

An Analysis of the Comprehensibility and Attitudes Towards Non-Standard L1 English Accents for Chinese L2 English Speakers

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Word Count: 18,072

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to express my gratitude for those who have supported me throughout my linguistics journey, and for those who have both encouraged and reassured me during my incredible MSc study at Oxford. To begin, I'd like to thank both Professor Victoria Murphy and Shawna-Kaye Tucker for their exceptional kindness, wisdom and patience during the creation of this dissertation. I'd also like to thank Dr Paul Cooper for inspiring me to pursue sociolinguistics, and for the knowledge and experience needed to complete this course. I'm deeply indebted to my friends for the continued kindness and solace they give me every day, and to my family for their unconditional love. I've managed to complete this because of all of you, and I'm eternally grateful.

Abstract

The present study aimed to explore levels of comprehensibility of non-standard, native English accents for non-native English speakers, and their attitudes towards such. It also sought to interrogate whether there was desire for non-standard, native English accents to be incorporated into the English language teaching classroom. This issue is particularly relevant given that in the context of global English language teaching, students are mainly exposed to the Received Pronunciation standard. Furthermore, a review of the literature demonstrated that language attitudes towards non-standard accents are complex and multi-faceted, particularly on behalf of non-native speakers. To that end, a mixed-methods approach was used within the study, including a Verbal Guise Test (VGT) administered to 32 Chinese L2 English speakers in higher education across England, as well as several semi-structured follow-up interviews. Both Friedman's ANOVA and Spearman's Rho tests were used to investigate the quantitative inquiry, and the qualitative data was explored using a thematic analysis. While the results were consistent with the multi-dimensional nature of such language attitudes, the review of the literature indicates a significant gap surrounding attitudes of non-native speakers towards such. On the one hand, within the current study, participants were keen to express a desire to be exposed to different language varieties within the English language classroom. On the other hand, the previous lack of exposure to such varieties may have led to a lack of comprehensibility of such accents, which in turn has likely led to subsequent negative attitudes towards such. These findings demonstrate a need for English language classrooms to more accurately reflect the English-speaking world learners will communicate in, and for accent variation to be embraced earlier on in English language curricula. These developments will help both to improve communication between native and non-native speakers, as well as ameliorate some of the perpetuated negative attitudes towards non-standard variation around the globe.

1 – Introduction

The present study is an exploration into the levels of comprehensibility of, and language attitudes towards, non-standard native English accents for second language (L2) English speakers. Previous literature does not appear to fully capture the experiences of non-native English speakers with non-standard accents - thus the current research hopes to provide an insight into any difficulties in understanding various English accents, and what their attitudes towards these non-standard varieties might be. Much of this research was motivated by the researcher's own sociolinguistic experiences, as a possessor of a non-standard native English accent and dialect, who has worked closely with the population demographic of the present study – Chinese L2 English speakers. Furthermore, second language researchers have also suggested that attitudes towards a target language play a significant role in the ability to acquire such language (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006; McKenzie, 2008a), and so a greater exploration into such attitudes is necessary for English language teaching to progress.

English, and its global spread, is one of the most heavily-studied linguistic phenomena across second language research. It is, indeed, the 'the indisputable world language' (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006, p.23), with estimates that there are 505 million non-native speakers worldwide (OMICS International, 2013). Throughout English language classrooms, however, learners are mainly exposed to two general accents of English: Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) English. These two models are seen as the standard varieties for both listening exercises and pronunciation models (Chan, 2016). However, within their daily social interactions, non-native speakers will be exposed to many different non-native varieties (Harding, 2012). Furthermore, if learners are learning English for the purpose of immigrating to an L1 English country for work or study purposes, they will undoubtedly be exposed to multiple native varieties as well. As Hope (2021, p.ii) writes 'few speakers use the standard varieties that learners are familiar with'. There is, therefore, a perceivable under-representation of the varieties of English learners may encounter outside the classroom, suggesting that classroom-based English does not accurately reflect the English-speaking world. This could have detrimental effects on students' communicative competence (Alptekin, 2002), as well as perpetuate any attitudes that have been developed due to a lack of exposure to diverse varieties of English (Sung, 2016a, 2016b; Dragojevic & Giles, 2016). It is thus no longer 'pedagogically relevant' (Sung, 2016b, p.190) to restrict learners to one or two standard varieties within the classroom.

There is a distinct gap in research literature as to the effect of this lack of exposure on non-native attitudes towards non-standard varieties, or the comprehensibility of such. The little work surrounding this issue (McKenzie 2008a, 2008b, 2015; Hope, 2021) demonstrates that negative language attitudes are perpetuated by an unfamiliarity to a certain variety. Other studies (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Hope, 2021) have also noted that speakers are seen to be less understandable when they speak with an accent perceived to be foreign. The

present study hopes to explore these findings further, by interrogating levels of comprehensibility and language attitudes for Chinese L2 English speakers towards non-standard L1 English accents. A mixed-methods approach was adopted within this study through the means of a Verbal Guise Test and survey, as well as semi-structured interview. This was analysed by means of multi-variate inferential testing, as well as thematic analysis; it is then presented in light of previous research, and discussed with regards to pedagogical implications.

The present study seeks to explore further the complex nature of language attitudes towards non-standard accents for non-native speakers, and make pedagogical recommendations. In **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**, there is a selective review of the literature, focusing on the following areas: standard and non-standard accents within England, comprehensibility, and the language attitudes of native and non-native accents towards such accents. **Chapter 3 – Methodology** presents the methodology of the study, with a detailed display of the tests and measures used within this research, with justification. In **Chapter 4 – Results**, the findings of the study with quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented. Finally, in **Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion**, these findings are interpreted with reference to previous literature, and the implications of such are considered in making pedagogical recommendations for future English language classrooms.

2 - Literature Review

The present study seeks to explore how easily native Mandarin speakers can understand English non-standard (regional) accents, and their attitudes towards such. The selective review of the literature presented in this chapter will evaluate previous research defining accents in England, and discuss levels of comprehensibility and attitudes towards accents of various speakers. It will also report on the limited findings surrounding the use of non-standard accents in the English language teaching classroom.

2.1 - Accents

Research has concluded that ‘accent’ relates to the phonological features of a person’s speech, including their pronunciation, which is dependent on both their regional and social background (Crystal, 2008). Indeed, accent has been argued to be one of the most powerful indicators of one’s social identity within a specific group (Kim, 2021). Sung (2016a, p.56) argues that accents are in fact an ‘immediately tangible characteristic’ of a speaker, which leads to Derwing and Munro’s (2005) conclusion that defining an accent can often be a ‘moving target’ (Kang et al, 2019, p.59). This is because defining an accent involves acknowledging both subjective and objective observations - that is to say, different speakers’ accents will be perceived differently by different varieties (Derwing & Munro, 2005). It is therefore understood that an accent can only be defined if it is compared to a different accent (Lippi-Green, 2011).

Overall, accents throughout the world are perceived as being either standard or non-standard. As Dragojevic et al (2017) summarize, standard varieties include norms that have been codified, and are seen as ‘correct’. These standard norms are normally associated with more dominant socioeconomic groups. However, non-standard varieties diverge from these norms, and are often characteristic of less powerful classes within society (Dragojevic et al, 2017).

2.2 – Non-standard accents in England

The classification of accents within England is an archetypal example of the distinction between standard and non-standard accents. Throughout modern English history, one accent prevails over others as the codified norm or ‘correct’ way of speaking (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016): Received Pronunciation (RP). This accent has often been described as ‘non-localisable’ (Wells, 1982, p.28). Social connotations are more often attached to RP than regional ones, and it has been argued that RP occurs as an indicator of education, or even income or profession (Crystal, 1995; Hughes et al, 2011). However, given RP’s association with upper and middle classes, it is often viewed as more prominent in the south of England, which has historically been linked to affluence and education. Linguists have started to believe, however, that the label of ‘Received Pronunciation’ has acquired ‘a dated - even negative - flavour’ (Hughes et al, 2011, p.3), due to its association with an upper class, to which there is often a restricted social access: increased wealth. Furthermore, Trudgill (2002) estimates that, at the beginning of the 21st century, only 3 to 5 per cent of the population in England spoke

with an RP accent. RP has thus been extended by many linguists to include Standard Southern British English (SSBE), which has been perceived in a more positive light (Hughes et al, 2011). SSBE has been described by linguists as a ‘synonym’ of RP, and was initially proposed to attempt to avoid the negative connotations associated with RP (IPA, 1999). RP, and by extension, SSBE, do, however, enjoy the highest accent prestige in England (Wells, 1982). It also remains the ‘chief’ accent taught abroad to those learning English (Crystal, 1995, p.299) as it is seen as both the most ‘beautiful’ and the ‘clearest’ accent by international speakers (Hughes et al, 2011, p.4).

RP represents the standard norm of England, and thus the myriad of regional accents that differ from it are perceived as non-standard, both by native and non-native speakers alike (Crystal, 1995). This linguistic hierarchy can be observed diachronically. Ellis coined the term ‘received’ (1869, p.23) in reference to this pronunciation in the late 19th century; later, in 1906, Wyld noted that RP had become the correct and standard way of speaking. This perspective is traditional, yet still pervasive in 21st century England, and current literature still notes how RP remains the standard norm for English in England. For example, Britain (2017) discusses at length how RP continues its status as the correct, standard and fixed pronunciation for English in England, and even describes this notion as ‘uncontroversial’ (p.291). RP is frequently demonstrated in the British media as the accent of news, politics or law, with the latest British prime minister Boris Johnson adopting a classic example of an RP accent. It is also the standard model of pronunciation for EFL or ESL learners (for further detail about this, see **2.6 – Non-standard accents in the English language classroom**).

Despite the prevalence of RP within the British media, and its depiction, as ‘standard’, regional accents around England are plentiful, and differ considerably dependent on where they are spoken. Despite being a relatively small island within the English-speaking world, there is a vast array of different accents in England, as well as in the rest of the UK. This is, in part, due to mass migration to and around the UK, and influences from colonizers from Europe. Furthermore, the prevalent class system within the UK has created significant discrepancies among class and education, both historically and within the modern day, which has led to a greater divergence in accents (Svartnik & Leech, 2016). Although increased social and geographical mobility has raised some concern about dialect levelling – where distinct accents can neutralize or diverge towards each other with greater contact (Kerswill & Williams, 2000) – there remains an ‘immense’ variation of pronunciation within the UK (Svartnik & Leech, 2016, p.124). As Wells (1982) states, ‘an accent characteristic of the north or east of the country is easy to identify’ (p.34), and many English regional accents are often associated with larger cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool, and Newcastle. Hope describes such accents as ‘wonderfully distinct’ (2021, p.ii), indicating their perceptible difference from standardised varieties.

2.3 - Comprehensibility

How accents are understood can be measured using scales of intelligibility and comprehensibility. Intelligibility has been described as the extent to which the message conveyed by one speaker is understood by another speaker (Nelson, 1982). Intelligibility refers only to the extent to which a speaker ‘understands an intended message’ (Derwing & Munro, 1997, p.2). Comprehensibility, however, refers to the experience of the listeners, and how difficult they *perceive* the message to be understood (Kang et al, 2019, 2020). In much of the literature, comprehensibility is measured using a rating scale to measure how easily listeners have perceived and registered a speaker’s intended message (Munro & Derwing, 1995; Derwing & Munro, 1997; Kang & Rubin, 2009; Kang et al, 2019, 2020). The present study will focus largely on the literature surrounding comprehensibility, as this method chooses only to measure ratings of such.

Ratings of comprehensibility include several different components, including processing fluency - this describes how easy or difficult it is for listeners to process the information presented to them by a certain interlocutor, and the effort they must make to understand it (Dragojevic et al, 2017). Generally, speech that is communicated in an accent that differs from that of the listener is seen as more difficult to process (Dragojevic et al, 2017), and so often speakers with higher levels of accentedness are given lower ratings on comprehensibility scales, particularly if these accents are very phonologically dissimilar (Dragojevic et al, 2017; Kang et al, 2019, 2020). Some research has even indicated that a ‘perceived’ accent – that is, when a speaker’s accent is observed to be different in some way from that of the listener - can affect the comprehension of a speaker. An example of this includes the work of Ahn and Moore (2011), who demonstrated that any non-specific non-native accent was negatively correlated with comprehension scores of speech. Within this work, the researchers found that any accent perceived to be phonologically dissimilar from that of the native-speaker university student participants resulted in a considerable decline in comprehensibility – consequently, student attitudes favoured accents that were closer to their own. This study seeks to investigate whether there are similar results for non-native speakers.

With regards to the comprehensibility of non-standard L1 English accents for non-native English speakers, little research has been produced. However, Hope’s (2021) doctoral study focuses primarily on the comprehensibility of Liverpool English for non-native students during their study abroad in Merseyside. She noted that students found the local accent significantly difficult to comprehend whilst they were studying in England, having had no prior exposure to this variety. This had dramatic consequences, including a reluctance to integrate into the local society, and an avoidance of speaking English with classmates, peers, and neighbours. The students within Hope’s (2021) research also confessed that the accent caused them to lose confidence in their English-speaking ability, which created some subsequent resentment of both the local area, as well as in their own communicative competence.

Therefore, exacerbating this concept further, is the relationship between language attitudes and comprehension scores. As Dragojevic and Giles (2016) note, there is an increasing volume of research demonstrating that the perception of both understanding and comprehending speech is linked to a speaker's attitudes towards a certain accent. Listeners have often justified any negative evaluations they may have of accents, specifically non-native or non-standard accents, by concluding that they are hard to process or comprehend (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Dragojevic et al, 2017; Shuck, 2006). Furthermore, another interrelated component of comprehensibility includes exposure to the speech variety in question. Kim (2021) argues that familiarity with a speaker's accent can lead to increased comprehension levels, as well as more positive attitudes towards the accent. Not only are comprehension levels seen to be higher when the interlocutor's speech is more familiar, they're also observed to be more accurate when coupled with ratings of intelligibility (Kang et al, 2020). The literature therefore demonstrates that measuring the comprehensibility of accents should not be performed in isolation, as there are attitudinal and exposure components to take into consideration; hence, this study focuses on both comprehensibility and attitudes, and with measures in place to control for exposure.

2.4 - Language attitudes

Research on language attitudes is plentiful and covers a broad range of components. Galloway and Rose (2015) argue that attitudes are one of 'the most distinctive and indispensable concepts in social psychology' (p.174) largely because of how they relate to certain behaviour (Garrett, 2010). Much of the literature uses Sarnoff's (1970) definition of attitudes to inform their discussion, which describes the phenomena as 'a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects' (p.79). Attitudes can be positive or negative, and have been studied in great detail, as they can inform social biases within different interactions (Cargile et al, 2006). Most importantly, attitudes are dynamic in nature, and are subject to change within individuals as well as within societies (Galloway & Rose, 2015) - they are heavily context-dependent, and should not be viewed as either static or rigid (Carrie, 2017). Furthermore, attitudes are often defined as consisting of three separate components: cognitive, affective and behavioural (Garrett, 2010; Loureiro-Rodriguez et al, 2013; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Artamanova, 2020). As Garrett (2010) summarizes, attitudes are cognitive in that they represent the relationship of the speaker to different entities; they are affective in that they involve emotions; and they are behavioural in that they are learned and can influence the way we act.

Language attitude research demonstrates that people often judge and make evaluations of others based on how they speak (Garrett, 2010). Listeners will react to phonological, syntactic or paralinguistic variation in their interlocutor's speech and evaluate their personal and social characteristics based on this (Cargile et al, 2006). As Derwing (2003) summarizes, 'an individual's speech tells a listener far more than the way one is dressed, the car one drives, or the hairstyle one wears' (p.548) thus highlighting the sometimes superficial nature of

language attitudes, in that speakers are judged by what they sound like at a surface level. However, examining language attitudes more closely, it is clear they can be organised on two dimensions: status and solidarity (Cargile et al, 2006; Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Dragojevic et al, 2017; Garrett, 2010). Status refers to how intelligent, professional or competent the speaker is viewed to be, whereas solidarity refers to how friendly or sociable they are deemed. Generally speaking, with regards to standard and non-standard varieties, speakers who adhere to more standard norms tend to rate higher on scales of status, whereas speakers who make use of non-standard variation often rate higher on scales of solidarity (Cargile et al, 2006; Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Dragojevic et al, 2017; Garrett, 2010).

Amongst all sociolinguistic literature studying language behaviour, accent is the most prevalent feature (Cargile et al, 2006). Accents, and the attitudes surrounding them, are so highly studied due to their social significance in the daily lives of different speakers, and how predictive they are of certain social behaviours (Garrett, 2010). Research has highlighted the importance of an awareness and analysis of certain language attitudes, as they are intrinsically linked to stereotypes and sociocultural biases. Although they are not always ‘publicly articulated’ (Garrett, 2010, p.1), and are indeed often unconscious, they provide an insight into how we perceive one another. Because of the ways in which people make judgements about others on the way they speak, some speakers may face difficulties accessing opportunities in many professional or social scenarios (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016). This is often due to the stereotypes that some language attitudes may create, causing some speakers to be placed in a certain social category that is difficult to change (McKenzie, 2008a).

There are multiple methods to measure language attitudes. McKenzie (2010) discusses the advantages of using indirect approaches, noting how these methods are considered to ‘penetrate deeper’ (p.45) than direct methods, by tapping into a listener’s subconscious and analysing their social awareness. Indirect methods also mean that participants are unaware of what the researcher is looking for and are thus arguably more likely to give more truthful or reliable responses rather than responses, aimed at trying to appease the researcher (Kim, 2021).

One indirect method which has proven extremely popular in research into language attitudes is the Matched Guise Test (MGT). Pioneered by Lambert et al (1960), this method involves participants listening to recordings of a speaker using different varieties of speech known as ‘guises’ - but the listening participant thinks that they are listening to different speakers. The listener then evaluates the ‘speakers’ on attitude-rating scales for characteristics such as friendliness, intelligence, professionalism, etc. The MGT has been praised for its ability to reflect attitudes, and has since become the foundation for both sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research (Garrett, 2010). However, as the speaker who is recorded adopts different ‘guises’, the MGT is often criticised for a lack of authenticity, as the speaker is mimicking speech varieties that differ from their own native variety (Galloway & Rose, 2015). The MGT has since been developed into the Verbal

Guise Test (VGT), in which different speakers are used for the recordings, thus providing a helpful response to the accent-authenticity criticism (Galloway & Rose, 2015). A recent example of this is Carrie's (2017) study, which included several speech samples of English from different parts of the world, allowing for more authentic listener ratings as the various stimuli were each speaker's own native variety. It has also been suggested that the indirect methods such as the MGT / VGT be followed up with qualitative methods such as an interview, to elicit responses that are contextualized in language, as participants initially believe they are rating speakers, not language varieties. Without this, the VGT is diminished, as comprehension scores are not explained, and participants do not have the opportunity to elaborate on their responses – follow-up qualitative methods encourage these. The present study has thus adopted said approach, opting for the VGT design with a follow-up interview (for further detail surrounding the methodology of this study, please see **3 - Methodology**).

Thus far, an explanation of the various accents in the UK, and the abstract concepts of comprehensibility and attitudes in general have been discussed. However, these issues need to be considered within the context of different speakers, both native and non-native. The following section will progress into this detail.

2.5 - Attitudes towards native, non-standard English accents

The following section will summarize and evaluate the literature surrounding attitudes towards regional accents in England - of both native and non-native speakers. The present study examines the attitudes of non-native speakers, and therefore this research will largely be the focus of the review.

2.5.1 - Native speakers

Evaluations by Carrie (2017) have noted that attitudes of native English speakers towards varying accents of English tend to rate more positively when an accent is closer – both phonologically, and geographically to its associated region - to that of a 'standard' variety. These accents, such as RP, are considered a 'prestige' variety, demonstrating the level of respect within the native speaker community (Bex & Watts, 1997). This variety is standardised, and used in institutions like the media, and it is often the norm that is taught in both native and non-native English classrooms.

Generally speaking, within England, RP (and, by extension, SSBE) is the most favourable accent, and in MGT investigations, rates highly on scales of status (Cargile & Giles, 1997; Giles, 1970; Lambert et al, 1960). This perception often leads to a discrimination against native English speakers whose regional accent differs from RP, as they aren't observed to speak 'proper' English (Derwing, 2003). Some studies have noted that some varieties of English, from urban areas such as London, Liverpool and Birmingham, receive a very negative response, and even have their own native speaker stigma attached to them (Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Ladegaard, 1998; McKenzie, 2008a). However, although varieties such as these are associated with lower levels of status, they are often also rated highly on such solidarity dimensions, like reliability and

friendliness (Giles, 1970; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Ladegaard, 1998; McKenzie, 2008a). Furthermore, as Cargile and Giles (1997) note, in investigations into language attitudes, the British (RP) accented speaker is often seen to be the least likeable, but the most intelligent speaker.

2.5.2 - Non-native speakers

Research into the perception of *any* non-standard accent of English (including non-native English accents) has been plentiful. An overall theme running through many studies is that of native-speakerism, demonstrating that native speakers, or *perceived* native speakers, often favour more highly on attitudinal scales than other speakers (Sherlock, 2016). An example of this includes Chan's (2016) study which took a multi-dimensional approach to analysing attitudes, factoring in components such as awareness and perception of accent within the VGT. Chan's VGT was split into two sections: first, attitudes were elicited from participants (Cantonese university students from Hong Kong) towards 7 different accents on status and solidarity; then, they were asked to elaborate on different pronunciations within various contexts, including the classroom (Chan, 2016). These results demonstrated a notable 'linguistic hierarchy' (Kim, 2021, p.12) in which varieties of speech associated with native speakers are placed higher than those of non-native speakers (Chan, 2016) – this method could, however, have been improved through using a follow-up interview, as explained in 2.4. The theme of a linguistic hierarchy that places native speakers above non-native speakers does, though, run throughout much of the literature, as McKenzie (2008a) notes. Furthermore, much of this literature regards comprehensibility as the reason that native speaker accents are preferred, as these tend to be rated as more comprehensible. To illustrate, both Dragojevic et al (2017) and Tsang (2020) showed that accents with large deviations – such as further phonological divergence - from the native speaker 'norm' produce a much more negative affective reaction. Tsang (2020) even noted a correlation between the comprehensibility of a speaker, and how well suited they were deemed for an English language teaching role. However, these studies, as with the majority of others, compare a native 'English' accent as a single entity to other non-native English accents. That is to say, the only native English accents used in these studies are that of RP or General American (GA) English. McKenzie (2008b) has criticised such work for conceptualizing native English as a single entity (RP or GA), thus perpetuating any native speaker norms. RP and GA accents are not only the most associated with native speakers and thus perpetuate the norm, they are also seen to be highly comprehensible as they are the norm from which other accents deviate. This relationship is thus circular in nature, as supported by the relationship between comprehensibility and language attitudes outlined above. There is therefore a complex yet positive correlation between what is seen as a desirable accent, and one that is deemed comprehensible.

In contrast with native speakers, Galloway and Rose (2015) note that RP is much more popular and prevalent outside of Britain, in its ever-increasing non-native speaker community, than it is within England itself. On the whole, however, there is little research analysing the perceptions of non-native English speakers towards non-standard English varieties from within England itself. Carrie and McKenzie (2018) note that, generally,

non-native English speakers demonstrate a preference for RP and GA, with a desire to adopt an RP accent themselves in conversation. This is observed in studies such as McKenzie's (2008a, 2008b), which notably are amongst some of the few studies that incorporate regional English and UK accents into attitudinal investigations. Interestingly, when comparing varieties of English from Scotland, the Japanese participants of McKenzie's (2008a) study demonstrate a preference for the standardised Scottish accent over the more vernacular or non-standard accents, such as that of Glasgow. It is therefore seen that standardised accents are more preferable for non-native speakers. Studies like this are notable in that they do not recognise native English accents as a single entity, but acknowledge the presence of regional accents too, which is often ignored in research (Galloway & Rose, 2015). Overall, however, RP is rated the most highly in these studies (McKenzie, 2008a, 2008b) as well as similar work in other contexts (Carrie & McKenzie, 2018; Hiraga, 2005; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). However, as noted previously by McKenzie (2008b), work in this area is minimal, or in fact less generalisable, as the small volume of existing studies tend to use small sampling methods that are less robust. The present study seeks to address this gap.

2.6 – Non-standard accents in the English language classroom

It has been noted that a potential reason for a preference for the RP accent by non-native English speakers is due to a significant exposure to this accent (Carrie, 2017; McKenzie, 2015; Sherlock, 2016). Indeed, as noted by Sherlock (2016), the depiction of English used in textbooks and within the classroom plays a significant role in the construction of what is deemed to be 'correct' English for its students. A view that the prototypical native speaker of English is one who speaks RP and is often a member of the white, socially dominant culture of the UK and the USA is perpetuated in English language classrooms throughout the world (Sherlock, 2016). RP and GA are seen as the 'default pronunciation models' when teaching spoken English (Carrie, 2017, p.432), and it is concluded that native-speaker norms are often the preferred basis for learning in many English classrooms (He & Zahn, 2010).

There have, however, been some calls to revise these norms. Jenkins (2000) notes that due to the increased global prevalence of English as a second language (ESL) and/or English as a lingua franca (ELF) methods of communication, it is restrictive to only expose students to a standard variety of English when the likelihood is that they will encounter different non-standard varieties during their lives. Increased exposure to non-standard varieties may help learners' processing abilities, and, due to the aforementioned relationship between comprehensibility and attitude ratings, may help assuage the biases towards standard varieties like RP and GA (Tsang, 2020). Kang et al (2019) applaud some standardised English tests, such as IELTS or TOEFL, for including some non-RP and non-GA accents in their listening activities and assessments. However, it can be argued that this does not go far enough, as they only incorporate non-native accents into this, and so regional or non-standard varieties of native English continue to be ignored.

The current literature discussed within this section highlight some significant findings, including a lack of comprehensibility of non-standard accents for both native and non-native speakers alike, as well as a perpetuation of negative attitudes towards such. However, as previously noted, this literature is yet to extensively use non-standard English accents within its methods, leading to a significant gap in any attitudinal or comprehensibility analysis. There are, therefore, several key questions that need to be addressed within second language acquisition research. Firstly, how easily are non-native English accents comprehended by non-native English listener? Secondly, what are the attitudes of non-native speakers towards these accents, and do these link to any levels of comprehensibility? Finally, is there a desire for non-native English speakers to be exposed to English accents earlier in their English language learning journey, and how can this be achieved? The research questions of the current study – presented in the following section – seek to explore these areas.

2.7 - Research Questions

This study seeks to explore and respond to the following research questions.

- **RQ1:** How are non-standard UK English accents perceived by Chinese ESL learners?
 - **RQ1a:** How comprehensible are these accents for Chinese ESL learners?
 - **RQ1b:** What are the attitudes towards these accents?
- **RQ2:** Could these findings have any pedagogical implications for future ELT classrooms?

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used within the present study. This includes a detailed description and rationale of the design, sampling strategy, participants, materials, procedure, and ethical considerations of the study.

3.1 - Research design

To obtain a rich and detailed response to the research questions, a mixed methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was used. Quantitative research has been defined as an investigation into social phenomena using variables that can be measured with numbers or statistical analyses, whereas qualitative research forms a larger picture using detail with words (Cresswell, 1994). Research in the social sciences, however, has noted that there may be issues in maintaining a distinction between these two approaches, in only applying one or the other (Richards, 2005; Rose et al, 2020). A mixed methods approach, described as ‘developing approach’ in the field of applied linguistics (Hashemi, 2020, p.39), was therefore employed in this study to address some of the limitations of using quantitative or qualitative inquiry individually. Although quantitative data is seen as more efficient, rigorous, focused, and tightly-controlled (Dörnyei, 2007) than qualitative research, it limits the researcher’s ability to explore results. This is because quantitative research focuses on numbers, therefore reducing human attributes or interactions to numerical values, without employing a nuanced or thorough interrogation of individual differences. Furthermore, qualitative research is applauded for its exploratory nature that broadens the field’s understanding (Dörnyei, 2007) - however, it has also been criticized for its time-consuming nature and lack of precision, as well as subjectivity in the researcher’s own interpretation of the data. By employing a mixed methods approach, the researcher hopes to combine the merits of quantitative and qualitative analysis (Rose et al, 2020), and use one’s strength to satisfy the other’s weakness to ensure a prolific and nuanced dataset to aid answering their enquiry.

This study was conducted using a verbal guise test, and a follow-up semi-structured interview. The verbal guise test was used to elicit ratings of comprehensibility (**RQ1a**), as well as attitudes (**RQ1b**), whereas the interview was used solely to elaborate further on participants’ attitudes (**RQ1b**). The verbal guise test (hereafter referred to as VGT) is an adaptation of the matched guise test, established by Lambert et al (1960), and since been used extensively to investigate language attitudes in both monolingual and multilingual environments (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Guzzardo Tamargo et al, 2019; He & Zhan, 2010; Loureiro-Rodriguez et al, 2013; Ryan et al, 2017). This involves participants listening to audio stimuli and evaluating each speaker using different characteristics on a pre-designed survey (Galloway & Rose, 2015). The decision to include a survey-based exercise in this study was due to its unique ability to capture large amounts of information both in a systematic and rigorous way (Dörnyei, 2007). The VGT was conducted online to allow

for participants to attend in various geographical locations, whilst the researcher was based in Oxford. The online survey also encouraged participants to attend in their own time, and to avoid any potential COVID-19 health risks¹. The semi-structured interview, presented as optional to the participants of the VGT, was used to encourage elaboration on previous responses, and elicit further data in a natural and flexible way (Dörnyei, 2007; Galletta, 2013). The interview was also conducted online using Microsoft Teams to allow for the flexibility mentioned above, and to encourage a naturalistic and comfortable environment for the participant situated at home (Rose et al, 2020). This design therefore establishes a reciprocal and interdependent combination of quantitative and qualitative inquiry to fulfil the criteria of mixed methods research – a summary of this is presented below in **Table 3.1.2**. Details of the VGT and interview guide designed and employed for the present study will be discussed further in 3.4.

Table 3.1.2 – Summary of data collection instruments and analysis strategy

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Data Collection Instruments</u>	<u>Analysis</u>
RQ1: How are non-standard UK English accents perceived by Chinese ESL learners?	VGT survey Semi-structured interview	Descriptive statistics Friedman's ANOVA Wilcoxon Post-Hoc Spearman's Rho Thematic analysis Word frequency
RQ1a: How comprehensible are these accents for Chinese ESL learners?	VGT survey (each speaker rated for comprehensibility on a semantic differential scale)	Descriptive statistics Friedman's ANOVA Wilcoxon Post-Hoc Spearman's Rho
RQ1b: What are the attitudes towards these accents?	VGT survey (long answer questions about each speaker) Semi-structured interview	Thematic analysis Word frequency
RQ2: Could these findings have any pedagogical implications for future ELT classrooms?	VGT survey (long answer questions about English language teaching pedagogy) Semi-structured interview	Thematic analysis

3.2 - Sampling

Both snowball and convenience sampling were used to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria for the present study – this is articulated within **3.3 – participants and setting**. The researcher used their network

¹ This study was conducted in 2022, throughout the easing of social restrictions in and around the UK during the decline of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

connections within the Chinese societies of several English universities to advertise and recruit participants for the study through email and social media (details of the recruitment materials are located in **Appendix A**). Participants were encouraged to share the information about the study with other parties who fulfilled the inclusion criteria to expand the sample size. Furthermore, as a previous member of Chinese to English language exchange programs throughout England, the researcher invited personal contacts to share information about the present study to stimulate recruitment further.

3.3 - Participants and setting

The target population for the present study is summarized below in **Table 3.3.1**. The researcher recruited Chinese students currently studying at universities within England, who speak Mandarin as their first language (L1). This population was targeted specifically for multiple reasons. Firstly, in 2021, the Higher Education Statistics Agency stated that of all international students studying in the UK, 24% were of Chinese origin, which is indeed a significant proportion. Secondly, the researcher's personal connections to several Chinese societies due to language exchange experience allowed for an efficient sampling process. Thirdly, a homogenous sample was used to prevent any variation that may occur as a result of differing first languages. The inclusion criteria included members who had moved to England to complete their studies and had not lived in a majority L1 English country previously. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students from these universities were targeted specifically to ensure similar levels of formal English language education to promote consistency within the sample, with entry requirements for the universities including formal English examination such as IELTS.

Table 3.3.1 – Participant inclusion criteria

<u>Participants must be:</u>
An undergraduate student studying at any English university, OR a postgraduate student studying at any English university who studied their previous degree in a non-English speaking country AND
a native Chinese (Mandarin) speaker AND
a second language English speaker AND
living in England to complete their degree studies

The study sample consisted of 32 participants, aged between 18 and 24, of which 7 identified as male and 25 identified as female. 32 participants took part in the VGT, and 6 participants were selected for a follow-up interview (for an explanation of this process, please see section **3.4.2 – semi-structured interviews**). This value for participants was calculated by means of the precedent set by Cargile et al (2006), the design of which was used as inspiration for this study. Students who had previously lived in a majority L1 English country (such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada or Australia) were excluded from the recruitment

criteria to avoid confounding any attitude or comprehensibility results from increased exposure to different native varieties of English.

The VGT was conducted online using Qualtrics survey software. The decision to conduct the survey online was done to encourage participant recruitment, as they can attend the survey in their own time within the data collection timeframe – this flexibility allows for participants to be more comfortable, and thus more willing to participate. Furthermore, as the inclusion criteria included students living throughout England, it was more practical to allow for data collection to be wholly online, to avoid transportation issues such as cost and commuting times. Finally, conducting the study online ensures that no COVID-19 health risks were posed, either to the researcher or to the participants within the study.

The semi-structured interviews were also conducted online, using Microsoft Teams. This was again to allow for the advantages of location-based flexibility listed above, and also so that the interviews could be recorded and stored for transcription (for details on the storage of data, see **3.7 – ethical considerations**). Furthermore, the decision to conduct the interviews online was also made in light of considerations of a comfortable and flexible setting for participants in a familiar environment, to elicit more naturalistic interview data (Rose et al, 2020).

3.4 - Materials and data collection instruments

3.4.1 - Verbal Guise Test (VGT)

The VGT is a modified version of the matched-guise test (MGT), which was pioneered by Lambert et al (1960) but has since been extensively employed in both monolingual and multilingual environments as an indirect measure of sociolinguistic attitudes (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Guzzardo Tamargo et al, 2019; He & Zhan, 2010; Loureiro-Rodriguez et al, 2013; Ryan et al, 2017). Within an MGT, participants are asked to evaluate different characteristics of several audio-recorded speakers. However, unbeknownst to the participant, the speaker remains the same, and adopts several different guises (Galloway & Rose, 2015). The guises here include different varieties of a language, including both phonological varieties of accent, and lexical and syntactic varieties of dialect (Garrett, 2010). Despite the MGT's popularity as a leading method of sociolinguistic research (Garrett, 2010), it has been criticized. The use of single speakers who adopt different guises are seen as a concern for effective internal validity, as people who speak different authentic and convincing varieties are scarce (Jackson & Jacobs, 1983; McKenzie, 2008a). Exacerbating this issue are more concerns surrounding accent-authenticity, such as the intonational features of the speaker's native accent affecting the guises they are mimicking (Garrett, 2010). The decision was therefore made to use a VGT in the present study, which incorporates multiple different speakers speaking their native varieties of English (Cargile et al, 2006). The VGT has grown more favourable to researchers than the MGT in recent years, particularly when investigating attitudes to English language speakers in second-language (L2) contexts, due

to its increased internal validity through more authentically accented speakers (Cargile et al, 2006; Carrie, 2017; Chan, 2016; McKenzie, 2008a, 2008b).

The accents used in the VGT in this study were UK-based accents, specifically those from several parts of England, including Liverpool, Newcastle, Bristol, Yorkshire, as well as Received Pronunciation (RP). These speech varieties were chosen to effectively address the research questions, as well as to contribute to the lack of literature surrounding attitudes to local accents of English within the Inner Circle (Galloway & Rose, 2015). RP was included within the study to provide an example of a standard variety, against the rest of the accents, which are considered non-standard. Overall, there are two ways of interpreting the distinction between standard and non-standard varieties. Firstly, these can be viewed as a binary: some accents are standard (in this case, RP), and some are non-standard (in this case, the regional accents of Liverpool, Newcastle, Bristol and Yorkshire). Secondly, these can also be viewed on a continuum, with a scale demonstrating accents that are closer to (or further away from) the standard, with regards to phonological variation. Within this study, these are analysed in terms of a binary distinction: either standard, or non-standard. Native speakers of each of these varieties were approached by the researcher and recorded to provide the audio stimuli for the VGT. The material for each recording was an excerpt from a popular children's story and was the same for each speech sample to promote consistency (a transcription of this is located in **Appendix C**). These recordings were then piloted on 15 other native speakers of English to ensure they were identifiable and representative of the speech variety described, as well as perceived as standard or non-standard. Once this was confirmed, the audio recordings were incorporated into the survey.

The survey for the VGT was developed by the researcher, but with inspiration taken from previous work in the field, particularly that of McKenzie (2008a, 2008b), Cargile et al (2006), and Carrie (2017) (for the full VGT survey, please refer to **Appendix B**). However, the VGT survey for this study was simplified due to research time constraints, and to limit the main focus of the quantitative element of the VGT to responses surrounding comprehensibility (**RQ1a**). Unfortunately, a closer replication of previous VGT surveys for a full quantitative analysis of both comprehensibility and attitudes was beyond the scope of the present study; furthermore, it was desirable for the questionnaire to be fairly short to avoid participant fatigue (Iwaneic, 2020). It was therefore decided to use semantic differential scales in the VGT to elicit responses with regards to comprehensibility (**RQ1a**) and use the long-answer responses and follow-up interview data to elicit qualitative data surrounding language attitudes (**RQ1b**) and English language teaching pedagogy (**RQ2**). Semantic differential scales ranging from 1 to 6 were used to avoid a neutral tendency bias, and to also elicit quick judgements to minimize longer mental processes as to reduce the risk of acquiescence biases (Garrett, 2010). This is where participants will rate or interpret stimuli more positively, either to appease the researcher or to appear more agreeable (Garrett, 2010). These scales were repeated for each speaker, and then, after this,

the survey included questions requiring longer responses for a more qualitative approach. At the end of the survey, participants could indicate whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

3.4.2 - Semi-structured Interview

It has been recommended previously that the MGT - and, thus by extension, the VGT - be supported using direct approaches or contextualized using further qualitative inquiry (Edwards, 1982; Galloway & Rose, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are an established method of supportive qualitative data elicitation in investigations surrounding sociolinguistic attitudes (Carrie, 2017; Derwing, 2003; Kim, 2021; Sung, 2016b; Tucker, 2020). A semi-structured interview guide was designed for this study to promote reflexivity and exploration of some of the topics that arose both in previous literature, and in the long answer questions during the VGT (Rose et al, 2020; Tucker, 2020) (The details of this interview guide are located in **Appendix D**). At the end of the VGT survey, participants expressed whether they may want to complete a follow-up interview. In total, 30 out of the 32 VGT survey participants indicated they had a desire to do so. However, due to the restricted timescale of this study, only 6 participants were chosen to complete this. These participants were chosen at random, to avoid interviewer bias. The interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams - this technology was used to facilitate and record the interviews to ensure data collection could progress whilst the researcher was situated away from the participants (O'Connor et al, 2008). Furthermore, the decision to hold the interviews online was also made due to considerations of comfort for the participant in the naturalistic environment of their own home (Rose et al, 2020). Microsoft Teams was chosen to facilitate these interviews, due to its recording and upload function to the OneDrive at The University of Oxford (for details surrounding the ethical procedures of data storage, please see **3.7 – Ethical considerations**). Furthermore, Microsoft Teams also allows for transcription of the interviews, which, given the limited timeframe to complete the study, was seen as advantageous.

3.5 - Procedure

Participants were recruited using email and social media. Societies at English universities with high populations of Chinese students – either the Chinese society of the corresponding university, or the local branch of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association - were approached via email using an informative recruitment poster (see **Appendix A**). This poster was also circulated using the researcher's own Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts. Once recruited, participants were asked to read through the information sheet (see **Appendix F**) and to sign consent forms (see **Appendix G** and **Appendix H**) before data collection began. Participants were also given an opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns before the data collection process began.

The VGT was conducted online, using Qualtrics survey software (for a version of this survey, please see **Appendix B**). Before the survey began, and the audio recordings were played, a further information page was presented to participants to ensure complete understanding and clarity, and a further opportunity was provided

for any questions via email. Participants then were asked to begin the survey. The audio recordings were played one at a time, with the option to repeat the audio-recording if necessary. Unfortunately, the software used did not offer a function to track how often participants listened to each recording. However, it was possible to see how long each participant spent completing the survey, which ranged between 25 and 30 minutes, so it is reasonable to assume the majority of participants did not play each recording more than twice. After each speaker, participants were asked a series of questions concerning the comprehensibility of each speaker, and any attitudes they may have towards such. After the audio section was complete, participants were given the opportunity to elaborate further on their ideas in the long-answer questions surrounding speaker variation, language attitudes, and English language teaching pedagogy. At the end of the survey, participants were asked whether they would like to partake in a follow-up interview. Those who did not wish to participate in a follow-up interview were then emailed with an expression of gratitude and thanks from the researcher. The quantitative data surrounding issues of comprehensibility was then analysed using SPSS, and the qualitative data surrounding attitudes and English language teaching was analysed using NVIVO.

Follow-up interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams at a time deemed convenient by both the researcher and the interviewee. The participants were asked to sign another consent form for the interview and read further information before the interview began (see **Appendix H**). Participants were also given a copy of their VGT answers and played the audio-recordings again to stimulate their memory. The interviews then lasted between twenty and thirty minutes per participant. These were recorded and transcribed, and then subsequently analysed using NVIVO. Participants who completed the follow-up interview were sent a thank you e-card after the data collection process was complete.

3.6 – Piloting

The VGT survey was piloted on 6 participants who were representative of the population frame. Pilot testing is imperative for enquiries such as within the present study for multiple reasons, including but not limited to: checking the practicalities of conducting interviews and surveys; to ensure the tasks themselves actually work; and to ensure there is variability within the data on which to perform subsequent analyses. The pilot interview was also imperative for the researcher to practice her interview skills to ensure participants would be comfortable, and the interview would be as naturalistic as possible (Prior, 2016; Rolland et al, 2020). Once pilot participants had individually completed the VGT and the interview, they were asked to provide feedback on the questions and statements used in both the survey and the interview, as well as on any technological issues such as the online survey or audio quality within the VGT, or the process of online interviewing. Overall, the piloting process ran smoothly without issue – however, some participants commented on the layout of the online survey and indicated that there should be more space to complete the long-answer questions. Furthermore, there was a grammatical error in one of the questions which impeded understanding. After receiving such feedback from the pilot participants, the relevant changes were made – the space to write

responses increased, and the grammatical error corrected - to improve clarity and understanding of the VGT survey.

The semi-structured interview was also piloted, but only on 3 participants, as, overall, only 6 participants were required for the semi-structured interview in the main study, due to the restricted research time frame. Again, the overall questioning process was thoroughly understood by the participants involved. There were some technology issues using Microsoft Teams, including difficulties with connection, but these were resolved on the behalf of the researcher swiftly.

3.7 - Ethical considerations

The collection, storage and transfer of all data for this present study was completed in accordance with The University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (2022). Data collection did not commence until after ethics approval was granted by the relevant bodies (see **Appendix E**). Once this was received, participants were recruited using an informative poster, circulated via email and social media (see **Appendix A**). Before any data was collected, participants were informed of the relevant procedures using the participant information sheet (see **Appendix F**) and asked to sign consent forms for both the VGT and the follow-up interview (see **Appendix G** and **Appendix H**). Interview audio-recordings, transcriptions, and survey data were stored on a password protected USB and The University of Oxford OneDrive and will be kept for a minimum of 3 years after the present study is complete, as per The University of Oxford's Department of Education Research guidelines. COVID-19 safety measures were adhered to throughout to ensure the safety and welfare of the researcher, their colleagues, and the participants of the study.

4 - Results

The results of the current study are presented in this chapter. The research questions, which seek to investigate the comprehensibility of various native non-standard (regional) English accents, and associated attitudes were analysed using a mixed methodology, employing both qualitative and quantitative elements through a survey and series of semi-structured interviews. The present results are therefore organised into two sections: quantitative and qualitative results.

4.1 - Quantitative Results

Within the VGT survey, there were two questions that elicited numerical responses. Firstly, participants were asked to rate how comprehensible each speaker was on a semantic differential scale. The scale values were from 1 to 6, with 1 being the lowest level of comprehensibility, and 6 being the highest. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and the means of each accent comprehensibility rating are displayed in **Table 4.1.1**. RP has the highest mean comprehensibility rating, with a score of 5.78. Following this, the Bristol and Yorkshire accent scored the second and third highest, with mean comprehensibility scores of 5.09 and 4.94 respectively. The two accents that scored the lowest in levels of comprehensibility were Newcastle ($M = 3.09$), and Liverpool ($M = 2.78$). In terms of sociolinguistics, if organised on a scale, RP would be the closest accent to what is considered ‘standard’; followed by Bristol, then Yorkshire, and then Newcastle and Liverpool would appear approximately at equally low levels. This is due to the phonology of such accents, which will be discussed in further detail in 5.1.2. At a descriptive level, there seems to be an observable association between the accents that are deemed closer to the ‘standard’ and their comprehensibility scores - the further the deviation from the standard, the less comprehensible they are deemed to be. This conclusion, however, is only drawn from the descriptive statistics, and needs to be supported with inferential statistical testing.

Table 4.1.1 – Descriptive Statistics for Accent Comprehensibility Scores in VGT survey

Accent	Mean Comprehensibility Score	Standard Deviation
Liverpool	2.78	0.80
RP	5.78	0.42
Yorkshire	4.94	0.84
Newcastle	3.09	0.64
Bristol	5.09	0.59

Before running any inferential tests, it was important to assess whether these scores had a normal distribution – this determines which test to run. For each set of comprehensibility scores, histograms were created, and upon initial inspection, the bell curve of each accent matched that of a normal distribution.

However, for a more precise calculation of normality, the numerical values of skewness and kurtosis values were calculated (see **Appendix J**). The values of skewness and kurtosis for a normal distribution are between -2 and +2 (George & Mallery, 2010) – all of the accent comprehensibility scores were therefore normal, apart from RP. Therefore, a non-parametric needed to be used as the assumption of normality is violated for one of the accents (Linebach et al, 2013).

To assess whether there was a statistically significant difference in the means of the comprehensibility scores of each accent, a Friedman's (non-parametric) ANOVA was run using IBM's SPSS software (v.28). This test was deemed appropriate because the variable scores are ordinal, given that they are ratings on a scale (Field, 2018). **Table 4.1.2** conveys the results of this test. Within this test, a p value of $p = < 0.05$ is used as a point of significance (Field, 2018). Therefore, if $p = > 0.05$, there is no significant relationship (Field, 2018). As observable from this table, there is a statistically significant difference in mean ratings depending on each accent, as $\chi^2(2) = 104.86$, and $p = < 0.001$.

Table 4.1.2 - Friedman's ANOVA Test - Comprehensibility Ratings

N	32
Chi-Square	104.86
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	< 0.001
Exact Sig.	< 0.001

This ANOVA indicates that amongst these five mean scores (of each accent) there is at least one statistically significant difference; however, this test alone does not identify where precisely the difference lies. To further investigate where the difference lies, a series of post-hoc tests were completed. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank tests for the different combinations of accents were conducted with the Bonferroni correction applied (Stehlic-Barry & Babinec, 2017; Field, 2018), in order to reduce the risk of a Type 1 error when running multiple statistical tests. This involved dividing the original significance level ($p = < 0.05$) by the number of tests ran (10, as demonstrated in **Table 4.1.3**), resulting in a significance level of $p = < 0.005$. **Table 4.1.3** illustrates that there were statistically significant differences between most accents, except between Liverpool and Newcastle, and Bristol and Yorkshire. This is understandable, in that Liverpool and Newcastle had both the lowest comprehensibility ratings overall, as their mean scores have a difference of only 0.3. Similarly, although these accents did not score as low as Liverpool and Newcastle, the mean comprehensibility scores of Bristol and Yorkshire were also very close, with a difference of 0.15.

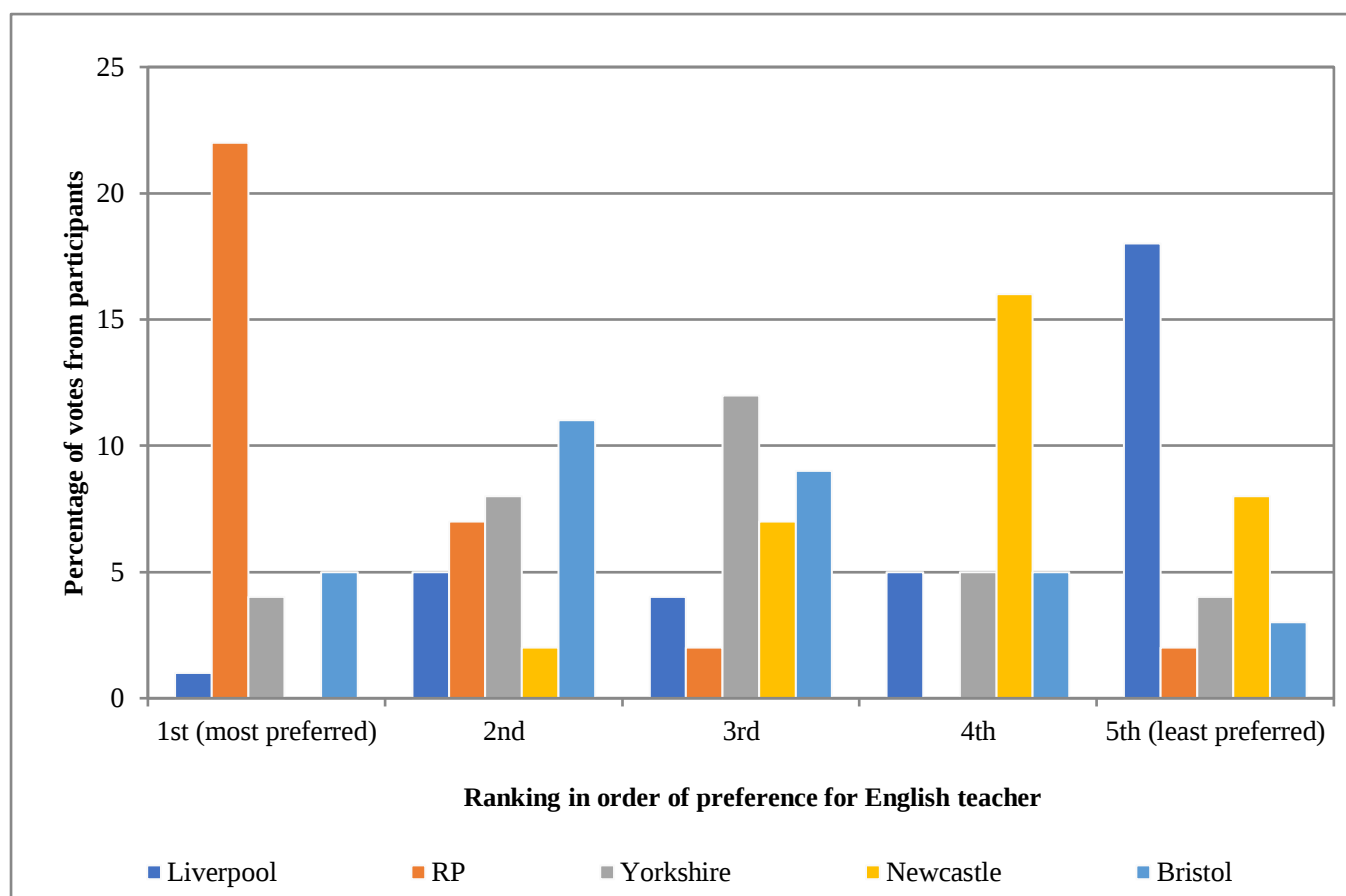
There was, therefore, in the majority, a statistically significant difference between the comprehensibility scores of most accents, indicating that there was a variability in the comprehensibility scores assigned to each speaker (and thus, the accent of such) from each participant.

Table 4.1.3 - Comprehensibility Ratings - Wilcoxon Post-Hoc Tests

	RP - Liverpool	York - Liverpool	Newcastle - Liverpool	Bristol - Liverpool	York - RP	Newcastle - RP	Bristol - RP	Newcastle - York	Bristol - York	Newcastle - Bristol
Z	-5.018b	-5.014b	-1.525b	-4.814b	-3.748c	-5.032c	-3.989c	-4.601c	-.920b	-4.933c
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.127	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.358	< 0.001

- a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
- b. Based on negative ranks.
- c. Based on positive ranks.

Participants were also asked to rank the accents of each speaker in order of preference for their English teachers - that is to say, what they would prefer their English teachers to sound like. The results are demonstrated in **Figure 4.1.4**. RP is clearly the most popular, with 66.7% of participants voting it as their most preferred accent for their English teacher. The Bristolian accent ranked the second most popular accent, with 15.2% of participants voting it as their most preferred teacher accent. With regards to the least preferred accent for English teachers, the Liverpool accent was ranked fifth by 54.5% of participants, whereas Newcastle was the least preferred for 24.2% of all participants. Therefore, there seems to be an observable pattern such that accents perceived as 'standard' - in that both RP and Bristol are southern English accents, the area associated with 'standardness' and education - are more preferred accents for an English teacher as rated by this sample.

Figure 4.1.4 - Accent Preferences for English Teachers

To analyse whether there was a correlation between the accent comprehensibility score and preference ranking, a Spearman's Rho test was ran. This method is popular to investigate if there is correlation between both rank order variables and rating responses on measures such as surveys (Abbott, 2014; Field, 2018). The results of this test are summarized in **Table 4.1.5**.

Table 4.1.5 - Spearman's Rho - Association between comprehensibility and preference

	Preference Rating Correlation Coefficient	p. Value
Liverpool	-0.294	0.102
RP	0.060	0.743
Yorkshire	-0.022	0.904
Newcastle	-0.375	0.034
Bristol	0.133	0.467

Similar to the Friedman's ANOVA (see **Table 4.1.2**) if $p < 0.05$, there is evidence of a statistically significant bivariate correlation between two ordinal variables - in this case, accent comprehensibility and accent rank

preference (Field, 2018). The table demonstrates that there is only one accent with a statistically significant correlation between comprehensibility and teacher preference rating - Newcastle. This is also a negative correlation, demonstrating that participants were less likely to prefer this accent over others. The other accents possess p. values that are greater than 0.05, and so the relationship between the comprehensibility scores and preference ratings for these accents can be deemed statistically insignificant.

To summarize the quantitative results from this data overall, the comprehensibility scores for each accent showed a preference for the standard accent (RP), which was supported by the teacher preference ratings also. Furthermore, the further the non-standard accent varied from RP, the less comprehensible they were for participants, and the less preferable they were for English teachers. This helps to inform both **RQ1a** and **RQ1b** (see 2.7 for detail) – however, to explore this inquiry further, these methods have been supported by qualitative methods, which will be analysed in the following section.

4.2 - Qualitative Results

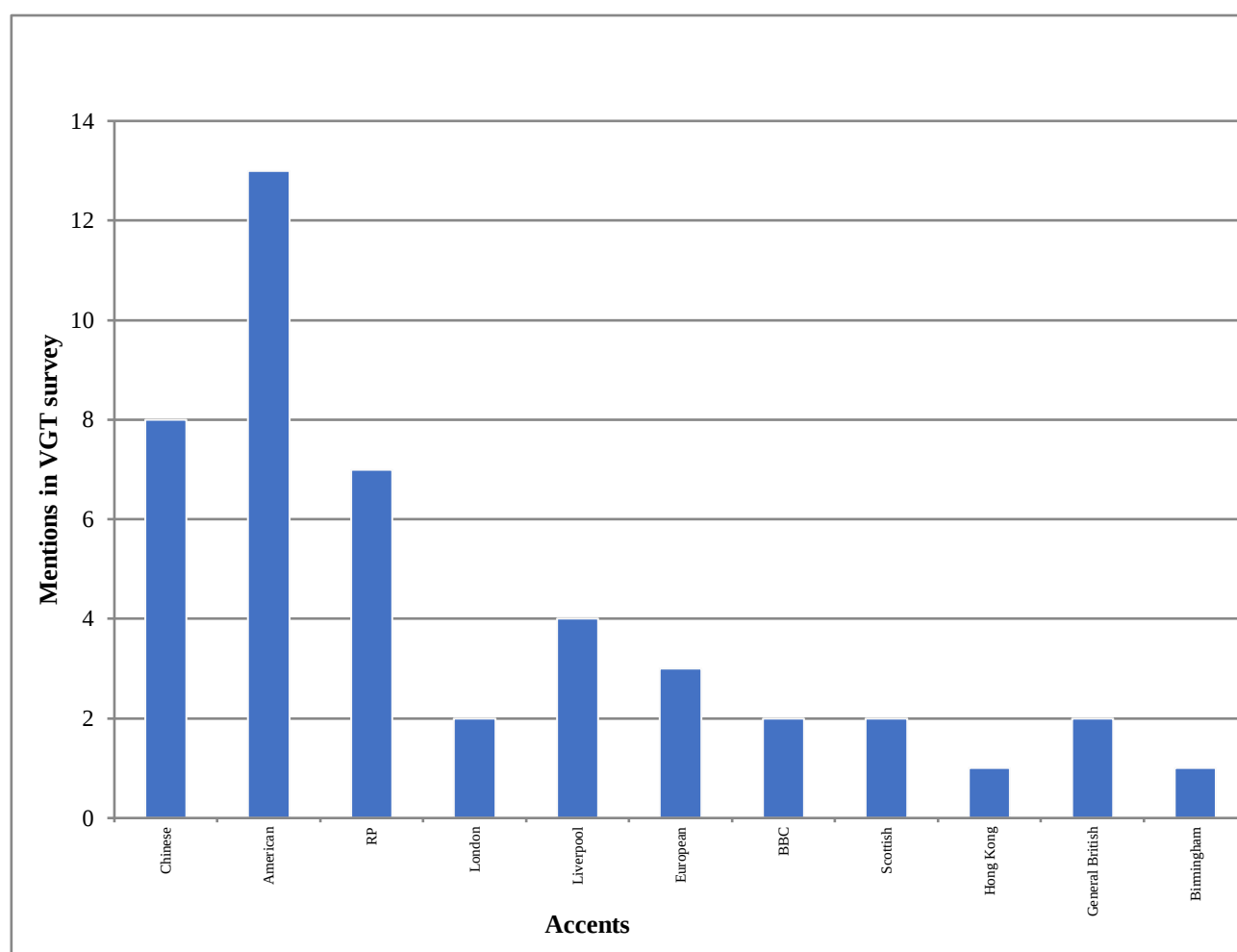
In both the VGT survey and the semi-structured interviews, qualitative responses were recorded to provide an exploration into participant attitudes surrounding varying native speaker accents of English. Both the qualitative responses to the survey, and the semi-structured interviews, underwent thorough thematic analysis, defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a ‘method for identifying, analysis, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data’ (p.297). Despite criticism that thematic analysis is not especially ‘scientific’ (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), thematic analysis provides both a flexible and nuanced approach to qualitative data analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) that is both popular and rigorous (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inspired by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process for establishing trustworthiness within thematic analysis (as reported in Nowell et al, 2017), the following procedure was employed: 1) familiarizing oneself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, 6) producing the report. From this thematic approach, several major themes were identified prior to analysis from previous literature and were used to draw meanings from this data to the overall field. These include: a lack of exposure to non-standard accents, negative attitudes towards non-standard accents, difficulty understanding non-standard accents, and a desire to increase exposure to non-standard accents. The results of these themes will be reported in **4.2.1**, **4.2.2** and **4.2.3** respectively.

Furthermore, initial coding was supplemented for both intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. Qualitative data was analysed at two stages by the researcher, to reduce the possibility of bias, with an appropriate space of time between points of analysis to promote intra-data reliability – 3 weeks, to ensure that re-coding was achieved without influence from the first codes, and to ensure all data was coded within the restricted timeframe of the study. Data was also initially coded by a research peer to increase inter-data reliability. This research peer was also an English-speaking student, completing the same master’s course of study as the present researcher. The two researchers agreed on codes, and themes were generated based on these findings.

The peer researcher coded 3 interviews (half of the overall amount) due to the aforementioned research timeframe, and the researcher considered this sufficient to promote inter-data reliability. Using NVIVO, Cohen's κ was calculated to determine if there was an agreement between the intra- and inter-rater analyses. The κ value for the intra-rater reliability was 0.8, suggesting a high agreement between the researcher at the two different time points (Field, 2018). The κ value for the inter-rater reliability was 0.7, suggesting a moderate to high agreement between researchers (Field, 2018). When codes weren't agreed, the researchers discussed their points of view, and any lack of understanding or clarity was resolved to each code.

4.2.1 - Lack of exposure to non-standard English accents

When asked what other English accents participants were familiar with, answers were varied and informative, as displayed in **Figure 4.2.1.1**. 'American' was the most popular answer, featuring a total of 13 times in the data. Overall, as expected from an entirely Chinese population, Chinese-English and Hong Kong-English accents were mentioned 9 times. RP was the third most popular answer, with 7 mentions in total, and both 'general English' and 'BBC English' received 2 mentions. Liverpool was mentioned 4 times. This finding is understandable as all participants who mentioned Liverpool studied at The University of Liverpool, yet still gave relatively low comprehensibility ratings for the Liverpool accented speaker. It would appear that most answers given were relatively vague - for example, describing the standard accent for an entire country or even continent, as conveyed in **Figure 4.2.1.1**. Barely any regional British accents were mentioned - as stated previously, Liverpool received 4 mentions, and London and Birmingham both received 2 mentions. Therefore, it seems that the more standard an accent is - for example, American English, or RP - the more familiar participants were with it, establishing a positive correlation between familiarity and standardness.

Figure 4.2.1.1 - VGT responses - English Accent Familiarity

Throughout the 6 interviews, reference to an awareness of different pronunciations of English arose 5 times altogether. However, this was mainly limited to the phonological differences between American and British English. Furthermore, when asked about their previous exposure to various accents (before moving to the UK), interview participants made reference only to standard accents of English, which they tended to compare to Speaker 2 (the RP speaker) within the VGT survey. Furthermore, there were multiple comments regarding media and television within the VGT survey, during which participants elaborated on how they came to know such standard accents. These included comments such as:

‘I feel like I recognise it [Speaker 2] from films and TV series’

[In reference to RP] *‘I heard most frequently when I learn English’*

‘The second one [Speaker 2] is like Emma Watson’s accent’

In one interview, when asked to elaborate on her negative opinions of the Liverpool accent, the participant (who studied at The University of Liverpool) attempted to explain why it was ‘very strange’ and ‘hard to understand’ (**Appendix I, Interview Participant 2** - p. 68). She cited her reasoning as attributable to the

COVID-19 lockdowns affecting her ability to interact with locals. Explaining that she had spent much of her time in Liverpool under social restrictions, she stated the following:

[When I first moved to Liverpool] *In the beginning it was like, really strong accent people, it's was really hard to understand [...] But I think after about half a half a year it was okay [...] but that was special like cause it was all locked down. I couldn't like really communicate with people frequently. But I think if there's no lockdown it might take me like two months' - Appendix I, Interview Participant 2 - p. 68.*

This interview participant appears to form an association between her ability to understand the accents, as well as her attitudes towards them, and her exposure in communication with people who speak with such accents.

4.2.2 - Attitudes towards non-standard accents

As suggested by Bernard and Ryan (2010), a key-word analysis was performed upon the descriptions of each speaker within the VGT survey. This involved looking at any patterns of key words that arose within the data, interrogating as to whether any terms occurred repeatedly, or if there was a correlation between some descriptors and the speaker (and thus accent) they are describing. The comments for each speaker's extract were processed using NVIVO software for word-frequency analysis, and the most frequent descriptors are displayed below. It should be noted that words such as 'educated' have been grouped together by word stem, and therefore include variations, such as 'education' or 'educating'. The term 'difficult' was also analysed using collocations, confirming that this adjective was used in reference to comprehensibility. The most frequent descriptors are displayed in **Table 4.2.1.2**.

Table 4.2.1.2 - VGT responses - High frequency descriptors for accents

Liverpool (Speaker 1)	RP (Speaker 2)	Yorkshire (Speaker 3)	Newcastle (Speaker 4)	Bristol (Speaker 5)
Difficult (to understand)	Educated	Professional	Non-native	Kind
Uneducated / Lack of Education	Professional	Kind	Unconfident / Lack of confidence	Professional
Lazy / idle	Hard-working	Mature	Uneducated / lack of education	Nice
Friendly	Calm	Relaxed	Unprofessional	Easy
Non-native	Responsible	Friendly	Lazy	Mature / Middle-aged

Overall, the RP accent was rated the most favourably, with positive status-related descriptors such as 'educated', 'professional' and 'hard-working' arising most frequently. Other descriptors that did not appear

in the top four results, but still occurred frequently, included reference to ‘broadcasters’ or ‘characters’. These references indicate that the media representation is largely related to perceptions of these accents. On the other hand, however, the accents of Liverpool and Newcastle were rated the least favourably, collectively referred to as ‘uneducated’, ‘lazy’ or ‘unprofessional’. Furthermore, reference to the comprehensibility of these accents were also notable, with the Liverpool accent being described as ‘difficult to understand’ by ten participants altogether. Within the interview data, too, this seemed to be an overall theme, and Speaker 1 (Liverpool) attracted a lot of criticism, including comments such as:

‘Speaker 1 will be a bit difficult to understand [...] they didn’t like pronounce it quite clearly’ –
Appendix I, Interview Participant 1, p.63.

‘[Makes me feel] exhausted to say to like you know, listen to those things it kind of drains my energy’-
Appendix I, Interview Participant 3, p.63.

‘I really for the first time I really can’t get what she’s saying because I’m it sounds to me lots of the words are so connected together so that I cannot distinguish the words from the the speed of the sound’
Appendix I, Interview Participant 3, p.78.

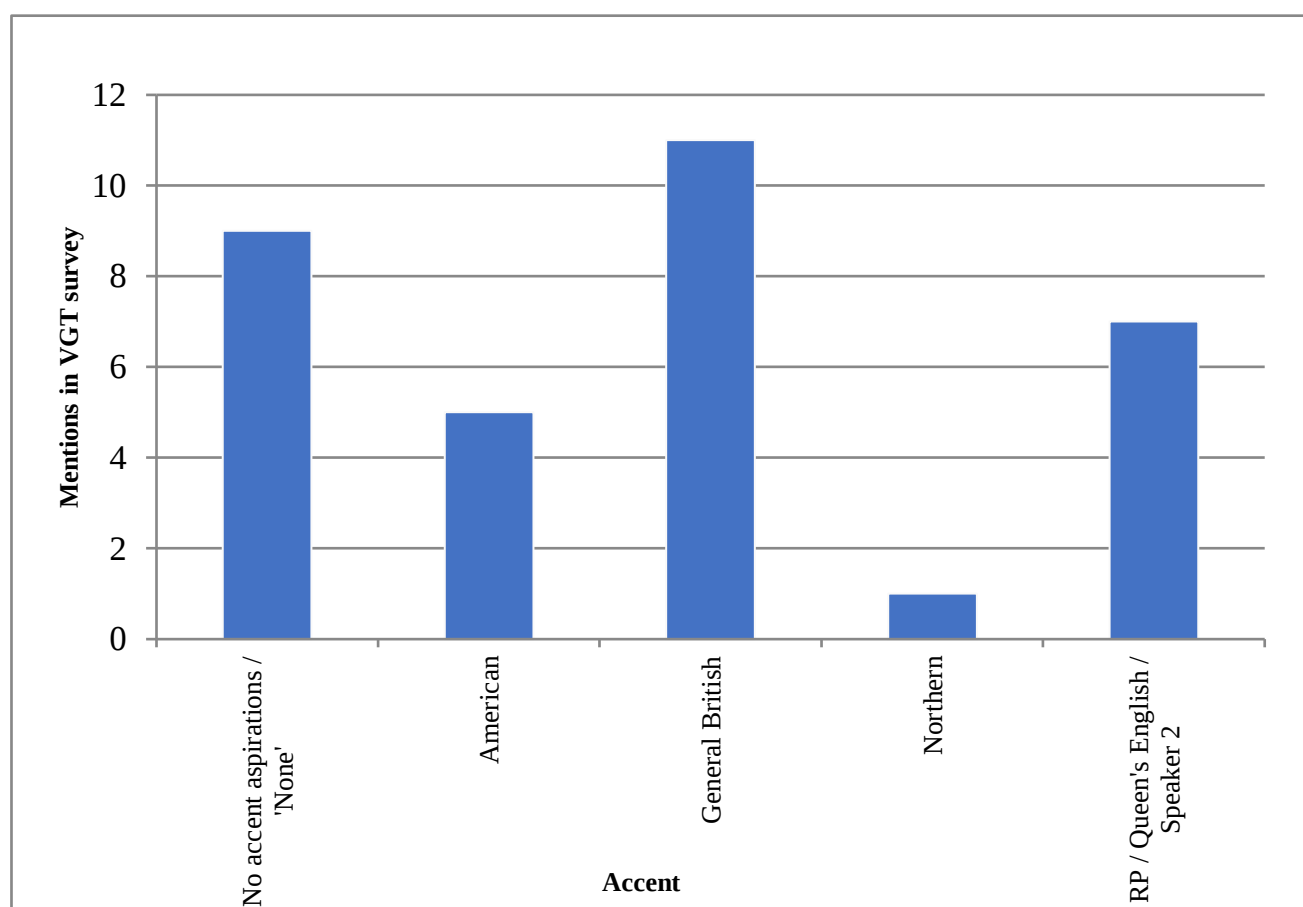
Furthermore, these opinions were not limited to those participants who had never heard the Liverpudlian accent before taking the VGT survey. One interview participant, who had been studying in Liverpool for three years, stated:

‘When I first arrived here in Liverpool I can hardly understand what anyone is talking about’
 – **Appendix I, Interview Participant 2, p.66.**

‘Still, the Liverpool accent is very strange’ - **Appendix I, Interview Participant 2 - p.68.**

‘If I speak with Liverpool accent they may not understand me’- **Appendix I, Interview Participant 2 - p.68.**

Interestingly, however, not all non-standard accents were described in such a negative way. Within the VGT survey, descriptors such as ‘kind’ and ‘mature’ proved popular for the accents of Yorkshire and Bristol. Overall, it seems that the accents least phonologically dissimilar to RP (Bristol, and then Yorkshire) were rated highly via positive descriptors on dimensions of solidarity. However, the two most regionally distinct accents (Newcastle and Liverpool) were the least favoured, with negative ratings for both status and solidarity dimensions.

Figure 4.2.1.3 - VGT responses – Participant aspirations of accent

Participants were also asked, within the VGT survey, whether they aspire or have aspired to use a certain accent when speaking English, the results of which are displayed in **Figure 4.2.1.3**. Overall, the most popular response was ‘general’ British, which received 11 mentions. Furthermore, this was also alluded to through other responses, such as ‘RP’, ‘Queens’ English’, or even ‘Speaker 2’ (the RP speaker), which received 7 mentions in total. These responses were often followed by explanations using adjectives to describe this accent, including ‘regal’, ‘gentle’, ‘noble’, ‘professional’ and ‘classical’. 9 participants actually stated that they do not have aspire to speak with any accent, following such statements with comments such as:

‘I think accent is not really important when other people can understand what you're saying’

‘I speak in whatever way I feel comfortable speaking. And others' comments on my accent are diverse.’

‘I feel like everyone has their individual accents so as long as people can understand me then it is fine’

These comments are interesting in that they state they have no accent preference on the condition that they are comprehensible. When analysing these ideas in light of the comprehensibility scores of the non-standard

accents (see **Table 4.1.1**), it seems that some of these accents (mainly that of Liverpool and Newcastle) would not be preferred, given that they have been deemed incomprehensible by these participants.

4.2.3 - Desire for exposure to non-standard English accents

The results of the question ‘Do you think there is an ideal English accent?’ in the VGT survey show similar trends. ‘RP’ or ‘Southern’ received 9 mentions altogether, with ‘general British’ receiving 3 mentions, and Speaker 2 (RP) and 5 (Bristol) each mentioned once. ‘American’ also received 2 mentions. However, ‘none’ or ‘no accent’ was actually the most popular response, and were followed with comments such as:

‘I think every accent represents its own culture and there is no accent more orthodox than others.’

‘Everyone has a certain accent and that is part of their identity. Accent is who I am, but at the same time I cannot let accent hold me back’

‘Every English accent is unique’

‘I do have preferred accent and I do think some accents are more attractive than others like RP. But I don't think there is an ideal one. Everyone is different. English language develops and evolves locally, so accents kind of carry local cultures. So, it's not a very good idea to say there is an ideal accent.’

Within the data, there is thus an observable appreciation for the diversity of English accents throughout the world. This theme extends into the interview data, in which 5 out of the 6 participants displayed enthusiastic assent when asked if non-standard accents should be incorporated into English language teaching classrooms. Elaborations on this theme included statements such as:

‘When you’re adding more accents into it [the classroom], you’re adding language diversity, so we can hear lots of like different people speaking English’

‘People only will like listen to two types or three types of accent, when they hear, like, the accent they haven’t heard about it will be very like difficult to understand’

‘I do find like when I’m here because I haven’t had a lot of contact with different accents. When I was learning English and when I’m here, I feel like sometimes is hard for me to understand’

‘I think it is helpful for students to know about other accents as well, and because they have to come across this like sooner or later if they’re going abroad or something’.

Throughout the assenting interview participants, there was a general reasoning that the inclusion of non-standard accents in the English language teaching classroom will improve the ability to communicate within the UK itself and will also help encourage more positive accent stereotyping. Such ideas were also communicated by several participants at the end of the VGT survey, when asked whether they had any final comments. These are displayed below:

‘I think for people who do not have a lot of direct contact with English speakers from different areas, their impression of accents can be quite limited to experience with cultural products and social media, which could facilitate stereotypes. This might be an issue worth addressing’

‘I think it might be helpful if exams such as IELTS can include a wider variety of accents in their listening sessions’

‘Some accents are very difficult for me to understand, and sometimes I almost can't understand a single sentence. I guess this has something to do with my education because for the most time I heard standard English in school (China), so I really don't have many chances to familiarise myself with different accents before I went abroad. It's a good idea to teach (or show) students a variety of accents in schools’

‘[I] think in English teaching we can promote the use of various accent as there is not only one accent in the world and English learners should get equipped with the skills of understanding different accents. It is a harsh learning curve to learn them later in life if people are only familiar with a specific accent’

The results of both the VGT survey and the interview survey support multi-dimensional views of non-standard accents within the UK. On the one hand, the non-standard accents were viewed less favourably with regards to both comprehension and attitudes. This can be seen within the descriptive statistics, as well as the inferential test of the Friedman’s ANOVA. However, participants were keen to demonstrate that they feel it is important to be aware of such accents whilst studying English in order to negate these attitudes and improve levels of comprehensibility. This was conveyed both in the long-answer VGT questions, as well as the interview. Overall, there was an observable appreciation for accent diversity of English, which provided an interesting contrast to the criticism the non-standard accents faced in the comprehensibility and teacher-preference questions. In the following section (5 – **Discussion**), these results from the present study will be discussed with reference to previous literature, and the implications of such will be presented with potential future research directions.

5 – Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the attitudes of Chinese ESL speakers towards non-standard British English accents. It also explored comprehensibility ratings for these accents, and analysed whether there was evidence of a relationship between how well accents are understood and how they are perceived by non-native speakers. With these goals in mind, this study seeks to contribute towards the limited literature on non-standard accents within the English language classroom and make potential recommendations to stop the perpetuation of negative attitudes of non-standard accents, as well as ease communication between native and non-native English speakers. Overall, results are mostly consistent with previous research in demonstrating that non-standard accents are both more difficult to comprehend, and more susceptible to negative attitudes by non-native speakers. However, there is a notable gap in this previous research surrounding non-native perceptions about non-standard L1 English accents, and this study intends to help provide new insights and a thorough exploration into this.

5.1 - Comprehensibility ratings of, and attitudes towards, non-native accents

5.1.1 - Comprehensibility

Within this study, participants were asked to rate on a scale how well they could comprehend each of the five speakers. The speaker with an RP accent (Speaker 2) was rated the most favourably with regards to comprehensibility, followed by speakers with Bristol and Yorkshire accents respectively. The two speakers who were deemed the least comprehensible spoke with the Newcastle and Liverpool accents. The results from the Friedman's ANOVA confirmed that there were in fact significant differences between each speaker's average comprehensibility rating, apart from between Liverpool and Newcastle, who were both rated almost as equally poorly with regards to comprehensibility. Participants of this study therefore deemed the most standard accent as the most comprehensible, a result supported by several studies using non-native speakers (Chan, 2016; Hope, 2021; Kang et al, 2019; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Smith & Bisazza, 1982; Zhang, 2019). However, these studies tend to use non-standard accents from outside the UK - for example, India, China, Africa, Mexico or Japan, with the exception of Hope (2021), who focused purely on the Liverpool accent. These studies tend to focus on English spoken in the Outer and Expanding Circles of English (Kachru, 1992) due its global linguistic spread. Few studies, however, focus on the comprehensibility of varying native English accents for non-native English speakers, therefore further study is needed to support the findings of the comprehensibility-based questions within this study. Furthermore, many studies also focus on intelligibility, rather than comprehensibility. As outlined previously (see 2 - **Literature Review**), how easily a listener comprehends a message relates the level of difficulty they have in understanding what the speaker is saying (Kang et al, 2018). Intelligibility, however, explores the degree to which the message from the speaker is actually understood, and can be investigated through measures such as the cloze test or other listening tests (Schüppert et al, 2015; Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979). This study focused on comprehensibility, as

tests of intelligibility were beyond the scope of the restricted research timeframe – this is because it would take too long to develop an appropriate test of intelligibility, administer it, mark the responses, and analyse these in conjunction with the tests of perceived comprehensibility within the VGT survey.

Explanations for the comprehensibility ratings given in this study rely heavily on the concept of exposure. Studies have proposed that comprehension depends on the listener's familiarity with the variety they are listening to (Buckingham, 2015; Kim, 2021; McKenzie, 2008a). This therefore suggests that the amount of exposure listeners have had to an accent will affect their ability to comprehend it. Traditionally, English language classrooms around the globe have used standard varieties of English within their teachings, and in their materials (Lewis, 2005). This means that most of the English that non-native speakers are aware of will be similar to RP, or even General American English (GA) (Carrie & McKenzie, 2018; Kang et al, 2019; Sung, 2016b). Non-standard or regional varieties of British English are therefore completely foreign to English language learners, who rely heavily on the language classroom for their English exposure. This is supported within the data, in which several guesses of the origins of these non-standard accented speakers included Europe, Australia, Scotland, Africa, Russia and India; one participant even wrote of the Newcastle speaker '*he is having a hard time learning English*'. Hope (2021) also found similar comments within her (2021) Liverpool English study. Furthermore, these varieties perhaps may even be perceived more harshly than non-native accents, as students who are studying English will be exposed to some of non-native accents from their peers and teachers. On the one hand, it may seem that this concept is not wholly supported by the data, as although 4 participants identified the Liverpool accent from their studies in Liverpool, they still assigned it low ratings of comprehensibility. However, on the other hand, it could still be argued that these participants simply haven't had enough exposure to the Liverpool accent, as they had only been in the UK for a maximum of three years, the majority of which has been largely disrupted by the social restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting social interaction with the local community. Had the pandemic not disrupted such interaction, and thus exposure to the non-standard local accents were increased, the results of the comprehensibility scores may have been larger, and attitudes may have been more positive. This speculation may be a direction for future research post-pandemic.

5.1.2 - Attitudes

Within the present data, there were consistent results that supported the idea that non-standard or regional accents are perceived with a more negative attitude than those considered standard. When considering the high-frequency descriptors of each speaker (see **Figure 4.2.1.2** in the **4 - Results**), RP was the most positively perceived, with multiple descriptions as 'educated', 'professional', 'hard-working' or 'responsible'. In contrast to this are the descriptors used for the Liverpool and Newcastle speakers, which included 'difficult [to understand]', 'uneducated', 'lazy', or 'unprofessional'. These findings support numerous studies, in which standard varieties such as RP or GA tend to be evaluated more positively or rated more highly than non-standard varieties by both native and non-native speaker communities (Carrie, 2017; Chan, 2016; Coupland

& Bishop, 2007; Garrett, Coupland & Williams, 1999; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; Lambert et al, 1960; Matsuda, 2003; McKenzie 2008a, 2008b). Furthermore, when interrogating these attitudinal responses closely, it's interesting to look at the accents of Bristol and Yorkshire. These accents may seem to be phonologically closer to RP than those of Newcastle and Liverpool, however still remain non-standard. This perception may stem from two key factors. The first is that RP, despite being previously described 'non-localisable' in its geographical origin (Wells, 1982, p.28) is commonly associated with the south of England – as is Bristol. This regional proximity may suggest a phonological similarity between the two accents – however, this does not account for Yorkshire, and is speculative. A more probable explanation for these responses might be based on several key phonological features that highlight the Liverpool and Newcastle as markedly different from the rest of the accents, and some of the most divergent accents in the UK (Foulkes & Docherty, 1999; Honeybone & Watson, 2013). There are many of these – the Liverpool and Newcastle accents sound significantly different from that of RP, as demonstrated in both the comprehensibility scores and attitude responses within these results. An example for Newcastle would be the prevalent pre-glottalization of certain consonants, such as /p/ or /t/, as well as certain unique realizations of the [aʊ] vowel, mostly commonly as [u] (Foulkes & Docherty, 1999). Furthermore, the Liverpool accent has been deemed one of the most recognizable and distinct accents in the UK (Honeybone & Watson, 2013; Hope, 2021), with several features such as the lenition of /k/ to [x], and the realization of /r/ as the vocal flap [ɾ].² None of the features listed above occur in RP, or the accents of Bristol or Yorkshire, thus deeming these three accents as more similar than the diverging accents of either Newcastle or Liverpool. They are therefore evaluated with more positive descriptors than Newcastle and Liverpool, but less so than RP, with descriptions including 'nice', 'easy', 'mature' and 'relaxed'. It should be noted that both the Yorkshire and Bristol speakers had also been described as 'professional', however they did not receive this interpretation as frequently as the RP speaker. Here, one can observe a hierarchy of what is considered to be the 'best' or most preferable accents, with RP at the top, followed by Bristol and Yorkshire, and with Newcastle and Liverpool seen as the least preferable. This concept is supported by results from Ladegaard and Sachdev's study, in which RP and GA English were both seen as the standard models of speech, yet RP was demonstrated to be much more preferable to GA (Ladegaard, 2008; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006).

Another area in which there is an observable preference for RP over the non-standard accents within the VGT survey was in the responses for teacher preferences. The majority of participants (66.7%) rated the RP accent as their most preferred for their English teacher (as in, what they would like their teacher to sound like). Furthermore, the Liverpool accent was placed last by 54.5% of participants, and the Newcastle accent by another 24.2%. There is, clearly, a preference for teachers to have more standard accents within the English

² A detailed account of the phonological variation within these accents, as well as those of the accents within this study, is beyond the scope of this work. For further insight into the phonology associated with these accents, please refer to Wells (1982). For the specific phonology of Liverpool English, refer to Hope (2021), and for Newcastle English, refer to Foulkes & Docherty (1999).

language teaching classroom. These results are interesting when interpreted with the interview data, in which the majority of participants stated their teachers of English had been of Chinese origin. This idea is perpetuated further in other studies; for example, Ladegaard (2008) muses that RP is the ‘ideal’ (p.266) accent for the classroom teacher. Carrie (2017) muses that the preferable tendency of RP stems from it being a source of emulation for students; this is, indeed, a plausible explanation. The present study could potentially support this notion, in that, within the VGT survey, 11 participants noted that they aspire towards a ‘general British’ accent when speaking. However, one could also suggest otherwise, given that 9 participants stated they do not aspire to an accent at all, and a further 14 stated that there was no such thing as an ‘ideal’ English accent. Much of these responses were followed-up with further comments that indicate similar ideas, with an overall theme of appreciation for accent diversity, or an ambivalence towards those with differing varieties. These notions are supported by Kim (2021) who notes that their participants ‘appear indifferent to others’ accents’ (p.1). Despite this, though, the quantitative analysis does indicate that there is a strong preference for teachers to have a standard accent, a finding that is not limited to non-native students. Donnelly et al (2019) noted that, typically, accents that deviate from RP are seen as ‘unprofessional’, and that accents associated with urban or working-class areas ‘remain stigmatised’, and are even ‘inappropriate’ within the classroom (p.507). Although this work refers to a general UK classroom, rather than a language classroom, this still proves interesting when interpreted with some of the negative descriptors of accents, recorded in 4.2.2. The researchers even recorded comments alluding to members of staff speaking with non-standard accents lacking the ability to speak English, a concept echoed in the results of the current study, during which one participant described the Newcastle speaker as *‘having a hard time learning English’*.

There are other multiple ideas surrounding exposure that could help explain the results of the present study, and the patterns that have arisen within other studies. Jenkins (2009) notes that much of the negative attitudes surrounding L2 English - therefore, non-standard but also non-native - accents stem from a lack of exposure and an unfamiliarity with them. It can be argued that this notion could be extended to native non-standard accents, too. When analysing the VGT survey results from the question surrounding accent familiarity, the most popular accents that arose were Chinese (understandably, given that all participants were of Chinese origin), American and RP. There is therefore a greater familiarity with the more standard accents, a result supported by other previous work (Carrie, 2017; Carrie & McKenzie, 2018; Galloway, 2013; Kim 2021; Ladegaard, 2008; McKenzie, 2008a, 2008b, 2015). This recognition may stem from the extensive exposure L2 English speakers will have had to standard accents and varieties, through both the classroom and media (McKenzie, 2008a). This causes learners to be somewhat unfamiliar with non-standard varieties and could help explain the lack of recognition of the non-standard speakers’ accents within the VGT survey - as McKenzie (2008b) writes, L2 English speakers ‘do not have sufficient experience and awareness of these forms of speech to achieve accurate identification’ (p.147). Both Ladegaard (2008) and McKenzie (2008a, 2008b, 2015) attribute this both to the English language classroom environment, in which RP is often used as

the standard model, as well as the media, which is supported in the present interview data, where there are frequent mentions of the prevalence of standard accents on television. Indeed, Preston (1996) argues that much of the information about language that students use is not actually the language itself, but rather a sociocultural background of such language - this could help explain the role that the prevalent standard model within the media, and the classroom, has on variety recognition.

It does need to be noted, however, that there is a significant lack of literature surrounding the attitudes of non-native English speakers towards non-standard L1 English accents. The most notable of this work has been researched by McKenzie (2004, 2008a, 2008b, 2015) and colleagues (Carrie & McKenzie, 2018), whose work has focused largely on the attitudes of Japanese students towards non-standard L1 English accents. Galloway and Rose (2015) acknowledge this as a limitation to the field, and this study hopes to help provide further insight to this inquiry.

5.1.3 - The relationship between comprehensibility and attitudes

Previous literature has discussed a potential correlation between speech varieties deemed intelligible, and any positive or negative attitudes towards such. Dragojevic et al (2017) speculated that speakers with heavy accents, particularly those considered to be foreign, elicit negative attitudinal responses because they are harder for the listener to process. The ability to decode or process speech has been termed 'processing fluency', and, in general, the higher this fluency, the more positive the attitudinal rating (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Dragojevic et al, 2017; Schüppert et al, 2015). Therefore, if a speech variety is more difficult to process, it will receive more negative evaluations. It should be noted, however, that the majority of this work has covered the concept of intelligibility, rather than comprehensibility. However, if a speech variety is *perceived* to be difficult to process, a similar correlation may stand. This notion is supported within both the quantitative and qualitative data from the present study. Upon initial inspection, there is an observable correlation in that the speakers with low comprehensibility ratings (Speakers from 4 and 1, from Newcastle and Liverpool respectively) were rated the least preferable for teachers' accents and received the most negative descriptors. However, the Spearman's Rho test, which measured if there was a correlation between the accent deemed preferable for an English teacher, and the comprehensibility score of that speaker, demonstrated that only one accent - Newcastle - had a statistically significant relationship. Within this, it appears that the relatively low comprehension scores correlate with the low preference ratings placed for teachers with Newcastle accents.

Although this was the only accent in the VGT survey with a statistically significant relationship, the data from the follow-up interview supports the idea that difficulty in comprehending speaker varieties leads to negative attitudinal evaluations of such. Within the interviews regarding Speaker 1 (Liverpool), most attitudinal responses were attributed to an inability to understand the speaker. Some participants even elaborated further, commenting that trying to understand the Liverpool accent made them tired, and that it was too effortful to

comprehend. Similar ideas have been conveyed in previous studies, including the work of both Scales et al (2006), and Dragojevic et al (2017), who note that the characteristics attributed to speakers with heavier accents relate to how difficult they are to understand and process. Again, it should be noted that these studies focus predominantly on L2 English accents, and not non-standard L1 accents - however, the idea of processing fluency influencing attitudinal evaluations appears to be relevant within this present study.

There have been numerous speculations as to why processing fluency has such a prominent effect on attitudes. Munro (2003) argues that listeners often ‘object’ to accents due to their difficulty in comprehending them, and this may in fact be because they are unwilling to accommodate any differences between themselves and the speaker (p.38). Furthermore, Schüppert et al (2015) elaborates on this, noting that other factors such as expectation and speaker stereotyping may also interact with the development of attitudes towards certain speech varieties. Nonetheless, it would appear that the concepts of comprehensibility and attitudes shouldn’t be viewed in isolation, due to their significant interaction and multi-dimensional nature.

5.2 - Increasing exposure to non-standard accents through the English language teaching classroom

Results from the present study show a consistent participant enthusiasm for incorporating non-standard accents into the English language teaching classroom. Within the VGT survey, comments included themes surrounding a lamented lack of familiarity with non-standard accents, which have caused a frustrating communication breakdown with native English speakers. Multiple participants made reference to their own experiences moving to the UK, even going as far to say it was a ‘*harsh learning curve*’ to attempt to understand native speakers with non-standard or regional accents. Furthermore, within the interview data, participants expressed a desire to integrate further into British culture through their understanding of different accents, noting an appreciation for the ‘*language diversity*’ within the UK.

The themes arising from this data are prevalent in other work, too. For example, Sung (2016a, 2016b) found similar ideas within his work, noting that some of his own participants expressed an interest about different native English accents, and a curiosity towards those of differing native linguistic backgrounds. However, despite this, there was still a concern about introducing non-standard accents into the classroom, as these participants didn’t believe that a lack of exposure to said accents resulted in any impeded comprehension. When compared to the results of the present study, this is, however, not the case.

Studies have demonstrated that current English language classrooms around the globe do not support the use of non-standard varieties of English for listening purposes. To begin, Sherlock (2016) notes that the representation of English speakers within textbooks tend to portray native speakers as white, and that north

American culture dominates the desired target for English language learners. Lewis (2005) summarises this into the ‘nativeness principle’, which describes how, in the classroom, learners are purely exposed to models of English that are considered standard, either from the UK (RP) or North America (GA). Furthermore, outside of the classroom, many internationally-recognised forms of English assessment have been criticised for their underrepresentation of the varieties of English, privileging RP above others (Kang et al, 2019). This has two significant consequences for learners. Firstly, this is unfair to test-takers, who will likely speak with their own non-standard accent, as non-native speakers of English (Kang et al, 2019). Secondly, as noted by Kang et al (2019), the validity of tests in predicting real-life performance will be weakened if the tests themselves don’t accurately reflect the communicative experiences of non-native speakers. Furthermore, learning English is a life skill developed not just for examination purposes, but for real life communication - if students aren’t exposed to non-standard varieties during their second language development, they will likely struggle communicating with native speakers (Elder & Harding, 2008).

There have, however, been some calls to improve the underrepresentation of non-standard accents within the classroom. Many global assessments of English, including the International English Testing System (IELTS), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), have begun incorporating varieties of English outside of RP and GA into their listening sections, assuring that this improves the authenticity of such assessment by representing a wider circle of English used around the globe (Kang et al, 2019). However, the varieties they include - for example, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand speakers - are all representative of other hegemonic cultures (Sherlock, 2016). Furthermore, there is still a significant lack of nuance within these tests with regards to regional variation. All of the attempts to create a wider range of accents readily available within the tests - and thus, the practice materials - have completely disregarded variation within these L1 countries. For example, not only is there a lack of Scottish, Welsh or Irish variation to represent UK speakers, there is also no representation of any variety within these countries themselves, as well as England. Although this may seem like a minor issue, in that the globalised world is seeing increasing forms of World Englishes, it poses an issue for learners who intend to move to the UK, either for work or study. With regards to studying, the Higher Education Statistics Agency issued that within the 2020/2021 academic year, there were 605,130 international students studying in the UK, with 144,000 of these of Chinese origin. This is an increase of 8.7% from the previous year, with these numbers set to increase as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and the UK completes negotiations to leave the European Union (EU). There is therefore a demonstrable demand for students - as well as those who immigrate to the UK to work - to be able to comprehend what native speakers are saying, and for negative language attitudes related to this to be avoided. Furthermore, these ideas are not just limited to within the UK - there are similar implications for other L1 English countries, such as the USA and Australia, who have diverse range of English varieties. In addition, these ideas also extend further into other varieties of World Englishes - Jenkins (2000, 2007, 2009) notes that students should be exposed to other L2 accents, and that English should be taught as

an international language. However, this has gained little traction, both in the examination sector, as well as in contemporary TESOL practices (Chan, 2016). The potential reasons for this are many, including a possible reluctance to change what is considered standard or traditional, especially when issues of native-speaker norms are acknowledged (Chan, 2016). Furthermore, when challenged about the inclusion of varying accents of English in either examination or classroom practices, education policy-makers may demonstrate concern about where to start, or where to end – and thus a question of which varieties are to be included or excluded arises.

5.3 - Pedagogical Implications

What, then, can be done to improve comprehension of non-standard varieties of English within the UK and beyond for learners? A number of scholars have advocated for an improved English language teaching curriculum that includes the varieties of English around the world (Kang et al, 2019). Some have suggested that both examination syllabi and the materials of such adopt an English as an International Language (EIL) approach that expands listening practice to include non-standard varieties that are more appropriate modes of communication, given their prevalence around the UK and the world (Hamp-Lyons & Davies, 2008). As Kang et al (2018) summarises, ‘the notion that one particular variety should be the standard bearer for English is increasingly unjustified’ (p.454), and teaching pedagogy should be updated to reflect this. Students themselves show a desire for this, as demonstrated in Sung’s (2016b) study, and also in the present work, in which the suggestion for IELTS to be updated to reflect non-standard forms was specifically mentioned twice. On initial inspection, this notion is somewhat contradictory to the results that demonstrated a preference for RP. However, this can be reconciled when considering that participants experienced the highest exposure to RP during their learning experience, and the familiarity from this leads to increased comprehension and positive attitudes. Here, learners acknowledge where this preference stems from, and an expressed desire for an updated teaching syllabus that incorporates non-standard varieties demonstrates an aspiration to extend repertoire of comprehensibility or positive attitudes to other accents, too.

These goals can be achieved through a variety of means. To begin, the goal of the learner’s pursuit of English should be determined, and courses tailored towards such. If students intend to learn English simply because it is part of an international curriculum and have little to no desire of immigrating to an L1 English country, then the need for an exposure to L1 non-standard accent is far less significant. However, if students are learning English to study or work either in an L1 English country, or a country where English may be used as a lingua franca, there is then a demonstrable need for students to be exposed to the types of English they might encounter abroad. Teachers should consider the goals of their students when expanding on teaching syllabi – although students may have differing goals within a group class setting, as an educator, an awareness of this is necessary. Of course, it will not be possible for learners to be exposed to all varieties of English - this is an unrealistic goal, which could hinder the learning process. This is because it is important for learners to have a general variety as a basis for pronunciation, and it is unlikely that developers of language assessment will

include too many varieties within their examination, and learners don't want to feel ill-prepared for such examination. However, by providing a broad landscape of linguistic diversity within the classroom, learners will likely become more accepting of variation than if they were exposed to a single standard variety. Within this, textbooks need to be updated to demonstrate where different varieties occur, using regional maps with accent borders, for example – although these might not be completely accurate, due to increased geographical and social mobility throughout the UK and the world, it would be helpful to provide a general overview for learners. Furthermore, listening exercises can incorporate a variety of speakers, and teachers should encourage learners to seek media outside of the classroom that represent a diverse range of English variation.

5.4 - Methodological Limitations

In considering interpretations of the data it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of the present study that might have influenced the results.

5.4.1 - Design

The methodological design of this study poses some restrictions on the generalisability of findings. To begin, the sample size was relatively small, at 32 survey participants. Although this figure was suggested by the literature of Cargile et al (2006), and thus deemed suitable for this study, there are other similar studies that use an increased number of participants, such as McKenzie (2008a) and Chan (2016). In addition to this, the number of interview participants was only 6, given the restricted timeframe. For future exploration, further interview data is vital for a more thorough insight. Furthermore, to limit the chance of variation among different nationalities, only Chinese students were invited to participate in the study. To be able to extend the findings and assumptions from such, further study of other demographics is needed.

The use of the Verbal Guise Test also presents its own limitations. The use of surveys is often complicated with participants' fatigue when completing them - although this was combatted as much as possible with the relatively short survey used in this study, there are still questions of how cognitively engaged participants can be when posed with an extensive series of questions (Iwaneic, 2020). Furthermore, Garrett (2010) warns of various limitations of Matched and Verbal Guise Tests, the most relevant of which is the salience question. Often, by providing participants with a series of various speakers, the repeated content of the passage that is read often exaggerates the differences between each speaker's voice (Garrett, 2010). There was no control for this within the present study. Also, as mentioned in **3.5 – Procedure**, there was no control for how many times participants could listen to the audio recordings. Therefore, some results, such as the comprehensibility scores, may therefore be affected by participants ability to repeat the recordings as many times as they wanted.

Finally, with regards to design, interviewing participants can often be difficult to control for potential limitations. It should be acknowledged that all participants spoke Mandarin as their first language, and thus conducted the interview in their L2 - English. Participants might feel more comfortable, and elicit more

personal views, when they speak in their mother tongue (Catalano, 2016; Dewaele, 2018). Furthermore, all interviews were conducted online to avoid transportation and health risks for both the student and the researcher - there could be some potential issues with the lack of face-to-face communication.

5.4.2 - Operationalization of ‘attitudes’

Another potential issue that could threaten the generalizability of the results is the operationalization of the term ‘attitudes’ within the present study. The attitudes considered in this study were analysed on a single dimension, of either ‘negative’ or ‘positive’. As Lourerio-Rodriguez et al (2013) note, attitudes are both multi-layered and complex, with 3 main components: affective, behavioural, and cognitive. These components depict the way a person feels, the way they act, and the way they think about the attitude object. Within this study, there was no analysis for the varying components of attitudes and how they might interact with one another. Furthermore, attitudes are dynamic in nature (Carrie, 2017), and thus the static responses elicited from participants may fluctuate as time goes by - for a deeper interrogation into this, a more longitudinal study is needed.

Overall, when considering generalizing the results of this study, it is important to note the limitations of the method, particularly with the design, as well as the operationalization of the term ‘attitudes’. However, despite this, this study provides a helpful insight into some of the difficulties learners of English face when confronted with varieties of English that differ from those they recognize, and their attitudes towards such. The pedagogical implications of these findings seek entirely to help these learners, with the hope of encouraging a more inclusive and representative classroom for future English language learners around the world.

5.5 – Conclusion and Implications

The results of this current study provide an interesting exploration into the research questions (2.7) and overall, are consistent with the somewhat limited prior research on research surrounding the attitudes of non-native English speakers towards non-standard native English accents, and the comprehensibility of such. Results are multi-dimensional in nature and demonstrate that despite a keen interest and enthusiasm towards exposure to non-standard native accents, in general, students of English are yet to encounter varying native English accents within the English language classroom. This, consequently, leads to lack of comprehensibility, and a subsequent perpetuated negative attitude towards such accents, as demonstrated within this sample. These attitudes include an idea that non-standard accents aren’t actually native or ‘real’ English, or come from speakers with low levels of education or professionalism. These attitudes can be shaped by early experience within the English language teaching classroom, and so it is thus the responsibility of educators to combat these negative stereotypes, as well as improve future comprehensibility for native and non-native speaker interaction.

It is therefore vital for English language teaching pedagogy to accurately reflect the society in which English language learners may communicate with native interlocutors. Exposure to non-standard English accents can be achieved through listening tasks in preparation for examination such as IELTS, and teachers can embrace variation within their lessons that focus on receptive skills. Furthermore, although it is unfeasible for every non-standard native accent to be represented within the classroom, it's important to note that *some* variation could lead to a greater tolerance of accent diversity, for both native and non-native speakers alike. This is because a diverse representation of language variation will demonstrate to students that English around the world does not prescribe to a standardised or prestige variety, and will normalize variation from earlier on in the language learning process. Furthermore, any development of teaching materials that focus on the intelligibility of non-standard accents would be extremely useful for learners who intend on moving to L1 English countries for study or for work.

Future research should seek to address some of the gaps outlined within this study. To begin, given the small sample size and limited demographic of the present study, further research is needed both on the population within the current study, and to extend outside of it, too. Further inquiry into the comprehensibility of varying native English accents for different non-native speakers is essential when developing further teaching materials, in order to inform which areas need the most focus, and what difficulties learners face when they are confronted with unfamiliar speech varieties. Finally, it is the hope of this study and the researcher that the present findings will be used to inform such future research, and that the suggested pedagogical implications are considered for English language teaching classrooms, both within China and around the globe.

6 – References

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7 – Appendices

Appendix A – Social Media Recruitment Poster

研究志愿者招募！

CHINESE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR LISTENING TASK SURVEY (& FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW)

This research is being conducted to see how different varieties of speech can be understood by people who have learned English as a second language. It seeks to understand how different people perceive different ways of speaking, and their attitudes and opinions about different speech types. **Ethics Approval**

Reference: CIA-22HT-007

I am looking for volunteers who:

- Are an **undergraduate** student studying at any **English** university **OR** are a **postgraduate** student who studied their previous degree in a **non-English** speaking country **AND**
- Are a native Chinese (**Mandarin**) speaker **AND** a second language **English** speaker **AND**
 - Have moved to **England** to complete your degree studies

You are invited to participate in an **online** listening task and survey (with the opportunity for follow-up interview) for one x 1 hour session (with an additional hour if you choose to interview).

You will be asked to:

- Listen to different audio clips and try and identify where the speaker is from
 - Rate the speaker according to different characteristics
- Write brief descriptions of the speaker and summarise your experiences and opinions similar speakers (if any).

You will also be asked if you would like to participate in a follow-up interview at the end of the survey. This will also be conducted remotely. There is no obligation to participate in this interview. There will be separate consent for this.

If you are interested and would like more information please contact Rhiannon Gurney at the Department of Education, The University of Oxford: 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX1 6PY, or rhiannon.gurney@education.ox.ac.uk. There is no obligation to take part.

Thank you! 谢谢!

Appendix B - Survey³**Listening Task Survey****Part 1: Demographic information****Age:****Gender (e.g male, female, non-binary, prefer not to say):****Current university (e.g The University of Oxford):****Degree (subject) study (e.g Mathematics, Engineering):**The logo of the London School of Economics (LSE), consisting of the letters 'L' and 'S' inside a square frame, with 'SEP' written below it.**Part 2: Listening Task**

You will now hear recordings of various speakers speaking in their native accents. There will be 5 speakers played altogether. Each speaker will be introduced before they are presented e.g ‘Speaker 1’. Press play to play the extract, and then click the arrow to move onto the questions. Please complete the following questions for each accent you hear. There will be the opportunity to play the extract again on the question page.

Speaker 1:**Please choose the number of the scale that you agree with.****How well can you understand this person? (1 being not at all, 6 being very well)**

1 2 3 4 5 6

Where do you think this person is from?

How else could you describe this person?

Speaker 2:**Please choose the number of the scale that you agree with.****How well can you understand this person? (1 being not at all, 6 being very well)**

1 2 3 4 5 6

Where do you think this person is from?

How else could you describe this person?

³ During this study, the VGT survey was completed online using the Qualtrics survey platform. However, each question is recorded here to demonstrate the design and layout of the survey.

Speaker 3:

Please choose the number of the scale that you agree with.

How well can you understand this person? (1 being not at all, 6 being very well)

1 2 3 4 5 6

Where do you think this person is from?

How else could you describe this person?

Speaker 4:

Please choose the number of the scale that you agree with.

How well can you understand this person? (1 being not at all, 6 being very well)

1 2 3 4 5 6

Where do you think this person is from?

How else could you describe this person?

Speaker 5:

Please choose the number of the scale that you agree with.

How well can you understand this person? (1 being not at all, 6 being very well)

1 2 3 4 5 6

Where do you think this person is from?

How else could you describe this person?

Part 3: Longer responses

You will now have the opportunity to hear all 5 speakers once more. If you need to listen to the speakers again, please press play next to the corresponding speaker. Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability.

Please rank the accents you have heard today in order of preference e.g which accent would you prefer your English teacher to have? (1 being your most preferred, 5 being your least preferred)

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Do you aspire to use a certain accent when speaking English? If so, how would you describe that accent? If not, why not?

Do you think there is an ideal English accent? If so, can you describe it?

What other accents of English are you familiar with? How did you become familiar with these accents?

Have you any other comments / ideas / opinions you would like to convey here about the accents you have heard today, English accents, or accents in English language teaching in general?

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview? If so, please tick YES and write your contact details below.

Yes No

Email address (if clicked yes):

Appendix C – Transcription of Speaker Extract⁴

Sophie Hatter was the eldest of three sisters. She was not even the child of a poor woodcutter, which might have given her some chance of success. Her parents were well to do and kept a ladies' hat shop in the prosperous town of Market Chipping. True, her own mother died when Sophie was just two years old and her sister Lettie was one year old, and their father married his youngest shop assistant, a pretty blonde girl called Fanny. Fanny shortly gave birth to the third sister, Martha. This ought to have made Sophie and Lettie into Ugly Sisters, but in fact, all three girls grew up very pretty indeed, though Lettie was the one everyone said was the most beautiful. Fanny treated all three girls with the same kindness, and did not favour Martha in the least.

Mr Hatter was proud of his three daughters and sent them all to the best school in town. Sophie was the most studious. She read a great deal, and very soon realised how little chance she had of an interesting future. It was a disappointment to her, but she was still happy enough, looking after her sisters and grooming Martha to seek her fortune when the time came. Since Fanny was always busy in the shop, Sophie was the one who looked after the younger two. There was a certain amount of screaming and hair-pulling between those younger two. Lettie was by no means resigned to being the one who, next to Sophie, was bound to be the least successful.

⁴ The researcher would like to thank author Dianna Wynne-Jones for the popular children's book 'Howl's Moving Castle', the origin of this extract.

Appendix D – Semi-structured Interview Questions

- 1) Before the Listening Task, had you ever encountered these accents before?
- 2) Which speakers / accents did you find the most difficult to understand? What about it was so difficult?
- 3) Do you feel like you could hold a conversation with someone with these accents?
- 4) Which one of these accents do you feel was the most native-English?
- 5) Tell me about your English language learning experience. Who were your teachers? Did they sound like any of the people you heard in the survey? What did they sound like?
- 6) Tell me about your English experience since living in the UK. Have you found it easy to communicate with native speakers?
- 7) If you had to choose would you prefer a native or non-native English teacher? Why?
- 8) Would you mind if you had an English teacher with one of these accents? Why?
- 9) What would your thoughts be about incorporating accents like these in the English language teaching classroom?
- 10) Do you have any other ideas / thoughts / opinions you would like to convey now?

Appendix E – Confirmation of Ethics Approval

‘Dear Rhiannon and Vicki,

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you on your application to DREC.

Your application for, 'An analysis of the perceived intelligibility and attitudes of non-standard British accents from Chinese ESL learners', has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, based on the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted. I would like to inform you that you will be required to update us on any amendments to your study should you need to change your research methods and may need to complete a data protection impact assessment if you use online platforms to conduct and record interviews. There is an application for this, and it is kept separate from the ethics committee. Please see the link below for more information.

<https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/policy/data/checklist>

Please continue to follow all current guidance issued by CUREC during the pandemic, notably COVID-19: CUREC guidance on research involving human participants, <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/coronavirus>

If needed, please follow the guidance on online data collection and research methods issued by the University,

(1) <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/covid-19/data#collapse2299911>

(2) <https://infosec.web.ox.ac.uk/article/guidelines-for-using-zoom>

If relevant, please also check the CUREC website for their best practice research guides, <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg>

Yours sincerely,

Pinar

Dr Pinar Kolancali

Postdoctoral Researcher

Departmental Research Ethics Committee Member

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Email: pinar.kolancali@education.ox.ac.uk

LiFT: <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/lift-learning-for-families-through-technology/>

Appendix F – Participant Information Sheet

Listening Task (and potential Follow-up Interview)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: CIA-22HT-007

Introductory paragraph

My name is Rhiannon Gurney and I am completing an MSc in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition. You are being invited to take part in a research project for an MSc dissertation. Before you take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with myself if you wish. Please feel free to ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

Why is this research being conducted?

This research is being conducted to see how different varieties of speech can be understood by people who have learned English as a second language. It seeks to understand how different people perceive different ways of speaking, and their attitudes and opinions about different speech types.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to participate because you are:

- An undergraduate student studying their undergraduate degree in at any English university, or a postgraduate student studying their postgraduate degree at any English university *who have not studied in an English-speaking country before*.
- A native Chinese (Mandarin) speaker
- A second language English speaker
- You have moved to England to complete your degree studies

You have been recruited in response to a circulated email or social media post, or in response to a flyer around your university. You will be a part of a group of participants within this study, including approximately 32 students altogether.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the study, without giving a reason, and without any negative consequences, by advising me of this decision by emailing me at rhiannon.gurney@education.ox.ac.uk. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is 30th July 2022.

What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

- The research will take place online. You will be asked to read and sign consent forms before the research begins. If you choose to participate in a follow-up interview, this will also be conducted remotely (online).
- For the Listening Task survey, you will be asked to complete a written informed consent form. If you choose to participate in a follow-up interview, consent for this will be obtained via email, as this will be conducted remotely.
- The Listening Task survey should take no longer than one hour to complete. However, if you wish to clarify any information during the survey or consent process, this may take longer. If you choose to participate in a follow-up interview, this should take no more than (an additional) one hour, at a separate and mutually convenient time. This interview will also be held online.
- For the Listening Task, you will be asked to listen to different speech styles and respond to a number of questions about what you have heard. You will be asked to rate different characteristics on a scale, as well as provide more detail in longer answer questions. You will also be asked if you wish to participate in a follow-up

interview. If you choose to participate in this interview, you will be asked to elaborate on the answers you gave in the survey, and expand further on your attitudes or opinions about different speech styles.

- With your consent, and if you choose to participate in a follow-up interview, I would like to audio record you so I can have an accurate record of our conversation and can refer back to this during data analysis.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

There are no reasonable risks or disadvantages in taking part in this study. All participants will be unidentifiable from the data they give.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research. Some indirect benefits include contributing to the field of educational research and advising on ways curricula can be improved for second language English learners.

There will be no payment for taking part in this study.

What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

Identifiable data (including consent forms) will be stored on my encrypted external hard-drive, which will only be accessed through my password protected laptop. At the end of the project, this will be uploaded to the University of Oxford's own OneDrive secure service by the Principal Investigator. Other research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. All data will then be destroyed at the end of this period using a data destruction application.

Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the research data.

Participants will not be identifiable from any of the information they give, as all data will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used.

Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in a master's thesis dissertation. It may be used to inform further studies. *Participants will be unidentifiable from this dissertation.*

I would like your permission to use direct quotations, *but without identifying you*, in any research outputs.

A copy of my thesis/ dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) where it will be publicly available to facilitate its use in future research/ its access will be restricted.

Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: CIA-22HT-007).

Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

The Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk;
Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford
OX3 7GB

Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

[REDACTED],

Department of Education, The University of Oxford, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY
01865 274024

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix G – VGT Survey Participant Consent Form

Name of Principle Investigator: [REDACTED]

Status of Primary Researcher: MSc student

Oxford University email of Primary Researcher: [REDACTED]

Consent to take part in Listening Task

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: CIA-22HT-007

Purpose of Study: To elicit opinions and attitudes to different audio stimuli. Participants will be asked to listen to different people speaking and evaluate how they feel about them. There will be prompts about different characteristics (for example, intelligence, friendliness etc.) and also about how easy it is to understand the speakers.

	Please initial each box if you agree with the statement
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point until 30th July 2022, without giving any reason.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I understand that I will not be identifiable from any publications	
Use of quotations from the survey: Please indicate your preference (select <i>one</i> option). Remember, you will not be identifiable from any data you give in this study: - I do not wish to be quoted. or - I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs	
I give permission for you to contact me again to clarify information.	
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	
I agree to take part.	
I agree that my personal contact details can be retained in a secure database so that the researchers can contact me about future studies.	

Name of participant

dd / mm / yyyy

Date

Signature_____
Name of person taking

dd / mm / yyyy

Date

Signature

Appendix H – Semi-structured Interview Consent Form

Name of Principle Investigator: Professor Victoria Murphy

Oxford University email of Principle Investigator: victoria.murphy@education.ox.ac.uk

Name of Primary Researcher: Rhiannon Gurney

Status of Primary Researcher: MSc student

Oxford University email of Primary Researcher: rhiannon.gurney@education.ox.ac.uk

Email Consent to take part in Listening Task Follow-up Interview

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: CIA-22HT-007

Please read the statements below. If you are happy with all of the statements, please copy and paste them into an email and send it to me at rhiannon.gurney@education.ox.ac.uk. This will be considered as consent to participate in the follow-up interview.

If you have any questions about the research or the statements below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the listening task and the follow-up interview. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at 30th July 2022 without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.
- I understand what will happen to my data.
- I give the researcher(s) permission to:
 - interview me
 - audio record me.
- I give permission for the researcher(s) to quote me anonymously.
- I give permission for the researcher(s) to re-contact me to clarify information.

I am happy to take part in the research.

Appendix I– Interview Transcripts

Interview 1

Researcher: Here we go. Recording started. OK, wonderful. Alright then so do I check before this listening task before the survey and the extracts I just played you. How do you ever encountered any accents like this before?

Interview Participant 1: To be honest, I haven't like we haven't done this kind of things before, yeah.

Researcher: Uh. OK. Umm, so you haven't heard anyone speak like the people in this audio before?

Interview Participant 1: Uh, I have heard. Like, I think from my own experiences, maybe there are speakers speaking about the UK lessons and American lessons. Yeah, because I have teachers from these two countries. So maybe I have heard this too, as as before.

Researcher: OK. So were they like accents in the study? Like, can you refer to either speaker or the speaker to like which ones within the listening task have you had before, like which speakers?

Interview Participant 1: I think speaker two and maybe three as well.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 1: They yeah, there. Maybe they come from UK, so probably they have like UK accents but I'm not sure of it.

Researcher: Yeah, that. Yeah, that's fine. That's absolutely great. It's not, uh, there's no right answers or anything. So whatever you say makes complete sense. Uh, did you find any of these speakers difficult to understand?

Interview Participant 1: Ohh I. Uh, I think speaker one will be a bit difficult to understand.

Researcher: Uh. Yes, because why? Why is that?

Interview Participant 1: Ohh, just like because. They didn't like pronounce it quite clearly, so I cannot hear the voice clearly. I'll think there were my make me a bit confused about what she's going to talk about.

Researcher: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh. Huh. OK, that makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

Researcher: Umm. Which one of these accents, like which one of these speakers would you associate mostly with being a native speaker of English? Like, who would you say of these speakers are, oh, they're definitely English. Or they sound like an English person.

Interview Participant 1: Uh. Often speaker number 2. Probably they are like a native speaker. And for speaker three, I think you have like an English accent, so probably they would like be a also a native speaker. For me I think.

Researcher: Hmm. Hmm. OK, fantastic. Thank you very much. Umm, so moving on from the from the speakers now. UM, I just wondered if you would tell me a little bit about your. When you are learning English about your English language learning experience, so who were your teachers were? Were they native English speakers or were they non native English speakers?

Interview Participant 1: Well. During because I'm I'm coming from China, so most of my English teachers are not native speakers, they they are Chinese, but because in China we mostly focus about the grammar and

listening tasks, so we do not care too much about the essence. So I'm not sure what like what's the accent I have for you.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 1: Yeah, I am. After during the high school. Umm my teachers, there's one native speaker to he's coming from Philippines. Yeah. And then. I think he's he has like in UK accent.

Researcher: Umm, OK, that makes that makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

Interview Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher: Umm so since you how long have you been living here in the UK?

Interview Participant 1: Approximately. Nine months.

Researcher: Nine months. OK, amazing. Have you found it easy to communicate with me to English speakers or have you had any difficulty?

Interview Participant 1: Ohh mostly are fine but. Sometimes I will find that I'm difficult to express myself if I don't really understand what the people I am I am speaking to to are saying.

Researcher: So it's not, it's more like it's not so much you listening to other people, but more like you finding it difficult to express yourself. Does that make sense?

Interview Participant 1: Sometimes I always found difficult to listen to others, just like I cannot understand some words. But mostly I'm fine.

Researcher: OK, OK. Got you. Thank you. And if you had, so if you had to go back and learn English again in China, would you have a preference for a native or non native English speaker teacher?

Interview Participant 1: I think it depends on the levels. Just like at the beginning levels, I think maybe the native speaker will be better because you have helped you to establish your. No. Like establish the. Foundations are in just like you make have a ideas about what will analytical to speak. Their language is like. What is their.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 1: Uh.

Researcher: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Interview Participant 1: I'm I'm I'm not sure how to say it, but just like looking at their actions and their just like facial expressions, so we can know what's the actual actual like pronunciation about the words.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I completely understand and I think a lot of people would agree with you as well, so that's good. Would you mind if any of your English teachers had any of these accents? The ones that you've heard today? Like, would there be some that you would say? Yeah, I wouldn't mind if my teacher had the accent or others that you'd be like. Oh, gosh, no. I wish they. I hope they don't.

Interview Participant 1: Ohh erm. Most of the speakers are okay for me. I think there are things are fine because I can understand it well. But maybe for speaker one I would like. If. I choose an English teacher I would be like a bit confused away she's talking about, but if she is more money, focus on like academic writing. But I think that's all for me. But if he tells us like umm speaking oral. All this kind of stuff.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant: I would be like a big struggle with it.

Researcher: Yeah, OK. Completely understand. Thank you. UM, what would your thoughts be if you were incorporating, if we were gonna add accents and speakers like this into English language teaching materials? So, you know, when you're sort of doing IELTS prep or? Umm, listening tasks you have like audio CD's and things like that, how would you feel if we added more accents like these ones that you've listened to today.

Interview Participant 1: Umm. Actually this was like quite. I have two sides of opinions. First, the one of the opinions is just like I think it's pretty good.

Researcher: Yeah, good, good.

Interview Participant 1: You'll be nice because when you're adding more accents into it, you're adding like language diversity, so we can hear lots of like different people speaking English. So actually, I think accents also can, like, express our countries customs and their cultures. But when put it into a test like IELTS test, they will make the listening test become more difficult because.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 1: It's mostly the people only will like listen to two types of three types of accents when they have heard, like the accent they haven't heard about the very like difficult to understand and then this will affect it. They are listening without, yeah.

Researcher: Umm, yeah, uh, yeah, absolutely. That makes more sense. Thank you. I appreciate everything that you've said. Is there anything else that you would like to add before we end the interview or is that it for today do you reckon?

Interview Participant 1: Ohh. I think this is a. I didn't have like anything this want to ask because I think. All of the things I found in me, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Fantastic. OK, that's great. Thank you. Uh, really appreciate you taking the time to uh. Do the interview with me. Uh, I'm really happy with it. Thank you. And also for rescheduling me of the day when I was sick, I am recovering slowly, but I do appreciate that. Thank you. Uh, so that well, that's the end. So I hope you have a fantastic Sunday and yeah, I really appreciate all of your help. Thank you.

Interview Participant 1: Thank you. Hoping you'll speed speedy recovery.

Researcher: Oh thank you very much. Bye bye.

Interview Participant 1: Bye bye. Have a nice day.

Researcher: You too. Bye bye.

Interview Participant 1: Bye.

Interview 2

Researcher: Just give it all ready to get going and then we'll get going. OK, so this is this is going to be the bit where I ask you kind of general questions both about the extract and also about sort of your English language learning experience in general. Feel free to give us longer response as you want anything everything

is fine. I I. OK. So the first question is before the listing task before the you know the survey and then what you've just heard about how do you encountered any of these accents before?

Interview Participant 2: Umm yeah, first one. I'm sure it's Liverpool accent.

Researcher: Uh.

Interview Participant 2: Yeah, it's really obvious cause I'm when I first arrived here in Liverpool I can hardly understand what they're talking about. I don't think they are speaking English.

Researcher: Yeah, that is a common theme. That is something that comes up quite a lot. I will, I will say that is true.

Interview Participant 2: It's answer 2nd, 3rd and the 5th record. I think it's. A similar to me, but the second I think it's like, you know, Emma Watson's accent.

Researcher: Yeah, it does sound a lot like Emma Watson.

Interview Participant 2: And the 3rd and the 5th they sound just like like to me and I can't tell the difference. And maybe it's from London or I don't know.

Researcher: That's great. That's right. I'll tell you where all of them are from at the end. If you like. Some people get really curious.

Interview Participant 2: There is still.

Researcher: Yeah, of course. So I know that you said that when you moved to the UK, when you moved to Liverpool for the first time, you found the Scouse. So the Liverpool accent quite hard to. Distinct. Did you find any other? Have you had any other difficulties with different English accents, or is it just scots that you've found hard?

Interview Participant 2: Umm, the Scotland?

Researcher: Was there was all the other those could be quite difficult, absolutely.

Interview Participant 2: And Birmingham.

Researcher: Birmingham yeah. Yeah, I get that. Quite. They're both. You know, they're inner city. Thick accents. They're work. Classed as to be working class accents sometimes.

Have that makes them quite like strong, so that can be a bit of a a thing as well. Absolutely. And but on on this, on these accents of these five accents, which ones did you find the hardest? Was it just the scale, or were there any that were quite difficult?

Interview Participant 2: The the 4th.

Researcher: Yeah, the 4th one. The 4th one. Yeah, that's true. OK, fantastic. Thank you.^[1] Which of these accents, if you had to pick one, which one would you associate more with a native speaker of English? Like if you had to choose one?

Interview Participant 2: Ohh the 2nd.

Researcher: The second one. Yeah. Popular. Popular choice. Uh, and one that seems to be definitely preview my point. So that's good, too. Fantastic. OK, yeah, the second one.

Uh, OK, so maybe going from the from the listing task a little bit, I was just wondering if you could kind of summarize your English language learning experience for me. So you obviously learn English in China, right? Don't you do your qualifications, did you do IELTS?

Interview Participant 2: Yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: I would say come here in the UK. Uh. Who were your teachers? Were they native speakers? Were they non native speakers were? Whereabouts were they from for specifically for learning English?

Interview Participant 2: You mean the IELTSs, teacher, or just my high school middle school teacher?

Researcher: All of them, if that's OK. If you could give me like a brief overview that would be fantastic.

Interview Participant 2: Oh, they are all Chinese teacher, not native speaker.

Researcher: All Chinese UK would follow, so they were all second language English speakers because they were first language Mandarin, right?

Interview Participant 2: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. OK, fantastic. So while you've been living here in the UK, have you found it difficult to communicate with native speakers or has it been OK?

Interview Participant 2: At first it's a little bit hard for me to understand what they're talking about, but now maybe I get more familiar with their accents and I can guess what's their meaning. You know, they they usually cut off a lot of words such such as they say.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 2: Well, do you know what I mean? They say general.

Researcher: Try to get the order. Yeah, yeah, I get that. That's great That's also true, right? So especially with the Liverpool accent, like I've obviously a native English speaker and native northern English speaker and I was working in Liverpool city centre after I finished my degree and with the masks try to understand what people were saying was so difficult. But I do I do get it completely? Yeah, absolutely. Fantastic. And if you if you had to choose, if you were gonna learn English again, you know, from scratch, would you prefer to have a native English speaking teacher or a non native English speaking teacher?

Interview Participant 2: And they have.

Researcher: You want the native. Yeah. Why? Why? Why so?

Interview Participant 2: Because my Chinese teachers say. They also have strong Chinese accents, and sometimes they their pronunciation is not standard and I think it's not very good for me to learn in the. The real English.

Researcher: Yeah. The yeah, that that's absolutely incredible answer. Absolutely. I mean, I've been letting Mandarin for three years now and two of my teachers were Chinese. And then one of my teachers was English. And I don't know why, I can't really explain why. I just preferred having the native Chinese teachers. I felt like I was like learning the real Mandarin, if that makes sense so I could complete. I can completely empathize with that, absolutely.

Uh. When you say a native English speaker teacher, would you mind if your teacher sounded like some of the people on the extracts that we listened to? Is there any that you were like? Yeah, that's fine. Or any that you're like. No, don't have. Don't speak like that.

Interview Participant 2: I prefer the 2nd, the 3rd or the 5th but not Liverpool or the 4th one.

Researcher: Can you can you explain? Can you tell me why?

Interview Participant 2: Cause. So, so well, the Liverpool accent is very strange and it's not common. So when I speak in this accent to commu, to communicate with others, they may not understand me. And it sounds weird.

Researcher: Yeah, OK.

Interview Participant 2: And and the when I was studying English, I usually listen to some music or watch some English films. A TV shows. But if I speak Liverpool accent I may not understand what the the real accent the the real English was talking about.

Researcher: OK, yeah, absolutely. Makes a lot of sense. So. So if you had. And English teacher, who sounded like maybe speaker two, what? Do you mind if maybe.

Interview Participant 2: Umm.

Researcher: Other accents, like the Liverpool accent or the Glaswegian accent, or the barrier accent we're introduced to you in the classroom, maybe in the form of listening tasks so you get more exposure to access like that. Or would you prefer if? You never had them all.

Interview Participant 2: No, I don't mind. I have to.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 2: Get. It's good to know about this diverse accents.

Researcher: Yeah. So you would like you would like it if you could hear the baby before coming to the UK that would, right could have been of it. Helpful maybe.

Interview Participant 2: Yeah I think helpful.

Researcher: OK, absolutely fantastic. OK, well, these are all the questions I actually have written down. Uh, unless there's anything else that you've kind of thought of that maybe a bit pertinent to the discussion, or if not, no worries at all. We can end right here.

Interview 3

Researcher: OK, good for me. And then I'm gonna ask you some questions. OK. So is that going? Is that recording starting recording? Come on. There we go. Wonderful. Right. OK, so.

Interview Participant 3: Right, you're.

Researcher: I'm sorry.

Interview Participant 3: Your your face is kind of stuck, then it's not.

Researcher: No. Is that better?

Interview Participant 3: No, you're just still.

Researcher: As long as you can hear me, OK. Is my voice off? That's the main. Yeah. OK well.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah. Yeah. Ohh working yeah.

Researcher: OK, wonderful. Alright then. So before the listening task in the survey before you'd completed that, how do you encountered any of these accents before?

Interview Participant 3: Umm. So basically, I heard the Liverpool accent in my daily life and other accents are either I got it from the TV show or people who live in here but not from here.

Researcher: Hmm.

Interview Participant 3: And yeah, basically like that. Or my friends, yeah.

Researcher: OK, OK. So can you remember any of the? So you said just to pick up on one of your points there, you said that there were some accidents that were people living here but not from here. Do you mean not from Liverpool or not from the UK?

Interview Participant 3: Not from Liverpool, cause like I think all the all the speakers are native speaker and.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: And then like some of them are from like on a like they don't have a strong Scouse accent. Playing so I kind of know how it feels like and. And some of them are from either north like north, like like standard or either on the like south of England like. Those areas

Researcher: Mm-hmm. OK. Yeah. Gotcha, gotcha. Wonderful. OK. Yeah. General General area is.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Because she OK. Fantastic. So when you were listening to the accents both on the listing task and in just now, did you find any of them difficult to understand or were they all OK?

Interview Participant 3: And the Scouse accents through like difficult understand cause like I feel like the speaker is quite. Exhausted to say to to like, you know, like, read those things and it's kind of drains my energy to, you know, try to understand and. And these are like they're they're not tired that much but.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: I couldn't.

Researcher: So which one? Which? Which accent did you identify as the Scouse one?

Interview Participant 3: The first one.

Researcher: Yeah. Cool. Yeah, you're right.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah. And and like.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 3: I think like this number 2 and the number 3 one are more easier for me to understand because they're quite slower and and also like.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: Clear when they speak with the pronounce words and they're not like Russian or anything like, you know, speaking fast and stuff. And the the second ones like a girl. And I feel like he's like

my friends, like my friends. So I could still understand them. But if I want to prefer, like, I will prioritize the second one.

Researcher: Mm-hmm Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 3: One and the and then the fifth and then the number 4.

Researcher: OK. OK. That's really. Yeah, that's really interesting. OK, fantastic. So I was gonna kind of ask that which one of these accents would you if you had to sort of associate an accent or a speaker of this list, mostly with a native speaker of English, which one would you, which one would you say if you had to pick one, if you were like, oh, they're definitely that's very native English.

Interview Participant 3: Umm, second one?

Researcher: The second one. OK. Wonderful wonder.

Interview Participant 3: Like teacher tone.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I mean, she's a teacher, actually, so that makes a lot of sense.

Interview Participant 3: Ohh.

Researcher: Yeah, my godmother. So, yeah, she's a teacher I have. So, OK, moving, moving on from the the accents then I just wanted to hear a little bit about your your English language learning experience. So I'm assuming that.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: You studied English, but in school and maybe outside of school, where you were in China, is that right?

Interview Participant 3: Yeah, I I started when I was about like 10 in primary school and. Yeah, in China, yeah.

Researcher: In China, OK. And who were your teachers? Were they native English speakers? Were they English? English Speakers, American English speaker teachers? What kind of, what did you, who did you get taught by?

Interview Participant 3: So they're all like. Like local or like Chinese.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 3: When I was like in high school, I attend like some kind of like the event in summer. So there's a American teacher coming to my school to, you know, like kind of tutoring a bit and Yep, basically they're all, like local Chinese.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: Native speakers, they were non native English speakers, but native Speaker Mandarin. That makes sense. Ohh Chinese away, yeah.

Interview Participant 3: No.

Researcher: OK, cool. What about? So you moved here, you say? Is it October 2020 UM? When you when you move to the UK, did you have you found it like completely easy to communicate with native English

speakers or have you found it quite hard? I know that obviously living in Liverpool, you've quite a heavy accent to negotiate it is it? Is it hard? Is it difficult? What what can you tell me about it?

Interview Participant 3: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I think in the beginning like was like, really strong accent people. It's really hard to understand. So I kind of just like extract the words they say and try to like interpret it the meaning by myself. But after I think after. About half half year but like cause cause it was special like case cause it was all locked down. I couldn't like really communicate with people frequently. But I think if there's no lockdown I might take like two months.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: To. Understand them and after probably half year I could like understand the words. Every words, almost every word they say.

Researcher: Uh today. OK, that's really interesting to. Bring up the lockdowns, obviously being in lockdown, you've had less exposure to the accents because you're not around people. So would you say that if there were more frequent exposure to the accent, there would be easier to understand?

Interview Participant 3: Yeah. Definitely, yeah. Because I.

Researcher: OK. Really helpful.

Interview Participant 3 Understand now.

Researcher: OK. Yeah. OK. That makes a lot of sense. Thank you. That's that's really, really helpful and I appreciate that a lot. If you were, if you had to say you had to learn English again from scratch, but you got to kind of call the shots, would you prefer to have a speaker, a teacher or a non native speaker teacher?

Interview Participant 3: Yeah. Def. Definitely native.

Researcher: Definitely native, definitely native.

Interview Participant 3: It's for really quickly, so if I have a native accent around me I could like mimic that. And that's how I do.

Researcher: Yeah. So you think.

Interview Participant 3: Like when I was in middle school, I start like watching American TV show and I was watching Desperate Housewives and they have really good accents.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: So I kinda get the pick up the American accents from them.

Researcher: Yeah. Right. OK. So you would prefer to have a native English speaker because a speaker teacher, sorry to be able to, for your own pronunciation.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. Wonderful. And yeah, that makes a lot of sense. OK. And if you're, if you did have a native English speaker teacher, which one of the accents of? Would you absolutely prefer them to have out of the accents that you've heard today? And in the survey?

Interview Participant 3: Ohh. Haven't thought about that. Think the second one.

Researcher: It's the second one. Yeah, that's a popular one. UM. OK. Yeah, that's helpful. OK, wonderful.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: UMA last lastly last question and then I'll let you go and have your Saturday. How would you feel about if you were learning English again.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: And you're using an audio? Umm, so I know that there's often my audio CD's or like recordings, especially for things like IELTS preparation, things like that. How would you feel about incorporating some native English accents like the ones on this listening task? How would you feel about if they were introduced to you earlier on before you moved here? Do you think that would be beneficial or not?

Interview Participant 3: You were. Are you saying that, like, kinda like make me feel? Have a big picture about people's accent before I move in the UK.

Researcher: Yeah, it in the class from the classroom. So if you use them, use accents like these English language materials.

Interview Participant 3: Uh. Ah. I think it's definitely useful cause that will make me have like an awareness or like. Something like I could be, you know. On like, wait, let me you know, organize a language.

Researcher: That's so ok take all the time.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah. So like if somebody told me there are so many different accents before from the class. I will have a picture in my head so I could like, you know, like try to slow down my mind to understand people and understand the individual difference between people and. You know have have the image of diversity of accents in my head. Cause like when I was learning it was all just like.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: Really like original tone like like royal tone or Queen tone.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 3: Posh.

Researcher: Yeah, posh. Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: Posh and that's ohh. I didn't know the accent could be this different. So I was like, just like jumping to him being like understand nothing and yeah, it was. So somebody tell me that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. Yeah, no, absolutely, I completely understand.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: Umm. And it would be, yeah. OK, I could understand that very, very well. So before I conclude this sort of you know, formal part of the interview, is there anything else that you would like to add about any of the points that you've raised or any of the questions that I've asked before I stop the recording or or are you all good?

Interview Participant 3: I realized there was something that kind of influenced me.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 3: Let's those audios cause like. I can feel the energy or emotions of the speakers, so like first hold. The first one is like I felt just so exhausted. So kind of make me feel tired and I don't wanna understand them. There's something like psychological factors inside.

Researcher: Huh. Yeah. OK. OK. OK. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Researcher: And the yeah. So yeah. That makes a lot of sense. Are kind of like the energy you were getting from the accents. You were kind of feeling within yourself. Does that make sense?

Interview Participant 3: Umm. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Researcher: OK. That's really interesting. That's really interesting and I appreciate all of this, because this is gonna be really helpful for me. So I'll just, I'll just finish recording now. Is that everything that you wanted to add?

Interview Participant 3: Yeah.

Interview 4

Researcher: OK. So can I just quickly ask before you did the the listening task on the survey, how do you encountered any of these accents before?

Interview Participant 4: Umm yes, I think UM, some of them, like in real life and others. I feel like I recognize from like films and TV series.

Researcher: Can you give any examples of of when in real which ones in real life and which ones from TV?

Interview Participant 4: Umm. I think the first one, the first one was Scottish accent, right? And.

Researcher: I'm sorry I I can't tell you which ones they are.

Interview Participant 4: Right, OK. If I hope I got it right. But because I'm gonna say I have actually met people from Scotland. But yeah, and and. Umm, I think with the other ones. UM. Umm. One of them was like kind of like Irish, I think. Blast one maybe and it was it wasn't very strong. I feel like I think it was last speaker of the fifth speaker.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: Umm I. Yeah. Umm, I think I recognized her as Irish during the the survey, but now I'm not that sure. But anyways. Yeah. And that's like I think I. Yeah, I met people who has the accent in real life and also from TV. Umm, but not that much. So like I'm less familiar with the Irish accent.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: And those, but also would like the Scottish accent if I went to Scotland last summer. So. I really hope I got that right.

Researcher: I'll tell you at the end which ones were which, OK.

Interview Participant 4: Hmm, OK.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah.

Researcher: Alright, OK. Fantastic. Did you find any of these accents difficult to understand?

Interview Participant 4: Umm the like for speaker one and maybe also for four a bit so like I can understand the general idea of what she was talking about, but not the like. Some of the details. Basically I couldn't really. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah, most people say that about speaker one, actually, but what about it was difficult. Was it the speed or was it what? What what I've thought about it. I think it's like mainly different pronunciation of some syllables.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: But and also I certainly the terms.

Researcher: Yeah, the terms yeah, that a lot of people. Most people say about speaker one and they often it's the speed and the pronunciation that kind of that pinned understanding. So yeah. OK. Thank you. Umm. If you were sort of thinking of a native English speaker, which one of these accents would you think? Would you like mostly associate with that?

Interview Participant 4: Like. A native, a native English speaker.

Researcher: Yeah. So if you were thinking, what is the archetypal like, the native English speaker, which one of these five accents would you mostly associate with that?

Interview Participant 4: Like a most, most standard one.

Researcher: Yes. Yeah, that's what.

Interview Participant 4: I think speaking number 2.

Researcher: Yeah, speaking number 2. OK, that makes a lot of sense. And most people say that as well. Umm, so when you were learning English? Who? Who were your teachers? Were they? Did they sound like any of the people in the survey or where whereabouts did they come from? If you could give me, like, a bit of a little overview, that would be fantastic.

Interview Participant 4: Uh, not really. So I. Umm was well, I started learning English when I was back in China and I've had so first of all, of course, like school teachers who school English teachers who were Chinese and then their English did not really sound that native.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: And then there's, Umm, I do have like classes outside school and that's mainly. Umm, I think I met some American teachers there, so native speakers who came to China to teach English and I feel like, yeah, throughout. I've mostly followed either Chinese teachers or American teachers and like my own English speaking is very, very much.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: Affected by that. So I have an American accent. Before I came to UK so.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah, I haven't really had anyone who spoke like a British accent.

Researcher: OK, OK. That makes a lot of sense. Thank you. And yeah, I think it seems to be a bit of a trend that students in China have had American teachers. I think most people have said that they're they're English language teachers were American, which is, which is really interesting. And and at definitely helpful for my thesis as well, which is good.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah. And also I feel like I should mention that like, because when teachers teach English in school back in China, so on the textbook, there would mark the pronunciations and the pronunciation they mark is actually.

Researcher: And. Umm.

Interview Participant 4: British English, but most teachers speak American. Like say it like in American English, like American accent, with like the R's, like saying R instead of like, that kind of, yeah.

Researcher: OK, great. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The rhotic 'R' that is. Yeah, I heard that before then. Some kind in some textbooks. They would have two pronunciations. Is that right?

Interview Participant 4: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: OK. That's really interesting and I found it really kind of fascinating that they would sort of really highlight that one is different from the other. And so yeah, really, really interesting. Have what about you? So you moved. When did you move to the UK?

Interview Participant 4: Umm. In. 2017.

Researcher: So these okay amazing. So while you've been living here, how have you found your experiences communicating with native speakers? Has it been a completely easy ride, or is there sometimes a little bit of difficulty?

Interview Participant 4: I feel like before its also been quite difficult.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: Umm I so I would be very conscious with my accent and I I'm the kind of person who does code switching a lot. So I change my accent according to people who like I I spoke to and.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 4: Umm like so my first year here. I wasn't really around many native speakers because. I was in an International School and like my peers, were from all over the world, and I kind of kept my American accent back then and then.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: I so like it would be like I would talk to like someone working at a cafe or something and they spoke their native speaker. They spoke British English and my accent was suddenly turned British in a just like for like 1 sentence probably that happened and it was. Yeah. So I was really conscious and I wasn't really confident speaking with native speakers because I just. I would feel unconfident if I sound different from them.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. OK. OK. That makes sense. That makes a lot of sense. It's quite common like I know that when I've been trying to speak a different language that I've been learning, so like Mandarin or Italian

that I've been way too self-conscious because speaking is quite a it's well, it's a performance, really, isn't it? It's like it's showing, showing who you are and and how proficient your language is. And that can be a really wanting thing for a lot of people.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah.Yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: Umm, So what about what about when you're listening to what the native speakers and and sort of trying to understand? What they're saying? Has that been fairly easy or has it been a bit difficult, could you all?

Interview Participant 4: Uh. That was a bit difficult at first, because I think in the first. I don't know. Not for too long though, like.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: A year? Yeah, like at most a year because. Mostly because of the speed at which they talk. Yeah, we.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah, it's quite like it's basically this. And like people here, like native speakers talk faster than whatever practice you have you've had like in your, you know, like back home and it's just quite overwhelming.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah, that is. Yeah, that's pretty, pretty, pretty much the case. I can definitely empathize with that. Can I can I quickly just confirm because I've realized I'm speaking a lot to a lot of students at the moment. Which university are you attending right now?

Interview Participant 4: Umm, Oxford.

Researcher: Ok. Ok. Yeah, I just want to check me too. I just wanted to confirm that one fantastic. And so when you were learning English, you noticed that you had some Chinese teachers and some American teachers. And would you say that? Would you have a preference for whether you had a native or a non native English teacher to be teaching you English?

Interview Participant 4: I feel like.

Researcher: There's no wrong answer, so don't worry.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah, I like overlap. It would prefer a native speaker, and I'm especially in terms of like speaking and listening.

Researcher: Umm. Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 4: Umm. Yeah. I guess overall like a native speaker would be more helpful. Yeah.

Researcher: So yeah, and when you say native speaker, would you mean? Umm. Which speaker? Out of the five that you've listened to today, which one do you think would be most sort of native to you?

Interview Participant 4: Umm, I feel like. Like if I were to choose an English teacher, I would probably. Leaning towards like a someone that's more close to like, closer to my conception of standard English pronunciation, which was Speaker 2.

Researcher: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Fantastic. That's a popular answer. UM, so that's good. So fantastic.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah.

Researcher: What would you? What would be your opinion on incorporating different accents like the ones that you heard today, and when you do the survey in the English language teaching classroom now, that doesn't have to mean sort of have a teacher with that accent, but maybe material or different listening tasks or audio things like that. How would you feel about that?

Interview Participant 4: Umm, I would think it's that would be quite helpful.

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 4: I feel like some, I mean some it in some places already do that during day like I think in our IELTS listening tasks for example, they would have speakers with accents, probably non native accents as well.

Researcher: Yes. Yes.

Interview Participant 4: Uh, yeah. So I feel like it does come up and and I do find like when I'm here because I haven't had a lot of contact with different accents. When I was learning English and when I'm here, I feel like sometimes it is hard for me to understand.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 4: Understands different accents and like I think right now my like main. Listening gap from the native with the native speaker is that I can't really like. I feel like they are very good at distinguishing not distinguishing but understanding people even when they have a heavy accent and I'm not so good at that so.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I get that completely. So UM OK, fantastic. Well, that was kind of the last question, but if there are any sort of ideas or thoughts or quick sort of opinions that you have on anything that I've asked, you can summarize them for me now or if if you think that that you've covered everything, that's OK too, just let me know.

Interview Participant 4: Yeah. Yeah, I have. I yeah, I think that's that's all probably.

Researcher: OK, no worries. Well, I'll do is I'm just gonna stop the recording one second.

Interview 5

Researcher: We go start the recording. Uh, fantastic. OK, wonderful. OK. So I'm gonna ask you a few questions about some of the speakers that you've heard, and then I'm gonna move on, and I'm gonna ask you a little bit about different ways of speaking English and also your experiences in hearing different accents and different speakers of English while you've been living here. And also when you were living abroad as well. So can I confirm that you are, in fact, Chinese?

Interview Participant 5: OK. Yes.

Researcher: OK, wonderful. Whereabouts in China are you from?

Interview Participant 5: I'm from southern part of China. I'm from Guangdong province, uh, some famous cities in our promising include Guangzhou and Shenzhen and we are the closest province to Hong Kong and Macau. Yeah.

Researcher: OK, fantastic. Thank you. OK, then so about what you've just heard. You've had a refresher of the of the. The the the. Extracts and the voices of that you had to look at and the listening and the listening task survey. So before you've done the listening task survey, how do you ever encountered accents like this before? And if you have where, where have you heard them?

Interview Participant 5: I think the speaker number 2 is quite a standard. English accent, which uh English language learners you usually hear from recordings when they learn English. I think it might be posh. Yeah, and and speak a number 3 is also quite familiar because she seems to be she seems to speak like characters in British drama. So. So these two are quite familiar to me while the rest of them are not familiar to. To me at all.

Researcher: OK. Fantastic. That's really, really interesting to hear. Thank you. Were any of these accents particularly difficult to understand, which which one would you say was the hardest? If it was difficult?

Interview Participant 5: I think the first one will be the most difficult to understand and and it could be that because that is the first recording that here and it's not as clear as the rest of them. So imagine if I had heard the the second speaker to speak first and then the first speaker and then I may not have. I might feel less confused but the but. But when I hear the first speaker, I really for the first time I really can't get what she's saying because I'm it sounds to me lots of the words are so connected together so that I cannot distinguish the words from the the screen of the sound. So it was quite difficult. And the fourth one was hard too.

Researcher: OK. That's really interesting. And I really I'm intrigued by what you've said about you'd already it's the first one that you'd heard. So by the time we got to say the fifth speaker, you will have already heard the extract so many times that you'd probably find it easier to understand, which is a really interesting point. Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that. Umm, you've already kind of touched on this a little bit, so feel free to go into more detail. But which one of these accents do you associate mostly with a native speaker of English?

Interview Participant 5: I would say number speaker two and three.

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 5: And yeah, maybe that's. Uh, what I heard most frequently when I learn English and so so that impression of how native speakers speak may have form earlier in, in the early phase of me learning English. So yeah.

Researcher: Of course.

Interview Participant 5: Yeah, I was, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Thank you. And it's really, really interesting as well. So you've you've touched a little on about about your your English language learning experience. And I was just hoping if you could elaborate a little bit on that, maybe tell me about your teachers, what did they sound like? Did

they sound like any of the of the people that you heard in this survey or maybe not just your teachers, but also the materials that you used in the classroom as well?

Interview Participant 5: OK so. I I started learning English quite young, I think I. I started. I started the exposure to English as early as when I was in kindergarten, and then from primary school. English became a compulsory subject, but it was only until. Middle school when I was about 13 that I got that, I got to learn and English. Pronunciation and we we look at really how to what is called.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 5: So well, how do you call? How do you write the pronunciation script? Something like that. So yeah, so before that I didn't really realize how English can be spoken differently until on that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 5: English textbook I received before middle school. A and I saw that there were two pronunciations on that vocabulary list, and one is American English and the other is British English. So then I realized that I've been learning American English from our teachers. And yeah, I think that's.

Researcher: Yes ohm.

Interview Participant 5: What we what we learn? Yeah.

Researcher: Sorry to interrupt where you were. Your teachers, American, or were they speaking American English? Were they Chinese or?

Interview Participant 5: They they were, there were all Chinese, Chinese, Chinese, native speakers and and they mainly speak American English.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 5: Yeah, yeah. And and only until I got into university. Then I had a teachers from America.

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 5: I didn't really remember teachers from the UK actually, so I I think I I've been exposed exposed to American English all the time, until until I came to the UK.

Researcher: Hmm. Well, accents. Are you exposed to now in the UK, while whilst you've been here, can you can you name any or any ideas?

Interview Participant 5: Umm. I. I think an. I will. I'm still not very confident that the way people. Speak English refers can can directly refer to a kind of English accent, and most frequently I hear what my classmates say and what my college friends and the college stuff stay English. So in our class.

Researcher: Mm-hmm. Umm.

Interview Participant 5: And we we, we have classmates from India. Uh, a Bangladesh, Korea and a bunch of us from China and also Canada, UK, Australia. So. So I kind of so my understanding of those actions really come from only the examples around me. So I don't know whether another, for example, I don't know whether another Australian person will speak like Vincent.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 5: I I have no idea, so I can't really. I I would know. I I can't really say and be confident that oh, that's American and that's a that's Australian English and that's Canadian English. I will I will. I will not think about it but that's what I.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 5: I've been exposed to and there's quite a lot of diversity here, so I appreciate it to get a lot of. Get to hear this kind of different accents.

Researcher: Yeah, absolutely. And I completely agree with you there as well. It is really good to be able to have such a a large exposure to lots of different varieties of accents, lots of different people, lots of different languages. It definitely helps us, which is good. Have OK then. Tell me, since you've been living in the UK, and obviously, as you've said, you've got a classroom that is people with lots of different varieties of English, lots of different acts and lots of different dialects. Have you have you found it easier to communicate? Now I'm gonna say specifically with native English speakers. So in your classroom, that would be what just me and Christina. I unless I think I think that and that's. Yeah, I think that's about it. And when I say native English speakers, I am specifically referring to native speakers from the UK. Have you found it easy? Have you found it difficult? Is there anything, any stories that you've got where you something has been a bit confusing or you've needed someone to slow down or you tell me.

Interview Participant 5: OK.

Researcher: OK, take your time.

Interview Participant 5: Where my where he is speaking very quickly. I can't really get it and so and what I remember one time when when I, Hamish and and all his supervisees had a drink together in Royal Oak and. Umm. And Hamish is uh, saying something is is talking about something about the house, something about how? I don't know. I can't get it. So Vincent and Allison can respond really quickly and actively. But I was kind of. I'm confused and lost. I I can't really get what they were talking about so. Umm I I I think the the the key key issue is that we can understand Native speaker when we talk about something we both know for example topics in applied linguistics, but if it's something not.

Researcher: Umm. Yeah.

Interview Participant 5: I'm not familiar with about about life, for example about pop culture and then it is is more difficult for me to understand. It's more. I think it's more about the familiarity with the topic and vocabulary that that, that matter a lot, yeah.

Researcher: Yes. Yeah. OK. So the topic and the content itself in the conversation, you kind of need to be aware of it before going into conversation or be sort of understanding of everything that's talking about before you go into it. I mean, I can definitely relate to that because there's been so many times. I mean my Chinese, my Mandarin is not strong at all, but there are sometimes I can pick up phrases that you guys are saying. When Cong and Joanna talking or you guys talking to earlier or Lingyi and I can get it. And then as soon as I focus on one thing, then you've moved on to something else. And I'm like, ohh, that conversation was two minutes ago now. And I could understand that it can be quite difficult. Umm, so yeah, I get that a lot. If you wouldn't

mind me asking, you could be perfectly honest here and there is no right or wrong answer. So don't worry. But I just wanted to ask, would you have a preference if you if you were learning English again if you needed to? Would you have a preference for a native or a non native English teacher? Would would this matter to you?

Interview Participant 5: Interesting.

Researcher: Thank you.

Interview Participant 5: If I. If I can then. English from scratch. Again, I wish to have more native English teachers. Because. Because I. Now I don't know because I because I can imagine myself being willing to study or work in a English, English speaking country and I would like myself to get used to how native English speakers talk to each other and their terms, their vocabulary, et cetera.

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 5: I. Yeah, I I. I will say that I want more native English teachers because I have already many. Non Native English speakers around who are also Chinese learning English, so I don't need to know how non native English speakers speak.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 5: But I need, but it's really rare to to meet a native English speaker if I'm not in the US or the UK, but in China. So I I really need.. More speakers like that so I can have more samples of how people speak because non native speakers is already a large sample and yeah.

Researcher: Yes. Yes, OK. I completely agree with you as well. So fantastic. Thank you so much for saying that. And that's really, really interesting. So out of the speakers that you've heard today, there are there were five ones together and they've all got very different accents now in in just this one little tiny island alone, there are hundreds of different accents. It's. Why are the most phonologically diverse areas of English language in such a such a small concentrated area? And now if you, as you said, if you did were to learn English again and you did have a native speaker, would you mind if they had all of the accents that I showed you today? Or were there some that you would prefer them not to or some that you would definitely say? Yep, that's fine. What? What do you think about that?

Interview Participant 5: I think I would be OK with a all of them because from my English learning experience, no matter how difficult the accent may sound, as long as you get used to it, you kind of understand and you will notice how that speaker pronounced something. For example some some speaker prefer.

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 5: Some speaker will pronounce uh as R more like R some, and once you get it you you will have less difficulty understanding what he's saying. Or she's saying so it would be fine. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Yeah. Fantastic. Thank you so much. I just got one more question and then I will let you go and have the have your Sunday evening. UM, what would your thoughts be about incorporating accidents like this in the English language teaching classroom as maybe material or audio files or stimuli or things like that?

Interview Participant 5: Yeah, I I think it's it's quite necessary though to at least. And have the student. I have the experience of listening to different accents. You don't have to make them listen to different kinds of accents all the time. But you you need to at least introduce to them or say so. There are different English accents and I want to show you. I want you to try to listen to it and see if you can get it and why you think it's difficult to understand because. Because now native speaker of speakers of English are really likely to talk to non native speakers of English as well. They don't. They they sometimes don't talk to. The the some of them may by never have the chance to talk to native English speakers, but it's always difficult to.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 5: Practice as a listener. Practice listening to different.

Researcher: That's the hardest as well, yeah.

Interview Participant 5: Kinds of accents of that particular language.

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Interview Participant 5: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Fantastic. Yeah, I completely. I completely and utterly agree with you. So that's great. And I'm very pleased with all of the answers that you've given and I can understand as well because I think listening, listening and speaking at the hardest for me, I mean personally, obviously every language learner is different and the hardest things to do because as you know, you're not you, you don't do, you didn't do English language teaching, did you, did you?

Interview Participant 5: You mean the the module or? I I didn't do it, but but you can tell me.

Researcher: Part of that was gonna say I'm so like when you're reading, you know, sort of receptive skill, but it's in your own time and it's the same with writing. It's in your own time. You can stop, you can digest. You can think about things, you can go back. But when you're listening, you can't keep asking people to be like, sorry, slow down, do it again. Go back to what you just said. And the same with speaking. There was kind of when you're wanting to communicate in your target language, especially if you're speaking to native speakers, they will want you to finish your sentence. And not be like me trying to ask somebody for help or something like that. So I can. Yeah, I get that a lot. Have and that makes a lot of sense. Obviously we've we've covered quite a broad range of things today. It was that any other thoughts or ideas that you would like to tell me now to do with any of the questions that we have asked, anything that I might have missed or that you might have missed? It's OK if not.

Interview Participant 5: OK. And maybe one last comment or of thought is that before I came to the UK and I always thought that writing and speaking are more more difficult skills than reading and listening. But after I came in here.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 5: Listening. Well, listening has been the biggest problem. Instead of reading and writing or speaking. Yeah, I.

Researcher: Why? Why is that would you say?

Interview Participant 5: Because I'm because reading and writing, because now I'm doing a graduate course. So anything I read or write will be relevant to my course and I I I have an interest in it and I can look after look up things I don't know. And if I got the time and speaking, I can choose to talk to people. In very simple way.

Researcher: Umm.

Interview Participant 5: I can also choose not to talk at all. And I can. I can also choose to talk to non native speakers.

Researcher: Yeah. Umm.

Interview Participant 5: If I find it very difficult to understand native speakers, but listening is something that you really can't avoid because when you. Go shopping or like when you listen to lectures.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 5: You you can't. You can't decide what others, how others speak and when you need to get information merely from listening. Sometimes it's quite hard to understand because of actions or speed or vocabulary or or topics. And if and if you can't understand and it's really hard to respond as well. Yeah.

Researcher: Absolutely. That's that's really interesting and really fascinating and that's that's all sort of what? Hang on. I'm gonna stop recording now because we're finished the interview. So just give me one SEC.

Interview 6

Researcher: OK, just give me one moment. I'm going to sneeze again, so just give me one second. OK, so here we go, right? So just before we get started, I just want to ask you before the listening task, so before the survey and before. The the, the, the what I've just played you there. Had you encountered any of these accents before? And if so, whereabouts?

Interview Participant 6: Again, the first one is a bit of an Indian accent. If I'm not like. Yeah. So I had a Indian teacher in my high school, so that was an international high school. And we have teachers from other places in the world. And yeah, I had an Indian teacher and that's what he sounds like. They're also like some a few very British accents, I believe. And yeah, I'll. I've also like, had Britain teachers and etcetera.

Researcher: Yep. Which which ones can did you think were there the British ones?

Interview Participant 6: Uh, yeah. So I think the third one and the last one are quite British.

Researcher: OK. The third one, the last one, what about, UM, accent? Number 2. Where did you think that one was from?

Interview Participant 6: I can't really tell because like it is quite, I mean the pronunciation are correct like this sounds very correct, but I can't really tell like exactly which place she is from. Like, I don't think there's a very heavy accent that it's recognizable based on my experience. Yeah.

Researcher: OK, OK. Absolutely fantastic. Did you find any of these accents difficult to understand, and if so, which one which what about it was difficult?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah. So the first one, I think like the portion that I understand is like about half half. So it's like for one sentence, I can probably understand half of it. Yeah, but the other few apart from like four are perfectly fine to understand.

Researcher: OK, wonderful. And which one of you? If you had to pick one of these accents that you'd heard, which one would you associate the most with? A native speaker of English?

Interview Participant 6: I would say between number 2 and number 3, but. If I should I would pick 2 over number 3 because 3 is a little bit slower and.

Researcher: Uh-huh.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah. So I feel like speaking like normal speed is somehow like more native or something, I don't know. Yeah.

Researcher: Well, maybe more fluent if it's if it's. If it's faster, it's a bit more fluent so. Uh, yeah.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: The need to speak absolutely OK. No. So if if when you you said that you went to an international high school's whereabouts and was that that was in China, whereabouts in China?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, yeah. It's in Canton. Have you heard about it?

Researcher: I haven't.

Interview Participant 6: OK. Ohm. It's like the province near Hong Kong.

Researcher: OK. OK. So in the South of China, OK, what t when you were learning English, you said that you had teachers from all around the world and and you said that the number one sounded a little bit like one of your teachers from India, was that right?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Uh, how? Where else around the world did you have teachers from? Did you have a lot of Chinese teachers who were teaching English? Did you have any native English teachers? I guess you I obviously I have seen this gonna be a lot of them.

Interview Participant 6: So. Yeah, yeah. So there will be teachers from other places, but not only teaching English. So usually for those English teachers, they are from English speaking countries like Britain, America and like for the Indian teachers and also other Asian teachers, they usually teach other subjects like, yeah. So the Indian teacher taught geography for me and also have Chinese.

Researcher: OK.

Interview Participant 6: Teachers teaching stem subjects. I'll also have, like, uh, teachers from America teaching history, something like that. So it's like all the other places, but not necessarily teaching English.

Researcher: OK. OK. And the in when you had English teachers teaching English, they were from English speaking countries. Majoritively, right? OK. Right. Amazing. Thank you. That's really helpful.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah.

Researcher: Umm. And how long have you been living in the UK now for?

Interview Participant 6: Umm this is my thoughts. Yeah. So it's like about it just more than half of a year. I arrived here like in October last. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. OK. I and you're in. I could just want to check you. Are you in Oxford?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: OK. Yeah. Just wanted to confirm. So you've been living here for about six months. Have you had, how was your experience been with communicating with native English speakers? Could you tell me a little bit about that?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah. So. I feel like I can understand what you're talking about, but sometimes it's just when they talk a little bit faster or they have their own like slangs etcetera. I am bit confused but like for the most of the time I'm OK with like the communication.

Researcher: Yeah. I do think that they're listening when people are speaking in their native tongue and also in their native environment.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah.

Researcher: The listening part when I've been trying to cause I've been learning Mandarin for about three years now. I've just stopped because for various things. Umm, but trying to pick up what people were saying when they're speaking in a group of Chinese people and they're speaking their native language and you could get one bit by the time you focus on one bit that the conversation has moved on and it can be quite difficult. So I I can be empathized with that because I really, really struggle.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Have. Uh, and if you were, if you were to learn English again, if you started again from the beginning, would you prefer it? If you're if you're English teacher was a native speaker, or would you mind if they were a non native speaker? Do you not have an opinion or do you have a strong opinion?

Interview Participant 6: Umm, I don't actually mind if they are native but. Umm, I think I will mind if they have that level of professionalism. It's like, yeah, I think the background is more important than where they came from.

Researcher: OK, so as long as they're competent and qualified and proficient to be a teacher, and they have that level of ability, it doesn't matter so much where they're from. Is that what you're?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah. Yeah, because I've seen, like, teachers who aren't native but also taught very well, and also teachers who are native but didn't talk. As well as like those non natives.

Researcher: Yes, OK. That makes a lot of sense. Thank you. Umm would you mind if your English teacher had any of the accents that you heard from the different speakers today? Was is there any that you would prefer them to have or any that you would say? Oh, I definitely don't want a teacher with that accent.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah. So I think some of those really heavy accents like some Asian accents, should be avoided, like when learning English because.

Researcher: I.

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, because some of them have wrong pronunciations and accents, like when like the accents that you have to have when you pronounce the word But yeah, so I think they say like people like when I was learning English. So the on the text books that we had there are like 2 pronunciations, both British and American. Like. But whichever that the teacher has is like really depends on the teacher.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 6: But I don't think for the teacher to have and. Not so strong. UM, let's say normal or formal English accents is helpful for English teaching because like if I have a Singaporean teacher, which I did really to teach me English, I would be having like it is very easy to speak English as well. If I'm learning from and Singaporean.

Researcher: Yeah. Yes, that makes a lot of sense. This is a really helpful as well if there was. So you mentioned that you would prefer. Not to have a thick Asian accent or a strong accent. Would you classify any of the ones that you've heard today as like a a strong accent?

Interview Participant 6: Yeah, I think the first one is quite strong. I mean, quite intense in terms of the UM.

Researcher: Yeah.

Interview Participant 6: I don't know the deviation from what we told is normal. Pronunciation, yeah.

Researcher: Yes, absolutely. And that is absolutely true as well. Sorry, wonderful. Just let me move this. I've lost my question so. Let me just get rid of that right. I would nearly coming to the end now. Umm, So what would your thoughts be about incorporating accents like this in the English language classroom? Like it doesn't have to be for a a teacher, but maybe for some material, maybe some listening material or in textbooks and things like that? Would you have any ideas about that?

Interview Participant 6: Umm, I think like in China all our like all the recordings played at English test were American accents. So they have a. I think it is helpful to for students to know about other accents as well, and because they have to come across this like sooner or later if they're going abroad or something.

Researcher: Umm. Yeah.

Interview Participant 6: On. Yeah, I hate it. It would be helpful.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. OK, wonderful. And that's exactly the answer I was looking for as well. So thank you. And OK, well, that those are the rest. That's the majority of my questions, unless you have any other sort of thoughts or ideas that you excuse me that you've thought of whilst I've been asking the questions, if there's anything else you'd like to say, you can let me know now or you can ping it to me in an email. Umm yeah. Anything at all?

Interview Participant 6: Not really.

Researcher: OK, that's fine.

Appendix J – Descriptive Statistics for Comprehensibility Scores**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Liverpool Comprehensibility Score	32	1	4	2.78	.792
RP Comprehensibility Score	32	5	6	5.78	.420
Yorkshire Comprehensibility Score	32	3	6	4.94	.840
Newcastle Comprehensibility Score	32	2	4	3.09	.641
Bristol Comprehensibility Score	32	4	6	5.09	.588
Valid N (listwise)	32				

Appendix K – Friedman's ANOVA**Ranks**

	Mean Rank
Liverpool_cs	1.47
RP_cs	4.58
York_cs	3.59
Newcastle_cs	1.67
Bristol_cs	3.69

Test Statistics^a

N	32
Chi-Square	104.862
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	<.001
Exact Sig.	<.001
Point Probability	.000

a. Friedman Test

Appendix L – Wilcoxon Post-Hoc Tests

		Ranks		
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
RP_cs – Liverpool_cs	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	32 ^b	16.50	528.00
	Ties	0 ^c		
	Total	32		
York_cs – Liverpool_cs	Negative Ranks	0 ^d	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	32 ^e	16.50	528.00
	Ties	0 ^f		
	Total	32		
Newcastle_cs – Liverpool_cs	Negative Ranks	8 ^g	9.13	73.00
	Positive Ranks	13 ^h	12.15	158.00
	Ties	11 ⁱ		
	Total	32		
Bristol_cs – Liverpool_cs	Negative Ranks	0 ^j	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	29 ^k	15.00	435.00
	Ties	3 ^l		
	Total	32		
York_cs – RP_cs	Negative Ranks	20 ^m	11.90	238.00
	Positive Ranks	2 ⁿ	7.50	15.00
	Ties	10 ^o		
	Total	32		
Newcastle_cs – RP_cs	Negative Ranks	32 ^p	16.50	528.00
	Positive Ranks	0 ^q	.00	.00
	Ties	0 ^r		
	Total	32		
Bristol_cs – RP_cs	Negative Ranks	20 ^s	11.08	221.50
	Positive Ranks	1 ^t	9.50	9.50
	Ties	11 ^u		
	Total	32		
Newcastle_cs – York_cs	Negative Ranks	27 ^v	14.00	378.00
	Positive Ranks	0 ^w	.00	.00
	Ties	5 ^x		
	Total	32		
Bristol_cs – York_cs	Negative Ranks	8 ^y	9.19	73.50
	Positive Ranks	11 ^z	10.59	116.50
	Ties	13 ^{aa}		
	Total	32		
Newcastle_cs – Bristol_cs	Negative Ranks	31 ^{ab}	16.00	496.00
	Positive Ranks	0 ^{ac}	.00	.00
	Ties	1 ^{ad}		
	Total	32		

Test Statistics^a

	RP_cs – Liverpool_cs	York_cs – Liverpool_cs	Newcastle_cs – Liverpool_cs	Bristol_cs – Liverpool_cs	York_cs – RP_cs	Newcastle_cs – RP_cs	Bristol_cs – RP_cs	Newcastle_cs – York_cs	Bristol_cs – York_cs	Newcastle_cs – Bristol_cs
Z	-5.018 ^b	-5.014 ^b	-1.525 ^b	-4.814 ^b	-3.748 ^c	-5.032 ^c	-3.989 ^c	-4.601 ^c	-.920 ^b	-4.933 ^c
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.127	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.358	<.001

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

c. Based on positive ranks.

Appendix M – Spearman's Rho Tests**Correlations**

			Liverpool_cs	Liverpool_pr
Spearman's rho	Liverpool_cs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.294
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.102
		N	32	32
	Liverpool_pr	Correlation Coefficient	-.294	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.102	.
		N	32	32

Correlations

			RP_cs	RP_pr
Spearman's rho	RP_cs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.060
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.743
		N	32	32
	RP_pr	Correlation Coefficient	.060	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.743	.
		N	32	32

Correlations

			York_cs	York_pr
Spearman's rho	York_cs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.022
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.904
		N	32	32
	York_pr	Correlation Coefficient	-.022	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.904	.
		N	32	32

Correlations

			Newcastle_cs	Newcastle_pr
Spearman's rho	Newcastle_cs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.375*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.034
		N	32	32
	Newcastle_pr	Correlation Coefficient	-.375*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.
		N	32	32

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

			Bristol_cs	Bristol_pr
Spearman's rho	Bristol_cs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.133
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.467
		N	32	32
	Bristol_pr	Correlation Coefficient	.133	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.467	.
		N	32	32