

A comparative study: Testing student teachers metalinguistic awareness regarding different varieties of English

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Introduction

The lack of including WE in English classrooms has been criticized frequently. Decke-Cornill (2003) points out that teachers with a university degree in English tend to identify themselves with standard varieties and therefore feel compelled to teach standards. In order to change that she demands shift in teacher education to view language as an expression of culture. Stephen (1997) exposed second year English students to recordings of different English varieties. The result was that standard varieties are more likely to be recognized. Furthermore Kruse (2016) points out that the teacher's age and competence influence their tolerance of varieties.

So how does the upcoming generation of German English teachers assess non-standard English varieties? Is the demanded shift by Decke-Cornill in process? Does the future teacher's knowledge and handling of English varieties improve during the academic education?

Research gap & aim

- previous studies have mostly used recordings to confront participants with English varieties
- The main purposes were to reveal degrees of recognition ,opinions about prestige, attitude
- How do the future teachers assess grammatical and lexical non-standard features of English varieties in written form?
- Is their assessment of these in correlation with their theoretical knowledge about the pluricentric language of English?

Aim: investigate future teacher's familiarity, metalinguistic awareness and assessment of correctness regarding varieties of English. Do the results between the two target groups differ?

Methods

Research instrument

- Online questionnaire

Participants

- 2nd semester bachelor students
- 3th /4th semester master students

Varieties

- Australian/New Zealandish English
- Indian English
- Irish English
- American English
- Nigerian English
- South African English

Structure of the questionnaire

- The questionnaire is structured in three parts
 - 1.) Sentences with non-standard features of different varieties
 - Assessment: Correct or incorrect + reasoning
 - 2.) Questions about theoretical background of World Englishes (e.g. Kachru's 3 Circle Model)
 - 3.) Questions about university career and private experiences with English varieties

Results

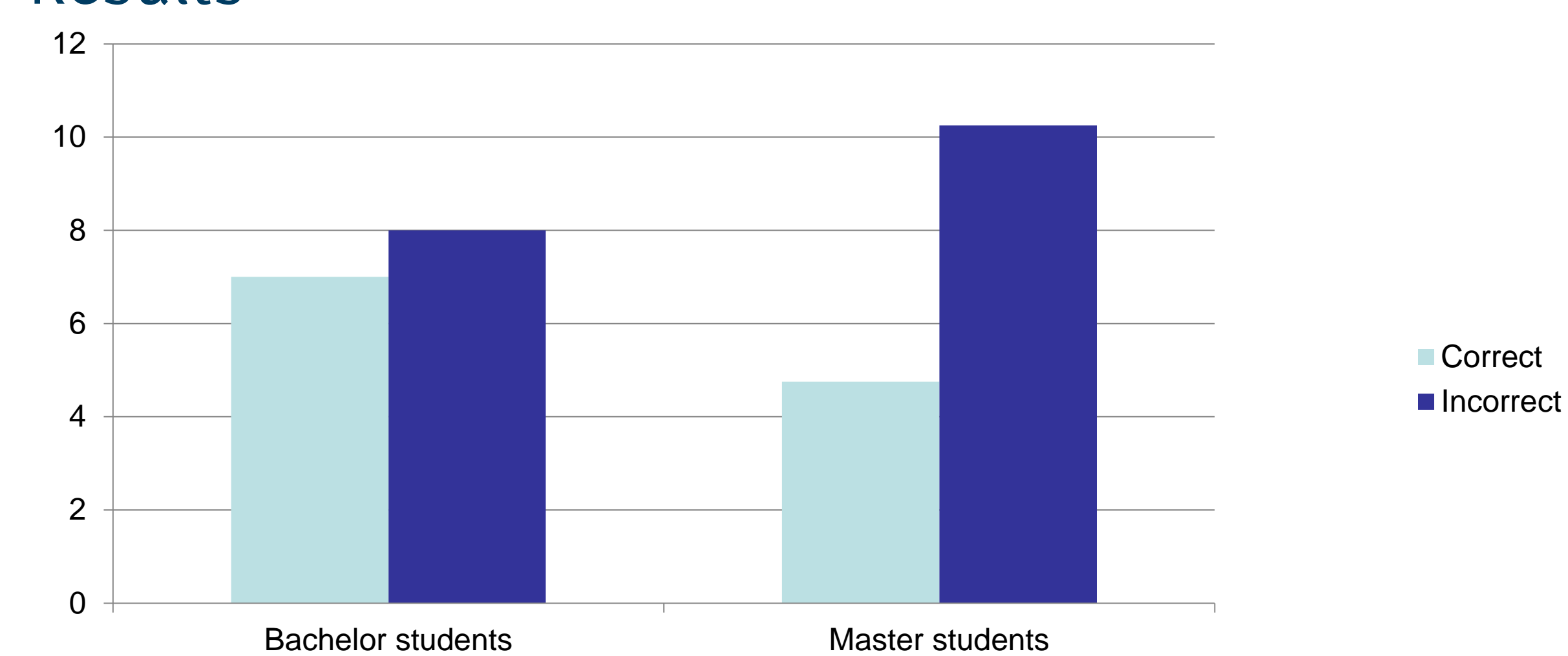


Fig. 1. Average of answers stated in the first part of the questionnaire

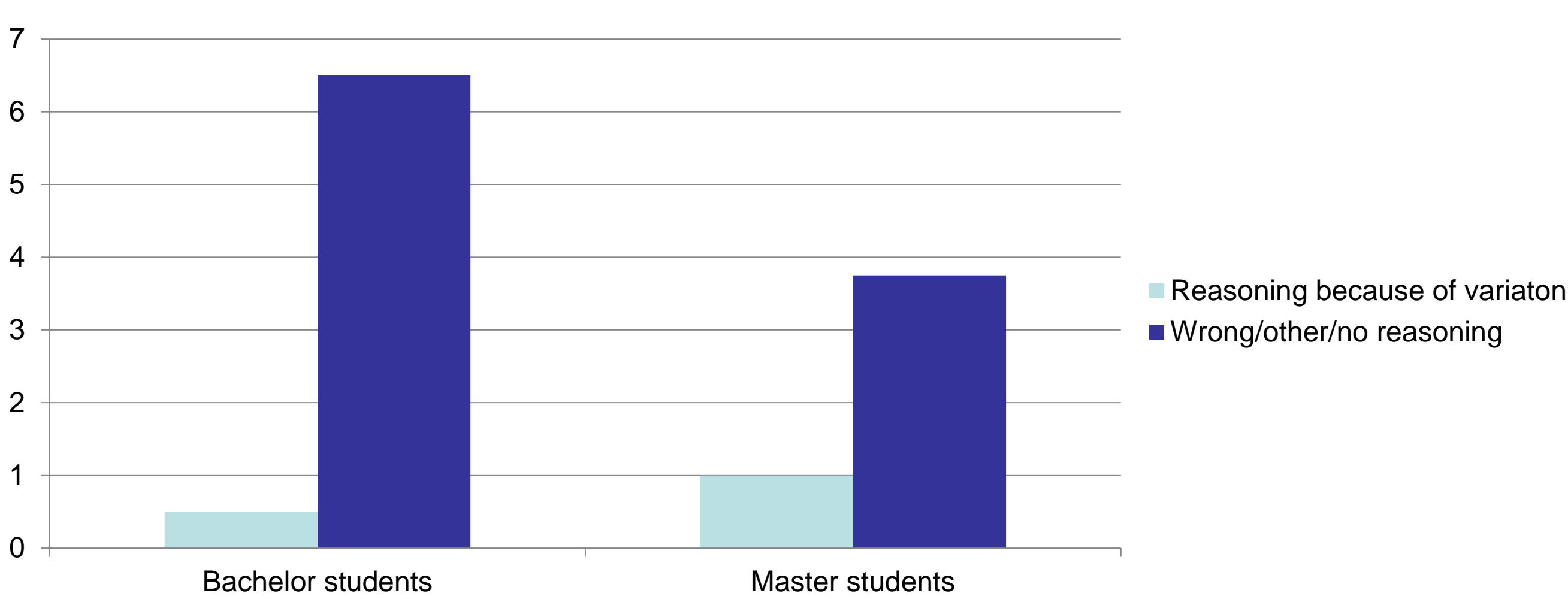


Fig. 2. „Correct“ answers of the first part in correlation to the reasoning by variation

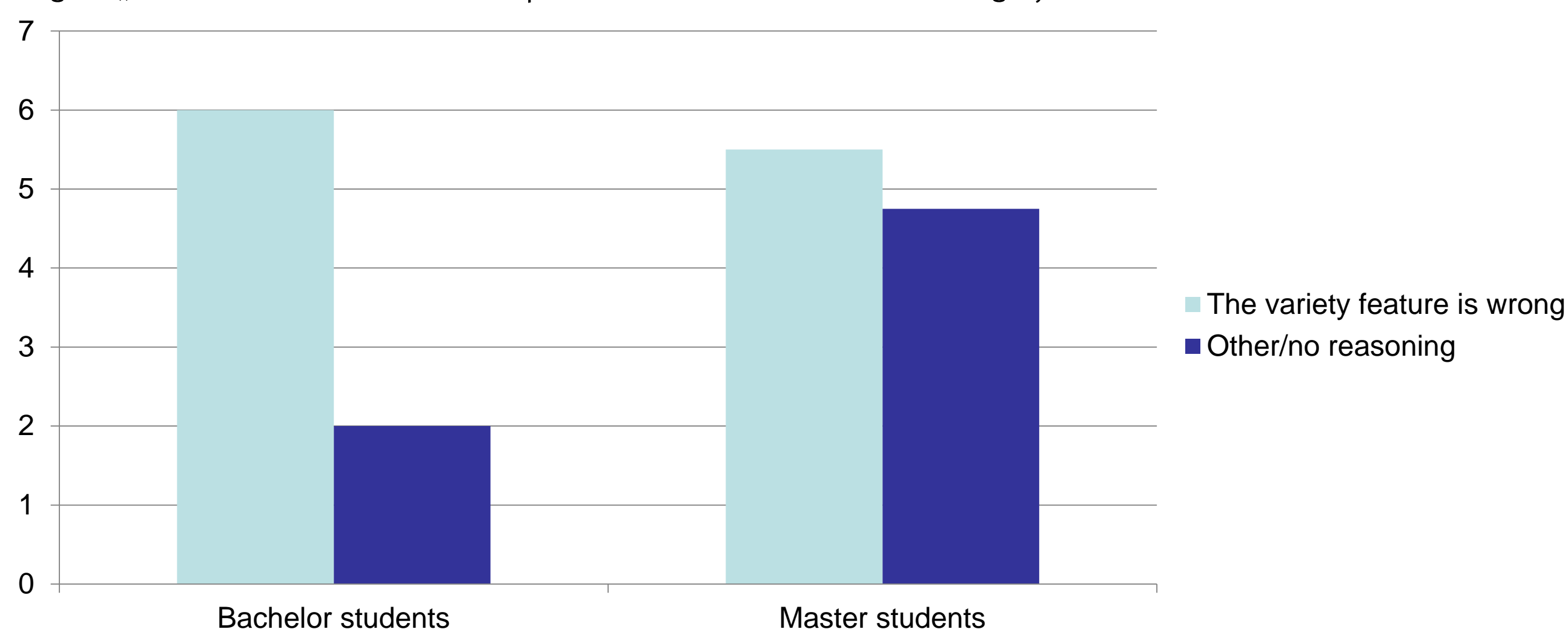


Fig. 3. „Incorrect“ answers of the first part in correlation to whether the distinctive linguistic feature was stated as a reason

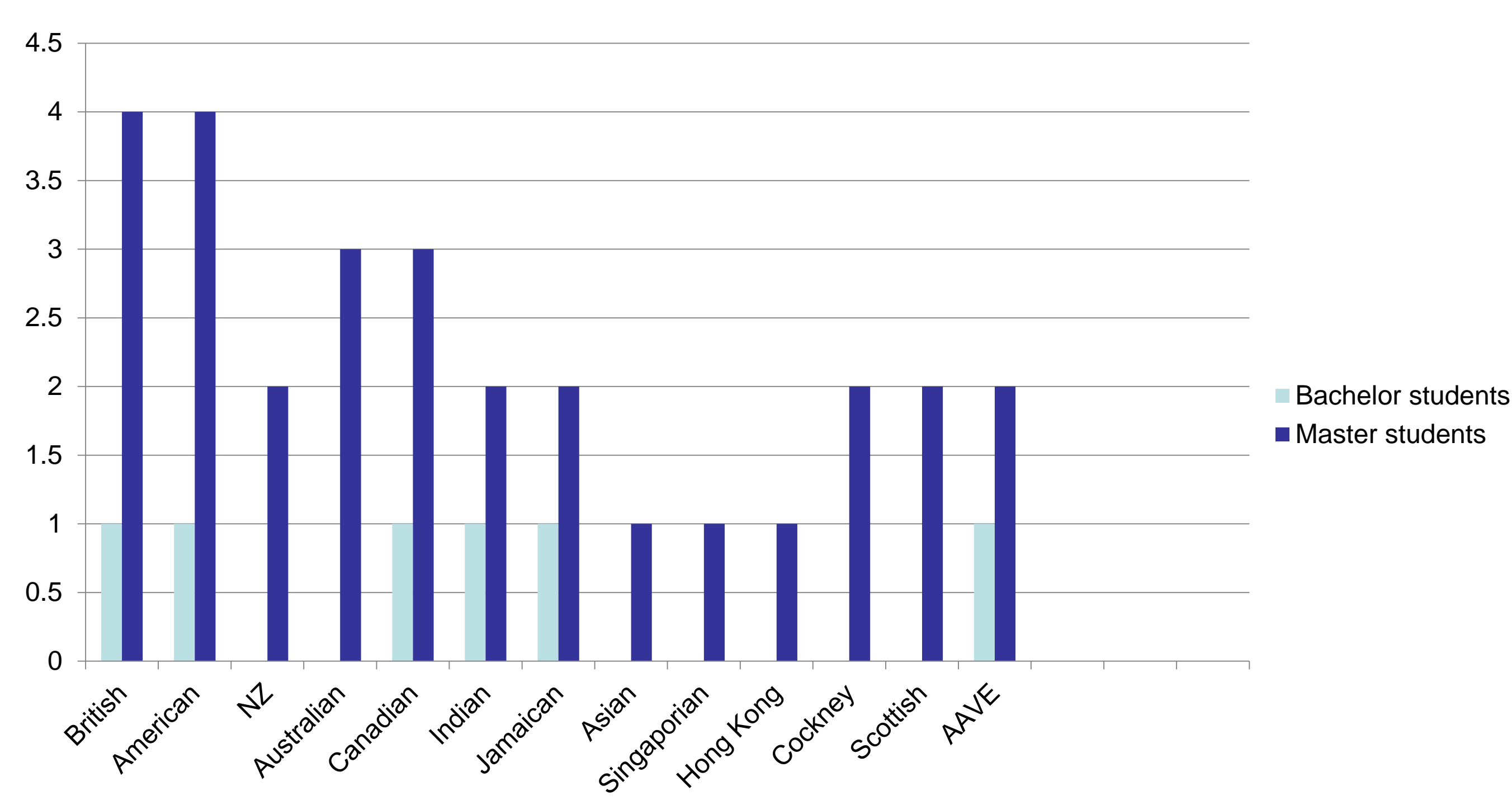


Fig. 4. Known varieties stated in the second part of the questionnaire

Conclusions

This comparative study demonstrates that the metalinguistic awareness of the two target groups differs. On the one hand, as one would expect, the master students seem to have greater knowledge about the theoretical background of World Englishes. As Fig. 4 shows they are able to name more varieties overall as well as regional varieties, whereas the bachelor students are more focused on national varieties. Furthermore they thought of more possible ways of categorizing varieties and presented greater knowledge about pluricentric knowledge.

A quite remarkable aspect of the results can be observed in the answers to the first part of the questionnaire. Despite their apparent advantage presented in the theoretical part the master students were more likely to assess the sentences as incorrect (Fig. 1.) On the other hand though they have a slight advantage in reasoning their „correct“ answers by stating the correct origin of the variant (Fig. 2.). They also show a slightly smaller likelihood to state the variant as the cause for their „incorrect“ answer (Fig. 3.). Anyway, the differences in Fig. 2 and 3 are so minor that they can not compensate the difference presented in Fig 1.

It can be said that the process in the teacher education demanded by Decke-Cornill does not seem to take place or at least does not influence the teachers-to-be. The fact that many of the „correct“ answers with valuable reasoning can be linked to varieties encountered abroad by the students emphasizes this. It appears that by the end of their education, the students seem to develop a greater tendency towards standardness.

Maike Grau (2005) notes that prospective teachers not only need to have a clear idea of the situation of English around the world but it would be necessary to be able to apply this knowledge in their teaching in order to guide their learners to be able to use English in different contexts. We can say that this study proves that there is an increasing awareness on this topic when regarding the increased metalinguistic awareness presented in the theoretical part.

References

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