**Register** journal

# Fluency Matters!: Chinese Netizens' Attitudes towards China English

## Qi Sun[1], Ying Qi Wu[2*]

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia[1]

School of Foreign Languages, Hebei Normal University for Nationalities, Chengde, China[2]

*) Corresponding Author
Email: yingqiwu@outlook.com
DOI: 10.18326/rgt.v15i2.284-310

## Abstract

This research examined Chinese netizens' attitudes towards China English (CE), a growing English variety in China, as well as the underlying reasons for their attitudinal responses. The corpus consisted of 905 tokens of Danmus (a form of video synchronous commentary used by netizens on the Internet video) that were collected from an online interview video. Instead of adopting the frequently employed questionnaire survey, these unique Danmus were utilized as the data resource and were analyzed via a paradigmatic approach to investigate Chinese netizens' acceptance of some potential features of CE. Four netizens were invited to an interview to investigate the reasons for their Danmu delivery on language attitudes. The results revealed that Chinese netizens showed overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards CE, which differed significantly from earlier findings. The participants' positive evaluations of CE were based on three key parameters: the fluency and confidence in using CE as a communicative tool, the possibility of CE to mark speakers' Chinese identity, and the ease of using CE in communication. The findings of the study may shed light on the increasing awareness of China English and English globalization among Chinese netizens in the web-mediated context where local varieties of English are emerging. This research also hopes to provide some methodological implications in terms of research subjects and data-collection approaches for current investigations of language attitudes. This study offers some pedagogical implications of introducing English varieties, especially China English, to the English language programs in China.

**Keywords:** China English, Danmus, Chinese netizens, language attitudes, English language teaching

## INTRODUCTION

English is now broadly utilized as a lingua franca for global communication in terms of different political, economic, cultural, and social purposes (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). As English is widely used, numbers of localized English varieties have emerged in various parts of the globe (Bolton, 2012). English is the most popular foreign language in China in terms of the number of foreign language learners (Wei & Su, 2012).

According to People's Daily Online (2020), there are estimated to be around 400 million Chinese people learning English. As English is widely learned and used in China, China English has been touted as a developing English variety arising in the setting of China and a feasible educational choice for Chinese English learners to challenge the dominance of native-speaker English in China (Deterding, 2006; Gao et al., 2014; Xu, 2010).

China English (henceforth CE), the local use of English in mainland China (Ma & Xu, 2017), is regarded as the fastest-growing English variety worldwide (Edwards, 2017). CE was initially coined in 1980 and refers to English expressions with distinct Chinese features (Ge, 1980). Some English expressions, for instance, *Fengshui* and *paper tiger*, were related to specific Chinese cultures and social norms, but not existing in other English varieties.

The concept of China English is getting momentum, and numerous researchers have discussed its definitions and features (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). Early research focuses on theoretical investigations to sustain CE's legitimacy (e.g., Gao & Wen, 2012; Niu & Wolff, 2003; Wang, 2002; Xie, 1995).

Empirical discussions have also been extended to identify CE's characteristics with regard to pronunciation, grammar, lexis, and discourse pragmatics (e.g., Bolton, 2003; Gao & Wen, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Xu, 2010; Yu, 2009). These investigations have advanced the understanding of CE by articulating and formalizing specific linguistic features. This also necessitates further explorations of language attitudes towards China English. The existing explorations have mostly concentrated on Chinese university students' or teachers' perceptions of CE (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002; Hu, 2004; Hu, 2005; He & Li, 2009; He & Zhang, 2010; Wang & Gao, 2015; Pan et al.,

2021). Kirkpatrick and Xu (2002) and Hu (2004) identified Chinese university students' overwhelming support for native English, particularly American English, as pedagogical models in language teaching and learning, yet a weak identification with CE. English teachers in Hu's (2005) study appeared to be supportive of CE. Despite the fact that approximately 80% of the language instructors polled preferred American English, CE was still accepted by 53% of them. He and Li (2009) conducted a later survey on teachers and students, finding that they had increased support (62.6%) for incorporating "certain characteristics" of CE into the classroom. He and Zhang (2010), drawing on He and Li (2009), carried out a further investigation by evaluating the pronunciation and grammar of CE. They discovered that while over half of the participants (55.4%) had no difficulty speaking English with a Chinese accent, 71% insisted on precisely adhering to the native speaker's English grammar norms. Wang and Gao (2015) adopted mixed methods to explore the attitudes of Chinese English learners and teachers towards China English features, differences, and reasons underpinning their attitudinal responses. The finding indicated that both teachers and students in China were hesitant to embrace CE as a legitimate variety, but their views on certain CE components differed.

There are also recent studies deploying questionnaires and interviews to examine Chinese university students' perceptions of China English and their particular linguistic identity regarding the practice of China English. The findings indicate a rising tendency in the majority of students' identification with China English, despite the fact that native English ideology continues to have huge impacts (Pan et al., 2021).

With technological advancements such as social networking sites and the global expansion of English, non-native English speakers now account for more than 80% of the global English communication (Lee & Lee, 2019). Linguistically speaking, the influx of Internet resources brings numerous opportunities for English language learners in many countries to process language input/output. This is mainly due to the fast exchanges of information and being of ease at with revealing the user's preferred expressive means in the network spaces (Muftah, 2022). Recent inquiries of web-mediated discourses have shown that the Chinese experience online

English practices on various social networking sites, especially with the growth of domestic sites, such as Sina Weibo, YouKu, and so forth (Zhang, 2021). Previous studies suggest online English users in China exhibit creative and distinctive communicative strategies by practicing the English language (Zhang, 2021). These strategies display the linguistic complexity and flexibility of China English with regard to localizing English features in online discourses. China, as a prominent participant in the English-as-lingua-franca (ELF) circle, will undoubtedly have an impact on nowadays and future construction of ELF through the way it uses English (Fang, 2017b).

In other words, with the rise of China's participation in globalization, using English with certain Chinese features (e.g., China English) will influence the use of English in other social contexts. Simultaneously, China has the world's largest digital population, with 1.03 billion netizens as of 2021 (Statista, 2022), and Chinese netizens are more exposed to different varieties of English through the heavy use of the Internet. However, as aforementioned, a prominent feature in the researches of language attitudes towards CE has been that teachers and students make up the majority of the research subjects.

In other words, most of the previous studies have focused on investigating Chinese teachers' and students' attitudes towards China English in curricular circumstances and pedagogical motivations in educational settings, which were mostly constructed by adopting conventionalized methodological measures, like questionnaire surveys.

Few studies have applied modern Internet information resources to elicit Chinese netizens' explicit and naturalistic attitudes. As past studies have mostly concentrated on the educational mechanisms, it is necessary to investigate language attitudes towards CE among the general public in other contexts to expand the understanding of language attitudes across different contexts. Drawing on the fact that more than 400 million people are practicing English for various purposes (Wei & Su, 2015) and that English is widely used in various fields beyond education in China (Pan et al., 2021), this study henceforth aims to explore the complexity of Chinese netizens' attitudes towards China English and investigate underlying reasons in the web-mediated context, which was fulfilled by incorporating the analysis of Danmus and interviews.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research draws on the use of multiple data collection tools, namely the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative-and-quantitative research design has been depicted as showing many advantages in that these two resources of data can complement each other (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). The researchers can utilize the strength of each type of data collection and minimize the weaknesses of any single research approach to obtain a more comprehensive overview of academic phenomena (Gong & Firdaus, 2022). First, this study used a quantitative method in the form of Danmu corpus that was directly downloaded from the video website. Then, interviews with Danmu creators were qualitatively analyzed.

### Data Collection

This study primarily approached with naturally occurring data that was composed of 3832 tokens of Danmus delivered by Chinese netizens in an online video. To begin with, Danmu or plural Danmus (Chinese: 弹幕, literally: "bullet curtain", figuratively: "barrage") is a form of video commentary used on the Internet videos consisting of scrolling user/viewer messages posted on top of the video in real time (Wikipedia, 2022). In other words, Danmu could be understood as a system of superimposed comments running across the screen from right to left as the video plays (Zhang & Cassany, 2020). These Danmus are collected from a video in Bilibili which is one of the most popular online video sharing and social media platforms in China. As shown in Figure 1, a native English-speaking hostess (the left) is interviewing a respectable Chinese transgender dancing artist, Ms. Jin Xing (the right). The viewers who are watching the video can add synchronous comments or responses, i.e., Danmus, on the screen (as indicated in Figure 1 by rectangular overlay in yellow). The entire one-hour-long interview was realized in English.

This video has attracted wide publicity. As of May 2022, it has been viewed 838,000 times and there are 3,832 tokens of Danmus since it was uploaded in June 2019. During the interview, some distinguishing features of China English in terms of lexis, syntax, and phonology can be found in Ms. Jin's

English. Consequently, a number of viewers used Danmus to comment Ms. Jin Xing's English language.



**Figure 1**. Danmus as the Scrolling Marquee Comment in Bilibili Video Delivered by Chinese Netizens

To help readers comprehend China English, several evident features of China English utilized by Ms. Jin in this video have been selected and offered as examples (see Table 1).

**Table 1**.

Demonstration of Distinctive Features of CE Used by Ms. Jin

| Category | Description | Explanation | Examples included in the video (in bold) | Occurrence Time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phonology | Chinese accent | Influenced by Chinese phonology, CE speakers have a tendency to pronounce /θ/ and /ð/ as /s/ and /z/. (Deterding, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2007) | *I don't know, I* **think** *[sıŋk] at young age.* | 0'47'' |
| Lexis | Transliteration | Transliteration of Chinese words and use of *pinyin* such as *Putonghua* (modern standard Chinese). (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Xu, 2010) | *The idea, the attitude toward life, the energy (are) very authentic, very* **Jin Xing**. | 12'12'' |
| Syntax | Adjacent default tense | Use adjacent default tense as criteria to decide the tenses of a cluster of clauses uttered together. (Xu, 2010) | *I think for the young kid I didn't know that. Then dancing* **come** *up,* **choose** *me* **become** *a dancer. So I* **become** *a dancer.* | 01'25'' |

Among the total 3832 tokens of Danmus, 905 Danmus with apparent evaluations of China English were saved and examined to investigate those Chinese netizens' attitudes towards China English. The rationale for Danmu collection is that writing Danmus is easy for viewers while watching videos, and the written Danmus will be instantaneously overlaid onto the video and shown to writers as well as other viewers. With the use of such Danmu systems, users may interact with one another much more directly and also have a real-time sharing experience (He et al., 2017). By doing so, Chinese netizens' attitudes towards CE will be more visually evident in a straightforward mode. Following the Danmus collection, four Chinese netizens among those Danmus creators were recruited and invited for interviews to identify reasons underpinning their attitudes delivered in Danmus.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of Danmus was initially drawing on the adapted analytical model of Wang and Fang (2019) who have transcribed attitude-related data via a paradigmatic approach of "taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database" (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5) through repeated reading of the data. As shown in Figure 2, to begin with, the authors of this study organized themselves to view and code all 3832 Danmus independently, and communicated their viewing results. This initial step enabled us to form a general understanding of all Danmus and thus to eliminate those that did not involve the viewers' attitudes towards Ms. Jin's China English. 905 Danmus with clear attitudinal judgments were chosen as the valid data after rigorous and thorough discussion and selection. Next, these 905 Danmus were read again to provide preliminary coding of taxonomies and categories. In this phase, the 905 Danmus which showed unambiguous attitudinal judgments were divided into two macro groups, positive or negative, regarding the characteristics of China English implemented in the video. In the third reading, these Danmus were coded according to the categories and taxonomies generated in the second phase while allowing micro topics/themes to arise. A fourth reading was performed after the previous three steps to analyze and verify the classification and coding.
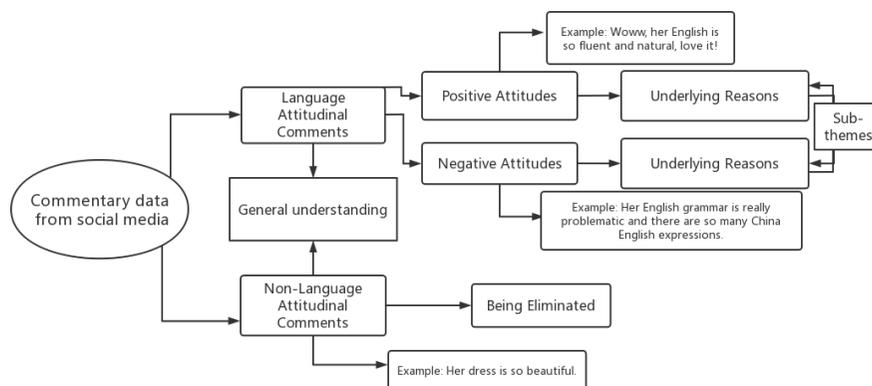
**Figure 2**. Paradigmatic Approach to Commentary Data
(Adapted from Wang & Fang, 2019)

After the Danmu analysis, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin according to the interviewees' preference because the native language would enable them to respond to questions in more depth (Mann, 2011). All the Chinese Danmus and interview data were translated into English by the first author and proofread by the second author. The selection and classification about netizens' attitudes were finished by the two authors under rigorous discussions. This process of securing inter-rater reliability assists in achieving reliability for this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
### Netizens' Attitudes: Danmus Analysis

The analysis of Danmus reveals that netizens' comments are overwhelmingly positive towards Ms. Jin's English, with 842 tokens of comments (93%/among 905) expressing approval or admiration for the English of Ms. Jin during the interview. The remaining 63 (7%) tokens of Danmus showed negative attitudes towards Ms. Jin's English. Initially, the findings indicate that the netizens might have rich and diversified mental perceptions of China English. As shown in Table 2, various themes that are mainly framed in the netizens' Damus are presented and will be discussed in the following sections.

**Table 2.**

Chinese Netizens' Attitudes towards CE and Framed Themes in Danmus

| Attitudes Category/FrR. | | Framed themes | Freq. | Percent. (1) | Percent. (2) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 1 | Fluency in using English | 489 | 58% | |
| | 2 | Using English as a communicative medium | 168 | 19.9% | |
| | 3 | General positive comments | 156 | 18.5% | |
| | 4 | Awareness of ELF and Global Englishes | 13 | 1.5% | |
| | 5 | Closeness to the Chinese language | 9 | 1.1% | |
| | 6 | Comparison with Standard Mandarin | 7 | 1% | |
| Sub Total | | | 842 | 100% | 93% |
| Negative | 1 | Non-standardness | 21 | 33.3% | |
| | 2 | Inadequate communicative effectiveness | 19 | 30.2% | |
| | 3 | Discrepancy with ELT classes/textbooks | 12 | 19% | |
| | 4 | China English is riddled with mistakes | 11 | 17.5% | |
| Sub Total | | | 63 | 100% | 7% |
| Total | | | 905 | | 100% |

**Positive attitude towards Ms. Jin's English**

Scrutiny of the reasons that netizens give to justify their positive evaluations show that the majority of Chinese netizens focused on fluency (n=489/58%) when evaluating others' English. Furthermore, some positive Danmus convey a strong message that these netizens generally conceptualize that the function of English is attributed to a communicative medium (n=168/19.9%). It seems that the level of fluency is the most important element to consider in evaluating a speaker's English in China from the perspectives of those Chinese netizens. In addition, some of the comments show positive attitudes towards Ms. Jin's English by simply voicing like: "Her English is brilliant" without supplementary explanations (n=156/18.5%). Besides the emphasis on fluency, communicative function, and general positive comments, there are also other rationales and reasons (n=29/3.6%) for positive attitudes among the 842 positive Danmus. Some positive-sense Danmus are excerpted as follows:

E.g.1 Woww, her English is so fluent and natural, love it. (Danmu 7)

E.g.2 It's not a big deal to have Chinese accents, what really matters is that Jinxing expressed herself very fluently and make her idea clearly output. English is just a tool! (Danmu 43)

E.g.3 It's really great to express ideas fluently and confidently. (Danmu 123)

E.g.4 Accent, accents! You only have accents in your mind! I am envious of this accent. Fluency, and accuracy, are the heel of the language. Accent judges, you are jealous. (Danmu 172)

E.g.5 From my point of view, it's ok to have our own accents when speaking English fluently. (Danmu 196)

These instances of Danmus suggest that Chinese netizens seem to place a higher priority on fluency when a Chinese is speaking English. Fluency usually refers to adequate content of speech used by speakers to communicate as effectively as possible (Harmer, 2015). It also means speaking languages quickly and confidently, with limited hesitations, unnatural pauses, etc. (Baily, 2003). As indicated in Example 1, the netizen showed an apparent admiration for Ms. Jin's English. Example 2 shows that English is merely a tool for communication, and this can be regarded in some way as Chinese netizens' awareness of English as a lingua franca, which is defined as any use of English among speakers of various first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice and often the only option (Kaur & Birlik, 2021; Seidlhofer, 2011). Example 3 emphasizes the significance of fluency while using English since it is a significant aspect in accomplishing communicative functions in conversations (Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017). Examples 4 and 5 are connected with the refutations of the harsh comments on Ms. Jin's accent in English speaking. Example 4 criticizes excessive nitpicking and criticism of accents and expresses appreciation for Ms. Jin's unique accent. Similarly, Example 5 shows explicit support for possessing our accent in speaking. Both highlight the focal idea that "fluency" or "fluently" is all that matters. These five excerpts suggest that many Chinese netizens prefer to focus on "the interactional and transactional purposes of the talk, as well as their interlocutors as people rather than the linguistic code itself" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 98). To put it another way, when Chinese netizens experience English conversation, e.g., interview video in this study, they tend to focus more on the content of the communication rather than the level of normality of Ms. Jin's use of English and China English features. This is accounted by Dammu 43 in Example 2, many Chinese

netizens have already formed a position that English serves as a lingua franca and a language tool for communication.

> E.g.6 There are more dialectal accents in English, most parts of the UK have a different accent from the so-called Oxford accent, as well as Ireland, Northern Ireland, the USA, Canada, and Australia, so Ms. Jin's China English is very acceptable. (Danmu 462)
>
> E.g.7 What is standard? Old English, British accent, American accent, African accent, Russian accent, Asian accent, even European and American countries are multiethnic. Come on, what is standard pronunciation? Why can't China English become one standard? (Danmu 865)
>
> E.g.8 Irish English can sound like Irish, American English can sound like American, and Indian English can sound like Indian, so why can't China English sound like Chinese? (Danmu 895)

In this case, it can be observed that some Chinese netizens have the awareness of Global Englishes, which is operationalized as the metamorphosis of English across borders in today's globalized world (Jenkins, 2015). These Danmus justify the legitimate use of China English. The key reason these netizens believe China English is acceptable is that they believe there should not be just one type of English and that it is entirely reasonable and acceptable for Chinese people to use English in a Chinese way. Example 6 demonstrates that people from different countries use English in various ways since English is moved over the world, it evolved to suit and accommodate specific local demands for expressions and identities (Yano, 2009). Example 7 argues that there are many varieties of English with different accents, even native English speakers from Britain and America use different accents. Therefore, this netizen questions what the definition of so-called "standard English" is. From the perspective of this netizen, there isn't a conventionalized form of standard English. Actually, the concept of standard English is notoriously hard to be defined and is extremely weak indeed in speech (Gupta, 2006). The netizen of Example 8 believes that using China English can show a Chinese identity as different people around the world form their own characteristic varieties of English. As a result, they hold the idea that China English should also be recognized as a variety of English that is particularly utilized by Chinese people, which is unique in the global

Englishes world. Interestingly, Standard Mandarin is also often mentioned by those netizens when they refute the criticisms of Ms. Jin's English with regard to her accent. They claimed that people who speak Mandarin in different regions might have hometown dialectal accents, thus there is no need to foreground Chinese English speaking with the Chinese accent.

> E.g.9 Hahahahahahahahaha. This is a direct translation using Chinese grammar. Such grammar is very good to understand. I like it. (Danmu 218)

China English is also valued for its closeness to the Chinese language. Example 9 shows that many Chinese netizens believe Ms. Jin's English is commendable because of the intermingling with Chinese grammar, e.g., direct translation or literal translation. It creates a sense of ease for those Chinese netizens to understand English words, phrases, or sentences by provoking their native-language competence.

> E.g.10 Language is a tool for communication, so you don't have to focus too much on grammar and syntax when speaking. Just express what you want to say. (Danmu 884)

> E.g.11 Those who struggle with the Chinese way of using English are really poisoned by stereotypical teaching. (Danmu 117)

Example 10 presents the idea that English is merely a communication instrument. Rather than focusing on grammar, what counts is that the communicative purpose of the speaker can be readily grasped and comprehended by the interlocutor(s). Considering that today's mainstream English-language-teaching practice in China still heavily emphasizes "native English" (Fang & Ren, 2018), Example 11 argues that English teaching in China is so stereotypical by employing the appraisal markers "struggle" and "poison", which indicates the exceedingly destructive effect of such pedagogical philosophy.

In sum, the analysis of the positive Danmus reveals most netizens' alignment with fluency into the use of English rather than the pursuit of standardized English and conventions. In addition, today's Chinese netizens also have the awareness of Global Englishes and appreciate China English as a particular English variety used by Chinese people. Also, there are some Chinese netizens who prefer to use China English as they believe it is easier

for them to communicate in English, and makes them feel much more grounded because they are familiar with using English in a Chinese way. In particular, China English is put forward as easily understandable and accessible to the general public. The results show that Chinese netizens' attitudes are remarkably positive towards China English, which differ from the previous findings that Chinese English learners and users (e.g., teachers and students) were generally reluctant to accept CE as a legitimate variety (Wang & Gao, 2015). These findings further show that people's language attitudes should be reconceptualized not as stable characteristics of language learners but as dynamic variables (Csizér et al., 2010).

## Negative attitude towards Ms. Jin's English

In contrast to the positive attitudes discussed above, there were Danmus portraying negative attitudes towards Ms. Jin's English. The Danmus belonging to this category convey a strong message that some netizens were reluctant to accept different specific features of China English, particularly the phonological perspective (i.e., Chinese accent). Of the total 63 (7%) tokens of negative Danmus, most of the which cite non-standardness (n=21/33.3%) as reasons for their criticisms on Ms. Jin's China English, as shown in Table 2. Other reasons are attributed to inadequate communicative effectiveness (n=19/30.2%), discrepancy with ELT classes or textbooks (n=12/19%), and incorrectness (i.e., China English is riddled with mistakes) (n=11/17.5%). They are illustrated with Danmus below:

> E.g.12 Fluency is superficial. People with high English proficiency will know at first glance that all her English is full of bugs and too Chinese style. (Danmu 269)
>
> E.g.13 Chinese accent, her expressions follow the Chinese way of speaking, straightforward, which may affect other people's understanding. (Danmu 880)
>
> E.g.14 It's not as good as others make it out to be, the English is so Chinese. It does not sound nice. (Danmu 694)
>
> E.g.15 Her English grammar is very problematic and there are also many China English expressions. (Danmu 874)
>
> E.g.16 To be honest, the accent is heavy. The language is very China English and the pronunciation is not clear enough. (Danmu 887)

These Danmus reveal that some Chinese netizens seem to look down upon Ms. Jin's English, as a representative of China English. They criticize China English and the Chinese way of using English. Example 12 indicates that China English is riddled with mistakes and that "Standard" English shouldn't be implemented in a Chinese-communicative mode. Examples 13 and 14 both criticize the Chinese accent produced by Ms. Jin in this interview, citing concerns that Chinese accents may cause interlocutors' misunderstanding when they may hardly identify the corresponding vocabularies. In other words, the communicativeness of China English especially Chinese accents is doubted by Chinese netizens. The netizens of Examples 15 and 16 believe that the expressions and grammar in this video are also problematic because she is in a Chinese-speaking way.

In summary, the analysis of negative comments reveals that some netizens continue to place a premium on Standard English ideology, particularly in their belief in and use of Standard English norms and conventions when assessing linguistic features of Ms. Jin's English, and regard what they learned in class as the norm. These findings substantially corroborate prior research findings that CE is widely recognized but not universally associated with Chinese English users and learners (Wang, 2015).

## Interview Findings

According to the above Danmu analysis, the interview process drew on a binary coding criterion, namely revealing positive or negative attitudes (see Table 3). Among the four Chinese netizens, two of them expressed positive attitudes towards China English while the other two held negative attitudes. These four participants are from different backgrounds (i.e., genders, ages, occupations) and all of them have been learning and using English for many years (see demographic information in Table 3).

**Table 3.**

Profile of the Interview Participants

| Attitude | Name | Gender | Age | Occupation | Length of Interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | Feng | M | 46 | Foreign trade salesman | 28'16" |
| | Meng | F | 20 | University student | 23'34" |
| Negative | Zhang | M | 33 | Bank employee | 25'28" |
| | Zhao | F | 58 | English teacher | 30'45" |

To begin with, semi-structured interview findings indicate that both Participants Mr. Feng and Ms. Meng consider that Ms. Jin's English is acceptable (see interview extracts in Appendix A). Ms. Meng deemed her use of English, featuring localized attributes, as an identity marker of herself, namely a Chinese English speaker. In addition, Meng's positive evaluation of CE, e.g., Ms. Jin's speaking, was based on the considerably easier and flexible syntactic and grammatical constructions. From the perspective of Ms. Meng, following the Chinese language structure seems to render her ease to form colloquial English. Although English in outer circle countries is still norm-dependent or exonormative which means relying on native/standard English for correctness, the comments seem to indicate that even in expanding circle countries like China, people have also begun to break away from exonormative models of English and started developing norms of their own (Wang, 2015). Interestingly, Ms. Meng has also voiced her appreciation for Ms. Jin's English, which is asserted: "she is my idol and role model" because of Ms. Jin's accomplishment as a popular celebrity and renowned dance artist. Based on this, we hold a hypothesis that Chinese netizens' evaluations of China English may have been influenced by the speaker's public identity and social status, and other characteristics of the individuals using China English. Mr. Feng has an optimistic attitude towards Ms. Jin's China English because he sees English as a communicative tool for interaction among various L1s. This confirms the fact that "English is not inherently used intra-nationally among Chinese speakers of English on a daily basis" (Fang, 2017a, p. 22). He also emphasizes that Chinese English learners should not go overboard with English standardization. According to him, the emphasis should also be connected with speakers' confidence which is one of the most demotivating elements affecting individuals' motivation to speak in the English context (Pale & Wisrance, 2021). These responses, from Ms. Meng and Mr. Feng, generally suggest that CE is not a concern for participants who are more preoccupied with communication than with standards. In other words, CE would be acceptable if it fulfills the speaker's communicative purpose, but not necessarily if it realizes native English norms. In short, the fluency and confidence in using CE as a language tool, the possibilities of CE to mark speakers' Chinese identity, and the much easier formation of English

conversations through CE, are three major reasons leading to participants' positive evaluation of CE.

On the contrary, opposite opinions were voiced by Participants Ms. Zhao and Mr. Zhang who think China English, such as Ms. Jin's, is not acceptable to them. Ms. Zhao sticks deeply to the Standard English ideology in ELT (see Appendix A). She argued that allowing China English to be used in educational contexts, e.g., in classes and exams, would pose a dilemma for English language teachers. Such disapproval of China-English expressions is owing to the lack of cohesion and coherence in authentic discoursal constructions, regarding both writing and speaking conventions. This explanation for her refusal of CE further indicates that native speakerism and Chinglish remain the predominating ideologies in the English educational context in China. Because native English is taken as the standardization and normalization, the English that deviates from these standardized norms is treated as an unacceptable expressive variety, e.g., Chinglish, particularly by English instructors. Another reason for Ms. Zhao's pessimism is that the exam-based syllabus is a result of the ineradicably established examination culture in today's China. Students cannot receive marks on the exam papers if they utilize much China English, as Ms. Zhao mentioned. In consequence, the mentality of "put exams first" reigns dominance among teachers, parents, and students (Pan & Block, 2011). Mr. Zhang also expresses concerns or anxieties about communicativeness when speakers use China English, implying that "most learners of English will assume that the only meaningful goal is native-like pronunciation" (Walker, 2010, p. 61). Generally speaking, Chinese netizens' negative attitudes towards China English are concerned with native-speaker ideology, exam-based syllabus, and communicativeness. This kind of negative-attitude responses consists of two widely acknowledged agreements of English in the Chinese educational context: the ideologies of native speaker standards and the China English as Chinglish stigma (Pan, 2011; Xiong & Qian, 2012).

## CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated Chinese netizens' attitudes and perceptions towards China English (CE) and probed into the reasons underlying their attitudinal judgments. Through analyzing their Danmus delivered in Bilibili revealing attitudes towards Ms. Jin Xing's English, the study has so far revealed that China English is a very discussable term encompassing diversified concerns and features from the perspectives of netizens.

The initial findings identified a high degree of positive evaluations of CE among Chinese netizens. As in Figure 3, the dominant influential factors include the participants' faith in fluency and confidence in using CE as a communicative medium to construct interactions. At the same time, for Chinese netizens, China English marks their bilingual identity as Chinese who can use English. Those netizens' positive perceptions are also attributed with a sense of ease when they speak English following Chinese-language modes (e.g., grammatical structure, lexical adaptations). Besides, some Chinese netizens have established an awareness of Global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca. In fact, there has been an explosive growth in the number of English speakers in China, and this increased usage on a global level has resulted in innovations in its use as it is employed by speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and assumes distinct functions and forms in different contexts (e.g., CE used in China) (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021). Therefore, it is no longer relevant to associate English purely with native-speaking nations, rather, English is spoken by the global community today (Galloway & Rose, 2015).

Based on this, many Chinese netizens believe that CE is also acceptable as one of the English varieties with unique Chinese characteristics, which as well triggers their positive attitudes towards China English. Whereas, it is also noted that some Chinese netizens, who are caught in native English norms and concerned about CE comprehensibility (communicative effectiveness) to the western world, hold apparent negative attitudes towards China English. In particular, most EFL teaching practices still consider native speaker English to be the goal of English learning and take native speaker English as standards and norms, resulting that CE, as a developing variety, has not yet been widely recognized by its speakers (Wang, 2015).
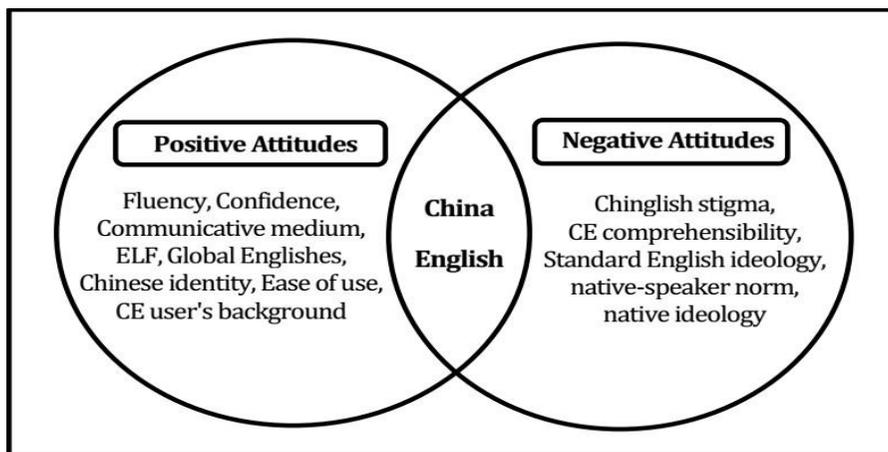
**Figure 3.** China English with relevant Qualities and Features
Note: ELF: English as a Lingua Franca

The research findings have certain implications for current investigations of language attitudes. Firstly, the findings show that Chinese English learners' and users' language attitudes towards CE are not set in stone but changeable, which testifies that language attitudes are inherently prone to change (Dragojevic, 2017). In addition, the study of linguistic attitudes should also be done on a community-wide scale rather than being limited to very restricted or highly popular representative groups such as educational communities (Yan & Moody, 2010). In other words, more participants among the general public are needed in language attitudes investigations.

This study recommends that netizens should be served as the suitable representation of the general public and function as more valid data resources to reflect the general attitudes or perceptions. Instead of being merely employed in investigating language attitudes, they can be used as research subjects in other socio-cultural phenomena. Thirdly, Danmus, as a real-time comment channel that can reflect netizens' immediate attitudes, are suggested to be applied as a discourse-based approach to investigate future language attitudes, as means of the methodological implication. Then, as most Chinese netizens focus on fluency and confidence when evaluating English speaking in China, more efforts and attention need to be attached to how to use English fluently and confidently in English teaching contexts, which is

definitely beneficial to Chinese students to establish linguistic confidence to transition from perennial language learners to legitimate language users (Fang, 2017b).

Finally, we propose that discussing users' and learners' attitudinal perceptions of a target language can be an effective pedagogical device. For instance, a classroom discussion of the evaluations of China English contributes to English language instructors to increase students' awareness of world Englishes and also help them perceive themselves as legitimate language users, thus to chip away the pervasive problems of linguistic racism caused by the rigid native phantom and the Chinglish stigma.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## REFERENCES
Bailey, K. M. (2003). Speaking. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical English language teaching* (pp. 47-66). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Contemporary.

Bolton, K. (2003). *Chinese Englishes: A Sociolinguistic History*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bolton, K. (2012). World Englishes and Asian Englishes: a survey of the fifield. In A. Kirkpatrick, & R. Sussex (Eds.), *English as an international language in Asia: Implications for language education* (pp. 13-26). New York: Springer.

Csizer, K., Kormos, J., & Sarkadi, A. (2010). The dynamics of language learningattitudes and motivation: lessons from an interview study of dyslexic language learners. *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(3), 470-487. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01054.x

Danmu—Wikipedia. (2022). Retrieved 30 June 2022, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danmu.

Deterding, D. (2006). The pronunciation of English by speakers from China. *English World-Wide*, *27*(2), 175-198. https://doi.org/10.1075/eww.27.2.04det

Dragojevic, M. (2017). Language attitudes. Retrieved 30 June 2022, from https://oxfordre.com/communication/abstract/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-437

Edwards, J. (2017). China English: Attitudes, legitimacy, and the native speaker construct: Is China English becoming accepted as a legitimate variety of English? *English Today*, *33*(2), 38-45. http://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078416000171

English education in China: An evolutionary perspective - People's Daily Online. (2020). Retrieved 4 July 2022, from http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0427/c90000-9684652.html.

Fang, F. (2017a). World Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca: Where does English in China stand? *English Today*, *33*(1), 19-24. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266078415000668

Fang, F. (2017b). An Investigation of attitudes towards English accents–A case study of a university in China. In Z. Xu, D. He, & D. Deterding. (Eds.), *Researching Chinese English: The state of the art* (pp. 141-156). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53110- 6_10

Fang, F., & Ren, W. (2018). Developing students' awareness of Global Englishes. *ELT Journal*, *72*(4), 384-394. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccy012

Galloway, N., & Rose, H. (2015). *Introducing Global Englishes* (1st Eds.). London, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315734347

Gao, C., & Wen, Q. F. (2012). 中国语境中本土化英语的可理解度和可接受度研究 [The intelligibility and acceptability of nativized English in the context of China]. *Foreign Language Education*, *33*(5), 53-58.

Gao, X., Liao, Y., & Li, Y. (2014). Empirical studies on foreign language learning and teaching in China (2008–2011): A review of selected research. *Language Teaching*, *47*(1), 56-79. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444813000414

Ge, C. (1980). 漫谈由汉译英问题 [Talking about some problems in Chinese-English translation]. *Translator's Notes*, *2*, 1-8.

Gong, J., & Firdaus, A. (2022): Is the Pandemic a Boon or a Bane? News Media Coverage of COVID-19 in China Daily. *Journalism Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2022.2043766

Gupta, A. F. (2006). Standard English in the world. In R. Rubdy., & M. Saraceni. (Eds.), *English in the world: Global rules, global roles* (pp. 95-109). London, UK: Continuum.

Harmer, J. (2015). *The practice of English language teaching* (5th Ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman.

He, D., & Li, D. (2009). Language attitudes and linguistic features in the 'China English' debate. *World Englishes*, *28*(1), 70-89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971x.2008.01570.x

He, D., & Zhang, Q. (2010). Native speaker norms and China English: From the perspective of learners and teachers in China. *TESOL Quarterly*, *44*(4), 769-789. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2010.235995

He, M., Ge, Y., Chen, E., Liu, Q., & Wang, X. (2017). Exploring the emerging type of comment for online videos. *ACM Transactions on the Web*, *12*(1), 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1145/3098885

Hu, X. (2004). Why China English should stand alongside British, American, and the other "world Englishes." *English Today, 20*(2), 26-33. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078404002056

Hu, X. (2005). China English, at home and in the world. *English Today*, *21*(3), 27-38. https://doi.org/10.1017/s026607840500307x

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2015). *Global Englishes: A Resource Book for Students* (3rd Ed.). London, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315761596

Kaur, J., & Birlik, S. (2021). Communicative effectiveness in BELF (English as a business lingua franca) meetings: 'Explaining' as a pragmatic strategy. *The Modern Language Journal*, *105*(3), 623-638. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12717

Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kirkpatrick, A., & Xu, Z. (2002). Chinese pragmatic norms and "China English." *World Englishes, 21*(2), 269-279. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-971X.00247

Lee, J., & Lee, K. (2019). Informal digital learning of English and English as an international language: The path less traveled. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 50*(3), 1447-1461. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12652

Liu, H., Zhang, X., & Fang, F. (2021). Young English learners' attitudes towards China English: unpacking their identity construction with implications for secondary level language education in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2021.1908228

Ma, Q., & Xu, Z. (2017). The nativization of English in China. In Z. Xu., D. He., & D. Deterding. (Eds.), *Researching Chinese English: The state of the art* (pp. 189-201). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53110-6_13

Mann, S. (2011). A critical review of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics, 32*(1), 6-24. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amq043

McDonough, J., & McDonough, S. (1997). *Research methods for English language teachers*. London, England: Arnold.

McKay, S. L., & Bokhorst-Heng, W. D. (2008). *International English in its sociolinguistic contexts: Towards a socially sensitive EIL pedagogy*. London, UK: Routledge.

Muftah, M. (2022). Impact of social media on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PSU Research Review*. https://doi.org/10.1108/PRR-10-2021-0060

Niu, Q., & Wolff, M. (2003). China and Chinese, or Chingland and Chinglish? *English Today, 19*(2), 9-11. 10.1017/S0266078403002025

Pale, E., & Wisrance, M. (2021). Analysis of demotivating factors affecting students' willingness to speak English. English Franca: Academic *Journal of English Language and Education*, *5*(1), 131-148. https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v5i1.2026

Pan, H., Liu, C., Fang, F., & Elyas, T. (2021). "How is my English?": Chinese university students' attitudes toward China English and their identity construction. *SAGE Open*, *11*(3). 215824402110382. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211038271

Pan, L. (2011). English language ideologies in the Chinese foreign language education policies: A world-system perspective. *Language Policy, 10*(3), 245-263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-011-9205-8

Pan, L., & Block, D. (2011). English as a "global language" in China: An investigation into learners' and teachers' language beliefs. *System*, *39*(3),391-402. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.07.011

Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *8*(1), 5-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Shahini, G., & Shahamirian, F. (2017). Improving English speaking fluency: The role of six factors. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *8*(6), 100-104. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.8n.6p.100

Statista. (2022). *Internet usage in China.* Retrieved 29 June 2022, from https://www.statista.com/topics/1179/internet-usage-in-china/.

Walker, R. (2010). *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Wang, W. (2015). Teaching English as an international language in China: Investigating university teachers' and students' attitudes towards China English. *System, 53*, 60-72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.06.008

Wang, W., & Fang, F. (2019). Chinese netizens' reactions to the use of English as a lingua franca. *English Today*, *35*(4), 3-12. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266078418000482

Wang, W., & Gao, X. (2015). "Oh my gosh! The expression is too Chinese": Attitudes of university teachers and students towards China English. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *38*(4), 392-414. https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2015-0026

Wang, Y. Q. (2002). 英语的全球化, 本土化与标准化 [The globalization, localization and standardization of English]. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, *2*, 61-65.

Wei, R., & Su, J. (2012). The statistics of English in China: An analysis of the best available data from government sources. *English Today*, *28*(3), 10-14. http://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078412000235

Wei, R., & Su, J. (2015). Surveying the English language across China. *World Englishes*, *34*(2), 175-189. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12132

Xie, Z. J. (1995). 中国英语: 跨文化语言交际中的干扰性变体 [China English: An interference variety in cross-cultural communication]. *Modern Foreign Languages*, *4*, 7-11.

Xiong, T., & Qian, Y. (2012). Ideologies of English in a Chinese high school EFL textbook: A critical discourse analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *32*(1), 75-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2012.655239

Xu, Z. M. (2010). *Chinese English: Features and implications.* Hongkong, China: Open University of Hong Kong Press.

Yan, X., & Moody, A. (2010). Language and society in Macao. *Chinese Language and Discourse*, *1*(2), 293-324. https://doi.org/10.1075/cld.1.2.07xi

Yano, Y. (2009). English as an International lingua franca: From societal to individual. *World Englishes,* *28*(2), 246-255. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971x.2009.01587.x

Yu, X. (2009). 中国英语报章用词的本土化特征[*Nativized local use in China's English newspapers*]. Nanjing, China: Nanjing University Press.

Zhang, L., & Cassany, D. (2020). Making sense of danmu: Coherence in massive anonymous chats on Bilibili.com. *Discourse Studies, 22*(4), 483-502. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445620940051

Zhang, Y. (2021). English as a linguistic resource: Localizing English in micro-blogging by users of Chinese. *English Today*, *37*(1), 34-41. doi:10.1017/S0266078419000324

## Appendix A Interview Excerpts
### Participant 1: Mr. Feng Excerpt 1

R (Researcher): Do you think Ms. Jin is using China English and do you think it's acceptable to you?

Feng: Definitely, that's China English and I believe it's quite
acceptable for me.

R: Well, could you please explain why you accept China English?

Feng: I am a foreign trade salesman, mainly in charge of the overseas department and I have to deal with people from different countries every day. So I can't expect everyone to be like the English listening test, right? hahaha. After all, we are Chinese, and English is a totally foreign language for us.

R: So you mean that we may meet different varieties of English in real communication and then what's the most important in using English in real communication from your point?

Feng: Well, personally speaking, I think confidence matters most because once you speak out and express your ideas, it's enough!

### Participant 2: Mr. Zhang Excerpt 2

R: Do you think Ms. Jin is using China English? And could you explain why you doubt whether a foreigner could understand the Chinese accent and structure?

Zhang: From my point of view, it's China English. I remember once there was a customer from Canada and it was really hard for him to understand me because I speak English with a strong Chinese accent.

R: So do you think that China English is not a good choice when using English?

Zhang: Agree, we need to try to imitate Westerners but not in a Chinese way, it's really a trouble for communication.

R: You mean that we need to try to sound like a native speaker when speaking English? Why do you think so?

Zhang: Yes, at least trying to make it. I think if you speak English with a too heavy Chinese accent, you will be laughed at for being so vulgar.

**Participant 3 Mrs. Zhao Excerpt 3**

R: Do you think Ms. Jin is using China English? And as you mentioned that her grammar is not good, does that mean you can't accept this kind of China English?

Zhao: Sure, I don't like China English, and I totally can't accept China English.

R: Could you please explain why you don't like China English?

Zhao: I am a teacher and I always meet students using China English. Like "horse horse tiger tiger (which refers to the Chinese idiom meaning "careless"); I am read a book". All these mean zero marks in exams, which is really a headache for me.

R: Therefore, you mean that students' use China English is not suggested in English classes and exams?

Zhao: Yes, but not "suggest" but "forbid". Students mustn't use China English in exams because there will be zero marks for students if they use China English instead of British or American English in the textbook. What's more, if China English is used in English teaching, how can we give marks?

**Participant 4: Miss Meng Excerpt 4**

R: Do you think Ms. Jin's English is China English? Could you please explain why you say Ms. Jin's English makes you comfortable?

Meng: Emm, yes, it's China English. It's really fluent and I like Ms. Jin very much. The confidence on her face really moves me. She is my idol and role model!

R: That's to say, do you think China English is acceptable for you? Do you like China English?

Meng: Yes, I like China English because I think it's much easier for me to learn and understand. Like when writing English sentences, I prefer to use Chinese grammar.

R: All right, do you think learning British English is our final goal in English acquisition?

Meng: Well, according to textbooks, probably it is, I don't know. But I am Chinese, speaking China English can show my Chinese nationality, it's emm, how to say, good.