Available online at www.jlls.org

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

ISSN: 1305-578X

Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13(2), 487-509; 2017

Students' perceptions of 'Good English' and the underlying ideologies behind their perceptions

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APA Citation:

Karakaş, A. (2017). Students' perceptions of 'Good English' and the underlying ideologies behind their perceptions. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13*(2), 487-509.

Submission Date:10/08/2017

Acceptance Date:10/09/2017

Abstract

This paper primarily aims to explore how the notion of '*Good English*' and its sister terms, such as good writing/writers and good speaking/speakers, are perceived by ELT students and secondly attempts to determine the language ideologies that lie behind their perceptions. A phenomenological research approach was adopted making use of open-ended email questionnaires with 42 students studying at a Turkish university to become English language teachers. The data analysed through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative content analysis revealed that most students' perceptions of *Good English* are normative and accord with the traditional view of the notion in which it is equated with *correct English* and *native-like English*. It was also observed that most students' perceptions of *Good English* guided their perceptions of good English speakers and writers and the way they perceive themselves as good or bad speakers and writers. The results indicated that particular ideologies, such as standard English, native-speakerism and authenticity, impact upon many students' normative perceptions of *Good English* and that such ideologies are passed on to students through various mechanisms. Not submitting themselves to these ideologies, a small group of students offered a different conceptualisation of *Good English* by underlining the importance of adjusting their language use to their interlocutors in different communication situations and prioritizing intelligibility over grammatical accuracy and native-like pronunciation/accent. Drawing on the results, the study makes some suggestions regarding the potential constituents of *Good English* and the key attributes of *Good English* users.

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Keywords: Good English; standard English; native-speakerism; language ideology

1. Introduction

The notion of *good English* has been subject of much debate and theoretical discussion for over a century in the field of English language teaching. It is, therefore, still an issue that has remained contentious. Many scholars have explored this issue in depth over the years from different angles, yet very few studies exist in the literature that have sought to determine the constituents of *good English*. The reasons for the lack of a clear guideline about what constitutes *good English* are primarily twofold: the vague use of the term in previous studies without any explicit and principled manner and a normative conceptualization of it in which *good English* was assumed to denote correct English,

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English of the educated native English speakers (NESs), and conventional English (Mauranen, Hynninen & Ranta, 2010; Mauranen, 2012). That is, the term was, one way or another, tied to the conventions of so-called standard English (StE). For instance, *good English*, alongside other descriptive adjectives such as *excellent*, *fair* and *poor*, was often given as a descriptor in the scales of attitudinal and perceptual studies to participants so that they could evaluate their own and others' perceived English skills (e.g. Cots, 2013; Pilkinton-Pihko, 2010; Suviniitty, 2008). Additionally, research has indicated that the term, *good English*, was also used in author guidelines of many journals while describing the required kind of English (Kirkman, 2001), but again in vague terms. It has also become part of most people's daily discourse as commonsense notions when remarking on their own and others' English language skills (e.g. I've *good English* pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary or Her English accent is so good) and setting linguistic goals for their desired English skills (e.g. I'd like to have *good English* pronunciation).

It is evident from the above accounts that no well-defined specifications of *good English* are available now because it has largely been left to the individuals to interpret what constitutes *good English* both in studies and in daily discourse. Generally, individuals have acted on the assumption that *good English* is achieved by speaking and writing grammatically correct English and that NESs use *good English*. Such assumptions about *good English* and the outdated view of the notion have yet to be explored in great depth. Hence, the major purpose of this paper is to explore how English-major students perceive *good English*. Part of the purpose was to find out students' perceptions about the main qualities of *good English* speakers and writers. This research was also motivated by the fact that despite the abundance of much debate and theoretical discussions regarding the recurring question, i.e. *what is good English*?, these debates and discussions as well as empirical studies are devoid of individuals' ideological positions towards the notion. For that reason, in this study, students' perceptions of *good English* were investigated against the theory of language ideologies.

1.1. Language ideology: Definition and different approaches

Due to the ideological grounds of the notion of *good English*, it is worth discussing the theory of language ideologies as the larger frame on which students' perceptions are mapped. Language ideology is a concept that has been discussed and variously conceptualized by several researchers, mostly from the field of linguistic anthropology (e.g. Rumsey, 1990; Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity, 1998; Silverstein, 1985; Woolard, 2004). Thus, there is a wide range of definitions of the concept, but they are relatively similar to one another. However, they differ in their approach to the concept. Most scholars have emphasized the cognitive underpinnings of the concept, describing it as beliefs, ideas and perceptions about languages, varieties and their forms and uses (Irvine, 1989; Irvine & Gal, 2000; Silverstein, 1979; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). In this strand of work, the most widely-cited definition is that of Silverstein (1979) who described language ideology as "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (p. 193). This definition suggests that language ideologies are a means for language users to "frame their understanding of linguistic varieties [their structures and uses] and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them" (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 35). Therefore, one can conclude that individuals project their ideologies into their practices and position themselves relating to other languages/varieties. Although the researchers lack consensus on the defining characteristics of it, they still largely agree that ideologies are socially and culturally deep-seated, collectively shared and often unquestioned.

However, some scholars, including political philosophers, such as Higgs (1987), and linguists, like Patrick (2009) and Register (2001), argued that mainly attending to the cognitive component of the concept brushes aside other constituting facets such as those of affection and behaviour. To these

scholars, ideology is a superordinate concept consisting of four interrelated aspects, i.e. cognitive, affective, programmatic (behavioural) and solidary. In this conceptualization, it is considered that language ideologies

- shape, from a cognitive perspective, speakers' perceptions and understandings about language(s), varieties, and their structures and uses,
- guide, from an affective dimension, speakers' evaluations of what they regard as good and bad use of the language as well as their neutral stance,
- drive, from a behavioural perspective, speakers to linguistically behave, i.e. speak and write, in line with their perceptions and evaluations,
- propels, from a solidary perspective, speakers to collectively act in their linguistic practices and share the same unity of interests in language-related issues.

Drawing on the above aspects of language ideologies, one can surmise that the ideologies held by speakers can influence their understanding of social, cultural and political life with respect to language. One can also reckon that language ideologies influence speakers' attitudes towards and motivation for using language in particular manners and making value judgments about language, its structures and uses. It is also notable to mention other aspects of language ideologies noted by Kroskrity (2000). According to him, language ideologies serve the interests of a certain socio-cultural group, and are manifold depending on some variables (e.g. social class, gender and generations). He also added that speakers are not equally aware of the ideologies they hold, and they draw on their ideologies to make sense of their "sociocultural experience and their linguistic and discursive forms as indexically tied to features of their sociocultural experience" (Kroskrity, 2000, p. 24).

1.2. Prevailing language ideologies of the English language

One pervasive ideology regarding English is the StE ideology. This ideology purports that there is a national variety of English, which "unlike most other varieties of English, has been codified over the centuries in the form of dictionaries, grammar books, pronunciation guides and manuals of usage" (Milroy, 2007, p. 136). It is also perceived as the most privileged variety which holds the power in its hand in decisions about language, its structure and use (Pullum, 2004). Moreover, it is considered to be the model of English on which assessment of speakers' linguistic performance is based (Davies, 1999). This ideology asserts that irrespective of nationality backgrounds, all language users should attempt to adhere to the norms of (educated) NESs in their linguistic acts (Cogo, 2010; Karakaş, 2016). Therefore, this model is promoted as the ideal model for non-native English speakers (NNESs) in schools (Bex & Watts, 1999; Pullum, 2004). Previous studies with students and teaching staff in higher education (e.g. Hu, 2015; Jenkins, 2014; Karakaş, 2016; Pilkinton-Pihko, 2010, 2013) and with learners and teachers in the ELT sector (e.g. Liou, 2010; Jenkins, 2007) showed that speakers, acting under the influence of StE ideology, had the following beliefs about English:

- the defining element of whether one's English is good or bad is the proximity of their English to StE and above all how correctly they use English,
- StE is likened to the English of NESs whereas non-standard English is associated with the English of NNESs,
- Grammatical correctness ensures success in international communication and understanding.

Another prevailing ideology, also closely interwoven with the StE ideology, is the ideology of native-speakerism. Unlike StE ideology, native-speakerism is mainly concerned with the speakers of language and the way they are perceived by others. According to Holliday (2006), native-speakerism is "a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that 'native-speaker' teachers

represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (p. 385). This ideology mainly asserts that a NES is an expert on the language, with a high degree of competence in its all facets and that they are furnished with this competence by birth, which is why they are perceived to be linguistically superior to NNESs both in teaching and using English.

There are also some other ideologies, such as the ideology of authenticity (Lowe & Pinner, 2016; Woolard, 2008) implicit in the discourse around the ideology of native-speakerism. Jenkins (2014) insisted that the ideology of authenticity covertly supports StE ideology. The ideology of authenticity requires that for any variety to be considered authentic and valuable, it should be associated with a particular geographical location. Namely, "the value of a language" is grounded "in its relationship to a particular community" (Woolard, 2008, p. 304). Therefore, she added that "[t]o profit, one must sound like that kind of person who is valued as natural and authentic, must capture the tones and the nuances" (p. 305). Thus, speakers, i.e. NNESs, who do not belong to that particular community, attempt to imitate the ways the valued authentic speakers (i.e. NESs) follow in language use by seeking to remove their L1 features. Previous studies (e.g. Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2013; Jenkins, 2014; Kuteeva, 2014; Suviniitty, 2007) into the perceptions and attitudes of language users in English-medium institutions observed that their participants, both academic staff and students, articulated various ideas under the influence of the abovementioned ideologies. The following are the most-oft mentioned thoughts by the participants in those studies:

- authentic English, correct English and good English are spoken by NESs and thus native English is the most favourable model for NNESs in language learning,
- the ultimate goal of language learning is to reach native-like competence in language use,
- NESs are the norm providers, consequently NNESs are required to conform to the native English norms in their linguistic behaviours,

1.3. Background: Debate, theoretical discussions and research on good English

It seems that the debates and discussions around the notion of *good English* have revolved around two different conceptualizations advocated by scholars of two schools of thought. These two schools of thoughts can be categorized as normative and post-normative. According to normative school of thought, *good English* corresponds to StE, or correct English. It is thus assumed in most books whose titles include the notion of *good English* and related notions, such as good writing, speaking and pronunciation, that for speakers to be proficient in speaking and writing *good English*, they should be knowledgeable about common errors, a set of figures of speech and numerous aspects of grammar and syntax, including punctuation, spelling, capitalization, diction (e.g. Arscott, 1997; Johnson, 1991; Mathur, 2012; Palmer, 2013). Therefore, language users, particularly from non-English dominant contexts, assume that they need to confirm to the norms of StE in order to speak and write *good English*. The prevalence of this assumption among the stakeholders of higher education has been substantially confirmed by researchers who investigated NNESs' attitudes towards and perceptions about their and others' English as well as their desired language abilities, reaching findings that not all but for most of their participants, *good English* meant StE or correct English (Cots, 2013; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2013; Karakaş, 2016). The case with language learners and teachers as well as teacher trainees and trainers was not so different as earlier studies demonstrated that it is also this traditional assumption of *good English* that has widely permeated the minds of ELT stakeholders (e.g. Dewey & Pineda, 2017; Jenkins, 2007; Mauranen et al., 2010; Mauranen, 2012). For most participants in these studies, *good English* was equivalent to StE and what is known as Queen's English or BBC English. Likewise, research with language users in various sectors, such as service and business, indicated that most participants wished to display a native-like competence and performance in

speaking and writing, with a belief that only then could they use English more efficiently and gain a more privileged status among their community (e.g. Lee, 2012; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Drawing on the discussions put forward by the scholars with a normative approach to good English and the findings of previous research, it can be safely concluded that the basic building block of (speaking and writing) good English is correctness in different sides of language, e.g. spelling, punctuation, vocabulary choice and grammar.

Contrariwise, according to non-normative school of thought, the notions of *correct English* and *good English* are not the same phenomenon as claimed by the scholars having the traditional view of *good English*. Therefore, some scholars insisted long ago that there is a dire need for a clear understanding of the distinction between these two concepts (e.g. Greenbaum, 1985; Johnson, 1991; Krapp, 1910). To Greenbaum (1985) and Krapp (1910), the difference between *good English* and *correct English* lies in the fact that *correct English* obliges language users to stick to the conventions of StE while *good English* allows users to make adjustments in their linguistic acts and harmonize their acts with those of their interlocutors in order to achieve successful communication. For post-normative scholars, *good English* is a multi-componential construct that cannot be satisfactorily described through a single definition. Thus, a number of views have been brought together for a thorough conceptualization of good English. To begin, Krapp (1910) maintained long ago that "all good English is not necessarily standard" (p. 326). He defined *good English* as "any English that "hits the mark", that is, language that can "express exactly what the speaker or writer wishes to express, in such linguistic terms as will convey to the hearer or reader exactly those impressions which it is intended that he shall receive" (p. 326). A similar description, but differently worded, was provided by Greenbaum (1985), according to whom, "[g]ood English is good use of the resources available in the language", namely it is "language used effectively or aesthetically, language that conveys clearly and appropriately what is intended" (p. 17). These two definitions make it clear that speaking and writing *good English* is ensured when speakers are able to successfully exchange their communicative messages with each other, using plain and intelligible English. Put differently, good English "is essentially an aid to clear-thinking and confident self-expression" (Arscott, 1997, p. 1). Additionally, good English is judged against an intelligibility principle and considered to "have more pragmatic and elliptic forms" compared to the traditional understanding of the term (Dewey & Pineda, 2017).

The non-normative view of *good English* has been substantially embraced by English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as an Academic Lingua Franca (ELFA) researchers who strictly reject associating speaking and writing *good English* with *native English* and *correct English*. For instance, Mauranen (2012) argued with respect to (academic) writing that "[s]ince writing cultures vary, there is no universal standard of 'good English'" that is applicable to writing in different contexts (p. 241). Thus, among the core constituents of good writing, one cannot see any obligation for correct usage or compliance with any particular norms and styles, but communication of ideas, opinions and meaning plainly and comprehensibly (Björkman, 2010, 2013; Karakaş, 2016). To write well in English, one does not need to set aside her or his culture specific styles and inclinations in their texts because, as earlier noted above and found in some studies (e.g. Mauranen, 2012; Maringe & Jenkins, 2015), such differences are part of speakers' repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources that they can capitalize on to enrich their writing skills and styles. Additionally, scholars believe that for writing, especially academic writing, all language users are, regardless of their native and non-native status, beginners in the acquisition of writing skills (Ferguson, 2007; Mauranen, 2006). Mauranen (2006) explained why speakers start as novices in academic writing, emphasizing the fact "that the English of academic genres is new use to all its practitioners at the beginning" (p. 149). Similar arguments are also true for *good English* in speaking. ELF(A) researchers, such as Björkman (2010, 2011a, 2013) and Hynninen (2010) differentiated speaking *good English* from speaking correctly or from the way NESs speak

English. They benchmarked their criteria for speaking *good English* against striving for mutual intelligibility by sharing the communicative burden and employing pragmatic communicative strategies such as repairing, repetitions and code-switching.

Previous studies carried out with people from the business and service sectors (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2010; Hynninen, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Pilkinton-Pihko, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) as well as non-English major students and lecturers from the higher education sector (e.g. Björkman, 2008, 2009; Kitazawa, 2012; Smit, 2007) demonstrated that language users had an instrumental view of English. According to this view, effective communication does not only occur through linguistic correctness or mimicking the way NESs use language, but is mostly realized when speakers have shared knowledge of the content of communication or field knowledge, when they can perform a wise adaptation to their interlocutors' language use, and when they avoid using slangs, idioms and jargons that are not stored in each speakers' linguistic inventory. As Ehrenreich (2010) argued, the difference between language users' approach and language teachers and learners' approach to *good English* originates from their need for English. That is, people in non-educational domains like business and service and non-English majors (e.g. engineering students and lecturers) are content-focused speakers, with a lesser concern on linguistic issues such as using English correctly, sounding like NESs, using phraseological units of native English in comparison to language teachers and learners who are actually language-focused speakers. For language users, English was just a means of getting things done.

1.4. Research questions

Building on the discussions cited above and seeing the descriptions of *good English* as incomplete and controversial, this study aimed at answering the following research questions to discover what constitutes *good English* from the perspectives of English-major students:

1. What are students' overall perceptions of good English?
    a. What language ideologies lie beneath students' perceptions about good English?
2. What are students' perceptions of good English speakers and writers?
    a. Do they consider themselves to be a good English speaker and writer? Why/Why not?
    b. What language ideologies lie beneath students' perceptions of good English speaker and writer?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

This study can be described as a phenomenological research study with an attempt "to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation or phenomenon" (Offredy & Vickers, 2010, p. 100). The phenomenon under examination is the notion of good English in general and its breakdown into different sides, such as good writing and speaking, features of good English speakers and writers. Through this research design, the aim was to gain knowledge of the experiences and perceptions of the participants by interpreting their descriptions of various phenomena around the notion of good English. As phenomenological inquiry sets individual experiences and perceptions from their own standpoints at the hearth of the research, it can, as Lester (1999, para. 3) discussed, be effective "at challenging structural or normative assumptions", i.e. ideologies, held by the relevant actors about a given phenomenon.

2.2. Participants

The participants were 42 pre-service EFL teachers in their first year at a state university located in Burdur. Thirty-three of them were female and 9 of them were male. The participants were sampled through a mixture of convenience and purposive sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrsion, 2007). The purpose of recruiting participants through convenience sampling was to easily access the participants, taking advantage of the researcher's close acquaintanceship with the participants as being one of their lecturers (Mackey & Gass, 2005) and through purposive sampling, the aim was to work with individuals who have greater familiarity with the phenomenon under investigation (Dörnyei, 2007). The type of sampling was also the reason for excluding students in the second, third and fourth grades from the research since the researcher has had no previous acquaintanceship with them. More than that, as the research was qualitatively grounded, generalization of the findings was not a serious matter of question. Therefore, the number of participants sampled from the first-year students was considered satisfactory to be able to reach an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon.

2.3. Instrument

The main source of data was an open-ended email questionnaire developed by the researcher. An email questionnaire is "a SURVEY that sends the survey instrument (e.g., a QUESTIONNAIRE) to a respondent via email" (Tavakoli, 2012, p. 187). Open-ended email questionnaires are practical tools of research when carrying out a thorough investigation into the research phenomenon, especially if the participants are skilled at expressing themselves in writing and feel that the research topic is interesting and relevant to them. The major reason for choosing an open-format question over a closed (quantitative) one was because they "can provide a greater "richness" than fully quantitative data… can yield graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and can also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated" (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 36). Bearing these points in mind, the following questions were included in the questionnaire:

- How do you define Good English in general? or what does Good English mean for you?
- In your view, what does it mean to speak good English? Please, explain.
- According to you, what are the main qualities or characteristics of good English speakers?
- Do you think you speak good English? Why/why not?
- In your view, what does it mean to write good English?
- According to you, what are the main qualities or characteristics of good English writers?
- Do you think you write good English? Why/why not?

As is seen above, some questions considerably overlap with each other. The overlapping questions were deliberately included in the questionnaire to determine the consistency of the participants' perceptions about *good English* from different perspectives.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

The questionnaires were sent via emails to 65 students who were attending Advance Reading and Writing II module in the fall term of the 2016-2017 academic year. Students' emails were already available to the researcher as emails are the main means of communication between the researcher and students. Students were asked to fill out the questionnaires and return them back to the researcher via emails within two weeks. Out of 65 students, only 42 sent their questionnaires back to the researcher. To analyse the data, a blend of descriptive analysis and interpretive analysis was employed in order to quantify the data through quantitative content analysis (e.g. by calculating the frequencies and

percentages of particular words, word groups and phrases used in students' descriptions of good English, characteristics of good English speakers and writers) and to examine the literal and especially the 'latent' meanings, i.e. the deep meaning underneath the surface (Berg & Lune, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007), expressed by the students in their answers through qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012). The analytical procedure was fulfilled by following four key steps suggested by Creswell (1998). Firstly, each of the returned questionnaires was carefully read, then major words, word groups and phrases and sentences were underlined; thirdly, the underlined word groups and statements were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to group the underlined sections into themes and sub-themes. Finally, the themes were compared with one another to draw conclusions with respect to the individual research questions (Ezzy, 2002).

3. Results and discussion

The results are presented around the research questions of the study. For sake of clarity, bold types are used to highlight the main themes and the transition between them while presenting the results.

3.1. What are students' overall perceptions of Good English?

The analysis of the data resulted in the identification of three major themes that recurred with erratic frequency in students' answers. These themes were named as follows: normative perceptions of good English, half-normative perceptions of good English and post-normative perceptions of good English.

Of these themes, the theme of **normative perceptions of good English** was the most intensive one into which more students' answers were coded compared to the other two themes. In total, 24 students' descriptions of good English were found to be normative in different terms. It emerged from the descriptors they used in their definitions that they associated *good English* with *correctness* and *nativeness* in general, taking the traditional stand on good English (e.g. Arscott, 1997; Johnson, 1991; Mathur, 2012; Palmer, 2013). This finding also answered the sub-research question, providing evidence that StE ideology and the ideology of native-speakerism lie behind students' normative perceptions of good English (e.g. Davies, 1999; Holliday, 2006; Karakaş, 2016; Milroy, 2007).

Turning now to the most frequently used phrases in students' descriptions, it can be said that a rich variety of phrases were used for particular skills. The following table summarizes the most frequently used phrases in students' descriptions according to the skill areas:

Table 1. Most frequently mentioned phrases in students' own descriptions of good English

Speaking	Vocabulary	Writing	Grammar	Others
well-spoken	right words	writing academically	faultless	pure language
spoken perfectly	variety of words	writing correctly (2)	using grammar correctly (3)	proper English
speaking fluently (7)		well written	fitting grammar rules	right spelling
native-like accent		strong vocabulary for writing	no grammatical mistake	using all parts of language correctly

correct pronunciation (2)	write formally or informally	careful usage	unity of good writing, listening and speaking
good pronunciation (2)	well-writing	grammatical accuracy	understanding everything
right pronunciation		knowing grammar rules well	being well in every area
speaking correctly (2)		good level of English grammar	a great deal of linguistic knowledge
speaking grammatically			no code-mixing
fluent and effective communication			world knowledge
			thinking fast
			correct punctuation

The phrases used provide enough evidence of students' normative perceptions of good English in which the constituents gather around speaking and writing in the main and the notions of correctness and nativeness. This situation was much more evident in most students' full descriptions. Take, for example, the description below by S3 who associated good English with NESs and grammatical accuracy.

> **S3:** Good English is a language, which is *used and spoken perfectly by their native speaker*. Also in Good English *there shouldn't be any grammatical mistake* and *speaking should be very fluently*. On the other hand, in writing language words, *grammatical rules etc. should be used correctly*...

The most interesting aspect in S3's accounts was the explicit reference to NESs as the perfect speaker and user since such a description of good English conveys the message that NNESs are out of the league of being good English users. This way of describing good English plainly shows the impact of ideologies of native-speakerism, authenticity and StE on students' perceptions on linguistic notions.

Similarly, closer inspection of Table 1 shows that pronunciation and accent, implicated in speaking or in people's speech, frequently collocated with the word 'native' and the adjectives 'correct' and 'right' and that fluency in speech is a serious matter of concern in most students' descriptions. For example, the following extracts exemplify the importance attached to the concepts of pronunciation, accents, fluency and grammatical correctness as constituents of the notion of good English.

> **S5**: If we use different words and *use grammar faultless* this is the Good English.

> **S13:** According to me, good English means *speaking fluently*, understanding everything that you hear and read, *using grammar correctly*, and being well in every area.

> **S19**: For me the Good English is that *spoken well enough* for a person with *the right words, sentences* and even *the right pronunciation*.

> **S41:** Good English means that you can speak, write and listen nearly most of English spoken or written language. Also *without grammar mistakes*.

If we now turn to the second theme, **half-normative perceptions of good English**, it emerged that only seven students' descriptions fell into this category. This theme was named as half-normative since, on one hand, part of students' descriptions was normative, with an emphasis on correctness in pronunciation, speaking, grammar, spelling and native-like fluency, yet on the other hand, part of their

descriptions was non-normative, underlining the value of conducting effective communication with their interlocutors via clear expressions of ideas. For instance, the following extracts demonstrate how students' descriptions oscillate between normative and non-normative conceptualizations of good English.

> **S11:** For me good English means that you are able to *communicate with people who speak English without a problem*. Also *not having an accent* is one of the most important parts for me.
>
> **S12:** I think, *Good English is a way of communication*. As everybody knows, language is vital for communication and nowadays, English is most spoken language in the world. When we speak English, *we should use it carefully*. I can explain Good English with some examples. For instance, if we take care *grammar rules, pronunciation*, we use Good English. For good English, it's very important *not to corrupt*.
>
> **S32:** Good English is *expressing your ideas clear*ly also speaking with in front of you fluently, writing *carefully*, using grammar *correctly* and reading cautiously.

The above accounts create an impression that those who cannot sound like NESs and depart from StE conventions in their linguistic behaviours are not considered good English users. It is most likely because the English used in such manners is, as implied in S12's descriptions, perceived to be a corrupted form of English. This way of thinking indeed points to the potency of the ideologies of native-speakerism and authenticity on shaping students' linguistic perceptions.

The results closely match those identified in previous studies with lecturers and university students (e.g. Cots, 2013; Doiz et al., 2013; Karakaş, 2016), language teachers and learners (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Mauranen et al., 2010; Mauranen, 2010), and language users from non-educational sectors (e.g. Lee, 2012; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) in which the participants' perceptions of good English was rather traditional as they desired to linguistically perform at a NES level and use English correctly. The belief that guided the participants' desire in language use appeared to be that gaining NES competence and using English correctly would gain them a privileged status among other speakers. Here, the prestige factor of native-speakerism seems to be at work in shaping users' language beliefs (Milroy, 2007). A possible explanation for this case is that through language teaching materials, such as codified dictionaries, grammar books, punctuation guides and usage manuals, such kinds of beliefs are passed on to language learners and users in schools and then these beliefs get entrenched through time, being placed in a very strong position that are so fixed that they are resistant to change.

Moving on now to the final theme, i.e. **post-normative perceptions of good English**, it was found that 11 students' descriptions of good English differed from the traditional view. Generally, these students did not conceive of English as a topic of study that needs to be mastered on a NES level, but as a facilitating vehicle of communication that can be bent and adjusted in situ for effective construction and communication of their ideas and effective reception of their interlocutors' intended meaning. Therefore, instead of referring to single linguistic elements, they used words like '*correct understanding*', '*expressing ideas clearly'*, '*using English effectively*', '*communication all over the world'*, among others. Unlike the students with half-normative perceptions of good English, in non-normative descriptions of the 11 students, there were no references to linguistic elements (e.g. correct pronunciation, faultless grammar and native-like accent) of StE and native English. The following extracts from students' descriptions illustrate some of the post-normative perceptions of students:

> **S1**: I think good English means *good communication all over the world*.
>
> **S20:** According to me; Speaking good English means you can *express yourself and your own ideas easily*.

S30: To me, Good English in general is *using it effectively* and it means that *understanding what is spoken and answering to it*.

S38: Good English means *speaking with people fluently* and transfer our thoughts to in front of us without stopping.

The phrases uttered by non-normatively-oriented students are centred on the idea of prioritizing effective communication over grammatical accuracy, native-like fluency or accent. There is thus plentiful evidence that some students were persuaded by the emerging ideology that equates good English with effective use of English that will ensure a high mutual communicative intelligibility among interactants.

Students' post-normative perceptions of good English corroborate the descriptions of scholars such as Krapp (1910), Greenbaum (1985) and Arscott (1997) who highlighted the need to separate good English from correct English, with a great stress on mutual effort for effective communication. This finding is somewhat unexpected, as most language users believe that it is the responsibility of NNESs to make themselves clearly understood while their interlocutors, especially if they are NESs or are perceived as StE users, do not need to put any efforts to adjust their English to that of NNESs. However, an expectation of this kind totally disagrees with a basic communication principle, i.e. the "fair share of communicative burden" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 83) according to which speakers should accept mutual responsibility and shoulder the communicative burden equally during interpersonal communication irrespective of their NES or NNES status, their varying proficiency levels and Englishes.

3.2. What are students' perceptions of good English speakers and writers?

In order to find out students' perceptions of good English speakers and writers, the defining phrases and word groups in students' descriptions were categorized into the above three groups. To start with students' descriptions of good English speakers, it emerged from the analysis that 20 students characterized good English speakers and writers with various normative attributes, while 14 students with post-normative attributes and 8 students with a mixed of normative and non-normative attributes. According to the perceptions of students in the normative category, the following are the attributes of good English speakers and writers in students' own words:

Table 2. Normative perceptions of good English speakers'/writers' attributes

	Good English speakers / writers*			
ID	Communicative Expression	Vocabulary	Grammar	Others
S2	speak fluently and clearly	have rich vocabulary stock	use correct grammar structure	have self-confidence / research knowledge*
S6	speak fluently by pronouncing words correctly	use variety of words*	full knowledge of grammatical rules*	are creative*
S7		have knowledge of English vocabulary	have grammar and fluency / activating prior grammar knowledge*	have awareness of the topic and the type of the writing task
S8	speak fluently	select the words carefully*	use grammar rules correctly**	do not get excited while speaking / use punctuation marks correctly*

S11	speak clean (clearly) never make pronunciation mistakes		never make grammatical mistakes	have control over the language and topic* / stick to the topic*
S12	speak fluently		are careful about rules	are self-confident / have great imagination*
S13	pronounce words in a correct way / are fluent		use grammar correctly**	write sentences in cohesion and form meaning unity between sentences
S15	are excellent speakers in terms of pronunciation		know the English grammatical rules*	
S16	have fluency and clarity / use it like his mother tongue	having a good vocabulary knowledge	having a good grammar knowledge*	use no slang / having knowledge about rhetoric*
S18	their accents are understandable/talk about almost anything	copious vocabulary**	use grammar correctly**	are not nervous / people understand them easily / people like listening to them / read many books*
S22	have correct pronunciation		control of language and grammar*	listen to native speakers
S23		know how to use the word*	fit the language skills and grammatical structure	are not shy/ know how to make research*
S25		use different words**	pay attention to grammar rules	know the rules of essays*
S27	pay attention to accents / to speaking fluently		pay attention to grammar rules / to spelling rules, writing rules of language*	pay attention to mimics, gestures / are experienced speakers
S33	speak fluently		know grammatical rules**	are confident, creative and positive/ know punctuation in English*
S34	speak fluently, correctly, nice, self-assuredly, evenly explicitly and transparently			give attention to detail*
S35	speak without doubt, any worry and any pronunciation mistakes		using correct English grammar / know grammar rules and writing rules*	tell ideas effectively* / write persuasively*
S36	have effective speaking skills, pronunciation	have appropriate word usage	use the rules and vocabularies carefully in the essay or other writings*	avoid using unnecessary details
S37	communicate with people easily	use suitable vocabularies	use suitable grammar rules	cannot be shy

*The attributes used in the descriptions of good English writers only
** The attributes used in the descriptions of both good English speakers and writers

Table 2 shows that students' descriptions of good English speakers and writers matched their overall perceptions of good English in which linguistic elements of StE (e.g. grammatical correctness, correctness in pronunciation) and native English (e.g. native-like performance, native-like pronunciation and accent) were the major defining attributes of good English speakers and writers. Relating to speakers, aside from linguistic elements, some students referred to affective factors such as

self-confidence and the state of being relaxed and bold in the company of others while speaking. A few students included elements of non-verbal communication in their descriptions, such as using gestures and mimics. Finally, one student underlined the prestige factor of good English speakers, writing that "people like listening to them". As for good English writers, in addition to writing mechanics such as punctuation, spelling and grammar, a few students mentioned the importance of knowledge of the writing process, content knowledge of essay topics and the exploitation of figures of speech and compositional techniques, i.e. rhetoric. Furthermore, some students required good writers to be creative, underlining the role of affective factors in writing.

As far as students' **half-normative descriptions of good English speakers and writers** are concerned, the analysis indicated that students alluded to particular notions relating to StE and native English, predominantly grammatical accuracy. However, their accounts also contained some elements essential for effective communication, e.g. subject knowledge, sticking to content of writing and speaking, as well as a list of key personality traits. To better illustrate the points mentioned so far, below are the descriptions of some students:

> ***Good English speakers***
>
> **S19:** First of all the good English speakers should spell the words correctly. Secondly they should have *the right amount of idea about any subject that they are talking* or giving information about.
>
> **32.** I think, generally they are *confident, relaxed and energetic*. They use their gestures and mimics while they are speaking. They find *English-speaking friends* to improve their English. Also generally, they watch different types of series and films. *They obey English grammatical rules.*
>
> ***Good English writers***
>
> **S20:** They should comply with grammar rules, not go beyond the content of the article, have fluency in their writing. Their writing must be persuasive, quote external materials to support their writing.
>
> **S30:** According to me, the main qualities of good English writers should not be boring and should be fluent. Furthermore, their writings should include correct grammar rules and words.

As regards **students whose descriptions were non-normative**, it emerged that they did not refer to any notions associated with StE, native English, or NESs. Rather, they underlined the prominence of communication-enhancing attributes, including nonvocal elements of non-verbal communication and body language, major personality traits and some affective factors for speaking. Likewise, for writing, the students drew attention to linguistic (e.g. knowledge of vast vocabulary, forming sentences correctly), non-linguistic and affective elements, personality traits (e.g. being creative, imaginative, persuasive and liking researching). Additionally, good English writers were perceived to be knowledgeable about writing process, well focused on what they are writing and have good planning/organizational skills. The phrases students commonly used in their descriptions are tabulated below:

Table 3. Non-normative perceptions of good English writers/speakers' attributes

Good English speakers / writers*				
ID	Affective factors	Personality traits	Linguistic elements	Other elements
S1	have self-confidence / are sure in what they write*	convince people efficiently		
S4	are not afraid of making mistakes / feel relaxed while speaking / self-confident	Sociable / industrious* / like researching*		generate different topic opinions*
S5		have cheerful face / imitation abilities / are not boring*	speak fluently / knowledge of a lot of words*	have lengthy writing*
S14	are self-confident, relaxed and not shy	are creative / have imagination*	make sentences with correct form*	
S20		are persuasive*	have expanded vocabulary	do not go beyond the content of the article*
S21		have different viewpoints*		use gestures and facial expressions / make eye contact with other people / create a meaningful whole in writing*
S24	have self-confidence	are social and curious about cultures and their languages		know steps of writing*
S26	are self-confident, relaxed energetic, not boring		select words carefully/ use intonation, stress, gesture / write understandably,	have eye contact, keep the audience interested / have knowledge about topic*/ are not repetitious, and stick to the point*
S30			use language fluently**	do it in an academic way**
S38		are relaxed and energetic in front of the people, talkative,	speak fluently	write clearly and persuasively*
S39	are not shy	are talkative		have eye contact and use gesture
S40	can think in English*		speak fluently / know so many words and know how and where to use these words*	know how to cope with thinking in English/ have good organization skills and ideas*
S41		make readers curious*	have rich vocabulary	choose words for the levels of listeners or who are conversing with

In response to the sub-research question whether students consider themselves to be good English speakers and writers, the analysis revealed concerning **Speaking** that 35 students did not agree that they are good English speakers while seven defined themselves as good English speakers. Among those perceiving themselves as bad English speakers, various reasons were alleged, but they largely gathered around a few issues: the lack of ability to think in English, lack of vocabulary knowledge,

failure to speak correctly and fluently, fear of making pronunciation mistakes and the negative impacts of previous educational experiences. The following extracts summarise some of the recurring reasons cited by most students to explain why they did not consider themselves good English speakers.

> ***Do you think you speak good English? Why/why not?***
> **S2:** No, I can't speak good English. Because, I think still Turkish in my mind later translate into English. It is false. I must think English not Turkish. But I can't. Also, I don't have enough background knowledge. In other words, I haven't got rich vocabulary stock. … The last thing is I can't use grammar correctly. …
> **S6:** No, I do not think, because I cannot pronounce words correctly.
> **S15:** I think I don't speak good English. Because I couldn't speak my high school anyway. *In high school, we just learn how to solve test, we just learn simple present tense*. In because of this condition, I couldn't find have the opportunity to speak.
> **S24:** No. I don't speak good English because *i didn't get enough speaking training at high school*. That's why i got used to just grammatical activities.

It is evident that students judged themselves as speakers against NESs and their English against StE. Their accounts indicate that students preferred to mention what they cannot do linguistically rather than what they can actually do using their English. Another distinctive point that emerged from students' accounts is that students' perceptions of themselves as speakers have been influenced by their previous educational experiences in which students were exposed to grammar-focused instruction with almost no room for speaking practices and some prevailing ideologies, such as the one that students should reach NES competence and use English correctly (McKay, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2011).

In contrast, the students who perceived themselves to be good English speakers stated that they are not afraid of speaking in public and can easily think in English, but that still care about and succeed in using correct grammatical forms. That is, linguistic uniformity in linguistic structure was an integral part of being a good speaker.

> **S12:** Yes, I think I use Good English. Because *I am trying to be careful about rules*. Firstly, I know that *I should learn grammar very well*; it's the main point. Secondly, *I am aware of my future job*. I will be an English teacher. Finally, I am trying to speak fluently and learn vocabularies very well.
> **S41:** I guess I speak average English but it is more close to good. *I am trying to be careful when spelling and caring about grammar rules as possible*. Also I am more relax when comparing to other foreign English speakers. Being calm is a key to speak properly. Also when I am speaking English I do not think in Turkish first and translate to English. I am thinking English and speaking English too. This is a better way to speak better.

One particular striking point in students' accounts is that future expectations and career resolutions have acted a part in students' perceptions, which was in line with what similar studies found previously (e.g. Lee, 2012). As S12 noted, some students necessitated the knowledge of grammar and fluent speaking for themselves to make a claim to being good English speakers, arguing that teaching English will be their profession. Based on this perception, we can conclude that if it were not for teaching English, students' perceptions of themselves as speakers might have been different.

When it comes to **Writing**, 19 students claimed for being a good English writer whereas nine students disagreed that they are good English writers. The rest of the students were of different opinions, maintaining that they are neither good nor bad English writers as their writing performance tends to vary depending on certain factors, such as types and topics of the writing task. Most students who claimed to be good writers mentioned what they are capable of doing in terms of writing, noting that they had some training in writing. Some highlighted the importance of attractiveness of topics and writing tasks, depending on which students either boost or reduce their writing performance. A few

students seemed to hold positive attitudes towards writing, which seemed to affect the way they perceived themselves in writing English. The extracts below illustrate the common reasons put forward by those students to account for why they consider themselves good at writing:

> **S6:** I think that I can write good English. *I learned how to write an academic essay in preparatory class*. I studied a lot this issue and prepared term paper in preparatory class. I learned a lot of things for example, I can write outline, thesis sentence and conclusion perfectly thanks to this.
>
> **S7:** I think I can write in English well because *I like writing*. But *choosing a good topic has a great importance for me*. If the topic wakes my interest, I can be more productive to express my thoughts and feelings by writing in English. Then if I feel myself sufficient in vocabulary and grammar to write about the chosen topic, I will be good at that kind of writing in English. And finally I need enough time to think and write in my comfortable chair. These are my own self decided qualities in English writing. So I think I am a good writer in English.

Surprisingly, none of them judged themselves as a writer against NESs, which was not the case for most students once explaining why they feel whether they are good speakers or not. This inconsistency may be because speaking is more prone to external judgments and one's performance in such judgements is done against a NES yardstick. However, this is often not the case with writing as writing, especially academic writing, requires investment and particular knowledge, such as genre knowledge, writing strategies, and types of writing. As noted earlier by Ferguson (2007) and Mauranen (2006), all language users start as beginners in academic writing. Therefore, no one is superior to anyone in (academic) writing at the outset.

In the case of students who perceived themselves to be not a good English writer, it emerged from their explanations that overall, these students cited their inability to use grammatical and syntactical structures correctly, lack of vocabulary knowledge and academic writing skills and practice as the major reasons for perceiving themselves as bad writers. Various points raised by those students regarding why they do not consider themselves a good writer can be seen in the following extracts:

> **S2:** If we compare speaking and writing, I am good at writing. But I am not superb. *I make some grammar mistakes*. Sometimes, I mistype word.
>
> **S16:** I don't think I am good enough to say I am good at English. Because *I cannot write a article paper truly*. I know what I need to do while writing but I can't write. In fact, I love writing but I am ineffective.
>
> **S38:** Not completely. Because I have good grammar knowledge but *I do not have enough experience*. I need to practise a lot.

Having presented students' perceptions of why they considered themselves as being good and bad at writing, we now turn to the perceptions of students which were neither good nor bad. These students' accounts indicated that they do not see writing as a static skill that can be mastered by one at a high level in each writing situation, but as a process in which one can excel his/her writing skills. Moreover, for some students, despite their positive self-evaluations of academic writing knowledge and skills, their failure to conform to StE conventions in writing did not let them make a claim to being a good English writer. Lastly, perceptions of linguistic deficiency in certain areas of language such as vocabulary, was given as a pretext for denying being a good English writer. The following extracts offer more precise elaborations of students' perceptions of themselves as being neither a good nor a bad English writer.

> **S4:** I think that *I can write anything as English. But, of course, not very well*. Because I don't know all vocabularies or some the groups of stereotyped words or sentences. And *I don't think I can do perfect translation.*

S10: I like writing but I can't say I'm good and enough for writing. Day by day we learn new informations about our lessons and I see that I need to improve it ...
S18: I think that I am not bad at all, *but I have some deficiency*. Writing is more simple for me. Because I can think when I am writing. I can *correct my mistakes*, but *my vocabulary is not copious* at all. I think I can develop myself.
S37: I think, I can write essays and I know rules about the writing but, *in some situations I cannot write fluently and I can't see my grammatical mistakes and I cannot find suitable vocabularies in my writing*. For example, I have information to write an essay, I know rules but I cannot choose suitable vocabularies so my essay doesn't have fluency.

4. Conclusions

This study attempted to delve into English-major students' perceptions of good English and its constituting elements at a time when there is lack of consideration on this issue, despite the term being used in daily discourses and research studies in vague manners. In line with previous studies, our findings show that, overall, it is the traditional view of good English to which most of our participants submitted themselves. The ideologies such as native-speakerism, authenticity and StE that feed the traditional view of good English appeared to be sowed in students' minds during their language learning in schools via various tools, including teaching materials, teachers' normative practices, future expectancies and normatively perceived career requirements. The fact that ideologies lead to deep-seated and a unified system of coherent beliefs has been substantiated in this study as students' descriptions of good English, good English speakers and writers and their perceptions of themselves as good English writers and speakers reasonably match one another.

The area where more comforting results are observed is that of non-normative perceptions of the notion of good English, good English speakers and writers as well as students' positive perceptions of themselves as speakers and writers. Several linguistic and non-linguistic elements, mostly ELF-compatible, which do not characterise StE and native English, were cited and appreciated by several students. Such a ground-breaking conceptualisation of good English and its relevant terms is symptomatic of embracement of an ideology by some students that is primarily concentrated on intelligibility criterion in the act of aiming for effective communication. Although students did not nominally mention a good speaker and a writer referring to specific terms, their descriptions accorded with what Jenkins (2011) mentioned as "skilled English user", what Björkman (2011b) described as "effective communicator" (p.1) and what Baker (2011) referred to as "intercultural speaker" (p. 4). Despite researchers' preferences for different phrases in defining good English users, Karakaş (2015) noted that these phrases describe a good English user more or less in similar manners. Drawing on earlier descriptions, he redefined a good English user as "anyone who is capable of modifying and adapting their language use in line with the communicative needs of their interlocutors and the interactional settings, with application of appropriate pragmatic strategies in communication" (p. 26).

Based on the results obtained, it is rather vital for ELT practitioners to take some initiatives. For example, they can raise students' awareness of alternative models for spoken and written English, since students have long been exposed to NES models only in schools via materials used. As argued earlier by some researchers (e.g. Hall, 2014; Tomlinson, 2004), such goals are unrealistic and unattainable. It is also likely that setting such unrealistic goals gave rise to students' negative perceptions of themselves as speakers in this study since students desired to transform into someone else, i.e. a NES, in the act of using English as the supposed target model in language learning and use.

A final note is that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other students and contexts though, as the students involved in this study are being trained to become future language teachers. Therefore, further studies need to be done with non-English major students who learn English as compulsory school subject in different levels of education to determine the way they perceive the notion of good English. Additionally, for a better understanding of this graving issue, similar studies can be done with English-major students at different universities, using different research instruments.

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Öğrencilerin 'İyi İngilizce' kavramına ilişkin algıları ve bu algıların altında yatan ideolojiler

Öz

Bu araştırma '*İyi İngilizce'* kavramı ile 'iyi yazma/yazar' ve 'iyi konuşma/konuşmacılar' gibi alt kavramların İngiliz Dili Eğitimi öğrencileri tarafından nasıl algılandığını incelemeyi ve öğrenci algılarının arkasında yatan dil ideolojilerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada, bir Türk üniversitesinde İngilizce öğretmenliği programında öğrenim gören 42 öğrenci yer almış ve bu öğrencilere açık uçlu e-posta anketleri gönderilerek fenomenolojik bir araştırma yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Nicel ve nitel içerik analizini ile analiz edilen veriler, çoğu öğrencinin 'İyi İngilizce' algılamalarının normatif olduğunu ve bu algıların İyi İngilizce'nin hatasız İngilizce ve ana dil İngilizcesi ile eş tutulduğu, kavramın geleneksel görüşüyle uyumlu olduğunu göstermiştir. Çoğu öğrencinin İyi İngilizce algılarının, İyi İngilizce konuşanlara ve yazanlara yönelik algılarını ve kendilerini iyi ya da kötü konuşmacı ve yazar olarak algılama biçimlerini şekillendirdiği gözlenmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, standart İngilizce, yerli-konuşmacılık ve özgünlük gibi belirli ideolojilerin birçok öğrencinin İyi İngilizce' ye ilişkin normatif algılamaları üzerinde etkili olduğunu ve bu ideolojilerin çeşitli mekanizmalar yoluyla öğrencilere aktarıldığını göstermiştir. Bu ideolojilerden bağımsız kalan küçük bir öğrenci grubu, dil kullanımını farklı ortamlardaki muhataplarına göre ayarlamanın önemini ve dilbilgisel doğruluğun ve anadili İngilizce olanların telaffuzu ve aksanından ziyade anlaşılırlığı ön planda tutmanın önemini vurgulayarak, İyi İngilizce'nin farklı bir kavramlaştırmasını önermişlerdir. Bu sonuçlara dayanarak, İyi İngilizce'nin potansiyel bileşenleri ve İyi İngilizce kullanıcılarının temel nitelikleri ile ilgili bazı öneriler getirilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: İyi İngilizce; standart İngilizce; yerli-konuşmacılık; dil ideolojisi

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