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A Study on the Perceptions of Korean EFL Learners on Four Native Varieties of English Accents

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This paper explores how Korean EFL learners perceive the four native varieties of English, namely British English (BrE), American English (AmE), Australian English (AusE) and Canadian English (CE). An experimental study with 121 undergraduate students in Korea was conducted. Adopting the indirect approach, survey questions employed in the experiment include adjectives, phrases or verbs, corresponding to three dimensions of attitudes: (1) dynamism (awareness, confidence) (2) status (superiority/privileged) and (3) solidarity (preference, favor). The collected data were analyzed according to frequency count, and two different ANOVAs. Results indicate that Korean EFL learners are likely to have recognized that one privileged English accent exists (Status) and they prefer a particular native variety of English accents (Solidarity). They show a less agreeable or less confident attitude, however, in their self-reported English accent identification level (Dynamism). In the English accent identification task, participants demonstrate better performance in recognizing BrE and AmE better than others (Dynamism: Awareness, Preference). Further comparisons are delivered in two conditions: gender and English proficiency level. Findings call for the properties of various English accents to be included in the learning materials or stimuli for students. In this way what is taught and learned will correspond to the present WE context.

[English accents/perception/English accents identification]

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I. INTRODUCTION

The prevalent conception that English proficiency is often associated with success and prestige has promoted the importance of English education in Korea. An average student in Korea starts studying English as a required subject at grade 3 in elementary school up to secondary schools complemented by cram schools costing 190,000 won (over USD 158) on average each month (Statistics Korea, 2015). Besides, students who enrolled in a tertiary school are led to keep studying English both in college and cram schools for obtaining certain qualifications to seek job opportunities. Korean EFL learners spend a significant amount of time and money aiming for *native-like* language proficiency. This socio-cultural environment (external factors) must have influenced EFL learners' attitudes toward foreign languages in Korea: for example, how important English ability is in the society and why English is to be learned or taught more than other foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese, French, and German.

Given the socio-cultural goal of the 'native-like' attainment in Korea, it seems to be important to address questions like (i) 'Which native varieties of English accents have EFL teachers, policy makers, and test makers chosen to teach and to incorporate in teaching, learning, testing materials?'; (ii) 'Which of the native varieties are more suitable for Korean EFL learners in Korea?'; and (iii) 'Do Korean EFL learners have many choices?' Our interest in the institutionally driven familiarity came from the observation that the educational environments are limited in Korea. It is considered that the learning, teaching and testing materials related to English listening skills incorporate a very limited variety in the English accents of speakers.

In the national school curriculum for English issued by Ministry of Education (MOE, 2015), the term 'English accent' is often used without an account of which of the English accents that students need to learn or to be taught. This rather vague term brought major English textbooks for elementary and secondary schools to contain audio materials recorded mostly by American speakers (Kim, 2014). According to Kim (2014), 76% of English native teachers in Busan in 2013 and 2014 were recruited from North America. It is seemingly inevitable that Korean students get accustomed to the American accent. Besides, the latest Korean college scholastic ability test for 2017 academic year had 17 listening questions for English subject. Although the question types were varied, the audio recording counterparts were spoken solely in an American accent. Leaving aside socio-cultural factors or even political reasons aside, negligence of other English varieties in the college entrance exam even more diminishes the reason for both learning and teaching different English accents throughout institutional (school) education. It can be observed that Korean EFL learners seem to exhibit a high degree of familiarity with American English since they heard and read predominantly American English during

their school days. This one-sided tendency has operated as a long tradition of regarding 'American English' as 'Superior', or 'as a role model', possibly causing students to lack' 'a global awareness of various accents' and to fall into the dilemma of 'native-like' vs. American-like attainments, not accepting other varieties of English accents.

In effect, the growing number of English speakers from Outer and Expanding Circle countries led up to challenging the view of English norms. Nearly 70 percent of English users were revealed to be English as a second or foreign language speaker (Ahn, 2014). It has partly resulted in some English proficiency tests using various English accents. For instance, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) included speech in the UK, UK regional Australian and American accents. In another example, Audio recordings in the TOEIC listening test feature four native accents: American, Australian, British and Canadian accents. It led English teaching practitioners and researchers in Korea to voice concerns as it is likely that Korean EFL students will find themselves unable to coping with the diverse range of Englishes, due to the limited (biased) input to which they have been exposed.

Indeed, the continuing prevalence of biased input quality in EFL contexts in Korea could have misguided EFL learners to be oblivious to a global awareness of various accents and led them to believe in the myth of that native–like attainment is to be equated with American-like attainment. In this regard, it is only by a more in-depth exploration of the relationship between learners' language awareness and the native varieties of English accents in Korea that we can understand a stereotypical native-likeness and EFL learners' attitudes toward the native varieties of English accents and that we can then suggest further pedagogical development as well as to inform policy makers and test making considerations.

The present study investigates how South Korean EFL learners, who are assumed to be exposed mainly to American English, perceive four native varieties of English accents (AmE, BrE, AusE, and CE). This study also attempts to explore the internal and external factors that affect attitudes of Korean EFL learners toward English accents, and which of the four native varieties of English accents Korean EFL learners prefer and would like to acquire and to use. Further, this study pursues the question of whether there is one privileged accent over others. To explore how Korean EFL learners perceive the four varieties of English accents, we have carried out an experimental study which consists of various survey questions (a survey questionnaire). It is expected that our findings from this study and data obtained from the experimental survey study should contribute to a reassessment of the notion of a single language norm in Korea in response to the reality of world Englishes paradigm.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Korea, Japan and Hong Kong share similar English language learning settings in that they recruit English native teachers for schools and the students make great efforts to perform well in the high-stakes English tests. Exploring the perception and attitudes in the context of these three regions would provide useful insight. Perception studies or attitudinal studies toward the English varieties have been done in the aspects of students, teachers, or comparing both perspectives.

1. Studies on Korean EFL Learners and Teachers' Attitudes

Paying attention to EFL learners in Korea, J. Y. Lee, S. K. Mo, S. H. Lee, and K. Sung (2013) have recently investigated college students' perception of East-Asian English accents of China, Japan and Korea. Results reported in Lee et al. (2013) indicate that East-Asian accents are considered acceptable as long as a message can be conveyed clearly to a listener, while EFL learners have an adherence to AmE and BrE, namely two native varieties of English accents. On the other hand, focusing on EFL teachers in Korea, Ahn (2014) explored the attitudes of Korean teachers of English toward Korean-accented English (KoE), conducting an experimental study at 20 secondary schools and two universities. The results presented in Ahn (2014) show that Korean English teachers perceived KoE to be an ill-conceived target model either for students to learn or for themselves to use. Ahn (2014) suggested that this tendency was developed by a belief that KoE lacks intelligibility, and that Korean English teacher considered KoE as a beneficial tool with which to express Korean culture.

Taking both EFL learners and teachers into consideration, Kim (2014) conducted a research at vocational and academic high schools recruiting both students and teachers to compare the perceptions about British Pronunciation in secondary school listening tests. In Kim's (2014) study, the main focus was on British accent in the recordings of the English listening comprehension test. Kim's (2014) study showed that students showed a high level of anxiety in the situation where the testing materials are spoken in British accent, and that teachers, on the other hand, approved of the BrE accent for testing. Still Kim (2014) pointed out that they extended their concern about its difficulty to teach it because the English listening stimuli available in the market obviously biased toward AmE.

2. Studies on Other East-Asian Learners of English as a FL

Focusing on L1 accented Englishes, Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) measured the

attitudes toward English accents of East-Asian students in Japan. In their study, the participants were in college level and from three countries; Japan, Korea and Malaysia, and were asked to evaluate their L1-accented speech. Their findings show Japanese students devalued their L1-accented English as shown in their low intention to keep their accent and their prioritizing the native-like accent when they speak English. It was also argued that Japanese English has a lack of intelligibility among Japanese EFL learners (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). Of the three different ethnical backgrounds, Japanese students displayed the strongest disapproval of their own English accent, while Malaysian students were likely to be most content with their L1-accent English (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). McKenzie and Gilmore (2015) also demonstrated somewhat negative evaluation of Japanese-accented English among Japanese college students. Studies of this kind induce questions like why Malaysian students are more content with their L1-accented English than Japanese and Korean students both of whom seem to be not in favor of their L1-accented English; what causes these differences among these three countries, and which native variety they would prefer to learn.

Moving onto EFL learners' preference, McKenzie and Gilmore (2015) reported that Japanese EFL learners displayed AmE as the correct form of English language. In addition, Matsuura (2012) explored the factors affecting Japanese students' preference toward an English accent, testing Two English accents: namely AmE and Hong Kong English (HKE). Matsuura (2012) reported that Japanese EFL learners favored AmE over HKE in the way that AmE is more intelligible than HKE and as a matter of fact they had been exposed for a longer period of time to AmE. Results of this kind seem to support the idea that there are numerous factors that determine the learning attitude.

Further exploring EFL learners in Hong Kong, Chan (2016) attempted to compare the perceptions of students at different academic stages (full-time university, senior secondary and junior secondary level). Chan (2016) compared three English native varieties (BrE, AmE, and AusE) and four L1 accented Englishes (Indian English, Chinese English, Philippine English and HKE). In Chan's (2016) study it is reported that BrE was approved the most by Hong Kong students of English, while among three educational levels, undergraduate students clearly showed preference for BrE over any others.

So far, we have seen that in the current literature, a different ideal English accent was found in each of the three contexts (Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong). The question arises why Korean and Japanese EFL learners prefer AmE over other varieties of English accents while Chinese EFL learners in Hong Kong BrE over others. Our underlying assumption is that 'familiarity' is derived from the biased EFL input quality, which in effect gives rise to the dominancy of a particular native variety of English accents in the institutional EFL learning environment in South Korea, including learning, teaching, and

testing materials. Our main argument is that preference for one particular English accent over others and superiority of a particular native variety of English accent are largely formed by and influenced by *the institutionally driven familiarity* (in other words, the biased input quality toward American English), working as external factors that influence EFL learners' attitudes. In order to see what the socio-cultural environment (external factors) have done with EFL learners' attitudes in Korea, we have formulated the following research questions (RQ) adopting the indirect approach.

RQ (1) What roles do the institutionally driven familiarity (the biased input) play in EFL learners' attitudes toward the four native varieties of English accents?

RQ (2) How do Korean EFL students perceive the four native varieties of English accents?

(2a) **Status (Superiority, Privileged, Prestige)**: which of the four do Korean EFL learners consider most *privileged* in Korea?

(2b) **Solidarity (Preference, Favor)**: Which of the four do they *prefer* the most?

(2c) **Dynamism (Awareness, Confidence)**: (i) Are they *confident* in identifying the four?; (ii) How well *can* they identify the four?

III. METHODS

1. Participants

The participants in this study include 121 Korean-speaking undergraduate students in Daejeon, South Korea. Approximately half of the participants are of each gender (49.6% male and 50.4% female). At the time of the experiment, all students were taking a general English course for freshmen. Their school years ranged from freshman to senior, with the largest proportion of students falling into freshman (112 students, 92.5%). They ranged in age from 18 to 24. Participants majored in a variety of disciplines including engineering (62.8%), economics and business administration (32.2%), information technology (3.3%), and humanities (1.7%). No participants majored in English. Of the participants, 108 students (89.3%) indicated they had no experience of studying abroad. Only 13 students (10.7%) went abroad for a short-term program (1-6 months): 7 students in the Philippines (7 students), 2 in Canada, and 4 students did not name the countries.

Participants were considered to have different levels of English listening skill from beginners to high-intermediate level (F (2, 118) = 227.41, p = .000). Based on 40 items

of TOEIC listening comprehension test from part 1 and 2, 15 students were classified into beginner level (M = 17.47); 68 into intermediate level (M = 25.32); and 38 into high-intermediate level (M = 33.58). Nonetheless, they shared similar attributes, having all received 10.4 years of English language instructions in the secondary school (i.e., a typical institutional learning environment) in Korea and taken a freshman general English class.

2. Listening Test: Participants' Language Proficiency

An English listening test was conducted to understand participants' proficiency for English listening skill. The listening test contained 40 items reproduced from the TOEIC sample questions from Part 1 and 2. In Part 1, in which test takers are asked to choose one of the four statements that best describes a picture in a test book, three types of English native varieties were included in the voice recordings. The recordings were taken from the official guide to the TOEIC test (ETS, 2016). Out of twelve items in Part 1, seven were in AmE accent, three in BrE and two AusE. In Part 2, the question with three possible responses section, there were eight question-response pairs of the recordings. Among 28 items of Part 2, seven items were in AmE-AmE dyads, two in AmE-AusE, four in AmE-BrE, three in AusE-AmE, three in AusE-BrE, five in BrE-AmE, three in BrE-AusE and one BrE-BrE. Cronbach's alpha for the listening test alone was .925.

One point was allocated for each item answered correctly. The maximum score points available in the listening test was 40. The result indicated that the participants fall into three groups: 15 students were in the beginner group, 68 in the intermediate and 38 in high-intermediate level. The mean scores on the listening test of the three groups were significantly different among one another as determined by a one-way ANOVA (F (2,118) = 227.412, p = .000). A Tukey post hoc test presented that the listening test results were significantly high in the high-intermediate group (33.58 ± 2.30, p = .000) followed by intermediate group (25.32 ± 2.73, p = .000) and beginners (17.47 ± 3.110, p = .000). The three different proficiency groups were used in ANOVA analyses to find any observable differences among the groups can be found in the responses.

3. Survey Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire was designed to explore how Korean EFL learners perceive the four native varieties of English accents. The survey consisted of 59 questions, classified into four headings: personal backgrounds, awareness of native English accents, external and internal factors and identification of native English accents. Originally,

there were five sections, but the four sections have been selected for the current study on general awareness of English accents and internal and 'external factors' that influence EFL learners' attitudes.

First *personal background* section aimed to collect demographic information on participants, including name, age, school year, gender, major, length of learning English and study-abroad experience. Perception by Korean EFL learners of native English accents was explored over two sections in the questionnaire, and internal and external factors related to the institutionally driven familiarity are addressed in one section in the questionnaire.

In the second *awareness of English accents* section participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement for three items on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability for the items in this section was calculated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The Cronbach's alpha indicated values of .613 suggesting a moderate level of reliability (the minimum level of reliability: $\alpha > .60$). Furthermore, there was one multiple choice question about which of the accents is considered as a privileged English accent in Korea. The given choices were (1) American English, (2) Australian English, (3) British English, (4) Canadian English, and (5) others.

The third *internal and external factors* section is constructed to see what factors affect EFL learners' choices and attitudes toward four native varieties of English accents. In other words, this section attempts to compare factors connected with English accent familiarity (the biased input quality of English accents) that Korean EFL learners might have. As the importance of familiarity in enhancing comprehensibility was reported by Gass and Varonis (1984), we have incorporated three factors: two external factors as *sources for or partly contributing to forming the institutionally driven familiarity*: English teachers' accent and Accent varieties in the learning materials, and one internal factor of 'personal preference.' The Cronbach's alpha in this section indicated values of .757 suggesting a moderate level of reliability.

The fourth *identification of English accents* section was intended to measure how well Korean EFL learners identify the native English accents and whether they are confident in discerning the various English accents. In this section of the questionnaire, there were ten items in the questionnaire, of speech recordings. Four native English accents were included: American English (AmE), Australian English (AusE), British English (BrE) and Canadian English (CE). The item order was randomly assigned. AmE accent speech was in items 1 and 8; AusE in 3, 6 and 10; BrE in items 2, 4 and 9; and CE in 5 and 7 (See Appendix). Then, they were asked to identify the accent from different choices as being AmE, BrE, AusE or CE. It is imperative to include these items determining native English accents since the responses would give an understanding of the awareness level of a much less exposed accent for Korean EFL learners, namely BrE. Voice samples

were taken from a TOEIC test guide book (ETS, 2016) in the scope of part 1 (see Appendix for complete list of questionnaire items).

4. Data Collection

The survey questionnaire including four sections was conducted within regular class hours in the first week of fall semester in 2016. The survey was administered by mobile phones using Google Forms software. Students received a text message containing a link direct to the survey page. After reading the informed consent form on the first page, participants proceeded to complete the questionnaire. The survey took no longer than 20 minutes.

Apart from the survey questionnaire, participants took part in a listening test at a later time in the semester. The result was used for dividing groups by levels of their listening skills and for further data analysis. This listening proficiency test was conducted in the 8^{th} week of fall semester in 2016.

5. Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22. The responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using the methods of, both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data were summarized as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. A repeated measures ANOVA was computed for the fourth section items (identification of English accents) in order to measure the differences in the accent recognition scores. Some of the data were further examined to uncover the relationship in respect of two learner variabilities. Those variabilities are gender and learner level of English listening comprehension. These two learner variables have been traditionally applied in the field of sociolinguistics as yardsticks shaping different language constructs. Tomiyana (1980), for example, pointed out that gender was one of the significant predictors in determining and correcting grammatical errors. Males outperformed females in correcting passages including three types of errors (omission, insertion, and wrong choice errors). Learner level distinction, on the other hand, has also been borne out to manifest linguistic feature. Although there is no single method for classifying the learner level, research has focused on the hypothesis that learner level accounts for certain patterns of language use and linguistic knowledge (Ellis, 2008). As a result, the current study focused on these two independent variables as a source of explanations for perception and variability: gender (male and female) and English listening proficiency levels (beginners, intermediate and high-intermediate). A one-way ANOVA was done to determine the existence of the differences associated with the two conditional factors.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

1. Perception of English Accents: Solidarity, Dynamism, and Status

Overall, results from the second section of the survey on the general awareness of the English accents are tabulated in Table 1, which shows mean score and standard deviation for each item in relation to two variables (gender and listening proficiency).

TABLE 1
Awareness of English Accents Section Items

Item	Gender		Listening Proficiency			Total
	Male	Female	(1)	(2)	(3)	
1. I can distinguish different English accents	2.52 (1.52)	2.56 (0.83)	2.47 (0.92)	2.49 (0.87)	2.66 (1.02)	2.54 (0.92)
2. I think there is a standard English accent.	2.83 (0.83)	3.03 (0.80)	2.80 (0.86)	2.91 (0.79)	3.03 (0.85)	2.93 (0.81)
3. I think a certain English accent is privileged in Korea	3.13 (1.08)	3.28 (0.95)	2.93 (1.22)	3.07 (0.94)	3.55 (1.01)	3.21 (1.02)
Total	2.83 (0.77)	2.96 (0.61)	2.73 (0.88)	2.82 (0.64)	3.08 (0.68)	2.89 (0.69)

Note. Mean and Standard Deviation in parentheses are presented; Listening Proficiency (1): Beginners, (2): Intermediate, (3): High-intermediate; Male (N = 60), Female (N = 61), (1) Beginners (N = 15), (2) Intermediate (N = 68), (3) High-intermediate (N = 38).

First of all, the results from the first item, on the ***solidarity*** (confidence, modal verb *can*) dimension of attitudes toward English accents (RQ2a: Solidarity) reveal that Korean EFL learners showed a slightly low degree of confidence in their ability to distinguish different English accents as shown in the average score, 2.54 out of 5 (SD = .92). The low level of confidence in identifying different English varieties may possibly have been triggered by the pedagogical context in Korea. The current educational situation has been depicted by a number of teaching practitioners and researchers (Ahn, 2014; Kim, 2014; Lee et al., 2013) worrying that English varieties are limited in Korea. Consequently, high anxiety was even reported when Korean students of English are exposed to a British accent in an English test (Kim, 2014). These English language learning environments in Korea can possibly be related to the erosion of confidence in identifying different accents of English, and to the lack of a global awareness of various English accents (RQ1: The roles of the institutionally driven familiarity).

Interestingly, notice that in the results obtained from the second item on a *global awareness* of English accents for which participants were asked about the existence of a *standard* English accent across the world illustrated in Table 2, the mean score (M = 2.93, SD = .81) is close under the midpoint three out of five. It is difficult to say that the results suggest a remarkably negative belief on the existence of a standard English accent, yet Korean learners of English could be seen as being not so much convinced of the existence of a single yardstick of English accent in the world. It is conceivable that Korean EFL students are in the process of accepting different varieties of English in language learning contexts. Both students and teachers have expressed their willingness to accept English accent varieties in previous studies (Ahn, 2014; Kim, 2014; Lee et al., 2013). Alternatively, we can interpret the results as indicating that EFL learners *lack* a global awareness of English accents, and as suggesting that many EFL learners believe a standard English accent in the world, since they have been exposed predominantly to one particular native varieties of English accents, namely American English. In other words, we can argue that results of this kind may be due to the biased EFL input quality (the institutionally driven familiarity) which might have governed the EFL learners' awareness of other varieties of English accents, and have influenced their belief about one particular variety of English accents (RQ1: The roles of the institutionally driven familiarity)

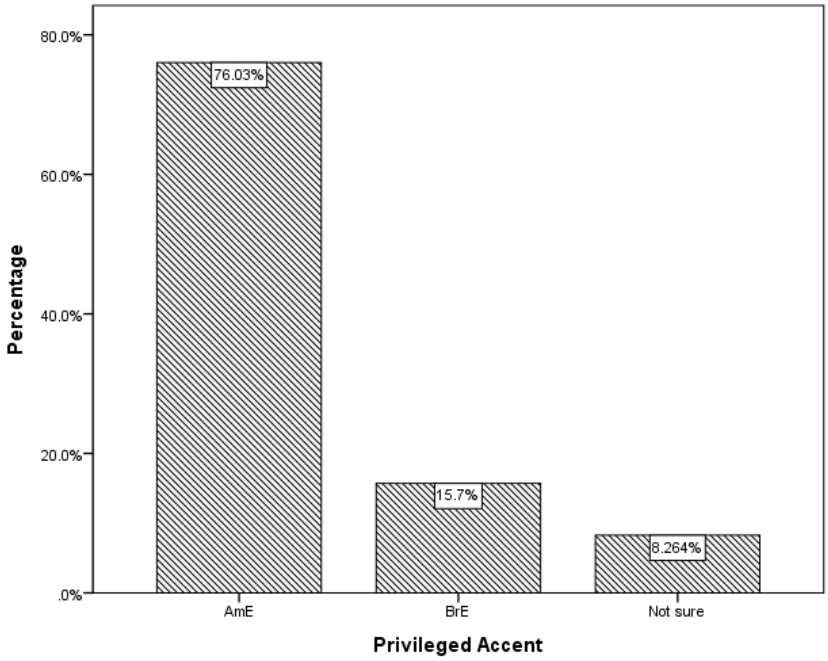
Moving on to the third item on the ***status*** (superiority, *privileged, advantageous*, prestige) of English accents, the results indicate that Korean EFL learners believe that a certain English accent is advantageous in Korea (*M* = 3.21, *SD* = 1.02). Although somewhat disapproving of the concept of standard English around the world (not confident, lacking/weak global awareness), Korean students of English show a general convergence regarding a privileged English accent present. Results of this kind in effect support our argument that the biased input quality (i.e., the *Institutionally Driven Familiarity*) should have influenced EFL learners' attitudes with respect to the status (superiority, advantageous, privileged) dimension, toward one particular native variety of English accents (RQ 2a: The status dimension of attitudes).

Given the results of supporting the belief about the existence of one privileged English accents in Korea, let us now discuss which of the four native varieties of English accent would be regarded as 'privileged one.' Contrary to the items one to three, the fourth item was formulated to ask students to select which of the accents they would consider as a privileged accent in Korea. Recall our second research question (RQ2a: The Status Dimension): *which of the four native varieties of English accents do Korean students think most privileged in Korea?* The responses for this item are found to clearly fall into three types: *AmE*, *BrE* and *not sure*. A dominant number of students in this study, 92 of the participants (76%), perceive AmE as a privileged English accent whereas 19 students

(15.7%) believe BrE is beneficial in Korea. The others (*N* =10; 8%) answer they are not sure. It is worth noting that none of the students selected CE or AusE as a beneficial English accent in Korea.

Subsequently, the one-way ANOVA tests are performed to assess the significant differences are found in respect to the two independent variables (gender and level of English listening proficiency) for the ***status*** component (superiority/privilege) of attitudes toward English accents the statements of native English accents awareness. Figure 1 displays the percentages for each response.

FIGURE 1
Percentages for Item 4: Privileged Accent



The result reveals that there are no significant differences in any of the variables: (a) gender (F (5,115) = .049, p = .825), and (b) listening skill levels (F (5,115) = 2.106, p = .126). In other words, the statistical analysis supports that the status (privilege) component of attitudes toward English accents is not distinguished from the two conditions, gender and English listening proficiency level.

TABLE 2
Personal Preference on Native English Accents

AmE	BrE	AusE	CE	Not sure
59.5	37.19	1.653	0.826	0.826

Note. Percentages are presented (N = 121)

Similar to the results reported in Lee et al. (2013), the results of 'preference' show that the EFL learners most prefer AmE (60%) most, followed by BrE (37%). This finding that Korean EFL learners prefer AmE over other native varieties is similar to Lee et al.'s study (2013).

2. Factors Related to the Institutionally Driven Familiarity

Overall, the results reveal that participants are likely to consider language learning materials as the strongest factor connected with English accent familiarity (M = 3.69, SD = .85), followed by individual preference (M = 3.51, SD = .96) and English teachers' accents (M = 3.48, SD = .90). In addition, the one-way ANOVA tests are further conducted for this section and the statistical analysis suggests that the gender and listening proficiency level did not influence on the degree of familiarity factors: (a) gender: F (5,115) = .001, p = .978, and (b) listening skill levels: F (5,115) = .511, p = .601. The findings for the factors affecting accent familiarity are not distinguished from the two conditions, gender and English listening proficiency level. That is, Korean EFL learners tend to exhibit similar manners in ranking the familiarity factors considering native English accents.

TABLE 3
Internal and External Factors Section Items

Item	Gender		Listening Proficiency			Total
	Male	Female	(1)	(2)	(3)	
1. Accents of English teachers	3.53 (0.91)	3.43 (0.88)	3.27 (1.16)	3.59 (0.88)	3.37 (0.79)	3.48 (0.90)
2. English accents in the learning materials	3.67 (0.90)	3.72 (0.82)	3.73 (1.16)	3.75 (0.80)	3.58 (0.83)	3.69 (0.85)
3. Personal preference in English accents	3.48 (1.05)	3.54 (0.87)	3.40 (1.18)	3.51 (1.00)	3.55 (0.80)	3.51 (0.96)
Total	3.56 (0.79)	3.56 (0.70)	3.47 (1.01)	3.62 (0.74)	3.50 (0.63)	3.56 (0.74)

Note. Mean and Standard Deviation in parentheses are presented; Listening Proficiency (1): Beginners, (2): Intermediate, (3): High-intermediate; Male (N = 60), Female (N = 61), (1) Beginners (N = 15), (2) Intermediate (N = 68), (3) High-intermediate (N = 38).

Recall the research question (RQ1) what roles do the institutionally driven familiarity play in EFL learners' attitudes toward the four native varieties of English? First consider the strongest external factor (Item 2. English accents in the learning materials), which is assumed to be one of the main institutional driving forces behind Korean EFL learners' becoming familiar with a particular native accent of English. From this line of argument, we can draw a tentative, but still speculative conclusion that the Korean EFL learners have attempted to form and develop their English accents aiming at the American-like attainment, since the learning materials they have encountered during their schooldays have been biased toward the so-called American English. In addition, it seems necessary to draw the attention of not only those who involve with making teaching and learning materials but also those who are involved with 'the national school curriculum of English' to how important learning and teaching materials are to EFL learners.

Let us move on to the second most important factor, Accents of English Teachers that the EFL learners believe to play an important role of affecting their English accents. The results in fact show that EFL learners consider their English teachers' accents important. Notice that our questionnaire question on 'Accent of English Teacher' contained some controversial issues since there is no specific distinction between non-native (L1 accented Korean) and native English teachers. However, it is still plausible to draw attention to the issues related to the external factors influencing attitudes of EFL learners toward English accents. In short, the EFL learners more or less strongly believe that teachers' English accents are important for their learning of English accents (RQ1).

As an internal factor, we take 'personal preference' as playing an important role in forming attitudes of EFL learners. Our argument is that this personal preference in fact is developed and formed through the institutionally driven familiarity, which in turn affects their attitudes toward English accents. The results from the internal factor suggest that the EFL learners also consider personal preference important affecting their English accents. Recall the results of preference for AmE (60%) over other varieties (BrE) discussed in the previous section.

3. Identification of the Native English Accents: Dynamism and Solidarity

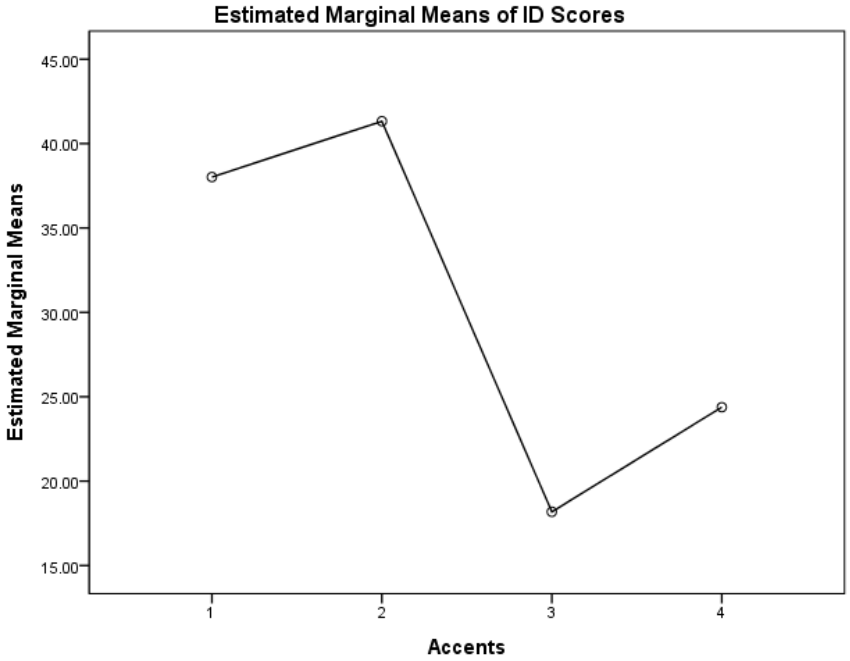
In the final (4^{th}) section of the questionnaire, ten recordings of two L1 English accents were given from items 1 to 10. Recall the two research questions: RQ (2c) (i) *Are they confident in identifying the four native varieties of English accents?* and (ii) *How well do Korean EFL learners identify the four native varieties of English accents?* We have discussed the dynamism (confidence) dimension of attitudes towards English accents in the previous section, addressing the first question of our RQ (2c) (i), and our results indicate that the EFL learners are not very confident but they are either in the stage of

developing or in the process of accepting different varieties of English accents.

1) Accents Identification

On the trait of the dynamism (confidence) dimension indicated in our RQ (2c), that is, *whether the Korean EFL learners are confident or not,* and *how well Korean learners can identify the four native varieties of English accent,* the findings are found to be somewhat controversial. The results indicate that Korean EFL learners are likely to identify BrE accent (41.32%) the best. AmE (38.02%) is ranked the second highest and CE (24.38%) followed next. It is AusE (18.18%) which is found to be the most difficult accent for Korean learners of English to correctly recognize or to single out. We can only interpret the results as suggesting that the Korean EFL learners may be less familiar to AusE than AmE or BrE accent, leaving the issues are of phonetic or phonological competence. Figure 2 shows the percentages of mean test scores in response to identifying whether the speaker was American, British, Australian, or Canadian.

FIGURE 2
Mean Scores for Identification of English Accent Items



Note. *N* = 121; Percentages of mean test scores are presented; Accent (1) AmE, (2) BrE, (3) AusE and (4) CE

A repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction determined that mean scores across four native accents differ statistically significantly (F (3, 118) = 17.261, $p < 0.001$). Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction reveal that scores for BrE are significantly higher than AusE (23.140 ± 3.05, $p = .000$) and CE (16.942 ± 3.86, $p = .000$). At the same time, AmE shows higher scores than AusE (19.835 ± 3.65, $p = .000$) and CE (13.636 ± 4.15, $p = .008$), which are also statistically significant. However, the results show that BrE and AmE have no statistically significant difference ($p = 1.000$). This was also the case for AusE and CE, meaning that the difference between AusE and CE in the mean scores is negligible ($p = .292$). Now, rather than perceiving them as four independent accents, the results show that they can be categorized into two groups of accents based on the mean scores. Accents with superior mean scores, BrE and AmE accents, can be regarded as a familiar accent group, and CE and AusE as a less familiar accent group. This implies that BrE and AmE can be seen as easier (familiar) accents, whereas AusE and CE as challenging (less familiar) accents for Korean EFL learners. Figure 2 displays the identification score differences according to four English native accents.

The preference toward AmE or BrE specifically in Korean and Japanese contexts has been documented in the previous studies (Kim, 2014; Lee et al., 2013; Matsuura, 2012; McKenzie & Gilmore, 2015; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) asserted that the limited exposure may have created this preference. As the great part of the time for Korean EFL learners of studying English with American accented listening stimuli, students might have become awarding AmE a higher status and formed a relatively positive perception toward AmE. This position is further supported by Chan's (2016) study of Hong Kong learners of English. Chan (2016) pointed out that Hong Kong students, from secondary to university level, rated BrE higher in status than other accents. The endorsement of BrE was attributed to the accent familiarity in Hong Kong, where BrE is used primarily in its educational setting. Further comparison is delivered by genders and listening proficiency groups, as it is shown in the Table 4 and 5.

TABLE 4
ANOVA Results for SE Identification Items: Gender Difference

SE Accent	Gender		F	*p*
	Male (N = 60)	Female (N = 61)		
AmE	39.17	36.89	.121	.729
BrE	46.11	36.61	3.123	.080
AusE	13.33	22.95	4.901	.029
CE	16.67	31.97	7.804	.006**

** $p < .01$

Note. Percentages of mean test scores are presented.

The one-way ANOVA test results show that there are statistically significant interactions for a couple of accents. From the data, it is discovered that there is a gender difference in the scores of CE accent identification (F (1,120) = 7.804, p = .006). It indicates that female students outstrip their male counterparts when they were guided to identify the CE accented speech.

Moreover, the proficiency levels are found to be an important indicator particularly in recognizing AuE (F (2,120) = 65.079, p = .037). However, it runs counter to our expectations. High-intermediate group students tend to make errors most frequently in identifying AusE. They performed evidently worse than those of intermediate level. In addition, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean test scores between intermediate and beginners level students. That is, Korean students of English both at beginners and intermediate levels are likely to perform better than the high-intermediate group students in distinguishing BrE.

TABLE 5
ANOVA Results and Post hoc Tukey Procedures for Native English Identification Items: Proficiency Group Difference

SE Accent	Listening Proficiency			F	p	Tukey
	(1)	(2)	(3)			
AmE	43.33	38.24	35.53	.253	.777	
BrE	46.67	40.20	41.23	.286	.752	
AusE	20.00 ^{AB}	22.06 ^{AB}	10.53 ^{C}	65.079	.037*	(2) > (3)
CE	36.67	23.53	21.05	1.430	.244	

$^{*}p < .05$

Note. Percentages of mean test scores are presented; Listening Proficiency (1) Beginners (N = 15), (2) Intermediate (N = 68), (3) High-intermediate (N = 38).

As to AmE and BrE, on the other hand, it is revealed that there is no meaningful difference between gender or among proficiency groups, meaning that the capability in recognizing the two, BrE and AmE, seems to operate regardless of gender difference or listening proficiency levels.

The difficulties in identifying native English accents were documented in the Ahmed, Abdullah, and Heng's (2014) study. In their experiment, the findings indicated that Malaysian University students were able to better identify nonnative English accents such as Malay, Indian, Arabic, or Chinese accented English in comparison with the native English accents, AmE or BrE.

2) Confusing Accents

By each target accent variety, the given accent choices are presented in descending order with their mean percentages. In terms of the items which were intended to be searched for AmE the choice of AmE (38.02%), is found to be the most chosen as an answer. Likewise, as to BrE items, the target accent is found accurately accounting for 41.32%. Korean EFL students are likely to find themselves to correctly search for AmE and BrE.

However, the most frequently chosen options for CE and AusE accents illustrate that they are inconsistent with the target accents. 45.04% of students marked AmE when they heard CE accented speech. The intended answer, CE, was ranked in the second-most chosen option among four varieties. It can be conjectured that Korean EFL learners would easily confused CE accents with AmE.

In regards to the AusE accent, Korean learners of English are more prone to misidentify AusE as AmE and BrE (amounting to 34.16% and 32.23%, respectively) more than its target accent (18.18%). The choice of AusE, the target accent, is placed on the third most chosen option. Table 6 illustrates the distributions of choices for accent identification items.

TABLE 6
Distributions of Choices for Accents

	AmE Speakers	BrE Speakers	AusE Speakers	CE Speakers
Most chosen	AmE (38.02%)	BrE (41.32%)	AmE (34.16%)	AmE (45.04%)
↕	AusE, CE (21.90% resp.)	AusE (23.14)	BrE (32.23%)	CE (24.38%)
↕	BrE (18.18%)	CE (21.49%)	AusE (18.18%)	BrE (16.12%)
Least chosen		AmE (14.05%)	CE (15.43%)	AusE (14.46%)

Note. Percentages of mean are presented in the parenthesis (N = 121).

Further comparisons in respect to the two variables, gender and proficiency levels, could not be proceeded since data were on nominal scales.

V. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

We have explored how Korean EFL learners perceive four native varieties of English

accents, paying attention to three dimensions of attitudes (status, dynamism, and solidarity), and the roles of the institutionally driven familiarity with one particular variety of English accents. Over decades, Korean students have been accustomed to listen to AmE, partly because of the invariable (biased) learning inputs, which have induced an 'institutionally driven familiarity' with American English in Korea. Our prediction was that the repetition might possibly have increased familiarity with AmE for Korean students and encouraged them to be in favor of AmE (60%). We found indications that the biased exposure to AmE played a role to some extent. The findings indicate Korean university students of English appeared to lack of confidence in identifying different English accents. Though the students cast doubt on the existence of a standard English accent in the world, they seemed rather be more convinced with the idea that AmE plays a role as privileged English accent in Korea.

However, the institutionally driven familiarity with AmE appears to have a relatively weak effect on the accents recognition but to have a strong effect on the preference of AmE (over 76%). Among four native English accents, Korean EFL learners were more capable of recognizing BrE somewhat better than AmE. Still, both BrE and AmE accents were significantly more correctly identified than CE and AusE accents. CE accents were likely to be mistakenly considered as AmE, possibly due to the phonological similarity. Meanwhile, AusE accent was found to be the most difficult native accents for Korean EFL learners to recognize. In this case, Korean learners of English tended to confuse AusE with AmE or BrE.

Furthermore, the findings suggested that gender or proficiency levels of English could not be associated to make influence in general. Only a couple of accents revealed that one or another of these variables was making a difference. For identifying CE, female students clearly outperformed male students. In addition, the AusE accent was misidentified the most in the high-intermediate group students.

Our research touches the matter of limited range of English varieties encountered in the current practice of English language learning. In the listening stimuli of the materials especially for secondary school level, AmE is used as almost the only source of English accent varieties (Kim, 2014). It is only by the time that Korean EFL learners prepare for TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, or go abroad in order to be exposed other English varieties. To prevent the dominance of particular accents and to be on guard against our own favoritism, the findings command our attention to provide Korean EFL students more chances to be exposed to balanced native varieties in their English language learning experience. The exposure to more native varieties of English would lead Korean students to be able to comprehend diverse speech accents in the current lingua franca situation.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire Items

Section 1: Personal background

(1) Name
(2) Age
(3) School year
(4) Gender
(5) Major
(6) Length of learning English
(7) Study abroad experience.

Section 2: Awareness of English accents

(1) I can distinguish different English accents.
(2) I think there is a standard English accent.
(3) I think a certain English accent is privileged in Korea.
(4) Which English accent is privileged in Korea?

Section 3: Internal and external factors

(1) Accents of English teachers
(2) English accents in the learning materials
(3) Personal preference in English accents

Section 4: Identification of English accents

(1) AmE accent recorded item
(2) BrE accent recorded item
(3) AusE accent recorded item
(4) BrE accent recorded item
(5) CE accent recorded item
(6) AusE accent recorded item
(7) CE accent recorded item
(8) AmE accent recorded item
(9) BrE accent recorded item
(10) AusE accent recorded item

Examples in: English

Applicable Language: English

Applicable Level: Secondary

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