Judgments of Intelligibility and Foreign Accent by Listeners of Different Language Backgrounds

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The major goals of this study were (a) to investigate multiple aspects of English phonological patterns spoken by Chinese speakers with different dialect backgrounds, (b) to explore non-native speakers' (NNSs') perceptual judgments of the intelligibility of Chinese- accented English, and (c) to examine the effects of the listener's language background on their perceptions of Chinese-accented speech. One Cantonese speaker from Hong Kong and one Mandarin speaker from Taiwan were recruited to read and record an English text. Twenty-nine listeners of various language backgrounds were separated into five groups: native Cantonese ($n = 5$) native Mandarin ($n = 5$), native English ($n = 5$), ESL ($n = 10$), and EFL ($n = 4$). They were requested to transcribe the test utterances in a self-paced speech recognition task and judge the intelligibility and the strength of the foreign accent. The results showed that all groups perceived both the Cantonese and Mandarin accents to be at least 70% intelligible. Mandarin-accented English was easier to understand than Cantonese-accented English was. The ESL group (including Filipino and Pakistani native speakers) and the Cantonese group performed worse than the other three groups. In comparing the two foreign-accented speeches, the listeners perceived consonant cluster simplifications and consonant substitutions in both accents. In Cantonese-accented speech, several word-stress shifts and double primary stresses evidently made words unintelligible. The listeners' perceptual judgments of Cantonese and Mandarin accents yielded a disfavour rating for both. Among all listeners, the ESL group demonstrated a higher degree of agreement on intelligibility and the

strength of accents. The native English-speaker group and Chinese-speaker group gave the lowest ratings to the two accents, demonstrating strict native English norms.

Key words: World Englishes, intercultural communication, pronunciation teaching

In the context of English as a global language, in which the interaction is not only among native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) but also among NNSs themselves, there is a need to investigate how well NNS listeners can successfully comprehend the accents produced by other NNSs. Hong Kong is a multilingual and multicultural society, so NNS communication in English is commonly observed in daily speech. For example, Chinese employers and Pilipino domestic helpers communicate with each other in English at home, and foreign tourists and businesspersons visiting Hong Kong interact with Chinese speakers in English.

Cantonese and Mandarin speakers are not mutually intelligible. It is common to witness two Chinese speakers talking to each other in their common language, English. In recent years, the Hong Kong government has relaxed the immigration controls on Taiwanese and mainland Chinese students going to Hong Kong in pursuit of university degrees. More and more top high school students from these areas have been admitted to Hong Kong universities. To enter the universities, applicants must pass English interview examinations. They are expected to understand the English language used as the medium of instruction without difficulty. However, the author learned informally from some of these students that they found it difficult to follow Hong Kong lecturers' English, and that, interestingly, they found lectures given by native English speakers much easier to understand. The reason for this may be that when students study English in their hometowns, 'Inner Circle models of Englishes cast a long shadow for both students and teachers' (Pickering, 2006), and 'most current pronunciation materials are consistent with the nativeness principle' (Levis, 2005, p. 371). Consequently, there is

little or no exposure to other varieties of English, which causes Taiwanese and mainland students to experience difficulty in understanding the English spoken by Hong Kong people.

Chen (2010), and Chen and Chung (2008) investigated the English speech patterns produced by 30 Taiwanese Mandarin speakers by examining both acoustic measures and perceptual ratings given by 10 native English listeners, and identified critical variables that affected native listeners' perceptions of foreign accents. The results showed that vowel reduction and linking were two important indices for perceiving accents. In these studies, however, only non-native speakers and English native listeners were examined. Unlike Mandarin speakers in Taiwan, Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong inhabit a former British colony and have extensive experience with its English-speaking environment. It may be expected that greater exposure to native English speakers in everyday life helps Cantonese learners in Hong Kong speak more fluently as a consequence of linking speech segments and accelerating the rate of speech. However, Setter (2006) found it not the case. Hong Kong English speakers showed smaller differences in the relative syllable durations of tonic, stressed, unstressed, and weakened syllables than the British English speakers did. Therefore, this study intends to investigate which distinctive features spoken by both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers affect listeners' intelligibility and how this occurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature, intelligibility and comprehensibility have very often been confounded or interpreted as being the same. Kirkpatrick, Deterding, and Wong (2008) showed that the English speech of Hong Kong speakers was internationally intelligible. Although the aim of the research was to investigate the international intelligibility of Hong Kong English speakers, it actually assessed the comprehensibility of speakers. The result lacked validity because the instrument used in the study was a comprehension test.

As pointed out by the authors, in reality, the process of comprehension is not as clear-cut as the word-recognition process of intelligibility. It was observed that the Hong Kong listeners, in trying to recognise the words in the recordings, may have taken the speakers' intentions and contextual clues into consideration. The authors themselves confounded intelligibility and comprehensibility and, in turn, contributed to a limitation of the study. It is indeed arguable that those with an intermediate or lower level of English proficiency were able to understand the speech with contextual clues or syntactical information, particularly in situations of cognitive processing overload.

According to Derwing and Munro (2005), and Jenkin (2000), there is no universally agreed upon definition of intelligibility. However, as Pickering (2006) noted, within the field of World Englishes, 'a common conceptualisation is Smith and Nelson's (1985) tripartite definition of intelligibility, the ability of the listener to recognise individual words or utterances; comprehensibility, the listener's ability to understand the meaning of the word or utterance in its given context, and interpretability, the ability of the listener to understand the speaker's intentions behind the word or utterance.' 'Intelligibility in this sense is restricted to the ability of listeners to accurately recognise and record individual words' (Kirkpatrick, Deterding, & Wong, 2008, p. 361). By asking participants to dictate the English words spoken by speakers, this study attempts to measure the first level, the intelligibility of the pronunciation of Cantonese and Mandarin speakers for listeners of different language backgrounds. At the same time, the listeners' attitudes to the foreign accents are also measured.

Jenkins (2002) has a liberating view: She notes that since the number of NNSs outnumbers NSs, teaching English as an international language (EIL) is more relevant than teaching NNSs to imitate native speakers' accents. Jenkins (2004) suggests five stages of pronunciation learning. In order to achieve international intelligibility, one needs to learn to produce the most essential phonological features in EIL communication first, then gradually learn the peripheral features to gain knowledge of the different varieties of

world Englishes. This is known as the lingua franca core (LFC) approach to EIL (Jenkins, 2003). However, as English proficiency is regarded as crucial for academic and career success in Chinese society, many English learners struggle to attain native-like accents in order to survive amid global competition. The issue is whether we should preserve standard English pronunciation or emphasise the intelligibility of EIL (Berns, 2005). It cannot be taken for granted that teachers, let alone learners from the expanding circle, wish to use their accented English to express their identities. Past experiences and their assessment of their future chances of success may combine to affect their attitudes to English at a deeper level. The participants in Jenkins' (2005) study, even those who would rather not use the native accent, appear to have had ambivalent and contradictory attitudes to English, and admiration for the native accent. The current study explores what is needed for this conceptual shift.

The purposes of this study are to investigate multiple aspects of English phonological patterns spoken by Chinese speakers with different dialects and explore non-native speakers' perceptual judgments of intelligibility and foreign accents in English. Through examining both transcriptions of a dictation passage and the perceptual judgments of listeners of different language backgrounds, the critical variables that affect listeners' perceptions of intelligibility and foreign accents will be identified.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the English phonological patterns used by speakers of different Chinese dialects (Cantonese and Mandarin)
2. To explore non-native speakers' perceptual judgments of intelligibility and foreign accents
3. To examine the effects of the listener's language background in interaction with their perceptions of Chinese-accented English.

METHODS

Participants

There are a total of 2 speakers and 29 listeners in this study, 8 males and 23 females, aged between 19 and 25 years. Two male Chinese speakers, one a Cantonese speaker from Hong Kong and the other a Mandarin speaker from Taiwan, were recruited to produce a long English text. Twenty-nine listeners with various first language (L1) backgrounds (British English [$n = 2$], American English [$n = 3$], Tagalog [$n = 9$], Pakistani [$n = 1$], Japanese [$n = 2$], Korean [$n = 2$], Cantonese [$n = 5$], and Mandarin [$n = 5$]) transcribed the test utterances in a self-paced speech recognition task, and judged the intelligibility and the strength of foreign accent. Among these listeners, the five native English speakers from the United Kingdom and United States formed the NS group. They were exchange students in a Hong Kong local university. The other four English-speaking groups of listeners are as follows: ESL group (10 Filipino and Pakistani speakers), EFL group (four Japanese and Korean speakers), Cantonese group (five Cantonese speakers), and Mandarin group (five Mandarin speakers). All participants were university freshmen in Hong Kong, except those from the Philippines and Pakistan, who were working in Hong Kong and had received their bachelor degrees in their home countries. All the university freshmen were currently attending a freshman English course at the foundational level (ranked lowest among the university's three-level language enhancement courses). All these participants were categorised at a low-intermediate level of English proficiency.

Materials

The materials employed in the study included a dictation passage and a short questionnaire about the subjects' perceptions of intelligibility and the strength of the foreign accents. A dictation passage of 15 sentences with 70

embedded blanks was selected from *Teaching Pronunciation* (Celce-Murcia et al., 2001). This passage is shown in appendix A. It has at least three obvious advantages: First, its limited inventory of vocabulary, grammar, sound segments, and consonant clusters, thereby enabling listeners to make more reliable comparisons of speakers. Second, the sentences in the passage were carefully designed to focus on a particular theme and to avoid sequences that were hard to syllabify or segment. Third, instead of using full sentence dictation, the fill-in-the-blank cloze eliminates the less important function words, decreases listeners' memory loading, and enhances their motivation to spell the words. Most of the content words, particularly the multisyllabic words, were chosen because these words carry the important information of the passage and thus help assess the intelligibility of this spoken text.

In the second task, the participants were asked to judge the intelligibility and the strength of foreign accents on a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire survey. The choice of adjectives in the questionnaire was inspired by several studies on accents (Bradford, Farrar, & Bradford, 1974; Lambert, 1967) as well as the feedback provided by the researcher's students. The contents of the questionnaire included three attitude categories: competence, social attractiveness, and personal integrity. It included such statements as the following:

- I think the speaker is smart.
- I think the speaker is handsome.
- I think the speaker is industrious.

Survey questionnaire details are given in appendix B.

The relationship between the transcription and perceptual judgments were then analysed to determine the phonological components of intelligibility and foreign-accented speech. Listener judgments of such variables as intelligibility and accentedness may help us both to understand the way in which people respond to particular accented speakers and to ascertain the difficulty they encounter in understanding a particular phonological variable.

Data Collection Procedure

In the production stage of the research, two Chinese speakers were informed of the research goal and the recording procedure before the session began. They read the passage individually in a quiet room and their voices were recorded on a notebook computer. The participants were asked to read the diagnostic passage and were allowed to request help. They were able to practice words they were not familiar with before recording began. For example, one participant found the word "Arabic" to be unfamiliar, and he checked it in the online Cambridge dictionary. The dictionary provided the IPA transcription and audio recording to help with his further practice. It took about 15 minutes for each participant to complete the task. The author then analysed the speech data acoustically and auditorily.

In the perception stage, a brief questionnaire about personal background was distributed to the listeners. The instruction sheet for the dictation and speech perceptual ratings was provided to the 29 listeners in the orientation session. In the first phase of this stage, a dictation task was conducted with a recording of Cantonese-accented English. Seventy fill-in-the-blank items were expected to be completed. Then the participants were asked to assess the degree of the foreign accent on a seven-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). After finishing the first phase and taking a 15-minute break, the second phase started. The same activities were conducted again with a recording of Mandarin-accented English. In order to eliminate possible order effects, the order of the speech samples given to the listeners was randomised.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Task One: Speech Recognition Task

To make a comprehensive comparison of the 29 listeners, those belonging

to the five language backgrounds were categorised as follows: (1) NS group, (2) ESL group (Filipino and Pakistani), (3) EFL group (Japanese and Korean), (4) Mandarin group, and (5) Cantonese group. The speech recognition stage had the five groups of listeners listen to and compare the two Cantonese- and Mandarin-accented English text recordings. The mean score for the native speakers served as the anchoring point and those of the other four groups were then compared to this. The numbers correct of the four groups were first counted and then compared.

Table 1 illustrates the means with standard deviation for the dictation task for the five groups. All the groups achieved at least 70% intelligibility of both accents, with the native English listener group achieving the highest rates: 90% intelligibility of the Cantonese-accented speech and 97% intelligibility of the Mandarin-accented speech.

Cantonese-accented English speech yielded the following intelligibility averages: NS, $M = 63.2$; ESL, $M = 49.2$; EFL, $M = 55.3$; Mandarin, $M = 59.8$; and Cantonese, $M = 51.8$. These were lower than those from Mandarin-accented English speech: NS, $M = 68$; ESL, $M = 51.1$; EFL, $M = 62.5$; and Mandarin, $M = 61.6$; the exception being the Cantonese group, $M = 48.8$. The NS (97% vs. 90%), ESL (73% vs. 70%), and EFL (89% vs. 79%) groups generated higher rates for Mandarin-accented speech. The Cantonese group showed relatively less familiarity with the Mandarin accent ($M = 48.8$, 70%) than with their mother tongue ($M = 51.8$, 74%).

Table 1
The Mean Score of the Dictation Task (70 Items)

Group	Cantonese accent	SD	Corr. rate	Mandarin accent	SD	Corr. rate
NS ($n = 5$)	63.2/70	1.5	90%	68/70	1.2	97%
ESL ($n = 10$)	49.2/70	12.3	70%	51.1/70	10.6	73%
EFL ($n = 4$)	55.3/70	4.2	79%	62.5/70	2.6	89%
M ($n = 5$)	59.8/70	5.5	85%	61.6/70	4	88%
C ($n = 5$)	51.8/70	2.8	74%	48.8/70	2.6	70%

Note. NS = native speakers; ESL = Filipino + Pakistani; EFL = Japanese + Korean; M = Mandarin C = Cantonese.

Table 2 shows the most frequent errors of each group (the data only shows the frequency of error equal to or more than 75%). Those marked in italics are errors common to both groups, suggesting that no matter what accents the listeners heard, they could not understand the words or spell them out. There are several possible reasons for this kind of error. First, both of the speakers' accents were so strong that even native speakers were not able to figure out the word or guess the word from the context (e.g., the word *accurate*).

Second, these errors might have been caused by the weakness of NNS listeners' listening skills. For example, their command of vocabulary was insufficient, they were not able to recognise the words, or they did not know how to spell the words (e.g., *Arabic* for the Cantonese group)

Table 2
The Most Frequent Errors of Each Group (Frequency ≥ 75%)

Group	Cantonese accent (error rates)	Mandarin accent (error rates)
NS (n = 5)	100%:*accurate*, issue 80%: address, exposure	80%: *accurate*
ESL (n = 10)	90%: *France, desire* 80%: *can't, old, accurate* theories, French	80%: *France, can't, desire, accurate, old,* system, address
EFL (n = 4)	100%:*old*, issue, 75%: address	100%: *old* 75%: Arabic, can't, desire, accurate
M (n = 5)	100%: *accurate* 80%: *theories*	100%: *accurate, theories* 80%: Arabic, desire
C (n = 5)	100%: *theories, Arabic, path, desire, exposure,* France 80%: *accent, accents, accurate, sound*	100%: *theories, Arabic, path, desire, accurate* 80%: *accent, accents, sound,* system, exposure

Note. NS = native speakers; ESL = Filipino + Pakistani; EFL = Japanese + Korean; M = Mandarin; C = Cantonese.

The differences in the errors with regard to Cantonese-accented English and Mandarin-accented English are listed below. Table 3a and Table 3b show examples and comments about the Cantonese-accented and Mandarin-accented speeches. In Cantonese-accented speech, several word-stress shifts

(e.g., in *theories*) or double primary stress (e.g., *issue* sounding like *eat shoe*) were found that made the sounds unintelligible. Furthermore, initial and final consonant cluster simplifications were the causes of words making no sense. Finally, such consonant shifts as /ʃ/ to /s/ or /θ/ to /f/ were special features leading listeners to be unable to decode the words.

Table 3a
The Most Frequent Errors Types/Words: Cantonese Accent

Examples	Comments
1. Several <u>theories</u> <u>address</u> this <u>issue</u> /fiːɔ́ːˌriː/ /əɖre/ /iːɕu: /	1. Stress shift 2. /θ/ → /f/ 3. Final consonant deletion 4. Double primary stress 5. /ʃ/ → /s/

2. Most native speakers of English can,
    for example, recognise people from
    <u>France</u> by their <u>French</u> <u>accents</u>
    /ˈfenˈtʃi/   /fenˈtʃi/ /ˈesen/
	1. Initial consonant cluster simplification
	2. Double primary stress
	3. Final consonant cluster simplification

3. You also need <u>accurate</u> information
                /əkəːˌreɪt/
    about the English_sound system_and
    lots of <u>exposure</u> to the spoken language.
                /ɪḱpəʊːsœː/
	1. Stress shift
	2. Initial consonant cluster simplification
	3. /ʃ/ → /s/

Table 3b
The Most Frequent Errors Types/Words: Mandarin Accent

Examples	Comments
1. Several theories <u>address</u> this issue. /əɖre/	1. Final consonant deletion

2. They may also be able to identify
    Spanish or <u>Arabic</u> speakers over the
                /ˈeɪbrok/
    telephone, …
	1 Totally wrong pronunciation

3. Does it mean that accents <u>can't</u> be
                /kæn/
    changed?
	1. Final consonant deletion

4. …to be a combination of hard work,
    a good ear, and a strong <u>desire</u> to
                /dɪśɜ̌: t/
    sound like a native speaker.
	1. Entirely incorrect pronunciation
	    Mispronounced as *dessert*

5. You also need <u>accurate</u> information /aḱrɔ: t/	1. Entirely incorrect pronunciation
	2. /m/ → /n/
about the English sound <u>system</u> and /sɪtən/	3. /ʒ/ → /dʒ/
lots of <u>exposure</u> to the spoken /ɪsṕəʊdʒə/	
language.	

On the other hand, in Mandarin-accented speech, except for final consonant deletion, most of the cases involved complete mispronunciation, suggesting that the speaker did not know the word and thus could not decode the words correctly (e.g., *accurate*). Because the Mandarin speaker had received explicit formal instruction in the IPA in secondary school, he did not demonstrate difficulty with the assignment of word-stress in known words; however, when unknown words appeared, his weak knowledge of letter–sound correspondences caused confusion. It is worth noting that one of his typical techniques was negative transference from Taiwanese Mandarin to English speech, that is, /m/ to /n/ (e.g., in *system*) in final position.

Task Two: Judgment of Feelings Toward Foreign Accents

Overall Judgments

In general, all the listeners' perceptual judgments of Cantonese and Mandarin accents were rated low, roughly between 3 and 4 points on the 7-point scale, suggesting listeners were not favourable to either accent. Table 4 and Figure 1 illustrate that Mandarin-accented speech was rated slightly higher than Cantonese-accented speech. Means varied for item 1, "It is easy for me to understand English with this accent" ($M = 4.4$ vs. $M = 4.0$); for item 2, "I like English with this accent" ($M = 3.6$ vs. $M = 2.8$); for item 3, "I think English with this accent is a little funny" ($M = 3.9$ vs. $M = 3.5$); for item 6, "I think the speed of the recording is too fast" ($M = 3.2$ vs. $M = 2.8$); for item 14, "I think the speaker is handsome" ($M = 4.2$ vs. $M = 3.0$); and for item 15, I think the speaker is well-educated ($M = 4.0$ vs. $M = 3.6$).

Table 4
All Listeners' Perceptions Toward Cantonese Accent and Mandarin Accent

Feelings toward Accents	C accent	SD	M accent	SD
1. Easiness	4.0	1.2	4.4	1.3
2. Likability	2.8	1.2	3.6	1.2
3. Funny	3.5	1.5	3.9	1.3
4. Unfamiliarity	3.7	1.7	3.5	1.3
5. Anxiety	3.7	1.3	3.5	1.1
6. Speed	2.8	1.4	3.2	1.3
7. Honesty	4.4	1.2	4.6	1.3
8. Pleasantness	4.4	1.2	3.8	1.5
9. Sophistication	3.7	1.2	3.7	1.4
10. Credibility	4.0	1.2	3.9	1.2
11. Industriousness	4.0	1.3	3.8	1.3
12. Determination	4.1	1.3	4.0	1.6
13. Smartness	3.8	1.0	4.0	1.3
14. Appearance	3.0	1.2	4.2	1.2
15. Education	3.6	1.1	4.0	1.2
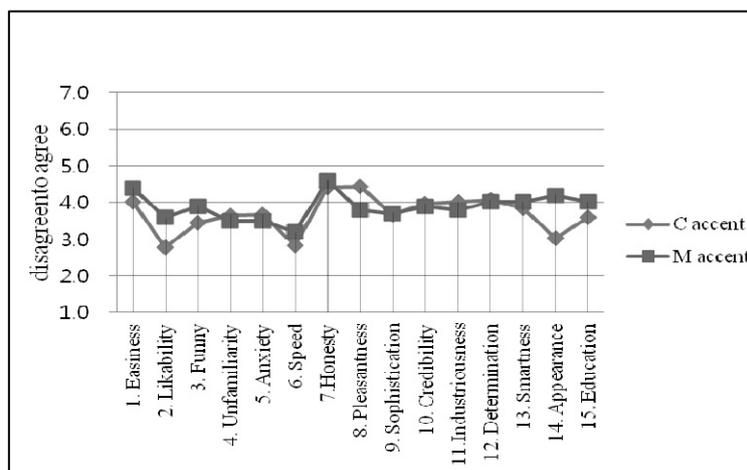
Figure 1
Summary of All Listeners' Feelings Toward the Cantonese- and Mandarin-Accented Speech.   Note. C = Cantonese, M = Mandarin.

Perceptual judgments from listeners with different language backgrounds. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the perceptual trends of listeners with different language backgrounds toward the accents produced by the Cantonese and Mandarin speakers. With regards to Cantonese-accented speech (Figure 2), Filipinos and Pakistanis (F + P) demonstrated a higher degree of agreement than the other groups for items 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15. This suggests that Filipino and Pakistani domestic helpers, used to working overseas and interacting more frequently with local employers than the other groups, make better appraisals of Cantonese-accented English than do the other four groups. In contrast, the native-speaker group (NS) gave a lower rating for items 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10, and the Cantonese group gave lower ratings for items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. It seems that NSs set a strict NS norm, and Cantonese speakers set themselves a higher standard for eliminating their foreign accent to comply with this norm. It is worth noting that Mandarin speakers across the five groups rated item 2 ("I like the accent"; $M = 1.8$, SD = 0.4) the lowest, thus expressing strongly negative views.
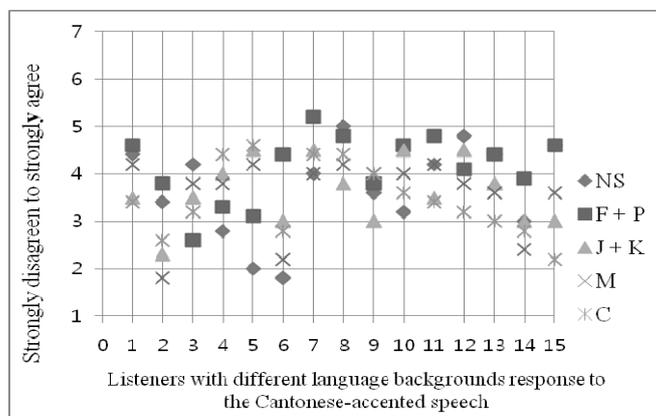

Figure 2
Listeners with Different Language Backgrounds Response to the Cantonese-Accented Speech.
Note. NS = native speakers; F + P = Filipino + Pakistani; J + K = Japanese + Korean; M = Mandarin C = Cantonese.
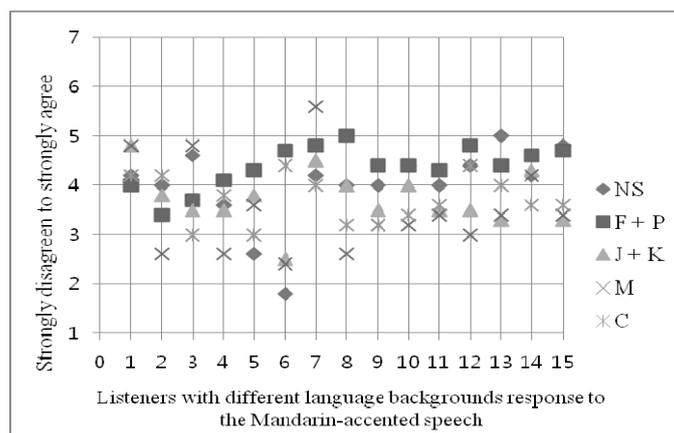
Figure 3
Listeners with Different Language Backgrounds Response
to the Mandarin-Accented Speech.
Note. NS = native speakers; F + P = Filipino + Pakistani; J + K = Japanese + Korean; M
= Mandarin C = Cantonese.

In relation to Mandarin-accented speech (Figure 3), Filipinos and Pakistani (F + P) again demonstrated a higher degree of agreement than the other groups, but this was for items 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14, suggesting that even though this group was, relatively speaking, not familiar with Mandarin-accented English, it evaluated the accent as more pleasant, sophisticated, credible, industrious, and determined—and its speaker as handsome. In contrast, Mandarin speakers gave lower ratings for items 2, 4, 8, 10, and 12, suggesting that they did not like their own foreign accent and set themselves a higher standard for eliminating their accent to comply with the NS norm. For example, they did not consider the accent pleasant or credible.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the intelligibility problems with Cantonese-accented English and Mandarin-accented English for listeners from different language

backgrounds. The results of the study showed that all the groups found at least 70% of the spoken texts intelligible in both accents, while for the Mandarin and EFL groups, the figure was 80%, and for the NS group it was above 90%. Relatively speaking, the ESL (Filipino and Pakistani) and Cantonese groups performed worse than the other three groups because some of the participants, depending on the dictation scripts, struggled with spelling. Listeners, except for the Cantonese group, had a lower number correct for Cantonese-accented English than for Mandarin-accented English. That is, Mandarin-accented English seemed a little easier to understand than Cantonese-accented English did. Both the Cantonese and Mandarin groups were much more comfortable with their mother tongue accents.

A comparison was made of the two accented speeches, and consonant cluster simplifications and consonant substitutions were found in both. In Cantonese-accented speech, several word-stress shifts or double primary stresses made words unintelligible. In Mandarin-accented speech, most of the errors stemmed from the mispronunciation of unknown words.

The greatest phonological obstacles to mutual intelligibility appear to be deviant core sounds in combination with misplaced or misproduced nuclear stress, or both, which echoes the results of Jenkins' (2000) study. As Jenkins (2000) noted, the research showing the importance of supra-segmentals, such as intonation and rhythm, in intelligibility has been based entirely on NS listeners, who may process speech differently from NNSs. In her data on NNS–NNS interactions, she found the majority of communication breakdowns were due to segmental errors or segmentals combined with nuclear-stress errors. This study found that Cantonese and Mandarin accented speech containing segmentals combined with nuclear-stress errors were noticeable. As Jenkins mentioned, these were the most difficult problems to solve because NNSs usually use bottom-up processing strategies and seem unable to compensate for pronunciation errors by using contextual or syntactic information.

With respect to perceptual judgments, all the listeners rated low on both Cantonese and Mandarin accents, showing their disfavour toward these

accents. Among all groups, the ESL (Filipino and Pakistani) group demonstrated a higher degree of agreement on several items in both accents, suggesting that their ratings were probably more lenient. However, in fact, they have more contact with people in Hong Kong and were thus perhaps more inclined toward the Cantonese-accented variety of English than were the other four groups. Conversely, the NS and Chinese groups (both Cantonese and Mandarin) gave lower ratings and had a stricter set of NS norms. The expanding circle of Englishes (including such speakers as Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), to use Kachru's (1982) term, is 'norm-dependent' because it relies on the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle. Even though the speech of these non-native speakers is intelligible enough for the listeners, they prefer to adopt the native norm.

The findings suggest that the influence of Received Pronunciation (RP) or the General American (GA) accent on Chinese learners has been rooted in history. Not only students but also English teachers in Greater China are a group of conservators of traditional practices. The notion of English as a lingua franca (ELF) core in college English teaching seems to lack support. Even in Hong Kong, where English is learned as an official language, some teachers still insist that English pronunciation teaching should follow the RP or GA accent. The same is true of Taiwan and mainland China, where most students learn English in the classroom. The main objective of English teaching in colleges is to ensure that students are able to learn to use standard English to improve their ability to communicate. Most English teachers still use RP or GA pronunciation as the standard to judge their students' oral English.

This study has a number of pedagogical implications. Due to frequent interactions in higher education among people from Taiwan, the mainland, and Hong Kong, Taiwanese and mainland English teachers should be aware that Hong Kong English has characteristic phonological features that are different from the English of native speakers. Students who are preparing themselves for tertiary studies in Hong Kong should be exposed to this type of English either in class or out of class so that they can become more

accustomed to the pronunciation. On the other hand, the typical phonological features of Hong Kong English should be introduced to local Hong Kong students to raise their awareness of the differences between Hong Kong English and other Englishes. However, the most important thing is that teachers and students in Taiwan and the mainland should realise that besides native speaker English, there are also other varieties of Englishes, each of which has its own phonological features. Only when students are exposed to different varieties of English can they benefit from learning the English language.

The ultimate goal of English teaching is to develop the students' language competence for communication. We should give students more opportunities to use English in international contexts. Encouragement should be given to them when their pronunciation is aimed towards international intelligibility rather than traditional pronunciation syllabuses.

Although the major focus of traditional pronunciation classes is the RP or GA standard, in the international communication context, they are not the most intelligible or preferred accents. They might even make students less intelligible to speakers in the expanding outer circle (Jenkins, 2002). Due to regional differences and cultural backgrounds, even the inner circle speakers have different accents, so English teachers should recognize Chinglish, Hong Kong English, and Taiwanese English. Instant error correction might be useful when teaching vocabulary and grammar; however, frequent error corrections in pronunciation class make students feel anxious and discouraged (Mehmet, 2001). A more tolerant and relaxed classroom learning environment promotes low anxiety among students and efficient learning.

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APPENDIX A

Instructions:

You will hear two audio samples one at a time. After each sample you will have some time to fill in the answers. The procedure is exactly the same for the two samples.

There are two kinds of tasks:

1) First, fill in the blanks according to the recordings you hear.

2) In the second task, on a scale from 1 to 7, circle a number that best describes your view. The number 1 means 'strongly disagree x', and the number 7 means 'strongly agree x'. There are 15 scales for each sample. You are also asked to describe the speaker in your own words, using the empty space provided.

The research is anonymous.

Background information:

Sex (circle)　　male　　　female

Age _____

Education background _____

Language background _____

Thank you for your participation!

Task One

From Celce-Murcia et al. (2001), *Teaching Pronunciation*, p. 398

1. If English is not your native language, people may have noticed that you
    1_____ 2_____ 3 _____ 4_____ because of your
    '5_____ 6_____'.
2. Why do people 7 _____ have an 8_____ when they speak a
    9_____10 _____?
3. Several 11_____ 12_____ this 13_____.
4. Many people 14 _____ that only 15_____ 16_____ can learn a
    second language without an accent, but applied linguists have 17_____
    18_____ of 19_____ 20_____ who have mastered a second
    language without an 21_____.
5. Another 22_____ 23_____ is that your 24_____ language
    25_____ your 26_____ in a 27 _____ language.
6. Most native speakers of English can, for example, 28_____ people from
    29_____ by their 30_____ 31_____.
7. They may also be able to 32_____ 33_____ or 34_____
    speakers over the 35 _____, just by listening carefully to their 36
    _____.
8. Does this mean that 37_____ 38_____ 39_____
    40_____?
9. Not at all!

10. But 41_____ 42_____ won't 43_____ without a lot of 44_____ 45_____, 46_____ 47_____?

11. In the end, the 48_____ to learning to speak a second language without an accent appears to be a combination of 49_____ 50_____, a 51_____, and a 52_____ 53_____ to sound like a native speaker.

12. You also need 54_____ 55_____ about the English 56_____ 57_____ and lots of 58_____ to the spoken language.

13. Will you manage to 59_____ 60_____, or will you just 61_____ 62_____?

14. Only 63_____ will 64_____, I'm 65_____.

15. 66_____ 67_____, and don't 68_____ to 69_____ 70_____!

APPENDIX B

Task Two

Please assess your feeling toward the accent you have obtained. According to the degrees of agreement, check the most appropriate response.

1 (Strongly disagree)   2   3   4   5   6   7 (Strongly agree)

1. It is easy for me to understand English with this accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I like English with this accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I think English with this accent is a little funny.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I am not familiar with English with this accent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. English with this accent makes me anxious.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I think the speed of the recording is too fast.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I think the speaker is honest.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I think the speaker is pleasant.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. I think the speaker is sophisticated   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I think the speaker is credible.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I think the speaker is industrious.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I think the speaker is determinate.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I think the speaker is smart.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I think the speaker is handsome.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I think the speaker is well-educated   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Describe the speaker in your own words.

_____

_____