This paper examines evaluations of Asian accented English by American English listeners. If the popular media are any indication, American attitudes about how Asians speak are overwhelmingly negative, with widely circulating performances of a stylized foreign accent called Yellow English or Mock Asian standing as the most culturally salient representation of Asian Americans’ language use (Reyes & Lo, 2009, p. 6). Yet despite these widely circulating stereotypes, and the substantial body of work on attitudes toward language varieties (see, e.g., Giles & Billings, 2004), relatively few studies have looked at American attitudes toward Asian accented English, and those studies that do exist have produced rather ambiguous results (Podberesky et al., 1990; Cargile and Giles, 1998; Cargile, 1997). This study represents one effort to address a gap in the language attitude literature.

The study consisted of an online language attitude survey in which participants rated different voices on several qualities that were grouped into general measures of Attractiveness, Status, and Dynamism. Three different Accent Conditions were used: Unaccented, Asian Accented, and Control. The Unaccented voices were native speakers of American English who would be considered by most people to speak Standard or Mainstream American English (Preston, 1989, p. 54; Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 59-62). The Asian Accented speakers were L2 speakers of English whose native language was either Chinese (Mandarin) or Korean. Finally, the Control speakers were L2 speakers of English whose native language was Brazilian Portuguese. Two hypotheses were put forth: 1) Asian Accented speakers would be rated negatively compared to Unaccented speakers on some or all measures, consistent with a general dispreference for foreign accented, nonstandard speech, and 2) Asian Accented speakers would be rated negatively compared to Control speakers on some or all measures, indicating a marked dispreference for Asian accented speech beyond the general dispreference for foreign accented speech.

In all, 69 respondents from across the U.S. completed the survey. Figure 1 shows mean ratings with 95% confidence intervals for each Accent Condition (blue circles = Unaccented, green diamonds = Asian Accented, red squares = Control).