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## University Students' Attitudes towards Comprehensibility of Pronunciation of Native English Teachers versus Non-native English Teachers

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### Abstract

The following research study investigated the relationship between students' perceived levels of comprehensibility of various English accents and their attitudes to their desired pronunciation models of use in their future communication in English. The findings strongly suggest that seen through students' eyes, native speaker (NS) accents are not necessarily more comprehensible than non-native speaker (NNS) accents. In fact, the majority of the participants remained *neutral* on this issue. The findings also reveal that students were aware and open-minded to various accents and pronunciation models in English, and they remained so in terms of how they envisioned the use of such accents in their future communication in English. Thus, their answers indicated that they were willing to use and produce other accents and pronunciation models in English than the NS model, including their own local South Korean English accent (SKEA).

**Keywords:** attitudes, comprehensibility, native English teacher (NET), non-native English teacher (NNET).

List of Abbreviations/Acronyms: American English Accent (AEA), British English Accent (BEA), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as an International language (EIL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Native English Teacher (NET), Native Speaker (of English) (NS), Non-native English Teacher (NNET), Non-native Speaker (of English) (NNS), Research Question (RQ), South Korean English Accent (SKEA), Thai English Accent (TEA), Thai English Teacher (TET), Woosong University (WSU)



### Introduction

The differences between native English teachers (NETs) and non-native English teachers (NNETs) have been documented and highlighted in numerous studies concerned with the practice of English language teaching (ELT) so far. Thus, numerous studies have been conducted whereby either teachers themselves or students were asked to elaborate and reflect on those differences between both types. This particular study is an attempt to provide some insights into the role learners' attitudes play in defining the preferred teacher and, thus, highlight some key issues surrounding the controversy of the native speaker (NS)/non-native speaker (NNS) polemic.

Until recently, the controversy surrounding the NS/NNS dichotomy has been researched and investigated with the focus mainly on the teacher rather than on the learner. Recently, the literature on the NS/NNS polemic, however, has followed a different trend: a more learner-related or learner-centred approach. Thus, there has been a number of studies conducted to examine the differences between both types of teachers as perceived by the learners themselves.

In this regard, Diaz (2015, p. 96) conducted a study investigating the preferences of students at the University of Rennes towards their NETs and NNETs. Most students expressed preferences for NETs in the areas of pronunciation and oral exercises. Investigating Hong Kong secondary school students' attitudes towards both NETs and NNETs, Cheung (2009, pp. 11-13) also found that the majority of the participants preferred NETs as their oral teachers, because NETs could speak better and more standard English, and their pronunciation was "more accurate." Participants stated that they preferred NETs also, because they could correct students' pronunciation and help learners get rid of their accent when communicating in English.

Students felt that, as a result, they were becoming more confident and believed they would be able to speak with other foreigners more effectively at a later stage.

In another similar study conducted in Thailand, Thai tertiary students again exhibited strong preferences for NETs as their ideal pronunciation teachers when compared to Thai English teachers (TETs). In this regard, TETs were not regarded by students as promising and favorable teachers in that particular area (Jindapitak, 2014, p. 4988). Investigating and pursuing the same research objective, Phusit and Suksiripakonchai (2018, p. 20) found that Thai undergraduate students had quite high positive attitudes towards American English and British English pronunciation models. Furthermore, participants believed and established that maintaining their Thai English pronunciation model was of no importance.

In a similar study conducted in South Korea, Bissett and Ma (2015, p. 1) established that tertiary students at a local South Korean university preferred strongly an American accent, followed by a British accent. Moreover, participants indicated that they were concerned with their own accents and wished they could sound like NSs. In another study, again conducted in a South Korean local context, college students also expressed that they wanted to "eliminate" their NNS accents and sound like NSs, even though earlier on, they had demonstrated an awareness of the importance of various English accents for the purpose of international and intercultural communication (Lee, Mo, Lee and Sung, 2013, p. 30). Nevertheless, some recent studies suggest that NNETs could also be good oral teachers in their own right. In other words, as far as teaching listening and speaking is concerned, including the teaching of pronunciation, some NNETs and, in particular, TETs possess a series of advantages as some studies suggest.



In this regard, Rattanaphumma (2013, p. 458) conducted a study trying to examine the attitudes of 348 English language learners towards both NETs' and NNETs' English accents and teaching practices. With reference to the area of English accents, it was found that learners held positive attitudes towards both NETs and NNETs. On the one hand, respondents perceived NS accents as "authentic, proper, and classical". On the other hand, they considered Thai English accents (TEAs) as easy and clear to understand. Moreover, Jindapitak and Teo (2013, p. 193; p. 201) conducted a study investigating the preferences of Thai university English students for varieties of English and their attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English. According to the findings of this study, despite the fact that the majority of learners preferred NS accents, they still considered non-native English varieties worth understanding and learning.

As so far illustrated, with regard to the area of correct pronunciation and accent, the results were not so clear-cut as they first might appear to be when NETs and NNETs were being compared. Thus, according to some participants, both NETs and NNETs could be efficient as oral teachers, and they did possess various advantages as far as teaching pronunciation/accent was concerned.

A departure point in terms of determining what constitutes correct pronunciation or accent in English is determining the students' ability to understand or comprehend pronunciation and one's speech in general within a given context. This study used a single term, comprehensibility, as it presumably encompasses understanding of words in a meaningful context and on a sentence level: thus, integrative understanding one's speech on both a micro-level and on a macro-level.

As a matter of fact, Smith (1992, 2009) draws a distinction between three key areas

(or dimensions) in terms of approaching and understanding the process of listening-comprehension. The first dimension is intelligibility, which measures a listener's ability to identify and recognize words or utterances. The second dimension is comprehensibility, which measures a listener's ability to understand the meanings of words or utterances in their given context. The third dimension is interpretability; that measures a listener's ability to perceive and understand the intention(s) of the speaker (Natiladdanon, K. & Thanavisuth, C, 2014, p. 18).

Given the levels of the participants in this study, it was perhaps advisable to measure the levels/dimensions of listening-comprehension from a slightly broader perspective: thus, considering students' ability to understand words on a micro-level, as well as in a meaningful context, and on this basis, understand the intention(s) of the speaker too. For that purpose, this research study used and engaged with a single term all the way throughout: comprehensibility.

### Objectives

In light of all that has been said so far, this particular study aims to shed a light on the controversy surrounding the issue of the *NS/NNS polemic* following the same trend and direction of research. In other words, it aims to investigate the advantages of each type of teacher in a local South Korean context from students' points of view as far as teaching pronunciation/accent is concerned.

In this regard, it should be mentioned right from the outset that only a limited number of research studies have been conducted in this particular research area precisely in a local, South Korean context. Moreover, no research study had been conducted at Woosong University (WSU) alone, which is located in Daejeon, South Korea. Thus, this particular research study aimed to fill a



gap and contribute to the body of knowledge on that specific topic.

In general, learners' attitudes could play a vital role in influencing the theory and practice of ELT at large. Thus, learners' attitudes could tell us a lot about the constantly evolving nature and status of English: whether English should be taught and learned based on the NS model or other varieties of English should also be considered legitimate and acceptable. Moreover, learners' attitudes could provide insights as to who owns English and whether English should rather be viewed in its pluralistic sense, considering the emergences of different forms of World English and the recognition of its status as an international language (EIL) or as a lingua franca (ELF). Lastly, students' attitudes could be crucial in terms of providing pedagogical implications when it comes to the design and implementation of curricula, textbooks, as well as learning tasks and activities, as far as teaching pronunciation/accent is concerned. In light of all this, this research study addressed three main research questions (RQs) set out to guide the general direction of the research:

1. From students' perspectives, what were the levels of comprehensibility when studying with a particular NET as compared to studying with a particular NNET as far as pronunciation/accent was concerned? (RQ)
2. Overall, which type of accent or pronunciation would students like to use (mimic and copy) in their future communication in English? (RQ 2)
3. Was there a strong relationship between RQ and RQ 2 or between students' perceived levels of comprehensibility of English speech, their preferences, and attitudes regarding their future desired pronunciation model(s) of use in English, respectively?

## Methodology

The participants chosen for this study were university undergraduate level students enrolled at WSU. The students were enrolled in a 5-week summer English language course, focused primarily on communicative English. The course was taught by a NNET or the researcher himself, Assistant Professor, Valentin Valentinov Tassev. 23 students participated in this study in total. This course functioned as a substitute for the TOEIC exam; in other words, completing the course meant one had completed the TOEIC exam successfully and had reached the required score or number of points as in the standard TOEIC exam.

The participants were mostly Sophomore students or second-year students: thus, they had studied English at WSU for at least two years or four semesters. Students' levels of familiarity and exposure to both NETs and NNETs as instructors of English during university level and prior to that were being accounted for when analysing the findings.

This study employed the use of a questionnaire (see the Appendix at the end). The first part of the questionnaire collected information about the participants' backgrounds, such as their nationalities and how long they have studied English at WSU.

The second part of the questionnaire asked students to determine the levels of comprehensibility comparing NETs and NNETs on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree and strongly disagree). The same scale was used when asking participants to indicate their preferences and attitudes as to their desired model(s) of pronunciation/accent(s) for use in their future communication in English. This part consisted of two more open-ended questions (Question 5 and Question 7-see Appendix), where students were given the choices to provide any



additional information in support of the answers as indicated on the Likert scales previously.

The findings are displayed mostly numerically via frequencies and percentages. As to the open-ended questions (Question 5 and Question 7-see Appendix), the findings are categorised whenever recurring patterns and similarities occur among students' responses. Thus, the procedure that was employed was a 'key word' analysis, which generates categories from the statements made by the participants.

## Results

### a) results regarding RQ1

With regard to RQ1, among all respondents, 13 participants (about 57 %) remained *neutral* as to the issue of comprehensibility. 7 participants (about 30 %) agreed that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs. 6 participants ticked the category agree and 1 participant ticked the category strongly agree on the 5-point Likert scale. Only 3 participants (about 13 %) disagreed with the statement that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs and they all ticked the category disagree. The answers given in favour of being neutral as to the perceived levels of comprehensibility when comparing NETs and NNETs were as follows:

"In my opinion, when we go to other countries, we need to hear and know different accents and pronunciation." {Participant 1}.

"I respect all pronunciations. No matter what their pronunciation is, I must not complain." {Participant 2}.

"I don't care who it is." {Participant 3}.

"I don't care. I can understand words." {Participant 4}.

"I think NETs and NNETs are not much different." {Participant 5}.

"It doesn't matter because all professors talk slowly and explain easily." {Participant 6}.

"It doesn't matter." {Participant 7}.

"I don't care." {Participant 8}.

The answers given as agreements to the statement that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs are given below. Participant 1-Participant 5 ticked the category agree previously on the scale and Participant 6 ticked the category strongly agree previously on the scale. Their answers in support of those preferences indicated were as follows:

"When I was an elementary school student, I studied English for the first time. Teacher was from Canada...and I was exposed to native accents. So, I can understand more native accents than non-native accents." {Participant 1}.

"Because it is a pronunciation that I have heard a lot and have used a lot since I was young." {Participant 2}.

"Actually, NETs are more natural than NNETs, such as with some idioms." {Participant 3}.

"I watched a lot of movies from the US and England, and when I was young, at school, I learned a lot with American and British pronunciation. Other pronunciations of other countries are difficult to encounter and are unfamiliar." {Participant 4}.

"I think the pronunciation of English (NETs) is more accurate." {Participant 5}.

"The pronunciation of NETs is mostly in use. That's why it's the easiest." {Participant 6}.

As mentioned above, only 3 participants disagreed that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs and they all ticked the category disagree. However, none of them provided any additional answers in support of those preferences indicated on the scale previously.



## b) results regarding RQ2

With regard to RQ2, among all respondents, quite surprisingly only 10 participants (about 44 %) exhibited preferences for using the accents/pronunciation models of NETs in the future. 9 participants (about 39 %) stated they would like to have an American English accent (AEA) and only 1 participant (about 5 %) stated he/she would like to have a British English accent (BEA). 10 participants (about 44 %) favoured using South Korean English accent (SKEA) in their future communication in English and 3 participants (about 13 %) remained neutral on the issue. All 10 participants in support of using SKEA elaborated on their answers even though only 6 participants gave clearer and more convincing answers, which are respectively quoted below.

So, the proportion could be displayed numerically as NETs (10 participants-about 44 %) versus all others (13 participants-about 57 % of which 10 participants preferred using SKEA).

The answers given in support of SKEA were as follows:

“Because I am Korean; I use Korean pronunciation.” {Participant 1}.

“It’s similar to what I hear.” {Participant 2}.

“Because I’m Korean, so South Korean professors’ English accents are very similar to my accent/pronunciation.” {Participant 3}.

“Since I’m Korean, Korean pronunciation is the easiest.” {Participant 4}.

“All sounds can be written.” {Participant 5}.

“It’s hard to understand what other countries say, but I can understand some Korean English a little bit!!!” {Participant 6}.

The answers given by the participants who remained neutral on the issue were as follows:

“I don’t care. All you have to do is understand.” {Participant 1}.

“Because the world’s using various accents/pronunciations. So, we should experience a lot of accents.” {Participant 2}.

“I don’t care...can understand (any) saying.” {Participant 3}.

The answers given in support of AEA were as follows:

“When studying English, it is convenient to speak it with an American accent because I learned it with an American accent.” {Participant 1}.

“Usually, English culture media says (uses) American accent, so we have listened to American accent a lot. American accent is more comprehensible.” {Participant 2}.

“Because I think the most popular English is still American.” {Participant 3}.

“It’s easy to hear in general, because American accent and pronunciation are popular.” {Participant 4}.

“I have (know) the pronunciation I heard and heard the most when I learned English.” {Participant 5}.

“An American accent is suitable for communication.” {Participant 6}.

“Because I think English, which is used as the official language of the world, is the basis of English that is used in the United States.” {Participant 7}.

The only 1 answer given in support of BEA was as follows:

“The pronunciation of British English is so cool.” {Participant 1}.

## Discussions and Suggestions

a) perceived levels of comprehensibility comparing NETs (NSs) and NNETs (NNSs)-RQ1

As stated earlier, with regard to RQ1, among all respondents, 13 participants (about 57 %-the majority) remained neutral as to the issue of comprehensibility. 7 participants (about 30 %) agreed that the accents of NETs were more



comprehensible than the accents of NNETs. 6 participants ticked the category agree and 1 participant ticked the category strongly agree on the 5-point Likert scale. Only 3 participants (about

13 %) disagreed that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs and they all ticked the category disagree. All these results are displayed in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Perceived Levels of Comprehensibility

NETs (NS) Accents- More Comprehensible	Percentage
Neutral	57 % (majority)
Agree	30 %
Disagree	13 %

These figures strongly suggest that from students' perspectives, NS accents were not necessarily more comprehensible than NNS accents. The majority of the participants remained neutral on the issue. In this regard, it is worth making enquiries into the reasons behind learners' preferences or the explanations they gave themselves when answering the question.

Judging from their answers, it seems that learners were well informed about recent and current developments in the ELT industry as far as teaching (and learning) pronunciation was concerned. Furthermore, their answers revealed that they had been exposed throughout their previous experiences to various English accents and their exposure had thus broadened their perspectives on how pronunciation should be taught, learned, assessed, and evaluated.

Their answers thus repeatedly revealed that they preferred to remain open-minded regarding the existence of various types of accents and pronunciation models, as well as the emergence of new ones. The recurring phrases "I don't care" and "it doesn't matter" among participants' responses (as shown earlier) established that pronunciation models and accents in English should not be

judged from a certain perspective or model, such as the NS paradigm, but they should be evaluated from the perspective of how successful they are in terms of communicating and negotiating meaning in various inter-cultural settings.

These responses did not account for negligence and indifference as to what constitutes comprehensible English accent or a pronunciation model; in fact, they did account for open-mindedness, acceptance and inclusion of various models of pronunciation or expressed the claim that English pronunciation should rather be approached, conceptualized, understood and judged from a pluralistic perspective.

Students' responses thus challenge the findings of Bissett and Ma (2015, p. 1); Diaz (2015, p. 96); Lee, Mo, Lee and Sung (2013, p. 30) and Cheung (2009, pp. 11-12), amongst others, who found that students exhibited preferences for NETs as their oral teachers and instructors precisely in the areas of pronunciation and speaking.

Based on the findings, one could conclude, therefore, that in the process of inter-cultural communication, users of English need to be informed about recent trends and developments in the evolution of EIL or ELF, especially with regard



to the area of pronunciation. Moreover, exposure to various accents and types of pronunciation would facilitate the process of communication, especially in inter-cultural settings, where English functions as an EIL (and/or ELF) and NNSs communicate with many other NNSs. Lastly, awareness of the evolution of English as an EIL (and/or ELF) concerns not only NNSs, but also NSs who need to become more and more aware of the changing nature, status and role of English in various parts of the world and, if necessary, adjust and re-adjust their conceptual orientations and teaching practices when it comes to teaching and assessing pronunciation.

b) preferences and attitudes as to the use of accents/pronunciation model(s) in English in the future-RQ2

As illustrated earlier, with regards to RQ2, among all respondents, quite surprisingly only 10 participants (about 44 %) exhibited preferences for using the accents/pronunciation models of NETs in the future. 9 participants (about 39 %) stated they would like to have an AEA and only 1 participant (about 5 %) stated he/she would like to have a BEA. 10 participants (about 44 %) favoured using SKEA in their future communication in English and 3 participants (about 13 %) remained *neutral* on the issue. So, the proportion could be displayed numerically as NETs (10 participants-about 44 %) versus all others (13 participants-about 57 %-the majority, of which 10 participants preferred using SKEA). All these results are displayed in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Desired Pronunciation Model of Use in the Future

Teachers' Accents	Percentage	
NNETs (NNS) Accents	Total: 57 % (majority)	
	SKEA	44 %
	Neutral	13 %
NETs (NS) Accents	Total: 44 %	
	AEA	39 %
	BEA	5 %

These findings strongly suggest that students once again remained aware and open-minded to various accents and pronunciation models in English. The findings reveal that students were still aware of NS accents and recognized their existences and legitimacy; yet, the findings also reveal that students were willing to acknowledge,

preserve and even produce other accents and pronunciation models in English, including their own SKEA.

One could conclude, therefore, that as in the previous finding related to RQ1, students were aware of the evolving nature, role, and status of English. Their responses challenged once again the





NS paradigm, which stipulates that the NS models are the most legitimate and valid ones. Students' responses thus reaffirmed the idea or the belief that English should be viewed from a pluralistic perspective and educators perhaps need to re-visit their theoretical orientations and practices as to how pronunciation in English needs to be taught, learned, assessed, and evaluated.

The recurring phrases “similar” and “Korean pronunciation” given by the participants supporting the use of SKEA also established that students' levels of familiarity with a certain accent/pronunciation model in English influenced their attitudes and preferences as to their desired model(s) of pronunciation in the future. Thus, students' familiarity with their own accent or SKEA eventually influenced them to favour using such accents and, in their eyes, this particular pronunciation model was equally legitimate, understood (comprehended) and successful in terms of negotiating meaning in every-day communication, at least in a local South Korean context. For that reason, students found it familiar, easy, well-known and, therefore, worth learning, understanding and, most importantly, using in their future communication in English.

These findings thus go in line partially with the finding of Jindapitak and Teo (2013, p. 193; p. 201), who established that even though the majority of learners preferred NS accents, they still considered non-native English varieties worth understanding and learning. These findings also support to some extent the findings of Rattana phumma (2013, p. 458) who found that even though Thai learners of English perceived NS accents as authentic, proper and classical, they still considered their own or TEAs as easy and clear to understand. Yet, the findings related to this particular RQ (RQ2) also revealed that students found AEA popular and widely-used around the

world and, therefore, worth learning and using. The recurring phrases, such as popular and mostly learned on a previous basis as quoted by students revealed that, as in the case with the SKEA, students' levels of familiarity with an accent and here AEA, did influence their choices and preferences as to their desired model(s) of pronunciation.

Their responses also suggested that among all NS models, students were familiar the most with AEA, in particular. As only 1 participant identified with a BEA, and no other NS accents were being chosen by respondents. It seems therefore that students were not informed enough or aware of other NS models. The same applied to SKEA. As shown earlier, students identified and pointed out only one NNS model, in particular: SKEA.

Perhaps, the whole debate of the NS/NNS dichotomy should rather be re-formulated and rephrased as to address and mention which NS models and which NNS models exactly are being compared and taken into consideration. In light of this, an issue that is largely being overlooked as part of this debate are its complexity and ambiguity.

One should look more profoundly at the existing differences between NS models themselves (such as, for example, comparing AEA with BEA) and between NNS models themselves (such as, for example comparing SKEA with TEA) and, in a later stage, conduct enquiries and research into the context where each one of those models functions (whether they are NS or NNS models) and consider the communicative needs and goals each one of them serves in that particular context, respectively. Such enquires should be the basis of any subsequent theoretical study and research into the NS/NNS dichotomy.

c) relationship between perceived levels of comprehensibility and attitudes and preferences for the use of accents/pronunciation model(s) in



English in the future (RQ3=RQ 1 + RQ2) Regarding RQ3, the results did not show a very strong relationship between RQ 1 and RQ 2 or whether students' perceived levels of *comprehensibility* of native versus non-native speech necessarily influenced their preferences and attitudes as to their desired future models of pronunciation/accents.

Some students (5 participants) were neutral regarding RQ1 but favored AEA in their future communication in English; others (5 participants) were neutral in RQ1 but preferred to use SKEA in the future; only 3 participants remained neutral when answering both research questions.

Among the 7 participants who found the accents of NETs more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs, 4 participants indicated they would prefer to use AEA in their future communication in English. 1 participant stated they would like to use BEA in the future. The other 2 participants, however, indicated that they would like to use SKEA in their future communication in English.

Even though the ratio of AEA to SKEA was 5>2, which showed an existing relationship between levels of *comprehensibility* of native speech and the subsequent use of a native speech model in future communication activities (thus in favor of the NS model), one could still argue that students' responses were quite subjective and both questions (RQ 1 and RQ 2) ask slightly different pieces and kinds of information.

Among the students who remained neutral in RQ1, students' answers largely varied from proceeding from one question to another. Thus, those participants' answers varied largely when answering RQ2, which indicated again that their answers could be highly subjective.

As the last question of the questionnaire (Question 7-see *Appendix*) was a very open-ended

question, it could evoke very different answers from the participants. In this regard, students did not elaborate thoroughly enough in their answers to this question as to show convincingly the relationship between perceived levels of *comprehensibility* (RQ1 and mainly Question 5 of the questionnaire, in particular) and their preferences and attitudes as to their desired future models of pronunciation/accents (RQ2 and mainly Question 7 of the questionnaire, in particular-see *Appendix*).

Perhaps the only slightly stronger or more evident relationship between RQ1 and RQ2 applies to the 3 participants who disagreed that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs, for which they all ticked the category disagree (when answering RQ1). All those 3 participants favored the use of SKEA in their future communication in English when answering RQ2. Yet again, this consistency could not indicate alone that the research study established quite a strong relationship between RQ1 and RQ2, bearing in mind the answers of the other respondents as described above.

According to the findings, one might assume that students' levels of *familiarity* with certain accents and here SKEA and AEA, still did influence their choices and preferences as to their desired model(s) of pronunciation, at least to some extent. Even though the research study did not establish necessarily a strong relationship between RQ1 and RQ2, and students' answers largely varied in this respect from answering one RQ to another, students still did provide their views and opinions on the matter when answering the two open-ended questions (Question 5 and Question 7-see students' quotes earlier).

One could assume or draw the conclusion that if an accent is familiar, it must be so because it is easily comprehensible, identifiable,



distinguishable and easily recognizable. Vice versa, the more exposed and familiar one becomes with an accent, they tend to become better able to identify it, distinguish it, recognize it and comprehend it, as a result. Furthermore, if an accent is familiar and easily comprehensible, distinguishable and recognizable, then it must be easier to mimic, copy and reproduce in use later. In other words, the inter-dependent and inter-twined relationship between levels of comprehensibility, familiarity and preferences for an accent becomes more and more convincing and obvious. Thus, drawing onto students' answers to both open-ended questions (Question 5 and Question 7-see students' quotes earlier), the findings did reaffirm the impression that exposure and levels of familiarity with certain accents did influence learners (to varied extents) in terms of their perceived levels of comprehensibility and, later on, their built-in preferences and attitudes as to their desired pronuncial model(s) in the future.

These assumptions indeed go in line with the findings of Kaur and Raman (2014, p. 258) who suggested that *familiarity* with certain accents resulted in having learners develop more favourable and positive attitudes towards those particular accents. As the authors added, as a result of high levels of familiarity with certain accents, learners developed deeply entrenched attachment to those particular pronunciation standards, and moreover, they regarded them therefore as more acceptable, pleasant and correct.

### Conclusion

The following research study investigated the relationship between students' perceived levels of comprehensibility of various English accents and their attitudes to their desired pronunciation models of use in their future communication in English.

The findings strongly suggested that from students' perspectives, NS accents were not necessarily more comprehensible than NNS accents. As it was illustrated, the majority of the participants preferred to remain neutral on this issue. The findings also revealed that students were aware and open-minded to other accents and pronunciation models in English than the NS model. They thus remained open-minded to the idea of using such accents in their future communication in English, which once again reaffirmed the impression that the NS model is not the only desired and prospective model of communication. As students themselves expressed, other models of pronunciation (than the NS model) were equally legitimate and important, and they successfully served certain communicative needs and goals in a given context, such as their own local SKEA.

Based on the findings, one could conclude, therefore, that in the process of inter-cultural communication, users of English need to be informed about recent trends and developments in the evolution of EIL and/or ELF, especially with regard to the area of pronunciation. Moreover, exposure to various accents and types of pronunciation would facilitate the process of communication better, especially in inter-cultural settings, where many NNSs communicate with many other NNSs. Lastly, the findings revealed that students' levels of familiarity with an accent did influence to some extent their perceived levels of *comprehensibility* of such an accent and, later on, their built-in preferences and attitudes as to their desired pronuncial model(s) in the future.

### Suggestions

This research study had a number of limitations. Perhaps, a research study conducted with a larger number of participants at WSU or, in



fact, elsewhere would account for more validity of the research. In addition, perhaps semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants would be a far better research tool that would highlight in more depth the issues at stake and the underlying reasons behind students' answers and preferences for their desired pronunciation model(s) in English. In this regard, this research tool would provide more information and background that would be deemed useful and relevant to reveal the complexity of the NS/NNS dichotomy in far more depth.

Semi-structured interviews would account for more objectivity and validity in terms of data collection procedures and data analysis. This study employed the use of a Likert scale as the responses were deemed to be more easily quantifiable, more easily analysed and more likely to present students with a number of choices, which would further help students understand better and more clearly the nature and objectives of the research study itself, especially for students not familiar with the research topic and the research area. Nevertheless, as it is often argued, the Likert scale is unidimensional and does not always provide a true account of students' responses, especially when investigating and dealing with attitudes. Once again, semi-structured interviews would prove a far better research tool when analysing students' attitudes from the perspective of qualitative research.

A research study of this kind might need to be conducted in a more structured environment, where students would listen to audio-recordings with extracts providing access to various English accents and give their answers afterwards. One could argue that students' answers would then be far more justified, well-argued and well-supported rather than indicating one's preference(s) for desired English accent(s) on a 5-point Likert scale.

Once again, such a method would account for far more validity of the research study and its findings.

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