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The Effects and Implications of English Accents in EFL and ESL Classrooms

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Resumen

Esta síntesis de investigación intenta analizar los efectos del uso de grabaciones en varios acentos del inglés en la destreza de escuchar de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera y como segunda lengua y las actitudes y percepciones de los estudiantes y los profesores hacia los acentos de la misma. Con este objetivo, 19 estudios de primera fuente fueron seleccionados al inicio. Los criterios de inclusión para la revisión literaria fueron: 1) estudios relacionados con la influencia de varios acentos en la destreza de escuchar; 2) las percepciones de los estudiantes y profesores hacia los acentos del inglés; y 3) el reconocimiento de todos los acentos del inglés.

Los resultados encontrados corroboraron la idea de que la inclusión de diversos acentos del inglés en las aulas trae consigo múltiples efectos. Primero, los resultados ratificaron la existencia de consecuencias desfavorables en el rendimiento de los oyentes cuando se usa grabaciones de acentos no familiares, lo cual lleva a que los educadores tomen ciertas acciones. Segundo, a través del análisis de las actitudes y percepciones de los estudiantes y los docentes hacia los acentos del inglés, ha sido verificado que la natividad es dada mucha importancia actualmente, especialmente por los estudiantes. Además, el reporte sobre las técnicas y estrategias aplicadas por los profesores mostró la necesidad de incrementar la exposición de los estudiantes a múltiples acentos del inglés. Finalmente, estos hallazgos conducen a la necesidad de reconocer la amplia variedad de acentos de este idioma en todo el mundo y apoyan la inteligibilidad en lugar de la natividad.

Palabras clave: Acentos. Familiaridad. Escuchar. Natividad. Percepciones.



Abstract

This research synthesis intends to analyze the effects of varied English accents recordings on ESL and EFL learners' listening skills and teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions toward English accents. With this aim, 19 primary source studies were selected at the beginning. The inclusion criteria for the review were: 1) studies dealing with the influence of varied accents on listening skills; 2) learners and teachers' perceptions toward English accents; and 3) the recognition of all English accents. The results found corroborated the idea that the inclusion of diverse English accents in our classrooms brings with it multiple effects. First and foremost, results ratified the existence of unfavorable consequences on listeners' performance when using recordings in an unfamiliar accent which leads educators to take some action. Secondly, through analyzing students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward English accents, it has been verified that nativeness is still given much importance today, especially by students. What's more, the report on the techniques and strategies applied by teachers showed the necessity of incrementing the exposure of students to multiple English accents. Finally, these findings lead to the necessity of recognizing the wide variety of accents of this language worldwide and supporting intelligibility rather than nativeness.

Key words: Accents. Familiarity. Listening. Nativeness. Perceptions.



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A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Paola Belén Torres Lazo", positioned above a horizontal line.

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I am grateful to my mentor Mgt. Jean-Paul Jara, and to all the professors who have guided me through the development of this research synthesis.



Dedication

This work is dedicated to my friends who always strengthen me, to my family, who encourage and support me in their own way and to God, whose grace is everlasting.



Introduction

Accent and listening are the core of this investigation. Accent is basically the way a person pronounces words in a particular language. Everybody has an accent in their first language which may be carried over their second or third language. Notwithstanding, accent may be marked not only as a factor that causes problems in communication, but also as a generator of discrimination among English speakers (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Listening is an essential skill when learning a language as it allows people to understand and interact with others.

In our globalized world, English has become an International Language (EIL) as this language is used as a tool for communication in a variety of fields worldwide. Likewise, this process of globalization has resulted in the existence of numerous English speakers and a variety of English accents. Given the fact that even though nonnative English speakers (NNES) outnumber native English speakers (NES) (Fang, 2016), acquiring a native-like accent is still a goal some learners try to attain, and recordings of NES are preferred to recordings produced by NNES in classrooms, it is worth investigating this field of linguistics as this dilemma about nativeness may provide significant benchmarks for the second and foreign language teaching and learning.

This research concentrates on the effects of speakers' English accents on the learners' listening skills, and how English learners and teachers perceive the existence of varied English accents, along with the necessity of recognizing and accepting all English accents. Thus, this research synthesis is carried out with the objective of shedding light on the pedagogical implications of having varied English accents in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, providing in service and pre-service teachers



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with insights about English accents recognition and techniques which may be taken into consideration to help learners deal with unfamiliar English accents.



Chapter I

Background

Accent and dialect are often misunderstood as they are used interchangeably (Aston University, 2018) ; however, these two terms are not the same. In that way, we need to establish their difference; dialect “implies lexical, grammatical and/or pronunciation differences” (English Language and Linguistics Online, 2018, p. 1) while accent refers to “a phonetic trait from a person's original language (L1) that is carried over a second language (L2)” (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), 2018, p. 1). In that way, this paper concentrates on English accent varieties. According to Wang (2017), the array of diverse accents in English as a foreign and second language classrooms (which will be referred later with the abbreviations EFL and ESL respectively) plays a significant role in the intent of achieving mutual intelligibility among English speakers.

On the contrary, Mccrocklin and Link (2016) pointed out that accent and intelligibility are not the same since intelligibility “refers to the ability to understand the words and phrases being spoken” (p.3). Notwithstanding accent is often accused for miscommunication problems. Similarly, Munro and Derwing (as cited in Mccrocklin and Link, 2016, p.3) displayed that a person can produce intelligible utterances while keeping his “strong and noticeable” accent.

Besides, as Kramsch argued that the non-native English speakers outnumber the native speakers (as cited in Wang, 2017, p.2), this paper reviews studies which have demonstrated that up to date there is a vast variety of English accents all around the world. Indeed, English has been evolving constantly throughout these years (Wang, 2017). Consequently, this paper categorizes the results of primary research studies in; 1) the influence of varied accents on English learners’ listening skills; 2) learners and teachers’ perceptions toward English accents,



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and 3) the recognition of all English accents. Thus, this research synthesis is carried out with the objective of integrating the implications of having varied English accents in EFL and ESL classrooms.

Problem Statement

Even though accent and intelligibility are not totally linked, Derwing and Munro (as cited in McCrocklin and Link, 2016, p.3) showed that accent not only may be marked as a factor that causes problems in communication, but also as a generator of discrimination among English speakers. As a matter of fact, some people will speak in unfamiliar accents by pronouncing words in a special way which differs from the listener's accent (van Heugten, Krieger, & Johnson, 2015).

Hence, accents unfamiliarity is related to the development of listening skills (Yildiz, 2017). Moreover, Park, Klieve, Tsurutani, and Harte's (2017) study noted that accented English has a relevant role in academic studies due to the fact that it may provoke anxiety too. In this context, recognizing English as a global language that has suffered many constant changes (Fang, 2016), and the fact that there has been an increment in the rate of interaction with people from diverse regional backgrounds in today's world (van Heugten, Krieger, & Johnson, 2015), it is necessary to draw our attention to accent for it is considered one of the determinants that made English a "pluricentric" language (Xu, 2018), and since English from this current perspective has not been explored enough with the objective of ensuring a comprehensible communication among speakers (Matsuura, Chiba, Mahoney, and Rilling, 2014).



Mastering all the English skills is stated as one of the goals of the Ecuadorian English Curriculum (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Yet no studies have been done to analyze the diversity of accents as a determining factor for succeeding in learning English. Furthermore, learners just recently began to get familiarized with varied accents in the classroom (Yildiz, 2017). Therefore, incorporating varied accents might help learners to avoid problems in the recognition of different English accents as shown by Clarke and Garret (as cited in Grohe and Weber, 2016, p. 2).

According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 32,367 students from other countries were part of the school year 2016-2017 (Diario El Telégrafo, 2017). This event proves that there are varied English accents because of regional cultural differences in Ecuadorian classroom. As presented by Cheng (2018), students sometimes present problems while developing their listening skills due to their accents and the recordings used in class. For instance, students who are not familiar with British English might get confused and discouraged since they have some problems to understand (Ahmed, Abdullah, Heng, 2014). Nevertheless, not much has been done to deal with this situation. As a result, there is a lack of analysis on how accents may have implications addressing teachers and learners. Therefore, as today education must be student-centered, teachers should have a significant insight about how learners and teachers perceive varied English accents and the recognition of them. It might be beneficial for teachers to improve their teaching practice based on these insights as well.

Rationale

According to Holmes (as cited in Ahmed, Abdullah, & Heng, 2014), “accent can be defined as a certain form of language spoken by a subgroup of speakers of that language which is



defined by phonological features” (p.4). It is then crucial to mention that accent plays a meaningful role in English learning, since students may struggle when having to decide between maintaining their own accent and acquiring a native-like English pronunciation which may allow them to either have a standard pronunciation or sound differently (McCrocklin & Link, 2016). Whether decision learners make may influence English teachers’ perceptions toward students’ accents in EFL/ESL classrooms as well (Chen, 2016). Some studies have demonstrated that teachers’ attitudes toward acquiring a Standard English pronunciation are sometimes positive as they respect and recognize that there are not only one or two appropriate English accents rather than making students change their accents (Buckingham, 2015).

Studies addressing the implications of varied English accents have been conducted in some countries; especially those in Asia, by virtue of the growing number of multicultural classrooms (Wang, 2017), the high number of non-native English speakers worldwide, and the increasing recognition of English as an International Language. Notwithstanding, there are no published studies dealing with this dilemma in Ecuadorian classrooms. Hence, there is a noticeable lack of research about this issue in our context.

The rationale for this paper relies on the necessity of examining the implications of the existence of varied English accents, which can inform teachers in the Ecuadorian context what has been studied up to date providing an insight into the learning process as influenced by accent issues. Plus, it is worth to investigate this topic considering that at the present time there are learners from different countries and regions of our same country in our classrooms (Diario El Telégrafo, 2017). In addition, providing learners and teachers with information about perceptions on diverse English accents, their influence on listening skills development, and the recognition of accents might encourage both teachers and students to respect and understand others regardless



of their accent when dealing with the target language. Therefore, the present study proposes to integrate the implications of the existence of varied English accents in EFL/ESL classrooms embracing their effects on learners' listening skills, and how accents may affect English learners and teachers' viewpoints, as well as the necessity of recognizing and accepting all English accents.

Research Questions

- What are the effects of varied English accents recordings on EFL and ESL learners' listening skills?
- What are English learners' and teachers' attitudes and awareness toward English accents?

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

Definition of Accent

Pennington (2014) shows that even though accent has been subject to investigation throughout time, it is still a term that causes problems when trying to define it. According to Derwing and Munro (1997), many linguists have focused their investigations on accent in recent years; in that way, the scope of the definition of accent has been modified. The aforementioned authors point out that accent refers to how the phonological sounds of a language are produced, in this case English sounds. Plus, these authors claim that when utterances are pronounced differently from their normal way, it is considered to be the result of having a foreign accent.

Additionally, Kang (2010) considers that accent does not only comprise phonetic traits, but also the influence of suprasegmentals and prosody which implies pitch, stress, and speech



rate. This author indicates that these factors have an influence when producing a language sounds, and let native English speakers notice foreign accents with ease.

Types of Accents

As accent has gained more importance year by year, Lippi-Green (2012) displays two types of accents, and claims that one must have a clear understanding of them as they present differences. These two accents are; First Language (L1) accent and Second Language (L2) accent. First Language accent refers to all spoken Native English varieties, which vary according to the geographic area, and Second Language (L2) accent which refers to the accent of people who learned English as a second or foreign language. Lippi-Green also emphasizes that the L2 accent is frequently influenced by the learner's L1 accent.

Kachru's Concentric Circles

As a matter of fact, in our society there are "approximately 1.5 billion speakers of English" (Brabcová & Skarnitzl, 2018), and people might expect the majority of these speakers to be Native English Speakers, but that is not the case. Kachru's concentric circles (1997) classifies English speakers in three groups. The inner circle is integrated by people whose mother tongue is English, for instance, the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. The outer circle is integrated by countries where English is a L2, as in India and the Philippines, and the last one is called the expanding circle which is for EFL learners as in China and Japan. Accordingly, English speakers could belong to one of these circles. Studies focusing on World Englishes have taken these concentric circles as a means of classification as seen in Kilickaya (2009)'s adaptation.

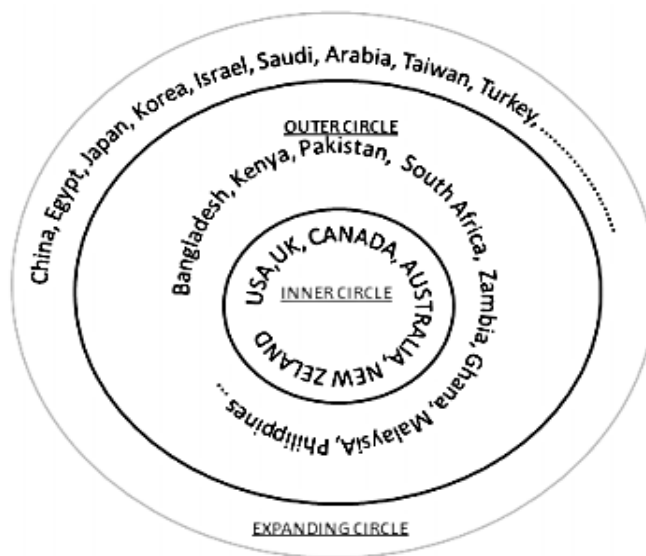


Figure 1. Kachru's Concentric Circles adapted by Kilickaya (2009)

English as an International Language

Fang (2016) affirms that English was commonly considered to belong to native English speakers (NSs) only, and that ESL/EFL learners had to base their learning on the native model. In other words, Fang (2016) indicates that it was an obligation for learners to acquire a native like pronunciation. Contrastingly, Lee and Chen (2018) note that with the spread of globalization, English speakers from diverse geographic regions had to interact more each day. As a consequence of this constant process of integrating all countries worldwide, the assumption of acquiring a native like English pronunciation was eliminated (Mrak, 2000).

Another significant element that promoted the growth of English as an International Language was the rapid development of technology. Consequently, interaction in multicultural and multilingual contexts became noticeable in a broad sense asserts Mrak (2000). Then, the



term English as an International Language was introduced (EIL), and currently it may be used by anyone regardless their linguistic, geographical or cultural backgrounds (Lee & Chen, 2018).

English is used across cultures as a means of international communication; for this reason, some researchers have mentioned that it is convenient to use the term World Englishes as there is not a unique form of English (Kuo, 2006). The recognition of English as an International Language brought some implications with it. The most significant to this topic is that the teaching practice needs some modifications as teachers have to face new situations and adapt their teaching to the current reality. For instance, Lee and Chen (2018) explain teachers have the necessity of including material with varied accents of English in their practices.

English as a Lingua Franca

According to the Cambridge and Longman dictionaries, a language becomes a lingua franca when it is used for people who do not speak the same language to communicate. The Merriam-Webster dictionary considers a lingua franca as “any of various languages” used with diverse purposes by people who speak different main languages. Shortly, it is a common language between speakers with a different L1 used for communication. Based on the above, English has become a lingua franca owing to the high number of nonnative English speakers (Crystal, 2003).

In an essay by Seidlhofer (2005), the author claims that it is inevitable not to consider English as a lingua franca since it is also an international language at the time. As a result of this phenomenon, this language has undergone constant changes produced by native and nonnative



speakers. To date, the growing number of English speakers results in the appearance of new varieties of English in different places, which are known as New Englishes (Crystal, 2003).

Listening

Ahmadi (2016) suggests listening is an essential process when learning a language because people need to be able to understand spoken language firstly to interact. This process includes hearing utterances, identifying grammatical structures, differentiating sounds, and understanding what a speaker is saying. Gonzalez, Cabrera, Castillo, Quiñonez, Solano, and Arias (2015) see listening as a challenging skill to develop and master in EFL classrooms for learners should be able to listen more than they speak, read, and write. These authors note that listening is a skill that should be developed through exposure to a variety of sources.

Chapter III

Literature Review

The use of recordings of varied English accents in EFL and ESL classrooms

English accent varieties and listening comprehension has been discussed by a great number of authors in literature (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2002; Abeywickrama, 2013; Ahmed, Abdullah & Heng, 2014; Ballard & Winke, 2017), and the majority of published research has applied the analysis of variance ANOVA, to carry out studies to analyze the effects of accented English on listening comprehension.

Some studies carried out in different countries (Matsuura, Chiba, Mahoney & Rilling, 2014; Cheng 2018; Asmawati, 2017) indicated that the learners' unfamiliarity with some English accents which are not considered standard or are not commonly used in EFL classrooms makes learners struggle when they are exposed to recordings with English accents they have not heard



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previously. Seminal contributions have been made by Cheng (2018), who suggested that EFL learners' listening comprehension is hindered when listening to unfamiliar accented English.

In an experimental study carried out in Taiwan, Cheng (2018) divided 75 participants randomly in an experimental (50) and a control group (25). Participants were Taiwanese Chinese-L1 EFL listeners who had B2 or C1 English proficiency level. They were undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in English language-related fields. A transcribing task and an interview were the instruments used in this study. With the idea of identifying predictors for success in coping with unfamiliar English accents, five accented familiar and unfamiliar audio files were chosen based on the results of an accent familiarity rating task done with a pilot group of 20 students who shared the same characteristics as mentioned above. General American English (GenAE) was the familiar accented English form and Northern Irish English (NIE), Southern American English (SAE), Glaswegian English (GE), and Welsh English (WE) were the unfamiliar ones.

This author observed that learners performed better when they had to transcribe audio files which were in familiar-accented English in comparison to their performance when listening and transcribing unfamiliar-accented scripts. Based on the results of the two phases of this study, Cheng affirmed that being not familiarized with a variety of English accents hinders listening comprehension in this EFL classroom, but the author mentioned that increased exposure to various English accents is not enough to be able to distinguish and understand different accents, meaning that an explicit intervention might be necessary. Lastly, accent imitation and exposure to native and nonnative English accents are mentioned to be necessary and beneficial for EFL learners to cope with unfamiliar accents.



Matsuura, Chiba, Mahoney and Rilling (2014) executed a study with 179 Japanese tertiary EFL students. The authors employed a survey form and 15 audio files recorded by fluent English speakers. They aimed to test learners listening comprehension and their perceptions of accentedness and speech rate. The listening comprehension test items were taken from the Official TOEIC Bridge books, and from a group of ten Outer Circle English speakers who were graduate students in the U.S, two were chosen, an Indian (most unfamiliar) and a Canadian man (familiar accent). In fact, in this experimental study the quantitative analysis revealed that there are some difficulties students face when they are not familiarized with English accents. It turned out that students presented problems with Indian English due to lack of familiarization, and that the North American accents were the ones most participants were familiar with. Additionally, it was shown that whenever an accent is really strong, it may cause more difficulties for the listener. Shortly, less familiarity resulted in participants' reduced understanding. These authors claimed that teachers should start including and promoting varied accents of English in classrooms through technology, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) system. For instance, incrementing the use of podcasts, chat rooms, blogs, audio tools, video sharing, among others.

In the same vein, Wong (2018) in a more recent study observed that the majority of nonnative EFL students who were studying to be teachers had difficulties to differentiate British English from many other accents in spite of their preference for this accent and the amount of time they had been exposed to it. In Hong Kong, 21 students from a teacher training institute participated in this study. They took part in a listening task, responded to a questionnaire, and some of them responded to an interview. For purposes of analyzing accent discrimination, students were presented video clips of TV drama series from the United Kingdom, Australia,



Canada, and New Zealand, and they responded comprehension questions. Drawing on the results of this study, these teachers-to-be also hold negative opinions on their own local English accent.

Ahmed, Abdullah, and Heng (2014) worked with 120 undergraduate Malaysian students taking an English proficiency ESL course. To analyze how familiar students were with varieties of English accents, and their attitudes toward them, students were presented American, Arabic, British, Chinese, Malay, and Indian English accents to identify after listening to a speech recording (accent recognition item). Researchers noted that participants were able to recognize when speakers had native and nonnative accents, but sometimes it was quite difficult to distinguish the British accent from the American one. It was noticeable that students were more familiar with American English, and that they rated nonnative lecturers' accents more positively than native lecturers. Thus, the results suggested that the more familiarized students are with an accent, the more positive they evaluate it. According to the authors, accents unfamiliarity is owed to students' limited exposure (movies only); hence, teachers should accommodate accents in their teaching.

Recent research provides a more comprehensive description as in Asmawati's study (2017) which focuses on all the difficulties students have regarding listening comprehension. The results obtained through a questionnaire and an interview show that 86% (32 out of 37) of the participants, who were in the second semester of the English Education Department in the State Islamic University of Alauddin Makassar in Indonesia, considered the variety of accents as a factor that affects negatively their performance in listening comprehension exercises. This author suggested that teachers should give students a chance to hear a variety of accents through activities like listening to English songs or watching TV to avoid future difficulties.



An even larger study done by Ballard and Winke (2017) in a Midwestern University, 121 university students (85 ESL students) who had different English proficiency levels, ranging from low intermediate and low advanced responded to a web-based survey and were presented five audio files to recognize the speaker's accent. These included American Midwestern, American Southern, British, Chinese, and Albanian English. In relation to the results nonnative speakers could not identify a speaker's accent, but native speakers could. Furthermore, although teachers perceived as natives were considered as more acceptable by some students, students showed positive attitudes toward nonnative accents. These results yield on the idea that English accents familiarity facilitates comprehension and correlates with acceptability as a teacher. They also reported that English proficiency has influence on accents recognition, too.

Ockey and French's (2014) study provided evidence about the relationship between L2 listeners' comprehension and their familiarity with the speaker's accent. This piece of research focused on analyzing not only how familiarity affects comprehension, but also accent strength. Given this purpose, 20 potential adult speakers' accents were judged in terms of familiarity by 100 instructors and students; this number also included second language English proficient speakers, all of them from US institutions. From these speakers, nine were selected, four Australians, four British, and a US speaker. These speakers recorded a scientific monologic lecture which was presented to 21,726 TOEFL iBT test takers from 148 countries. Test takers responded to an accent familiarity questionnaire mentioning how familiar they were with Australian, British, and American accents. The results of the analysis coupled with Matsuura, Chiba, Mahoney and Rilling (2014) as it shows that familiarity with English accents has certain effects on listening comprehension, and these researchers suggested that accent strength plays a



significant role when it comes to Australian accents. Results regarding British accents evidenced that students had an advantage by their familiarity so comprehension was easier.

Pedagogical implications on the development of listening skills

Over time, a number of authors have recognized that being not familiarized with plenty native and nonnative English accents negatively affects listening comprehension at a certain degree. Adank, Hagoort and Bekkering (2010) previously pointed out in their study that imitating unfamiliar accented speech helps learners to get a greater understanding of unfamiliar English accents. Dutch speakers (120) who were assigned to one of six groups (baseline, listening, repeating, transcription, imitation, and imitation plus noise group) participated in this study taking a pretest, posttest, and some of them were part of a training phase. After analyzing participants' performance on these tests, researchers claimed that the environment conditions are also a factor that may impede the perceiver to understand an unfamiliar spoken language.

Likewise, Cheng (2018) confirmed imitation to be effective as a mechanism to help learners to improve their understanding of unfamiliar accents. Cheng worked with Taiwanese Chinese-L1 EFL learners. These learners used accent imitation to cope with accent unfamiliarity problems. This researcher provided learners with the recordings and scripts which later had to be imitated as similar as possible. It was observed that students who were more successful at imitation were also successful at understanding unfamiliar accents. However, the author suggested these findings should be interpreted carefully considering that there is not much research on accent training and the probable existence of other variables that might have not been analyzed.

Regarding the importance of the listening skills in the English teaching process, Gonzalez, Ochoa, Cabrera, Castillo, Quinonez, Solano, and Arias (2015) conducted a study



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based on a mixed-methods approach in Zamora and Yantzaza. With the purpose of analyzing the implementation and use of educational resources to teach listening and speaking skills, 188 students and ten English teachers from public high schools were selected. Students responded to a questionnaire and took The Cambridge English Unlimited Placement Test. Teachers participated in an interview, responded to the same questionnaire, and their classes were observed and evaluated according to an observation sheet. Results showed that even though teachers and students mentioned in the questionnaire that teachers use the audio CD that comes with the book to teach listening, none of them used it during the class observation. Teachers used read-aloud activities as listening input, instead. In conclusion, teachers considered it important to use technology in class to provide students with a correct and diverse listening input, but some of these high schools did not have technological devices in the classrooms.

Solano, Cabrera, Ulehlova, and Espinoza (2017) also highlighted the necessity of using several technology tools in EFL classrooms to facilitate the development of all English skills. These authors based their investigation on a mixed-method approach, and for this purpose the instruments used were surveys and observation sheets. This study was done at 10 public schools, with 150 students and 15 teachers in the South of Ecuador with the objective of observing whether teachers use technology to teach English or not. Among the results obtained, it was pointed out that teachers do not use technology due to three reasons; a) their lack of knowledge which means some teachers need training, b) they are used to teach based on textbooks only, and c) some schools do not have enough facilities.

Counterarguments for accents unfamiliarity

Despite the benefits of getting familiarized with a variety of English accents may result in, American and British English are still considered to be the Standard English model some ESL



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and EFL learners pretend to acquire. Sounding like a native English speaker is the goal for many learners. For this reason, they neither give importance nor support the idea of using material involving diverse English accents in classrooms. A mixed-method study conducted by Sung (2016), revealed that L2 undergraduate students who were taking an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course were aware about the existence of a wide variety of native and nonnative English accents; however, they took an ‘ambivalent’ position when asked whether exposure to different accents was a need or not. These L2 learners responded to a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire survey. They agreed that being exposed to more accents would help them understand other accents, but at the same time they mentioned it was not essential in classrooms due to some reasons;

- a) It might cause confusion,
- b) Familiarization with many English accents do not have a practical use for them as they do not commonly interact with people who have different accents,
- c) Participants were able to understand accents with ease.

Additionally, one of the participants suggested “[#26] It’s very easy to pick up the accent and to understand the accent. I think there is no need to be exposed to different varieties of English accents intentionally” (Sung, 2016).

In Turkey, six English teachers, both native and non-native speakers, and 107 EFL students with intermediate level of English proficiency participated in Yildiz (2017)’s study. This mixed-methods study not only delved into knowing if the speaker’s accent unfamiliarity affects positively or negatively the listener’s comprehension, but also on the learner’s attitudes toward English accents. Participants took the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) tests as these focus on international communication, and they responded a



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questionnaire. For this purpose, only the speaking section from the test was analyzed.

Tests' scores analysis conceded that speaker's accent might play a role on listeners' comprehension due to pronunciation, tone, speech rate, and stress, but not in all texts. In other words, texts were recorded by American, Australian, British, Turkish, Russian, and African teachers, and for instance, some students presented difficulties understanding the first text, scores differed greatly between the African speaker and the British speaker.

Moreover, the author admitted she was not able to state a direct relation between a certain speaker accent and students' listening comprehension. Notwithstanding, the author concluded that students reaching for undergraduate or graduate programs are appealing to hear native English accents rather than nonnative accents because 83, 2% responded affirmatively when asked if they struggled with the listening comprehension exercise due to the speaker's accent, 11, 2% disagreed, and 6% said their performance was somewhat affected. This did not correlate with participants' test scores which demonstrated the opposite. This researcher suggested that more studies should be done.

Teachers' attitudes and awareness toward English accents

Throughout history American and British English have been seen as the standard or native-like pronunciation. With the introduction of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and the rise of World Englishes (WE), more research was done to focus on learners' and teachers' attitudes regarding English accents awareness. Bøhn and Hansen (2017) conducted an exploratory, mixed-methods design to analyze EFL teachers' orientations toward the assessment of pronunciation in a secondary school in Norway. Participants responded to interviews and a questionnaire. Researchers noted that most of these Norwegian EFL teachers who participated in this study considered intelligibility to have greater importance than nativeness when assessing EFL



learners. Understanding that intelligibility refers to “the ability to understand the words and phrases being spoken” (McCrocklin & Link, 2016, p.3). These 24 qualified teachers think that being successful in communication; understanding and being understood is what they expect from their students, not acquiring a native-like accent.

Accents awareness has also been investigated with EFL pre-service teachers (Wong, 2018), who mentioned that these pre-service teachers opt to choose native English as model for learning the language and teaching it. This study suggested three factors on which participants base their preference for a native accent rather than their Chinese accent;

- 1) “Assessment and teaching materials used in the EFL classroom
- 2) Status of native English teacher
- 3) Historical reason that Hong Kong was a British colony” (Wong, 2018, p.5)

Despite their knowledge about the array of English accents, pre-service teachers had the ideal of acquiring a British native-like accent since it was considered to show high status and education. Textbooks or material these participants used when learning English was also an influential factor when choosing a learning and teaching model. In addition, research showed that these Chinese teachers are prone to getting a native-like for it guarantees a higher salary. In light of these findings, in-service teachers should encourage pre-service teachers to recognize the variety of English accents and understand that there is not a standard way of speaking English in our globalized world.

Na (2016) in a quantitative study examined the implicit attitudes of college-level instructors toward Latino-accented English and the effects of gender, teaching experience, home language, race/ethnicity, and rank on those attitudes. In this study, 93 college instructors in Florida responded to a demographic questionnaire and participated in the auditory Implicit



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Association Test (IAT). These ESL teachers were found to present preferences for standard-accented English. All the 93 instructors were slightly bias toward Latino-accented English even when 47 of them were non-white, they were born in 20 different countries, and three of them were Venezuelans. This suggests that up until now, it is necessary to discuss about English accent awareness to avoid prejudice and hidden biases in our classrooms. Results demonstrated that any of the other features above mentioned influenced participants' responses.

Unlike, Buckingham (2015) observed that Oman EFL teachers are aware about the diverse English accents so that they support the inclusion of varied teaching materials in their classrooms. To gain a deeper understanding of the significance of teaching and modelling particular accents for EFL teachers from tertiary public and private institutions, and their perceptions on using an English Native speaker accent in their teaching, data from 225 participants were collected through an online survey. Results support the idea that as English is used as a lingua franca and there are many English accents worldwide, teachers should not focus only on a specific accent. Participants' aim was that students get a clear pronunciation rather than focusing on a specific accent. Lastly, they mentioned the necessity of promoting the inclusion of diverse English accents since English is now used as an International language.

Learners' attitudes and awareness toward English accents

English learners' viewpoint on English accents has been discussed by some authors in the literature (Saengboon, 2015; Fang, 2016; Brabcová & Skarnitzl, 2018; Kung & Wang, 2018), this previous research proposes that some English learners have not changed their mindset since they still consider native-like accents as their goal (Fang, 2016). Aiming to analyze 309 Chinese students' perspectives on their own English accent and other English accents, a questionnaire and a face to face interview were the instruments of Fang's study. This mixed-methods approach



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revealed that these English learners still wanted to acquire a native-like pronunciation owing to the fact that they did not have a frequent access to materials encompassing a variety of English accents; as a result, learners had limited opportunities to be exposed to other World Englishes. With the purpose of increasing learners' awareness on the array of English accents, Fang suggested teachers need to incorporate new material acknowledging the importance of all English accents.

Brabcová and Skarnitzl (2018) agreed with Fang (2016) even if in this study most of the Czech participants showed to be highly aware of the need to be exposed to many different accents. A survey was sent online, and 175 university Czech speakers of English who were not studying English as their major responded to it. Around 70% of the participants mentioned they wanted to acquire a native-like accent, mainly British, as it is considered a sophisticated and elegant accent. Furthermore, participants concluded that English learners should choose the English accent they would like to acquire, and that they should be exposed to numerous native and nonnative accents.

Controversies regarding accents acceptance

Kung and Wang's study (2018) focused on Chinese English as a foreign language. In southeast China, 34 students with a B1 English level responded to an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview; as a result, it demonstrated that the majority of these college students would like to speak English as natives because they interact with international students at college. Besides, some of them mentioned they wanted to avoid having an accent so they can be successful when using English as a Lingua Franca. Meanwhile, some students pointed out that they were pleased with their accent and did not have any difficulties when talking to native speakers.



Another study related to teachers' and learners' attitudes towards English accents is one done by Arboleda and Castro (2012), whose purpose was to shed light on the significance of having a foreign accent for EFL teachers and learners. In order to carry out this study 32 participants were selected; 16 teachers (eight Colombian and eight from different EFL contexts), 16 university students (eight Colombian and eight from different EFL contexts), and data were collected through a questionnaire. According to the results, these teachers considered sounding as a native important, but not as an obligation to teach a language because aside from having a good proficiency in the target language, teachers need to have other qualifications such as patience, tolerance, creativity, among others. Conversely, students pointed out that having an English teacher who has a native or a native-like accent is of great importance as it enhances the learning process.

Chapter IV

Methodology

In order to analyze the effects and implications of English accents in EFL and ESL classrooms, the methodology will be exploratory bibliographic. Primary research studies were collected for further analysis and discussion. Among the databases used we have ERIC (EBSCO), Research Gate, Directory of Open Access Journals, SAGE Journals, Annual Reviews on Linguistics, and Taylor & Francis Online. Search terms included combinations of the following: (a) accent, (b) attitudes, (c) English language learners, (d) native and non-native speakers, (e) world Englishes, (f) pronunciation, (g) listening, and (h) lingua franca. Additionally, the following journals in the field were considered for the purpose of this research synthesis: *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *International*



The development of this research synthesis will draw upon the findings discussed in 19 primary source studies; however, for the purpose of this study and considering the research questions stated before, the number of studies analyzed may be reduced. These studies together investigated the consequences of having English varied accents on learners from different countries. The inclusion criteria for the review were: 1) studies dealing with the influence of varied accents on listening skills; 2) learners and teachers' perceptions toward English accents; and 3) the recognition of all English accents. Furthermore, these studies were carried out in EFL and ESL classrooms, and they were published between 2010 and 2018. On the contrary, some papers were excluded from the analysis owing to their lack of relation to the categories established beforehand.

Analysis and results

In this section, the studies reported in the literature review are used to analyze the effects of varied English accents recordings on ESL and EFL learners' listening skills and teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions toward English accents. All the studies fulfill the criteria detailed in the methodology section and they were categorized in terms of publications dates and contexts where they were held. Table 1 indicates that most of the studies were executed in recent years (2016-2018); therefore, the information to be analyzed is updated. Likewise, based on the data presented in this table, it is evident that the correlation between accents and listening has been studied in the past ten years, as well.



Table 1. Years of publication of primary studies

Year	N	%
2016-2018	12	63.16
2013-2015	5	26.31
2010-2012	2	10.53

Note: N=19

Source: Torres

Focusing on the aims of this investigation, the author has chosen 19 studies carried out in EFL and ESL contexts. Table 2 shows that 73.68% of the studies reported were conducted in places belonging to the Expanding Circle, meaning that English is learned as a Foreign Language, and only 26.32% of them belong to the Outer Circle, meaning that English is learned as a Second Language. Of the 19 studies, 10 took place in Asia, and the others were carried out in the European (three) and American (six) continents.

The majority of the studies were carried out in Asia since it has numerous EFL learners (Fang, 2016). This noticeable imbalance regarding the context of the studies suggests that there are not many researchers who focus their investigation on this topic in ESL classrooms.

Table 2. Classification of studies based on research context

Kachru's Concentric Circles	N	%
Expanding Circle	14	73.68
Outer Circle	5	26.32

Note: N=19

Source: Torres

From the 19 studies only 17 will be used for further analysis since they are directly related to the main categories of this investigation; a) the effects of accent unfamiliarity on listening comprehension and b) learners' and teachers' attitudes toward English varied accents. Two studies were excluded for they address listening instruction only, not its relation to accents



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(Gonzalez et al., 2015; Solano et al., 2017). With this purpose, from the 17 studies, nine will be analyzed in the first category and eight in the second. Some studies may be used in both main categories.

Table 3 presents the results of nine studies focusing on the effects of accents unfamiliarity on listening comprehension. Seven out of nine studies showed that indeed lack of familiarity with a wide variety of accents has negative effects on the listeners' performance (Matsuura et al., 2014; Ockey & French, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2014; Asmawati, 2017; Ballard & Winke, 2017; Cheng, 2018; Wong, 2018). Then ESL and EFL learners struggle when distinguishing accents as shown in the accent recognition item exercises applied in many studies. Nonetheless, some authors also brought some information about other factors which may interfere in the process of accents discrimination (Matsuura et al., 2014; Ockey & French, 2014; Ballard & Winke, 2017; Yildiz, 2017; Cheng, 2018).

These authors pointed out the existence of other variables like speech rate, tone, accent strength, language proficiency, type of speech file, among others which may also impact the listener's performance, not only the amount of exposure to accents. For instance, Tessa (2018) considers age as a factor that influences learners' performance in accent recognition exercises. She stated that accent recognition develops as people reach adulthood. This could explain why two out of these nine studies resulted in an ambivalent outcome which means some participants considered familiarity with accents to play a crucial role, while some others did not share this idea.



Table 3. Effects of accent unfamiliarity on listening comprehension

Type	N	%
Negative	7	77.78
Ambivalent	2	22.22

Note: N= 9

Source: Torres

Considering that most studies reported detriments of being unfamiliar with diverse English accents (Matsuura et al., 2014; Ockey & French, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2014; Asmawati, 2017; Ballard & Winke, 2017; Cheng, 2018; Wong, 2018), they provided readers with some pedagogical suggestions to deal with them as shown in the table #4. The most common solution researchers mentioned was greater exposure so that learners get familiarized with accents. Accent imitation, inclusion of varied English accents, and the use of new material were the main suggestions scholars did. Afterwards, technology use was mentioned to be a necessity for helping students to have access to listening different accents.

In fact, current teaching materials should be renewed as different varieties of English need to be included in our classrooms for learners to get a greater exposure to World Englishes. Innovative systems and approaches like the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) system or the “polymodel” (Sung, 2016, p.14) approach which comprises different English accents should be implemented in our classrooms to aid learners develop their listening skills.



Table 4. Suggestions to cope with accents unfamiliarity

Suggestions	<i>N</i>	%
Accent imitation	2	20
Greater exposure	3	30
Inclusion of a variety of accents	2	20
New material	2	20
Technology use	1	10

Note. *N*= 10

Studies may be counted towards more than one category if applicable.

Source: Torres

Table 5 indicates that standard or native-like accents are still preferred mainly by students since four (36.37%) out of the 11 studies analyzed in this section show this, and only an 18.18% have no preference for a specific accent. In the case of teachers, there is an 18.18% who consider having a native-like accent as a significant feature for them. However, with a higher percentage (27.27%), some teachers do not give much importance to sounding like an English native speaker as they considered intelligibility to be the utmost objective when teaching and learning English.

The reasons why some students and instructors prefer native to non-native accents are not addressed in this synthesis; nevertheless, they all could be summed up in the “accent stereotype tendency and idealization of native English speech” (Wong, 2018, p.5). In the case of the students, native accents are known to be elegant, professional, high class, the ideal accents to reach effective communication and to advance on their careers, etc. For teachers, their accent gives them a status, higher salaries, and level of education (Sung, 2016; Na, 2016; Fang, 2016; Wong, 2018; Brabcová & Skarnitzl, 2018; Kung & Wang, 2018).



British and American English are the accents some English learners and teachers would like to acquire; however, there are some participants who showed not to have a preference as they recognized these aforementioned accents to be the main accents that should be used in tests or exams, but they also admitted that other English varieties are worth using in classrooms, especially when it comes to the development of listening skills (Buckingham, 2015; Fang, 2016; Brabcová & Skarnitzl, 2018).

Table 5. Preference for a specific accent

Accents	No. of studies	%
Native-like		
Students	4	36.37
Teacher	2	18.18
No preference		
Students	2	18.18
Teachers	3	27.27

Note: N=11

Studies may be counted towards more than one category if applicable.

Standardized accents (American and British English) preference was considered in the native-like category.

Source: Torres

In light of these findings, up until now accents are classified as standard and non-standard although English is used as a Lingua Franca and as an International Language. There is an underlying preference or positive attitude toward standard or native English accents; henceforth, British and American, which results in the existence of prejudice toward non-standard accents. This is backed up by Lippi-Green (2012), who demonstrated that foreign accents lead to discrimination in North America. Hence, not all English accents are always accepted or seen as



appropriate since sometimes foreign accents are considered to be producers of miscommunication.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The current research synthesis demonstrated that educators undergo some challenges related to accents when teaching EFL or ESL courses since it involves several features (Kang, 2010); notwithstanding, how educators handle these situations is what makes a difference. Technology use, greater exposure, accent imitation, inclusion of new materials, among others, are some of the alternatives teachers who participated in some studies mentioned as techniques they used to overcome listening issues linked to accents. Therefore, it indicates that trying to understand other people is not complicated as there are multiple ways we may handle this situation.

Having a native like pronunciation is not a must; however, as it has been shown some English learners would prefer to do so. Whatever their motivation is, they do not have to do it just because of social pressure or to please others because having an accent is not wrong. Accents do not need to be corrected or fixed. Additionally, even though the teacher's role is different from the student's role, English teachers are not obliged to acquire a native like pronunciation. Unless they do it for their own desire. As a result, neither learners, nor teachers should feel acquiring a native like accent as indispensable because what really matters is conveying a message, being understood, and understanding others. In other words, intelligibility not nativeness.

All in all, as shown in Kilickaya (2009)'s adaptation of the concentric circles, there are numerous non-native English speakers, and it ends up in the existence of varied English accents



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in EFL and ESL classrooms. This fact might bring with it some consequences, which may be seen as benefits and drawbacks. People could admit that varied accents may hinder or facilitate communication as seen in the analysis previously presented. Nevertheless, there are some positive effects of getting familiarized with several English accents. This familiarization allows people learn more about world englishes (Kuo, 2006). As learners are in constant interaction, they have to work harder, listen closely, so communication becomes easier. It does not only serve learners while in class, but it will also help them in future situations. Thus, the existence of various English accents in a classroom should be seen as a teaching tool. All ESL and EFL learners need to keep in their mind that their accent is as valuable as a native one, and that nobody has to be judged or judge, be discriminated or discriminate due to accents.

Lastly, as the author has not found a considerable number of studies addressing the diversity of accents as a determining factor for succeeding in learning English in Ecuador, it could be suggested that more research should be done regarding English accents, especially in our country considering that English learning is promoted by the Ministry of Education. The increase of investigation in this area would provide educators with deeper insights on this topic while informing learners about the significance of recognizing and valuing each person's accents. Plus, the existence of varied English accents in EFL and ESL classrooms should be addressed from a sociocultural perspective which involves identity, intelligibility, sense of belonging, etc., (McCrocklin and Link, 2016). Learners should be encouraged to critically examine the reasons behind their accent preferences and understand the ideological underpinnings of their accent choices



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