

Who's speaking?

Intelligibility, Comprehensibility, and Accentedness in a multilingual classroom

by

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ABSTRACT

Kachru's World English (WE) framework from 1985 situates English as an ever-evolving language with different accents and reveals natural phonetic speech differences that stem from a learner's first language (Zhang, 2019). In an English for academic purposes (EAP) classroom, international students come to study English as an additional language (EAL) with different first languages and use English as the primary means of communication. The problem is that many EAL students have had little to no previous exposure to WE varieties. Differences in EAL accents may result in a breakdown in communication for students during class. This study explored the impact of accented English on Non-Native English speakers (NNS) studying EAP at a private language school in Halifax, Canada. A qualitative approach was used, with three students completing a questionnaire, a comprehension assessment, and a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis from the interview data identified twelve themes as common difficulties for NNS, which included the negative impact of unfamiliar accent pronunciation and vocabulary that leads to a breakdown in comprehension. Thematic analysis also revealed that the familiarity of the accent strongly impacted the ease of understanding the accent. This study highlights the necessity for exposure to WE varieties during class time and an understanding of accent difficulty for teachers. This study accentuates the importance of WE exposure for NNS students to foster success and confidence in interactions to reach their goals.

Keywords: World Englishes, Intelligibility, Accentedness, Comprehensibility, English for Academic Purposes

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CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

The following literature review will briefly define World Englishes (WE) and the standard terms used to measure understanding of non-native speaker (NNS) speech and listening comprehension: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. This literature review will briefly overview similar research studies that helped shape this study. It will consist of findings that reveal the implications of shared first language advantages and the role of students' confidence, anxiety, and personal bias toward accented English.

World Englishes

English is used worldwide as a first language or to communicate with humans for school, work, or social connections (Ishaque, 2018; Jung, 2010; Suntornsawet, 2019). Due to this widespread usage, English exists in many forms through its mixture of additional languages, cultures, and communities (Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Suntornsawet, 2019). Kachru (1985) initially represented these English varieties and how they were used through his theory of World Englishes (WE). The Kachruvian concentric layout (See Figure 1) is composed of three circles: inner, outer, and expanding; each represents how English is spread and used differently worldwide depending on its purpose (Ishaque, 2018; Jung, 2019; Kang et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2017).

The inner circle comprises native speakers from countries like the USA, Canada, and Australia, where English is the mother tongue (Ishaque, 2018; Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Zhang, 2019). Although English does not belong to inner-circle countries, dialects from these regions seem more correct to non-native perceptions (Ishaque, 2018; Kang, 2020). It is the teacher's responsibility to expose students to WE varieties to diminish this perception.

The outer circle comprises countries like Nigeria, India, and the Philippines, where English is a second official language used for communication in institutions like government and education (Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Zhang, 2019). Interestingly, Zhang (2019) notes that these countries consist of NS once colonized by the British and Americans in the 19th century.

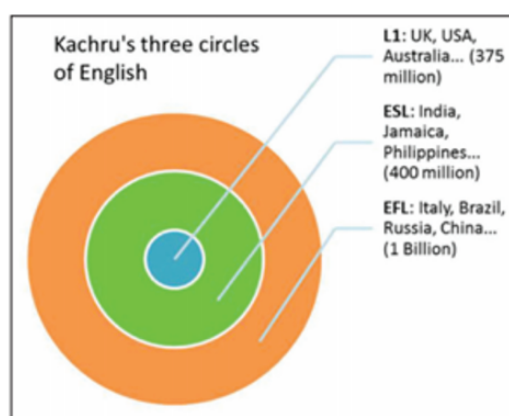
The expanding circle includes countries like China, France, and South Korea, where English does not have an official language status and is spoken as a foreign language or global communication (Kang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). Statistics show that speakers from outer circles account for the total number of English speakers living in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) (Ishaque, 2018). Furthermore, the expanding circle relies on NS from the inner circle to teach English fundamentals.

Englishes of the world exist due to colonization or necessity, but they are consistently growing and changing the more they interact. Passakornkam and Vibulphol (2020) noted that Kachru has since developed other theories to represent how WE changed between 1992 and 2004. In line with Kang et al. (2020), English use worldwide is constantly evolving, but the original 1985 model is the best visual representation of how speakers interact globally.

Due to a lack of exposure, listeners of accented English from outer or expanding circles might have difficulty perceiving a foreign World English accent (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). Students often strive to sound like a native speaker as they deem their pronunciation inferior or a sign of low competence (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). As a result, schools often limit exposure to the inner circle variety by pushing native standards (Saito et al., 2019; Hsueh & Wang, 2016), and students usually show a preference for native accents (Evans & Imai, 2011; Ishaque, 2018; Kang & Ahn, 2019). Through exposure to English varieties, students' attitudes about themselves and their preferences will positively shift to acceptance (Boonsuk et al., 202;

Kang & Ahn, 2019). In Thailand, students were more accepting of their unique accent after being immersed in a Global Englishes class (Boonsuk et al., 2021). Difficulty and proficiency perfectionism can easily be debunked through awareness of cultural varieties in a classroom.

Figure 1: *Kachruvian Concentric Circles (Adapted from Ishaque, 2018, p.94)*



Native-speakerism

English is an international language, a community that bridges humans from all parts of the world. However, schools and teachers often neglect representing WE (Ishaque, 2018; Kang et al., 2020). For example, in Japan, schools only study US English (Saito et al., 2019). Similarly, Hong Kong universities' pronunciation courses aim for non-native students to achieve a native-like accent (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). As a result, discrimination against NNS from outer or expanding circles often deems accented speech as a reflection of their low proficiency level. L2 learners with little to no foreign accent in their speech are more favoured by NS than those with a strong foreign accent (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). Accuracy for English pronunciation is often compared to a clear NS dialect from a NS country such as the UK or US (Ishaque, 2018; Jung, 2010; Nguyen, 2017; Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Zhang, 2019). The desire to achieve this native-like proficiency diminishes confidence in the learner and is an unfair expectation. Regardless, students often believe that having a native-like accent will help them better succeed

in their endeavours (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). In Nguyen's qualitative study (2017), their interview participant from Vietnam, An, tries hard to follow "the standard" (p. 26) of English speaking, which alters the perception of his authentic speech. Kang (2015) notes that students think native proficiency will make them more confident when the reality is that the student should feel confident in their abilities without comparison. Therefore, NNS strive to achieve perfect pronunciation and lose confidence in themselves when they cannot reach the NS standard. NNS are not required to have native proficiency to interact today because NNS populations outnumber NS (Huang & Hashim, 2020; Ishaque, 2018), reinforcing that accented English has become the new norm and is nothing to be ashamed of. Furthermore, Ishaque (2018) concluded that it is not as essential for an EAL student to sound native in their accent as it is to be proficient and have a command over different forms of WE that they will undoubtedly encounter. Through exposure in the classroom, teachers can establish mutual respect and understanding for other English varieties and diminish native-speakerism.

Accentedness, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

NNS perceived difficulty with WE varies among individuals. A lack of exposure to the varieties can negatively affect the level of understanding between English speakers. Jung (2010) uses Derwing and Munro's (1995) theories of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness to measure listeners' perceived understanding patterns. The studies discussed reveals the need for exposure to establish mutual understanding and respect.

Accentedness. Accentedness refers to how easy it is for the listener to understand a dialect that stems from a different pattern of speech sounds compared to the local variety (Shintani, 2019). Accents exist in every language known to humankind. An accent is commonly referred to as the distinct phonological and intonation features which convey insights into geographic

locations that are sometimes very apparent and recognizable (Huang & Hashim, 2020). Speech properties include intonation and phonetic features that differ depending on speakers' first language characteristics and social influence (Huang & Hashim, 2020; Shintani et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020). Intonation is an essential component of communication in English as it adds emphasis or conveys emotion, unlike tonal languages such as Chinese (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). When no intonation is present, and the speaker has a more compressed pitch range, the accent can seem monotonous, unpleasant, and cause frustration for the listener (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). The segmental features of English, such as consonants and vowels, are essential for a speaker's appropriate pronunciation of English and are considered significant accuracy elements (Wu et al., 2020). Accuracy in English pronunciation is an important element in conversation regarding understanding what was said and is often tied to the first impression of L2 competence (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). Incorrect pronunciation can easily misconstrue meaning and confuse the listener. Pronunciation features are unique and similar within WE varieties, and how one sound is linked to our identity by the self and others (Baron-Lucraz & Lee, 2021). Research suggests that NNS accents may be more intelligible to fellow NNS. However, NNS speech often evokes negative impressions for fellow non-native listeners (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). This is due to centering around native pronunciation, where dialects have consistently led to discrimination and negative attitudes toward non-native English speakers (Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Ishaque, 2018). This could be because, as Huang (2020) notes, discrimination and negative attitudes are due to intricate links between voice and stereotyped personalities. People with standard English accents will often be perceived as more competent than foreign-accented English speakers, where credibility is questioned because of the stereotypes or prejudices evoked in the listener (Hsueh & Wang, 2016).

Accentedness is measured through speech sample ratings (Shintani, 2019) or analysis (Wu et al., 2020). In Shintani (2019), listeners rated accentedness on a 9-point scale (1 = no accent, 9 = heavily accented). In Wu et al. (2020), the speech data was collected through Chinese university students reading aloud a 10-sentence passage that included phonological features difficult for Chinese students. The sample was then used to assess the degree of accentedness compared to inner-circle varieties. In Hsueh and Wang (2016), participants from China, South Asian countries, and native-speaking countries rated 16 Chinese speakers that were acoustically analyzed in terms of stress, tone, speech rate, and pauses and compared the results to British English speakers. Although their study did not reveal significant findings related to listener attitudes toward the speaker in terms of competence, the accent did affect the overall intelligibility of what was heard (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). Hansen Edwards et al. (2019) states that overall understanding may not entirely be correlated with intelligibility or comprehensibility. Based on Hsueh & Wang (2016), the degree of accentedness influences comprehension judgements. Shintani et al. (2019) propose that accentedness difficulty can be positively influenced through exposure to WE varieties and when there is a shared first language between listener and speaker (Shintani et al., 2019).

Intelligibility. After many attempts to define intelligibility, no one has reached a consensus. Suntornsawet (2019) and Li and Hsueh (2019) state that intelligibility is how easily the listener can recognize the speech or utterance they hear. Zhang (2019) defines it as the measure of producing and receiving what we hear in phonological form. To establish intelligibility for a listener, the learner must analyze how information is understood (Nguyen, 2017; Zhang, 2019). The measure is calculated by transcribing spoken words at an average speed (Hansen Edwards, 2019; Jung, 2010; Zhang, 2019). The number of accurate transcriptions can then be assessed

(Foote & Trofimovich, 2018). Suntornsawet (2019) states that these pronunciation or phonology features are the most prominent influence on understanding. Also, Ishaque (2018) argues that these features may be more critical than an accent's influence. This could be because it involves understanding linguistic elements and generating an appropriate response, which is the key to successful communication (Nguyen, 2018; Ishaque, 2018; Zhang, 2019). Therefore, the relationship between a NNS accent and intelligibility is essential to understanding factors of successful communication (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). A learner's intelligibility intelligence may be positively influenced by familiarity (Kang et al., 2016; Zhang, 2019) and shared linguistic speech properties (Suntornsawet, 2019; Zhang, 2019).

Comprehensibility. Li and Hsueh (2019) define comprehension as to how a listener understands a word or utterance in context. Therefore, it is the listeners' subjective judgments of difficulty understanding what was said (Saito et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). Comprehensibility is measured through a given speech sample (Shintani et al., 2019), where listeners judge their difficulty in processing speech via rating scales (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018). The learner's difficulty is often determined by understanding phonetic speech qualities (Shintani et al., 2019). In an EAL learner, these comprehensibility judgments can be positively influenced by first language, familiarity with the language (Shintani et al., 2019) and strong intelligibility judgments (Zhang, 2019). A major downfall of research in this field is that most studies use NS to judge comprehensibility in foreign-accented speech (Saito et al., 2019), which fails to represent the large population of International English.

Previous Studies

Very few studies seek to incorporate a complete relationship between the intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of WE (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). Many studies will

focus on just one or two elements that lend themselves to dialects' perceived difficulty, such as comprehensibility (Saito et al., 2019; Shintani et al., 2019) or intelligibility and comprehensibility (Jung, 2010; Zhang, 2019). Some researchers also focus on other miscommunication factors, such as cultural background (Al-khresheh, 2020; Douglas & Rosvold, 2018).

Accentedness, Intelligibility, Comprehensibility, and speech properties. In a multilingual classroom, the accent is the most critical factor for the difficulty in comprehensibility judgments, as accentedness and comprehensibility are closely related (Shintani et al., 2019; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). Many studies have noted that the accent creates a unique articulation of sound called speech properties, such as pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns resulting from a speaker's first language (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Jung, 2010; Zhang, 2019). Thus, the listener will perceive the variety of WE heard differently due to their first language (Kang et al., 2016). For example, Jung (2010) found that Chinese and Korean participants have different phonological pronunciations that negatively affect comprehension through differences in vowel sounds and consonants. However, their mother tongue is one of many factors influencing judgments. Therefore, it can be said that phonological accuracy is what affects comprehension. This pronunciation accuracy is usually measured in the listener and then compared to NS pronunciations (Saito et al., 2019). As a result, less accented speech is perceived to be more comprehensible (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). The comparison to inner circle speech creates a gap in the WE community and an inferiority complex within the EAL learner.

In Foote and Trofimovich's study (2018), a Chinese EAL listener recognized that a speaker was Chinese "because his pronunciation is not very good" (p. 269). The Chinese participant knew that it was a Chinese speaker because there is a common first language; "he's Chinese so I

can understand what, what he's talking about. But maybe for some other people who is not familiar with Chinese accent, with Chinese like logic, maybe it's a little bit hard to understand" (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018, p., 269). In Kang et al. (2019), comprehensibility lectures delivered in the shared first language English variety benefited comprehension tests. Thus, success in understanding accents occurs when there is a shared first language (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2019). The difficulty arises if there has been no prior exposure or familiarity.

Intelligibility is also affected by different speech properties (Jung, 2010; Nguyen, 2017; Suntornsawet, 2019; Zhang, 2019). Therefore, pronunciation is a barrier to the listeners' ability to communicate with others. This barrier is the first to emerge in conversation. Researchers include a speech sample and corresponding Likert scale ratings to gauge intelligibility and comprehensibility judgments to assess students' perceptions. This study builds on Zhang (2019), who investigated the existing attitude that WE can be intelligible to an EAL learner. In Zhang's research, 39 Chinese English major university sophomores with similar schooling and English experience listened to pre-recorded passages from an online database read by nine varieties of World English accents representing inner, outer, and expanding circles. They are short stories entitled *Comma gets a cure* and *Rainbow*. These recordings are effective speech stimuli as they are fast and mimic something that would be read about in a multilingual classroom.

Similarly, Hansen Edwards et al. (2019) quantitative study measures accent difficulty in terms of accentedness, intelligibility, and comprehensibility of 92 participants from Asia and the United States. The speech samples chosen are short 20-second clips that spontaneously discuss favourite childhood memories, travel experiences, or are read aloud from a short story. These samples are authentic and would be topics discussed in a lower-level multilingual classroom.

Because of the lower-level case, this sample type is unsuitable for an academic context like a multilingual classroom proposed in this study.

In line with the previous studies, Ahn and Kang (2017) also used speech recordings to gather 101 South Korean university students' perceptions of different English varieties. Ahn and Kang (2017) included five speech samples representing the three circles of WE and their participants. However, Ahn and Kang's (2017) speech samples were pre-recorded by only male college professors between the ages of 40-50 who specialized in applied science and had a WE accent. The passage was about immigration and was intended to replicate a lecture in a college classroom. Although these recordings were appropriate for the context of a multilingual classroom and are academic in theme, they do not include a women's accent or a very engaging topic.

To gauge listening difficulty for 31 Saudi English students, Al-khresheh (2020) provided a diagnostic listening test of a two-minute conversation between two native English speakers and a questionnaire that contextually aligned with the participant's cultural and religious beliefs since the cultural background is also a factor that influences listening judgements. Al-khresheh (2020) found that participants had difficulty with unfamiliar topics, guessing the meaning of words, and understanding information quickly. The sample was an authentic choice that would be heard in a multilingual classroom. However, both participants have a native accent that does not align with the context of this study.

Evans and Imai (2011) gathered 101 Japanese perceptions of only inner-circle varieties and chose not to use speech stimuli to avoid respondent fatigue. Although students are bored after repeatedly listening to the same passage, Evans and Imai (2011) focus on inner-circle varieties by asking participants to list what countries they know of that speak English as a native language

and then give their impression through open-ended questions. A downfall is that this study was conducted entirely in Japanese and then translated to English, making it less authentic. This study still captured spontaneous emotional and cognitive responses, but this study does not account for other varieties of English.

To gather more profound insight into students' judgements of accented speech, post-interview questions were adapted from Nguyen's qualitative case study (2017) that examines the communicative problems that arise with WE and its pedagogical implications on speakers in Vietnam, where there is less familiarity of the concept. Nguyen (2017) used the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) to investigate the perception and experience of 3 Vietnamese university graduates. The researcher transcribed semi-structured one-to-one interviews translated from Vietnamese by the researcher and a professional translator. The cross-case analysis allowed Nguyen to establish commonalities and divulge rich articulations of the participant's authentic experiences outside the classroom that discloses the potential effects of unfamiliar WE speech properties in interactions and their implications on an English language learner's identity (2019). However, Nguyen's techniques were researcher-centric and relied heavily on the researcher's understanding to make sense of translated samples (2019). The semi-structured post-interview adapted from Nguyen's (2019) took place entirely in English and gained authentic insight into the EAL experiences of students in a multilingual classroom.

To test the impact of accented speech on EALs, several studies use native speaker speech samples to represent varieties of WE (Ahn & Kang, 2017; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Hyun-Sook Kang & So-Yeon Ahn, 2019; Kang et al., 2019) or include native speaker raters of L2 speech (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Kang et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2019). The downside is that these samples and raters are usually limited to proper American and

UK English varieties and do not often represent fewer standard dialects or slang. Although in a NS country, this study did not include inner-circle varieties to amplify perceptions of EALs in a multilingual classroom and represent a multilingual classroom better.

There have been many combinations of methods to gauge perceptions of accented speech. Some studies have incorporated questionnaires (Baron-Lucraz & Lee, 2021; Evans & Imai, 2011; Huang & Hashim, 2020; Jung, 2010), interviews (Nguyen, 2017; Otair & Abd Aziz, 2017), a combination of speech samples and questions (Ahn & Kang, 2017; Al-khresheh, 2020; Braunfaut & Revesz, 2015; Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Kang et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2019; Saito et al., 2019), or speech samples, questionnaires and interviews (Shintani et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019).

This study chose to include speech samples pre-made and readily available online for simplicity purposes. In addition, this study also incorporated a questionnaire and interview to gain further insight into students' perceptions of accented speech. The studies discussed include students already enrolled in university. Therefore, there are no studies in a private language school setting with a focus on peer relationships. This study addresses the research gap related to context, participants, variables, and instruments.

The influence of familiarity. Many previous studies examine the relationship between exposure and familiarity on listeners' intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness judgments. They discovered it as a mediating variable through questionnaires, interviews, and case studies. In most instances, success and perceived difficulty of speech properties inherently depend on the listener's language background within the situational context (Kang et al., 2019). To gain insights into familiarity, background surveys and interviews have been done to recognize nationalities.

In Foote and Trofimovich's study (2018), a shared first language successfully impacted judgments due to the familiarity of the accent. Being from the same language background instills confidence in the listener due to the familiarity with their speech traits (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). Moreover, familiarity with other WE varieties also impacts successful comprehension judgements. In Zhang's study (2019), Chinese participants identified inner-circle varieties and found them comprehensible. Similarly, in Ahn and Kang (2017), US speakers and those from other native-speaking countries besides Ireland were rated the most familiar, pleasant, and correct. This could be due to movies or school curriculum exposure that often portray native speakers. Therefore, comprehensibility judgments are better when a native accent is used (Kang et al., 2019). Although proficiency plays a role in success or difficulty, it can change over the years through exposure (Kang et al., 2020; Shintani et al., 2019). Regardless of proficiency, the perceived difficulty will arise if a learner has not been exposed to the WE variety or cultural customs they are listening to (Carlson, 2019; Cheng, 2018; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Jung, 2010; Kang et al., 2020; Shintani et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019; Al-khresheh, 2020). Therefore, multilingual classrooms require intercultural communicative competence, as culture and EAP (English for academic purposes) are closely related (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018; Jung, 2010).

Culture can be defined in many ways, but Douglas & Rosvold (2018) sum it up as the influence of an individual's norms, values, and beliefs on their behaviour and interactions. Douglas & Rosvold (2018) point out that differences could result in negative feelings and miscommunication. Intercultural competence is the ability to cope with these negative feelings brought on by cultural differences. Communicative competence is knowing what to say, whom to say it to, and when depending on circumstances (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018). Intercultural communicative competence is needed in multilingual classrooms as they consist of speakers

from diverse cultural backgrounds with various proficiency levels. This study will use the setting of a private language school in a native-speaking country where there will be many learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds with little-to-no understanding of other cultures besides their own.

Listening material in EAL classrooms widely consists of American inner circle accents, so varieties like British or Australian may still be unfamiliar to some WE listeners. For example, in Jung's study (2010), Korean participants did not understand British English and its contextual norms. As a result, there was a miscommunication. In Ahn and Kang (2017), the Irish accent was difficult to comprehend for non-native speakers. Although research in this area is also essential, this study will not include inner circle speech stimuli to focus on phonetical and cultural differences of two different or similar non-natives in a native-speaking country to represent the population of a multilingual classroom in a native-speaking country.

Nguyen (2017) found that problems concerning sound recognition and phonological elements, such as intonation and pronunciation, were the leading intelligibility issue, while comprehensibility and interpretability problems depended on the situational context and caused anxiety in the learner that dissolved through familiarity. Furthermore, unfamiliarity negatively reflects a student's perception of themselves (Nguyen, 2017). The EAL listener undergoes psychological effects of shock that impact intelligibility judgments. In Nguyen, 2017, their Vietnamese participant found that the more familiar he gets with an accent, the less shocked he feels (Nguyen, 2017). Similarly, For Japanese participants in Carlson's study (2019), unfamiliar listening passages with difficult comprehensibility were due to the number of unknown words. Non-culturally familiar listening passages were perceived as more difficult to comprehend than culturally familiar ones, and a large amount of unfamiliar proper nouns led to anxiety in the

participant (Carlson, 2019). Likewise, Al-khresheh (2020) notes that misunderstanding or breakdowns in communication can stem from speech properties such as speed and cultural differences between the speaker and the listener.

The studies mentioned include EAL perceptions of English accents and cultural backgrounds. However, not all have a complete WE theoretical framework and all variabilities of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of accented speech for the listener. Most studies reveal the importance of familiarity, everyday listening struggles, and pedagogical implications for students' success. In addition, not all of them include a complete relationship between listening difficulty and the student's personal bias toward an accent. Not all give insight into how a different L1 impacts L2 speech for the listener. This study situates itself in the literature by using components of the above studies to create a well-rounded analysis and representation of how L2 speech is perceived by speakers with the same and different L1 and what other contributing factors add to the difficulty of communication between NNS with a focus on the outer and expanding circles present in a multilingual classroom. Moreover, this study aims to promote listening skills and the necessary inclusion of English varieties in schools.

Overall, many methods are employed in previous studies to gauge learner's perceptions of accented speech. Most studies include students already enrolled in a university, and prior studies only focus on one listener group or include native speakers in the speech stimuli. This study situates itself in the literature by addressing the research gaps regarding a non-native speaker-listener group focus and EAP in a private language school setting.

Therefore, standard pronunciation might enhance intelligibility, and nonstandard pronunciation leads to intelligibility failure (Suntornsawet, 2019). The pronunciation of accented English is measured in the listener against native speaker standards, which is an unfair judgment.

Intelligibility is the goal for learners and the most critical communication factor (Nguyen, 2019; Jung, 2010). Through exposure to WE, the teacher can lessen the comparisons to native English and diminish speech property influence to create a well-rounded learner.

The influence of anxiety. In line with the lack of familiarity with accented speech, the situational context of a multilingual classroom and emergence into a NS country instills a sense of uneasiness in an EAL student. In addition, listening to various strange accents within a time constraint can lead to a loss of concentration, anxiety, and understanding. As a result, participants may be shy to recall what was heard or engage in conversation with accented peers. A few studies have investigated the source of a student's anxieties, but there is no representation of anxiety and connection to WE in a multilingual classroom. However, some research discussed the impact of accent (Otair & Aziz, 2017) and suggested that listening is a passive skill that should be treated differently by teachers (Babakhouya & Elkhadiri, 2019). Internal and external factors trigger different anxiety responses for individuals, and teachers should be aware of this anxiety in a multilingual classroom. This study investigated the influence of anxiety on 3 participants through semi-structured interview questions after listening to the speech stimuli.

Otair and Aziz's (2017) qualitative study confirms that listening invokes a sense of anxiety in two EAL males from Saudi Arabia. Both participants claimed in individual interviews that their anxiety during listening tasks stems from the speaker's speed and unfamiliar accents, which led to a loss of concentration. As a result, the participants experienced a breakdown in understanding, leading to anxiety and fear of recalling what they had just heard. In Brunfaut and Révész (2015), a listening anxiety questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly) and a proficiency test assessed the judgments of 93 non-native English speakers' second language listening to measure the characteristics of listeners and

tasks. The study investigated listening anxiety and memory and found that participants with lower listening skills specifically experienced anxiety that hindered their cognitive processing of listening input. The study offers pedagogical implications for teachers, such as the need for authentic level-appropriate listening pages.

Babakhouya and Elkhadiri (2019) investigated foreign language listening difficulty and "the Big Five Personality Factors" (depression, anxiety, self-consciousness, immoderation, vulnerability), and they also investigated neuroticism, which relates to individual tendencies when experiencing distress. All these characteristics exist in students, and the study notes that teachers could have a tough time recognizing them as a factor contributing to listening skills (Babakhouya & Elkhadiri, 2019). Since listening is a passive skill, it can easily go unnoticed. Babakhouya and Elkhadiri (2019) chose 328 Moroccan non-English major university students with a disposition to anxiety to participate. The study found that EAL students listening comprehension was significantly affected by anxiety and depression. In line with previous studies, students experienced worrying about receiving information, processing what was said, and responding.

The studies above mentioned anxiety as a critical factor when researching listening comprehension and accented English. Although they do not relate their studies to WE and a multilingual classroom, they offer concrete evidence supporting EAL students' innate behaviour characteristics and experiences. This study addressed anxiety through qualitative interview questions.

Summary

In a NS country, such as Canada or USA, an EAL classroom consists of many different interactions of cultures, accents, and backgrounds. Sometimes, students fail to understand peers

when speaking in a presentation or following pre-recorded listening during class time. Moreover, students are often shy to initiate conversation because their pronunciation is not like a native speaker. Students usually aim to achieve a native-like accent and can complete training to obtain native proficiency. However, teachers need to reinforce to students that it is not essential to sound like a native speaker but must have a command over listening to other non-native accents (Ishaque, 2018). Often schools are not inclusive of WE and promote teachers from NS countries, or teachers promote native speakers in their class content (Ishaque, 2018).

Consequently, some students have difficulty understanding or recognizing accented speech and regard native dialects of English as more prestigious (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Evans & Imai, 2011). When listening to unfamiliar accents, students may have a negative perception of themselves (Nguyen, 2017) or feel anxious and experience a loss of concentration (Carlson, 2019; Otair & Aziz, 2017). Inability to foster mutual intelligibility between non-native speakers could stem from differences in pronunciation, speed, proficiency, and confidence between the speaker and the listener, but often these variables are intertwined. Therefore, accentedness influences students' ability to engage in authentic conversations with learners of a different L1.

Research in comprehensibility and intelligibility relies on NS ratings of accented speech (Saito et al., 2019) or includes NS as a speech sample or listener participant (Ahn & Kang, 2019; Evans and Imai, 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2019; Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Suntornsawet, 2019). Therefore, there is a significant lack of research on interactions between NNS who come from diverse cultures with different languages and dialects. There is also a research gap related to educational contexts. Many previous studies of NNS perceptions of accented English take place in non-English speaking countries such as China (Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Zhang, 2019) or Korea (Ahn & Kang, 2017; Jung, 2010), where participants are already enrolled in university. Studies

in this area sometimes focus on one dialect of accented speech, such as Chinese (Wu et al., 2020). Research does not often allude to the experience of those in an academic language learning environment engaging with international peers. In these contexts, students strive to become working residents in an English-speaking country, attend post-secondary education, and usually interact with other cultures and accents for the first time. Students in these interactions have subjective experiences and proficiencies that influence their comprehension. Therefore, EAL classrooms in a private language school are an excellent source to collect data relating to accented English's mutual intelligibility and comprehensibility. Research on NNS perceptions of accented speech and the influence of their L1 will better equip EAL teachers in EAP classrooms. Insights into linguistic differences will allow teachers to address students' sources of pronunciation or comprehension difficulty. Furthermore, teachers can help situate accented English as the norm so that learners can accept their differences and feel confident in their abilities.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

Research has shown that some non-native speakers (NNS) encounter difficulty listening to fellow NNS-accented English (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). Furthermore, some NNS feel their accent is not proper English (Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Nguyen, 2017) and prefer native accents (Evans & Imai, 2011). As a result, students in a multilingual classroom often lack confidence and experience frustration when completing a listening or speaking task. Additionally, they are hesitant to engage in group work with classmates from other countries. Despite this reality, there has been limited research on students' experience and understanding of accented speech, and no studies have been found to take place in private language schools.

This study fills the gap in research related to classroom experiences in a private language school for adults studying English for academic purposes (EAP). This study exposed EAL students' perspectives on the sources of difficulty and their experience communicating with other NNS. The findings of this study contribute to the growing literature relating to the intelligibility and comprehensibility of World Englishes (WE), or the varieties of Englishes that exist worldwide, according to EAL learners.

By examining the experiences of international students and testing their comprehension of WE, this study elicited the sources of difficulty for EAL learners when listening to fellow NNS accented speech and gives insights into how EAL students perceive WE in an academic context. Pre-recorded listening passages presented students with WE, while a cloze activity helped gauge EAL students' comprehension of WE and the influence of accented speech. A semi-structured interview with students emphasized subjective experiences where accents may have negatively influenced their communication with others.

This study used qualitative data to find similarities regarding sources of difficulty for EAL learners' perception of listening to accented speech. Students revealed in interview data that difficulty stems from a lack of previous exposure, confidence, and personal biases. This study contributed to the literature by promoting cultural understanding and accent awareness in private language schools. The practical goal of this study was to encourage students, teachers, and schools to incorporate more authentic WE listening material during class time and honour WE as a valuable form of English so that students feel confident in their abilities and are successful in future encounters.

Research Questions

1. How do students perceive the intelligibility, accentedness, and comprehensibility of World Englishes?
2. What is the relationship between a listener's L1 and their perceptions of intelligibility, accentedness, and comprehensibility of L2 speech properties?
3. What are the student's perceptions and experiences when encountering different World Englishes?

Research relating to WE's intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness is based on participant judgments of what was heard. Only a few studies focus on the EAL's perceptions and personal bias toward accented English (Nguyen, 2017). Instead, many studies include NS speech samples or judgments of WE accents (Ahn & Kang, 2019; Evans & Imai, 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2019; Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Suntornsawet, 2019). In addition, many previous studies have taken place in a NNS country, such as China (Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Zhang, 2019) or Korea (Ahn & Kang, 2017; Jung, 2010), and focus on one WE dialect, such as Chinese (Wu et al., 2020). Although these case studies reveal fundamental difficulties and differences between the groups, this study incorporated a broader representation of EAL speech samples. However, this study relied on intake available at private language schools in native-speaking (NS) countries.

Many factors affect EAL listeners' accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility judgments. The most common include WE speech properties (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Jung, 2010; Shintani et al., 2019), same first language (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2019), previous exposure to World English varieties (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019), anxiety (Otair & Aziz, 2017) and self-consciousness (Babakhouya & Elkhadiri, 2019). Although these factors

are interconnected, the measure of difficulty varies depending on the individual and the context. The extent of difficulty was determined by analyzing speech property ratings (Jung, 2010; Zhang, 2019), testing comprehension, and interview discussions (Nguyen, 2017) about individual perceptions of accented speech. Listening is among the biggest struggle for students, and since it is a passive skill, difficulty can go unnoticed (Babakhouya & Elkhadiri, 2019), but successful communication involves listening and being able to reply to what was said. Testing listening comprehension and asking for further insight into participants' difficulties can reveal phonetic and cultural differences that should be represented and understood in multilingual classrooms. Research in this area helps teachers relinquish anxieties and instill confidence in their students immigrating to a native-speaking country.

Theoretical background

World Englishes

English is used worldwide as a first language or to communicate with humans for school, work, or social connections (Ishaque, 2018; Jung, 2010; Suntornsawet, 2019). Due to this widespread usage, English exists in many forms through its mixture of additional languages, cultures, and communities (Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Suntornsawet, 2019). Kachru (1985) initially represented these English varieties and how they were used through his theory of World Englishes (WE). The Kachruvian concentric layout (See Figure 1) is composed of three circles: inner, outer, and expanding; each represents how English is spread and used differently worldwide depending on its purpose (Ishaque, 2018; Jung, 2019; Kang et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2017).

The inner circle comprises native speakers from countries like Canada, where English is the mother tongue (Ishaque, 2018; Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Zhang, 2019). Although

English does not belong to inner-circle countries, dialects from these regions seem more correct to NNS perceptions (Ishaque, 2018; Kang, 2020). It is the teacher's responsibility to expose students to WE varieties to diminish this perception.

The outer circle comprises countries like Nigeria, where English is the second official language used for communication in institutions like government and education (Passakornkam & Vibulphol, 2020; Zhang, 2019). Interestingly, Zhang (2019) notes that these countries consist of native speakers once colonized by the British and Americans in the 19th century.

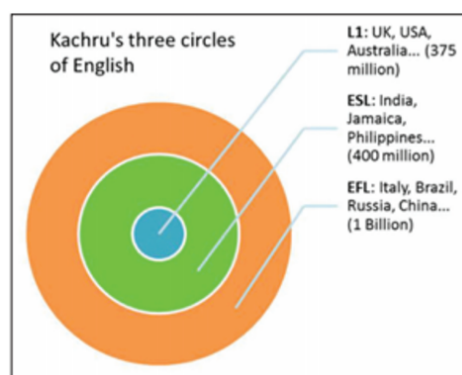
The expanding circle includes countries like China, where English does not have an official language status and is spoken as a foreign language for global communication (Kang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). Statistics show that speakers from outer circles account for the total number of English speakers living in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) (Ishaque, 2018). Furthermore, the expanding circle relies on NS from the inner circle to teach English fundamentals.

WE exist due to colonization or necessity, but they are consistently growing and changing the more they interact. Although English use worldwide is constantly evolving, and other models for this interaction exist, Kachru's original 1985 model is the best visual representation of how speakers interact globally (Kang et al., 2020).

Due to a lack of exposure, listeners of accented English from outer or expanding circles might have difficulty perceiving a foreign WE accent (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). Furthermore, students often strive to sound like a NS as they deem their pronunciation inferior or a sign of low competence (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). As a result, schools often limit exposure to the inner circle variety by pushing native standards (Saito et al., 2019; Hsueh & Wang, 2016), and students usually show a preference for native accents (Evans & Imai, 2011; Ishaque, 2018; Kang

& Ahn, 2019). Through exposure to English varieties, students' attitudes about themselves and their preferences will positively shift to acceptance (Boonsuk et al., 202; Kang & Ahn, 2019). In Thailand, students were more accepting of their unique accents after being immersed in a Global Englishes class (Boonsuk et al., 2021). Difficulty and proficiency perfectionism can easily be debunked through awareness of cultural varieties in a classroom.

Figure 1: *Kachruvian Concentric Circles (Adapted from Ishaque, 2018, p.94)*



Native-speakerism

English is an international language, a community that bridges humans from all parts of the world. However, schools and teachers often neglect to represent WE (Ishaque, 2018; Kang et al., 2020). For example, in Japan, schools only study US English (Saito et al., 2019). Similarly, Hong Kong universities' pronunciation courses aim for non-native students to achieve a native-like accent (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). As a result, discrimination against NNS from outer or expanding circles often deems accented speech as a reflection of their low proficiency level. Hsueh & Wang (2016) noted that NS favoured L2 learners with little to no foreign accent in their speech over those with a strong accent (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). The desire to achieve this native-like proficiency diminishes confidence in the learner and is an unfair expectation. Regardless, students often believe that having a native-like accent will help them succeed better (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). In Nguyen's qualitative study (2017), their interview participant from Vietnam,

An, tries hard to follow “the standard” (p. 26) of English speaking, which alters the perception of his authentic speech. Kang (2015) notes that students think native-like proficiency will make them more confident when the reality is that the student should feel confident in their abilities without comparison. Therefore, NNS strive to achieve perfect pronunciation and lose confidence in themselves when they cannot reach the NS standard. NNS are not required to have native proficiency to interact today because NNS populations outnumber NS (Huang & Hashim, 2020; Ishaque, 2018), reinforcing that accented English has become the new norm and is nothing to be ashamed of. Furthermore, Ishaque (2018) concluded that it is not as essential for an EAL student to sound native in their accent as it is to be proficient and have a command over different forms of WE that they will undoubtedly encounter. Through exposure in the classroom, teachers can establish mutual respect and understanding for other English varieties and diminish native-speakerism.

Accentedness, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

NNS perceived difficulty with WE varies among individuals. A lack of exposure to the varieties can negatively affect the level of understanding between English speakers. Jung (2010) uses Derwing and Munro’s (1995) theories of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness to measure listeners’ perceived understanding patterns. The studies discussed reveals the need for exposure to establish mutual understanding and respect.

Accentedness. Accentedness refers to how easy it is for the listener to understand a dialect that stems from a different pattern of speech sounds compared to the local variety (Shintani, 2019). Accents exist in every language known to humankind. An accent is commonly referred to as the distinct phonological and intonation features which convey insights into geographic locations that are sometimes very apparent and recognizable (Huang & Hashim, 2020). Speech

properties include intonation and phonetic features that differ depending on speakers' first language characteristics and social influence (Huang & Hashim, 2020; Shintani et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020). Intonation is an essential component of communication in English as it adds emphasis or conveys emotion, unlike tonal languages such as Chinese (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). When no intonation is present, and the speaker has a more compressed pitch range, the accent can seem monotonous, unpleasant, and cause frustration for the listener (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). The segmental features of English, such as consonants and vowels, are essential for a speaker's appropriate pronunciation of English and are considered significant accuracy elements (Wu et al., 2020). Accuracy in English pronunciation is an important element in conversation regarding understanding what was said and is often tied to the first impression of L2 competence (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). Incorrect pronunciation can easily misconstrue meaning and confuse the listener. Pronunciation features are unique and similar within WE varieties, and how one sound is linked to our identity by the self and others (Baron-Lucraz & Lee, 2021). Research suggests that NNS accents may be more intelligible to fellow NNS. However, NNS speech often evokes negative impressions for fellow non-native listeners (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). This is due to centering around NS pronunciation, where dialects have consistently led to discrimination and negative attitudes toward NNS (Hsueh & Wang, 2016; Ishaque, 2018). This could be because, as Huang (2020) notes, discrimination and negative attitudes are due to intricate links between voice and stereotyped personalities. People with NS accents will often be perceived as more competent than foreign-accented English speakers, where credibility is questioned because of the stereotypes or prejudices evoked in the listener (Hsueh & Wang, 2016).

Accentedness is measured through speech sample ratings (Shintani, 2019) or analysis (Wu et al., 2020). In Hsueh and Wang (2016), participants from China, South Asian countries, and

native-speaking countries rated 16 Chinese speakers that were acoustically analyzed in terms of stress, tone, speech rate, and pauses and compared the results to British English speakers.

Although their study did not reveal significant findings related to listener attitudes toward the speaker regarding competence, the accent did affect the overall intelligibility of what was heard (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). Hansen Edwards et al. (2019) states that overall understanding may not entirely be correlated with intelligibility or comprehensibility. Based on Hsueh & Wang (2016), the degree of accentedness influences comprehension judgements. Shintani et al. (2019) propose that accentedness difficulty can be positively influenced through exposure to WE varieties and when there is a shared first language between listener and speaker (Shintani et al., 2019).

Intelligibility. Suntornsawet (2019) and Li and Hsueh (2019) state that intelligibility is how easily the listener can recognize the speech or utterance they hear. Zhang (2019) defines it as the measure of producing and receiving what we hear in phonological form. To establish intelligibility for a listener, the learner must analyze how information is understood (Nguyen, 2017; Zhang, 2019). The measure is calculated by transcribing spoken words at an average speed (Hansen Edwards, 2019; Jung, 2010; Zhang, 2019). The number of accurate transcriptions can then be assessed (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018). Suntornsawet (2019) states that these pronunciation or phonology features are the most prominent influence on understanding. Also, Ishaque (2018) argues that these features may be more critical than an accent's influence. This could be because it involves understanding linguistic elements and generating an appropriate response, which is the key to successful communication (Nguyen, 2018; Ishaque, 2018; Zhang, 2019). Therefore, the relationship between a NNS accent and intelligibility is essential to understanding factors of successful communication (Hsueh & Wang, 2016). A learner's

intelligibility intelligence may be positively influenced by familiarity (Kang et al., 2016; Zhang, 2019) and shared linguistic speech properties (Suntornsawet, 2019; Zhang, 2019).

Comprehensibility. Li and Hsueh (2019) define comprehension as to how a listener understands a word or utterance in context. Therefore, it is the listeners' subjective judgments of difficulty understanding what was said (Saito et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). Comprehensibility is measured through a given speech sample (Shintani et al., 2019), where listeners judge their difficulty in processing speech via rating scales (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018). The learner's difficulty is often determined by understanding phonetic speech qualities (Shintani et al., 2019). In an EAL learner, these comprehensibility judgments can be positively influenced by first language, familiarity with the language (Shintani et al., 2019) and strong intelligibility judgments (Zhang, 2019). A major downfall of research in this field is that most studies use NS to judge comprehensibility in foreign-accented speech (Saito et al., 2019), which fails to represent EAL interactions.

Method

This study used qualitative methods to investigate the sources of comprehension difficulty for EAL listeners in a multilingual classroom. This study examined the listener's perception of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of WE through qualitative data collection via a questionnaire, cloze activity, and post-interview that highlighted students' subjective experiences. These methods for data collection offered insights into the impact of an L1 accent on L2 speech for the listener and students' awareness of different WE. These approaches were suitable to answer the previously stated research questions as a questionnaire, cloze activity, and interview emphasized the learner's perception of WE speech.

Research Context

This research study occurred in a University Bridging Program (UBP) CLB Level 6 (C1/C2) online class at a private language school based in Halifax, Canada. The successful completion of this level indicates that their current proficiency level meets the requirements necessary for admission into a university or college. In other words, this program is the last class for formal English learning intended for EAL students looking to study EAP to prepare them for post-secondary education.

At the time of this study, the school faced low intake due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it took place online over Zoom. The students studied five days a week (Monday-Friday) for 4 hours a day over eight weeks. Attendance and participation in class were mandatory and made up part of their final score in addition to homework, tests, exams, and presentations. This research project was volunteer-based, which means that choosing not to participate did not impact their overall score and took place over 1 hour during regular class time on a Friday after their scheduled quiz.

Participants

The three participants, Tree, Zach, and Helicopter, spoke Mandarin as their first language and came from different cities in China to study English as an additional language.

Tree. Tree was a 21-year-old female from Shanxi, China, with Mandarin as her first language. She studied English for 15 years in her public school as part of her curriculum and by watching English TV shows. At the time of the interview, she had never lived abroad but planned to study in Canada after completing UBP. She previously attended post-secondary education for journalism in China and is still determining which program to pursue at a Canadian school and whether she will live and work in Canada when she completes her studies. Outside of class, she

is exposed to English through English television programs. She studied at the Canadian language school online in China for two semesters and completed Level 5, where she interacted and made friends with a Spanish classmate.

Zach. Zach was a 21-year-old male from Taiyuan, China, with Mandarin as his first language. He studied English for ten years, predominately through grade school, as he deems it a requirement for his life. Zach moved to Canada in December 2022 and had not lived abroad previously. He plans to attend post-secondary education in Human Resource Management and has some previous instruction in this area from his schooling in China. Zach indicated that his occasional exposure to English is through English movies. Zach also studied at the Canadian language school online in China for two semesters and completed Level 5, where he interacted and made friends with a Spanish classmate.

Helicopter. Helicopter was a 20-year-old male from Altay, China, with Mandarin as a first language, and has learned a little Kazakh from a neighbour. He studied English for five years in grade school. He had never lived abroad but will move to Canada in May 2023. He has yet to decide what program he will pursue at a Canadian university but has experience with business management from a school in China. He often engages with English outside of class through the Internet, where he can learn new words through video games and music.

Instruments

The instruments employed in this study include 4 speech sample recordings, a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview.

Speech stimuli. The speech stimuli were taken from an online database called the IDEA (International Dialects of English Archive). The speaker reads some text aloud with natural pauses and unnatural reading intonation. This website also provided detailed information about

the speaker's hometown, age, and proficiency was also available. This background information helped determine the choices that mirrored the accents and age groups dominating an EAL classroom. In addition to the clarity of the recordings, 4 different speakers were chosen with accents that represented the outer and expanding circles of WE (i.e., Nigerian, Chilean, Vietnamese, and Chinese). The speaker read aloud a portion of text, so there were natural pauses and unnatural intonation when reading.

The first recording was *Comma Gets a Cure*, one of two available sample selections on the website (See Appendix B for transcription). *Comma gets a Cure* (IDEA, 2005; 2007; 2019) was used for rating judgements and tells a story about insulin and a goose, including vocabulary, themes, and accents that were sometimes unfamiliar to the participants.

The second speech sample, *Rainbow*, was used for the cloze activity in the following stage (See Appendix B for transcription). A second speech sample was used so that repetition did not influence comprehension. *Rainbow* (IDEA, 1999) is a short definition read aloud of what a rainbow is. The recording also included vocabulary unfamiliar to the participants.

Questionnaire. The open-ended questions in Part I (See Appendix B) gathered insight into the participant's demographic information, such as cultural and linguistic background, education, and English use. Part II was the most significant section, which included three separate scales (accentedness, intelligibility, and comprehensibility) using a 7-point Likert rating scale (from strongly disagree to agree strongly). There were three questions, one for each speech sample related to a different World English dialect, and each composed of a fill-in-the-blank for nationality and five rating questions related to speech details (See Appendix A). Furthermore, part II of the questionnaire included a cloze assessment to assess the student's comprehension of what was heard regarding a fourth speech sample and speaker (See Appendix A).

Interview protocol. After completing the questionnaire, all participants took part in a 20-minute volunteer semi-structured one-to-one interview. The interview questions (see Appendix C) discussed the student's language background, experiences, and confidence. The interviews allowed the participants to offer insights into their opinions of dialects and perceived difficulty when speaking with another NNS.

Data collection

Before data collection, ethics approval was obtained from the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board (REB). A multiple-methods approach was used to collect that data and conduct a thematic analysis. Since the study took place online, the participants joined a Microsoft Teams meeting, were visible on webcam, and all used their computer speakers and microphone to take part.

Firstly, data was collected through the first part of the questionnaire sent to the students by email, which took 10 minutes to complete. After that, the second part of the questionnaire was emailed to the students. Then, the researcher played the recordings through their computer audio to ensure the listening passages were played from expanding to outer varieties: 1) Vietnamese, 2) Chilean, 3) Chinese, and 4) Nigerian. The order was chosen to ensure that familiar accents, like Chinese, did not impede perceptions. The recordings were not paused, and the participants could only listen once. A total of 5 minutes was given to complete each task. While listening, the students completed their ratings to incorporate their immediate perceptions into their judgment ratings. Two minutes were given between each listening sample to prepare the following recording and ensure students were ready to continue. This process was the same for all four recordings.

Finally, the interview took place immediately following the questionnaire for all 3 participants. The participants left and joined the Microsoft Teams meeting when it was their turn. The study took one hour and 30 minutes of scheduled class time.

Data analysis

To address the epistemological research questions above, which allude to the participant's perceptions of WE, a descriptive coding method was used to find similarities in responses (Saldaña, 2021). Since epistemological questions address the participant's knowledge and understanding of WE, exploring their perceptions within the data was necessary (Saldaña, 2021). The descriptive coding method catalogues and reveals epistemologies that can be grouped into themes. Overall, the qualitative analysis involved several steps in coding meaningful responses, recognizing patterns, and establishing themes from the questionnaire and the interview data. After the interviews were transcribed verbatim with ums and ahs removed, the first round of analysis began with the researcher reading over the questionnaire responses and the interview data multiple times to identify initial descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2021). For example, each questionnaire response was considered independently and labelled to capture the main idea. The initial code labels included self-consciousness, previous experience, sources of difficulty, etc. To record these initial codes, the colour highlighter and comment feature in Microsoft Word were used to distinguish and label chunks of text with a corresponding number for the questionnaire and interview data. For the second coding round, patterns were established through the similarity and repetition of ideas (Saldaña, 2021). The patterns were then used to categorize the coded data and were grouped into five themes (Saldaña, 2021). They included; 1) the participant's background, 2) their perception of others and the features of World Englishes, 3) intelligibility, 4) comprehensibility, and 5) accentedness.

Table 1: Coding Framework

Themes	Descriptive Codes
Personal factors	Shy personalities Experience with English outside of class
Perception of NNS	A positive view of NNS personality Perception of a good WE accent Perceived difficulties while listening to WE accents Preference for a NS accent
Intelligibility of WE	Recognition through familiarity Inability to respond
Comprehensibility of WE	Benefit of a Shared L1 Vocabulary
Accentedness of WE	WE speech properties Confidence

Findings

The participants' difficulty listening to accented English spoken by fellow EALs in this study can be explained through the five themes: 1) personal factors, 2) perception of NNS; 3) intelligibility of WE; 4) comprehensibility of WE; and 5) accentedness of WE.

Theme 1: Personal factors

For this study, two codes related to personal factors emerged from the interview data: *shy personalities* and *experience with English outside of class*.

Shy personalities. A recurring code from the interviews was the participants' shyness when using English, their L2, versus their L1. Based on the interview data, shyness refers to the fear of making mistakes and nerves that arise when using EAL to communicate with others.

Part of this shyness was the fear of making mistakes when using English, especially when communicating in class discussions. For instance, Zach mentioned that when he speaks English, he worries about how his pronunciation affects his speaking, which thus makes him shy when he is usually an outgoing person: "I will [be] outgoing when I use my first language, but when I use English, then sometimes I will [be] shy. "This is because, "when I speak English... it's not [...] smooth and maybe some vocabularies and some grammar is not good." The fear of making mistakes makes the participants nervous and shy when communicating with others in English.

The participants nerves when using English to communicate is also influenced by the interlocutor's personality. For Helicopter, he felt that it depended on "who [they're] talking to..." rather than "which language [they're] using." Students must feel comfortable with their peers for successful communication regardless of language.

The context of communicating in English influenced the participants' nerves. For instance, when the participants felt they needed to be spontaneous in English, they were nervous or well-prepared through assigned in-class presentations and more at ease because, as Tree notes, they "have some time to prepare." Presenting had challenges for the participants because "no matter which...language [they're] using," the nerves that arise in English presentations are due to their insecurities with their English abilities or needing to focus on what is being graded. Zach said, "Sometimes... I will feel... nervous 'cause presentation is a big part [of our score]... and so many people focus on the...fluency and smooth." It is not surprising for the participants to fear making mistakes at this level of English ability and who have limited experience in an English-intensive

environment. Possible reasons for nerves and shyness could be related to insecurities related to English pronunciation, lexicon, and fluency. The fear of making mistakes and the situational context influence the participants' personalities through their nerves and may make them shy to engage with others.

Experience with English outside of class. Highlighted across all three participants' interviews as a reoccurring code was the lack of friendships outside the participant's culture. Based on the interview data, participants had little to no interaction with other language backgrounds outside of class time and barely used English outside of class. Experience with English outside of class refers to the previous interactions with fellow EALs and the capacity that participants use English in their leisure time.

The notable experience and previous encounters with English involved the influence of friendships and language schools. Zach and Tree, who lived in China at the time of the study, noted that their friends were also in China. Therefore, their friends speak the same language, and there is no reason to use English. Tree and Zach went on to say that in their Level 5 class at the same language school, a Chilean girl who spoke Spanish fostered a friendship with them. In her company, they relied on English as their means of communication which took work and was not easy. Thus, the interview data confirmed that the participants could engage with fellow EALs and make friends outside of their usual social circle through private language schools.

The prominent experience for EALs during leisure time with English was to enjoy various forms of entertainment, such as music and video games. In the interview data, Helicopter divulged that he likes to play video games such as *Red Dead Redemption* because he needs to "communicate with [his] teammates if they are from [an] English-speaking country." Through playing these video games and using English to communicate with team members, Helicopter

ultimately made friendships outside his culture, especially with one from India. By engaging with English for entertainment outside of class, EALs can better make friends outside their usual social circle and engage in authentic experiences with their target language, English.

Theme 2: Perception of NNS

For this study, four codes related to the participant's perception of fellow NNS when using English to communicate emerged from the interview data. These included; a *positive view of NNS personality*, *perceptions of a good WE accent*, *perceived difficulties while listening to WE accents*, and a *preference for a NS accent*.

Positive view of NNS personality. Participants recalled previous encounters with fellow NNS through classroom interaction or entertainment. A code that emerged from the interview data was an overall positive view of other NNS. A positive view can be defined as getting along with fellow EALs in past encounters. For example, Zach and Tree noted that the only other NNS they had encountered was a Chilean girl in their previous class, who they identified as friendly, nice, and kind. The participant Helicopter raised the point that he could not judge the personality of others because it is dependent on the situation. For example, Helicopter relayed his experience playing *Red Dead Redemption*, where aggressive behaviour in a fellow NNS is bound to occur due to the context and social situation. Helicopter states, "I think most people will be... a little aggressive because I can understand [it's] a competition game... and... we [could lose]." Therefore, interactions are usually positive between NNS when using English to communicate, but the scenarios can influence them.

Perceptions of a good WE accent. The participants could not recall the speakers they discussed in the interview, but the same characteristics eased difficulty while listening to WE speech samples emerged. A code in the interview data was that a WE accent with a strong

command of English had clear pronunciation and was spoken at a proper speed. A strong command of English can be defined as being easily comprehensible to fellow EALs and preferred when compared to others. For Helicopter, the accent he most preferred listening to was not fluent but had good pronunciation where the speaker “[spoke] very clearly and [had] proper speed” that he could overall “easily understand.” In line with Helicopter, Zach also noted in interview data that the WE he preferred was “friendly” and of “medium” speed to be “excellent.” Likewise, Tree noted that the speaker she most preferred listening to had “some mistake[s]” but thought the accent's pronunciation was good without being “awesome.” Regardless, Tree thought the speaker she most preferred listening to was from “some English country,” even though none of the speech samples were NS. Tree could not accurately articulate the speaker in the interview, but she knew they were not NS, so this comparison was a compliment. The participants conceded that their preferred NNS accents that showed a strong command of English appeared friendly, with clear pronunciation and speed.

Perceived difficulties while listening to WE accents. The interview data revealed factors that cause listening difficulties between NSS. Difficulty can be defined as factors that negatively influence the ease of understanding. A common code for difficulty stemmed from the speaker's L1 phonetic speech properties and their influence on their L2. Difficulties included accent pronunciation and its influence on unfamiliar vocabulary. Tree commented that, unlike a NS, for an EAL, the “[pronunciation] is different, so [it’s] hard to understand all of this... Accent. Yeah, and vocabulary.” She says that the language, or how her Chilean classmate spoke English, confused her, so she could not “understand a lot of [the] time.” Meanwhile, Zach also noted that language, which can be presumed as speaking in general combined with unfamiliar vocabulary and accent, impedes his understanding: “Many times, I can't understand what she's talking about.

Sometimes [her] language, ... I don't really understand because [of] the accent." Thus, the interview data revealed that difficulty listening to WE accents could stem from the speaker's L1 phonetic L2 pronunciation and unfamiliar vocabulary.

Preference for a NS accent. A code in the interview data was a preference for the NS accent. This refers to the notion of native-speakerism, which is the perception that English spoken without a prominent accent is better. The interview data revealed that most participants preferred the fourth and final speaker from the study, who was from Nigeria and represented the outer circle variety. The participants recognized that the Nigerian speaker had the accent closest to a NS because it sounds natural in speed and has proper pronunciation. Tree noted in the interview data a preference for NS: "The [native] speaker [who] will speak [faster] ...and... the not [native] speaker is... slower, and pronunciation is not very [good]." Therefore, if the accent is slow and there are some pronunciation errors, she will assume the speaker is a fellow EAL. In Zach's opinion, this final speaker sounded more natural: "'cause... [it] is almost native and... I like the accent. Haha, I just like... the native accent like... 'hey bro' or something, just like normal." Zach refers to a preference for a NS accent because he sees it as "normal," or something he often encounters. Through promoting WE, accented English could also be considered "normal" to EALs and, therefore, easier to understand.

Theme 3: Intelligibility of WE

Intelligibility refers to accent familiarity and speech properties such as fluency, speed, intonation, and pronunciation of words. The codes that emerged from the questionnaire and interview data included the *ability to quickly identify* a WE variety due to a *shared L1, previous exposure*, and an *inability to respond*.

Recognition through familiarity. The first coded aspect of familiarity was the ability to recognize and identify the WE variety. Recognition is defined as the ability to recall and correctly label the origin of the speech stimuli to identify the country they think the speaker is from. Tree and Zach, who were Chinese, could recognize the Chinese speaker and label the speech stimuli. Although Helicopter assumed this speaker was Korean, it shares similar speech properties to its fellow expanding circle accents like Chinese. In the interview data, Helicopter noted that the ease of recognizing an accent "depends on where exactly they come from." For example, he could quickly identify an accent from India because he plays video games with someone from India. Furthermore, Helicopter states that he would have difficulty recognizing someone from "France or Italy" because he does not encounter speakers from those regions. Therefore, the lack of encounters with fellow EALs leads to an inability to comprehend their unique phonetic speech properties, even if they are from the same country. This could be because familiarity with WE speech properties allows for better inference in recognizing it.

Familiarity with the accent can stem from a shared L1. Speech properties can be defined as the pronunciation of words. The interview and questionnaire data accentuated that familiarity with the accent leads to an ability to recognize it. Tree states in the interview data that "Chinese English is more familiar like natural English." Tree emphasizes that the Chinese accent is easily recognizable because it is familiar. She then likens the familiarity to how often she hears a NS accent. An advantage of having a shared L1 is that she has grown used to its unique phonetic features that may cause comprehension difficulty. This means that through a shared L1, mutual intelligibility between NNS may result from the familiarity of shared mistakes.

Familiarity with the accent can also stem from previous exposure. This study defines previous exposure as encounters with WE at a private language school. In the questionnaire and interview

data, participants who shared a previous class with a Chilean student could quickly identify a Spanish speaker. Zach noted the unique phonetic features of the Spanish accent by attempting to mimic it: "I think... in Spanish... they have a lot of... accent like, ... *incoherent sound* [their] tongue it's ... really hard and... in English, maybe they will have a little bit accent, I... will, I can [distinguish] it." This participant confirmed in interview data that they could recognize the phonetic features of Spanish-accented English because they had interactions with a Spanish speaker before: "Yes... I think... I can [recognize the speaker] 'cause... there is [a Spanish accent] very clearly." Interview data revealed that the previous exposure to a Spanish accent allowed the participants to recognize, label, and even recall its phonetic features. Therefore, exposure to accents eases intelligibility through awareness of unique WE articulation features.

Inability to respond. A reoccurring code in the interview data was the inability to respond. In this interview, the inability to respond is defined as lacking comprehension to continue the conversation, which is crucial in establishing mutual intelligibility. The interview data indicated the samples were "a little bit long," according to Zach. Due to the length of the study and speech stimuli, Zach did not feel he could remember what was said and could not respond. Furthermore, Helicopter noted that he was "not paying attention to what was said." He was "paying attention to the question" and the "fluency" of their speech and "didn't care [about] the content" or what they said. Due to the nature of the task, the participant did not consider the importance of taking in the meaning enough to converse. This reveals that the length of the speech samples and task influenced their intelligibility judgement. Therefore, external factors like length could be connected to mutual intelligibility and the ability to generate conversation between NNS.

Theme 4: Comprehensibility of WE

Comprehensibility focuses on meaning via clarity, speed, natural intonation, fluency, and ease of understanding overall. Codes that emerged to influence comprehensibility judgements were the *benefit of a shared L1* in the interview data and *vocabulary* in the questionnaire cloze activity.

Benefit of a Shared L1. Based on the interview data, a shared L1 emerged as a code. Since the participants were all Chinese, they could easily comprehend the Chinese accent. Tree recalled in the interview data that: "...Chinese is not difficult because we are... [the] same, we can get... each other easily." Tree explains that since they share the same phonetic features in their accented English, they make the same mistakes and can infer the meaning more easily. Similarly, Zach revealed in his interview that he could easily comprehend the Chinese accent because it is "similar to [him]." Although the students had heard accents from multiple backgrounds, the interview data revealed that a shared L1 eased the participant's ability to understand what was said even when mistakes were present. Therefore, a shared L1 may positively influence intelligibility judgements for EALs.

Vocabulary. The questionnaire data through the cloze assessment showed that vocabulary plays a vital role in inferring meaning. This study defines vocabulary as contextual nouns that influence the meaning or are topic specific. Most participants could not complete the cloze task even though they listened to an outer circle variety which resembles a NS. In the questionnaire data, all participants guessed where the WE might originate, but none of the participants were able to get it right. For the cloze activity, only Tree could complete it successfully, while Zach and Helicopter only got two out of five answers correct. Zach and Helicopter left at least one space blank in the cloze activity rather than assuming the missing word. A common source of

difficulty for Zach and Helicopter was “arch,” where Zach had heard “out” and Helicopter had heard “org.” Arch is a typical mathematical term used to describe a rainbow. No recollection of this vocabulary term is evident. The participant’s answers in the cloze assessment seem phonetic-specific as meaning could not be established on the context alone. In this regard, unfamiliar contextual vocabulary and the WE accent could have influenced the questionnaire data for the cloze assessment. Therefore, comprehensibility judgements for EALs may be influenced by new words and accents.

Theme 5: Accentedness of WE

Accentedness refers to how speech properties such as intonation and pronunciation affect comprehension and intelligibility. Through questionnaire data, the participant determined the extent to which the accent's clarity and fluency impeded understanding by Likert scale ratings. In interview data, two codes emerged to reveal the influence of accentedness: *WE Speech Properties* as a barrier when listening to WE, and *confidence* with speaking abilities.

WE speech properties. According to the questionnaire Likert scale data, a shared L1 positively influences the fluency and clarity of an accent heard. Fluency and clarity are the ability to express oneself easily and accurately. For Tree and Zach, the questionnaire ratings of WE fluency and clarity for the Chinese speaker were very high. At the same time, WE pronunciation clarity was the biggest hurdle for participants when listening to other WE varieties. The questionnaire data revealed that all participants were negatively affected by an accent's unclear pronunciation by assigning low ratings for expanding circle varieties such as Spanish. This could be because although they had previous exposure to the accent in the Level 5 class, the speech properties, such as intonation, still caused some listening difficulty. Therefore, a shared L1 may influence the negative impacts of fluency and clarity for EALs.

Confidence. A reoccurring code from the interview data was that the accents heard, though unfamiliar, did not instill an adverse reaction in the participants due to their confidence. This study defines an adverse reaction as a negative emotion, such as anxiety which makes you uncomfortable and influences comprehension. Though frustrations were present, such as the speech samples being “too fast” in Helicopter’s case, the students did not feel inadequate to complete the task. Furthermore, all participants revealed that they feel confident in their English-speaking ability even though they know they sometimes make mistakes. The participants do not let their mistakes get in the way of their attempts to communicate. The participant Helicopter disclosed that he had “never heard [his] accent before.” After considering the impact of his speech, he noted that “maybe someday day [he’s] gonna try [to] record and listen.” Therefore, some students like Helicopter, although confident in their abilities, may not have considered the impact of their L2 speech and how it can influence their ability to communicate successfully. When EALs know their pronunciation mistakes through methods like recording, they can learn to address them and better understand how they come off to others.

Discussion and Implications

The discussion will respond to the research questions individually and then state the implications of the findings.

1. How do students perceive the intelligibility, accentedness, and comprehensibility of World Englishes?

According to the participants, multiple factors influence the intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of speech for EALs in line with previous studies, which can all be positively influenced by familiarity.

Intelligibility is said to be affected by different speech properties (Jung, 2010; Nguyen, 2017; Suntornsawet, 2019; Zhang, 2019). Nguyen (2017) found that problems concerning sound recognition and phonological elements, such as intonation and pronunciation, were the leading intelligibility issue. Likewise, participants in this study noted pronunciation as the leading source of the difficulty. Pronunciation becomes a barrier to the listeners' ability to communicate with others and is the first barrier emerging in conversation. For the participants in this study, the pronunciation of a Spanish speaker in the class had previously impacted their discussion because they could not establish meaning. Students also indicated that, in their opinion, pronunciation with a strong accent indicates a less "normal" version of English where mutual intelligibility may then be compromised.

Comprehensibility refers to the general meaning of what was said overall. In previous studies, comprehensibility was impacted predominately by the number of unknown words (Carlson, 2019). Similarly, this study's participants revealed that vocabulary was a source of difficulty in understanding what was said. Participants in this study noted that vocabulary is also heavily influenced by an accent's pronunciation and unfamiliarity with the vocabulary heard. This was clear as two participants could not accurately complete the cloze assessment portion of the questionnaire, which indicates that the students could not make out the vocabulary to try and spell what they heard. The participants also felt that they could not generate an appropriate response to what they had heard in the speech stimuli to have a conversation due to the length, which indicates an additional source of comprehensibility difficulty.

Previous studies have noted that the accent is the most critical factor for the difficulty in comprehensibility judgments, as accentedness and comprehensibility are closely related (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Shintani et al., 2019). The accent creates a unique articulation of sound

called speech properties, such as pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns resulting from a speaker's L1 (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Jung, 2010; Zhang, 2019). Thus, the listener will perceive the variety of World English being heard differently due to their first language (Kang et al., 2016). Therefore, less accented speech is perceived to be more comprehensible (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). For participants in this study, phonological accuracy profoundly affects their ability to communicate with others. The study participants frequently mentioned that the accents heard caused difficulty for them unless they shared a first language, had previously heard the accent, or closely resembled a NS.

2. What is the relationship between a listener's L1 and their perceptions of intelligibility, accentedness and comprehensibility of L2 speech properties?

In most instances, previous studies found that success and perceived difficulty of speech properties inherently depend on the listener's language background within the situational context (Kang et al., 2019). In Foote and Trofimovich's study (2018), a shared first language successfully impacted judgments due to the familiarity of the accent. Being from the same language background instills confidence in the listener due to the familiarity with their speech traits (Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). Thus, success in understanding accents occurs when there is a shared first language (Foote & Trofimovich, 2018; Hansen Edwards et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2019). The participants in this study were more confident when they felt that they could quickly identify the Chinese speaker and the Spanish speaker due to their cultural background and previous exposure to English varieties. The ease of understanding familiar accents in this study came from understanding their mistakes. For example, the Chinese participants could establish meaning from the Chinese accent because they make similar speaking mistakes. Similarly, students could recognize the unique speech properties of the Spanish speaker. According to

participants in this study, successful interactions also depend on whom they are speaking to, so multilingual classrooms require intercultural communicative competence, as culture and EAP are closely related (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018; Jung, 2010).

3. What are the student's perceptions and experiences when encountering different World Englishes?

For the participants in this study, encountering WE in a multilingual classroom and beyond causes some difficulty for NNS. Problems arise because they have very few encounters with different dialects of English outside of class. The students were studying EAP at an international language school, preparing for university, and working in a NS country. In these contexts, some participants could interact pleasantly with other cultural backgrounds, such as Spanish, whereas they usually stick within the same language group. Although all students claimed that they interact with different dialects of English outside of class, like an Indian accent, through entertainment such as movies or video games, the perception of others may be negatively skewed due to the context (i.e.: aggression and video games). Furthermore, these situations, like movies and video games, generally portray NS rather than NNS (Ahn & Kang, 2017).

In addition, the students experienced a sense of detachment when hearing accented English and self-consciousness when interacting with others in a multilingual classroom. Otair and Aziz (2017) confirm that listening invokes a sense of anxiety in EALs that stems from the speaker's speed and unfamiliar accents, which leads to a loss of concentration and listening comprehension. Although the participants in this study did not mention feeling a sense of anxiety, they all experienced a loss of concentration and detachment when listening to the speech samples. The recordings were short but consisted of improper speed and pronunciation read aloud by predominately unfamiliar accents. As a result, the participants were not able to

comprehend the passage enough to reply to what was heard or in some cases, complete a comprehension test.

Understanding these interaction experiences is essential to better assisting students in successful future encounters. It is crucial to gain insight into these perspectives to address the gap in the literature that focuses on the dynamics between students in a multilingual classroom in a native-speaking country who intend to stay and work full-time.

Implications

The results of this study offer classroom teachers implications of accented English on EAL students. Teachers can understand how differences in EAL speakers' phonetic features, such as pronunciation and fluency, impact EAL listeners in a multilingual classroom. Teachers can also better assist learners from various language backgrounds, guide them toward successful encounters, and establish healthy pronunciation goals and cultural awareness. Furthermore, results from this study encourage a shift in lesson development to include a more comprehensive representation of WE. This is because the participants revealed a lack of previous exposure and experience with various forms of accented English. Authentic material can be obtained through Ted Talks or professor speech samples. However, more accessible resources of accented English for academic purposes are needed. By incorporating these "imperfect" speech samples, the teacher represents natural conversation and forms of English. They are diffusing discrimination that might occur in the classroom and instilling confidence in learners who are shy to speak.

Limitations and Future Studies

The findings of this study only relate to a small population of students studying EAP in a multilingual classroom at a private language school in a NS country. The aim was to solidify EAL's difficulty listening to fellow NNS English accents. Because only 3 participants were

enrolled in UBP and all spoke Chinese as a first language, the population sample does not represent a variety of NNS from different countries. Therefore, the study unintentionally focuses on Chinese learners as they are the leading student population of the school, and the findings cannot be generalized as other EALs experience.

This study also endures limitations concerning speech stimuli. First, the speech stimuli do not represent an authentic listening passage, such as a conversation or lecture that an EAL student may hear in the real world. Past studies in this area have used authentic or contextualized samples such as lectures where many difficult words, topics, and lengths affect attention span and need to be considered. For example, Carlson (2019) did not account for unfamiliar proper nouns or context in his speech samples. These problems led to low intelligibility scores in his study and created an additional proficiency variable that this study could not accommodate. Although the listening passages had an element of unfamiliarity to the participants regarding vocabulary, there were other intelligibility issues. Since the study was quite long and the samples repeated themselves, participants found they could only focus on the questions rather than considering the actual content of what was heard. As a result, students could not recall the different speakers and their accent traits or accurately respond as if they had to continue the conversation.

Future studies may aim for an in-depth investigation into various language backgrounds that more accurately mirrors students enrolled in an EAP course at private language schools in a NS country. In this way, researchers can also represent more genders and age groups. In addition, a larger population would allow the researcher to collect the data quantitatively to support the qualitative data through a mixed-methods study. Since this study only occurred once, future studies may wish to investigate how proficiency, anxiety, or confidence changes over time for

the participants throughout their level progression. An extended study could also account for the role of the teacher, class materials and even learning disabilities. In the future, curated speech samples could measure students' phonetic differences in their L1 accent on their L2 speech compared with native speakers, as seen in past studies (Wu et al., 2020). Furthermore, authentic speech samples could be helpful in the future for making assumptions about common errors and sources of difficulty for different language groups, including local native slang or varieties of regional dialects. Therefore, the apparent limitations of this study call for a deeper understanding of the multilingual classroom experience and require additional study in the future to continue normalizing WE varieties.

Conclusion

Overall, for the participants in this study, accented English negatively impacted listening comprehension. While there are individual differences, there are many causes why difficulty may arise. The primary factor for difficulty in understanding was the impact of the speaker's pronunciation due to the unique influence of the speaker's L1 on their L2 speech. Furthermore, comprehension difficulty arose from unnatural fluency; if the speaker is too slow, much like if the speaker is too fast, the listener has difficulty following along. The final significant influence was unfamiliar vocabulary, such as the contextual noun “arch,” because EALs may not have had exposure to this mathematical term, the students may have lost the just of the meaning. It is evident from interview data that familiarity helps an EAL's comprehension difficulty, such as a shared L1, exposure to various WE dialects, and familiarity with vocabulary terms.

Understanding how accented English impacts EAL's listening comprehension contributes to a deeper awareness of the EAP classroom experience. By understanding the student's reality and empathizing with them, the teacher can better assist with confidence, anxiety, and motivation

issues that may arise due to difficulty, such as a lack of participation. Furthermore, WE accent awareness and inclusion in course materials will help prepare students for the real world. By ensuring students have exposure to the many English dialects, the teacher can foster successful interactions for the student outside of class. This way, students will be prepared to live and work in a NS country and make lifetime friends outside their usual social circle.

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Appendix A

Speech sample text for listening passage***Comma Gets a Cure*** (IDEA, 2011)

“Well, here’s a story for you: Sarah Perry was a veterinary nurse who had been working daily at an old zoo in a deserted district of the territory, so she was very happy to start a new job at a superb private practice in North Square near the Duke Street Tower. That area was much nearer for her and more to her liking. Even so, on her first morning, she felt stressed. She ate a bowl of porridge, checked herself in the mirror and washed her face in a hurry. Then she put on a plain yellow dress and a fleece jacket, picked up her kit and headed for work.

When she got there, there was a woman with a goose waiting for her. The woman gave Sarah an official letter from the vet. The letter implied that the animal could be suffering from a rare form of foot and mouth disease, which was surprising because normally you would only expect to see it in a dog or a goat. Sarah was sentimental, so this made her feel sorry for the beautiful bird.

Before long, that itchy goose began to strut around the office like a lunatic, which made an unsanitary mess. The goose’s owner, Mary Harrison, kept calling, “Comma, Comma,” which Sarah thought was an odd choice for a name. Comma was strong and huge, so it would take some force to trap her, but Sarah had a different idea. First, she tried gently stroking the goose’s lower back with her palm, then singing a tune to her. Finally, she administered ether. Her efforts were not futile. In no time, the goose began to tire, so Sarah was able to hold onto to Comma and give her a relaxing bath.

Once Sarah had managed to bathe the goose, she wiped her off with a cloth and laid her on her right side. Then Sarah confirmed the vet’s diagnosis. Almost immediately, she remembered an effective treatment that required her to measure out a lot of medicine. Sarah warned that this course of treatment might be expensive – either five or six times the cost of penicillin. I can’t imagine paying so much, but Mrs. Harrison – a millionaire lawyer – thought it was a fair price for a cure” (IDEA, 2011, para. 1-4.).

Speech sample text for comprehension passage***The Rainbow passage*** (Adapted from IDEA, 2011; IDEA, 1999)

“When the sunlight strikes raindrops in the air, they act like a prism and form a rainbow. The rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. These take the shape of a long round arch, with its path high above, and its two ends apparently beyond the horizon. There is, according to legend, a boiling pot of gold at one end. People look, but no one ever finds it. When a man looks for something beyond his reach, his friends say he is looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Throughout the centuries men have explained the rainbow in various ways. Some have accepted it as a miracle without physical explanation. To the Hebrews, it was a token that there would be no more universal floods...”

Appendix B

Linguistic background questionnaire
(Adapted from Zhang, 2019; Jung, 2010).

Listening Judgements

Instructions: Please complete the questionnaire below about yourself and your experience with English accents. There is no right or wrong answer, so please be honest. This questionnaire will remain confidential because it is for research purposes only. Thank you so much for your participation!

Pt I: Background Information

1. Gender: 1- female, 2- male, 3- nonbinary	
2. Age:	
3. Level:	
4. Hometown (City, Country) and Native language:	
5. Do you speak other any other languages? (Y/N) Which?	
6. Total years spent learning English and in what context (school, tutor, etc.):	
7. Are you currently living in Canada? (Y/N) If yes, how long have you lived here? If no, when will you arrive?	
8. Do you have additional experience living abroad (6+ months) where English was the main medium of communication? (Y/N) Where?	
9. Do you plan on attending post- secondary education? (Y/N) If	

yes, for which program(s)?	
10. Have you had post-secondary education in the past, or in your first language? (Y/N) If yes, for which program(s)?	
11. Do you engage with English outside of class time (Y/N)? In what capacity? (With friends, internet, etc.)	
12. What is your average time spent engaging with English outside of class time?	

Pt II: Listening Judgments

Instructions: Below are some statements about the three recordings you will hear.

Please circle the number that best represents your perception of the speaker.

- 1 = Completely Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Disagree somewhat
- 4 = Neutral
- 5 = Agree somewhat
- 6 = Agree
- 7 = Completely Agree

A. Presumed nationality of the speaker: _____

- (1) The speaker speaks English clearly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (2) The speaker speaks at a proper speed. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (3) The speaker's intonation is natural and pleasant. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (4) The speech is fluent. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (5) I can easily understand the passage. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Presumed nationality of the speaker: _____

- (1) The speaker speaks English clearly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (2) The speaker speaks at a proper speed. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (3) The speaker's intonation is natural and pleasant. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (4) The speech is fluent. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (5) I can easily understand the passage. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Presumed nationality of the speaker: _____

- (1) The speaker speaks English clearly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (2) The speaker speaks at a proper speed. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (3) The speaker's intonation is natural and pleasant. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (4) The speech is fluent. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- (5) I can easily understand the passage. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Listening Comprehension

Instructions: Please fill in the blank with the missing words. Don't worry about any spelling errors. You will have 10 minutes and can listen to the passage three times. Please indicate which nationality the speaker is.

Comprehension listening fill in the blank (Fill in the blank/spelling is not an issue)
(combination of comprehension and transcription...)

Adapted from...

Nationality of the Speaker: _____

When the sunlight strikes raindrops in the air, they act as a _____ and form a rainbow. The rainbow is a _____ of white light into many beautiful colors. These take the shape of a long round _____, with its path high above, and its two ends apparently beyond the horizon. There is, according to legend, a _____ of gold at one end. People look, but no one ever finds it.

Appendix C

Semi-structured interview perception questions

(Adapted from Nguyen 2017)

1. What brought you to Canada? Do you wish to stay and work full-time when you have finished your studies?
2. How often do you use English to communicate outside of class time? What is the situation, and who are you usually with? Do you have friendships with people from other language backgrounds?
3. What is your comfort level in using your first language and English? For example, are you shy or outgoing? How often do you participate in class discussions? Do you feel nervous giving presentations in English? (Why is there a difference in comfort level between your first language and English?)
4. Are you hesitant to work with others from another country than you? What are some common speakers of English you meet, and what are your impressions of them?
5. What problems arise when you use English to communicate with other non-native English speakers? Are there any you find more difficult than others?
6. Please give some examples of when an accent led to a breakdown in your communication ability. What do you think might have caused it? What impacts do some of these difficulties have on you?
7. Are you exposed to many World English accents during class time? How do you think integrating more World English accents in listening activities would help your learning?
8. Did the speech samples you heard make you feel uneasy or instill a negative reaction? Why?
9. To what extent do you think you could reply to what you had heard? (What would you say?)
10. What language background did you find the easiest to comprehend? Is this related to a shared first language?
11. Are you comfortable with your current accent?
12. How easily were you able to recognize the accent in the listening passages? What made it easy or difficult?
13. How easily were you able to transcribe the listening passage? What made it easy or difficult?
14. Which listening passages did you have difficulty understanding? What aspects of the passage made it difficult to understand? (For instance, was it vocabulary, clarity, etc.)
15. Were there accents that you preferred listening to? Why? What did you like about the accents?
16. Which accents did you find showed a strong command of English? Why do you think so? (For example, was it the speed, intonation, word stress, etc.)