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A cluster analysis of attitudes to English in Germany and the Netherlands

Alison Edwards¹ D | Robert Fuchs²

¹Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

²Institute of English and American Studies, University of Hamburg

Correspondence

Alison Edwards, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, PO Box 9515, 2300 RA Leiden, Netherlands. Email: alisonedwards@cantab.net

Abstract

Although English is becoming increasingly entrenched in Western Europe, large-scale comparative studies of attitudes among the general public to this development are scarce. We investigate over 4,000 Dutch and Germans' attitudes towards English based on responses to an attitudinal questionnaire. Respondents saw English as a useful additional language, but not generally as a threat to their national language. Using k-means, an unsupervised clustering algorithm, we identified two attitudinal groups per country. Respondents with positive attitudes towards English, regardless of nationality, tended to be younger, urban, better educated and more proficient in English than their compatriots with more negative views of English. These within-country differences outweighed between-country ones, for example, that Germans were more confident in the status of their L1, whereas Dutch showed signs of 'English fatigue'. The findings thus appear to confirm the previously identified divide between elite 'haves' versus 'have-nots' of English.

1 | INTRODUCTION

English is becoming increasingly entrenched in continental Europe, especially in Western and Northern European countries. This study focuses on Germany and the Netherlands, two countries where this development is particularly pronounced, especially in the latter given its smaller size and historical imperative to connect economically with the outside world (Ammon & McConnell, 2002, p. 98; McArthur, 1998, p. 106). What are people's perceptions of (the rise of) English, and how do views differ within and between these two countries? In exploring such attitudes, the 'spokesman' problem (Edwards, 2012) arises: 'who is actually in a position to present or represent the views of the group as a whole' (De Bot & Weltens, 1997, p. 145)? It is not self-evident that the attitudes expressed most vociferously in the media and policy debates reflect those on the ground generally. Indeed, they may be highly controversial views picked up by a sensationalist media or unusually conservative attitudes exploited for political ends. In

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an early study in France, for instance, Flaitz (1993) found that French 'power elites' (journalists, academics and public officials) were more negative towards English than the general public. While elite public discourse was characterised by calls-to-arms to protect French from the 'invasion' of English, the general public 'did not seem to share the alarm of their more highly-placed compatriots with regard to the threat of English' (Flaitz, 1993, p. 187).

Similar findings have since emerged for Germany and the Netherlands. For reasons of space, we refrain from giving a detailed description of the history and current spread of English in these two countries; such background has been provided elsewhere (Erling, 2004, 2007; Hilgendorf, 2001). In the specific context of language attitudes, however, opinion leaders in both countries regularly express concerns about the perceived inundation of English. In Germany, Erling (2004, p. 42) describes this as a 'palpable' fear. She cites the example of a language purification law proposed by the conservative Christian Democratic party (CDU) in 2001 'to stop the unnecessary use of Anglicisms [...] in public domains all over Germany' (Erling, 2004, p. 144). Although the bill did not pass, it received support from prominent politicians as well as numerous academics and linguists. She also discusses the establishment of the protectionist Verein Deutsche Sprache in 1997 'to protect the German language, German people, German nation and German culture from being overly influenced by Anglo-American language and culture' (Erling, 2004, p. 148) (and which persists today in its attempts to influence public and political discourse on English in Germany). Yet, Erling found that such 'macro-attitudes' expressed by the media, politicians and protectionist groups are not necessarily reflected in the 'micro-attitudes' of people on the ground: even German university students of English, as in her study, placed great value on and recognised the importance of German as the national language. Other studies, focusing on university students at large, have also reaffirmed the general confidence in the status of German vis-à-vis English (Ammon & McConnell, 2002; Gnutzmann, Jakisch, & Rabe, 2015).

Similarly, prominent voices in the Dutch media and public discourse regularly lament issues from the encroachment of English in education to the purported slavishness of the Dutch towards Anglo-American culture. Protectionist organisations such as the Stichting Nederlands propose alternatives for Anglicisms, while the rather vitriolic Stichting Taalverdediging Nederlands labels public figures who appear all too pro-English as 'language traitors' and compares the promotion of English to the Nazi occupation during World War II (Stichting Taalverdediging, 2009, p. 6). Although the members of such organisations have been described as 'militants' and in a 'very small minority' (Van Oostendorp, 2012, p. 260), they tap into a frequently cited public narrative that the Dutch take little pride in their own language and are all too willing to give it up (De Bot & Weltens, 1997; Groeneboer, 2002; Smakman, 2006; Van Oostendorp, 2012). De Bot and Weltens (1997), however, found no empirical support for this apparent lack of regard for Dutch. They surveyed the attitudes of Dutch, English, German and Turkish speakers living in the Netherlands towards their own and each other's languages. The Dutch participants showed no signs of undervaluing Dutch, rating it as their most important language (followed by English), while the immigrants considered it important to learn Dutch. The authors concluded that 'there is simply no empirical evidence on the real or perceived threat of English or the position of Dutch in the Netherlands' (De Bot & Weltens 1997, p. 146). Others examined the evaluation of English and Dutch job titles by Dutch university students (Van Meurs, Korzilius, Planken, & Fairley, 2007). They found that the students' evaluations of the use of English 'were not always as negative ('odd'/'exaggerated') nor as positive ('prestige-enhancing') as those found in scholarly and more popular publications', thus questioning to what extent 'academics, advertising agencies, and opinion leaders [...] can speak for "ordinary" language users' (Van Meurs et al., 2007, p. 202).

2 | THE PRESENT STUDY

We are interested in: (i) testing the results of previous empirical work by means of a larger scale, cross-country study; and (ii) extending it by creating profiles of characteristic attitudes towards English in Germany and the Netherlands. Specifically, we use the clustering algorithm k-means (see further section 3.2) to identify patterns in the responses to an attitudinal survey with over 4,000 respondents.

An earlier example can be found in Berns, De Bot, and Hasebrink (2007), who used k-means to investigate the patterning between the English proficiency of Dutch and German high school students and variables relating to their social

654

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background, media environment and contact with English. They identified roughly corresponding national groups with similar atttibutes: both countries had a large 'mainstream' group primarily exposed to English through music, an 'educated' group that also encountered English in the print media, a 'culture-oriented' group that engaged with Englishlanguage cinema, and a low-proficiency group with few contacts with English (Berns et al., 2007, pp. 97–101). The study showed that k-means is a promising method for clustering participants and identifying similarities and differences across groups. By making use of a larger dataset encompassing all population sectors, we are able to go beyond the smaller, more restricted samples of school or university students used in previous studies. The Dutch subset was used in a previous, somewhat impressionistic analysis seeking to group participants based on their attitudinal profiles (Edwards, 2016). These initial results tentatively identified a large 'instrumental' group, whose participants regarded English as personally important, but valued Dutch as well; and two peripheral groups: an 'anglophile' and an 'anti-English' group. However, the large, main group was very large indeed, whereas the two marginal groups, with their rather extreme views, accounted for only 7 per cent of people (after discounting overlap). The three groups accounted in total for slightly less than 80% of the dataset. Here, we set out to improve on that initial study by (i) employing a more statistically rigorous method that identifies the optimal number of distinct groups and places all observations into the most optimal group and (ii) furthering its scope by adding a comparable, recently collected German dataset. The research questions are as follows:

- 1. What are the underlying patterns in the responses; that is, how many discrete attitudinal groups can be identified per country?
- 2. How do the groups differ within and between countries in terms of attitudes?
- 3. How do the groups differ within and between countries in terms of sociodemographic characteristics?

3 | DATA AND METHODS

3.1 | Questionnaire and sample

The Dutch data were collected by means of a questionnaire originally from Edwards (2016). The questionnaire was later translated for use in Germany. In both cases, the questionnaire (available on request) was disseminated online using Google forms. The Dutch version was live for approximately six months in 2013; the German version for nine months from June 2015. We used a two-pronged approach to collect data: (i) dissemination via our own contacts (via email and social media) and having them forward the link to the questionnaire to their contacts in turn, and so on (snow-ball sampling); and (ii) targeting of a range of online networks. For example, as online questionnaires are likely to attract younger, more internet-savvy participants, we explicitly targeted senior citizens' groups; and as a questionnaire on the English language risks appealing most to people who are well-disposed to the language, we also targeted organisations known to be more or less hostile to English (e.g. the Verein Deutsche Sprache and the Stichting Taalverdediging Nederlands).

A total of 4,372 responses were received. Invalid responses (for example, blank forms and duplicate forms) were excluded (n = 211), leaving a total of 4,161 responses for inclusion in the analysis. Half were from German (n = 2,075) and half from Dutch (n = 2,086) respondents. The first part of the questionnaire collected personal information, which we subsequently coded into six sociodemographic variables: age, sex, self-reported English proficiency level, education level, language of instruction in higher education and place of residence. Table 1 shows the coding scheme and the breakdown of respondents across the different variables. In brief, respondents ranged in age from 11 to 92 years (DE M = 40.7, SD = 16.0; NL M = 44.3, SD = 16.8). For both national groups, slightly more men than women filled in the questionnaire (female DE 52.8%, NL 56.1%). Over 90 per cent of all respondents self-reported having at least 'reasonable' English proficiency, with Dutch respondents being more likely than Germans to choose the 'fluent' option. Over 60 per cent of Dutch and 80 per cent of Germans reported high education levels, although a caveat is in order here: the highly educated German group includes students or graduates of *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences), whereas

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TABLE 1 Sociodemographic variables

		Germa	Germany		Netherlands		
Variable	Classification	n	%	n	%		
Age	>20 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 ≤60 no data	26 580 608 269 254 320 18	1.3 28.0 29.3 13.0 12.2 15.4 0.9	55 511 346 325 379 467 3	2.6 24.5 16.6 15.6 18.2 22.4 0.1		
	Total	2075	100.0	2086	100.0		
Sex	male female no data	969 1095 11	46.7 52.8 0.6	908 1170 8	43.5 56.1 0.4		
	Total	2075	100.0	2086	100.0		
English proficiency level	1 = not at all 2 = with difficulty 3 = reasonable $4 = fluent^{*}$ no data	12 170 687 1205 1	0.6 8.2 33.1 58.1 0.0	2 31 578 1470 5	0.1 1.5 27.7 70.5 0.2		
	Total	2075	100.0	2086	100.0		
Highest attained education level	$\label{eq:low} \begin{split} & \text{low} = \text{primary school/lower secondary education}^{\dagger} \\ & \text{medium} = \text{vocational education}^{\ddagger} \\ & \text{high} = \text{university education}^{\$} \\ & \text{no data} \end{split}$	163 162 1749 1	7.9 7.8 84.3 0.0	61 713 1301 11	2.9 34.2 62.4 0.5		
	Total	2075	100.0	2086	100.0		
Language of instruction in higher education	NationalLang = (mainly) [Dutch/German] English = English bilingual = [Dutch/German] + English [∥] other = e.g. French, Swedish none = no higher education (yet) no data	1334 157 295 18 271 0	64.3 7.6 14.2 0.9 13.1 0.0	1434 252 296 24 61 19	68.7 12.1 14.2 1.2 2.9 0.9		
	Total	2075	100.0	2086	100.0		
Current place of residence	city+ = population > 250,000 city = population 50,000-250,000 town = population 5,000-50,000 country = population < 5,000 abroad-L1 = country other than [Germany/ Netherlands], where [German/Dutch] is main language abroad-English = country other than [Germany/Netherlands], where English is main language abroad-other = country other than [Germany/ Netherlands], where a language other than [German/Dutch] or English is main language no data	1027 443 396 62 22 15 44 66	49.5 21.3 19.1 3.0 1.1 0.7 2.1 3.2	435 756 458 114 90 87 85 61	20.9 36.2 22.0 5.5 4.3 4.2 4.1 2.9		
	Total	2075	100.0	2086	100.0		

*Based on averages of self-report ratings on four competences (speaking, listening, reading and writing)

[†]*Haupt/Realschule* (Germany) or VMBO/MBO (Netherlands)

[‡]Abitur + Berufsausbildung (Germany) or HAVO/HBO (Netherlands)

[§]Abitur + university/*Fachhochschule* (Germany) or VWO/WO (Netherlands)

Includes respondents who merely had some literature in English (hence 'mainly')

[¶] Includes formally bilingual programmes, programmes involving some classes in English (either in respondent's own country or

as an exchange/Erasmus student) or programmes in different languages (e.g. a Dutch/German bachelor and an English master)

**E.g. Austria (German respondents), Belgium (Dutch respondents)

those of the conceptual equivalent in the Netherlands (HBO) are classed as having a medium education level. This is because while it is not unusual for Germans with an Abitur (the highest-level secondary school diploma) to go on to attend a Fachhochschule, this is rather more unusual in the Netherlands; the vast majority of HBO students attended one of the lower secondary school streams (Ministry for Education Culture and Science, 2015). This difference in classification is reflected in the comparatively larger highly educated group for Germany, but does not necessarily mean the German sample was generally better educated than the Dutch sample. More Dutch respondents than Germans reported studying entirely in English (DE 7.6%, NL 12.1%). Finally, approximately 70 per cent of Germans and almost 60 per cent of Dutch respondents resided in small to large cities (> 50,000 inhabitants). Based on these figures, our sample appears to be more highly educated and have higher English proficiency levels than would be expected on average, which, although almost unavoidable in a study such as this, should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. The second (main) part of the questionnaire consisted of attitudinal statements with responses on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree). In this paper we focus on questionnaire items concerning the use of English, the status of English and attitudes to local varieties of English ('German English' and 'Dutch English'), most of which were derived and adapted from earlier surveys on attitudes to English in Europe (Buschfeld, 2013; Erling, 2004; Leppänen et al., 2011; Preisler, 1999). The wording of the questions is shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4 in the Results section.

3.2 | Statistical analysis

Respondents were grouped using k-means based on their scores for the attitudinal variables. K-means is a commonly used, unsupervised clustering algorithm that partitions observations into groups ('clusters'), repeatedly reassigning each data point until the cluster assignments are optimal. In this case, we sought to form groups of people with similar attitudes based on their responses to the questionnaire items. In calculating groups the algorithm seeks a balance between improving fit and minimising fragmentation: the more groups the better the fit, but as overly fragmented groups are not optimal for interpretation, additional groups are penalised.

The algorithm needs to be supplied with two things: the raw data and the number of groups to partition the data into. This raises the question of how the researcher can know in advance how many groups are optimal. The obvious solution is to base the initial decision on a priori knowledge (Moisl, 2015). As described above, previous analyses of the Dutch data tentatively identified three groups: a large 'instrumental' group and two smaller 'anglophile' and 'anti-English' groups (author). Therefore, in RStudio version 0.99.491 (RStudio Team, 2015), which was used for all analyses, we directed the NbClust function (Charrad, Ghazzali, Boiteau, & Niknafs, 2014) to run through all configurations from two to five groups. The optimal number of groups for both the German and the Dutch dataset turned out to be two. Thus, we next ran the k-means function (R Core Team, 2016) on the two national datasets specifying that each should be partitioned into two groups. Two types of output were obtained: the cluster assignments for each observation (i.e. the group number, 1 or 2, for each respondent), and the cluster means for each attitudinal variable (that is, a mean score between 1 and 4 for each group on each attitudinal statement).

We labelled the clusters DE1, DE2 (the two groups for Germany), NL1 and NL2 (the two groups for the Netherlands). As the k-means algorithm partitions data points based on mutual dissimilarity, we naturally expect the two DE groups to be significantly different in terms of responses to the attitudinal questions and, likewise, the two NL groups to be significantly different from one another. However, two things are interesting to point out here that were not obvious a priori. First, it was not self-evident that the two countries would have the same optimal number of groups. Second, an initial glance at the groupings suggested there were broad cross-country similarities in the attitudes and sociodemographic characteristics of groups DE1 and NL1 and groups DE2 and NL2. We subsequently ran the NbClust function on the data for both countries at once, which indeed confirmed that two clusters were optimal also in this large, combined dataset. As we discuss in more detail later, this suggests that with respect to the attitudes investigated here, participants have more in common with their peers in the neighbouring country than with their compatriots in the other national group. To identify the specific attitudes that characterise each group, we used one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's tests for multiple pairwise comparisons to compare the means of all four groups on each

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TABLE 2 Attitudes per group to using English

	English-negative			English-positive		
Variable	DE1	NL1	Sig.	DE2	NL2	Sig.
I like using English	2.06	2.43	***	3.69	3.66	
Sometimes I resent having to use English	2.68	2.64		1.39	1.52	***
I prefer using [German/Dutch] in most situations whenever possible	3.65	3.60		2.48	2.98	***
I always use English when I get the chance	1.62	1.51	*	2.82	2.31	***
When I use English I:						
-am quieter	1.56	2.57	***	2.06	1.71	***
-am more talkative	1.38	1.71	***	2.07	1.97	**
-use less humour	2.59	2.84	***	2.03	1.74	***
-find it easier to talk about my emotions	1.34	1.65	***	2.07	2.10	
-feel smarter	1.45	1.72	***	1.99	2.02	
-feel less capable	2.37	2.52	**	1.82	1.65	***
-feel like an outsider	1.92	2.10	***	1.39	1.42	
-feel the same as in my mother tongue	1.46	2.20	***	2.61	3.21	***

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

 $p^* = p < 0.05, p^* = p < 0.01, p^* = p < 0.001$

attitudinal variable. Finally, to flesh out the sociodemographic characteristics of each group, we (i) compared the means on the continuous variables age and proficiency using, again, ANOVA and Tukey's posthoc tests and (ii) compared the distributions on the categorical variables sex, education level, higher education language and place of residence using chi-square tests, with the chisq.post.hoc function (Fife, 2017) and Holm correction for multiple pairwise comparisons. All R code used in the study is available on request.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Attitudinal variables

As reported above, based on the responses to the attitudinal statements, two clusters were identified in each country. The group sizes were remarkably similar across countries, with each country having one smaller group (DE1 n = 775, 37.3%; NL1 n = 800, 38.4%) and a larger one comprising just over three-fifths of respondents (DE2 n = 1,300, 62.7%; NL2 n = 1,286, 61.6%). As we shall see, the larger groups in each country were characterised by predominantly positive attitudes towards English, the smaller groups by somewhat more negative attitudes. Indeed, the patterning across the two countries matches closely, indicating broad similarities in attitudes between Germans and Dutch who are well-disposed towards English and between those who are not. The following sections address the three categories of attitudinal statements – using English, the status of English and local varieties of English – in turn.

4.1.1 Using English

Table 2 presents the cluster means for each group on the variables concerning their use of English. We interpret cluster means of greater (less) than 2.5 (the midway cut-off point on the 4-point scale) as indicating that respondents on average somewhat or strongly agree (disagree) with the statement. With four groups, there are six possible pairwise combinations. As previously noted, the two within-country comparisons (DE1 vs DE2 and NL1 vs NL2) are by design expected to reveal significant differences; and indeed these means were significantly different from one another in all cases (with one exception, which is specified in the relevant section below). The two between-country comparisons (i.e. between the two 'negative' groups DE1 and NL1 and the two 'positive' groups DE2 and NL2) are of particular interest here; thus, this and subsequent tables highlight significant differences in the between-country means of these corresponding groups. The remaining two pairwise comparisons (DE1 vs NL2 and DE2 vs NL1) are of less interest and thus not discussed further. To illustrate, let us look at the first row, the variable *I like using English*. The within-country differences are clear: the positive groups DE2 and NL2 (strongly) agreed with this statement (means > 3.6) whereas their peers in groups DE1 and NL1 tended towards mild disagreement (means < 2.5). Additionally, however, the negative German group (DE1) liked using English significantly less than did the negative Dutch group (NL1). There was no significant difference in the mean scores of the two positive groups DE2 and NL2. Having discussed how to read the table, we now consider in more detail the within- and between-country differences it reveals.

Within-country differences

As has been noted, groups DE2 and NL2 can be broadly characterised as having more positive attitudes than their compatriots in groups DE1 and NL1. Specifically, the English-positive groups in both countries agreed, unlike the negative groups, that they like using English and feel the same in English as they do in their L1 (that is, they do not sense a loss of identity when expressing themselves in English). By contrast, the English-negative groups agreed that they sometimes resent having to use English, use less humour in English and prefer using their L1 whenever possible (although the positive Dutch group tended to agree with the latter statement as well; see next section). Other differences were more a matter of degree. Respondents in the positive groups were more likely to report that they always use English when they get the chance and are more talkative, find it easier to talk about their emotions and feel smarter in English, although they did not necessarily outright agree with these statements. To illustrate, all groups disagreed with the statement 'When I use English I am more talkative' (the highest group mean is 2.07, in the case of somewhat disagree). However, the means for the two negative groups are significantly lower (1.38 and 1.71) than the means for the two positive groups (1.97 and 2.07) on this item. In other words, the English-positive groups do not actually agree with the statement 'When I use English I am more talkative', but they are closer to agreeing with it than are the negative groups. The table also shows that respondents in the negative groups were more likely to feel less capable and like an outsider in English (although again, they did not always outright agree with these statements).

Between-country differences

Broadly speaking, the German respondents seemed to feel more encumbered by English than their Dutch counterparts. Germans in the negative group liked using English less, were quieter and less talkative, found it harder to talk about emotional things, felt less smart and capable, and were less likely to say they feel the same in English as in their L1 than their counterparts in the negative Dutch group (the latter group shared most of these attitudes but less strongly). Similarly, although both positive groups disagreed that they are quieter, use less humour and feel less capable in English, the German group did so less strongly, suggesting that even those with positive attitudes towards English may not feel entirely 'themselves' in the language, as it were. In line with this, they agreed less strongly than the positive Dutch group that they feel the same in English as in their L1. However, compared to the Dutch respondents, the Germans were more likely to agree that they always use English when they get the chance (although they did not necessarily outright agree). One may speculate that they wish to make use of every opportunity to practise, whereas the Dutch, with possibly more chances to use English in everyday life, feel less urge to do so. In the same vein, Dutch respondents with positive attitudes towards English nevertheless preferred using their L1 whenever possible, more so than their German counterparts. Additionally, they were more likely to sometimes resent using English. As we shall discuss later, these findings could - tentatively - be interpreted as a possible reaction to the perceived Anglicisation of Dutch society. Finally, the negative Dutch were more likely than the negative Germans to feel like outsiders in English. In line with the interpretation suggested above, it may be that Germans can generally get by without English, whereas the Dutch are compelled to use it at least occasionally in day-to-day life, leaving those with negative attitudes towards it more frequently feeling excluded.

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4.1.2 | Status of English

Table 3 shows the cluster means for respondents' views on the status of English in their lives and in their respective countries. These results point to a general confidence in the status of German/Dutch vis-à-vis English. All respondents, regardless of how well-disposed they were towards English, agreed that their L1 is more important and that without their L1 it would be hard to find a job. By the same token, they disagreed that English has a higher status than their L1 and poses a threat to their L1. At the same time, all affirmed that speaking both their L1 *and* English is an advantage, and that English offers advantages when it comes to finding a good job.

Within-country differences

Both English-positive groups agreed, unlike their negative compatriots, that English enriches their L1. They also agreed more strongly that English is important to them personally, speaking English in addition to their L1 is an advantage, and English offers advantages in seeking a good job. By contrast, the negative groups agreed more strongly than their compatriots that their L1 is more important than English and without their L1 it would be hard to find a job. They were also more likely to see English as having a higher status than their L1, as posing a threat to their L1 and as being overrated in their respective countries (although they did not necessarily agree with these statements).

Between-country differences

The German respondents appeared to be more confident in the status of their L1 than their Dutch peers, both in society in general and on the domestic labour market. Germans agreed more strongly than Dutch that without a good command of their L1 it would be hard to find a job. Both Dutch groups agreed more strongly than the corresponding German groups that speaking both English and their L1 is an advantage, and were more likely to believe that English has a higher status than their L1 and is overrated in their country (although they did not necessarily agree with these

	English-negative		English-positive			
Variable	DE1	NL1	Sig.	DE2	NL2	Sig.
English is very important to me personally	2.35	2.64	***	3.65	3.68	
Speaking both [German/Dutch] and English is an advantage	3.48	3.75	***	3.85	3.94	***
For [Germans/Dutch], [German/Dutch] is more important than English	3.50	3.56		3.26	3.32	
English has a higher status than [German/Dutch] in [Germany/the Netherlands]	1.95	2.05	*	1.55	1.87	***
English skills are overrated	2.46	2.76	***	1.56	2.18	***
Without knowledge of [German/Dutch] it would be hard to get a job in [Germany/the Netherlands]	3.66	3.54	**	3.56	3.43	***
English offers advantages in seeking good job opportunities	3.25	3.27		3.63	3.58	
English enriches the [German/Dutch] language	1.98	2.27	***	2.75	2.71	
English is a threat to the [German/Dutch] language	2.41	2.33		1.40	1.73	***

TABLE 3 Attitudes per group to the status of English

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

 $p^* = p < .05, p^{**} = p < .01, p^{***} = p < .001$

660

statements). The positive Dutch group, despite being well-disposed towards English, were more worried than their German counterparts that English poses a threat to their L1. While the positive German and Dutch groups did not differ on the variables concerning English as an enrichment to their L1 and as personally important, the negative Dutch were more likely to agree with these statements than the negative Germans. Indeed, the negative Dutch group tended to agree that English is important to them personally, suggesting the language is broadly recognised as important in people's lives in the Netherlands whether one is well disposed towards it or not.

4.1.3 | Local varieties of English

Table 4 presents the cluster means for the four groups on their attitudes towards local varieties of English ('Dutch English' and 'German English'). All tended to agree that as long as their English is good, they don't mind if it has a bit of local 'flavour'. Yet at same time, they also considered 'Dunglish'/'Gerlish' to be 'bad' English. This apparent contradiction highlights the stigma attached to 'hybrid' labels and underlines the importance of phrasing questions in a neutral way.

Within-country differences

Respondents who were better disposed towards English appeared to hold a more traditional, English-native-speaker orientation than their less positive compatriots. For example, the positive groups in both countries tended to agree, unlike the negative groups, that outsiders should not be able to recognise where they are from when they speak English, whereas the negative groups showed higher levels of acceptance of local 'flavour' in their English.

Between-country differences

This association between positive attitudes to English and exonormativity seemed to be particularly prevalent among the Dutch respondents. The positive Dutch group agreed more strongly than the corresponding German group that 'Dunglish'/'Gerlish' is 'bad' English. It is unclear why this trend was reversed for the negative groups: the negative Germans agreed more strongly than did their Dutch peers. This may, very speculatively, be attributable to an issue with the questionnaire. In analysing the German responses we noticed a number of respondents had suggested 'Gerlish' (*Denglisch* in the German version of the survey) can be interpreted as German with English transfer, rather than English with German features. If this understanding was widespread, the high level of agreement with this statement would make sense: respondents with negative attitudes towards English would presumably not want to see it 'infecting' German.

The traditional, English-native-speaker orientation appeared to be more characteristic in general of Dutch than German respondents, regardless of how well disposed they were towards English. Both Dutch groups believed more strongly that outsiders should not recognise from their English where they come from and were less accepting of local 'flavour' in their English than the corresponding German groups. Further, while the two German groups differed in their

	English-negative		English-p	English-positive		
Variable	DE1	NL1	Sig.	DE2	NL2	Sig.
['Gerlish'/'Dunglish'] is bad English	3.25	3.02	***	2.67	3.06	***
As long as my English is good, I don't mind if it has a bit of [German/Dutch] 'flavour'	3.27	3.13	**	2.90	2.71	***
When I speak English to outsiders, they should not be able to recognise where I'm from	1.79	2.34	***	2.54	3.01	***

TABLE 4 Attitudes per group to local varieties of English

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

 $p^* = p < .05, p^{**} = p < .01, p^{***} = p < .001$

662	EDWARDS AND FUCH:

TABLE 5 Mean age of respondents per group

Country	Overall mean	Negative group	Positive group
DE	40.7	49.1	35.7
NL	44.3	49.4	41.1

views on 'Gerlish', the two Dutch groups did not when it came to their condemnation of 'Dunglish'; indeed, this was the only non-significant within-country difference we identified. That both Dutch groups agreed to an indistinguishable degree that 'Dunglish' is 'bad' English seems to point to an undifferentiated standard language ideology across the population at large.

4.2 | Sociodemographic variables

Having identified four groups in the data and the attitudes that typify them, we now turn to respondents' sociodemographic characteristics. Recall that the clusters were established by the k-means algorithm based on dissimilarity in compatriots' responses to the attitudinal variables; thus, differences in attitudinal patterning were to be expected. What remains to be explored is whether the sociodemographic variables, too, map in a distinct way onto these groups. The following sections consider the relationship between the sets of attitudes identified and the sociodemographic characteristics of the people who hold them.

4.2.1 | Age

As shown in Table 5, English-positive respondents were on average younger and negative respondents older than their compatriots (F(3,4136) = 184, p < 0.001). All pairwise differences were significant (at the p < 0.001 level) except that between the two negative groups, which had remarkably similar means, both around 49 years. The within-country age difference was more pronounced among German respondents; positive Germans were on average over 13 years younger (compared to positive Dutch respondents, roughly 8 years younger) than their negative compatriots.

4.2.2 | Sex

There were significant differences in the sex distribution between groups ($\chi^2 = 59.14$, df = 3, p < 0.001). Although the gender balance did not differ significantly between the two Dutch groups, and was roughly as expected based on that of the Dutch dataset as a whole (Table 6), pairwise comparisons showed that the sexes were distributed differently

	Total	Negative group	Positive group
DE			
-male	969 (46.7%)	442 (57.0%)	527 (40.5%)
-female	1095 (52.8%)	328 (42.3%)	767 (59.0%)
-NA	11 (0.6)	5 (0.7%)	6 (0.5%)
Total	2075 (100.0%)	775 (100.0%)	1300 (100.0%)
NL			
-male	908 (43.5%)	356 (44.5%)	552 (42.9%)
-female	1170 (56.1%)	440 (55.0%)	730 (56.8%)
-NA	8 (0.4%)	4 (0.5%)	4 (0.3%)
Total	2086 (100.0%)	800 (100.0%)	1286 (100.0%)

TABLE 6 Sex distribution of respondents per group

TABLE 7 Respondents' mean English proficiency levels per group

Country	Overall mean	Negative group	Positive group
DE	3.37	2.86	3.68
NL	3.58	3.23	3.79

in the two German groups (p < 0.001). Women were overrepresented in the positive group, which was 59 per cent female (53% was expected based on the German dataset as a whole). Conversely, men were overrepresented in the negative group (57% compared with 47% expected). Although there is ample previous research indicating that women have generally more positive attitudes to foreign languages than do men (Lai, 2007; Sung & Padillar, 1998), it is not immediately clear to us why attitudes to English should be gendered for the Germans but not for the Dutch.

4.2.3 | English proficiency level

As shown in Table 7, respondents in the English-positive groups had higher self-reported proficiency rates than the overall means for the respective national datasets, approaching 'fluent' on the self-report scale. The negative groups reported lower than average proficiency rates (around 'reasonable'). The means for both Dutch groups were higher than those of the corresponding German groups, presumably reflecting more widespread proficiency among the Dutch population at large (European Commission, 2012). Differences among groups were significant (F(3,4151) = 833.8, p < 0.001), with all pairwise differences significant at the p < 0.001 level.

4.2.4 | Education level

The positive groups were associated with more highly educated people and the negative groups with less welleducated people ($\chi^2 = 569.26$, df = 6, p < 0.001, all pairwise differences p < 0.001). Specifically, the two positive groups had higher proportions of respondents with high education levels and lower proportions of respondents with low education levels than expected based on the distribution of education levels in the respective national datasets (Table 8). The opposite held for the negative groups.

Education level	Total	Negative group	Positive group
DE			
-low	163 (7.9%)	105 (13.6%)	58 (4.5%)
-medium	162 (7.8%)	66 (8.5%)	96 (7.4%)
-high	1749 (84.3%)	603 (77.8%)	1146 (88.1%)
-NA	1 (0.0%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	2075 (100.0%)	775 (100.0%)	1300 (100.0%)
NL			
-low	61 (2.9%)	27 (3.4%)	34 (2.6%)
-medium	713 (34.2%)	320 (40.0%)	393 (30.6%)
-high	1301 (62.4%)	449 (56.1%)	852 (66.3%)
-NA	11 (0.5%)	4 (0.5%)	7 (0.5%)
Total	2086 (100.0%)	800 (100.0%)	1286 (100.0%)

TABLE8 Respondents' education levels per group

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TABLE 9 Language of instruction in respondents' higher education per group

Language	Total	Negative group	Positive group
DE			
-German	1334 (64.3%)	570 (73.5%)	764 (58.8%)
-English	157 (7.6%)	11 (1.4%)	146 (11.2%)
-bilingual	295 (14.2%)	30 (3.9%)	265 (20.4%)
-other	18 (0.9%)	6 (0.8%)	12 (0.9%)
-none	271 (13.1%)	158 (20.4%)	113 (8.7%)
-NA	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	2075 (100.0%)	775 (100.0%)	1300 (100.0%)
NL			
-Dutch	1434 (68.7%)	666 (83.3%)	768 (59.7%)
-English	252 (12.1%)	35 (4.4%)	217 (16.9%)
-bilingual	296 (14.2%)	54 (6.8%)	242 (18.8%)
-other	24 (1.2%)	13 (1.6%)	11 (0.9%)
-none	61 (2.9%)	22 (2.8%)	39 (3.0%)
-NA	19 (0.9%)	10 (1.3%)	9 (0.7%)
Total	2086 (100.0%)	800 (100.0%)	1286 (100.0%)

4.2.5 | Languages of higher education

The positive groups were associated with higher education in English and in a combination of English and their national language, the negative groups with higher education in the national language ($\chi^2 = 572.17$, df = 12, p < 0.001, all pairwise differences p < 0.001). Specifically, compared to the distributions in the relevant national dataset, the two positive groups had higher proportions of respondents who followed English-medium or bilingual higher education and lower proportions of respondents whose higher education was entirely in Dutch/German (Table 9). Again, the opposite held for the negative groups.

4.2.6 | Place of residence

Broadly, the positive groups were associated with people living in urban areas, the negative groups with more rural dwellers ($\chi^2 = 644.14$, df = 21, p < 0.001, all pairwise differences p < 0.001). As shown in Table 10, the two positive groups had lower proportions of respondents living in towns or the countryside and higher proportions of city+ (and for the Germans, city) residents than expected; this pattern was reversed for the two negative groups. Turning to respondents who lived abroad at the time of filling in the questionnaire, those who lived in countries where either English or another foreign language was the main language were overrepresented in the positive groups. By contrast, those who lived in a country where their L1 was the main language were overrepresented in the negative groups.

5 | CONCLUSION

Our investigation of over 4,000 Dutch and Germans' attitudes towards English has confirmed earlier suggestions of a 'spokesman problem' (De Bot & Weltens 1997, p. 145), namely that vociferous warnings about the threat and infiltration of English often heard in the media are not necessarily shared by large swathes of the general public. Echoing previous studies in European countries (Ammon & McConnell, 2002; De Bot & Weltens, 1997; Erling, 2004; Flaitz, 1993; Van Meurs et al., 2007; Van Oostendorp, 2012), we find that such alarmists do not speak for everyone. In fact they seem to speak for very few. For, despite the differences we presented above and briefly recap below, what our

664

TABLE 10 Respondents' place of residence per group

Residence	Total	Negative group	Positive group
DE			
-country	62 (3.0%)	37 (4.8%)	25 (1.9%)
-town	396 (19.1%)	211 (27.2%)	185 (14.2%)
-city	443 (21.3%)	161 (20.8%)	282 (21.7%)
-city+	1027 (49.5%)	323 (41.7%)	704 (54.2%)
-abroad -L1	22 (1.1%)	11 (1.4%)	11 (0.8%)
-abroad-English	15 (0.7%)	4 (0.5%)	11 (0.8%)
-abroad-other	44 (2.1%)	9 (1.2%)	35 (2.7%)
-NA	66 (3.2%)	19 (2.5%)	47 (3.6%)
Total	2075 (100.0%)	775 (100.0%)	1300 (100.0%)
NL			
-country	114 (5.5%)	59 (7.4%)	55 (4.3%)
-town	458 (22.0%)	198 (24.8%)	260 (20.2%)
-city	756 (36.2%)	290 (36.3%)	466 (36.2%)
-city+	435 (20.9%)	153 (19.1%)	282 (21.9%)
-abroad-L1	90 (4.3%)	39 (4.9%)	51 (4.0%)
-abroad-English	87 (4.2%)	12 (1.5%)	75 (5.8%)
-abroad-other	85 (4.1%)	25 (3.1%)	60 (4.7%)
-NA	61 (2.9%)	24 (3.0%)	37 (2.9%)
Total	2086 (100.0%)	800 (100.0%)	1,286 (100.0%)

respondents shared was a general confidence in the status of their national language vis-à-vis English. Although they saw English as a beneficial additional language, all broadly agreed that German/Dutch was more important in their respective society and domestic labour market, and roundly disagreed that English poses a threat to their L1. Yet there were certain distinctions between sets of respondents, which reiterates the risk in singular voices purporting to speak for all and emphasises the usefulness of casting a wide net in terms of study population. Using the k-means clustering algorithm, which proved simple to use and extremely fruitful for this type of dataset, we were able to identify two groups per country; that is, four groups in total with similarities and differences along two dimensions: between country (nationality) and within country (attitudes).

To sum up the findings on the nationality dimension, we identified certain differences between German and Dutch respondents regardless of how well disposed they were towards English. Germans appeared to be more inhibited in and encumbered by English than Dutch respondents, possibly due to less widespread English proficiency (European Commission, 2012). However, they were also more enthusiastic about opportunities to make use of their English, whereas Dutch respondents were more likely to sometimes resent having to use English. These findings may point to a sense of 'English fatigue' (Lee, 2014) in the Netherlands, where English has become a more inescapable fixture in education, business and the media than in Germany. Compared to Dutch respondents, Germans were somewhat more confident in the status of their L1, and showed lesser adherence towards English-native-speaker norms. It may be that confidence in the place of German (and Germany) tempers the urge to defer to English native speakers. Yet it is the second dimension, that of attitudes, that our findings reveal to be the most important. Respondents who were well disposed towards English, regardless of nationality, tended to like using English, to use it often, to feel relatively comfortable expressing themselves in English, and to consider it important to them personally, a benefit on the job market and an enrichment to their L1. These people were on average younger, were more likely to live in urban areas, had higher self-reported English proficiency rates, were more highly educated, and had more exposure to English in their

665

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higher education. By contrast, their compatriots (who were typically older, more rural, less competent in English, less well educated and associated with higher education in the national language, if at all) had more negative associations with English. They sometimes resented having to use English and felt less capable and more like outsiders when using English. They seemed to be more attached to their L1 (they were more likely to prefer using it whenever possible and to insist on its importance over English), and had stronger views on English as a threat to their L1 and as overrated. Interestingly, they were also more accepting of local 'flavour' in their English; compared to their compatriots they were less committed to the English-native-speaker ideal. We can confirm that this attitude dimension predominates over nationality because, as mentioned in the methods, we also combined the data from both national groups and ran our clustering procedure on this single, large dataset. Two clusters proved to be optimal also in this combined dataset—again, a broadly positive and a relatively more negative group—with 96 per cent of respondents assigned to the same group they were in when the national datasets were analysed separately. Respondents were thus optimally divided along the lines of attitude, not nationality. In other words, Germans and Dutch with particular attitudes towards English (and sociodemographic characteristics) have more in common with their peers in the neighbouring country than with their compatriots in the other national group. This finding is broadly in accordance with the socioeconomic divide between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of English identified in previous studies (Preisler, 2003).

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ORCID

Alison Edwards D http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6370-6698

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666

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