

# Cantonese-Speaking students' Perceptions of teachers' Local Accents: a Comparative Study of Mandarin and Hong Kong Accent.

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**ABSTRACT.** Currently, many China universities have employed English-Medium Instruction (EMI) to reveal their international features in China. The study reported in this article examined Cantonese speakers' attitude towards Mandarin English and Hong Kong English and investigated the social factors that influence the students' judgement in an EMI university. By means of verbal guised match, 178 participants had different perceptions of Mandarin English and Hong Kong English based on genders, self-reported proficiency and familiarity with accents. After listening to the two accented varieties, a semi-structured interview was conducted to grab potential attitudes and factors. The results indicated that Cantonese speakers maintained more positive attitudes toward Mandarin English in terms of status and dynamism, while they preferred Hong Kong English in the field of intelligibility and comprehensibility. The article discussed those comparative attitudes with consideration of China' economic and historical background, which might impact Cantonese speakers' attitudes towards accented Englishes. Finally, the article concluded by discussing potential teaching models in EMI universities based on the research's results.

**KEYWORDS:** *Lingua franca, Language attitude, Accented english, English as medium instruction, Introduction*

## 1. Introduction

Recently, the English education goals have experienced great changes based on the theory of lingua franca. Traditionally, English learners and teachers prefer model standard English, such as British English or American English, especially in the field of pronunciation (Butler, 2007). Nevertheless, in response to the development of intercultural communication between countries after World War II, English has been employed as a communicative tool by one-third of the world population and more than 70 percent are non-native speakers (Ahn, 2014). Thus, English is being learnt for "international communication rather than for communication with native speakers" (Jenkins, 2002, p.84). International intelligibility then has become crucial for English teaching and English learners tend not to concern their non-native English's characters since they does not cause misunderstanding (Seidlhofer, 2005). Today, the diversity of English varieties is being rationalized and non-native English speakers is playing an important role in language change (Ahn, 2014).

Despite the coexistence of native English and non-native English, it is paradoxical that English learners still maintained prejudice in accented English (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Kirkpatrick (2007) found that English learners believe in the better communicative skills of native English speakers (NES) than non-native English speakers (NNES); and the more professional teaching skills of NES teachers NNES teachers in the field of English teaching. In Japan, Japanese parents doubted the capability of NNES teachers and insisted that NES teachers should teach their children (Takada, 2000). The Native English still serves as a model for the majority of English learners whose ultimate goal is to acquire American English or British English accents (Scales et al., 2006). The result was consistent with some research in America, which investigated the attitude of 617 EFL and ESL students towards teacher's pronunciation instructions. 66 percent of the students in the expanding circle dissatisfied with their teachers' accent and almost 85 percent of the respondents in the expanding circle preferred inner circle norms (Kang, 2015).

From mentioned above research, it is currently popular to have a heated debate over the attitudes towards NES teachers and NNES teachers under the traditional approach of English language teaching in applied linguistics field (Mckenzie, 2016). Nonetheless, a new approach named English Medium Instrument (EMI) is adopted in many university to response the social demand of improving the quality of English teaching and deeper engagement in the globalization (Baker, 2012). For example, many China's colleges, such as BNU-HKBU United International College

(UIC), and University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNUC), employ English as medium instrument to reveal their international characters. In these universities, English is applied as a medium instruction in classes to impart knowledge rather than the subject itself. Accordingly, English is the only classroom language, and then the teachers with different linguistic backgrounds are obligated to speak English exclusively in classrooms. It is inevitable for students to listen to different English varieties. However, under the new teaching approach, EMI, a few study on accent attitude has been conducted to investigate students' attitudes toward different types of accented Englishes (Botha, 2013).

In addition, social factors are important in conducting sociolinguistics research in certain regions, because the results will reveal the significance of social variables and complete the frame of sociolinguistics (McKenzie, 2008). Unfortunately, no detailed information has been provided regarding the relationship between the attitude toward accented English and the effect of social factors (Zhang, 2014). The current study, thus, also aims to explore the relationship between attitude and social factors to fill the previous gap.

Students' perceptions of the two English varieties and the factors that influence their judgement would be different under the new approach of EMI from traditional teaching approach in which English taught as target knowledge. Nevertheless, to date, only a few studies have employed the verbal guise technique (the details were positioned in the methodology section) to examine the attitude towards Asian accented English, especially English with Eastern Asian accents (Zhang, 2014). Little convincing evidence was also provided to prove on the English learners' attitudes towards English varieties in the context of English-medium instruction in mainland, China. Accordingly, the paper aims to identify students' attitudes towards two English varieties: Mandarin English and Hong Kong English in an EMI university. To achieve this research objective, the paper addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What Are the participants' Perceptions of the Hk English Accent and the Mandarin English Accent in the Emi University?
- 2) What Social Factors Influence the participants' Perceptions?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 English as an International Language

Along with the development of globalization and the increasing global status of English, English is serving as a communicative tool across various nations and ethnics. As Crystal expressed, "English is a global language" (Crystal, 1997, p.1). According to Jenkins (2005), about two billion English speakers, including native English speakers, were found in the world. Thus, an increasing number of countries acknowledged English as a compulsory course for equipping students with the ability to communicate with those from other nations.

English tends to become a world language. Kachru (1992) then introduced the "three circles" model on world Englishes, which comprises the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle. The inner circle refers to the countries where first language of speakers is English, such as America, Britain and Australia. In the outer circle, English speakers are the dwellers of the countries which were colonized by Britain or America. English in this circle is deemed as an additional official language/ the institutionalized second language for education, business, legislation, and other official fields. The outer circle typically includes countries such as India, Malaysia, and regions, such as Hong Kong. As for the expanding circle, English is regarded as a foreign language and the speakers in the countries within the circle, such as China and Japan usually learn English from school. In the expanding circle, learning English is for international communication and English serves no official function.

In the establishment of the "three circles" model, English within the inner circle has strengthened its prestige, providing a norm for English of the other two circles and those in the outer circle are subject to norm-developing English and those in expanding circle as norm-dependent English (Jenkins, 2005). However, with the continuous deepening of globalization, English serves as a communicative tool for people from different linguistic backgrounds. A new term *English as an international language* (EIL) was then born (Jenkins, 2000). ELI means the common English choice among speakers with different linguistic backgrounds. The ELI approach regards English as a lingua franca among the world and emphasizes that English is mainly employed for cross-national communication rather than for communication with only NES. The practice of ELI implied the importance of mutual intelligence and the

ration of the existence of diverse varieties (Jenkins, 2017). The EIL approach, thus, does not advocate to follow the norm of the inner circle, but accepted the idea of English pluralism and neither English variety is better (Kirkpatrick, 2007). For instance, pronunciation is not a factor that blocks people from successful communication. Jenkins (2002) conceptualized lingua franca core, which indicated that in the field of pronunciation, some characteristics of nonnative English varieties should be tolerated, e.g. the replacement of dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ by alveolar stops like /t/ and /d/, because these pronunciation changes did not hinder mutual intelligibility.

## 2.2 Attitudes Towards Native English and Non-Native English

With the popularity of the teaching approach, EIL, the emphasis on mutual intelligence has been enhanced, and the emphasis on imitating the pronunciation of native English has gradually faded (Kang et al., 2018). English tests also incorporate the approach. Those tests, such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Testing system (IELTS), take in various types of accented English, such as French English and Japanese English, especially in listening. Besides, diverse accents are accepted and not given disadvantages in those standardized English tests.

Despite the promotion of the EIL approach in tests, English learners still maintain a language ideology. Those learners favor inner-circle English and believe that they are natively like and free of accents (Winke & Gass, 2013), even though they could not identify the accented English from native English. Scales et al. (2006) found that 65 percent of 23 Asian English learners desired to emulate native English, but they only identified the English with their first language accents and only 29 percent managed to distinguish American English from other accented Englishes. In a similar vein, the research on Anglophone-centric attitude towards English standard has been studied in various contexts, such as Korea (Lee, Lee, & Arifah Drajadi, 2019), Greece (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005) and China (He & Zhang, 2010).

Listeners are likely to judge the speakers based on stereotype when they perceive various accented Englishes. By hearing the linguistic characteristics of English varieties, the listeners tend to identify the region that the speakers come from and classified into different personality traits depending on stereotype (Ballard & Winke, 2019). For example, the speaker with the British accent is regarded as well-educated, organized, or other good descriptions, while some college students judged that instructors with Chinese English accent do not possess proficient teaching skills (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2008). The results of Zhang' (2013) research were consistent with the previous statements. Zhang found the participants' stereotypes resulted from the people with the corresponding accents that the participants knew in daily life. The participants, students in Hong Kong universities, maintained positive attitudes towards Mandarin-accented English (ME) in terms of the speakers' status. The reason for higher status position of ME than HKE was that students encountered many elites, such as university professors in Hong Kong who came from the mainland and spoke ME in universities.

## 2.3 Status, Solidarity, and Dynamism

To specify the dimensions describing the native English and non-native English speech, researchers promoted personality traits with bi-polar items, such as "intelligent", "considerate", "friendly", etc. Zahn & Hopper (1985) summarized the previous research and categorized into three traits, namely, status/competence, solidarity/ social attractiveness and dynamism. They defined *status* as an intellectual achievement and a kind of social status, such as "competent", "intelligent", "well-educated", etc. *Solidarity* refers to the social and aesthetic appeal, such as "considerate", "warm" and so forth. The last category, *dynamism*, is an important component of speech evaluation, although it did not appear in many previous studies. It mainly concerned the social power of speakers, activity level and the self-presentational aspect of speech, such as "confident" and "active".

Generally, non-native listeners often rated the inner circle English as a higher status, while they rated non-inner circle English in the higher ranking of solidarity (Zhang, 2014, Mckenzie, 2016). In Japan where Japanese students rated Japanese English was lower status (Mckenzie, 2016). They stated that the media stereotyped their unique speaking style and their accent possessed little intrinsic value. The attitudes on the solidarity completely went to opposite. The Japanese accented English appeared to be superior, because the variety presents a sign of Japanese identity.

However, some participants also expressed a mixed attitude for their regional accents (Zhang, 2014). The university students in Hong Kong rated their regional English negatively even in terms of solidarity (Chan, 2016). Chan (2016) investigated their attitudes towards English varieties: Hong Kong's education English (HKE), HK broad/colloquial English (HKbr) GA, RP, Philippine English, Indian English, and Australian English in universities, senior secondary schools and junior secondary schools. Surprisingly, the result on solidarity was completely different from the previous studies. HK university students gave HKE the lowest rank in rating varieties of English. The researcher inferred that the local students in HK might aim to be international and looked down upon their region accent. In Singapore, local university students also expressed a sense of self-hatred on their colloquial English both in status and solidarity (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009).

#### ***2.4 Comprehensibility, Intelligibility, Accentedness, and Acceptability***

Besides personality traits, the other three dimensions are also dominant in the field of evaluating the L2 pronunciation, namely intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness (Munro & Derwing, 1995; Derwing & Munro, 1997). The researchers defined the intelligibility as the amount of words that listeners actually understand the utterance, whereas comprehensibility is the degree of difficulty in which listeners can understand an utterance. The last dimension, accentedness pertains to the extent to which an L2 speech is perceived to differ from native English (Kang, Thomson, & Moran, 2018).

The three dimensions were clearly related but were not equivalent (Munro & Derwing, 1995). Munro & Derwing recruited 26 NES speakers to evaluate the four accented speech from Cantonese, Japanese, Polish and Spanish ESL speakers. They found that linguistic features of accent would contribute to the judgement on accentedness and comprehensibility aspect, but it did not influence the perceptions on intelligibility. The accent did not hinder the comprehension of the speech content, but if the speech was spoken with strong accent, speakers need to spend more time to comprehend it, and then the score of comprehensibility would be lowered.

Drawing on previous research on comprehensibility, accentedness and intelligibility, Ballard & Winke (2017) renovated a new approach, adding acceptability as a new evaluative aspect to their research on students' attitudes towards NNEST teachers and NES teachers. They found a positive relationship between comprehension and acceptability. Thus, students gave a comprehension of the high priority to the acceptance of speakers as teacher. From these research, the discrepancy of these findings on the evaluation of status and solidarity would reflect the effects of social factors in different contexts.

#### ***2.5 Social Factors for Evaluating L2 Accented Speeches***

In fact, comprehensive social factors in the study on language attitudes have not summarized thoroughly (Baker, 1992; McKenzie, 2010; Zhang, 2014). However, researchers discovered that students' attitudes were affected through certain social factors, such as the accent familiarity, the gender of participants, and self-perceived proficiency (McKenzie, 2008; Zhang, 2013).

Accent familiarity rendered raters to maintain a positive perception of the varieties. If learners are familiar with the accented English, they tend to familiarize accented English with speakers' pronunciation characteristics (i.e. prosody, fluency and segment) and fewer obstacles prevented listeners from understanding the speakers' utterances (Derwing & Munro, 1997; Carnicle & Huang, 2016). The similar results were also obtained qualitatively and the result showed that the accent familiarity reminded them of someone who they knew (Winke & Gass, 2013). Winke & Gass interviewed heritage speakers in America after listening to the stimuli of English varieties, and the listeners gave high scores for the accents because region accents reminded them, as they expressed, of their family members or someone who they had been familiar with, so they rated high scores for the accent. Pronunciation similarity also helps listeners have a positive attitude towards other non-native English varieties. For instance, Chinese and Japanese understood the Spanish accented English relatively well, because they shared the characteristic of prosody (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2008). Additionally, previous experiences of interaction with accented Englishes have a positive influence on accented varieties (Kang & Rubin, 2009). It is because that listeners already experienced recognizing the pronunciation characteristics of the variety, and felt easier to understand the speakers (Kang & Rubin, 2009).

Gender effect also have been studied. In Zhang's (2014) research, Hong Kong male showed their loyalty to the local accent, while Hong Kong females rated inner-circle English more positively. The research conducted in Japan also revealed that female raters more preferred native English compared to males (Mckenzie, 2016). Moving to the last factor, self-perceived proficiency is how she/he perceives her/his proficiency in a target language. In Japan, Japanese raters with higher English proficiency more negatively evaluated their accented varieties and held more positive attitudes towards inner-circle English (Mckenzie, 2016).

Overall, the previous study mainly investigated the students' attitudes toward non-native English teachers, which was characterized into seven aspects: status, solidarity, dynamism, intelligibility, comprehensibility, accentedness and acceptability. The social factors of evaluating L2 speech comprised three categories: gender, self-perceived proficiency, accent familiarity. Moreover, the previous research investigated students' attitudes to the accented English varieties in EMI universities in many countries or regions, such as Macao (Botha, 2013), and Netherland (Hendriks, van Meurs, & Reimer, 2018). However, the previous study rarely investigate students' language attitudes in mainland, China, especially under the EMI approach. Thus, it remains unsolved what attitudes participants have and what new factors will affect their perceptions.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Research Design***

The present research employed the mixed research method, comprising the verbal guise technique (VGT) and semi-structured interviews. Various researchers have utilized guised-matched technique to measure participants' attitude to varieties of different varieties (i.e. Zhang, 2013; Mckenzie, 2016). A major advantage of the method is the neglect of visual influence, which means that participants only listen to the radio-typed accented Englishes and were not influenced by speaker's physical information. A VGT experiment should employ speakers with parallel English proficiency from different linguistic background. Thus, this research employed two speakers whose first languages were Beijing Mandarin and HK Cantonese respectively with parallel English proficiency.

After the first phase of the research was completed, interviews were conducted to probe into the in-depth voices of the participants. The interview questions reflected the research questions to investigate students' attitudes toward HKE and ME, and the factors that influence their attitude. The combination of a quantitative method and a qualitative method could assess the students' perception from two dimensions, which enhanced the research's accuracy and credibility.

#### ***3.2 Setting and Participants***

The study was conducted in one of EMI universities in China. The policy of this university indicated that English was the only language in classes, except Chinese and the physical education.

For convenient collection, 178 Cantonese speakers who were capable of speaking both Mandarin and Cantonese were recruited from the EMI university (aged 18 to 22; 64 males and 144 females). Ten interviewees were then selected randomly (5 females and 5 males). The respondents represented four self-perceived proficiency level: pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced.

#### ***3.3 The Selection of Speakers***

The research employed two male recorders, who spoke Hong Kong English and Mandarin English respectively sharing similar ages (around 35 years old). Both of them were university professors in HK and mainland universities respectively, and they perceived their English proficiency as advanced level. Additionally, both of the speech was finished for around one minute. The similar profile of speakers could decrease the influence of voice quality.

China witnesses multitudes of Mandarin varieties, among which Beijing Mandarin is the representative of Mandarin. As the most representative accent, Mandarin based on Beijing dialect was picked up in the present study. On the other hand, HKE is characterized into Hong Kong Education English (HKe) and Hong Kong Broad English (HKbr). HKE is the variety of English spoken by well-educated elites, while HKbr implies the variety produced by

the lower class with the heavy HK accent (Zhang, 2013). The aim of the current research is to investigate students' attitudes towards the teacher' accent, especially the accent of university teachers receiving higher education. To ensure the reality of the research, HKE then was used in the recording.

### **3.4 Instruments**

A direction on a map was shown to the speakers from the start to the end (Appendix A). Compared to a prepared text, a spontaneous speech is more authentic, because the speech provided more cues for word choices, syntax and fluency, which facilitated the listeners to judge these two varieties: HKE and ME from linguistic dimension and social dimension (Mckenzie, 2008).

The questionnaire (Appendix B) with Seven-point Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was employed to investigate participants' attitudes towards two accented English. The statements were divided into three parts. The first part was about the speakers' descriptions. These descriptions reflected the principle dimensions of status (educated, competent, intelligent), solidarity (friendly, modest, gentle), dynamism (confident, energetic), comprehensibility ("It is easy for me to understand the expert"), intelligibility ("I can understand the content of the spoken excerpt"), accentedness ("I think the speaker has no accent") and acceptability ("I think the speaker is acceptable to be a teacher in my university"). The second part was the statements on the factors that would influence the judgement of speakers, such as accent familiarity ("I familiarize with the accented English").

### **3.5 Procedure**

The collection of the questionnaires from Cantonese students was administered in research site, UIC, via a way of convenient sampling collection. The listening test lasted about ten minutes. First of all, the participants completed their personal information, including grade, gender, self-perceived proficiency and read the instruction to know the procedure and the purpose of the research. The participants equally divided into two groups subsequently listened to audiotapes of two speakers and finished the questionnaires. In the first phrase, one group (n=86) initially listened to the Mandarin-accented English, while the other group (n=86) listened to Hong-Kong accented English. The random order could eliminate the influence of the sequence of listening to the recordings.

To obtain a more qualitative understanding of the factors that influences the learners' judgements, 10 participants were interviewed orally in Chinese after completing the questionnaires. The interviewees were from year three or three four, because the researcher expected they already had enough experiences of listening to HKE and ME. The questions in the interview were designed to explore the factors that affect the 10 participants' judgement, their attitudes toward two English varieties and ideologies of English to address research questions.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Besides means and frequency calculation to gain the whole picture of participants' backgrounds, a paired samples t-test was also conducted to compare two different mean scores of a single group for the responses to Mandarin-accented English and Hong Kong-accented English, investigating the differences between two variables in terms of status, dynamism, solidarity, comprehensibility, intelligibility, accentedness and acceptability. Pearson correlation was then used to investigate the relationship between the evaluation dimensions of the varieties and familiarity, as one statement in the verbal-guised technique. A paired samples t-test and independent t-test then were implicated to investigate the similarities and differences between gender, and the attitude. Finally, a one-way ANOVA and paired-samples t-test were adopted to examine the association between self-perceived proficiency and attitudes. 4. Results

### **3.7 Students' Attitudes Toward Hke and Me**

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the Cantonese speakers' perceptions of HKE and ME. The attitudes were categorized into seven aspects: status, solidarity, dynamism, comprehensibility, intelligibility, accentedness and acceptability. According to the results of the paired t-test in Table 1, no significant difference was found in solidarity between HKE (5.20, 0.97) and ME (5.38, 0.95),  $t(177) = -0.27$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , so did acceptability and

accentedness respectively with the results which saw HKE (4.20, 1.67) and ME (4.14, 1.08),  $t(177) = 0.41$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ; HKE (3.39, 1.49) and ME (5.16, 1.17),  $t(177) = -5.35$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

On the other hand, the results revealed significant differences in terms of status between HKE (5.20, 0.97) and ME (5.38, 0.95),  $t(177) = -2.51$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , so did comprehensibility, intelligibility and dynamism respectively with the results indicating HKE (6.42, 0.81) and ME (5.92, 1.14),  $t(177) = 3.04$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; HKE (6.34, 0.81) and ME (5.92, 1.01),  $t(177) = 3.00$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and HKE (4.22, 1.11) and ME (5.40, 1.12),  $t(177) = -1.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

These results indicated the participants' perception of the higher status and dynamism of ME than that of HKE. Besides, the participants thought they could understand more content recorded in HKE and HKE was easier to be understood compared to ME.

*Table 1 Descriptive Statistics, Results of the Paired Samples t-Test on Students' Attitudes Toward Hke and Me*

Items	All (n=178)	HKE (n=88)	ME (n=88)	t	sig. (p)
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.29 (0.96)	5.20 (0.97)	5.38 (0.95)	-2.51	.00**
Solidarity	5.20 (1.01)	5.19 (0.95)	5.20 (1.07)	-0.27	.79
Dynamism	4.83 (1.42)	4.47 (1.14)	5.20 (1.37)	-5.57	.00**
Comprehensibility	6.17 (0.98)	6.42 (0.81)	5.92 (1.14)	3.04	.00**
Intelligibility	6.13 (0.91)	6.34 (0.81)	5.92 (1.01)	3.00	.00**
Accentedness	4.57 (1.33)	3.98 (1.49)	5.16 (1.17)	-5.35	.61
Acceptability	4.17 (1.38)	4.20 (1.67)	4.14(1.08)	0.41	.68

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

### 3.8 Factors That Influence students' Attitudes

#### 3.8.1 Familiarity

The Pearson correlation analysis was implemented to investigate the correlations between the respondents' attitudes and their familiarity with the corresponding accents when they listened to the accented varieties. The results in Table 2 revealed that the correlations between the familiarity with ME and the attitudes toward ME was more significant than the correlations between HKE and the familiarity with HKE. Only one weak positive correlation between the familiarity with HKE and acceptability,  $r(177) = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . However, as Table 2 indicated, familiarity with ME was correlated weakly with the following aspects: dynamism,  $r(177) = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , comprehensibility,  $r(177) = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , accentedness,  $r(177) = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Besides, familiarity was very weakly correlated with the last two factors: intelligibility,  $r(177) = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and acceptability,  $r(177) = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

Overall, familiarity influenced the participants' judgement slightly. The results demonstrated that the more familiar the respondents were with HKE, the more acceptable the speaker with HK accent acted as teachers of an EMI university. On the other hand, familiarity put more influence on the attitude towards ME compared to HKE. More specifically, the more familiar the respondents were with ME, the more positive judgements the participants preserved on status, dynamism, comprehensibility, intelligibility, accentedness and acceptability.

*Table 2 Pearson Correlations Between Accents Attitudes and Familiarity with the Corresponding Accents*

Items	Familiarity with HKE	Familiarity with ME
Status	0.22	0.29**
Solidarity	0.05	0.23
Dynamism	0.27	0.29**
Comprehensibility	0.18	0.31**
Intelligibility	0.15	0.19**
Accentedness	0.04	0.26**

Acceptability	0.32**	0.17 **
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\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**3.8.2 Gender**

A paired samples t-test was employed to explore the two genders’ perceptions of different languages and the results were presented in Table 3 and Table 4. Table 3 revealed the attitudes of the female participants towards HKE and ME. As Table 3 indicated, significant differences in the field of dynamism were observed between ME (4.26, 1.24) and HKE (5.62, 1.03),  $t(143) = -6.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , so did comprehensibility and intelligibility, respectively with results showing HKE (6.44, 0.81) and ME (6.04, 0.95),  $t(143) = 2.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; HKE (6.44, 0.81) and ME (6.04, 0.95),  $t(143) = 2.8$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Females, thus, perceived that ME was more dynamic, more understandable and less difficult to understand.

*Table 3 Descriptive Statistics, Results of Paired Samples t-Test on Female Participants’ Attitudes Toward Hke and Me*

Items (Female)	All (n=144)	HKE (n=144)	ME (n=144)	t	sig. (p)
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.24 (0.88)	4.96 (0.80)	5.52 (0.95)	-1.44	.16
Solidarity	5.26 (0.98)	5.31 (0.90)	5.20 (1.06)	-0.14	.89
Dynamism	4.94 (1.14)	4.26 (1.24)	5.62 (1.03)	-6.32	.00**
Comprehensibility	6.25 (0.88)	6.46 (0.81)	6.04 (1.14)	2.43	.02*
Intelligibility	6.24 (0.98)	6.44 (0.81)	6.04 (0.95)	2.8	.00**
Accentedness	5.24 (1.19)	5.18 (1.12)	5.30 (1.25)	-0.59	.56
Acceptability	4.13 (1.74)	4.27 (1.76)	3.98(1.72)	1.16	.25

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 4 refers to the males’ perception of HKE and ME. There were two significant differences: one was the differences in status between HKE (4.96, 1.03) and ME (5.34, 1.05),  $t(63) = -3.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and the other was the difference in dynamism between HKE (4.28, 1.51) and ME (5.03, 1.54),  $t(63) = -3.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Male participants also maintained more positive attitudes toward ME, and they believed that ME was more dynamic and subject to a higher status than HKE.

*Table 4 Descriptive Statistics, Results of the Paired-Samples t-Test on Male Participants’ Attitudes Toward Hke and Me*

Items (Male)	All (n=64)	HKE (n=64)	ME (n=64)	t	sig. (p)
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.15 (1.04)	4.96 (1.03)	5.34 (1.05)	-3.47	.00**
Solidarity	5.08 (1.18)	4.95 (1.28)	5.21 (1.08)	-1.89	.62
Dynamism	4.66 (1.52)	4.28 (1.51)	5.03 (1.54)	-3.24	.00**
Comprehensibility	5.96 (1.20)	5.89 (1.24)	6.03 (1.15)	-0.94	.34
Intelligibility	5.98 (1.43)	5.88 (1.81)	6.08 (1.04)	0.73	.47
Accentedness	5.02 (1.38)	4.88 (1.40)	5.16 (1.39)	-1.67	.10
Acceptability	4.20 (1.90)	4.13 (1.75)	4.27(2.05)	-0.57	.57

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

The independent t-test was conducted to compare the two genders’ perceptions. In Table 5, it was revealed that various attitudes toward HKE were significantly different including the different attitudes towards status between the male (4.96, 1.03) and the female (5.34, 0.91),  $t(176) = -2.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , toward solidarity between male (4.95, 1.03) and female (5.34, 0.94),  $t(176) = -2.03$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , toward comprehensibility between male (5.89, 1.23) and female

(6.33, 0.89),  $t(176) = -2.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and toward acceptability between male (4.12, 1.75) and female (3.87, 1.67),  $t(176) = -2.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

However, not many significant differences were noticed between the two genders when they listened to ME, except the difference in solidarity between the male (5.12, 1.28) and the female (5.20, 1.96),  $t(176) = -0.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

It can be drawn from the results that female respondents, compared to male respondents, maintained more positive perceptions of HKE, while the two genders almost shared the similar attitudes toward ME.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics, Results of the Independent t-Test on the Two Genders' Attitudes Toward Hke and Me

Items (HKE)	All (n=178)	Male (n=64)	Female (n=114)	t	sig. (p)
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.15 (0.97)	4.96 (1.03)	5.34 (0.91)	-2.48	.00**
Solidarity	5.14 (1.11)	4.95 (1.28)	5.32 (0.94)	-2.03	.04*
Dynamism	4.43 (1.46)	4.28 (1.51)	4.58 (1.36)	-1.31	.20
Comprehensibility	6.11 (1.06)	5.89 (1.23)	6.33 (0.89)	-2.47	.00**
Intelligibility	6.04 (1.13)	5.88 (1.18)	6.19 (1.07)	-1.79	.08
Accentedness	3.60 (1.29)	3.42 (1.07)	3.77 (1.51)	-1.35	.18
Acceptability	4.00 (1.71)	4.12 (1.75)	3.87(1.67)	-2.48	.00**
Items (ME)	All (n=178)	Male (n=64)	Female (n=114)	t	sig. (p)
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.46 (0.94)	5.37 (0.93)	5.52 (0.95)	-0.08	.10
Solidarity	5.16 (1.17)	5.12 (1.28)	5.20 (1.06)	-1.01	.03*
Dynamism	4.95 (1.27)	4.28 (1.51)	5.62 (1.03)	-0.44	.31
Comprehensibility	5.97 (1.19)	5.89 (1.23)	6.04 (1.14)	-0.78	.43
Intelligibility	5.96 (1.07)	5.88 (1.18)	6.04 (0.95)	-0.36	.76
Accentedness	6.07 (1.16)	3.42 (1.07)	5.30 (1.25)	-0.71	.48
Acceptability	4.05 (1.74)	4.12 (1.75)	3.98(1.72)	-0.27	.79

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

### 3.8.3 Self-Reported Proficiency

One-way ANOVA was employed to compare the differences among four groups: pre-intermediated (PI), intermediated (IN), upper-intermediated (UI), and advanced (AD). As shown in Table 6, Surprisingly, no significant difference was found among these groups, because all the p values exceeded 0.05.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics, Results of Anova on the Attitudes of Participants with Different Proficiency to Hke and Me

Item (HKE)	Mean (SD)				ANOVA F (3,174)	P
	PI (n=7)	IN (n= 91)	UP (n= 71)	AD (n=9)		
Status	5.39 (0.55)	5.18 (0.87)	5.26 (1.07)	4.75 (1.62)	0.842	0.47
Solidarity	5.04 (0.82)	5.15 (1.01)	5.31 (1.09)	4.55 (1.70)	1.41	0.24
Dynamism	4.85 (0.90)	4.41 (1.41)	4.56 (1.47)	4.11 (1.45)	0.52	0.66
Comprehensibility	6.14 (0.90)	6.07 (1.03)	6.35 (0.97)	5.66 (1.65)	1.66	0.18
Intelligibility	5.85(0.90)	5.96 (1.17)	6.22 (1.05)	6.22 (1.05)	0.85	1.04
Accentedness	4.28(0.95)	3.71 (1.55)	3.60 (1.64)	2.77 (1.92)	1.33	0.26
Acceptability	4.71 (2.13)	4.28 (1.68)	4.38 (1.69)	3.77 (1.71)	0.47	0.70

Item (ME)	PI (n=7)	IN (n= 91)	UP (n= 71)	AD (n=9)	F (3,174)	P
Status	4.00 (2.38)	4.17 (1.70)	4.06 (1.79)	2.00 (2.12)	1.16	0.33
Solidarity	5.04 (0.82)	5.15 (1.01)	5.31 (1.09)	4.55 (1.70)	1.41	0.24
Dynamism	4.87 (2.07)	5.21 (1.36)	5.34 (1.23)	4.67 (1.87)	0.52	0.66
Comprehensibility	6.14 (0.90)	6.07 (1.03)	6.35 (0.97)	5.66 (1.65)	1.66	0.18
Intelligibility	6.14(0.69)	5.80 (1.18)	6.16 (1.04)	6.33 (1.32)	0.85	1.04
Accentedness	4.28(2.90)	3.22 (1.58)	3.06 (1.41)	2.00 (1.12)	1.33	0.26
Acceptability	4.71 (2.13)	4.17 (1.70)	4.06 (1.79)	2.00 (2.41)	0.47	0.70

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

The paired samples t-test was calculated to compare the attitudes of the participants at each level of proficiency towards HKE and ME. The number of participants in PI and Ad were small (7 and 9), then the PI and IN and UI and AD were blended as low proficiency level (LP) and high proficiency (HP) low respectively for more statistical accuracy.

However, in the case of LP level of the participants, significant differences showed up, including the differences in status between HKE (5.10, 0.79) and ME (5.43, 1.01),  $t(97) = -2.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and differences in dynamism between HKE (4.28, 1.34) and ME (5.16, 1.36),  $t(97) = -3.57$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . The result was consistent with that of the HP, revealing significant differences in status between HKE (5.14, 1.01) and ME (5.48, 0.90),  $t(70) = -2.82$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and differences in dynamism between HKE (4.20, 1.48) and ME (5.50, 1.16),  $t(70) = -5.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

*Table 7 Descriptive Statistics, Results of the Paired Samples t-Test on the Attitude of the Participants At Each Level of Proficiency Towards Hke and Me*

Items (LP)	All (n=98)	HKE (n=98)	ME (n=98)	<i>t</i>	sig. ( <i>p</i> )
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.27 (0.90)	5.10 (0.79)	5.43 (1.01)	-2.23	.03*
Solidarity	5.19 (1.04)	5.11(1.12)	5.27 (0.96)	-0.95	.34
Dynamism	4.72 (1.35)	4.28(1.34)	5.16 (1.36)	-3.57	.00**
Comprehensibility	5.88 (1.24)	6.00 (1.11)	5.76 (1.36)	1.35	.18
Intelligibility	5.89 (1.17)	5.94 (1.24)	5.84 (1.09)	0.76	.45
Accentedness	3.46 (1.67)	3.46 (1.50)	3.46 (1.73)	0.00	1.00
Acceptability	4.22 (1.83)	4.06 (1.78)	4.38(1.88)	-1.17	.25
Items (HP)	All (n=80)	HKE (n=80)	ME (n=80)	<i>t</i>	sig. ( <i>p</i> )
	MD (SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Status	5.31 (0.96)	5.14 (1.01)	5.48 (0.90)	-2.82	.01**
Solidarity	5.19 (1.09)	5.18 (1.07)	5.20 (1.10)	-0.15	.88
Dynamism	4.85 (1.32)	4.20 (1.48)	5.50 (1.16)	-5.43	.00**
Comprehensibility	6.30 (0.96)	6.34 (0.96)	6.26 (0.96)	0.53	.60
Intelligibility	6.25 (0.90)	6.34 (0.87)	6.16 (0.93)	1.14	.26
Accentedness	3.35 (1.62)	3.58 (1.68)	3.12 (1.56)	1.78	.08
Acceptability	6.27 (1.21)	4.20 (1.65)	4.14(1.76)	0.26	.80

#### Interview

The interview was then conducted for grabbing other potential attitudes and the effect of factors. Ten students from an English program were selected to conduct interviews, because all of them studied the course related to linguistics in the freshman year, thus, they would describe their feelings more accurately through using terms.

### ***3.8.4 I Felt Comfortable When I Listened to Hke***

Nine of the participants indicated that they preferred HKE, because it would be more comfortable with HKE. Since they were children, they have explained that they have watched TV series in HK media, e.g. Television Broadcast Limited (TVB). As a bilingual speaker, one participant, Alex, acknowledged that both of the two accents are acceptable for him, but he preferred HKE. He demonstrated that the articulation of Cantonese was similar to English and “I am more familiar with HKE, because when I was a child, most actors in TV series spoke HK Cantonese or HKE.” Additionally, all of them stated that HKE possessed more salient pronunciation features than ME, but they have adapted the accent, because the majority of their friends and teachers spoke English with similar accents. Stephen even stereotyped that HKE represented “internationality” and was more standard than ME in terms of articulations.

As for ME, all of the participants mentioned that the accent reminded them of their classmates in high schools or universities from the north of China. A number of interviewees also mentioned that ME speakers tended to stress the ultima (the last syllable of words), and ME speakers spoke English with a little change of intonations. These linguistic features made the participants feel less comfortable when they listened to ME. In addition, the respondents maintained negative attitudes to ME with the strong northern regional accent. “Although I can understand what they are speaking, but their articulations really make me uncomfortable”.

However, two participants indicated the less social attractiveness of HKE than ME. Cornelia believed that HKE speakers were proud of themselves and Zach mentioned that HKE speakers were cold but ME impressed him of a feeling of warmth.

### ***3.8.5 As Long as I Could Understand What They Said...***

The participants were open to ME, HKE and even other accents spoken in EMI universities but demonstrated that intelligibility was most important. Iris’ answer represented other participants to this question:

*If a speaker has a slight accent [pause] the accent does not interfere with my understanding. However, if a speaker has a strong accent, I will misunderstand the utterance and these imposes burdens on my comprehension (original in Mandarin).*

The quote revealed the participants could accept English speakers with accents, but the accent could not hinder them from understanding classes. Some other participants, like Andy emphasized that the function of English was communication, thus, the communicative tool was necessary to be intelligible.

In an EMI university, other aspects were emphasized in terms of teaching evaluations teachings. Christina and Cornelia stated that rather than the accents the pedagogical skills and the way of imparting knowledge were the most important in class. Cornelia also indicated that it needed a process for accepting and familiarizing with accented English, but she believed it was a good way of improving her listening skills. As a senior student, Cornelia had attended many courses taught by teachers from Malaysia, Korea, India and so forth, but she evaluated the teachers depending on class contents and the pedagogical skills rather than accents.

To summarize, the interviews confirmed the impact of familiarity. The participants recognized that HKE was more preferable than ME, because they indicated that they have listened to HKE or Cantonese English since they were children. They already familiarized with and adapted to such accented English. Simultaneously, intelligibility was emphasized, and all of the participants expressed an open-minded attitude to ME and HKE, as long as the varieties were understandable for them.

## **4. Discussion**

### ***4.1 Students’ Attitudes Toward Hke and Me***

According to the results of the previous study, Cantonese believed that ME speakers possessed higher social status and were more dynamic, confident and active, but stated that HKE was more intelligible and left less brain burden for them to understand. It was interesting that Cantonese speakers treated ME, rather than their first language: Cantonese, positively in terms of status and dynamism. The results were consistent with the previous research launched in Singapore (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009). The Singaporean participants maintained more negative attitudes to

colloquial Singapore English than standard Singapore English, expressing a feeling of self-hatred on their regional accents. The researchers found that Singapore government mandated the “Speak Good English Movement” to eradicate colloquial English in official conditions, such as mass media, education and etc. Singaporeans then maintained negative attitudes to colloquial English and believed that colloquial English was not a standard language. The Chinese governments also mandated policy to promote the spread of Mandarin as an exclusive official language. The researcher, thus, inferred the power structure of the two languages would influence the judgement on the two languages. Mandarin is a national language, while Cantonese is a regional language or a dialect. It might explain the possibility that the participants agreed with higher status of ME speakers and was more confident.

On the other hand, the participants felt easier to understand HKE, because they shared Cantonese as their first language. The results align with the previous research which demonstrated that the sharing of linguistic background could facilitate listeners’ comprehension even though they listened to the speaking with strong accents (Derwing & Munro, 1997).

In addition, no statistical difference was found in terms of solidarity, accentedness, and acceptability. As mentioned above, although the first language of the participants was Cantonese, Mandarin, as a lingua franca in China, served as an exclusive official language in education, governments, media, etc. Thus, it is evident that the participants were bilingual speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese, and they regarded Cantonese and Mandarin both as the marks of social identities (Cheung, 1985; Kalmar, Yong & Hong, 1987). Mandarin was a marker of national identity, while Cantonese represented a regional identity. Accordingly, the participants could not distinguish the differences in the aspect of solidarity. For accentedness, ME and HKE was classified into non-inner circle. The NNES participants might regard these two English varieties as non-native English or accented English. The practice might result in the no difference between two accents on the judgement of accentedness. In terms of acceptability, the participants maintained positive attitudes toward ME and HKE (see the mean score in Table 1) and accepted the speaker of both English varieties as teachers of the EMI university.

The interview also confirmed the result in which the participants’ open attitude toward the acceptability of teachers. The interviewees emphasized the mutual intelligibility of the accented English rather than native ideologies. As long as the participants understood what a speaker said, they tended to accept the speaker as teachers. The result was consistent with Moussu’s (2010) study, indicating the students’ attitudes towards NNES were positive when the students could comprehend the teachers’ accents.

#### ***4.2 The Factors That Influence Their Perceptions***

A comprehensive factor set has not been decided (Zhang, 2014), so the current study patterned the study of Mckenzie (2008), and Zhang (2013) and three social factors were picked up: familiarity, genders, and self-reported proficiency.

##### ***4.2.1 The Effect of Familiarity***

Familiarity always serves as an important factor that influences the participants’ attitude (Munro & Derwing, 1999). In the current study, positive relationship between familiarity and perceptions was discovered. These results align with that of earlier study indicating the effect of familiarity on participants’ perceptions of NNE including a speaker’ social status, how easy it is to understand an accent and a speaker’s acceptability as a teacher (Mckenzie, 2008; Zhang, 2013; Ballard & Winke, 2017).

Unfortunately, only one positive relationship was found between the familiarity with HKE, namely, the acceptability to HKE teachers, while more positive relationships were discovered between the familiarity with ME and all the evaluative aspects, except solidarity. From the results, the familiarity with ME was a more influential factor in the accent attitude compared the familiarity with HKE. It seems that the participants who lived in Guangdong province, would spoke Cantonese on a daily basis, especially in non-official situations and they would only use Mandarin as the lingua franca when they need to communicate with non-Cantonese speakers or in official contexts. Thus, the participants were exposed less to Mandarin than Cantonese, and the familiarity with ME then would have a more significant effect on their accent perceptions. More reliable reasons should be investigated in further study.

### 4.2.2 The Effect of Gender

Generally, males prefer their regional accents while females would like to choose inner-circle Englishes (Zhang, 2014). However, in the current study, two types of accented English, HKE and ME, were classified into the outer circle and expanding circle respectively. Two genders then overall maintained a more positive attitude towards ME than HKE. The result would come from the status of the two languages. As mentioned above, Mandarin was regarded as an official language in China, while Cantonese was powerless and it was only used in Canton province, Hong Kong and Macau. The two genders, then, maintained a positive attitude toward more powerful language.

Additionally, the independent t-test showed female participants' more positive attitudes toward HKE and ME than their male counterparts. Unfortunately, no previous research could explain the reason and further study need to focus on the genders' aspect.

### 4.2.3 The Effect of Self-Reported Proficiency

In the current research, no significant difference was not shown among the four levels of proficiency (pre-intermediated, intermediated, upper-intermediated and advanced). In the previous research, as the level of learners' proficiency rises, the learners could acquire more new sounds with more variation. Thus, fewer factors were influential on intelligibility and comprehensibility (Beinhoff, 2014), but Lee & Collins (2006) concluded that the subjects with lower levels of English proficiency tended to have a tolerant attitude toward the use of debated English. However, the result of the present study does not align with the neither previous research.

The further analysis revealed that the respondents in both proficiency level evaluated ME more positively in terms of status and dynamism. The attitudes also attributes to diglossic situation in which Mandarin plays a high role while Cantonese plays a low role (Liu, 2018). 6. Conclusion

The current study set out to objectively measure and assess the attitudes of the Cantonese speakers toward ME and HKE and strove to find the social factors that would influence the participants' attitudes through questionnaire and interview. The attitudes' aspects mainly comprised two parts mainly, the social aspect (status, solidarity and dynamism) and the linguistic part (comprehensibility, intelligibility, accentedness and acceptability). By the means of statistical calculations, the study has identified that the participants maintained more positive attitudes toward ME than HKE in the field of status, solidarity and dynamism, but held more positive evaluations of HKE in terms of comprehensibility, intelligibility, accentedness and acceptability. The research also showed the differences in the effect of influential factors, including gender, self-reported proficiency and familiarity on the judgement on English varieties. On the other hand, the participants in the English program indicated that they preferred HKE, because they have familiarized with the Cantonese accent and felt it comfortable when they listened to HKE. They accepted accented Englishes as long as the accented English enabled mutual intelligibility and they also emphasized the importance of teaching skills of professors in ELF classroom rather than accents when they evaluated professors.

Admitting to the participants' attitudes toward accented English, it is pedagogically necessary to provide a teaching model in EMI universities. According to Morrow (2004) people are not expected to listen only one English variety in Hong Kong, because Hong Kong is an international city, so does in EMI universities. The students of EMI universities have to listen to various types of accented English and they are more open to the different types of accents. Accordingly, an EMI university should allow the pluralistic English and emphasize mutual intelligibility in classrooms. The approach of English as a lingua franca could be introduced into EMI universities. In these universities, various accented English should be welcomed, providing opportunities for students to have cross-cultural communications. Teachers also could prepare the related course, namely, *World Englishes*, to encourage students to develop an intercultural awareness and intercultural skills and strategies that synthesize the values of linguistic diversity and maintain the awareness of world citizens.

Finally, the current study has couple of limitations. First because only Cantonese speakers and three factors were included in the study. More factors should be studied, such as the characteristics of accent and suprasegment (vowel, consonant, prosody, fluency, etc.), and the background of speakers (nationality, genders, ages, etc.). The scale of participants also should be extended, implying the recruitment of non-Cantonese speakers for studying attitudes toward accents in other EMI universities.

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