The Effects of Prestige Model Familiarity on Students' Perceptions of and Interactions with Diverse English Accents

Gemma Archer

Abstract For decades, English language students worldwide have been exposed to prestige L1 accent models, such as Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA), often to the exclusion of all other varieties. However, the dominance of these models is questionable today with L2-L2 English communication considered the most common interaction pattern globally. This study was undertaken to understand the extent to which the exposure of L2 students to these models can affect their perception of diverse Englishes, such as those encountered while attending an international university. Thirty international students completed a pre-test questionnaire about their accent beliefs, followed by a Verbal Guise test. Although the questionnaire affirmed broadly positive opinions of prestige models, L2 accents were believed to be easier to understand, while the local model, Scottish Standard English (SSE), was believed to be extremely difficult. Results from the Verbal Guise test indicated most positive associations with the RP accent. However, participants selected the L2 Chinese accent as that which they liked the most, just surpassing the prestige models, potentially due to its native-like speech rate. Interestingly, though the local accent, SSE, was perceived poorly in the pre-test questionnaire, the Verbal Guise test results revealed far less severe views.

Keywords Accent · Perception · Prestige models · RP · Global Englishes · Regional Englishes

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1   Introduction

English is spoken as a second language (L2) with increasing prevalence worldwide, with current estimations of two billion plus users (Crystal, 2019; The British Council, 2013), which far outnumbers native or first language (L1) users. Due to such demographics, it is highly likely that L2-L2 and L2-L1 contact will occur more frequently (Baese-Berk et al., 2013), especially in international universities where the number of English medium educational courses continues to grow yearly (Myhovych, 2019). This is certainly the case in UK universities, where students and academic staff interact using diverse L2 and L1 regional accents. However, accent is a known variable that can affect comprehension significantly (Buck, 2001). As such, it can be startling for many international students to begin a degree programme in a location where the accents they hear do not match the controlled prestige native speaker or 'default' (Sung, 2016) models they were exposed to as they prepared for international university education in their home countries.

The University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland, where this study occurred, accurately demonstrates the sheer variety of Englishes that can be present within just one institution. University staff represent 77 different nationalities and, in some departments (e.g., University of Strathclyde's Engineering Department, n.d.), almost 50% of the academic staff are international. The university also has a large international student body with their respective mother tongues and accents, and local Scottish staff and students who speak Scottish Standard English (SSE). SSE largely mirrors the written standard of English but, as would be expected, it has its own phonological inventory made up of 13 vowel sounds and 25 consonant sounds. Outside of the university, international students may also encounter the Scots language with its own unique vocabulary, syntax, and phonology. This adds yet another element into the linguistic melting pot with which international L2 students have to contend, often with no warning or preparation, when they study in Glasgow.

Locations such as Strathclyde are not unique, however. In many educational institutions in the UK and beyond, international L2 speakers must grapple with spoken English in its many variations on a daily basis as reported in studies conducted in Singapore (Goh, 1999), the US (Major et al., 2005), Hong Kong (Sung, 2016), and Australia (Harding, 2008). Yet, despite the increasing internationalisation of universities, the spread of English in lingua franca contexts and the further intermingling of L1 and L2 Englishes, literature investigating L2 speakers' perceptions of diverse accents remains limited and classroom materials using prestige native speaker models persist. The goal of this small-scale study is to contribute to this existing body of work by investigating L2 speakers' perceptions of various English accents, many of which international students at the University of Strathclyde are not likely to have had previous exposure to.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Prestige Accent Models in ELT

Many variables can influence how comprehensible a speaker is perceived to be, but accent is often held responsible for causing communication breakdowns. However, despite the receptive benefits which could come from increased access to and familiarisation with diverse English accents, the majority of English teaching coursebooks and materials continue to present only two models: the prestige L1 varieties of Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) (Kiczkowiak, 2021).

When discussing the continued use of the prestige model RP in English language teaching, Jenkins (2007) concluded that feelings towards this model as a standard are "historically deep rooted and thoroughly naturalised" (p. 33). RP is also suggested to be "the most popular accent for EFL purposes … throughout the twentieth century" (Przedlacka, 2008, p. 18) and "the most thoroughly described accent of English" (Wells, 1982, p. 279). A large number of student textbooks, audio materials, teacher training courses, dictionaries and influential phonetics textbooks continue to take Daniel Jones' original descriptions of RP as their pronunciation model de rigueur. In fact, some coursebook writers have even revealed that they face pressure from publishing houses to use only educated L1 speakers from the south east of England in the audio resources they create (Kiczkowiak, 2021).

A second prestige model, GA, also referred to as Standard American English, has become increasingly visible since World War II due to the status of the US as a political and economic power (Crystal, 2019). In addition, the prevalence of the US (and also GA) in films, television, music and online has contributed to an instantly accessible "American cultural hegemony" worldwide (Henderson et al., 2012, p. 21). Considering the growing ease of access to GA and in multiple different formats, it is easy to see why it is considered a viable alternative to RP within ELT and is often the preferred model for many students (Henderson et al., 2012).

2.2 Factors Affecting Perception of Diverse Accents

As communication between L2 English speakers of diverse language backgrounds grows, more research investigating L2 interactions and perceptions of accented English is increasingly warranted (Crowther et al., 2016). However, when undertaking such investigations, it is necessary to establish what influences listeners' judgements, be it "the acoustic and phonological properties, or whether they indicate something about the listener and therefore vary with listeners' language experience" (Witteman et al., 2013, p. 537).

In their comprehensive article on non-native listeners' perceptions of accent, Crowther et al. (2016, p. 161) summarise the phonological features which can increase ratings of accentedness and, consequently, the assigning of the label 'native' or 'non-native' speaker. The items listed include accurate production of segmental and suprasegmental features, such as vowel and consonant sounds, syllable stress, syllable length, and pitch. The consequences or 'costs' for the listener upon being confronted with speech realisations that are unfamiliar to them can be an increase in the length of time required for cognitive processing (Adank & McQueen, 2007; Adank et al., 2009; Harding, 2008; Perry et al., 2017) and the obvious potential for misunderstandings (Munro & Derwing, 1995). It is possible that the longer it takes to identify what a speaker has said, the higher the chances a listener will perceive the accent as different or challenging.

Speech rate has also been identified as another potential factor of influence (Trofimovich & Baker, 2006). Speech rate can aid perceptions of native or non-native status and level of proficiency. Native speakers and more proficient users typically receive a higher rate; the opposite occurs among L2 learners and those of lower proficiency (Munro, 1999). Additionally, while qualitative data from L2 listener-raters show they perceive speech rate, particularly faster speech, to be a negative factor reducing their comprehension (Goh, 1999; Harding, 2008; Zhao, 1997), quantitative data have produced mixed and sometimes contradictory results (Munro & Derwing, 1998; Zhao, 1997).

A further variable reported in previous research is that of a shared L1. Studies such as Bent and Bradlow (2003) have shown that a shared L1 between speaker and listener can positively impact on the intelligibility ratings given by the listener, even if the speaker is of lower proficiency. This is due to a phenomenon known as the *Matched Interlanguage Speech Intelligibility Benefit* (Bent & Bradlow, 2003). Kang et al. (2016) succinctly explain this benefit as a feature "which predicts that a NNS listener may be better equipped to interpret specific acoustic–phonetic features of an L2 that are matched with his own L1 than a different L1" (p. 2). However, studies by Tauroza and Luk (1997) found limited evidence to support this benefit, and Major et al. (2002) found inconsistent results in their own study of Spanish and Chinese listeners.

Furthermore, there is a general consensus that unfamiliar accents, whether native or non-native, can negatively affect comprehension for all speakers (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al., 2002). However, exposure to and experience with a particular accent can aid our ability to recognise it and cope with its diverse realisations, ultimately meaning that the greater the exposure to a particular language variety, the easier comprehension becomes (Ballard & Winke, 2016; Smith & Bisazza, 1982). The role and influence of the media in establishing familiarity with diverse varieties, even when little or no face-to-face interaction takes place, was also suggested by Adank et al. (2009), who found that Scottish speakers based in Glasgow exhibited familiarity with and rapid processing of Standard British English, a variety ubiquitous across radio and television broadcasting throughout the UK. Yet,

the reverse effect was not true for Standard British English speakers who were unfamiliar with the Glasgow accent, which is infrequently used in UK-wide media. They had slower response times and made more mistakes upon hearing Glasgow accent (Adank et al., 2009).

Attitude is another important factor to consider with regards to listener perception. As Holmes (2001) states, "people develop attitudes towards languages which reflect their views about those who speak the languages, and the contexts and functions with which they are associated" (p. 343). While it is well-documented that native speakers often negatively perceive deviations from the target language in L2 speaker speech, L2 speakers can also hold negative opinions of non-native speech (Abeywickrama, 2013; Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010) and regional L1 speech (Archer, 2018). Such attitudes have been known to correlate with comprehension and perception of said accents—e.g., in ratings of how friendly or educated a speaker sounds—, and even influence comprehensibility (Eisenstein & Verdi, 1985). Indeed, Major et al. (2005) state unequivocally that the more prestigious a variety is, the greater the levels of comprehension will be.

3 The Study

The current study was conducted at the University of Strathclyde. The students who participated were expected to have been exposed to prestige models from prior English language instruction, from their ubiquity in pop culture and in the media, and from their own use of social media tools and converting platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. This familiarity with prestige models could exert significant positive influence over these students' perception of prestige speaker accents. In contrast, it could afford negative characteristics to the speakers the students perceived to 'deviate' from more familiar prestige varieties, thus negatively affecting judgements of the L2 and regional L1 speakers. Based on the existing literature and the characteristics of this student population, three hypotheses were formulated to guide this investigation of L2 speakers' perceptions of various English accents:

1. Participants' familiarity and positive associations with prestige models may aid their identification, though the opposite is likely true with the SSE and L2 accents.
2. Participants will likely prefer prestige model accents (RP and GA) to SSE and L2 speakers' accents.
3. Participants will likely perceive and associate prestige models with more positive qualities than SSE or L2 models.

4   Methodology

4.1   Participants

Thirty students at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow volunteered for this study. They were 20 males and 10 females between the ages of 20 and 38 years old. They were from Saudi Arabia (16), China (9), Libya (3), France (1), Kuwait (1), Thailand (1), and Colombia (1), and were enrolled on a mixture of programmes, including pre-entry English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, Masters, and Ph.D. studentships. As can be expected from the diverse pathways of study, their language level and time spent studying English varied significantly, from just three months to 28 years, with corresponding levels of English ranging from IELTS 4.5 to 7.5. The average length of residence in Glasgow was 4.4 months, but it ranged from new arrivals (one week) to two and a half years. Eleven participants had lived elsewhere in the UK prior to their move to Glasgow.

4.2   Test Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, a pre-test questionnaire gathered participants' background information, which included details such as their L1, home country, age, gender, last scores on a standardised English test (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL), length of English study, and length of residence in the UK and in Glasgow (if different). Next, participants were asked to identify who they communicated with more (L1 or L2 speakers of English) or if they talked a similar amount of time with both, and rate the ease with which they believed they could understand prestige models (RP/GA), and regional (SSE) and international (L2) accents using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Difficult or impossible to understand*; 5 = *Easy to understand*). A description was provided for each model to ensure students who were unfamiliar with the terms could understand the type of accent to which the questions referred. Then, participants completed a Verbal Guise test that measured their perceptual judgements of eight different speakers (see Sect. 4.3). Following the Verbal Guise test, participants were instructed to pick which of the eight accents they liked the most and which was the easiest to understand, and state why. Finally, participants were invited to a post-test interview to discuss the implications of the study within an English language teaching context. Five of the 30 participants completed the post-test interview.

4.3 Verbal Guise Test

Eight different speakers were recorded and used as the stimulus for participants' evaluations. The speakers were between 20 and 40 years old, educated, and all female in order to control for potential differences due to speaker gender. They were graduates, current research students, teachers, and other employees connected to English language teaching at the University of Strathclyde. Three speakers spoke SSE and were from Glasgow, Dundee, and Ayrshire. Two others had prestige model accents (RP and GA) and three were bilingual speakers with different L1 mother tongues (Spanish, Hindi, Mandarin). The speakers read the following four sentences aloud:

1. *The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.*
2. *I just bought new shoes.*
3. *It's very warm in here.*
4. *I chose and bought the fruit carefully.*

Sentence one was an example taken from teaching materials. Sentences two to four were between 5 and 9 words long and were constructed around various lexical items containing phonological features which diverge in different accents, namely various vowel sounds, and /r/ in a post-vocalic position. The diversity of these features is particularly salient when comparing SSE and RP accents.

Participants were instructed to respond to the following questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *I disagree 100%*; 5 = *I agree 100%*) after listening to each speaker:

Do you think the speaker.

- is a native speaker?
- has bad pronunciation?
- speaks too fast?
- has a foreign accent?
- is nice to listen to?
- has an annoying accent?
- would be a good English teacher?
- sounds educated?

How easy was the speaker to understand?

Test participants had no prior exposure to the test materials or speakers, and there were no limitations on the amount of times they could listen to each speaker. The test's design, requiring participants to scroll down to locate the next speaker, enabled distribution and distance between the different accents.

4.4 Data Analysis

To get an initial broad-spectrum view of the participants, their demographics, and perceptual judgements, descriptive statistics (including frequencies and means) were used. Following this, Chi-squared tests were undertaken to enable a comparison to be made between participants' accent preferences and their perceptions of ease of comprehension for each of the eight speakers. Pearson correlations were also used to establish if there was any association between the participants' ability to pinpoint speaker accents and any of the participants' variables. These variables included age, gender, level of proficiency, mother tongue, length of time studying English, length of time in the UK, and length of time in Glasgow. Finally, a Fischer exact test was used to corroborate results due to the small sample size ($N = 30$). Participants' anonymous responses are identified as P1, P2, P3, etc. A thematic analysis was conducted with the data from the post-test interviews. Pseudonyms are used to report participants' comments during the interviews.

5   Results

5.1   Pre-test Questionnaire Ratings

Participants' use of English with other speakers and their beliefs regarding which accents they found the most difficult/easier to understand were gathered prior to the Verbal Guise test. The majority of the participants (46%) said that they spoke to non-native English speakers/students more than native speakers, with 23.3% stating the opposite and 23.3% stating they spoke to both equally. Not unexpectedly, both RP and GA were generally rated as easy to understand, with over half of the respondents rating them either 'easy' or 'very easy' (RP = 50% and GA = 56.6%), and a large cohort awarding them a neutral mid-point rating (RP = 43.3%; GA = 30%). As per previous questions, justifications for these ratings were largely connected to clarity and familiarity with the models either through media or prior education. In contrast, ratings for SSE were more severe: 63.3% rated it as 'very difficult or impossible to understand' or 'difficult.' Some of the justifications for these ratings were as follows:

> *It is not very clear and sometimes fast.* (P11)
>
> *It is very short and unclear.* (P13)
>
> *It has a lot of strange pronunciations.* (P10)
>
> *The accent is heavy.* (P30)
>
> *It has a heavier sound.* (P7)
>
> *We are not used to hear such accent.* (P17)

Lastly, participants believed the bilingual or highly proficient L2 speaker option to be the easiest of all of the accents, with 60% rating it as 'easy' or 'very easy' and

26.6% as 'neutral.' A sense of camaraderie between some of the study participants and the 'L2 speakers' option became clear among their justifications for their ratings, with remarks made such as the following:

We are the same and use the same pronunciations. (P26)

We have the same process and we know what each other is talking about. (P21)

We learn and use the same words. (P19)

W*e are in the same level of pronunciation.* (P8)

However, other participants noted that that the intelligibility of an L2 speaker for them was still dependent on which country they came from and which accent they had.

These ratings at this stage of the study provided an important benchmark. This benchmark made it possible to draw comparisons between participants' beliefs regarding the different accents they were asked to listen to and their responses in the subsequent Verbal Guise test in which they were asked to identify the accent and then answer the questions.

5.2   Identification of Accent

Given so many students' strong positive feelings towards prestige models of English, it was thought prudent to establish if participants could correctly identify said models and those they perceived more negatively (i.e., SSE). The results showed that the most identifiable accent was the SSE accent from Glasgow, with 36.6% accurately pinpointing it. As all of the participants live in Glasgow, it was presumed that exposure to this model's phonological features could explain why it was more recognisable for some participants. However, no significant correlation was found between length of time living in Glasgow and ability to identify this accent ($p = 0.319$). The two other SSE speakers, neither of whom were from Glasgow, were not so easy for participants to identify, suggesting a particular salience in the Glasgow model's segmental or suprasegmental features, which participants seemed to recognise.

Indian was the next most identifiable accent (33.3% correct identifications), potentially due to its syllable-timed prosody, which stood out, particularly between the two native speaker accents that came before and after it during the Verbal Guise test. Following this was the GA accent (30% correct identifications), then RP (20% correct identifications). Interestingly, the majority of wrong answers for these two varieties were usually for each other, with 23.3% of participants labelling the RP accent as 'USA' and 16.6% believing the US accent to be from 'England' and 33.3% from 'the UK.' Such results suggest that while these varieties may be familiar, participants cannot always distinguish between the two. Among the remaining L2 accents, the Chinese accent was correctly identified by 20% of participants, all of whom were themselves Chinese native speakers. Using Pearson's correlations, a statistically significant score of $p = 0.004$ was obtained, thus determining that for the

Chinese accent, 'mother tongue' is a significant determiner for successful identification, in keeping with similar results found by Scales et al. (2006). Due to the demographics of the speakers and study participants, there was no other shared L1 between them to test further correlations of this feature.

The Spanish accent had little to no positive identification, perhaps because this speaker had had less discernible features associated with her mother tongue. Alternatively, it could be because participants had less interaction with speakers from Spain as this nationality is not the most prevalent among the University's international student population.

After examining variables such as length of time in the UK, length of time in Glasgow, length of time studying English, age, and gender, aside from shared mother tongue among Chinese speakers, only one other correlation was found regarding the ability to identify accents accurately: length of time in Glasgow and correct identification of the RP accent ($p = 0.027$). This may be due to the fact that many students begin intensive English instruction when they come to Glasgow, and this model remains prevalent in teaching resources, thus reinforcing exposure.

One significant issue which became visible from among the participants' results was an apparent lack of awareness of the geographical and phonological differences which exist in the individual nations within the UK: Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and England. When asked to identify an accent, many participants simply wrote 'Great Britain' or 'UK,' suggesting a limited understanding of the very diverse accents in these nations, or a belief that there is only one 'British' accent in the whole of the UK. On the one hand, such beliefs are surprising, particularly given that many of the participants had been studying in Scotland, and in other parts of the UK, for months and even years, presumably absorbing some knowledge about their most recent country of residence. On the other hand, such results paralleled with a previous study conducted by the researcher (Archer, 2018) where among new arrivals to Glasgow from East and South East Asia, many admitted being unaware of any accent differences prior to coming to Scotland, assuming that everyone in Britain spoke 'British English'; many were disappointed to find this was not the case. As it stands, only answers referring to the individual nations such as 'Scotland' or 'England' were marked as correct and any use of 'UK' or 'Great Britain' as incorrect.

5.3   Accent Perceptions and Associated Qualities

To establish any qualities associated with each accent, participants were instructed to listen to each recording and then, against a list of statements (see Sect. 4.3), provide a rating between 1 and 5, where 1 = *I disagree 100%* and 5 = *I agree 100%* (see Table 1). The mean scores revealed interesting insights into the participants' perceptions of the eight accents. As predicted, RP elicited more generous feelings from participants, rating the highest among all the accents for 'nice to listen to,' 'would be a good English language teacher' and 'sounds educated.' In keeping with

Table 1 Mean accent ratings by speaker ($N = 30$)

Qualities	L2 Spanish	SSE Glasgow	GA	RP	L2 Indian	SSE Dundee	L2 Chinese	SSE Ayr
Bad pronunciation	2.5	1.9	1.8	1.9	3.0[a]	2.1	2.0	2.1
Speaks too fast	1.5	2.3	2.4	2.7	1.9	2.9[a]	2.2	2.1
Foreign accent	3.5	2.1	1.9	1.9	4.3[a]	2.2	2.7	2.7
Nice to listen to	3.5	3.5	3.9	4.2[a]	2.5	3.2	3.8	3.6
Annoying accent	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.7[a]	2.4	1.9	2.2
Would be a good EL teacher	3.1	3.4	4.1	4.3[a]	2.5	3.1	3.5	3.5
Sounds educated	3.4	3.3	3.7	3.9[a]	2.9	3.1	3.4	3.3
Easy to understand	4.0[a]	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.5	3.1	3.9	3.7

[a]Highest ratings

prior results, the GA speaker was also rated positively in these categories, similar to the RP speaker.

Among the L2 accents, the L2 Indian accent was rated highest for 'having a foreign accent,' 'having an annoying accent' and 'having bad pronunciation.' However, the rating for 'bad pronunciation' and 'annoying accent' were located midway on the scale, therefore interpretable as a more neutral or undecided response from participants regarding these particular qualities. The Chinese accent largely received neutral mid-point scores for most statements, except for 'has bad pronunciation' and 'has an annoying accent' with which participants seemed to disagree. Participants also felt this accent was 'easy to understand' and it received the same mean score as the prestige GA accent. The L2 Spanish accent was rated as the easiest to understand of all, and participants also clearly disagreed with the statement 'speaks too fast.' With regards to the SSE accents, in contrast with the pre-test views, participants' perceptions were significantly less severe. For the SSE Glasgow accent, participants tended to disagree with 'has bad pronunciation' and 'has an annoying accent,' which they rated identically to the RP accent. The remaining SSE accents' scores were also only slightly higher. The remaining ratings fell into the neutral mid-point, eliciting neither strong agreement nor disagreement.

5.4 Accent Preferences

The final task in the perception test instructed participants to choose which of the speakers' accents they liked the most, and which were the easiest to understand. They were allowed to listen again to each of the accent recordings to refresh their memories. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the accent that participants liked the most was the L2 Chinese accent, with eight participants (26.6%) selecting it and justifying their choice with comments such as "it was clear" and "it was familiar." As mentioned previously, many participants (40%) believed this to be a native accent, which may have also affected their perceptions of it. While examining the raw data, it became obvious that among those who selected the Chinese accent as their preference, there were no Chinese participants. In fact, the majority were from Saudi Arabia, along with one Colombian and one Thai. With regards to the Chinese participants, 10 out of 11 selected a prestige L1 model and one selected the Indian accent as their preference.

As predicted, the two prestige models were also popular among the listeners, with both being selected by seven participants each (23.3% each) and thus being the joint second favourite. Comments in favour of the RP accent ranged from "it's clear" and "it's easy" to "I think her voice is close to the British Standard" and "she speaks the best way." For those who selected the GA model, their justifications were unanimous in finding it the clearest and easiest to understand. Among the remaining accents, L2 Spanish was selected as the preferred model by three (10%), the SSE Glasgow model by two (6.6%), and the remaining L2s and L1 SSE models received 3.3%.
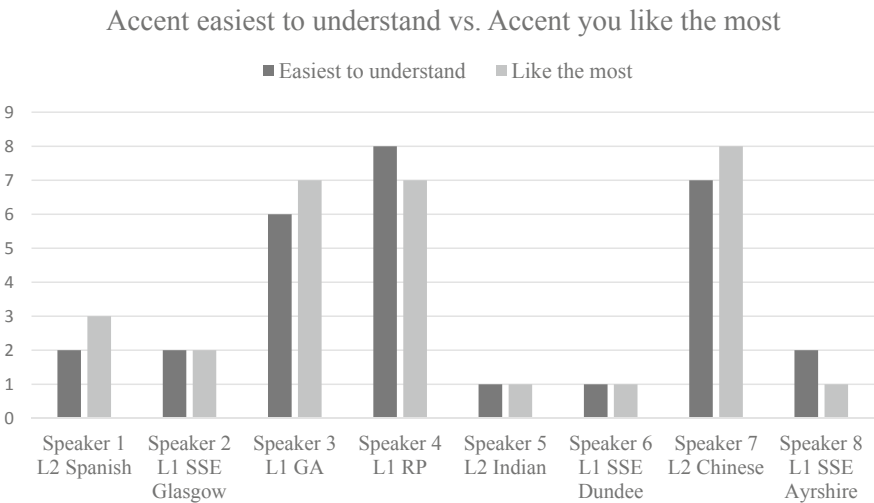

Fig. 1 'Easiest to understand' versus 'like the most' (preferred) accent

5.5 *Ease of Comprehension*

To ascertain if accent preference correlated with ease of comprehension, participants were also asked to select which accent they perceived to be the easiest to understand. The association between these two variables was then calculated using Phi. A statistically significant score of $p = 0.000$ was determined, thus establishing a clear relationship between the two variables, suggesting the easier an accent was perceived to be, the more it was liked (see Fig. 1). Further testing was undertaken to establish any possible correlation between mother tongue and the accent perceived as 'easiest to understand' (i.e., the 'Matched Interlanguage Speech Intelligibility Benefit'). In the current study, this correlation could only be checked among the Chinese participants, as this was the only nationality group present among both the speakers and listener participants. To establish if this benefit existed, a Pearson's chi-squared test was undertaken and it demonstrated that there was no significant correlation between participants' L1 and their perception of the easiest accent to understand ($p = 0.616$). Due to the small sample size in this study ($N = 30$), a Fisher's Exact Test was also used to corroborate the findings, confirming once again no correlation ($p = 0.604$).

6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of L2 and L1 regional speech among international students, who are more likely to find prestige model accents (RP/GA) more familiar than other speech accents due to their prior education in their countries. Three hypotheses were formulated based on a review of literature. Each one is outlined and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Hypothesis 1 Participants' familiarity and positive associations with prestige models may aid their identification, though the opposite is likely true with the SSE and L2 accents.

This hypothesis was not confirmed. The results garnered show a limited number of participants being able to correctly identify the language background of the speaker, demonstrating that such a task is challenging for L2 learners. It also suggests that exposure alone may not be enough to make an accent recognisable; interaction with said accent may be necessary to enable learners' conceptualisation and subsequent recognition of its phonological features. Should that be the case, the identification of the SSE Glasgow and L2 Indian accents above all others could be due to prior interactional experiences the participants have had with them, as was found in the research of Austrian students by Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997).

Hypothesis 2 Participants will likely prefer prestige model accents (GA/RP) to SSE and L2 speakers' accents.

This hypothesis was not confirmed. Prestige model accents RP and GA have been reported as a preferred accent of L2 English students in numerous studies (Abeywickrama, 2013; Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Henderson et al., 2012). In contrast, in this study, the Chinese accent was selected as the most preferred, followed closely by both prestige models. An examination of the Chinese speaker's speech rate revealed that it was identical to that of the RP and was faster than the General American speakers. As faster speech rates are typically found in native and high proficiency L2 speakers (Munro, 1999), this feature could have contributed to the mistaken belief among participants that she was also a native speaker and thus was awarded the same positive associations. Aside from the fastest speaker (SSE Dundee), the next most preferred accents (RP, SSE Glasgow, GA) were also faster overall than all remaining models used. It could be therefore that accents believed to be native, potentially due to their speech rate, are more preferred.

Hypothesis 3 Participants will likely perceive and associate prestige models with more positive qualities than SSE or L2 models.

This hypothesis was confirmed. Mean scores of participant ratings revealed a tendency for prestige models RP and GA to be received more positively for sonority, perceived level of education, and potential to be a good English language teacher. Such results could simply be due to the fact that participants' familiarity with these models means less cognitive processing is required upon listening, resulting in faster and easier identification and comprehension.

7   Post-test Interviews

All participants were invited to a post-test interview to establish their beliefs about how international varieties might become more accepted and normalised among L2 students. Five participants volunteered to complete this final stage of the study. Four were Ph.D. students from Colombia, Thailand, Libya and China, and one was a Master's student from Taiwan.

Two themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of their responses: use of teaching materials, and approaches to accent in the classroom. Three of the participants believed using international voices in audio or video materials would be inspiring and normalising to L2 students, as shown in the following excerpts:

Show a video about a conference where people are speaking with different accents and sharing ideas in different accents and they can communicate without any problems. Sometimes, at least for me, I think that people won't understand me because of my accent, but when I have the chance to speak with other researchers from France or from Wales, they manage to understand me without any problems, because they are used to these different accents, especially in the academic world, it's very common. (Hao, China)

[Referring to a pronunciation class he had taken] *something that I really like is when we were watching interviews with people from different parts of the world. So for example, I remember this guy- the one who's really famous from South Africa, or the Malaysian guy*

that was interviewing the scientist in Florida, this kind of thing. So I think that would be a really good strategy, because at the end, there is not a right or wrong accent. It's not about this. It's a diverse world. It's totally globalised so we're having interaction with people from all parts of the world. So why people are just expecting to learn one English when they can just be conscious that there are various and the varieties extensive. That for me worked. (Jorge, Columbia)

I think every textbook only have one accent in common. Like in Taiwan, we have only American accent or British accent or Australian accent when we have a test or something. I think we have to be mixed because we could not choose the people we are talking about so we have to understand the different accent when we are learning. (Siyu, Taiwan)

Remarks such as these suggest that teaching materials and tasks could be useful ways of generating exposure to international Englishes and normalising accent diversity even prior to international university education.

Another of the interviewees highlighted the need to educate students about accent in a globalised world:

At school teach us there is no right accent. They have to change their mind. You have to communicate with, like, the global world, so you have to understand every accent. (Chalerm, Thailand)

Participants also remarked on the negative perceptions of diverse accents (namely the SSE accent) they encountered before arrival in Scotland, accessed online, or heard from peers.

My friend, she is studying in UK and she told me a lot like "oh you cannot understand the people in Scotland" but I think it's fine. (Siyu, Taiwan)

One participant felt strongly that negative perceptions could have significant implications for students considering further studies in Scotland.

All of student I think on YouTube or on Google for the accent in Scotland, all of them says "it's very difficult to understand; it's not good," and many students avoid coming to Glasgow to Scotland because of the reputation of the language, but when I came here I see the Scottish accent, especially in Glasgow is very nice, the Scottish accent has a rhythm like a melody when they speaking. (Amir, Libya)

Again, thoughtful pedagogical classroom tasks and teacher guidance could prevent, or at least, reduce the predictable negative reactions to unfamiliar sounds being generated by speakers with unfamiliar accents.

8 Implications

From the various stages of this research it can be seen that positive perceptions of prestige model accents, such as RP and GA, persist in English language learning despite the fact that L2 listeners may struggle to identify them as such. Moreover, said models are not essential for communication in the global environment where English is increasingly used as a lingua franca. As mentioned in the interviews, denying

students opportunities to grow accustomed to diverse Englishes may limit their global vision, potentially even leading to life changing decisions, such as whether or not to visit, live or study abroad, despite the potential for learning and success they may find if they did. As Derwing et al. (2002) found, explicit instruction on the phonological features of Vietnamese accented English not only aided social work students' overall comprehension, but it also altered their perceptions of these speakers for the better. Therefore, providing input and support in class has the potential to alleviate some of the stigma attached to certain unfamiliar accents.

A simple way to begin the process of international English acclimatisation is via teaching resources. As gleaned from the existing literature and participants' comments during interviews, it seems clear that teaching resources play a considerable role in formulating what students believe is the acceptable or correct form of English. If major publishers continue to produce resources with limited or prestige models only, teachers could supplement their classroom practice with materials that represent the diversity of English as it is spoken worldwide. In an English for academic purposes context, this could be online lectures accessed from other universities, especially as many are now freely available. Alternatively, recordings of short concise academic presentations, such as those of the Three Minute Thesis competition, could be a simple way to provide diverse exposure, normalise accent variety, and even stimulate discussion on interesting topics and useful listening and decoding strategies.

9 Conclusion

The current study provides insight into the experiences of L2 English students studying in an international setting and contending with diverse novel L2 and regional L1 accents on a regular basis. Without the contextual clues provided in face-to-face communication, participants' observations of speech accents revealed that though many have developed a set of beliefs regarding prestige model native speaker accents, these beliefs do not necessarily help them identify or comprehend the language presented to them. Furthermore, without any information to guide them, some exert accent preferences contradicting their firmly held pre-listening beliefs. This can be seen in participants' preference for an L2 accent over a prestige model, or in participants' disagreement regarding SSE models having a 'bad pronunciation' (see Sect. 5.3), although the majority (63.3%) had previously stated that SSE was 'impossible' or 'difficult to understand' (see Sect. 5.1). Such results suggest that exclusive use of prestige models in ELT, and especially EAP, is unwarranted and could even be detrimental, affecting students' perceptions of accents, countries, and their inhabitants. However, an appropriate place in which acclimatisation to diverse Englishes can occur is in the classroom. With appropriate resources, teacher guidance can support students as they navigate their way through the diverse utterances and realisations of sounds, normalising the natural diversity that exists among international pronunciations of English.

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