

***Beyond Native Standards: A Pedagogical Strategy for Listening
Comprehension through Authentic Materials and Accent Awareness***

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Abstract

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In the context of increasing global use of English, students are now frequently exposed to different accents, although many classrooms still prioritize native-speaker norms that can limit learners' confidence in listening. This study explores how an English Literature classroom can be reoriented by questioning the dominance of the native-speaker standard and how students' perceptions shift from viewing accents as "errors" to understanding them as part of real-world communication and identity. This study used a qualitative descriptive design involving thirteen undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected from reflective responses after a structured listening comprehension task using authentic materials such as Singlish interviews and Indian English videos. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences. The findings show that exposure to diverse accents helps students become more flexible listeners. Instead of focusing on native-like pronunciation, they gradually rely more on context and meaning to understand spoken English. This process also helps reduce listening anxiety when dealing with unfamiliar accents. Drawing on *Global Englishes* and *Intercultural Communicative Competence*, this study suggests that listening should be understood as meaning-making in context rather than simply recognizing ideal pronunciation. It also highlights the importance of valuing linguistic diversity in English as a global language.

Kata Kunci:

*Dekolonisasi,
Global Englishes,
Pemahaman
Menyimak,*

Abstrak

Dalam konteks meningkatnya penggunaan bahasa Inggris secara global, paparan terhadap beragam aksen telah menjadi aspek penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa,

*Materi Autentik,
Kesadaran Aksan.*

namun banyak ruang kelas masih memprioritaskan norma *native speaker* yang dapat membatasi rasa percaya diri komunikatif pembelajar. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana kelas Sastra Inggris dapat didekolonisasi dengan mempertanyakan dominasi standar *native speaker* dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Fokus penelitian ini adalah melihat bagaimana persepsi mahasiswa terhadap aksan berubah, dari yang awalnya dianggap sebagai “kesalahan linguistik” menjadi bentuk valid dari identitas budaya dan bahasa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain *qualitative descriptive* dengan melibatkan tiga belas mahasiswa sarjana yang dipilih melalui *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui respons reflektif mahasiswa setelah melakukan tugas pemahaman listening terstruktur menggunakan materi autentik, termasuk wawancara jalanan *Singlish* dan video *Indian English*, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *thematic analysis*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penekanan pada pemaknaan dan pemahaman bersama lebih efektif dibandingkan sekadar meniru pelafalan *native-like*, karena dapat mengurangi kecemasan mahasiswa saat mendengarkan aksan yang tidak familiar serta mendorong praktik listening yang lebih fleksibel dan percaya diri. Berlandaskan *Global Englishes* dan *Intercultural Communicative Competence*, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemahaman listening seharusnya dipandang sebagai proses konstruksi makna dalam konteks sosial dan budaya, bukan sekadar mengenali bentuk pelafalan ideal, serta menghargai keberagaman linguistik sebagai bagian dari bahasa Inggris sebagai *lingua franca* global.

INTRODUCTION

English is no longer confined to a handful of countries; it has genuinely become *English as a Lingua Franca*. This change requires a new way of teaching: *Global Englishes Language Teaching*. Too many classrooms, unfortunately, still operate with an archaic attitude that American or British accents are the only "right"

way to speak. In fact, *English* is a world tool that everybody uses and being able to recognize different dialects is much more useful than simply trying to sound like one particular model. Such variety should be prioritized to establish a more inclusive identity for language learners (Boonsuk et al., 2021).

The actual problem is that many students still get anxious or even blank out when they hear an accent that is not like the ones in their old schoolbooks. They have come to believe that *Standard English* is the sole “correct” way to speak, and this creates a large disconnect between what they learn in the classroom and the unpredictable, varied world outside. We need to stop worrying about perfect pronunciation and start working on developing *accommodative competence*, which is just the ability to keep calm and interpret what people mean regardless of how they sound (Woldemariam, 2023; He & Jiang, 2020). It’s incredible to observe how immediately that “accent anxiety” begins to dissipate when students cease rehearsing with scripted audio and begin to listen to authentic individuals on podcasts or videos; it’s as if a lightbulb ignites, and they immediately understand they are capable of managing various rhythms and intonations (Silaj et al., 2023; Kabir & Cunningham, 2023).

Recent studies have increasingly questioned the dominance of *native-speakerism* in English language teaching and its impact on learners’ confidence and listening development. Boonsuk et al. (2021) emphasize that awareness of *Global Englishes* helps students move away from the pursuit of an “ideal” accent, while Kabir and Cunningham (2023) show that consistent exposure to diverse accents can ease listening anxiety and improve learners’ ability to interpret meaning in real communication. In a similar direction, Woldemariam (2023) and Silaj et al. (2023) highlight that authentic multimedia input creates a more realistic bridge between classroom English and everyday language use. Even so, most of these findings remain largely general in scope and have not fully explored how such exposure reshapes students’ sense of linguistic identity within literature-based learning environments. This leaves an open space to examine how structured interaction with authentic and varied accents may influence learners at a deeper level, particularly through reflective learning processes that encourage *accommodative*

competence and gradually shift attention away from pronunciation perfection toward more flexible and inclusive understanding of English use.

The present study investigates the effect of authentic videos in different accents on the development of listening comprehension and *accommodative ability*. This study investigates the real-world language exposure and its effects on the learning experience beyond the standard ways. Initial findings reveal a dramatic shift in students' attitudes - *non-native accents* are no longer viewed as impediments to communication but as natural and vital components of global engagement. By examining the particular challenges students encountered and how their perceptions of what "standard" *English* is had changed, the study offers empirical data that supports the need for the implementation of more inclusive, *ELF-oriented* practices in higher education (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Kabir & Cunningham, 2023).

METHOD

A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to explore students' experiences in interpreting different English accents within classroom listening activities. This approach is appropriate for examining how learners construct meaning from linguistic variation in naturalistic learning contexts, particularly in relation to Standard English and Global Englishes perspectives (Ghanbar et al., 2024). It is grounded in an interpretive orientation that prioritizes participants' lived experiences in understanding communicative development.

The participants consisted of thirteen undergraduate students selected through *purposive sampling*. The selection was criterion-based, focusing on students enrolled in English literature courses who had direct experience with structured listening activities involving diverse English accents. This ensured the inclusion of *information-rich cases* capable of providing relevant and reflective accounts of their learning experiences. Such an approach is appropriate in qualitative research where depth of understanding is prioritized over generalizability (Riazi et al., 2023).

Data were collected through reflective written responses following a structured listening-comprehension activity. This instrument allowed participants

to articulate their cognitive and affective responses toward accent variation, including perceived difficulty, listening strategies, and attitudes toward Standard English (Yahya, 2023). The listening task was implemented in three stages: pre-listening (schema activation), while-listening (exposure to authentic materials with diverse accents), and post-listening (reflection on meaning-making and Global Englishes perspectives) (Woldemariam, 2023; Astika & Kurniawan, 2020). This procedure aligns with socio-cognitive views of listening that emphasize interaction between input, context, and comprehension processes (He & Jiang, 2020; Silaj et al., 2023).

Data analysis followed *thematic analysis*, involving familiarization, coding, and theme development to identify recurring patterns in students' responses (Nowell et al., 2017; Naeem et al., 2023). To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed *member checking* to confirm participant interpretations, *methodological triangulation* by comparing reflective responses with classroom observation notes, and an *audit trail* to document all analytic decisions. These procedures strengthened *credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability* of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results of this study are not just a catalogue of *hearing difficulties*; they are a map of a particular *cognitive and ideological itinerary* of the participants, from the 'fear' of the unknown to the 'professional pragmatism' of the *globalized communicator*. The *matrix* below is a summation of this voyage and will be the map for the narrative that follows.

Table 1 Thematic Analysis Matrix

Theme	Key Findings	Representative Insights	Student
Cognitive Challenges	Difficulty with speed, rhythm (syllable stress), and intonation, particularly with non-native accents.	"The speed was fast and the intonation was very different."	S2
Adaptive Strategies	Reliance on contextual decoding and active communication strategies, such as requesting repetition.	"I focus on key words and guess the meaning from context."	S2

Mindset Shift	Transition from native-speakerism to a focus on clarity and mutual understanding.	“Now I think any clear accent is standard if people can understand.”	S2
Perception of Accents	Rejection of the “barrier” narrative; accents are viewed as natural, global, and markers of identity.	“Accents aren’t glitches; they’re just the local flavor of a language.”	S3
Professional Pragmatism	Recognition that accommodative competence is a professional necessity for future global interactions.	“Mastering one standard accent only helps be heard. But accommodation helps hear everyone else.”	S13

The Initial Friction

The *Journey* began with a strong sense of *difficulty*. The first audio samples contained a variety of speakers, especially those with an *Indian English accent*, and as the participants listened, they didn’t only hear a different sound, but rather a startling ‘*cognitive collision*’ between what they expected to hear and what really registered in their ears. Many felt panic right away. It wasn’t that they lacked the language skills, but that they had a collision with their internal ‘*blueprint*’ of how *English* should sound, and this made them freeze for a moment during the *listening job*.

Table 2 Themes of Phonological Barriers and Learner Responses

Theme	Sub-theme	Evidence from Participants (S1-S13)
Phonological Barriers in Accent Comprehension	Speech rate difficulty	Students consistently reported difficulty following fast speech, especially in Indian and Singaporean English. Example: “speaks too fast so I cannot catch every word” (S2), “speed makes it hard to follow conversation” (S6).
	Syllable stress variation	Participants struggled with unfamiliar stress patterns that affected word recognition. Example: “stress in Indian accent makes it difficult to understand” (S9), “no stress makes words sound flat” (S10).
	Intonation differences	Learners reported confusion in interpreting meaning and emotion due to unfamiliar intonation patterns. Example: “intonation is very different and confusing” (S4), “hard to understand speaker tone” (S1).
Listening Strategies (Accommodative Competence)	Keyword focusing	Students relied on identifying keywords such as nouns and verbs to understand meaning. Example: S1, S3, S9.
	Context guessing	Learners used contextual clues to infer meaning when words were unclear. Example: “guess meaning based on topic” (S2), “focus on overall context” (S7).
	Repetition & subtitles	Participants repeatedly listened or used subtitles to improve comprehension. Example: S6, S11.

Attitudinal Shift Toward Accents	From native-speakerism to acceptance	Students shifted from viewing US/UK English as “correct” to accepting multiple accents as valid. Example: “no longer only American or British is correct” (S3).
	Accents as communication identity	Learners began to see accents as cultural identity rather than errors. Example: “accents reflect identity not mistakes” (S7).
	Global English awareness	Participants recognized English as a global lingua franca. Example: “English belongs to all speakers, not only native speakers” (S10, S13).

Students reported that the most common difficulty in listening to different English accents was related to *phonological features*, particularly speech rate, syllable stress, and intonation. S10 described that *Standard English* sounded more “bouncing” in rhythm, while the Indian accent was perceived as more “flat and steady,” which made it difficult for them to identify word boundaries during listening tasks. Similar responses were given by S1, S3, and S7, who stated that fast speech and unfamiliar pronunciation patterns affected their ability to follow the spoken message clearly.

Several participants also reported that syllable stress differences influenced their comprehension, especially when words were pronounced in ways that differed from what they were accustomed to. In addition, *intonation patterns* were mentioned as a factor that made it harder for students to recognize meaning and follow the flow of speech. The data further show that students commonly experienced initial difficulty when exposed to unfamiliar accents, particularly Indian and Singaporean English, as these differed significantly from the accents they were most familiar with.

The Adaptive Pivot

The data show that students used different strategies when facing difficulty in understanding English accents. Many participants reported that instead of focusing on every word, they shifted to focusing on key words and general context to understand the meaning of the message.

Table 3 Adaptive Listening Strategies Employed by Participants

Strategy Type	Tactical Focus	Evidence from Participants
Contextual Guessing	Using keywords (nouns/verbs) and topic context to infer meaning	S1, S2, S3, S7, S9
Active Negotiation	Asking for repetition or slower speech during comprehension difficulty	S2, S4, S8, S11
Macro-level Processing	Focusing on overall meaning rather than word-by-word decoding	S3, S6, S7, S10
Supportive Tools Use	Using subtitles, repetition of audio, and digital tools (e.g., Google Translate/AI)	S6, S11, S12, S13

As shown in *Table 3*, students such as S2, S3, and S10 reported that they relied on contextual cues to help them understand spoken input when they could not catch all words clearly. They identified familiar words and used them to construct the overall meaning of the speaker's message. Several participants (S4, S5, S8, and S11) also reported that they asked speakers to repeat or slow down when they experienced difficulty in comprehension. Others mentioned using subtitles or replaying audio to support understanding, especially when dealing with unfamiliar accents or fast speech.

The Paradigm Shift

The data show that students reported changes in their attitudes toward English accents following the listening activities. These changes are presented in *Table 4*, which summarizes participants' responses related to their perceptions of *Standard English* and the use of different English accents.

Table 4 Attitudinal Shifts Toward English Accents

Attitudinal Stage	Description	Evidence from Participants
Initial Standard Belief	Belief that American/British English is the correct or standard form	S2, S5, S11, S12
Emerging Acceptance	Recognition that non-native accents are valid forms of English	S1, S3, S8, S10
Global English Awareness	Understanding English as a global language with multiple acceptable accents	S6, S7, S9, S13

The data show that students reported changes in their attitudes toward English accents after participating in the listening activities. As shown in *Table 4*, several participants initially stated that *American English* or *British English* was the standard or correct form of English. This view was reported by S2, S5, S11, and S12. After the listening activities, some students (S1, S3, S8, and S10) reported that

they started to accept non-native accents as valid forms of English. They mentioned that different accents could still be understood as long as the message was clear and communication was successful.

In addition, other participants (S6, S7, S9, and S13) reported a broader understanding of English as a global language with different acceptable forms. They noted that exposure to various accents made them more familiar with how English is used in different ways across speakers.

Discussion

Deconstructing the "Native" Hegemony: Toward a Global Linguistic Identity

The findings of this study show that students initially relied heavily on native-like pronunciation as a reference point when engaging in listening activities. American and British English were often perceived as the standard forms, and this influenced how students evaluated their comprehension at the beginning of the learning process. This tendency reflects the strong presence of native-speaker norms in English language education, which can be linked to the idea of *Linguistic Imperialism* (Phillipson, 1992), where certain varieties of English are positioned as more legitimate than others.

However, the results also indicate that this perception did not remain static. After repeated exposure to different English accents, students began to adjust how they interpreted spoken English. Instead of focusing only on correctness or similarity to native pronunciation, they started to rely more on meaning and context. This shift aligns with the perspectives of *World Englishes* and *English as a Lingua Franca* (Kachru, 1985; Jenkins, 2000), which emphasize that English exists in multiple legitimate forms across global contexts.

What is important here is not that students completely rejected native-speaker norms, but that they began to broaden their understanding of what counts as “acceptable” English. Some participants initially expressed difficulty when encountering unfamiliar accents, yet over time they reported becoming more open and less rigid in their expectations. This suggests a gradual reorientation in how

English is perceived, moving from a fixed standard toward a more flexible understanding of linguistic variation.

The development observed in the findings can also be related to *Intercultural Communicative Competence* (Byram, 1997), where understanding across linguistic and cultural differences becomes more important than imitating a specific accent. In this sense, students' listening experience becomes not only a linguistic activity, but also a process of adjusting to diversity in communication styles. Exposure to authentic materials such as Singlish and Indian English appears to play a role in this adjustment, as it provides learners with real examples of English used in different contexts.

From Accent Correction to Intercultural Competence: Bridging Theory and Practice

The second theme of this study highlights how students responded to exposure to authentic listening materials. The findings show that using real-world English sources, such as YouTube videos featuring different accents, influenced the way students approached listening tasks. At the beginning, many students experienced difficulty in understanding speech due to differences in speed, stress patterns, and pronunciation. These challenges were particularly evident when dealing with unfamiliar accents such as Singlish and Indian English (Woldemariam, 2023).

Over time, students reported adjusting their listening strategies. Instead of trying to understand every single word, they began to focus more on overall meaning and context. This adjustment reflects a shift in listening behavior, where comprehension is achieved through flexible interpretation rather than strict word-by-word decoding. Such changes are consistent with socio-cognitive views of listening, which emphasize the interaction between input, context, and cognitive processing (He & Jiang, 2020; Silaj et al., 2023).

The findings also suggest that repeated exposure to diverse accents helped reduce initial listening pressure. While some students initially preferred familiar accents, their responses indicate increasing tolerance toward variation in English

pronunciation. This suggests that familiarity plays an important role in reducing listening anxiety and improving comprehension over time.

In addition, the use of authentic materials appears to support a more realistic understanding of English as it is used globally. Rather than presenting English as a fixed system with one correct form, exposure to different accents allows students to see language as something dynamic and context-dependent. This experience encourages learners to adapt their listening approach depending on the speaker and situation.

Overall, the findings indicate that listening activities using diverse English accents contribute to the development of more adaptive listening behavior. Students gradually shift from focusing on linguistic accuracy toward focusing on meaning construction in communication. This suggests that exposure to linguistic diversity in the classroom can help learners develop more flexible and realistic listening skills aligned with global English use.

Limitations and Future Directions

These findings illustrate the potential of *real resources* to deconstruct *colonial classroom norms* but the move to *accommodating competency* is not a simple cure; it is a lengthy, structural battle. This change is sometimes mired by inertia within institutions and a deeply entrenched notion among students that ‘*Standard English*’ is the only marker of academic success. This study provides a much-needed snapshot, but future research has to go the distance with *longitudinal analysis*. However, the question still remains as to whether prolonged exposure to a range of *global dialects* translates to *professional communication efficacy* once students leave the university bubble. Additionally, the lens should also consider the *intersectionality* of teachers’ own identities in the facilitation of these materials, as it provides additional insight into the *power dynamics* that are embedded in the classroom. Changing the curriculum is a start, but the true work is to examine the institutions of power that educators themselves represent. If these tactics can be continually challenged and refined, the field will be moving in the direction of an

English education that quits chasing an elusive "native" ghost and can finally reflect the genuine, lively reality of *English as a worldwide lingua franca*.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that students initially tended to rely on *native-like* pronunciation as a standard when listening to English. At the beginning, many of them still saw American or British English as the most "correct" form. But after being exposed to different accents through authentic listening materials, their views slowly started to shift. They began to realise that English can sound different depending on who is speaking, and that does not necessarily make it wrong.

What also came out from the study is that students are not just listening passively. They actually adjust the way they listen when they face difficulty. Instead of trying to catch every single word, they start to rely more on context, keywords, and sometimes repetition. This shows that listening is not only about accuracy, but also about how learners manage meaning in real time. From a theoretical point of view, this study supports ideas from *Global Englishes* and *English as a Lingua Franca*, where English is seen as something flexible and used by many different speakers around the world. The findings also relate to *Intercultural Communicative Competence*, because students gradually learn to understand different ways of speaking and become more open to variation in English use.

Overall, the study suggests that bringing different accents into the classroom can help students become more comfortable with real-world English. It also helps reduce the idea that there is only one "correct" way to speak. Instead, students start to see English as something more diverse and practical, used by different people in different situations.

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