attitudes

Due to the close link between language and social identity, individuals tend to react to language as though it were indicative of the personal and social characteristics of the language user – for better or for worse (Cargile and Giles 1997). It often only takes a few seconds to form an impression of an interlocutor’s supposed personality, capabilities, and attributes, and to thereby categorise them as an ingroup or an outgroup member. Since people strive to hold positive social identities – and more specifically, social identities which compare favourably to those of relevant outgroup members – ingroup favouritism is a widespread phenomenon (e.g. Giles and Johnson 1987; Hewstone et al. 2002). It is, however, not the only force behind linguistic judgements: They also depend on factors such as the aforementioned status and prestige of the linguistic groups. Notably, research has shown that robust social preferences for ingroup members as well as for language users from high-status social groups are prevalent even in children from a very early age (e.g. Kinzler et al. 2012a; Kinzler and DeJesus 2013a; Byers-Heinlein et al. 2017).

As Cargile and Giles (1997: 195) note, the significance of language attitudes lies in the fact that they ‘bias social interaction – and often in those contexts where important social decision-making is required’. Individuals who are users of varieties with low status, as well as those who are perceived as outgroup members, are thus likely to face stigmatisation, challenges, and barriers in almost every sphere of their lives. This has been shown to range from education (e.g. Sachdev et al. 1998) to employment (e.g. Giles et al. 1981), the search for housing (e.g. Purnell et al. 1999), and even adoption procedures (e.g. Fasoli and Maass 2019). It affects not only basic levels of credibility (e.g. Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010) and co-operation (e.g. Kristiansen and Giles 1992) but also extends to the treatment that individuals receive in institutional contexts such as the judicial system (e.g. Dixon et al. 2002). Since people react to language as if it were an indicator of the personal and social characteristics of its users, discrimination based on language is effectively a proxy for discrimination based on individuals’ (perceived) sexual orientation, immigration background, ethnicity, and other salient social group members. This is an important issue for language attitudes studies to address.

There is a long tradition of research which demonstrates that language attitudes affect not only how people perceive and treat others, but also how they engage with language themselves. Attitudes have been shown to have implications for the languages that individuals decide to learn (e.g. Gardner 1982;
Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) and for how frequently they use these languages (e.g. Edwards and Fuchs 2018). Attitudes also influence which languages a person decides to use in which contexts and with whom, including the decision of which language(s) to pass on to their children (e.g. De Houwer 1999; Kircher 2022). Moreover, attitudes have a significant bearing upon the varieties of particular languages that people use, and upon the extent of this variation (e.g. Ladegaard 2000; Hundt et al. 2015; Hawkey 2018; Hawkey 2019; see also Kristiansen and Jørgensen 2005). Notably, this is not static: Giles’ communication accommodation theory (CAT) elucidates how attitudes affect individuals’ adjustments to their language use during interactions in order to create, maintain, or decrease social distance from their interlocutors (Giles 1973; Giles and Ogay 2007; see also Leimgruber 2019).

The influence of language attitudes at the micro level of individual linguistic choices naturally also has consequences at the macro level. For instance, language attitudes influence language change (e.g. Kristiansen 2011). Moreover, in multilingual societies, language attitudes play a crucial role in whether languages undergo shift and loss, or whether they are maintained and even revitalised (e.g. Sallabank 2013; Durham 2014; Hornsby 2015). Furthermore, it has long been recognised that knowledge about language attitudes is fundamental to the formulation of effective language planning measures – for without such knowledge, it is impossible to predict which measures are likely to achieve their intended aims, and which ones are destined to fail (Cargile et al. 1994; see also O’Rourke and Hogan-Brun 2013). As Lewis (1981: 262) puts it:

Any policy for language […] has to take account of the attitudes of those that are likely to be affected. In the long run, no policy will succeed which does not do one of three things: conform to the expressed attitudes of those involved; persuade those who express negative attitudes about the rightness of the policy; or seek to remove the cause of the disagreement.

Research has shown time and again the lacking effectiveness of policy and planning measures which fail to take account of the attitudes of those who will be affected (e.g. Hilton and Gooskens 2013; Kircher 2016a). In the context of language planning, it is also important to note that language attitudes can function as both, ‘input into and output from social action’ – and language planners often strive for this kind of two-way function when devising planning measures (Garrett 2010: 21).

1.4 Factors That Influence Language Attitudes

There are various models of language attitudes that have been developed within the mentalist framework (e.g. Giles and Ryan 1982; Ryan et al. 1982, 1984; Cargile et al. 1994; Cargile and Bradac 2001; see Giles and Marlow 2011 for an overview). They all reveal the complexity of language...
attitudes, including the fact that not everyone – even within the same social group – holds the same language attitudes. The socio-demographic variables that have been shown to influence a person’s language attitudes include their age (e.g. Paltridge and Giles 1984), their gender and location (e.g. Bellamy 2012; Montgomery 2012; Loureiro-Rodríguez et al. 2013; Price and Tamburelli 2019), their educational level (e.g. Dewaele and McCloskey 2014; Kircher and Fox 2019), and the amount of contact they have with the relevant language group (e.g. Hundt 2019; Kircher and Fox 2019). Certain personality characteristics – for instance, extraversion, emotional stability, and tolerance of ambiguity – have also been found to affect language attitudes (e.g. Dewaele and McCloskey 2014). Moreover, for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, language attitudes are influenced by the age of onset of their hearing loss, the age of sign language acquisition, the hearing status of their parents and siblings, and the number of years they have spent at a school for the deaf (Kannapell 1985, 1989).

A further factor with a bearing upon language attitudes is the strength of a person’s social identity that is associated with a particular variety (e.g. Kannapell 1985, 1989; Cargile and Giles 1997; Kircher 2016b). However, the influence of social identity on language attitudes is not always straightforward: Changes in the frame of reference for categorisation and social identification may dynamically affect language attitudes. For instance, Dragojevic and Giles (2014) showed that when Californians were asked to judge an American Southern English accent, this variety was evaluated much more positively when it was compared with Punjabi-accented English (i.e. when there was an international frame of reference, and speakers with an American Southern English accent were categorised as ingroup members) than when it was compared with a Californian accent (i.e. when there was an interregional frame of reference, and speakers with an American Southern English accent were categorised as outgroup members). As the researchers note: ‘That the same [language user] can be categorised as an ingroup or an outgroup member is, in part, made possible by the fact that language cues [ . . . ] can index multiple identities at different levels of abstraction’ (Dragojevic and Giles 2014: 93; see also Abrams and Hogg 1987).

There are numerous further situational variables that have been shown to affect language attitudes, including the immediate social situation: Varieties or even specific linguistic features that tend to be evaluated negatively in one situation might, under different circumstances, be perceived positively (e.g. Carmichael 2016). Cargile et al. (1994) illustrate this with the example of a slow speech rate, which is likely to be considered odd during introductions at a cocktail party, yet would probably be perceived as entirely appropriate in a lecture on nuclear physics, where it would be seen as an attempt to facilitate the transmission of highly technical information. The interpersonal history between the interlocutors constitutes another important influencing variable: The more developed the interpersonal history, the less likely an individual will be to hold attitudes that are purely based on another person’s language use – because ‘attitudes triggered by various linguistic features are most likely to affect recipients’ behaviours
towards senders in contexts of low familiarity’ (Cargile et al. 1994: 223). When individuals are unfamiliar with one another, their expectations about the likely linguistic behaviour of their interlocutor can also play a role in shaping attitudes. If an individual negatively violates expectations by using a less prestigious variety than anticipated, this leads to even more negative evaluations (compared to evaluations of interlocutors who use the variety that is expected of them); and if they violate expectations by using a more prestigious variety than anticipated, this leads to even more positive evaluations (see e.g. Dragojevic et al. 2021 for a discussion of the relevant literature). Among hearing individuals, listening conditions also have a bearing upon language attitudes, with noisy listening conditions making it more difficult to process speech – which, in turn, results in more negative language attitudes (e.g. Dragojevic and Giles 2016). Moreover, a growing body of research demonstrates that individuals shift in their perception of linguistic features if they are primed with relevant information (Hay et al. 2006; Hay and Drager 2010; Carmichael 2016; moreover, Drager et al. 2010 demonstrate that priming affects production as well as perception).

In addition to the socio-demographic and situational variables outlined above, there are also two main socio-structural factors that influence the formation and expression of language attitudes: standardisation and vitality (Ryan et al. 1982). Standardisation is said to have occurred when a formal set of norms defining the ‘correct’ usage of a language has been codified (usually by means of dictionaries and grammar books) and this codified form has become accepted within the relevant speech community (e.g. Fishman 1970; Schneider 2007). Typically, the process of standardisation is advanced and confirmed via such institutions as the government, the education system, and the mass media (e.g. Havinga 2018, 2019; Rutten et al. 2020). The standard consequently becomes associated with these institutions, the kinds of interactions that most commonly occur within them, and the sets of values that they represent (e.g. Fishman 1970; Schneider 2007). Notably, recent research indicates that the linguistic proximity of the variety that undergoes standardisation and the new standard itself is also a factor that impacts speakers’ attitudes (Vari and Tamburelli 2020). The second socio-structural variable that affects language attitudes, vitality, refers to the number of interaction networks that actually employ a particular variety for essential functions: ‘The more numerous and more important the functions served by the variety for the greater number of individuals, the greater is its vitality’ (Ryan et al. 1982). A theory of so-called ethnolinguistic vitality was proposed by Giles and his colleagues. Defining ethnolinguistic vitality as ‘that which makes a group behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations’ (Giles et al. 1977: 308), they systematise the numerous variables relating to ethnolinguistic vitality by organising them under three main headings: status, demography, and institutional support. The more status a variety and its users have, the more favourable a linguistic group’s demographic profile is, and the more institutional support the linguistic group and its variety receive, the more ethnolinguistic vitality the variety is considered to have (see e.g. Smith et al. 2018 and