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Investigating the impact of Liverpool accent on language learners' experiences in a study abroad context

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by

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ABSTRACT

Kathryn Hope

Investigating the impact of Liverpool accent on language learners' experiences in a study abroad context

Accents provide learners of English with an unexpected range of pronunciation in both native and non-native speaker contexts. Few speakers use the standard pronunciation that learners are familiar with. This research project investigates the impact of the wonderfully distinct Liverpool English (LE) accent on English language learners' listening experiences. Lack of accent familiarity has been identified in previous research as a contributing factor to listening difficulties, yet standard accents continue to be predominant in teaching materials.

This thesis assesses the impact of unexpected pronunciation on upper intermediate level learners in a Study Abroad (SA) context. Due to its distinctive features, LE is used as an example to examine how accent may impact students' communication experiences outside of the class and exam room setting. It investigates the likely sources of problems for learners' listening in an L2 environment. It explores the quantity and quality of the spoken English that students were exposed to during one-year studying in the UK; the study aimed to understand how learners communicate in the SA experience. This study also investigates how students' previous ELT experiences prepare them to cope with the realities of listening to language in use.

This study uses a mixed methods approach to gather data on students' initial and ongoing experiences studying and living in the UK. These methods included questionnaires, listening experiences (with rating scales), semi-structured interviews and spoken interaction journals.

The findings of this study highlight that accent causes significant listening difficulties for students. Students reported being unable to understand the accents they heard for up to 12 months. Participants stated feeling unprepared and unaware of the vast variety of English accents before they arrived in the UK. Interviews and spoken interaction journals highlighted how these difficulties impacted language use; students spent over half their time communicating in their L1 and reported that LE affected their confidence in using English. These findings indicate that the LE accent is directly impacting students' ability and confidence communicating with other English speakers. Importantly, it is having an impact on how much English students are able or comfortable to use when they arrive in Liverpool.

This study may support the future design and use of listening materials in ELT. This research is likely to contribute to the development of teacher training and learning policies. The conclusions highlight that raising awareness of the variation in English pronunciation and greater exposure to language in use may improve students' ability and confidence communicating in an L2 environment.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ELT	English Language Teaching
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LE	Liverpool English
LoR	Length of Residence
NNS	Non-Native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
RP	Received Pronunciation
SA	Study Abroad
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SSB	Standard Southern British
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WTC	Willingness to Communicate

LIST OF TERMS

- **Accent**
Aspects of phonetic and phonological variation that define a variety of a language.
- **Accentedness**
The degree to which the phonology of speech sounds different in comparison to a standard variety.
- **Comprehensibility**
A listener's perception of how they can understand a speaker's meaning.
- **Dialect**
Aspects of grammar and vocabulary that define of a variety of language.
- **Intelligibility**
The extent to which a learner can understand the words they hear.
- **Liverpool English (LE)**
The accent associated with Liverpool, spoken in the city itself.
- **Phonology**
Patterns of speech sounds in languages.
- **Phoneme**
Smallest unit of speech which distinguishes one word from another.
- **Received Pronunciation (RP)**
A standard accent of British English, historically associated with prestige.
- **Standard Southern British (SSB)**
The accent associated with the South of England; a contemporary accent developed from RP.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There is an undoubtable and unavoidable contrast between real-life spoken English and the language taught through the language learning process. Whilst learners of English are often presented with one standard form, the realities of listening to speakers' day-to-day interactions can include much more variation (Buck, 2001).

The researcher's own experiences learning another language provided the initial motivations for this study. Learning French at school, they were confident comprehending the language heard in class, able to converse with peers and passed their exams with flying colours. The researcher arrived in Normandy, France, eager and ready to use their language skills to communicate with native speakers; they were disheartened to discover their listening skills were not sufficient. Words were pronounced differently and this surprise that no one sounded as they expected heavily impacted their confidence and motivation to continue to use their L2.

This similar contrast between language in use and language presented in ELT (English Language Teaching) was highlighted through the researcher's studies and experience teaching English. Peers and students shared many anecdotes of how accent caused listening difficulties, for experienced L2 English users, when they arrived in the UK. When studying for their MA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at the University of Liverpool, the researcher was often asked to be an 'interpreter' between international and Liverpool English (LE) speaking friends. These experiences highlighted that unexpected pronunciation can cause comprehension difficulties and impact learners' willingness to converse with L1 speakers.

Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018) highlight that often ‘learners have very few opportunities to listen or interact meaningfully face to face with speakers of the target language’ (p. 228) when learning English. Learners’ introduction to what English sounds like is commonly through listening materials. In their previous research (Hope, 2014), the researcher investigated what varieties of English are presented to learners in such materials. Through this analysis it was found that standard forms of accents, such as Standard Southern British (SSB), continue to be the most prevalent. The prevalence of such varieties provides a basis for learners own L2 production and endeavours to enable learners to be able to participate in interactions across the largest possible number of communities. However, this is unrepresentative of much of the English spoken by NSs (Native Speakers) today (Trudgill, 2001). Students’ exposure to English within the language learning process builds an expectation of how L1 users speak. They become confident and comfortable with the sounds they hear, and this familiarity can aid their future comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994; Major et al., 2005; Song & Iverson, 2018).

When learning English, students must develop and adapt to the complex processes needed to effectively listen to an L2 (Cutler, 2012). Due to the complexities of listening, students may take time to build confidence; processes involved in L1 listening are highly automatic (Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009) but this skill and related confidence must be built over time in the L2. The Study Abroad (SA) environment can challenge this confidence in even highly proficient learners. The surprise of how daily interactions actually sound can be difficult, and this can be further exacerbated by variation in pronunciation, such as those presented in regional accents.

LE highlights the variation that learners can be presented with when coming to study in the UK. The Liverpool accent is notable in its distinct pronunciation differences; speakers often sound markedly different even from those who come from a near-by town (Honeybone, 2001; Watson, 2007). The different phonology of LE, which marks it as one of the most distinctive accents in the North West of England (Honeybone, 2001), provides a perfect starting point to assess students’ experiences in the SA context. This allows us to begin to understand why and what impact the disparity between students’ expectations and the realities of spoken English has on learners’ interactions.

This research will highlight the impact that the distinct LE accent has on students’ experiences of English when studying at British universities and highlight the contrast between ‘expectation’ and ‘reality’.

This research project aimed to investigate the listening experiences of upper intermediate level learners of English in the SA environment, specifically in Liverpool, England. The research aimed to assess how the LE accent may impact students' initial and ongoing experiences. LE was used to identify how unexpected pronunciation and accent unfamiliarity may negatively impact students; section 2.4 (p. 37) outlines the features that mark LE as a regionally distinctive accent. This project examines students' specific SA experiences and how listening difficulties may negatively affect their time spent studying in the UK. The study explores what type of, and how much, spoken English students were engaging with during their time in Liverpool. This research endeavoured to develop a greater understanding of how students' previous exposure and expectation of English prepared them to cope with the realities of interacting with language in use.

Through the researcher's own experience studying alongside and teaching students of English, it was expected that accent will be identified as a significant and prolonged problem in learners' listening experiences. The research began by following the hypothesis that learners experience significant and prolonged difficulties understanding LE due to its unexpected phonology. Consequently, students' experiences communicating are impacted, leading to students altering the quantity and quality of their language use.

1.2 Existing Research

This study focused on examining the disparity between what language students expect and the realities that accents cause phonological variation in spoken English. L2 learners face challenges in developing the complex processes need to comprehend speech; they must decode different sounds and meaning, whilst continually taking in new input (Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009).

Existing research has found that listening processes may be impacted by features of accented speech. This can impede processing and cause difficulties in understanding for learners. Chang et al.'s (2013) research identifies accent as one of the major hindrances in listening comprehension, building on Goh's (1999; 2000) studies. Chang et al.'s (2013) study highlights the idea of 'speaker factor' noting accent as one of the key

elements which is out of the listener's control and can cause difficulties. The significance of accent in relation to other listening difficulties is highlighted in section 2.3 (p. 23). Whilst research has assessed how accent can be a significant difficulty for L2 listeners an analysis of how these factors impact listeners' lived experiences has not been established. The current study examined how accent may be influencing students' initial and ongoing experiences in real life encounters, outside of the class or exam room.

Previous studies have also identified that familiarity to accents can increase students' listening comprehension abilities (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al., 2005; Song & Iverson, 2018). Major et al. (2005) comment that it is 'widely believed that listeners understand some [accents] more easily than others, although there is little research that has rigorously measured the effects' (p. 37). Familiarity with an accent may aid comprehension whether this be through exposure to that accent or when the speaker shares the listener's accent (same L1) (Major et al., 2005). Whilst research has identified that familiarity aids comprehension, little research has examined how accents directly impact learners' spoken interactions in real-life scenarios (Chang et al., 2013; Derwing & Munro, 2009; Sung, 2016). The current study focused on students' lived experiences and has been able to add a new dimension to the discussion of how accents may be influencing learners' language use. Another gap in this area of research is that the accents present in many studies were either NNSs (Non-Native Speakers) or regional accents other than Liverpool English (LE). The current study aimed to fill this gap, using LE to build on these discussions of accent familiarity, again looking at how this factor impacts student's interactions and experiences outside of the classroom. The features of a familiar accent (such as Standard Southern British, SSB) and an unfamiliar accent (LE) were compared.

In addition to familiarity, existing studies have highlighted that listeners' perceptions are key in how learners comprehend accents (Eisenstein & Verdi, 1985; Major et al., 2005; Sung, 2016). Montgomery (2007) comments that stereotypical perceptions as to what is good and bad English remain; this can be seen from both L1 and L2 listeners. Watson & Clark (2015) identify this in relation to L1 listeners' perception of LE; their study found that LE is often perceived negatively and is commonly given associations of low social status and untrustworthiness. Studies, such as Sung's (2016) research, have identified that L2 learners also perceive accented speech negatively. In their evaluation of learner's experiences, Sung (2016) found there to be ingrained negative views of non-standard English. Their findings emphasised that learners often view accented speech

negatively, as incorrect or undesirable. The current research project expanded on these discussions, exploring students' perceptions, assessing students' feelings and experiences of the accents they have encountered in Liverpool.

Existing studies have also investigated the nature of the SA experience. Several studies have highlighted that SA students can show greater skills development through the SA context compared to those studying in their home countries (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Freed et al., 2004; Teng, 2010; Xu et al., 2009;). These studies are discussed in more detail in section 2.9 (p. 56). Researchers such as Kashiwa & Benson (2018) and Taguchi (2011) have highlighted the importance in the quality of stay in the SA context; language skills may only develop if students take part in quality interactions. These studies indicate that it is valuable to investigate factors, such as accents, which may impact students' quality of stay. Hamano-Bunce et al.'s (2019) study also looked at language learners in the SA context, investigating their listening skills development. Their study found that, whilst students' listening skills did develop in the SA context, this was dependent on students' strong motivation to interact in social situations and avoid L1 use. This links to a common assumption that in the SA context, students will engage with more L2 than L1, and this increased exposure will improve their overall language skills (Hamano-Bunce, et al, 2019; Taguchi, 2011; Xu at al., 2009). Previous research has acknowledged that it is important to establish the number and quality of students' interactions in the SA environment to be able to assess other factors impacting language skills and use (Freed et al., 2004; Kashiwa & Benson, 2018).

Extensive research has also highlighted students' preference for NS accents within teaching instruction, listening materials and their interactions (Holliday, 2006; Kuo, 2006; Scales et al., 2006; Sung, 2016; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). However, NNSs' perceptions of non-standard varieties have not been analysed in as great detail.

The distinct and specific phonology of Liverpool English (LE) allowed for analysis of how, if learners do experience difficulties understanding accented speech, this impacted their interactions, further skills development and their overall quality of their SA experience. Montgomery (2012) comments that an individual's 'perception may determine who they interact with, when they do, and the length of time they do' (p. 639). Perceptions and difficulties caused by LE were examined to evaluate the impact they had on students' listening experiences during their time studying in Liverpool.

1.3 Data Collection

This study gathered data surrounding NNS students' experience of accents in Liverpool. Students from the University of Liverpool who were studying on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistic programmes took part.

This study used a mixed methods approach to gather data surrounding students' initial and ongoing experiences studying and living in Liverpool. Participants completed questionnaires, interviews, listening experiences and spoken interaction journals.

In questionnaires students were asked to reflect on their initial and ongoing experiences of listening to spoken English and highlight any difficulties that they experienced. In semi-structured interviews, students were then given the opportunity to expand on these responses and provided additional details and explanations. To support this reflective data, participants listened to a series of extracts of two different accents (LE and SSB). In these listening experiences students were asked to rate how familiar and easy to understand they found the accents. They were also asked to highlight, in a transcript of the recordings, if and where they experienced any difficulties understanding what they heard. Finally, students were also asked to complete a journal of all their spoken interactions across a period of seven days; this data allowed for a representation of the language, both L1 and L2, that participants were interacting with whilst in the SA environment. All methods employed were designed to investigate the language that students are exposed to and if accent causes difficulties for learners; students were able to reflect on their experiences communicating, identifying any areas of difficulty or interest. Data was also collected to establish, if accent is a listening difficulty, what impact does this have. Students' self-reflections and rating of accents allowed for an understanding of what impact is being had and if it is significant. Students reflected on the English they were engaging with and any factors that impacted their choices.

The data collected has been used to answer the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:**

How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?

- **Research Question 2:**

What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?

- **Research Question 3:**

How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?

The research questions are discussed and outlined in greater detail later in the thesis in the Literature Review (section 2.11) and Methodology (section 3.2).

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study begin to indicate that accent, especially LE, is impacting students' communication. The difficulties students' experience has been found to cause them problems understanding spoken English and the consequences of this impacts their ongoing engagement with speakers. Some students acknowledged avoiding certain interactions and changing their behaviour from what they expected prior to arriving in Liverpool. This was found to be especially relevant in relation to the university environment. Students are able to avoid engaging with local accents and can, in some cases, spend a high proportion of time speaking in their L1.

This study is significant in contributing to the discussion of how relevant accents are in both the SA experience and the language learning process overall. The findings indicate that the LE accent is directly impacting students' ability to communicate effectively with English speakers. These findings highlighted the importance of including a greater amount a variation in speech throughout the language learning process to raise students' awareness of possible differences. This may reduce the impact that the unexpected pronunciation of accents can have on learners' experiences.

This research project contributes to the development of awareness raising teaching methodologies in ELT. The study provides evidence of how exposure to, or the lack of, variation in spoken English impacts learners' listening skills. The findings of this research project are significant in highlighting the prolonged impact that accent can have on learners' communication experiences. The methods examine students' perceptions of LE and how perceptions, as well as difficulties, influence their interaction choices.

This thesis assesses the impact of unexpected pronunciation on upper intermediate level learners in a SA context. Due to its distinctive features, LE (defined in section 2.4, p. 37) is used as an example to examine how accent may impact students' communication experiences outside of the classroom setting.

The following chapters will outline the literature that informed the study, the methods used to collect the data and finally will present the findings and discuss their implications and significance.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the background research and theories relating to this research project. This chapter will focus on four main areas assessing existing research in these fields; listening processes, listening difficulties, the phonology of Liverpool English (LE) and the Study Abroad (SA) experience will be discussed. Firstly, the processes involved in listening will be discussed, highlighting when the aspects required for effective listening may be impacted by spoken language features such as accent. Following on from this, a discussion of listening difficulties will examine the features of spoken English that may impact learners' listening comprehension. Finally, this chapter will highlight the factors surrounding the participants in this study that may impact or alter their specific listening experiences, such as the phonology of LE and the SA experience. Other related fields (such as accents in listening materials) will be reviewed alongside the four main areas.

Students can experience challenges in spoken interactions with native and non-native English speakers outside of the security of the classroom environment. Language in use can be faster, louder and sound significantly different from what learners have heard in class; research has begun to examine this experience, highlighting listening difficulties, including accent. Carr (2013) comments that 'differences in accent concern solely phonetic and phonological variation, whereas dialect differences involve more than this: they also include differences in vocabulary and syntax' (p. 41). Accent, rather than the term dialect, is used throughout this project to refer to phonological variation in English (Hughes et al., 2012; Kerswill, 2006). This research project focuses on accent,

specifically LE, to isolate how the associated pronunciation differences may impact students' listening experiences.

This chapter will outline the particular phonological variation that the students in this study experienced; LE and its distinctive characteristics are presented. This chapter will also provide some detail of how accent variation is currently presented in teaching materials and whether this is reflective of today's spoken English. On first arriving in the UK, students can face unfamiliar accents and other ambiguities in spoken English; this brings in to question what impact do these factors have on students' experience and how able are they to tolerate them.

2.2 Listening Processes

To effectively examine the impact of accent on learners' listening experiences it is important to first consider the processes involved in listening and where accent may impact or alter them. Vandergrift (2011) and Graham (2006) comment on the complex cognitive abilities necessary in listening; due to the unique implicit nature of this skill, it is often considered as being the most difficult to learn. Vandergrift (2011) comments that 'listeners must process speech whilst simultaneously attending to new input at a speed controlled by the speaker, process input that can be characterized by phonological vagaries (enunciation, pronunciation and accent) [and] parse the input into meaningful units' (p. 455). This continuous and complex processing makes this skill particularly difficult to develop. This process can be presented in five stages, as shown below in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Five stages of the listening process (adapted from Field (2009)).

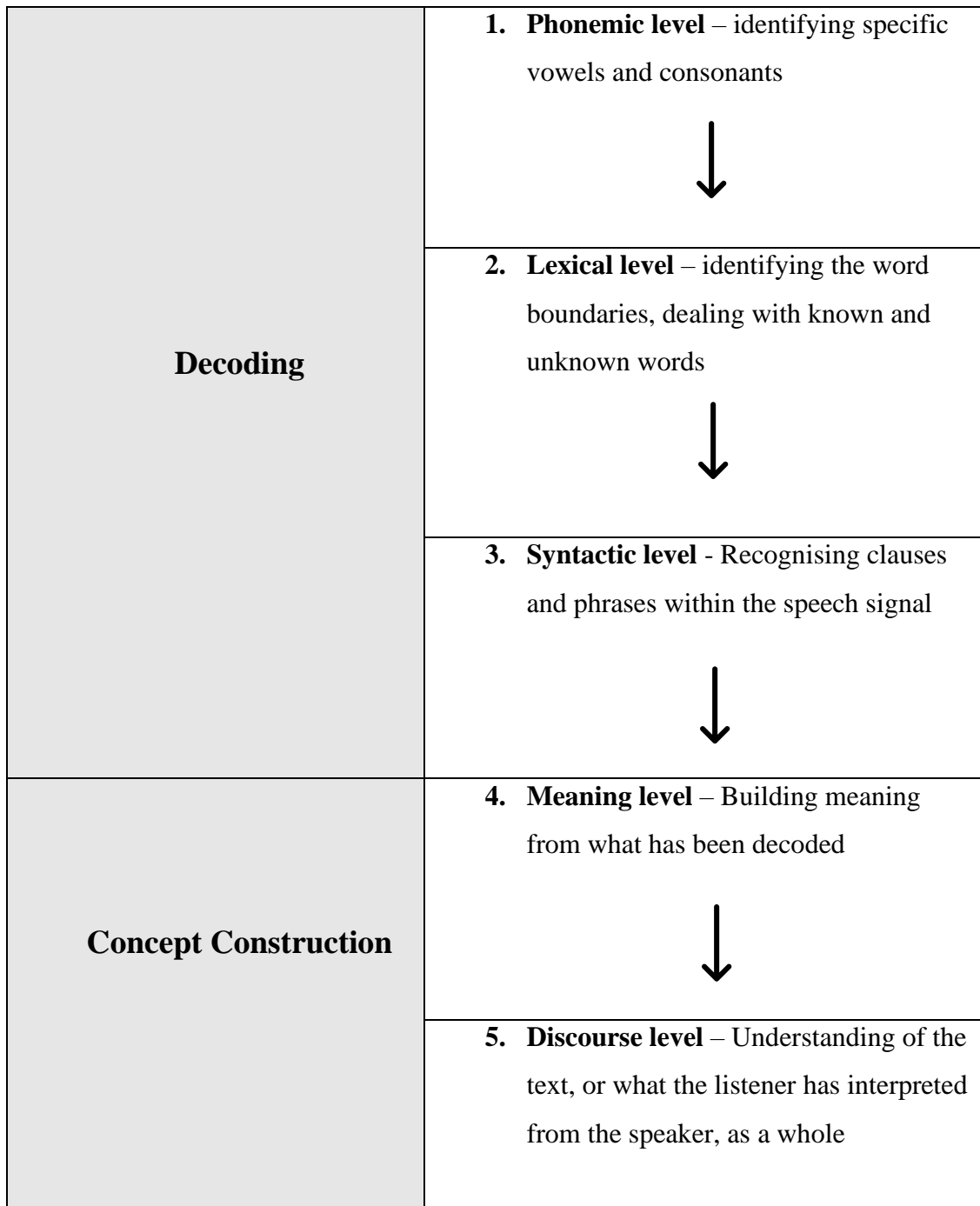


Figure 2.1 shows how the process of listening can be divided into a decoding and concept construction. Within these stages, the listener must process phonemic features up to understanding the discourse level of the overall text. This multi-level process makes listening skills and the ability to process spoken language complex. In L1 listening, this ability relies heavily on an adaptation to the structure of the native language; as a child,

we acquire phonological knowledge of our first language (L1). Whilst L2 listening is rooted in the same processing, as the same skills are needed, an existing adaptation to a listener's native language makes an adaptation to a new language's sounds and ambiguities challenging. Previous research has highlighted this disparity; L2 learners have a significant difficulty in mastering new phonological elements (Kuhl et al., 2008). Consequently, L2 learners are expected to have more difficulties adapting to differences in L2 pronunciation.

Features of a listener's L1, such as phonemic categories, are well established and practised in the early life. Adult learners developing L2 abilities can therefore be constrained by the established phonemic categories of their L1 (Cutler, 2012) such as the adult learners who participated in the current study. This current study aims to assess if these challenges are exacerbated with accent, specifically LE.

To further understand what listening entails for learners, we must not only consider what is different from learning to listen to an L1 but also consider the specific processes involved. Rost (2011) highlights the 'invisible process' of listening, describing the interactive and interpretative processing involved (p. 2). The nature of listening encompasses numerous linguistic characteristics; these features include the phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse structure and language (Buck, 2001).

Rost (2011) comments that within effective listening there are different types of processing that overlap; 'neurological processing, linguistic processing, semantic processing, and pragmatic processing' complement each other in explaining how we listen to and process what we hear (p. 9). Rost (2011) highlights that 'listening is an integrated ability that requires a number of overlapping psycholinguistic abilities' (p. 117), giving detail from how we are able to hear a sound, to the attention we are able to give to the sound we hear and our consciousness within the overall process.

Linguistic processing requires a linguistic input and is what most learners would 'consider the fundamental aspect of listening to language' (Rost, 2011, p. 9). Looking deeper into this aspect of listening as a whole will allow a greater understanding of how different or unexpected phonology may impact listening. As discussed in the Introduction, this study focuses on the impact of LE on learners' listening experiences; this study is most interested in how an L2 listener may process the differing phonology of spoken English.

Cutler (2012) comments that within linguistic processing, 'successful listening requires at least that listeners can:

- distinguish minimal interword contrasts (i.e. phonemic contrasts).
- activate words from memory.
- segment continuous speech into its component words.
- and construct sentences from the resulting words.’ (p. 304)

It is these areas of distinguishing contrasts and segmenting speech where phonemic differences from speakers’ accents may impact the L2 students’ ability to comprehend the English they thought they were prepared for.

How listeners process precise linguistic input has long been categorised in to two forms: top-down and bottom-up processing (Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Rost, 2011; Vandergrift, 2011:). Vandergrift (2011) comments on the difference between bottom-up and top-down processing noting that ‘bottom-up processing involves decoding, i.e., segmenting the sound stream into meaningful units’ whereas ‘top-down processing involves the application of context and prior knowledge to build a conceptual framework for interpretation purposes’ (p. 456).

When discussing these methods of processing, an important distinction should be made: bottom-up and top-down refer to the direction of the processing rather than the type of material. Field (1999) highlights that top-down and bottom-up processing are more complex than often suggested. These processes do not relate to the type of material being processed, but the direction in which they are being processed (e.g., building from small units up to larger, or starting with larger and breaking this down into smaller units).

In bottom-up processing, listeners gain understanding from the smallest meaningful units, developing from phonemes and syllables to form words, clauses, sentences and so on (Rost, 2011). Bottom-up processing focuses on ‘actual evidence in the speech signal’ (Field, 2004, p. 40) building from smaller units. In contrast, in top-down processing listeners begin by using larger units of background and contextual knowledge to begin to understand the detail of what they hear (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Rost, 2011). Whilst these models allow for an indication of the direction of processing, these processes do not happen in isolation; there is often an interplay between the two.

Buck (2001) comments that bottom-up and top-down processes can happen both simultaneously and in a different order. Simply using these terms to define the overall process of listening is problematic (Field, 2009). Due to the complexity of listening one

cannot assume that there is a simple progression, in either direction of small to larger units; both interact, compensating for one another to allow for understanding. An interactive model that represents the combination of bottom-up and top-down processing is now widely accepted (Carney, 2020; Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009) and provides a more realistic representation of how listening is an ‘online’ process (Field, 2009).

Field (2009) provides a more detailed framework to evaluate the processes involved in listening, avoiding the complications of the terms bottom-up and top-down processing and highlighting the actions that take place. The two operations, which are closely interconnected, that make up the skill of listening are defined by Field (2009) as:

- *decoding*: translating the speech signal into speech sounds, words and clauses, and finally into a literal meaning.
- *meaning building*: adding to the bare meaning provided by decoding and relating it to what has been said before. (p. 125)

These two interconnected operations allow for a picture of how learners process listening, decoding units and finding meaning non-sequentially and continuously as they hear the speech signal. Listening can be viewed as an ‘online activity, with the listener decoding the sounds of speech at a delay behind the speaker of as little as a quarter of a second’ (Field, 2009, p. 129). As the focus of the current study is the spoken interactions that students encounter outside of the classroom setting (within the SA context), this speed of processing is pertinent. These processes which are highly automatic and accurate for L1 speakers (Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009) must go through these learnt processes of decoding and meaning building for the L2 listener. Outside of the classroom, spoken interactions can often be quick and time sensitive in contexts such as service encounters (supermarkets, banks, food servers etc.); the necessity for quick and accurate processing can be extremely challenging. This may be made more challenging with unexpected phonology or phonemic categories, that are presented to learners through regional accents, such as LE.

Within the same processing time of an L1 user, L2 learners must give ‘additional attention [...] to decoding unfamiliar sounds and words’ (Field, 2009, p. 85-6). Whilst this decoding process is complex and challenging in learning an L2, learners can ‘adapt to unfamiliar characteristics’ (Field, 2009, p. 114) to develop their listening skills. The

current study aims to assess what impact is had on students' communication experiences when they have not had the opportunity to adapt; the pronunciation they may encounter in LE is unexpected and unfamiliar. The nature of accent familiarity, and how students may acquire this, is discussed in more detail later in this chapter (section 2.3.2.2, p. 33).

Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018) further highlight the complexities associated with receptive skills, such as listening; they note the particular difficulties of developing L2 listening skills in 'controlled practice' as there are many introspective processes involved. This not only highlights that, due the nature of listening, it is complex to 'teach' or 'practice', but also that there are numerous factors within the listening process to address and isolating where problems lie is not a simple task.

Vandergrift (2007) acknowledges the nature of listening, commenting that, as it is often viewed as the most complex skill to develop, it can cause anxiety for learners. As listening skills are often taught and evaluated via production of other skills, such as dictation activities, learners can develop negative associations with listening. This can be exacerbated by the speed at which listening processing happens. When reading, learners have a text to process and to refer back to. Cutler (2001) highlights how word boundaries, evident on the page of a written text, are difficult to determine in spoken language. Furthermore, the influence of the rhythms of a listener's L1 can influence the segmentation procedures they may naturally use (Cutler, 2001; 2012). Taguchi (2008) highlights that listening is unique in its skills development as learners have to comprehend language without anything to refer back to; learners reference point relies heavily on their short-term memory (Rost, 2011).

Both the speed of processing and the lack of reference points emphasises the importance of familiarisation or awareness of listening difficulties, such as the variation in pronunciation that is found in regional accents of English. These complexities of listening can be further exacerbated through features such as phonetic accommodation; 'speakers modify the pronunciation of a word in the interests of making an easy transition from one sound to another' (Field, 2004, p. 1). Even in standard pronunciation, such as Standard Southern British (SSB), words are pronounced differently within connected speech. SSB is defined in this study as the accent associated with the South of England; a contemporary accent developed from RP. This variety is discussed in more detail in section 2.5 (p. 44).

Assimilation, elision, and vowel reduction all contribute to different phonological elements (Brown & Kondo-Brown. 2006, p. 2.). The features of connected speech are

discussed in more detail later in this chapter in section 2.2.1 (p. 18). L2 listeners must be able to adapt to such variation when processing spoken English effectively. Rost (2011) comments that successful listeners must be able to tolerate ambiguities of natural speech as these features are used to ‘shorten both production and reception time’ in connected speech (p. 40). These features, regardless of accent, influence listeners’ comprehension, impacting their ability to segment the language they hear. The current study will assess how these features, when presented in two different accents (LE and SSB), may be comprehended differently.

Vandergrift (2011) highlights that listening can become a ‘problem-solving activity where listeners reconcile linguistic input with their store of knowledge in order to solve the problem of what is meant by the speaker’ (p. 458). In this problem-solving process, if learners’ ‘store of knowledge’ does not include awareness or exposure to variation in accent, it may inhibit or delay their ability to process the spoken input; learners may not understand because an unexpected accent causes them to miss subsequent elements or causes confusion (Goh, 2000).

Research has highlighted that listening is complex due to the speed and simultaneous processing that is required (Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Rost, 2011; Vandergrift, 2011). Additional factors such as different pronunciation, can further complicate this process, even halting it. Song & Iverson’s (2018) study investigating listening effort during speech perception indicates that L2 listening requires additional effort and that ‘speech recognition is affected by the similarity between the talker’s and listener’s accents rather than being purely driven by overall proficiency’ (p. 163). These findings suggest that familiarity, or similarity, to an accent has a greater impact on comprehension ability than overall proficiency. More detail of how accent familiarity may be impacting learners’ comprehension is discussed in section 2.3.2.2 (p. 33).

Song & Iverson (2018) also discuss that ‘the match between [L2 speech] and a listener’s expectations can be [...] less reliable than with more-consistent L1 speech’ (p. 167). The mis-match between learners’ listening expectations and the reality complicates the learnt listening processes and increases listener effort. Whilst this is discussed in relation to NNS accented speech, the current study examines that this is also prevalent in NS regional varieties. LE has been used in to demonstrate the impact not exposing learners to variation in spoken language may have on listener effort and learners’ emotional or behavioural responses to this.

Field (2009) acknowledges that in order for effective connections to be made to form the necessary decoding process the listener must also first have ‘confidence in her ability’ (p. 79). This confidence is required to process spoken language effectively and continue to develop skills to increase the automaticity found in L1 listening abilities. The researcher believes that it is this confidence that is significantly impacted by learners’ lack of awareness of phonological differences as learners are not able to meet their expected listening proficiencies. Accents, and their unexpected phonological features, can impact the necessary ‘confidence in [their] ability’ that learners require to effectively comprehend spoken language in a variety of contexts.

Research has further highlighted that listening is often a skill which produces anxiety in learners (Graham, 2006; Rost, 2011; Vandergrift, 2011;). ‘L2 teaching typically focuses on the product of listening: the correct answer’ (Vandergrift, 2011, p. 464). This focus on the production of a right or wrong answer can result in a high level of anxiety in learners. Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018) also highlight the stress and anxiety learners associate with listening as a consequence of such listening activities; students often expect to be assessed on some form of language production immediately after they listen to a text. Nair et al. (2014) highlight that the focus of previous SLA studies, in relation to listening, has been on the product of listening rather than the process. To respond to this, the current study focuses its methodology on the process of listening, more importantly participants’ experience of these processes.

Graham (2006) comments that factors outside of learners’ control, such as the unexpected pronunciation in a speaker’s accent, can increase anxiety further, impacting the listening processes that they have developed. Research has indicated that students rely on their ‘store of knowledge’ and existing ‘confidence in [their] ability’ (Field, 2009; Vandergrift, 2011), however, the direct connection between how these factors impact listeners lived experiences has not been established. The current study examines how accent may be influencing students’ listening experiences. Due to numerous aspects of listening, including variation in the signal depending on connected speech and the speaker themselves, the researcher perceives that accent has a significant impact on learners’ ability to decode the speech they hear.

Features of spoken language which complicate the process of listening, such as connected speech, will now be outlined. Following this, a more detailed of discussion of how these features impact the L2 listener will be presented.

2.2.1 Connected Speech

One characteristic of spoken language that all listeners have to tolerate is connected speech. Collins et al. (2019) discuss the surprises of connected speech, commenting that this complication in the speech signal happens in all languages to ‘simplify the articulation process’ (p. 122), but the ways in which this can be heard is different in different languages. In English, connected speech is frequent and can significantly alter the way words sound in their citation form to how they sound in a stream of continuous speech.

When highlighted to them, this difference between the citation form of a word and how it is produced in a connected speech process is often even a surprise for the L1 speaker (Collins et al., 2019). These processes are unconscious and developed from ease and need to communicate quickly and efficiently. Connected speech processes are prevalent and unconscious in L1 speech, therefore these features are something all listeners must be aware of, or able to adapt to, to be able to comprehend language effectively.

Brown & Kondo-Brown (2006, p. 2.) outline the many features of connected speech as:

- word stress
- sentence stress and timing
- reduction
- citation and weak forms of words
- elision
- intrusion
- assimilation
- transition
- liaison
- contraction

These features alter the speech signal, presenting a challenge to listeners. For example, assimilation can cause ‘handbag’ to become ‘hambag’; elision can cause ‘camera’ to become ‘camra’. In these instances, connected speech complicates the signal, altering a word from how it sounds in its citation form. The key difference for L2 listeners is this

discrepancy between what they have learnt in isolation, in their citation form, rather than within connected speech (Field, 2009).

Connected speech processes are frequent and unconscious, however, Collins et al. (2019) highlights that there are patterns in these processes, they are not just a ‘matter of chance’ (p. 122). For example, phonetic conditioning (which includes assimilation and elision) explains the reduction that is often apparent in consonant clusters. Connected speech alters pronunciation in relation to what is being articulated before or after. The wider texts (the phrase, the sentence, the paragraph) impact how connected speech processes are applied in the speech signal.

It is these patterns, or familiar ways of producing words in a stream of speech, which allow the L1 listener to accommodate for them and process input with little difficulty. As discussed in more detail later in this review in relation to accent familiarity (p. 21), the L1 listener is able to activate familiar stored forms. However, to the L2 listener connected speech causes spoken language to sound notably different than one would expect based on only the written form. The lack of word boundaries as a result of connected speech reduces clarity. Unlike in written language, word boundaries are often unclear or not marked at all (Cutler, 2012) creating listening difficulties. This challenges the process of decoding and segmenting continuous speech for the listener (Cutler, 2012).

Another feature which causes further variation in the speech signal is unique to the individual speaker. Speaker delivery creates additional variation that the successful listener must be able to adapt to.

2.2.2 Speaker Delivery

There are many features of speaker delivery which also influence the process of listening. Within a speech signal, a speaker’s voice can also impact listening abilities. How each speaker articulates their utterance varies depending on each individual’s physical features (such as their tongue, teeth and mouth shape and size). Further to this, speakers’ voices differ depending on their gender; the voices of men and women have notable differences in pitch (Field, 2003). This feature of speaker delivery has been taken into account in the design of listening experiences in the current study; this is discussed in more detail later in section 3.4.2.1 (p. 93). Additionally, voice and accent familiarity play a role in ease of

listening and listener effort. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter in relation specifically to accent familiarity.

Another feature of speaker delivery that can impact both L1 and L2 listening processing is the length of the utterance a listener is expected to comprehend. The longer the length of the utterance the more information the listener is required to process. This is especially relevant to the participants in this study who are students at university. Listening to speech at length in a lecture setting can add additional effort in the listening process. Students are unable to interact or negotiate meaning in this type of listening; it is in this setting that the listener must be able to process a large volume of speech. Cutler (2012) highlights this, commenting that even those learners who perform well in listening may still have ‘great trouble listening to natural continuous speech (e.g., a lecture in the L2)’ (p. 339) as it can prove difficult to segment a stream of continuous speech. This is then complicated further by the rate the speech is delivered by the speaker.

2.2.2.1 Speech Rate

Speech rate can also change depending on the speaker and, as with other features in the speech signal, can complicate the listening process. However, the phonemic knowledge we have adapted to with our own L1 as a child allows an L1 listener to process speech at speed with little trouble. Listeners can understand their L1 at remarkably fast rates of speech; Dupoux & Green (1997) found that listeners can comprehend language spoken at a rate faster than a human speaker can communicate.

Rost (2011) acknowledges that speech rate is only one of the factors that can ease comprehension, and that it does not apply for all listeners. Other features, such as pausing, are more relevant in improving comprehension. Other factors may equally or be more significant in causing a barrier to effective listening experiences. As has been previously discussed in relation to listening processing (p.10), an individual’s ability to effectively process the linguistic input they hear involves numerous factors and levels. Throughout the development of the current study an awareness of prevalent listening difficulties in addition to phonological differences has been maintained. For example, speech rate was measured and considered in the choosing of extracts of spoken English to present to participants in listening experiences; this is discussed in more detail in section 3.4.2.1 (p. 93).

Some features of spoken language can be exacerbated by rate of delivery. Collins et al. (2019) highlights for instance, that many features of connected speech are more frequent in faster speech. Whilst this is true, speech rate can often be undeservedly blamed for other difficulties in the listening process. This is evident in another feature of speaker delivery which the listener must process in successful listening, speaker accent.

2.2.2.2 Speaker Accent and Accent Familiarity

Firstly, in discussing speaker accent, an important distinction in terminology should be made; the terms accent and dialect can often be used synonymously to refer to the way a speaker sounds. Accent refers to the pronunciation and phonology of spoken language, whereas dialect can include other features such as region-specific vocabulary and grammar (terms also defined in the List of Terms, p. xii). Carr (2013) comments that ‘differences in accent concern solely phonetic and phonological variation, whereas dialect differences involve more than this: they also include differences in vocabulary and syntax’ (p.41). Accent, rather than the term dialect, is used throughout this thesis to refer to phonological variation in spoken English.

Accents can cause listeners difficulties and can increase listener effort. In listening to spoken language accent differences can influence the sound of speech from the phonemic level. This adds further variation to the speech signal and forces the listener to adapt to effectively gain understanding. L1 listeners may have to adapt to unfamiliarity in pronunciation in regional accents and accents from other NS English countries (e.g., an Australian English speaker listening to a British English speaker). In such listening there has been found to be perceived adjustment, which is impacted by both variation in the speech signal and perception of accents. Major et al.’s (2005) study indicated that L1 listeners experience difficulty when listening to NS accents of English other than their own. This study employed Standard American English to contrast how NS and NNS listeners comprehend spoken input. It was highlighted that NS listeners had a level of comprehension difficulties in relation to other NS varieties (Australian English) and regional NS varieties (Southern American English). However, this was to a lesser degree than NNSs’ difficulties. Major et al.’s (2005) study is discussed in greater detail, in closer relation to L2 listening difficulties, later in this review (section 2.3.3, p. 34).

The unfamiliarity of accented pronunciation increases listener effort. However, interestingly in relation to the current study, the L1 advantage makes this process smoother than for the L2 listener. While accent may be unfamiliar, research (Major et al., 2005) suggests that the effort required is easier to adapt to. This highlights the relevance of the L1 advantage and of accent familiarity.

To discuss accent familiarity, a view of how it is acquired is necessary. Two central models of L1 word recognition have previously considered how the L1 listener processes speech. Marslen-Wilson & Welsh's (1978) Cohort Model indicates that a set of candidate words is activated based on the initial phoneme heard. As the listener hears more input, this 'set' of words is decreased and narrowed down. With more input, a word can then be identified. McClelland & Elman's (1986) TRACE model focuses on layers of units rather than focusing on the initial phoneme heard. In this connectionist model features interact during processing. This model highlights listening taking place in real time, therefore the listener processes input independent of phoneme or word boundaries; connected sections of what they hear are linked to what immediately came before it (McClelland & Elman, 1986). In both of these models, however, speaker specific details are disregarded.

Building on this, exemplar-based models have highlighted that features are stored in a listeners' memory and employed when processing spoken language (Docherty & Foulkes, 2014; Johnson, 1997). These models assume that when an L1 listener hears language, they form categories with which they store examples of variation; these categories are activated when they hear that same variation at a later time. Such models explain how as listeners, previous listening experiences or increased familiarity, develop our abilities to manage variation in the speech signal. Variation in speech, which affects phonetic and lexical processing, therefore can be influenced by if the L1 listener has been exposed to the variation before. This highlights the influence of accent familiarity on the listening process and indicates a further complication in the development of L2 listening skills. Key factors, specifically speech rate and accent, will now be discussed in more detail in relation to L2 listening difficulties.

2.3 L2 Listening Difficulties

The degree or amount of listening difficulties students may experience when they first arrive in the UK is often unexpected. Learners of English can find listening challenging when they first arrive. The level of difficulty can be exacerbated by existing factors, such as previous learning experiences, or new factors, such as the most common language spoken in their accommodation. With all levels of learners, it is important to consider that there is not one singular reason for L2 listening difficulties (Cutler, 2012).

Buck (2001) comments that simple factors such as the level of background noise can impact listening and cause difficulties; as with other features, such as accent, this can be in stark contrast to the listening learners have experienced in a classroom context. They discuss how the context of listening influences how learners can interpret what is being said. Buck (2001) notes the realities of day-to-day listening and how this input is different than what is heard in the classroom or through testing. It is, however, important for learners to establish that it is not necessary to understand every detail straight away and there is an opportunity to negotiate meaning. In real-life communication, to overcome difficulties, it is essential to be flexible in understanding different input types; language is used in many different ways in different settings, where listeners have to accommodate different features such as background noise and the elements of ‘speaker factor’ (Chang et al., 2013).

Goh (1999) outlined the five major causes of listening difficulties as vocabulary, prior knowledge, speech rate, input types and speaker’s accent. Their study looked at factors which influence learners’ listening comprehension and importantly learners’ awareness of them. Similarly, to the current study, participants were a group of Chinese students; students in the study completed learner diaries and interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on their own learning experiences. Goh’s (1999) five categories of listening difficulties were created based on the most common factors that students themselves reported influenced their listening comprehension. The study compared two proficiency levels; the findings indicated that higher proficiency level learners identified more factors, however ‘they also saw listening as an interactive process in which both the listener and the speaker shared a responsibility for meaning construction’ (p. 17). These findings align with Buck’s (2001) comments on the realities of day-to-day listening; there are opportunities to negotiate meaning.

Goh (1999) also comments on their previous study (1998) that investigated students' knowledge of listening comprehension. This study aimed to examine the factors that influence listening comprehension as well students' awareness of these factors. Goh (1999) states that 'metacognition, or what learners know about their learning processes, is said to have an effect on the outcome of learning' (p. 18). Their study examined how students' knowledge and awareness of listening linked to their listening skills. This relates to the methods chosen in the current study; the study will examine students' reflective data regarding their ongoing and previous experiences listening to English.

Expanding on Goh's (1999) categorisation of listening difficulties, Chang et al. (2013) confirmed that there is a consensus among research that 'generally shows that speech rate, new vocabulary (new terms, slang or colloquial expressions), prior knowledge (new concepts), and speaker's pronunciation (accent) are the most frequently mentioned difficulties' (p. 418-9). The focus of Chang et al.'s (2013) research was also Chinese students' experience of English. Their study shows elements of speaker factor as 'major hindrances' to listening comprehension. Chang et al.'s (2013) study endeavoured to establish the importance of each factor in listening comprehension when learning a second language; this study used questionnaires to examine this further. In contrast to the current study, the participants were specifically low-level learners, therefore findings relating to listening difficulties may be different.

Chang et al. (2013) suggest that familiarity to spoken English features, such as accent, should be considered from both teacher and learner perspectives. 'To address the speaker factor, L2 teachers need to expose their students to a variety of spoken English with different characteristics, such as different accents, pronunciation, and speech rates' (Chang et al., 2013, p. 427). From student perspectives, they should focus on 'listening to authentic input, and doing extensive listening practice' (p. 431) to increase their ability to understand spoken English even when it differs from standard forms. This relates closely to the importance of acknowledging listening as a skill which needs to be developed and worked on, it is not a passive skill (Nunan, 2002).

Exposure to language in use may reduce the impact of 'speaker factor' (Chang et al., 2013) but which features of spoken English have the most impact on communication in specific contexts (such as SA) have not been examined in detail. Anecdotally, the researcher has found that accent is identified by learners as the main listening difficulty they experience when they first arrive in Liverpool, but whether accent is the most problematic feature in 'speaker factor' is up for debate.

Connected speech, speech rate and accent familiarity are three key concerns within listening skills (Carney, 2020; Chang et al., 2013; Goh, 1999; 2000). These speaker variables, or those factors which may be most unexpected by the upper intermediate level listener, will now be discussed in more detail.

2.3.1 Connected speech

Research has acknowledged that connected speech is a difficulty for learners (Brown & Kondo-Brown, 2006; Carney, 2020; Kennedy & Blanchet, 2014; Koster, 1987). As highlighted in relation to listening processes (p. 18), connected speech is a feature of natural spoken language that all listeners must adapt to in order to comprehend language effectively. Importantly for L2 listeners, there is a discrepancy between the words and phrases that students have learnt in isolation to how they sound when in a stream of connected speech (Field, 2009). This can impact students' comprehension and word recognition abilities.

Koster's (1987) study examined students' word recognition abilities, comparing L1 and L2 speakers. This study found that L2 speakers had greater difficulty decoding speech, even of known lexis. Koster (1987) commented that these difficulties were due to connected speech and the L2 listeners' inability to segment the words they heard within a stream of continuous speech. These findings have been supported by more recent research (Carney, 2020; Kennedy & Blanchet, 2014) confirming that connected speech can result in learners failing to recognise words, causing listening difficulties. Learners may know words spoken in isolation, but numerous features such as elision, assimilation and transition, mean they fail to recognise these words.

Kennedy & Blanchet (2014) employed a longitudinal study to explore L2 listeners' understanding of connected speech in relation to their language awareness. L2 French learners who were taking part in a course to actively improve their ability to comprehend connected speech participated. Their perception of connected speech processes was assessed through dictation tasks. This study concluded that students' perception of connected speech did improve after specific instruction of connected speech processes, however this study did not have a control group in relation to length of stay in a NS country. Consequently, the study was unable to determine if the improved perception of connected speech was due to the additional instruction or time spent in a NS country.

Carney's (2020) study examined learners' difficulties in comprehending known lexis. L2 listeners can struggle to comprehend words they know in isolation when presented to them in continuous connected speech (Cutler, 2012; Huang, 2004). Carney's (2020) study assessed how Japanese English language learners were able to recall and repeat text across multiple and different listening opportunities. The findings of this study indicated that, at varied proficiency levels, students experienced listening difficulties and misinterpretations. Importantly to the current thesis, Carney (2020) highlights that students experience difficulties beyond the frequency of words they know; their existing knowledge and proficiency was still impacted by the variability present in spoken English. This study also attributed difficulties to L1 phonological influence. As with the level of ability, this factor will be controlled where possible in the current study to limit the variables in assessing how LE impacts learners' listening. Carney (2020) also highlights that accent familiarity plays a key role in students being able to recognise and comprehend known lexis. It is the comparison between the connected speech of a familiar accent and an unfamiliar accent where the focus of the current research project lies.

Crucially, words are pronounced differently within connected speech regardless of the accent of the speaker. Several features contribute to altering phonological elements in the speech signal (Brown & Kondo-Brown, 2006; Cutler, 2012). Here is where the present study will focus its attention. Connected speech is key to variability within the speech signal, however, if upper intermediate level learners are able to understand this in standard forms (such as SSB, defined in section 2.5, p. 44) a closer determination that an unfamiliar accent, LE, is the greater barrier to listening may be made. As outlined by Brown & Kondo-Brown (2006), connected speech is not solely used in specific contexts and registers. Previous associations of connected speech only being used in informal settings has been discredited; students will hear connected speech in academic and non-academic settings.

It is also relevant to note that within LE there are specific 'stigmatised connected speech processes' (Clark & Watson, 2011). Accent can, as with LE, exacerbate connected speech processes; such processes can be perceived negatively by listeners. Discussed in more detail in section 2.6 (p. 47) in an outline of perceptions of LE, there are some features of connected speech, when linked to certain accents, that can be perceived negatively. Clark & Watson's (2011) research specifically looked at '*t-to-r* [...] e.g., 'shut up' [ʃʊɪr ʊp]' (p. 523) noting this feature as a 'stigmatised connected speech process' (Clark & Watson, 2011).

Features of connected speech may be present in the majority of native speech, to a lesser or greater degree, but there are more varied and specific features associated with certain accents. This further indicates the complexities that accent, specifically LE, may present to learners when they arrive in the SA experience. Importantly, successful listeners must be able to tolerate these ambiguities of natural speech as these features are used to ‘shorten both production and reception time’ (Rost, 2011, p. 40) and they are ubiquitous in all accents of English.

2.3.2 Speech Rate

Speech rate is a common listening difficulty for learners of any language (Carney, 2020; Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009; Goh, 1999). Chang et al. (2013) comment that speech rate has been considered one of the most significant factors in L2 English listening comprehension. Listeners can understand their L1 at remarkably fast rates of speech; Dupoux & Green (1997) found that listeners can comprehend language spoken at a rate faster than a human speaker can communicate. However, the ability to comprehend continuous language at pace is challenging when translated to listening to L2 speech. This connects with how listening is processed, as previously discussed in section 2.2. The phonemic knowledge we have adapted to with our own L1 as a child gives us a wealth of knowledge to draw from. The L2 listener is not able to access the same resources as easily and therefore speech rate can impact comprehension (Munro & Derwing, 1995); this additional processing burden is placed in on the L2 listener.

Research has indicated that increased speech rate impedes the processing of spoken words and that high speech rates have lower accuracy in transcription tasks (Bradlow & Pisoni, 1999; Sajin & Connine, 2017). However, it is arguable if transcription is the most effective way to gauge actual understanding. This method involves production and repetition of exact discourse; as commonly shown in this kind of research, the focus appears to be on accuracy, rather than meaning.

Whilst speed of speech is expected to cause difficulties for L2 listeners, Dilley & Pitt’s (2010) study identifies that altering, slowing or speeding up, speech rate can impact word recognition for L1 listeners also. Speech rate can affect processing of utterances in numerous ways, impacting how listeners segment speech (Sajin & Connine, 2017). This

provides an interesting insight into how listeners process spoken language; however, this may also indicate that if learners can understand conversational speech rate in one accent (i.e., a standard form) these methods of processing, segmenting etc., can theoretically be applied to other accents. Does this begin to suggest that accent is the problem?

Predictions of Sajin & Connine's (2017) study were that words will be more difficult to process at faster speech rates. The study used Romanian accented English to compare with American English. All participants in this study were NSs of English and focused on accuracy rather than meaning. Participants listened to recordings and identified what it was in written form. This form of testing was both accuracy focused and not interactive. The findings of this study suggested that 'when listeners hear accented speech, [...] variability in speech rate does not generally influence access to semantics' (p. 630).

Munro & Derwing (2001), however, reported 'very slow speech and very fast speech having higher accented scores and poorer comprehensibility' (p. 630). They comment that 'slow speech draws out the acoustic information that makes accented speech different from native speech' (p. 630). This data suggests that speech at slower rates may be perceived as more 'accented' and consequently less comprehensible, as it highlights different phonetic features in speech. Munro & Derwing (2001) commented that slower speech does not necessarily enhance listening comprehension. They discuss that a determination on the impact speech rate has on comprehension cannot be made; their 1998 study found that poorer comprehensibility rates were found in speech at slower rates. Unnaturally slow speech rates may exaggerate other features and therefore negatively impact comprehensibility (Munro & Derwing, 2001).

Previous studies have highlighted that simply slowing speech rate does not result in understanding (Munro & Derwing, 2001), however, it cannot be ignored that L1 speech rate will make the speech signal harder for the L2 listener to decode (Carney, 2020). Methods such as measuring and comparing the speech rate of listening input will allow for a balanced look at the impact accent has, if any, on learners' listening experiences. Speaker variables, such as speech rate, have been controlled in the current study's data collection methods (discussed in section 3.4.2, p. 92).

Speech rate was found to be a significant difficulty in Huang's (2004) study. This research looked at Chinese students studying at an American university; it focused on L2 students listening to academic English and looked at how professors can make listening easier for NNS students. As with the participants in this thesis, students were in the SA context and, as a result, Huang's (2004) study prioritised looking at professors speaking

in lectures as this accounts for a high proportion of students' listening when they are studying at university. Speech rate is highly relevant in this context as professors may speak at length in a lecture setting, in a monologue rather than a conversation. Students are unable to interact or negotiate meaning in this type of listening; it is understandable that speech rate would be a significant factor in students being able to process a large volume of speech. Cutler (2012) highlights this, commenting that even those learners who perform well in listening may still have 'great trouble listening to natural continuous speech (e.g., a lecture in the L2)' (p. 339) as it can prove difficult to segment a stream of continuous speech. This can be markedly exacerbated with a higher speech rate.

Huang's (2004) study reported that the majority of Chinese students in the study did not have NS English teachers when learning English in China and consequently did not have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the normal or natural speed of NSs' speech. These findings highlight that speech rate can be a significant factor in listening, even in the academic setting, but that it is also a factor of NS speech that students could be exposed to.

The students in the current study will be in a similar SA context as those in Huang's (2004) study, however the study will be focused on students' interactions outside of the lecture hall. It is unlikely that in such interactions as service encounters and conversations with their peers that they will need to understand long periods of continuous speech.

It is also important to consider, in relation to the SA context of the participants in the current study that, the apparent difficulty of speech rate can be amplified in a NS country. In NS to NS communication speech rate is often significantly higher than NS to NNS and NNS to NNS. This is evidenced in the CEFR (2018) which outlines that there are different levels of listening skills required to understand conversation between other speakers. Cutler (2012) comments that there is also, with all languages, a 'common impression that foreign languages are spoken faster' (p. 338) and 'when comprehension is impaired for any reason, rate of speech may get the blame' (p. 339). Speech rate can both add to difficulties caused by other features (such as accent) and may often be blamed for accent-originating problems. Maintaining features within the current research project, such as speech rate, will allow for an assessment of other features such as accent.

2.3.3 Speaker Accent and Accent Familiarity

A speaker's accent and whether a listener is familiar to it can both be features which impact listening comprehension. The following sections will discuss how a speaker's accent can influence learners' ability to understand speech. The review will then go on to discuss how such difficulties may be intensified by a listener's degree of accent familiarity.

2.3.2.1 Speaker Accent

Speaker accent has been identified as a common factor in listening difficulties for L2 listeners (Carney, 2020; Chang et al., 2013; Goh, 1999). Accent is listed by Goh (1999) and Chang et al. (2013) as one of the predominant factors contributing to listening difficulties; arguably, accent is one of the most significant difficulties, especially for those visiting the UK. As Hughes et al. (2012) comment, when visiting the British Isles 'the English that most British [...] people speak seems to be different in many ways from the English the visitor has learned' (p. 1). Accent is one of the unavoidable realities in spoken English which alters the speech signal significantly.

Derwing & Munro (2009) comment that 'one of the most salient aspects of speech is accent'. They highlight the nature of accent in intelligibility and comprehensibility and how it has been 'blamed for all sorts of things' (p. 476) from communication problems to discrimination such as racism. In the discussion of accent and the impact it has on understanding, we must also distinguish the key terms of intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness. As outlined in the List of Terms (p. xii), intelligibility is the extent to which a learner can understand the words they hear, whilst comprehensibility is a listener's perception of how they can understand a speaker's meaning (Shephard et al., 2017). The important distinction between these two constructs is that intelligibility is how much the listener actually understands, and comprehensibility is the perceived effort to understand it (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Shephard et al., 2017). Consequently, comprehensibility is often harder to assess. Finally, accentedness refers to the degree to which the phonology of speech sounds different in comparison to a standard variety; Derwing & Munro (2009) comments that it can also be defined as 'how different a pattern of speech sounds compared to the local variety' (p. 478).

Research has highlighted that accent, and associated accentedness, can be identified by L2 learners and can cause difficulties (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Issacs & Trofimovich, 2012). Derwing & Munro (2009) discuss listener perception and the remarkable ability with which listeners can identify NNS speech. They highlight Flege's (1984) earlier work that stated that listeners could distinguish foreign accented speech 'on the basis of only 30 ms of speech' (p. 477). Major (2007) also found that 'people can distinguish foreign-accented speech samples from native-produced samples in languages they don't speak' (p. 477). Features of accent are highly prominent leading to this rapid rate of recognition; listeners can easily and quickly note a difference and identify 'outsiders' based on their speech (Scovel, 1988). Listeners can make judgements on speakers quickly, identifying characteristics based on the different ways people produce speech (Derwing & Munro, 2009).

Importantly, Derwing & Munro (2009) acknowledge that 'having an accent doesn't necessarily impinge on communication – but sometimes it does' (p. 478). It is this 'sometimes' that this current research project will investigate; why or when does accent 'impinge on communication'. In discussing their research, they highlight the 'robust finding [...that] intelligibility and accentedness are partially independent' (p. 479). Someone having an accent does not necessarily lead to immediate listening difficulties; there may be a closer connection to the degree of accentedness or learners' perception of this.

Derwing & Munro (2009) discuss that, in their research, there was often a consensus on what was qualified as a strong or heavy accent and, consequently, what was easy to understand. As they comment, 'listener's judgements are the only meaningful window into accentedness and comprehensibility' (p. 478) and 'what listeners' perceive is ultimately what matters most' (p. 478). This relates to the reasoning behind the wealth of reflective data in the current study; as discussed in Chapter 3, understanding how students experience accents provides a greater understanding into their language learning than simply listening proficiency testing. Furthermore, in relation to the SA experience, real-life communication encompasses more features than can be effectively assessed in testing (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018; Taguchi, 2011).

Derwing & Munro (2009) also discuss the findings of their 1997 study, highlighting that when perceived accentedness increases, comprehensibility directly decreases. They also found however, that it is possible to be perceived as having a heavy accent and as still being intelligible. Such findings suggest that, whilst perceived accentedness may

cause initial listening difficulties, accented speech is still in fact intelligible. Students are still able to understand this language but perceive this process as difficult. Here we can see the important distinction between the constructs of intelligibility and comprehensibility. This also reflects that it is possible that learners will require an adjustment period. Raising students' awareness, through exposure and the teaching of listening skills, that one can be intelligible with an accent, could mark an important change in the impact of such listening difficulties. Derwing & Munro (2009; 1997) suggest a relationship between accent and listening difficulties; however, they also recognise that accented speech is still intelligible. Whilst accented speech may be decreasing comprehensibility it is still possible for learners to understand this speech, it is still intelligible. This area is where the current research project will aim to assess how long and if this perception of accentedness gets in the way of learners' comprehension.

Issacs & Trofimovich (2012) looked at listening difficulties in relation to pronunciation instruction investigating the nature of listening comprehension. They also comment that 'comprehensibility [...] is broadly defined as listeners' perceptions of how easily they understand L2 speech' (p. 476). Issacs & Trofimovich (2012) begin to discuss the close link between accentedness and comprehensibility; they comment that these two elements of listening are often conflated. An assumption is often shared between speakers and listeners that accentedness causes difficulties in some way. To avoid this association, the current research project will ask students to think more broadly about any listening difficulties they have experienced. It is intended that students will consider any and all listening difficulties to see if they identify accent as a problem in their communication. Furthermore, when students will be asked to listen and rate accented speech, they will be asked to rate familiarity and ease of understanding, not specifically degree of accent. Students' perception of if accent is 'standard' is expected to influence their rating of accents.

Issacs & Trofimovich (2012) also go on to highlight that 'listeners' impressions of the effort needed to understand speech are likely to shape their real-world interactions with their L2 interlocutors' (p. 480). Once more, this is a key aspect within the current research project; the project aims to understand how these impressions, existing or new, impact communication experiences whilst in the UK. Are students' 'real-world interactions' negatively impacted by speakers' accents and can their familiarity to them impact this.

2.3.2.2 Accent Familiarity

Accent familiarity can play a key role in students' immediate responses to a speaker's pronunciation. As discussed in relation to listening processes, accent familiarity is believed to allow a listener to activate stored categories of variation they have previously heard (section 2.2.2.2, p. 21). Simply, an L2 listener's familiarity to an accent can be constructed as a consequence of their exposure to accented speech (White, 2016). A familiar accent here can be defined as pronunciation that is familiar, or similar to, a variety of English that can be understood and requires little to no additional effort from listeners (Van Engen & Peelle, 2014). This may be formed through input or output; learners' familiarity can be both influenced by the accent they speak and other accents that they hear in high quantities. Van Engen & Peelle (2014) discuss that unfamiliarity to an accent can increase listener effort and therefore impact listening experiences. These findings expand on the previous discussion (p. 30) of accent as a listening difficulty, and how accent can block intelligibility and decrease comprehensibility (Derwing & Munro, 2009; 1997). Van Engen & Peelle (2014) comment that even when learners are able to repeat or transcribe accented speech, processing this intelligible input still requires more effort and therefore listeners report that accented speech is more difficult to comprehend. Accent familiarity appears to cause a barrier to otherwise intelligible speech. Van Engen & Peelle (2014) discuss the increased number of cognitive processes that this requires from learners. The current research project aims to establish that with this increased cognitive effort, does this also have an increased emotional or behavioural impact on students.

Previous research has indicated that familiarity to an accent can overcome the difficulties caused by accent and can in fact lead to effective comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Wilcox, 1978). Gass & Varonis's (1984) study found that accent familiarity can actively facilitate listening comprehension. Their study assessed NSs' comprehension of NNS speech and found that in addition to topic familiarity, accent familiarity can increase listening comprehension.

Flowerdew's (1994) discussion of listening comprehension in lectures, further highlights that accent familiarity has been considered a key variable in what impacts comprehension and suggests that sharing an accent with a speaker further aids comprehension. The assumption that the accent learners have heard the most, usually

also being the one they speak, is the accent they are most able to comprehend has been further assessed by looking at specific accents.

Major et al. (2005) comment that it is 'widely believed that listeners understand some [accents] more easily than others, although there is little research that has rigorously measured the effects' (p. 37). They highlighted Goh's (1999) findings that '66% of learners list a speaker's accent among the factors that influence listener comprehension' (Major et al., 2005, p.40) and that they consider other factors as 'lesser factors'. This suggests 'that familiarity with an accent aids comprehension' whether this be through exposure to that accent or when the speaker shares the listeners' accent (same L1) (p. 40). This has been acknowledged in previous research such as Flowerdew (1994) and Gass & Varonis (1984).

Major et al.'s (2005) study compared listeners' experiences with Standard American English and NSs of ethnic, regional and international varieties. It should be noted that in their research, Major et al. (2005) use the term dialect where the present study would use the term accent; in the discussion of their study, the researcher has chosen to use the term accent to avoid confusion.

Major et al.'s (2005) research built on their 2002 study which found that NS and NNS speakers both scored distinctly lower on comprehension tests when listening to NNS speech and interestingly no determination regarding L1 advantage could be made. Their findings demonstrated that whilst some NNS learners performed better when listening to English from a speaker who shared their L1, some contrasted this and performed significantly worse. Research has identified that accent familiarity aids comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984), however what it is that causes this and to what degree is less clear.

Major et al. (2005) discuss the realities of international students who are NNSs of English coming to English-speaking countries; students are likely to encounter accents, including non-native and regional. All participants in their study had lived in the USA for a year or less within the SA context; this demographic links closely to the participants in the current study in relation to Length of Residence (LoR) and the SA context. Lecture scripts were presented to learners in 5 different accents, following which participants were tested for listening comprehension. The research was completed to support the TOEFL 2000 project; test instruments were prepared in a similar manner to those used in TOEFL and all participants were potential TOEFL test takers.

Standard American English was used as a baseline as this was commonly spoken in the country of the study, the USA, and normally used in testing and teaching methods in this context. The regional accent chosen in this study was Southern American English; in contrast to the current study, there was no context to suggest that students would have had any quality experience of this accent. Students in the current thesis will have had direct experience of the regional accent, LE, that is the main focus of the study. All participants will have spent time living and studying in the Liverpool area.

The results of Major et al.'s (2005) study showed that both NS and NNS students' test scores were impacted by accent. Their findings supported that NSs perform better in these listening comprehension activities but that there was an overall effect of accent on all listeners, regardless of L1. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between listeners' response to the standard (Standard American English) and regional (Southern American English) accents presented. The results of this study suggest that regional accents do not affect listening comprehension, but the international (Australian English and Indian English) and ethnic (African American Vernacular English, AAVE) varieties do. However, this may not indicate whether it is the variety of accent (regional/international/ethnic) that causes difficulty, but in fact the level of accentedness (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Major et al. (2005) discuss in their methodology that extreme forms of the Southern American accent were not used; there is an implication that the 'heavier the accent, the greater the difficulty' (p. 59). However, this was also contradicted by listeners comprehension of AAVE; the degree of accentedness was considered lower with AAVE than Southern American. Major et al. (2005) discuss the possible reasoning for these findings, highlighting that this may have been connected to exposure due to the location of the students who participated. They discussed that these findings could be related to AAVE not commonly being present in the academic environment; students in the SA context can have a narrowed view of the English that is spoken in the country they are studying. This is relevant to the current study where this can also be seen with LE (discussed in more detail in section 2.4, p. 37). Furthermore, Major et al. (2005) suggest that there could be an association with the social stigma related to AAVE. These speculations also relate to the focus of the current study, LE, which also has associated social stigmas (Clark & Watson, 2011).

Major et al.'s (2005) study provides interesting data regarding the input of accent varieties into testing; they acknowledge that accent should not be included in testing simply for authenticity if this causes bias regarding familiarity. Their findings also

suggest that familiarity and prestige are the most relevant factors in learners being able to comprehend accented speech. They acknowledge that accent strength must be a consideration in the discussion of their data; regardless of whether accent was regional, international or ethnic, there is an ‘implication that the heavier the accent, the greater the difficulty’ (p. 59). This study begins to question the implication of accent familiarity; students in the study had been exposed to some accents in their 12-month stay. It also considers accent perception, looking at the possible prestige associated with accents. Attitudinal perception was not directly assessed in this study; assumptions of what was considered more prestigious could only be made.

Major et al. (2005) also referenced Eisenstein & Verdi’s (1985) earlier study which examined the intelligibility of three accents; ‘Standard English, New Yorkese, and [...] American Vernacular English’ (p, 42-3). The findings of this study showed that comprehension was significantly affected by accent and discussed the perceptions and judgements made based on accents. A negative perception of an accent can impact learners’ ability to comprehend it; Major et al. (2005) comment on how positive perceptions of accents can improve comprehensibility. However, it is questionable as to whether this positive response comes only from the fact that learners perceive that they can understand that particular accent. If it is an accent they can understand, learners may feel more confident and less anxious communicating. The current research project will expand on this, exploring students’ perception of accents, assessing students’ feelings and experiences of the accents they have encountered in Liverpool.

There were limitations to Major et al.’s (2005) study, such as the limited number of accents used and that there was no control for background knowledge of the lecture topics. Whilst the current study also assesses a small sample of accented speech, it uses the context of the study to try and create a specific picture of an accent’s impact on overall listening comprehension which may then be applicable to other scenarios. LE is used to begin to give an insight into how students tolerate ambiguities in the vast variety of spoken Englishes.

The results of Major et al.’s (2005) study ‘clearly indicate that the [accent] of a speaker significantly affects the listening comprehension of [NNS] listeners who hear that speaker’ (p. 63) and that familiarity is a key variable. Major et al.’s (2005) findings supported their hypothesis that NSs will have greater comprehension than NNSs, but interestingly both are affected by accent. These findings highlight the relevance of confidence and preparation via awareness in tolerating the ambiguities in accents. NSs

also experience a degree of difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents but are able to adapt to this more easily, partially due to the confidence that comes from speaking one's L1. These findings also highlight the unnecessary reverence to NS abilities and advantages; 'there was an overall effect of speaker [accent] on all listeners' (Major et al., 2005, p. 58). Learners' L1 can impact their language experiences, however, Major et al. (2005) suggest that it is exposure, rather than same L1, that has a greater impact on listening comprehension, specifically in relation to accent.

Familiarity to an accent has been found to impact learners' understanding of the speech they hear. Research has demonstrated the contrast between comprehension of familiar accents and unfamiliar accents (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al., 2005). Whilst previous studies have identified accent familiarity as a significant factor in comprehension, its impact outside of testing has not been evaluated in the same detail. The increased effort required of the listener in addition to the negative impact of perceived accentedness may cause a barrier to learners' listening communication. This is where the current research project will be focused, assessing to what degree unfamiliarity causes a barrier to effective and productive listening. To assess this Liverpool English (LE) has been chosen; LE is an accent with varied and likely unexpected phonology, providing the perfect comparison of these difficulties.

2.4 Phonology of Liverpool English (LE)

As discussed in relation to listening difficulties (section 2.3, p. 23), accent can cause learners of English comprehension problems. These difficulties arise from the different phonological features of different English accents. The current study was conducted in Liverpool, in the north-west of England. As such, the phonological features focused on here include those which are specific to Liverpool English (LE) (often referred to as 'Scouse'). Buchstaller et al. (2013) discuss the reality that there are still unknown features of vernacular Englishes in the UK. Their research highlights that grammatical differences, as well as phonological, exist in vernacular Englishes compared to Standard forms. Due to the small scale of the current study, it is not possible to assess the vast

variety of features in all spoken English in the UK. This study will focus on LE and, specifically, its phonological variation.

There is historical precedent for focusing on the phonology of LE, most notably in Knowles (1973) seminal work regarding the English spoken in Liverpool. Knowles (1973) highlighted that it is elements of phonology rather than syntax which are most notably region-specific. They comment that ‘the peculiarities of [LE] are almost entirely phonological. When someone speaks, he produces a constant stream of prosodic patterns and segmental features which mark him unmistakably as a Liverpudlian’ (Knowles, 1973, p. 50). Watson (2007a) expanded on this in their research investigating LE, reiterating that the most salient features of LE are phonological differences; these differences are also what mark LE as distinct.

LE is well-known in the UK due to its distinguishable features which mark it as different from other nearby accents (Honeybone, 2001; Watson, 2007). Honeybone & Watson (2013) comment that LE is one of the most distinctive varieties in the north-west of England.

Following the research of Knowles (1973) and Watson (2007), we can see that the distinctive linguistic features of LE are perceived to be predominantly phonological in nature. Table 2.1 below outlines the linguistic characteristics which are viewed as being ‘unique’ to LE, based on recent linguistic work on the variety (Cardoso, 2015; Clark & Watson, 2011; Hickey, 2007; Knowles, 1973; Honeybone & Watson, 2013; Watson, 2007; Watson & Clark, 2017).

Table 2.1 (below) outlines the linguistic characteristics which are ‘unique’ to LE. Here LE is defined as the accent spoken in the city of Liverpool, not including the further variation found in the surrounding Merseyside region (defined in List of Terms, p. xii).

Table 2.1: Summary of Liverpool English key phonological features

Feature of Liverpool English (LE)	Example
Consonants:	
TH -stopping: Dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are realised as dental stops [t, d]	‘Those’ - [ðəʊz] becomes [dəʊz]
Dropping of /h/ (present in many other varieties)	‘Him’ – [hɪm] becomes [ɪm]
/r/ is pronounced as a voiced tap [ɾ] in both word-initial and intervocalic contexts	In <i>mi[r]or</i> , <i>ve[r]y</i>
Non-rhotic (/r/ is not pronounced after vowels)	‘Offa’ is the same as ‘Offer’ - [ɒfə] (Knowles, 1973)
Lenition:	
/t/ is realised as a fricative and can also be debuccalised to [h]	‘What’ - [wɒt] becomes [wɒh] ‘Not’ - [nɒt] becomes [nɒh]
/k/ can be lenited to [x]	‘Back’ - [bæk] becomes [bax] ‘Dock’ - [dɒk] becomes [dɒx]
Vowels:	
No distinction between [ʊ] and [ʌ] in the FOOT and STRUT lexical sets (Wells, 1982) respectively.	‘Cup’ as [kʊp] not [kʌp]
Short [a] in words such as ‘bath’ rather than [ɑ:]; BATH TRAP split.	‘Bath’ as [bɑθ] not [bɑ:θ]
The NURSE/SQUARE merger. Lack of contrast between the lexical sets nurse and square; both realised as a front vowel [ɛ:].	‘Hair’ and ‘her’ both [hɛ:] ‘Fair’ and ‘fur’ both [fɛ:]
The GOOSE/FOOT merger. Lack of contrast between the lexical sets goose and foot; both realised as a long vowel [u:].	‘Book’ as [bu:k] not [bʊk] ‘Look’ as [lu:k] not [lɒk]

As presented in Table 2.1, LE has distinct and specific features that mark it as different to other accents in the UK. Cardoso (2015) describes the formation of LE and comments that Lancashire English, Cheshire English, Irish English, Welsh English and Scots English all had an effect of the formation of the accent, however its phonology is unique and intertwined with the identity of Liverpool and of being ‘Scouse’.

As previously highlighted, key distinctions in LE are widely considered to be phonological (Knowles, 1973; Watson, 2007); the most well recognised of these features are TH stopping, lenition, non-rhoticity, the NURSE/SQUARE merger and lack of the

FOOT/STRUT split (Belchem, 2000; Cardoso, 2015; Hickey, 2007; Watson, 2007). Below is a summary of each of these key linguistic characteristics:

- **TH -stopping:**

As outlined by Watson (2007), TH -stopping in LE is when ‘dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are often realised as dental stops [t, d] (word-initially, medially and finally)’ (p. 532). Dental fricatives, consonants produced with the tip of tongue against the teeth, in LE are produced as dental or alveolar stops (Cardoso, 2015; Honeybone, 2007), a consonant sound made with the tongue in contact with teeth or alveolar ridge. In most varieties of English, a contrast can be heard between words such ‘tin’ and ‘thin’ (Honeybone, 2007) but this contrast is not heard in LE due to TH-stopping. An example of this is in the word ‘those’ where [ðəʊz] becomes [dəʊz]. TH-stopping is commonly found in contemporary LE (Honeybone, 2007; Honeybone & Watson, 2004) and therefore is a likely feature that students in the current study will encounter during their time studying in Liverpool.

- **Lenition**

Honeybone (2007) describes lenition as one of the most recognisable features of LE; it is a distinct marker of the language used by LE speakers today. Lenition is the process of phonological weakening, turning plosives to fricatives and affricatives. Lenition can be heard in many languages; Cardoso (2015) summarises that this pattern in LE is that ‘stops are lenited to fricatives or affricatives with the same place of articulation as the original stop’ (p. 50). The lenition that can be heard in LE in contrast to other English varieties is due to the amount that is present; it is not heard to the same degree in other varieties (Honeybone, 2007; Watson, 2007). Examples of this process of lenition in LE are the words ‘what’ where [wɒt] becomes [wɒh] and ‘back’ where [bæk] becomes [bax].

- **Non – rhoticity**

The feature of rhoticity is notable, often as a well-known difference between UK and USA varieties of English, and ‘relates to where the phoneme [r] can occur in words’ (Honeybone, 2007, p. 107). Non-rhoticity is where the ‘r’ consonant is only pronounced prevocally. LE is non-rhotic (Honeybone, 2007; Watson & Clark, 2017). This is distinctive for LE as the accents within its close geographical area are predominately rhotic; for instance, it contrasts its close neighbour of Lancashire. Honeybone (2007) also highlights that no

findings have reported rhoticity in the variety of LE. An example of non-rhotic pronunciation is ‘Offa’ sounding the same as ‘Offer’, both being pronounced as [ɒfə] (Knowles, 1973).

- **The NURSE/SQUARE merger**

The NURSE/SQUARE merger is a salient feature of LE (Cardoso, 2015). In most other English varieties, the vowel in the NURSE lexical set and the vowel in the SQUARE lexical set are pronounced differently, whereas in LE there is a lack of contrast between these lexical sets (Watson & Clark, 2017). Both are realised as a front vowel [ɛ:]; an example of this is ‘fair’ sounding the same as ‘fur’, both pronounced as [fe:].

- **The lack of the FOOT/STRUT split**

One of the most discussed features which distinguishes northern and southern English accents from each other is the FOOT/STRUT split. LE, as with other northern varieties, lacks the FOOT/STRUT split; there is no distinction between the FOOT and STRUT vowels (Cardoso, 2015; Knowles, 1973; Wells, 1982). Therefore, an example of this the vowel sounds in ‘Foot’ and ‘Strut’ being pronounced the same. This can be heard in the word ‘cup’ where it is pronounced as [kʊp] not [kʌp].

There are also features of LE that are spoken only by speakers of certain generations. This can be seen in relation to when /t/ between two vowels can be pronounced as a voice tap [ɾ] (‘getting’ becomes ‘ge[ɾ]ing’, ‘lot of’ becomes ‘lo[ɾ] of’) (Watson, 2007). This is not commonly heard in modern LE however, this highlights that there is variation found across different ages of speakers. Whilst students in the current study are less likely to encounter this specific voice tap [ɾ] feature, to account for such variation, a range of different aged speakers were presented to participants in the current study (this is discussed in more detail in section 3.4.2, p. 92). Watson (2007) further highlights the relevance of presenting participants with different ages of speakers commenting on lenition, specifically the debuccalisation of /t/ to [h] (for example when ‘what’ is pronounced as [wɒh]). They highlight that in younger LE speakers ‘the realisation of /t/ as [h] can also occur in polysyllabic words which end in an unstressed syllable (e.g., *market* [ma:xih], *maggot* [magih], *aggregate* [agrɪgih])’ (Watson, 2007, p. 353) further signifying a necessity to include a range of speakers as depending on context students may hear difference features of LE.

In considering what phonological variation participants may encounter, it is also important to note how LE relates to accents which surround it. Leach et al. (2016) illustrate the particular variation within LE in their study which focused on Perceptual Dialectology. Their study assessed the North West and north-west Midlands of England and looked at LE. They note that even within this small geographical area ‘there is a considerable amount of accent variation’ (p. 197). Leach et al. (2016) highlight characteristics that the north of England share, such as the short vowel in BATH and ‘no split between FOOT and STRUT’ (p. 197) but identify some vowel features which are localised to Liverpool. As summarised in Table 2.1, these include that ‘in Liverpool [...] NURSE and SQUARE are merged’; an example of this is where ‘fair’ and ‘fur’ can be pronounced the same. Regarding consonants, ‘some speakers in Liverpool still have TH/DH-stopping’, ‘/t/ is lenited in non-initial positions in Liverpool’, ‘T-glottalling is common in all [of their study’s] localities except Liverpool (Clark & Watson, 2016)’ and ‘like /t/, /k/ is lenited in non-initial positions in Liverpool’ (p. 199).

Respondents in Leach et al.’s (2016) study were asked to identify which geographical location they thought each accent they heard was from. The findings of this study showed that ‘Liverpool was correctly identified most often (66.6%)’ (p. 202). Leach et al. (2016) comment that this was expected as LE is both culturally prominent and has a ‘distinct phonology’ (p. 202). Despite localised regional variation, there are still some very salient and distinct features which allowed Leach et al.’s informants to identify it as LE correctly. However, as these features are so distinct from other forms of regional English, they may pose a problem for NNS. Combined with the additional variation Leach et al. (2016) describe, it is likely that NNS will have some trouble with certain LE features.

This distinct phonology makes this accent a useful tool in the current research project. As LE is an accent with unique phonological features, this will help in identifying if accent is a problem for learners when they arrive in the UK as it is starkly different from the standard forms used and heard in ELT. This will also allow students to more reliably reflect on their experiences of LE; as it is distinct it is expected that participants will have been able to identify it.

LE is also distinct as it has not undergone a significant amount of levelling. Clark & Watson (2016) discuss the spread of linguistic features across geographical areas. They comment that the levelling of accents has been common; ‘phonological levelling is well attested across the United Kingdom’ (p. 31). Williams & Kerswill (1999) define levelling as ‘a process whereby differences between regional varieties are reduced, features which

make varieties distinctive disappear, and new features emerge and are adopted by speakers over a wide geographical area' (p. 149). However, LE has been cited as a counterexample of this levelling process (Watson, 2006). Clark & Watson (2016) highlight that 'Liverpool English has several phonological features that are regionally restricted and socially marked' (p. 32). Whilst the Liverpool accent covers a small geographical area, it includes distinct phonological features that mark it as different from other Northern English accents. This may indicate an issue in the representation of regional accented English in ELT. When a limited amount of regional variation is presented to learners (Hope, 2014) it may be assumed more similarity in varieties of regional English (due to levelling). LE is an example of how more difference may exist in reality due to resistance to levelling. Accents frequently presented in listening materials are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.2.1 (p. 87).

Clark & Watson's (2011) research contributes to the discussion of the nature of LE, specifically looking at '*t-to-r* [...]' e.g., 'shut up' [ʃʊɪ/r ʊp] (p. 523). It is interesting to note that this feature is recognised as a 'stigmatised connected speech process' (Clark & Watson, 2011). Stigmatised features, or accents as a whole, may impact listening comprehension. Major et al. (2005) found that familiarity and prestige were key factors in the listening comprehension process in relation to accented speech. The negative view of features as 'non-standard' can be stigmatised from native and non-native perspectives. Learners are likely to be unfamiliar with such features in speech and listening skills development. Negative perceptions held by L1 speakers can influence the speech introduced to learners in throughout the language learning process. These features, undoubtedly, will not have been taught as 'correct' pronunciation and it is unlikely they will have been presented in the process of developing listening skills. Whilst these ideas of incorrect and correct speech from L1 and L2 perspectives may influence the language introduced to learners, it is still important to acknowledge the value of a model of pronunciation for learners. Standard forms allow students an introduction to spoken language that will give them access to understanding a wide proportion of speakers. Students' unfamiliarity with other phonological features could, however, cause listening comprehension difficulties in some instances; the current study examines what impact unfamiliarity to these specific features may have on spoken interactions.

The distinct nature of LE will be valuable in assessing students' experience of accents. Students' previous experience of standard English forms will likely be in contrast to LE. LE is both phonologically different from standard forms and perceived

negatively; this will be reviewed in more detail later in this chapter (section 2.6). It is predicted that students will have greater familiarity with SSB (Standard Southern British); the features that define the SSB accent will now be outlined.

2.5 Phonology of Standard Southern British (SSB)

The presentation of standard British pronunciation is now commonly labelled as Standard Southern British (SSB) (Hughes et al., 2012). This variety of English is one which learners are expected to be familiar with through teaching materials and instruction. Standard accents, such as SSB, are a useful tool in providing a model for L2 production and presenting learners with a neutral variety which will allow them to comprehend a large group of speakers. Historically, the standard presented to learners would have been Received Pronunciation (RP). SSB is now considered the contemporary phonology developed from the more traditional RP (Lindsey, 2019).

RP has long been used to define the ‘standard’ variety of English that learners are presented with in the language learning process; it has often been used as the model for both teaching listening and speaking skills. Hughes et al. (2012) comment that ‘RP has [...] remained the accent of those at the upper reaches of the social scale [in Britain], as measured by education, income and profession, or title’ (p. 3). Importantly ‘RP, unlike prestige accents in other countries, is not the accent of any particular region’ (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 3). RP has historically been considered an accent associated with prestige and one which can be evident in various regions of the British Isles, however its prevalence amongst native English speakers is decreasing (Trudgill, 2001).

In later years RP has often been conflated with the term SSB to describe the ‘standard’ English often used as a basis for comparison of regional and NNS phonetic variation. As is evident from the term ‘Received’, used in its archaic definition of ‘accepted in the most polite circles of society’ (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 3), this term to discuss ‘standard English’ spoken today has become somewhat dated. This is both due to the phonological changes over time and the reduction in number of RP speakers (Hughes et al., 2012; Trudgill, 2001). To more accurately reflect the phonetic and social changes, linguists often now use the label SSB (Hughes et al., 2012; Lindsey, 2019). It is important, however, to note that some research continues use the label RP, in either

referring to this original ‘standard’ or conflating it with the modern SSB English terminology. When referring to standard English within this thesis, notably when presenting a contrast to LE, the term SSB will be used.

SSB shares a wealth of features with RP, many of which contrast regional varieties such as LE. These include features such as the FOOT/STRUT split, a lack of H-dropping, and a long ‘a’ [ɑ:] in words such as ‘bath’. The most notable difference between LE and SSB is that, of the ten categories highlighted in Table 2.1 as defining features of LE (Summary of Liverpool English key phonological features, p. 38), none are present within the features that define SSB. This stark contrast between these accents highlights how LE is a useful tool in the current study to compare students’ perspectives and experiences. LE pronunciation is different and expected to be less familiar.

SSB does, however, contain features which mark it as unique and different to RP. Table 2.2 (below) summarises the linguistic characteristics which are viewed as being ‘unique’ to SSB, based on recent linguistic work on the variety (Hickey, 2012; Hughes et al., 2012; Kerswill, 2006; Lindsey, 2019; Upton, 2008; 2012;). These features have developed from RP to form the ‘standard’ accent we refer to today.

Table 2.2: Summary of the key phonological features unique to SSB

Feature of SSB	Example
Consonants:	
Aspiration of plosives /p/ and /k/ (creating an /h/-like whisper in syllable initial positions)	[k ^h] in words such as ‘kiss’ [k ^h ɪs]
Affrication of plosive /t/	[tʰ] in words such as ‘tea’ and ‘city’
Palatalization or Yod Coalescence. /tj/ and /dj/ becoming /tʃ/ and /dʒ/	‘Tuesday’ - [tʃu:zdeɪ] not [tju:zdeɪ]
/sj/ simplified to /s/ by most speakers, with /j/ lost altogether.	‘Suit’ – [su:t] not [sju:t]
/l/ and /n/ now pronounced with normally released t/ and /d/ followed by a weak vowel	In ‘little’ [lɪtəl] and ‘certain’ [sə:tən]
Glottal Stop common as a form of /t/	‘Football’ – [fʊʔbɔ:l] not [fʊtbɔ:l]
Vowels:	
<i>Anti-clockwise vowel shift:</i>	
Raised vowels: Lot is nearer [ɔ] than [ʊ] and Thought is nearer [o] than [ɔ]	‘Lot’ - [lɒt] not [lʊt] ‘Thought’ - [θɒt] not [θɔ:t]
GOAT backing (GOAT vowel becomes more like the short LOT vowel)	‘Old’ – [ɒld] not [əʊld]
Lowered vowels: Trap is [a] rather than [æ] And Dress [ɛ] rather than [e]	‘Trap’ – [træp] not [træp] ‘Dress’ – [dres] not [dres]

Table 2.2 demonstrates the defining features of SSB. These features have altered the sounds that would have been heard in RP (Upton, 2012). Whilst similarities between RP and SSB can still be heard, these noted distinctions highlight that modern standard speech has been modified (Hickey, 2012; Upton, 2008; 2012).

One example of such a change is palatalization, also known as Yod Coalescence. Lindsey (2019) highlights that this difference is now commonly found where consonant clusters /tj/ and /dj/ are pronounced /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ by SSB speakers. The pronunciation of ‘Tuesday’ as [tʃu:zdeɪ] not [tju:zdeɪ], marks this difference in SSB phonology.

Lindsey’s (2019) in depth work also notes another prominent change in contemporary SSB. The glottal stop was ‘not characteristic of RP, but is very common today as a form of

/t/ (Lindsey, 2019, p. 67). This can be heard in the pronunciation of ‘Football’ as [fɒʔbɔ:l] not [fɒtbɔ:l].

G-dropping and H-dropping are also more commonly being heard in modern SSB; this feature is not present in RP speech (Upton, 2012; Wells, 1982). Lindsey (2019) does note, however that these features are being heard within more informal speech, not that which would be presented to learners (p 73). Importantly to this study, students may be familiar with SSB through teaching materials and methods; in these forms, where accuracy of pronunciation is heightened, these more informal features may not have been as common.

The English that learners refer to as standard is expected to be reflective of SSB pronunciation. Whilst RP has been the historical predominant form presented in ELT (Hughes et al, 2012; Upton, 2008; 2012; Wells, 1982), this standard has been modernised. RP has faded and terms such as ‘BBC English’ are now commonly used to describe the standard accent or phonology that learners of English will be exposed to through media and the language learning process (Upton, 2012). SSB provides a control, or contrast, for which to examine how the unfamiliarity in LE phonology may impact learners’ comprehension. These differences can also be seen in relation to perception, which can impact both L1 and L2 engagement which these speech varieties.

2.6 L1 Perception of LE

Research has highlighted that non-standard varieties of English can be associated with negative perceptions and attitudes (Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Montgomery, 2007; 2012) by both NSs and NNSs (Sung, 2016). LE is one of the UK’s most stigmatised accents in terms of how it is perceived; research such as Coupland & Bishop (2007) and Montgomery (2007) have highlighted this high level of stigmatisation. Honeybone & Watson (2013) comment that LE ‘usually does badly in studies of sociolinguistic prestige’ (p. 306). They comment that whilst there is an awareness that LE is stigmatised in relation to prestige and social class, less is known about the specific phonological features that contribute to these assumptions. To assess this, they looked into how non-standard spellings in Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature (CHLDL) can add to the discussion; such literature aims to represent localised linguistic features. This gives an insight into what features are particularly associated with certain accents;

Honeybone & Watson's (2013) research highlights the features that are salient in LE. For instance, they show how H-dropping in Liverpool English is represented in CHLDL data; 'examples include *hurry up* <urry up>, *empty house* <empty ouse> and *at home* <at 'ome>' (p. 325). This provides an idea of which phonological features NNSs will be presented with that will mark this accent as different to what they have heard in standard forms and begins to suggest how L1 speakers may also identify LE speech.

Accented speech in general has been found to influence NS comprehension, as well as NNS comprehension; Major et al.'s (2005) study examining how English varieties impact listening comprehension, found that both NS and NNS speakers' listening test scores were affected by accented speech. Consequently, it is important to consider how the phonology of LE is perceived by NS speakers as well as NNS speakers. Research has not assessed L1's understanding of LE to a significant degree, however, research has evaluated the perception of regional accents (including LE) from an L1 perspective which gives an insight into how regional variation is viewed by L1 speakers (Cardoso et al., 2019; Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Montgomery, 2012). It was not within the scope of the current study to assess this factor in L1 speakers directly; however, looking into previous research regarding the perception of this accent provides an indication of NSs' experiences.

Preston's seminal work (1981) looked accent perception. Their study examined American speakers and highlighted that consistently, in a group of L1 English speakers, the same locations were chosen as the area where the 'worst' English was spoken; in Preston's study, this was identified as areas in the southern USA, such as Alabama. Montgomery's (2007) study built on this idea in relation to British English accents; LE was found to be highly identifiable and, as with Alabama, perceived negatively. Montgomery (2007) asked participants to consider an accent and report its associated characteristics. LE, or 'Scouse', was described negatively by L1 participants, using terms such as 'Scallies', 'Criminals' and 'Not to be trusted' (p. 248). Montgomery's (2007) research highlights the negative stereotypes often associated with LE; other regional accents, such as 'Geordie' from the North-East of England, were viewed positively with adjectives such as 'Friendly' and 'Funny' (p. 248). However, whilst LE was identified as having negative social associations, no comments were made regarding an inability to understand the accent.

Montgomery's (2012) research expanded on this look at language attitudes in relation to language variation. Their study indicated that perceptions can in fact influence

the basis of some of our everyday behaviour consequently impacting engagement with certain language; ‘people’s perception may determine who they interact with, when they do, and the length of time they do’ (p. 639). These findings can be applied to NNSs; previous research has identified that NNS students have negative perceptions of certain accents (Sung, 2016) which could also impact their spoken interactions. Montgomery (2012) highlights that ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ language use are still evident in both L1 and L2 perspectives.

Coupland & Bishop (2007) discuss how features of spoken language, such as those present in accents, can create ‘sociolinguistic indexicalities’ (p. 74); relationships can be formed between specific variation in speech and social meanings. Their research highlights ideas surrounding standard languages and the fact that they are commonly associated with ‘correctness’. NSs can therefore perceive non-standard, accents such as LE, negatively and lesser than. These ideas of ‘correctness’ are especially relevant in language learning. Stakeholders across the language learning process, including the users and publishers of listening materials, continue to associate NS standard varieties with ‘correctness’ (Holliday, 2006; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). This will be discussed in more detail in relation to listening materials and students’ perceptions in sections 2.7 and 2.8.

Watson & Clark (2015) further assessed listeners’ perceptions of LE. Research has established that listeners are capable of identifying and forming opinions on regional accents, however little research has assessed exactly when these opinions and attitudes are formed (Watson & Clark, 2015). In the listening process, individual’s may ‘arrive at their decisions at different times’ (Watson & Clark, 2015, p.39). Their study explored NS listeners’ real-time responses to regional accents. The study looked at five regional accents; Cambridge, Cardiff, Dublin, Newcastle and Liverpool English were investigated. Samples of speech from the Intonational Variation in English corpus (IVIe) were utilised; these texts were created with the objective of ‘exploring variation in intonation patterns across regional accents [using] story re-telling [to provide] sound clips which were relatively ‘neutral’ with respect to their content’ (p. 44). Using online software to track listener’s responses, the research assessed how ‘friendly’ and how ‘posh’ the accents were perceived to be. The findings of this study highlighted that non-standard varieties were rated highly in terms of solidarity (how friendly) but were given low ratings in terms of status (how posh). LE was also found to be a recognisable and distinctive accent; LE had the earliest reactions in relation to status. These findings

signify that L1 listeners both recognise LE quickly and perceived it negatively in terms of prestige.

No determination regarding ease of understanding can be made, however research does suggest L1 listeners' perceptions of LE are defined as negative and low status. As these perceptions are intrinsically linked with 'correctness' these perceptions, that LE is not a desirable way to speak, may be passed on to L2 learners of English.

2.7 Learners' perceptions of Spoken English

Learners' perception, how they regard or interpret forms of English, is an important factor to consider in both the impact on listening skills and which accents students are exposed to. The number of speakers who use different accents of English across the world has altered. A high proportion of English speakers use English as lingua franca (ELF) rather than using English to communicate with NSs of the language. Kuo (2006) comments that 'English has often been used in a geographically and historically remote setting [from its origins] for purposes ranging from conducting professional discourse to carrying out everyday conversation, which require no participation by its native speakers' (p. 213). Whilst standard varieties allow learners an introduction to a valuable model of English, whether students should also be introduced to additional varieties can be questioned. However, Kuo's (2006) research highlights that the majority of students within their study, when given the option, still wanted to be given models of native speaking to assist their speaking and listening skills. Using NS accents in listening activities is no longer a necessity for learners to be able to successfully communicate outside the classroom environment, especially in relation to ELF, however, learners' perceptions mean that they may still want to aim to understand or attain a NS accent. Native-speakerism, the idea of NS English as the ultimate goal, persists with many learners of English (Holliday, 2006; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). However, it is also important to acknowledge, that whilst the number of NS and NNSs have changed over time, the idea of global English is still idealistic. This is especially relevant in ELT where teachers require a format or model of English to teach to students. As there is no consensus of what one 'global English' could or should include its practicalities in widespread teaching are limited. There continues to be variation in NS varieties,

including differences between NS standard accents from different countries. However, McArthur (2003) highlights that in all standard NS varieties there are often shared similarities. Such as that the standard is often most closely linked to the written form, it is spoken in news broadcasting and is often a reflection of a level of social status and education.

Research, such as Scales et al. (2006), highlights that learners also continue to show a preference for using NS models of English. Scales et al.'s (2006) study assessed English language students' perceptions of different English accents; the accents looked at were British, American, Mexican and Chinese. This study highlights learners' want to attain a NS sounding accent. Participants were individually interviewed about different accents, and more than half stated that their goal was to sound like a NS. However, this variety of NS English is likely to be specific to standard forms; not all NS accents are desirable.

As has been previously discussed (section 2.6, p. 47), Watson & Clark (2015) investigated the linguistic stereotypes L1 speakers associated with different regional accents; these stereotypes have been found to occur in Britain and other English-speaking countries. Watson & Clark (2015) analysed listeners' linguistic judgements in relation to regional accents of British English; this study found that non-standard varieties of English accents are considered to have less status than standard varieties, however, the non-standard varieties are considered more socially attractive. Watson & Clark's (2015) findings align with Hiraga's (2005) study. The findings of Hiraga's (2005) study indicate that some regional accents can be considered more appealing than standard accents, such as RP or SSB, even though they are less desirable to learners in terms of developing their own language skills. Scales et al. (2006) reinforce that learners 'prefer standard inner-circle models, either General American (GA) or Received Pronunciation (RP)' (p. 718) as they perceive these accents as easier to understand. Kuo (2006) found that ultimately 'L2 learners should be allowed to decide which English to learn, including which accent of that variety to aim towards' (p. 220); the inclusion of regional or global variations of English could allow students the opportunity to make this choice independently.

Sung (2016) discussed how, as a result of the global presence of English, exposing learners to a greater variety of English is often proposed but learners' view on this has not been examined. Sung (2016) employed interviews and questionnaires to assess Cantonese-speaking students' perceptions of different accents of English. In this study, students acknowledged 'the importance of familiarising themselves with different accents of English in order to smooth out ELF communication' (Sung, 2016, p. 195).

However, interview data also highlighted ingrained negative views of NNS English. There continues to be a belief that ‘native-speaker English is the ‘best’ and the ‘standard’ which may explain why some students referred to NNS accents as ‘‘strange’ or ‘weird’’ (Sung, 2016, p. 196). The findings of this study reiterate that students commonly share a concern that listening to NNS accents, or non-standard accents, will have a negative impact on their speaking skills. In the researcher’s own experience, students have shared this concern, worrying that speaking to one another will reinforce incorrect pronunciation. Sung’s (2016) interview findings did show, however, that there was a contradiction between a proportion of students; some students stated being open and actively interested in being exposed other accents, but some had reservations. Students in this study highlighted that learners have negative perceptions of certain NNS accents, supporting Hiraga’s (2005) study, which can influence whether they want to hear them in listening materials and throughout the language learning process.

Sung’s (2016) study focused on the possible introduction of NNS accents in the classroom environment and highlighted students’ preferences towards NS accents. The data collected in the current study aims to establish if students share similar concerns regarding LE or if it is viewed more favourably than NNS accents. Sung’s (2016) findings also demonstrate a contradiction from students’ perspective, the want to be aware of other varieties of English but concerns regarding the negative impact it may have. The current research project provides evidence of what impact accents are currently having, giving an insight into the possible value of exposure to accents for effective communication to learners, publishers and other stakeholders in the language learning process.

Discussion of learners’ perceptions of accents, and their concerns regarding the influence on their own abilities, is also relevant in relation to testing within ELT. A student’s want and need to do well in examinations plays a key role in the accents they are willing to listen to and engage with.

Buck’s (2001) research highlights the limitations of testing listening skills; tests are often unable to reflect the challenges of real-life spoken interactions. They state that ‘the test situation is unnatural in demanding that the listener comprehend with a much greater degree of precision than normal’ (p. 171). Buck (2001) notes that in day-to-day conversation, it is not necessary to understand every word immediately and that there is an opportunity to negotiate meaning; this process is not evident in testing. The accuracy focus of listening tests can result in learners’ only wanting to prepare for the specific

English they will hear in exam scenarios. In the researcher's own experience teaching English, after varied listening activities students continually respond with "but is this what I will hear in the exam". Students' association that only hearing the language used in examinations will help them do well is entirely understandable, however, this can develop a negative perception of many varieties of English that will not be tested. Students can be unwilling to engage with listening materials that demonstrate a greater variety of linguistic features, including accent.

Throughout the ELT process learners' attention is often heavily focused on their objective proficiency. Learners' attitude towards accents can be affected by how they perceive it will impact their test results. This is relevant in considering the use of accents in ELT listening materials, however, the current study examines how students' lack of awareness of variation may impact English skills when they are used to communicate. This study provides data to demonstrate the possible negative impact that lack of exposure to varied pronunciation is having. This evidence may be useful in demonstrating to students, and other stakeholders in the language learning process, that language in use is not only about their test results.

2.8 Accents in Listening Materials

Listening materials in ELT coursebooks provide learners with an opportunity to practise listening skills. Barekat & Nobakhti (2014) comment that listening is an elemental skill; 'language users spend nearly 60% of their time listening' (p. 1058). Listening is a base for speaking skills; it 'proves to be the natural prerequisite in learning a second or foreign language' (p. 1058) as with learning a first language. The language included in ELT listening materials can often be students first, or only, introduction to what spoken English sounds like. When learning English in their home countries, listening materials in coursebooks can be one of the few opportunities for learners to hear spoken English. These materials give students an opportunity to develop their listening skills, but also present an idea of what English sounds like, essentially, what an English accent is.

These listening materials are focused on NS norms. Holliday (2006) highlights the reverence towards a 'native-speaker ideal' that is still held by many. Often stakeholders across the language learning process view native speech as the ideal and the ultimate goal

in learning English. This idea of native-speakerism is further evident in that many NNS teachers limit the amount of English they speak, and their students do not want to listen to each other's English for fear of enforcing 'incorrect' skills (Holliday, 2006). In the researcher's own experience teaching English, this perception has been witnessed; students resisted working with their peers to advance their speaking and listening skills as they reported only wanting to hear how the researcher, a NS, sounded. Holliday (2006) highlights the impact of native-speakerism and how it impacts employment, professional life and the presentation of language. This focus on native norms as the ideal has resulted in a prevalence of NS voices in listening materials. Focusing on only NS accents in listening materials will reduce the realistic representation of spoken English; approximately only one out of every four speakers of English is a native speaker of the language (Crystal, 2003). Furthermore, there is not one accent that all NSs use. RP, due to the association of prestige (Hughes et al., 2012), has often been used as the model for both teaching listening and speaking skills as it has been considered a standard form of English. In more recent years, this presentation of a standard accent has been more closely related to SSB. With both RP and SSB, this preference for a standard 'ideal' is presented to learners even though a large proportion of NS individuals do not speak this way. The use of a small variety of accents brings into question the authenticity of these materials and if they are effectively preparing learners for language in use.

Ghaderpanahi (2012) looked at the use of authentic listening materials and how they can be used to reflect more real-life scenarios. The findings of their study indicate that the use of authentic listening materials enhances students' listening comprehension. Ghaderpanahi (2012) comments on the significance of listening in the development of other language skills as is evident in children acquiring their first language. L1 children listen, understand and respond to language before they are able to speak. Ghaderpanahi (2012) goes on to comment on the complexities of listening and how different factors, unrepresented in unauthentic listening materials, exist in real-life situations. Factors discussed include that conversation is layered, speakers interrupt and overlap one another, and the fact that speech is accented; whilst the written form remains the same, speech varies from speaker to speaker. They comment that learners draw on their previous language experiences to 'create expectations of what they are about to hear' (p. 149); awareness of the reality of spoken English is important to give learners the required knowledge to draw on. This is especially relevant in listening which, as previously

discussed (section 2.2, p. 10), is unique in its skills development as learners have to comprehend language without anything to refer back to (Taguchi, 2008).

Findings of the researcher's previous study (Hope, 2014) highlighted the prevalence of standard forms of English in published listening materials. Focusing on coursebooks designed for the UK market, the study highlighted that standard forms of accents were the most common; collectively RP (defined as SSB in the current study) accounted for 65% of the accents presented (Hope, 2014). This research looked at coursebooks of intermediate level which relates to the levels of proficiency outlined in the CEFR (2018; 2020). At intermediate level, learners are expected to be able to 'interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible' (p. 83).

It is not feasible to expose learners to all the possible accents of English that they may encounter but including more variety of accents in coursebook materials can aid in developing their listening and speaking skills outside of the classroom environment. A model of English which students can listen to, can assist them in improving both their speaking and listening skills. Wilson (2008) comments that 'one thing that listening can do is provide a model [for students to] copy or learn from' (p. 20-21). Listening to different accents, other than the model they may aspire to in terms of speaking skills, however, will help them to 'familiarise themselves with the discourse patterns, intonation, pronunciation [and] rhythm' (Wilson, 2008, p. 20-21) of spoken English. If students leave the classroom environment without hearing more than one particular model, whether that be the accent of their teacher or from the listening materials they have used, they may struggle in understanding real-life communication.

Teachers' accents are often the main language input heard by learners in the classroom; the teacher's accent will influence learners' speaking and listening skills. Barratt & Kontra's (2000) study was designed to assess Hungarian students' attitudes towards NS teachers. Their study found that students were critical of certain features of NS teachers' accents. Barratt & Kontra (2000) state that 'respondents in the Hungarian survey highly valued the NS teachers for their English language abilities [...]. Respondents were, [however], critical of different English accents. For instance, the Hungarian students found strong [accents] (e.g. Scottish English) difficult to understand' (p. 21). This signifies that there may be a necessity to introduce learners to a variety of regional accents throughout the learning process so that they do not continue to find such accents 'difficult to understand'. Whilst a teacher's accent is often an uncontrolled

element in the learning process, learners' exposure to accents through teaching materials can be controlled. The use of a variety of accents in coursebook materials may ensure students are more prepared in order to be able to comprehend different accents regardless of the one spoken by their teacher. Presenting learners with one standard variety in listening materials, such as SSB, may reduce the phonology that students are prepared to tolerate.

Vandergrift (2011) comments that the understanding of learners' listening skills often focuses on the product: the focus on a correct or incorrect outcome can create negative associations and lower self-confidence in learners (this is discussed in more detail in section 2.3). Teaching materials are often sterilised, which can be beneficial for explanation or examination purposes, but is not representative of 'real-life' communication.

2.9 The Study Abroad Experience

Many NNSs of English choose to live and study in the UK. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2021) found that 20% of all student enrolments in the UK were students from outside the UK (academic year 2019/20). Moreover, a high proportion of these students were from China, with China sending more students to the UK than any other country (HESA, 2021). The focus of the current study is on Chinese students and how they experience SA life in Liverpool. HESA (2021) states that 'the number of students from China has increased by [...] 56% over the five year period 2015/16 to 2019/20'. This vast, and increasing, number of students are arriving in the UK ready to communicate and develop their English skills.

The SA experience can be invaluable in exposing learners of a language to a wealth of spoken and written communication. Collentine & Freed (2004) comment on some of the distinct differences between the Study at Home (SAH) and the SA experience. They highlight that SAH is often biased towards specific L2 classroom contexts; the priority is on the classroom environment. SA is, however, a 'hybrid communicative learning context [in which] learners study the L2 in the target culture and often live with host families' (Collentine & Freed, 2004, p. 156). However, the expected experiences of the Chinese students in the current study may challenge this; even though the students are

within the SA experience, they may not be experiencing the ‘target culture’ and language. Students’ accommodation whilst studying in the UK will be a key factor to consider; if students are living with a NS host family are their listening experiences different than those who are living in student halls of residence, often surrounded by students who share their L1, due to the high proportion of Chinese students.

Taguchi’s (2008) study suggests that the SA context improves language comprehension speed through exposure. This study investigated comprehension in relation to Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL). Their study compared learners’ ability to understand spoken language across different proficiency levels, examining the impact of proficiency on accuracy and speed of comprehension. Students in the study were studying Japanese in a US university and had different L1s; some of the students had experience living in the L2 country, Japan. A computerised listening test was used, where students listened to a conversation with multiple choice options and response time was measured. The findings of this study support the idea that ‘comprehension speed correlate[s] significantly with the amount of language contact outside the classroom’ (p. 570). Students noted how much time they spent studying Japanese outside of class. The group that had spent time in Japan had significantly greater comprehension accuracy, supporting the advantages expected from the SA experience.

Whilst the findings of Taguchi’s (2008) study suggest that SA increases students’ listening comprehension abilities, Taguchi (2008) does acknowledge the complexities involved in developing listening skills. They comment that listening is a complex skill to develop as it ‘is greatly affected by short-term memory because after the information is heard, there is no text to refer back to’ (p. 569). SA could, therefore, be advantageous in listening skills due to the specific complexities; continued, out-of-class exposure to spoken language can help students develop something ‘to refer back to’.

Whilst this study was in a different target language to the current research project, the ideas can be applied to English as an L2. This study begins discussions into how the use of L2 outside classroom settings can impact listening comprehension. The current thesis has been developed from such ideas of language use’s impact on listening comprehension, regardless of proficiency, focused on a SA context.

Taguchi’s (2008) study highlights the invaluable exposure gained through the SA experience, however, it is important to note that there is often an assumption that being in a native-speaking country will automatically improve language skills. The current research project will examine this simplistic assumption, assessing learners’ language

use in the SA context. This is particularly evident in relation to listening which is often considered to be a passive process, from both a student and teacher perspective. Nunan (2002) highlights this, referring to listening as the ‘Cinderella skill’, that it is often given less time and attention in relation to the development of writing, reading and speaking skills.

Research has suggested that it is in fact the quality of stay in a NS country that can aid language acquisition (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019; Taguchi, 2011). Taguchi (2011) expanded on their 2008 study, specifically looking at the impact of the SA experience using a listening test. Japanese learners of English were the participants in this study. Previous research has highlighted that exposure and, importantly, engaging in social interactions advance language skills (Barron, 2003; Kinginger, 2008; Schauer, 2009). Within the SA context, students have the opportunity to engage with the target language, however, whether students do always actively engage is questionable.

Taguchi (2011) discusses how the SA experience provided learners with the opportunity to become more aware and practise language use. ‘Being exposed to unscripted, authentic discourse in everyday interaction, learners can also practice inferential comprehension’ (p. 910) something which is not afforded in the classroom or through constructed listening materials. This is also demonstrated in Xu et al.’s (2009) study where length of residence (LoR), not experience of language, is shown to play an important role in pragmatic competence, but not in overall general proficiency. Whilst Matsumura (2003) found ‘that exposure was a predictor for pragmatic development, but proficiency was not’ (p. 912). It is important to acknowledge that proficiency levels can result in different behaviour in learners; Matsumura (2003) comments that ‘higher proficiency learners sought more opportunities for exposure, which consequently fostered their pragmatic development’ (p. 912). Such research highlights the considerable variability found within SA contexts; these range from individual differences, such as personality and proficiency, to the availability and quality of social interactions that students are exposed to (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019; Matsumura, 2003; Taguchi, 2011).

Taguchi’s (2011) study found that the SA experience provides additional advantages, including exposure to social interactions. Students who had spent at least a year abroad were found to have had ‘more exposure to target language input and communication patterns which afforded plenty of opportunities to practice’ (p. 927) their language skills. They comment that, in providing opportunity for language use and exposure, the SA experience ‘is an ideal place for the development of processing speed’

(p. 930). Taguchi's 2008 findings supported this suggestion, but the 2011 study did not. Factors such as that they were not currently residing in the SA country at the point of data collection may have been why. Data collection in the current thesis will avoid this factor (data collection will be in the UK). Taguchi (2011) suggests that returning to their L1 country (Japan) could have gradually decreased the skills developed in the SA experience; the current research project looks at students' initial and ongoing experiences studying in the UK, where students' target L2 is spoken.

The current research project will examine the effect of the SA experience on students' listening skills, specifically the impact of accent, whilst they are in the L2 environment. Consequently, students' reflective and perception data will be more reliable and representative. Students will be able to directly examine their listening experiences as they happen or have recently happened through interviews and spoken interaction journals; these methods are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.3 and 3.4.4. These methods relate closely to Hamano-Bunce et al.'s (2019) study.

Little research has directly examined the impact of SA programmes specifically on the development of listening skills. Freed et al.'s (2004) study found that students in the SA experience outperformed those in the SAH experience in relation to fluency, however, 'few SA studies have dealt with listening' (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019, p. 108). Hamano-Bunce et al.'s (2019) study employed listening dictation tests to compare SA and SAH students; in this test learners listened to a monologue spoken by a British speaker. Japanese students studying in Scotland participated; the SA learners also completed questionnaires, interviews and listener diaries. Their study found that there were clear gains in the group of SA students. Questionnaire responses also highlighted that students positively evaluated the progress they had made; they reported 'seeking opportunities for social interaction and avoiding L1 use' (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019, p.116). Students in the study also commented on the 'rude awakening' (p.116) they experienced when they first arrived in the UK, noting an unexpected disparity between their proficiency in Japan and proficiency in the UK. The study demonstrated a greater overall improvement in SA students' listening skills than SAH students, supporting the benefits the SA experience plays in L2 listening development. However, these findings were shown to be influenced by students' strong motivation to interact in social situations and avoid L1 use. The current research project is expected to challenge that L2 listening improves in all SA contexts. Participants in the current study are expected to spend a large proportion of their time communicating in their L1, due to the high percentage of

Chinese speaking students at the University of Liverpool (HESA, 2021), therefore they will have less exposure to spoken English. This reduced exposure is expected to extend the period that students experience a disparity between their expected abilities and actual ability in the SA context; their listening skills in certain contexts are expected to be halted.

An additional factor to consider in relation to exposure in the SA experience is LoR. Teng's (2010) study assessed 'length of residency in an English-speaking environment' as one of four variables that are helpful in accounting for learners' varying levels of proficiency. This study aimed to establish if there is a relationship between foreign accent and speaker factor and what are NSs' perceptions of foreign accent. This study focused on the implications of speech instruction and factors influencing foreign accent. Whilst this study focused on speaking skills, it does provide some relevant insights. The study investigated foreign accent in the EFL speech of Taiwanese college students. Teng (2010) discussed Purcell & Suter's (1980) findings that there are four variables in accounting for the variability of L2 speech– 'first language' (the most), 'aptitude for oral mimicry', 'length of residency in an English-speaking environment' and 'strength of concern for pronunciation accuracy'. As with listening skills, there are a variety of factors that affect accent development and use.

Teng's (2010) study employed methods including rating scales of foreign accentedness (as employed in the study by Munro & Derwing (1995)). Questionnaires were also used to assess foreign accent perceptions; questionnaires were 'employed to examine the English native speakers' perceptions of foreign people and their accented English' (p. 563). This research looked at the amount of spoken language participants took part in. Their study supports 'the common belief that L2 proficiency is significantly related to the degree of foreign accent' (p. 568). Findings highlight the variable 'percent of time for participants to use English at home (PEH)' was the third most important factor for predicting pronunciation accuracy' (p. 569). As discussed by Taguchi (2011), quality exposure to the L2 outside of the classroom can directly influence language abilities, such as comprehension speed, which will have a direct impact on communication experiences. Therefore, exposure will be a key factor assessed in the current study.

Previous research has acknowledged the benefit of language exposure (Taguchi, 2008, 2011; Teng, 2010), in and out of the classroom; importantly, there remains a contrast between the language that is used in class and the language that is spoken by NSs and NNSs. Kashiwa & Benson (2018) look at the contrast between in-class and out-

of-class learning in the first three months of Chinese students studying in the SA context, in Australia. This study used ‘self-report’ (p. 729) data; students were asked to reflect on their listening experiences and spoken interactions.

Their study further indicates how the SA experience assumes there will be meaningful exposure, specifically in relation to the context of language use; ‘study abroad is an ideal setting in which to study the role of context in second language (L2) learning’ (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018, p. 725). SA can assume that the target language will be used outside of the classroom, however, as commented on by Coleman (2015), the SA experience often involves classroom instruction of some variety, but actual use of the target language outside of the classroom environment can be limited. This is expected to be evident in the participants in the current thesis who will be mainly Chinese; due to the wealth of Chinese speaking students at the University of Liverpool and surrounding Chinese speaking community, students can easily avoid speaking English outside of their studying experiences. There is a large, and increasing population of Chinese students at UK universities, as noted in HESA’s (2021) data. Further to this, the increasing use of technology throughout society means that students can further avoid communicating in their L2; self-service tills, ordering goods online and communicating with service providers via the internet can all be done in written formats or even translated to their L1. Kashiwa & Benson (2018), however, highlight how technology is changing the use of English outside the classroom; learners are increasingly using new technologies to actually engage in informal L2 use in at-home settings where there were previously few opportunities for out-of-class L2 use (Richards, 2015) both at home and in the SA experience.

Kashiwa & Benson’s (2018) study, using narrative inquiry, gave insights into students in-class and out-of-class learning. This study acknowledged students’ lack of opportunity to speak English outside of the classroom and how they felt ‘uncomfortable speaking English outside class’ (p. 733). It also highlighted an interesting contrast between in-class and out-of-class English even in the ‘study abroad’ country. An example from an interview with a participant highlights that the use of slang vocabulary that she had picked up outside of class was ‘forbidden’ by her teacher and she was told to be ‘serious’; the participant expressed confusion as this was how ‘original English speakers speak’ (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018, p. 733). This was in an academic English class which may explain the student being reprimanded for using ‘slang’, however, arguably this method of teaching could be enforcing the idea of one, ‘correct’ English. This may be

reinforcing students' negative perceptions of other English features, such as varied pronunciation in accents, and consequently causing students to distance themselves from 'this' English. In fact 'this' English is the English commonly used to communicate; there is not one uniform variety that students can listen to.

Kashiwa & Benson (2018) go on to highlight that individuals respond significantly differently to opportunities the SA experience offers; there is a comparison shown between more and less proactive students and the impact that this can have. This applies to listening difficulties and the level of impact that this may have on students.

Kashiwa & Benson (2018) state that using ELF also helped improve students' English skills. They discuss their 'view of the early weeks of study abroad as a process of transition, in which students must exercise agency to reconceptualise and reconstruct their learning environments' (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018, p. 741). The study demonstrated that, particularly in the early stages, those students who exercised their agency and befriended L2 speakers and engaged in activities benefited and understood the differences in between in-class English and 'real-life' English. The current thesis endeavours to examine these factors further; do the initial, and possibly ongoing, listening difficulties that students experience when they first arrive in the UK impact their agency and consequently their understanding of real-life English.

Freed et al. (2004) discuss the traditional belief often shared by students, teachers and 'the lay public', that 'learning in an 'immersion' context is preferable to learning that is limited to the formal language classroom setting in an at home institutional context (AH)' (p. 276). This study looked at fluency to examine the development of the 'popular perceptions regarding superior language gain in the SA context' (p. 277). One of the evaluations of fluency in the study was 'comfort in the ability to converse' (p. 278); the CEFR (2018; 2020) states 'conversing comfortably' as a C2 level listening skill.

Students in Freed et al.'s (2004) study were NSs of English, who had not spent time abroad before the study commenced and were enrolled on French courses. Three learning contexts were evaluated; At Home (AH), Study Abroad (SA) and Immersion (IM), a more intensive language learning course in their home country. One of the methods employed in this study was a Language Contact Profile; this method provided an 'insight into specific qualities of each of the three learning contexts' (p. 284). They acknowledged that students may exaggerate their use of the L2 but that there was no incentive to do so; 'it strikes us that the low frequencies reported for the use of French suggest they were relatively honest in stating the extent to which they actually used English and had contact

with NSs of French' (p. 284). This method gave an insight into the percentage of language use students were exposed to and were interacting with. This method relates closely to the Spoken Interaction Journals that are used in the current study (see section 3.4.4, p. 108).

Findings in Freed et al.'s (2004) study highlight that, as expected, SA experiences show greater benefits than AH, however 'IM, rather than in the SA, context were those who made the greatest gains' (p. 294). This highlights the importance of how much L2 experience students' actually have, emphasising the importance of the time students spend using the target language compared with the 'presumed immersion in a native speech community' (p. 294). These findings support scholars (such as Brecht & Robinson (1995); Firth & Wagner (1998); Miller & Ginsberg (1995); Wilkinson (1998)) indicating that there is a need to establish what L2 language experiences students are having in the SA experience. Freed et al. (2004) found that the IM group reported using French (the target language) more out of class, significantly more than both AH and SA groups. These findings challenge the simplistic assumption that SA is the most valuable experience.

Participants in the current research project were not in the UK solely to learn their L2 (English), however, they were still within the SA experience, studying in English to gain their qualifications, with some taking part in additional English support to improve their English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The contrast between language used in the academic setting (EAP) and more informal communication will present challenges for learners. As previously discussed in relation to Kashiwa & Benson's (2018) research, there can be a contrast between the more formal language used in academia compared to colloquial English spoken outside of the classroom. This is, however, only in certain instances. A more marked distinction can be made between prepared and unprepared speech in the academic environment. For example, in a prepared academic presentation, one may be expected to listen to more formal language. However, in unprepared, casual conversation, interactions in the academic environment are not always more formal than other day-to-day conversations. This variation means that students need to be prepared for certain instances of different language used in EAP.

EAP is a rapidly growing field of language instruction; often courses focus on both language and study skills to prepare learners to interact effectively in the higher education environment (Ding & Bruce, 2017). The current study does not assess students' participation in pre-sessional or in-sessional EAP courses. However, it is important to

note that as university students, the participants in the current study will undoubtedly have a focus on the language they need to succeed in academia. There are different requirements of students' language use in this university context; factors such as more formal language, reduced connected speech process and differences in pronunciation (Ding & Bruce, 2017) may contribute to the difference they hear in the unfamiliar LE.

This is further evident in relation to speaker's accent; Yule (2017) discusses that in different settings, social factors can influence accent. Accents can be softened in different settings (Yule, 2017) such as the university environment. An examination into the contrast between if the university and local environment creates more listening difficulties for learners will be made. Accents in the university setting, from both students and staff, are often unrepresentative of the accent of the local area; students and staff come to study from different regions and countries. The unique qualities of university life will provide an interesting look into the impact of varied English pronunciation.

These differences in contexts are especially relevant as they can alter the input of language. Huang (2004) discusses the 'special challenges in English academic listening' (p. 212) that NNSs of English experience in the SA context. Miller (2009) also highlights the additional challenges of academic listening that students face as they must comprehend complex information and unfamiliar terminology. Huang's (2004) study particularly focused on Chinese students in American universities; they looked at the speed of professors' speech, pronunciation, complexity of sentences, use of colloquial language and use of discourse markers. The study postulates how American professors could make their lectures more accessible to Chinese students.

Huang (2004) focused on the importance of academic listening whilst the current thesis places more focus on listening outside of the classroom environment. It is also important to consider how this may contrast the specific listening skills needed for academic purposes. Academic listening has its own characteristics and requires skills such as distinguishing between important and unimportant information (Flowerdew, 1995). Huang (2004) highlights that Chinese students at American universities are often 'from very different educational system[s] and cultural environment[s]' (p. 212) which can cause additional difficulties in understanding academic English. This can also be applied to the UK context; there will be similar Western differences. Huang (2004) highlights the specific difficulties Chinese students may experience, due to the contrasts between English and Chinese; English and Chinese are two non-cognate languages. Furthermore, 'academic listening is different from everyday conversational listening'

(Huang, 2004), but both are as essential to the international student's experience in the UK. One significant difference between conversational and academic English is that there is little or no opportunity for interaction and negotiation; the demand on the listener is greater (Flowerdew, 1995).

Huang's (2004) study involved 78 Chinese students completing questionnaires. Their findings acknowledge that the majority of Chinese students in the study did not have NS English teachers when learning English in China and consequently did not have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the normal or natural speed of NSs' speech. These findings highlight that speech rate can be a significant factor in speech, even in the academic setting, but that it is a factor of NS speech that students could be exposed to.

The findings highlight that it was speech rate and the clear pronunciation of lecturers that students reported as causing problems in comprehension. Interestingly, respondents reported that American teachers did not pronounce words clearly; this indicates that the complexity of pronunciation can impact comprehension even in the academic English setting. From the researchers' experiences speaking with peers who are NNSs, they experience more listening difficulties with spoken English outside of the academic environment, often commenting that tutors and lecturers speak with a standard accent that they find easy to understand. The findings of Huang's (2004) study contradict this anecdotal evidence and interestingly suggest that pronunciation could be a factor even within the academic environment. The current study will examine this further by asking participants to discuss their experiences in and out of the university environment.

Chang et al. (2013) also discuss how a pre-planned lecture will be a very different stream of speech than the speech in a spontaneous conversation. This contrast between language use will be particularly relevant to the international students in the study. The English that they will hear in the university environment will be different from socialising and communicating with members of the public.

The SA experience has associated assumptions, such as the automatic improvement of language skills, but students also often arrive with an expectation of what English they will encounter. UK universities require students to have a minimum B2 (CEFR) level of English proficiency to be accepted on a course of study (University of Liverpool, 2020). Therefore, students arriving to study in the UK will be expecting to be able to 'engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment' (CEFR, 2018). Interesting, the updated CEFR (2020) does now

also to refer to these skills in relation to a familiar variety which may indicate the difficulties unfamiliar pronunciation can cause. As Kashiwa & Benson (2018) highlight, there is a stark difference between real-life spoken English and the English students will have encountered in class; there are numerous aspects they may be unprepared for and difficulties they may experience which may impact their willingness to communicate.

2.10 Willingness to Communicate

Students Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a key factor in the success of their experience within the SA context. Le et al. (2018) discuss how students use of English outside the classroom can help to develop their communication skills; using English out of class enables students to develop skills essential for interactions, such as negotiating for meaning (Le et al., 2018). There is stark difference between in-class and out-of-class English (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018); encouraging students to communicate in their L2 outside of the classroom can expose and familiarise learners to these differences. There has been a long-held assumption that learners' WTC directly impacts their language acquisition (Long, 1996) and that factors such as self-confidence and anxiety can impact their WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Le et al. (2018) researched how Vietnamese students developed their skills outside of the classroom through online interactions using Skype and Facebook. Their study assessed how this impacted their WTC; the virtual environment can afford students with a less stressful environment to converse in English. The study took place in Vietnam, rather than in the SA experience, therefore increasing WTC outside of the classroom was difficult. The study investigated students' anxiety and perceived ability communicating in English before and after undergoing a course that involved using written and spoken English outside class. Many students in the study reported anxiety and shyness in face-to-face communication; their WTC was affected because 'they did not feel confident to speak in front of the class because they perceived that their English was not good enough, or that they did not feel comfortable speaking English' (Le et al., 2018, p. 50). The findings of this study showed that, both before and after the course, students felt most self-conscious and lacking in confidence during face-to-face communication (including video interactions on Skype). Students preferred to use written English in online

communication as they could refer back to language points and look-up items they were unsure of. Producing written language, rather than spoken, can be easier for students as they can 'refer back' (Taguchi, 2008) meaning they are more comfortable. The increasing use of technology in day-to-day life means that students can rely more heavily on written English, such as online ordering and self-service tills. The current study will assess if this preference for written English, as highlighted by Le et al. (2018), contributes to students avoiding spoken interactions. Le et al.'s (2018) study highlighted the significant impact of self-confidence in interactions, even within the virtual environment.

Research has also assessed the effect of students' motivation on WTC; motivation has been found to directly impact learners' WTC in the classroom. Lee & Hsieh (2019) discuss motivation highlighting that, whilst it can have some impact on WTC, other factors such as anxiety and self-confidence, have been found to be more impactful. The participants in Lee & Hsieh's (2019) study were undergraduate students studying at a university in Taiwan. The study used a questionnaire to assess students' WTC, looking at factors such as self-confidence, anxiety and motivation; a five-point Likert scale was used to rate these variables. As with Le et al.'s (2018) study, self-confidence was found to be a significant factor in learners' WTC. Students who felt 'more comfortable communicating in English tended to make more attempts to initiate communication' (Lee & Hsieh, 2019, p. 69). The current research study examines how listening difficulties impact students' confidence communicating and, if so, for how long this persists. Asking students to reflect on their experiences in the UK provides an insight into whether self-confidence improves over time and whether there is a relationship between listening difficulties and self-confidence. As the students in this study will be in a NS country, their motivation to speak English is expected to be higher than those learning English in a classroom setting in their home country.

Chang & Read's (2007) study looked at listening difficulties in relation to listening assessment and how to effectively support learners. They highlight that, in comparison to reading comprehension, listening includes features which are out of learners' control such as 'the speech rate, the speaker's accent [and] the cultural content' (p. 376). They also reiterate the reality that students often learn English through 'formal instruction' and therefore are not exposed to valuable, authentic input which includes these features.

Chang & Read's (2007) study looked at students with low level English proficiency in Taiwan and because of their low proficiency 'had great difficulty comprehending lectures given in only English' (p. 380). Their study involved students taking listening

tests with different methods of listening support offered (visual support, textual support, repeated input and no support). Students also completed questionnaires and interviews. Their study found that the different methods of support proved to have similar effectiveness, but the greater marked difference was between the level of comprehension students perceived at the end of the test than their actual results (Chang & Read, 2007). The findings of this study indicate that ‘providing listening support may enhance students’ confidence and may perhaps reduce their anxiety, which could be beneficial in the longer term for the development of their listening comprehension’ (Chang & Read, 2007, p. 387). Through the interviews, students reported their problems with listening, noting their preference for repeated input, specifically because it increases familiarity. Accent is an initial listening difficulty, often due to students’ lack-of awareness and familiarity (Major et al., 2005). The findings of this study reflect the importance of teaching learners to persist in their listening proficiency; ‘presenting them with a realistic challenge’ (p. 390).

Chang & Read (2007) go on to highlight that ‘if English teachers in a foreign language environment can provide input containing interesting scenarios, they can arouse their students’ interest and motivate them to keep on listening’ (p. 391). This relates to WTC and realistic listening strategies for communication outside of the classroom; as Buck (2001) discussed, the focus on meaning, ability to negotiate and interact is important. Such research begins to indicate that whilst accent can cause listening difficulties an awareness or exposure to them could assist students in being able to understand them, increasing their WTC.

2.11 Identifying gaps in the Literature

The literature review has discussed the main areas in existing research that relate to the research aim of the current study; the research aim is to discover how and if LE impacts NNS students in the SA context.

This review highlighted how listening processes may be impacted by the features of accented speech. Research has assessed how accent can be a significant difficulty within ‘speaker factor’ (Chang et al., 2013; Eisenstein & Verdi, 1985; Goh, 1999; 2000; Major et al, 2005;) and can influence comprehension. However, an analysis of how these factors

impact listeners' lived experiences has not been established. These factors have previously been examined in relation to proficiency; students' scores on listening comprehensibility tests have been the main assessment of this impact. The current study examines how accent may be influencing students' initial and ongoing experiences in real life encounters, outside of the class or exam room. This is particularly relevant to the SA experience; real-life communication encompasses more features than can be effectively tested in proficiency testing.

Research has also highlighted that accent familiarity plays a key role in students being able to comprehend accents (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al, 2005; Song & Iverson, 2018). The accents present in such studies were either NNS or regional accents other than LE. The current study used LE to build on these discussions of accent familiarity, again looking at how this factor impacts student's interactions and experiences outside of the classroom. It is the comparison between the features of a familiar accent (SSB) and an unfamiliar accent (LE) where the focus of the current research project lies.

Studies have assessed listeners' ability to identify features of accented speech (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Flege, 1984; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Issacs & Trofimovich, 2012; Scovel, 1988). Additionally, L1 and L2 perceptions and comprehension of accented speech have been further evaluated (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Issacs & Trofimovich, 2012; Scovel, 1988; Watson & Clark, 2015). The current research project will expand on these discussions, exploring students' perceptions, assessing their feelings and experiences of the accents they have encountered in Liverpool. The current study will expand on studies such as Major et al. (2005) and Sung (2016) that identified that learners' negative perceptions of an accent can cause difficulties.

Participants in the current study will be studying and living in the SA environment; research has identified the value of exposure offered in this context on students' experience (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Freed et al., 2004; Kashiwa & Benson, 2018; Taguchi's, 2008; 2011; Teng, 2010; Xu et al., 2009). There continues to be, however, an assumption that in the SA context, students will interact in more L2 than L1, and this increased exposure will improve their overall language skills (Hamano-Bunce, et al, 2019; Taguchi, 2011; Xu at al., 2009). Existing studies such as Kashiwa & Benson (2018) and Freed et al. (2004) have acknowledged that it is important to establish the amount of students' interactions in the SA environment to be able to assess other factors impacting

language skills and use. The current study will examine students' interactions and allow participants to reflect and expand on their choices in language use.

Further to this, little research has directly examined the impact of SA programmes on listening skills. Hamano-Bunce et al.'s (2019) study assessed listening in the SA context; their research focused on testing listening comprehension development. As predicted from the existing research highlighting the importance of quality experience, these findings were shown to be influenced by students' strong motivation to interact in social situations and avoid L1 use. The current research project is expected to build on these findings in highlighting that students, in certain SA contexts (e.g. Liverpool which has a high population of Chinese speakers), can often spend a large proportion of their time communicating in their L1. This reduced exposure is expected to extend the period that students experience a disparity between their expected abilities and actual abilities in comprehending natural speech. In contrast to Hamano-Bunce et al. (2019), the current study will assess how this impacts learners' perceptions of their initial and ongoing listening experiences.

As highlighted in research regarding students' ability to identify accentedness (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Issacs & Trofimovich, 2012; Scovel, 1988), students' perception of accentedness can impact their real-world interactions. Research has investigated that students' perceptions of accents may cause difficulties (Eisentein & Verdi, 1985; Major et al., 2005; Sung, 2016), but a study assessing the specific impact of LE on NNS has not been conducted.

NNS learners have been found to show a preference to standard accents such as SSB. Extensive research has highlighted student's preference for NS accents in teaching, listening materials and their interactions (Holliday, 2006; Kuo, 2006; Scales et al., 2006; Sung, 2016; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018), however these forms of NS English are not regional varieties. Hiraga (2005) highlights that some learners consider regional varieties more appealing but that they are not desirable in the context of language learning.

LE has also been found to be perceived as 'undesirable' by L1 listeners. Research has discovered that L1 listeners perceive LE negatively; this accent is commonly rated down in terms of correctness and prestige (Cardoso, 2015; Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Honeybone & Watson, 2013; Montgomery, 2007; Watson & Clark, 2015). Whilst research has signified learners' preference for NS standard varieties, research has not examined learners' reactions to LE. Their perceptions, and the possible implications of these perceptions, will be examined in the current study.

The impact that the specific phonological features of an English accent (LE) has on upper intermediate level learners has not been examined in detail. The current study will aim to fill this gap, using LE to highlight how distinct phonology can impact learners' understanding, their interactions and their language use.

The Research Questions employed in this study and why they were chosen will now be outlined.

2.11.1 Research Question 1

How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?

The first research question has been designed to examine if LE does actually cause a barrier to listening comprehension in learners' initial experiences in Liverpool. The question will establish if students do experience any difficulties comprehending LE and how this is manifested. For example, in their initial experiences did LE cause them to not understand speech in certain contexts.

Previous research has identified accent as a listening difficulty (Chang et al., 2013; Derwing & Munro, 2009; Goh, 1999; 2000; Major et al, 2005), however these studies have not examined LE solely. They have also not evaluated how this reported difficulty of accented speech causes a barrier to listening comprehension; how significant this obstacle is has not been fully assessed. Research such as Hamano-Bunce et al. (2019) has highlighted that there is a disparity experienced by listeners between their expected comprehension and actual comprehension when they initially arrive in an English-speaking country. Studies have also shown that when this is assumed to be related to accent unfamiliarity, listener effort is increased causing listening problems (Derwing & Munro, 1997; 2009; Van Engen & Peelle, 2014). This disparity and related listening problems are expected to cause a barrier to listening comprehension, but how this is experienced, specifically in relation to LE, has not yet been examined. Research Question 1 will establish how LE is a barrier to students' effective listening when they first arrive in Liverpool. This will provide an insight into the significance of accent as a listening difficulty and will link to Research Question 2, which assesses the impact that LE has on learners' experiences.

2.11.2 Research Question 2

What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?

The second research question has been designed to understand the impact that LE, and its expected associated listening difficulties, has on learners' experiences communicating in English in the UK. The question will examine how LE impacts learners' initial and ongoing experiences communicating with other English speakers in the UK. The question will assess students' encounters across the SA experience, analysing their studying and out-of-class experiences.

As has been previously discussed in identifying gaps in the literature, existing research has assessed how some forms of accented speech can cause significant listening difficulties (Chang et al., 2013; Eisenstein & Verdi's, 1985; Goh, 1999; 2000; Major et al, 2005). However, there has not been an analysis of how these factors impact listeners' lived experiences. Furthermore, the LE focus of this study in relation to NNS experience is novel. Research Question 2 will aim to establish in students' day-to-day spoken interactions does LE have any impact, positive or negative.

Previous research has also assessed the value of the SA experience (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Freed et al., 2004; Kashiwa & Benson, 2018; Taguchi's, 2008; 2011; Teng, 2010; Xu et al., 2009) and how quality interactions can help learners improve their English. Due the complications that students are expected to experience with understanding regional accents, LE is expected to have a notable impact on the SA experience. A disparity between the English learners expect to hear in the UK and the realities that they are presented with has been researched previously (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2012). Unique to the current study, is the assessment of how this initial disparity impacts students' daily communication, behaviours and feelings regarding their language use. The study will also examine for how long these difficulties persist. Students in the current study are upper intermediate level learners expected to be confident in using English; Research Question 2 will be used to evaluate how listening complications caused by LE, impact their confidence and consequent WTC.

This research question will answer what relationship students' difficulties or perceptions of LE have on the contexts they use English, if they avoid certain interactions and how often they use their L1 in an English-speaking environment. This analysis of the impact caused by this difficulty will link closely with Research Question 3 which assesses students' perceptions of LE in contrast to SSB.

2.11.3 Research Question 3

How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?

The third research question has been designed to examine students' perceptions of LE in contrast to SSB. As has been established within the Literature Review (p. 37), LE is a distinct and recognisable regional accent (Cardoso, 2015; Honeybone & Watson, 2013; Watson & Clark, 2015). Its phonology is unique, and it is predicted to present unexpected pronunciation to learners. LE has also been found to be perceived negatively by NS listeners, commonly being associated with social stigmas (Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Montgomery, 2007). Research Question 3 will use the more standard accent variety of SSB, to compare and contrast students' perceptions of LE.

Previous research has highlighted that students' perceptions of accents can contribute to listening difficulties (Eisenstein & Verdi, 1985; Major et al., 2005; Sung, 2016), however the perception of LE by NNSs has not been assessed. Research Question 3 will begin to establish how distinct regional phonological variation, such as is heard in LE, is perceived by learners. This may also then be related back to the possible difficulties and impact discussed in Research Questions 1 and 2.

SSB has been chosen as a contrast to LE based on previous studies; research has identified learners' preference for standard NS varieties of English (Kuo, 2006; Holliday, 2006; Scales et al., 2006; Sung, 2016; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). Whilst research has shown learners' preference for NS varieties, NNS listeners' response to LE has not been fully examined. It is expected that learners will show greater familiarity and positive responses to SSB due to its close relationship with standard varieties of English that are often used in teaching materials. This comparison with SSB and LE will allow for an understanding of how different pronunciation is perceived by learners, and if their previous experience (such as the predicted familiarity to SSB) affects their perceptions. The findings of Research Question 3 will run parallel with those of Research Questions 1 and 2 due to the links between perceptions, listening difficulties and the impact these have on learners' listening experiences.

2.12 Summary

The literature reviewed has identified accent as a difficulty, noting that factors such as familiarity and perception are key to impacting this difficulty. The literature has also highlighted the complexities of the SA experience and the relevance of assessing the quantity and quality of students' interactions.

The next chapter will discuss the chosen methodology of the current study, outlining the methods used to collect data to fill the gaps identified in the literature. It will discuss the research aims, design and administration of the methods and the participants in the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify the impact and response international students have to LE (as defined in section 2.4, p. 37). The study identifies the listening difficulties students reflect that they experienced on first arrival to the UK and what strategies contributed to them gaining understanding initially and over time. This study also assesses students' 'on the spot' response to LE and SSB (defined in section 2.4 and section 2.5) who have spent a period of time in the UK, specifically Liverpool. Employing a mixed methods study allowed these different elements to be examined fully. As this study investigated students' initial and ongoing experiences, a variety of methods allowed for a more complete picture of these experiences. Subjective data was able to be collected from students' own perspectives, and in employing additional methods, the researcher was able to collect objective data to confirm or contrast this. This mixed methods approach both reduced the limitations of methods and increased the reliability of the overall findings.

This chapter outlines the rationale behind this study and will present the research design and the research questions. The chapter will also outline how the students were sampled, contacted and how the listening experiences and semi-structured interviews were executed. Finally, the procedures used for data analysis will be discussed along with any limitations.

3.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to discover how and if LE impacts international students when they arrive to study at university in the UK, specifically in the city of Liverpool. This research will highlight the impact the distinct LE accent has on students' experiences of English when studying at British universities and highlight the contrast between 'expectation' and 'reality'. The study will demonstrate that students may not understand a proportion of their daily communication, consequently impacting their English spoken interactions and WTC.

The research questions were devised to answer key problems outlined in the Literature Review, importantly focusing on if LE is a problem and to what degree. The questions use an open-ended style employing exploratory verbs such as 'what' and 'how' (Creswell, 2013). Such questions will reveal the impact and significance of LE on students in the SA experience.

The Research Questions are as follows:

- Research Question 1:
How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?

- Research Question 2:
What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?

- Research Question 3:
How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?

The research questions lend themselves to adopting a qualitative approach to data collection to examine the world of human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994; 2011) and obtain the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). The use of interviews and students' self-report data from questionnaire responses allowed the researcher to establish students' initial and ongoing experiences of LE. Importantly, these methods allowed students to add their own experiences to the data collected that, if solely assessing students 'test' ability to understand LE, would be missed. The data

collection methods employed, allowed an interesting and important insight into students' experiences with English outside of an exam or classroom. As highlighted in the Literature Review (section 2.9, p. 56), the SA experience encompasses more than time spent studying and such data, as collected here, may challenge some of the assumptions of the SA experience.

The focus of this study is to investigate learners' experiences within in the SA context, examining their perspectives and reflections of how their lived experiences of spoken English impacted their language perception and use. Consequently, this research aligned with an interpretivist paradigm. As highlighted by Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), the interpretivist approach makes an effort 'to get into the head of the subjects being studied' (p. 33); this research endeavours to understand how unexpected pronunciation made upper intermediate level learners feel and subsequently act in relation to their language use. The interpretivist approach focuses on understanding an individual's interpretation of the world around them, and hence qualitative research allows for an insight into their interpretation and perspectives (Lichtman, 2013).

3.3 Study Design

The design of this study focuses on how to effectively encompass and highlight the specific views and experiences of the sample of participants. After studying alongside and teaching international students in a Liverpool context, and other British regional contexts, the researcher has gained an anecdotal understanding of the impact and implications of unexpected phonology. Defining the specific impact that this 'issue' has on students in the SA experience will contribute to the discussions around ELT, specifically areas such as preparatory and in-session courses.

This research takes an interpretivist approach and as such must be designed with the reflections and interactions of students in the SA context in mind in order for the data to be meaningful (Creswell, 2013). The reflective approach of this study will contribute to a new view on students' spoken interactions which will be "co-constructed between the researcher and the researched" (Creswell, 2013, p. 36).

As previously mentioned, the study aligns closely with the interpretivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) focusing on the participants' views

of the phenomenon being studied and the significant qualitative focus. However, this research does draw on the researched; limited data is drawn on from the researcher as, as a native English speaker, they have not had the same experiences as the participants. This underlying framework, or paradigm, supports the dominance of the qualitative and reflective data from participants, however quantitative methods have been employed to complement the inquiry (Creswell, 2003).

Whilst the approach of this research is predominantly interpretivist, a strictly qualitative approach was not deemed appropriate. A mixed methods approach was undertaken for this research study to allow for a fuller representation of students' experiences; using mixed methods allows for subjective and objective data of learners' experiences. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through different methods; this data was then analysed separately, and the findings were collated (Creswell, 2013). The triangulation of this data enhanced the reliability of the data collection and findings.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

This research study employed four methods of data collection in order to respond to the specified research questions (p. 70). Four different data collection tools were considered appropriate to effectively establish both the viewpoints and previous experiences of the students participating in the study. This combination of methods allows for a comparison of students' viewpoints and their general comprehension. The four methods utilised were a questionnaire, listening experiences, semi-structured interviews and spoken interaction journals. The following sections of this chapter will discuss each method in detail.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaires allow for the collection of a wealth of self-report data from participants to establish how LE impacts students, initially by taking a wider look at students' reflections of any listening difficulties they experienced when they first arrived in Liverpool. This method was chosen to collect data to contribute to answering Research

Question 1 (How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?).

The questionnaire designed for this study explored how accents, specifically LE, influenced NNSs' of English listening experiences. The questionnaire aimed to discover what factors students found to be a significant barrier to their understanding of spoken English on their first entry to the UK. Further to this, students were asked to consider how their experiences altered after their first entry, did their comprehension of accents improve over a period of time and how long was this factor an issue for them.

To collect the data, initially a pilot questionnaire was administered to a group of NNS students to allow them to reflect on their experiences. Derwing & Munro (2009) comment that 'listener's judgements are the only meaningful window into [both] accentedness and comprehensibility' (p. 478). Consequently, reflective data was collected to discover what factors students found to be a significant barrier to their understanding of spoken English. Questionnaires were chosen based on Goh (1999) and Chang et al.'s (2013) studies which also employed this method to establish the factors considered important in listening comprehension.

3.4.1.1 Design of the questionnaire

The questionnaire asked respondents whether they experienced any difficulties understanding spoken English on their first entry to Liverpool and asked for clarification; if they experienced difficulties, what were these difficulties. Whilst the focus of the current study is accent, the initial questions were designed to allow respondents to reflect on their overall listening comprehension when they first arrived in the UK. It was expected that learners may report other factors than accent in their responses, such as speed of speech, however, it was expected that accent would be a key factor.

Pilot Questionnaire

A small pilot was administered to inform the design of the questionnaire. 16 students studying at The Liverpool School of English completed the pilot questionnaire; all students were experiencing English in a NS country in a SA context and they were all taking part in English language classes whilst in the UK. Whilst some of the students in this study may have had previous experience of English in a NS country, as they were

still at the beginning of their English language learning experiences, they were able to reflect on their initial encounters with spoken English in NS environments. The details of the participants in this pilot are outlined in Table 3.1 (below).

Table 3.1: Participants in Pilot Questionnaire

	<i>Number of Participants (n = 16)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male – 3 (18.75%) Female – 13 (81.25%)
<i>Age</i>	19 - 23 Mean age = 21.13
<i>Nationality</i>	Chinese – 9 (56.25%) Japanese – 1 (6.25%) Spanish – 5 (31.25%) Polish – 1 (6.25%)
<i>L1</i>	Chinese – 9 (56.25%) Japanese – 1 (6.25%) Spanish – 5 (31.25%) Polish – 1 (6.25%)
<i>LoR in Liverpool</i>	1- 4 months Mean LoR = 1.88 months

As demonstrated in Table 3.1, the majority of the participants were female (81.25%); this variable was discounted as gender was not perceived to have an influence on the phenomenon assessed in this study. Students were L2 speakers of four different languages (Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and Polish); this variable was reduced in the final stages of the study. Importantly for the pilot, students LoR in Liverpool was low, at an average of 1.88 months, meaning students were able to provide reflections of their initial experiences in Liverpool. The questionnaire focused on initial difficulties in encountering English accents. The questionnaire was designed and distributed to establish the factors which may impact learners' communication difficulties on first entry to Liverpool.

The pilot questionnaire was administered in order to inform the final design of the questionnaire which was administered to a larger number of participants (n=92). The pilot questionnaire was administered online via the online survey provider Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). Students at The Liverpool School of English were emailed a link to the survey and a participant information sheet from their teacher (see Appendix 1, p. 245). The pilot questionnaire allowed for open answers (this was later used to inform multiple choice options in the final questionnaire to allow for quantitative results). The focus of this study is the LE accent, but the questionnaire did not skew the results to focus on this; participants were asked to reflect on their overall experiences understanding spoken English. Open questions in the pilot questionnaire ensured no questions employed later in the research project were leading.

Table 3.2 (below) outlines the procedures used in administering the pilot questionnaire; it was administered online, and students were contacted regarding participation by their teachers, via email.

Table 3.2: Procedures used in Pilot Questionnaire

<u>Data Collection for Pilot Questionnaire</u>				
Time	Procedure	Researcher's role	Student(s)'s role	
Pilot Questionnaire:				
<i>Prior to participating in the study</i>	<i>Students have been sent (via their teacher) information sheets and consent forms and asked to contact the researcher if they have any concerns or questions.</i>			
1 minute	Invite students to complete the questionnaire via email	Email link to students' teacher. Link to questionnaire forwarded onto students via email by their teacher.	Open link to online questionnaire provider (SurveyMonkey).	
5 minutes	Introduction to study and consent form.		Complete consent form on first page of questionnaire (students cannot proceed to next stage if consent is not given).	Students leave study if consent is not given.
10 minutes	Complete questionnaire.		Complete questionnaire.	

The pilot questionnaire gave an opportunity to develop the questions asked to students. An example question from the pilot questionnaire is shown below.

1. When you first came to the UK did you experience any difficulties understanding spoken English?

- a. Yes
- b. No

1.1 If Yes, what kind of difficulties did you experience?

In piloting the questionnaire, open questions were used to elicit respondents' thoughts which were then evaluated and used to inform the choices provided in the multiple choice questions in the final design. Mackey & Gass (2005) comment that open questions give respondents an opportunity to express their own thoughts and ideas without any constraints. Such questions can provide data which is unexpected which is why this question type was chosen for the pilot.

The initial questions were designed to promote respondents to think about their listening experiences. The questionnaires were then designed to focus on learners' experiences of accent asking whether they found the accents they heard familiar. The phrasing of this question was altered as a consequence of the pilot; the researcher concluded that the original question may have been leading. The original question was written as follows:

*'4. When you first came to Liverpool were the accents **different than other accents?**'*

This question was redrafted to:

*'4. When you first came to Liverpool were the accents you heard **the same as others in the UK?**'*

In their in-depth discussion of research methods used in education, Cohen et al. (2011) highlight that a common pitfall in question writing is writing leading questions; whilst there may be an answer you wish to get from a particular question it is important not to lead respondents to reflect what you require, or your data will be flawed. This redrafting process, as demonstrated with question 4, aimed to remove any leading questions from the questionnaire. The pilot questionnaire also asked students 'What did you do to achieve understanding?' and 'What do you think has helped you to understand the

accents you have encountered in the UK'; again, these were open questions so not to restrict students' responses or be leading. The response to these questions informed the choice of multiple-choice options in the questions used in the final questionnaire.

To create a questionnaire which would give quantitative results, the final draft of the questionnaire included multiple choice questions. When creating the multiple choice options for the questionnaire, the pilot questionnaire allowed for open answers. Using the responses from the pilot, the multiple choice options were more informed and less leading. The focus of this study is accent, but the questionnaire did not skew the results to focus on accent; participants were asked to reflect on their overall experiences understanding spoken English.

One significant indication from the pilot questionnaire was the inclusion of *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* as well as *Accent* as a multiple choice option. In the pilot study, students categorised *Accent* as a person's overall pronunciation, whereas if they only identified certain pronunciation difficulties in an individual's speech, they did not always identify it as their accent. Including *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* ensured students would be able to identify all difficulties they had. The pilot questionnaire allowed for effective drafting of the questions used in the final questionnaire.

Final Questionnaire

The final draft of the questionnaire included questions regarding respondents' methods of gaining understanding and the length of time respondents felt it took them to understand the new accents they heard. These were chosen to establish respondents' ability to cope with the ambiguities in spoken English.

Respondents were also asked:

7. *Approximately, how long after your first entry to the UK did you feel able to understand the accents you heard?*

- 1-2 weeks
- 3-4 weeks
- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- Other (please specify) _____

This question was designed to establish to what extent learners' difficulty with unfamiliar accents was a barrier in their ongoing listening comprehension. Students were given multiple choice options for this question (and an option to specify another answer if they wished). The multiple-choice options given were categories rather than specific periods of time, e.g., 1-3 months. The process of becoming used to a language feature, such as an accent, will be gradual; these categories allow respondents to provide an approximate response. A dichotomous response, such as 1 month or 2 months, forces respondents to come to an exact judgement. Cohen et al. (2011) comment that including elements, such as categories, can reduce pressure on respondents making the completion of questionnaires easier.

Multiple choice options allow respondents to easily reflect on their experiences and perceptions; this reflects Sung's (2016) study which assessed learners' perceptions of different varieties of English. The questionnaires also remained anonymous, and students were informed that their responses would not affect their studies. Sung (2016) comments on the importance of this assurance; making students aware that their grades will not be affected reduces any pressure on participants.

To gather further data from the questionnaire, questions were also designed to establish the background of the respondents, such as whether they learnt English in a native English-speaking country. Huang's (2004) study highlights the relevance of using questionnaires to gather background information; they were able to make connections between learner's listening difficulties and their previous experiences. Establishing students' previous learning experience provided data regarding if students had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the natural qualities of NSs' speech.

Both the pilot and final questionnaire were administered online and therefore they were self-completion questionnaires. Cohen et al. (2011) comment that it is important to 'avoid too many open-ended questions on self-completion questionnaires [as] self-completion questionnaires cannot probe respondents to find out just what they mean by particular responses' (p. 396). The pilot questionnaire included a greater number of open questions; this was necessary to inform the multiple-choice options chosen for the final questionnaire. Open-ended questions allowed students to respond in their own words; whilst this has its benefits, including allowing for responses that may have been unexpected by the question designer, this can lead to misunderstanding and a lack of clarity. For example, it could be ambiguous which specific listening difficulty a participant is referring to if they state 'the way people speak'; this could relate to multiple

factors, such as accent, vocabulary and speed of speech. Consequently, Cohen et al.'s (2011) comments regarding the number of open questions is reflected in the design of the final questionnaire which was distributed to a greater number of respondents.

To gather more data around students' overall experience in the UK, additional questions were added to the final questionnaire. Students were asked to reflect on their previous language experiences, as shown in Questions 3 and 5 (below).

3. Have you spent an extensive period (e.g. over a month) in an English-speaking country before?

- *Yes*
- *No*

If Yes, please provide more details (e.g. Where? For how long?)

5. Did you grow up or learn English in an English-speaking environment (e.g., English-speaking relatives)? Please specify.

These questions were included to provide a more detailed perspective of students' language experiences before they came to the UK. Students' previous experience living in an English-speaking country or surrounded by spoken English could significantly impact their language skills. Respondents were asked to provide details of their previous and ongoing language experiences to help inform the data gathered. Students were asked if they had grown up in an English-speaking country, had they spent an extensive amount of time in an English-speaking country before and what language they speak most often in their accommodation. These factors begin to allow for some understanding of what has influenced their reactions to LE and their abilities to tolerate the ambiguities they may encounter. This data also provides estimates in relation to exposure to spoken English; exposure has been found to be a key factor in relation to listening comprehension and accent familiarity (Major et al., 2005).

Students were also asked to reflect on their spoken interactions in the questionnaire. Question 8 (shown below) was included to provide quantitative data about students' spoken interactions.

8. Please tick which spoken interactions you have experienced. Please indicate, approximately, what percentage of your overall interactions does each interaction account for.

<i>Interaction</i>		<i>Percentage of overall interactions</i>
<i>Peer to peer (in English)</i>		
<i>Peer to peer (in another language – please specify)</i>		
<i>Tutor/Lecturer</i>		
<i>Library staff</i>		
<i>Other university staff (e.g., administration, accommodation)</i>		
<i>Government staff (e.g., visa department)</i>		
<i>Medical (doctors/nurses)</i>		
<i>Bank staff</i>		
<i>Taxi driver</i>		
<i>Public transport staff</i>		
<i>Telephone interaction (in English)</i>		
<i>Telephone interaction (in another language – please specify)</i>		
<i>Cashier (e.g., supermarket, clothes shops)</i>		
<i>Restaurant (waiter/waitress)</i>		
<i>Food and drink services (e.g., coffee shop)</i>		
<i>Members of the public (e.g., people on the train, in a shop etc)</i>		
<i>Other (please specify):</i>		

Question 8 (above) allowed students to reflect on what spoken interactions they were taking part in. To define the spoken interaction categories, NSs and NNSs who were peers of the researcher, studying at the University of Liverpool, were asked to consider their day-to-day interactions. The most common responses were chosen for the categories. As the participants in the study were also university students who were living in the Liverpool area, they were expected to share similar interactions. Whilst the data from this question only gave approximations provided by the learners, it did provide a quantitative insight into what English students are interacting with in the SA experience.

3.4.1.2 Administration of the Questionnaire

The final questionnaire was administered online via the online survey provider Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and via email, directly to students. Online was chosen as the method of administration in order to reach a wider number of participants over a short period of time. Initially, later questionnaires were expected to be completed in person. As discussed in more detail later in this chapter (section 3.4.2, p. 92), questionnaires had been planned to be administered when the researcher met with students face-to-face to conduct other research methods (listening experiences and semi-structured interviews). This was impacted by the government restrictions which were put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, ultimately, all questionnaires were administered online.

Table 3.3 (below) outlines the procedures used in the administration of the final questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered online, and students were contacted regarding participation via email or via the University of Liverpool's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Table 3.3: Procedures used in final draft of the Questionnaire

<u>Data Collection for final Questionnaire</u>				
Time	Procedure	Researcher's role	Student(s)'s role	
Questionnaire:				
<i>Prior to participating in the study</i>	<i>Students have been sent information sheets and consent forms and asked to contact the researcher if they have any concerns or questions.</i>			
1 minute	Invite students to complete the questionnaire via email or through the University of Liverpool's VLE.	Link to questionnaire (or email version of questionnaire) forwarded onto students via email or posted on the University of Liverpool's VLE by the teacher.	Open link to online questionnaire provider (SurveyMonkey) or email version of questionnaire.	
5 minutes	Introduction to study and consent form.		Complete consent form on first page of questionnaire (students cannot proceed to next stage if consent is not given).	Students leave study if consent is not given.
10 minutes	Complete questionnaire.		Complete questionnaire.	

Students studying at the University of Liverpool on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics courses were invited to take part via a link which was posted on the University of Liverpool's VLE pages and emailed to students mailing lists, alongside a participant information sheet. An online consent form was included at the beginning of the questionnaire (see Appendix 6, p. 254). In the Survey Monkey version of the questionnaire, respondents were not able to proceed to the next page until the participant had responded to the consent form; this feature was only used in the online questionnaire once as preventing respondents from proceeding if they have not provided a response can 'both anger respondents – such that they give up and abandon the survey- or prevent them from having a deliberate non response (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 277). With those students who participated during the COVID-19 pandemic, who were emailed their questionnaire,

they were in contact with the researcher via Microsoft Teams or Skype and so it was possible to ensure they completed the consent form prior to completing the questionnaire.

During the design of the questionnaire it was noted that the chosen method of administration had some limitations; while online questionnaires can reach a greater number of participants the return rate can often be lower than other methods (Dörnyei, 2003). To diminish these limitations reminder emails and VLE posts were sent to participants to encourage participation. Additionally, participants were informed that they may ask for a report of the findings of the study if they wished. This provided some possible benefit to the respondents; as all the respondents were in an educational environment, and studying courses related to this research project, this may have been of some interest to them. Cohen et al. (2011) comment that another limitation of online questionnaire is that respondents can often be unaware of how long the questionnaire will take as they are unable to see beyond one question at a time, consequently they abandon the questionnaire part way through. This factor was overcome in the study using a progress bar; respondents were able to see how far through the questionnaire they were. Respondents were also informed in the participant information sheet and on the welcome page that the questionnaire would take no longer than 10 minutes. Figure 3.1 (below) shows the first page of the questionnaire, as administered by Survey Monkey, demonstrating the information respondents were given and the progress bar.

Figure 3.1: First page of Questionnaire

Your Views on Native British Accents

Hi, my name is Kathryn.
I am a PhD student at the University of Liverpool. I am interested in what kind of difficulties, in relation to spoken English, non-native speakers' experienced when they first arrived in the UK.

You are invited to participate in this study as a non-native speaker of English.
Please may you answer the following questions; your answers will remain anonymous and there are no right or wrong answers.
If you feel uncomfortable, you can withdraw from this research study at any time, without explanation.
This questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes or less to complete.


If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire, please email me (Kathryn Hope) at hskhope2@liverpool.ac.uk.

On the next page you will find a consent form. Please complete this and then move on to the following page where the questions begin.

Thank you very much for your time.

1 / 7

Next

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3.4.1.3 Questionnaire Participants

92 students completed the final draft of the questionnaire. Students studying at the University of Liverpool, enrolled on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics programmes were invited to take part in this study as they were all experiencing English in a NS country in a SA experience. Table 3.4 outlines the demographic of the students who completed the questionnaire.

Table 3.4: Participants in Final Questionnaire

	Number of Participants (<i>n</i> =92)
Gender	Male – 14 (15.2%) Female – 78 (84.5%)
Age	21 – 35 Mean age = 23.89
Nationality	Chinese – 89 (96.7%) Japanese – 3 (3.3%)
L1	Chinese – 83 (90.2%) Mandarin – 4 (4.3%) Kazakh – 2 (2.2%) Japanese – 3 (3.3%)
LoR in Liverpool	4 - 18 months Mean LoR = 8.02

As shown in Table 3.4, the majority of the participants were female (84.5%); as in the pilot questionnaire, this variable was discounted as gender was not perceived to have an influence on the phenomenon assessed in this study. Participants average LoR in Liverpool was 8.02 months; this allowed students to be able to reflect in their initial experiences in Liverpool whilst also being able to report if they have experienced changes since spending a notable period of time in Liverpool.

The variable of students' nationality was reduced in the final version of the questionnaire; 96.7% of participants were Chinese. Students were also asked to record their first language (L1) as part of the questionnaire. This data added to the understanding of the demographic of the participants. The majority of participants were from China (96.7%); whilst there are several languages spoken in China, often students did not specify their L1. Some students identified that their L1 was Mandarin or Kazakh, however most reported simply 'Chinese' (90.2%).

In all stages of the data collection of this project, students were believed to be B2 (CEFR level) or above. This was, however, only based on the entry requirements to the University of Liverpool which state that to study at the university, students 'must satisfy a minimum of CEFR B2 level in each component (speaking, writing, listening and

reading) [as] this is the minimum level acceptable for degree level study in order to secure a visa to enter the UK via Student Route' (University of Liverpool, 2021). Due to the postgraduate nature of students' studies, this level will likely be higher than minimum. Whilst there will be some variation in these levels, participants in the study can be categorised as upper intermediate level learners.

3.4.2 Listening Experiences

The questionnaire was able to gather data on students' demographic information and their personal reflections on how they experienced spoken English when they arrived in the UK. To examine learners' immediate and current reactions to different accented speech, participants were asked to listen to a range of different recordings and report on their perception of the voices they heard. These listening experiences were chosen to provide additional data on students' perceptions of accents. This method was chosen to collect data to answer Research Question 3 (How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?).

The method was used similarly to Kaur & Raman (2014) and Hamano-Bunce et al.'s (2019) studies which assessed learners' perception and understanding of different accents of English. This data gives an insight to how students perceive accent at the time of the study and can be compared with their reflections of how they perceived accents when they first arrived in the UK. Students were asked to listen to audio recordings and rate their familiarity and ease of understanding. Following on from this, participants were asked to record, via the marking of transcripts, any difficulties they had in understanding the speech they heard (this is discussed in more detail later in this section, p. 99).

In the original design of this stage of data collection, students were going to meet face-to-face with the researcher to listen to the samples of speech and discuss their thoughts. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic these meetings with the researcher had to be cancelled. Hartshorn & McMurry (2020) discuss that many universities quickly closed due to COVID-19, and teaching transitioned to online platforms. Similarly, this stage of research moved online, meeting with students via Microsoft Teams or Skype. Due to government restrictions and safety regulations this was an unavoidable change and compromises had to be made to be able to continue the

data collection (Leemann et al., 2020). One significant limitation of this data collection was the number of participants who were able to take part. Students who had already signed up to take part in the study were contacted to participate in the online format, however, due to numerous factors such as severe anxieties (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020) many students did not wish to take part. As this process was now completely online recruiting additional students was difficult. Furthermore, it was important that students who took part in the research, both listening to the recordings and in the later semi-structured interviews, had some experience of spoken English in a pre-pandemic lifestyle to be able to reflect on. Many students travelled to their home countries as soon as they were able, therefore there was a limit to the number of students who could participate. Importantly, all of the participants who did take part have had a comparable experience of LE as those in the previous data collection, such as the questionnaire, in terms of LoR in Liverpool communicating in a ‘normal’, pre-Covid lifestyle.

3.4.2.1 Design of the Listening Experiences

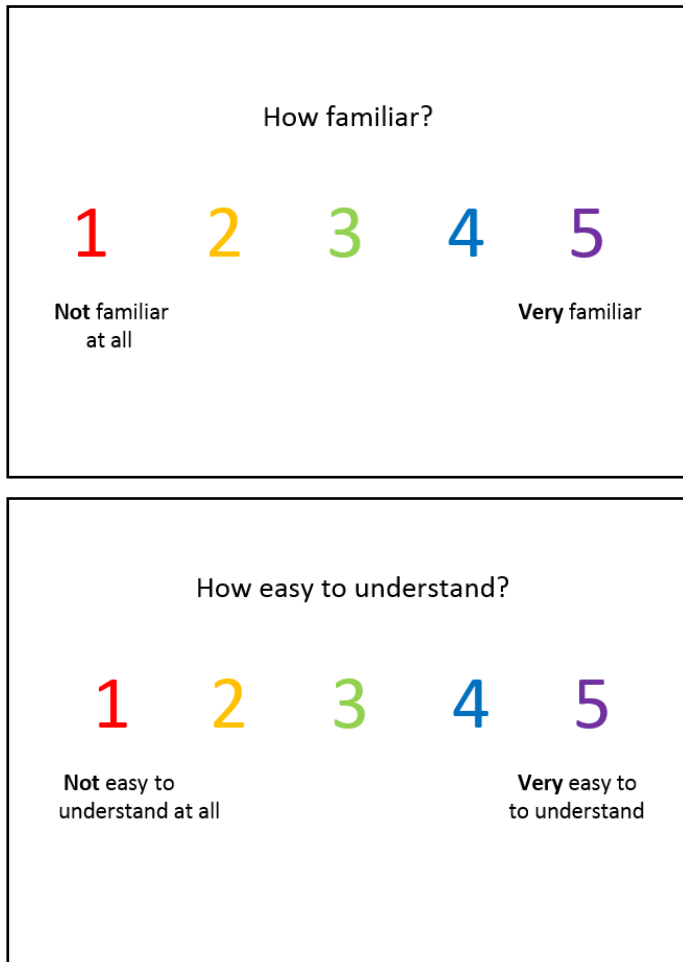
In this stage of the data collection, participants were asked to reflect how understandable and familiar they perceived LE to be. In order to do this effectively, students were asked to listen to recordings of LE; whilst there is a wealth of valuable reflective data used in this study, this gave participants opportunity to respond to a direct stimulus.

Pilot Listening Experiences

To inform the design, this method of data collection was piloted on a group of the researcher’s peers. The participants who completed the pilot were 5 NNS students at the University of Liverpool and were able to reflect to the researcher the ease of the process and if any features were missed in the research design. 3 peers completed the tasks prior to the pandemic in person and 2 completed it online to further test these methods. One feature which was altered in the pilot process was the use of a visual prompt when asking students to rate the accents they heard; this was made especially evident when these methods had to move to an online platform. A visual prompt (seen in Figure 3.2) was developed to ensure participants were both clear what they were been asked and the details of the scales; without the visual prompt, in piloting these methods, participants

were sometimes unclear whether 1 or 5 represented the most or least understanding/familiarity. Figure 3.2 (below) shows the visual prompt.

Figure 3.2: Visual Prompt used in Listening Experiences



As the methods moved online, some technical issues were also evaluated in the pilot. One specific change was to ensure sound quality; screensharing was found to be the best way to share the recording with the participants. Other methods, such as sending the recordings to the students or playing them on a different device, were found to reduce the sound quality and cause problems in relation to the recordings being played at the correct time.

Final Listening Experience

The recordings used in the final listening experience were chosen, predominately, to present accent features associated with the accent being investigated in this study, LE. In addition to LE, students were also presented with samples of SSB. This was chosen to provide a contrast, or control, in evaluating students' perception of LE. As discussed in section 2.8 (p. 53), learners are often presented with standard varieties of English, such as SSB, throughout the language learning process, in both listening materials and teaching methods.

In choosing the recordings to present to participants, it was ensured that the key features that make each accent distinct were present (this is demonstrated in Table 3.5). The recordings were a selection of samples of natural connected speech where specific features of LE and SSB were identified. These samples were carefully chosen from BBC Voices (n.d.), part of the British Library Sounds Collection. They were taken from longer recordings; details of the full-length recordings can be found in Appendix 7 (p. 261). The full recordings are available online; MP3 samples from the recordings were created of each shorter sample. This was to ensure that each sample presented to each participant was the same.

Each sample is an extract from an interaction between 2 or more speakers and includes specific accent features (LE and SSB). One extract (Extract 2) included only one speaker but is taken from a longer conversation; the sample still includes the speaker's natural conversational English. As discussed in relation to listening processes (section 2.2, p. 10), this presented learners with natural connected speech and therefore gave a realistic representation of students' experiences listening to spoken English in day-to-day life. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 provided details of the samples used.

Table 3.5: Key Features of LE as evidenced in the samples

Feature of Liverpool English (LE)	Example	Evidence in transcript
Consonants:		
TH -stopping: Dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are realised as dental stops [t, d]	‘Those’ - [ðəʊz] becomes [dəʊz]	Extract 1- 7.18: ‘that’ 7. 29: ‘they’ Extract 3- 44.42: ‘nothing’
Dropping of /h/ (present in many other varieties)	‘Him’ – [hɪm] becomes [ɪm]	Extract 3- 44.33: ‘have’
R is pronounced as a voiced tap [ɾ]	In <i>mi[ɾ]or, ve[ɾ]y</i>	Extract 4- 8.40: ‘very’
<i>Lenition:</i>		
/t/ is realised as a fricative and can also be debuccalised to [h]	‘What’ - [wɒt] becomes [wɒh] ‘Not’ - [nɒt] becomes [nɒh]	Extract 1- 7.22: ‘what I mean’ 7.26: ‘but’
/k/ can be lenited to [x]	‘Back’ - [bæk] becomes [bax] ‘Dock’ - [dɒk] becomes [dɒx]	Extract 1- 7.07: ‘talking’
Vowels:		
No distinction between [ʊ] and [ʌ]. Lack of the FOOT/STRUT split.	‘Cup’ as [kʊp] not [kʌp]	Extract 3- 44.48: ‘us’ Extract 4- 8.05: ‘made up’
Short [a] in words such as ‘bath’ rather than [ɑ:]	‘Bath’ as [baθ] not [bɑ:θ]	Extract 4- 8.27: ‘laugh’
The NURSE/SQUARE merger. Lack of contrast between the lexical sets nurse and square; both realised as a front vowel [ɛ:].	‘Hair’ and ‘her’ both [he:] ‘Fair’ and ‘fur’ both [fe:]	Extract 2- 22.13: ‘share’
The GOOSE/FOOT merger. Lack of contrast between the lexical sets goose and foot; both realised as a long vowel [u:].	‘Book’ as [bu:k] not [bʊk] ‘Look’ as [lu:k] not [lʊk]	Extract 2- 21.24: ‘Liverpool’

Table 3.6: Key Features of SSB as evidenced in the samples

Feature of SSB	Example	Evidence in Transcript
Consonants:		
Aspiration of plosives /p/ and /k/ (creating an /h/-like whisper)	[k ^h] in words such as ‘kiss’ [k ^h ɪs]	Extract 5-14.28: ‘part’
Affrication of plosive /t/	[tʃ] in words such as ‘tea’ and ‘city’	Extract 6-31.43: ‘city’
/l/ and /n/ now pronounced with normally released t/ and /d/ followed by a weak vowel	In ‘little’ [lɪtəl] and ‘certain’ [sə:tən]	Extract 5-14.06: ‘important’
Glottal Stop common as a form of /t/	‘Football’ – [fʊʔbɔ:l] not [fɒtbɔ:l]	Extract 5-14.06: ‘important’
Vowels:		
<i>Anti-clockwise vowel shift:</i>		
Raised vowels: Lot is nearer [ɔ] than [ɒ] and Thought is nearer [o] than [ɔ]	‘Lot’- [lɒt] not [lɔt] ‘Thought’ - [θɒt] not [θɔ:t]	Extract 5-14.48: ‘thought’
GOAT backing (GOAT vowel becomes more like the short LOT vowel)	‘Old’ – [ɒld] not [əʊld]	Extract 6-31.52: ‘whole’

Table 3.5 and 3.6 (above) outline the specific examples of each feature that is present in the samples of spoken English. Each phonological feature is one that has been identified as a distinctive feature of the chosen accents, LE and SSB (as discussed in more detail in sections 2.4 and 2.5).

It has not been possible to introduce all defining features of each accent within the brief samples presented to students. However, the group of sample accents presented do provide a representative sample of each accent whilst also being able to present a range of ages and genders of speakers.

In addition to phonological features, it was important to consider other factors which may impact a speakers’ voice. Factors such as age and gender can influence an individual’s voice and therefore must be considered (Watson, 2007); this is discussed in greater detail in section 2.4 (p. 41). To counteract this and give a fair representation of the accents being examined, the recordings were selected from a range of speakers of different ages and genders, as outlined in Table 3.7 (below).

Table 3.7: Speakers in LE and SSB Samples

	Number of LE Speakers	Number of SSB Speakers	Total number of Speakers
Gender	Male – 3	Male – 4	Male – 7
	Female – 2	Female – 3	Female - 5
Age	19 - 61	17 - 69	

As shown in Table 3.7, a range of speakers were present in the samples to represent the variation in speakers. 7 male and 5 female speakers were used, and their ages ranged from teens to sixties.

Length of extracts used was also considered; there were some allowances, for example to allow a speaker to finish their utterance, but the recordings were kept to between 40 and 70 seconds (average time of 49.63 seconds). This ensured that, whilst there is a greater number of SSB speakers for example (7 SSB speakers and 5 LE speakers), the amount of exposure to each accent was approximately the same. The focus when selecting the extracts was to ensure they were brief enough to not cause fatigue for the listener, but they also included key distinctive features that define the speech as LE or SSB (features previously discussed in section 2.4 and section 2.5).

Another important feature to consider when assessing students' response to the speakers they heard was speech rate. Speech rate is a commonly reported listening difficulty by L2 learners (Carney, 2020; Cutler, 2012; Field, 2009; Goh, 1999). To reduce this variable, the speech rate of each sample was assessed. The most frequent and economical measurement of speech rate is words per minute (wpm) and NS English speech has been found range from 120 to 260 wpm (Götz, 2013; Huang & Graf, 2020).

Both LE and SSB speakers in the recordings were found to have a similar speech rate; an average of 215 wpm and 230 wpm respectively. These speech rates also align with the average native British English conversational speech rate of between 190 and 230 wpm (Huang & Graf, 2020).

To reduce the impact of factors other than accent, recordings using non-complex language were chosen (see Appendix 7, p. 261, for the transcripts). Within the conversations between speakers there are some proper nouns such as place names (e.g., 'Toxteth') used. It may be understandable for speakers to be unsure of these words

regardless of how they are pronounced; this has been considered in relation to analysis and discussion. There are also some words and phrases which may be less commonplace in modern speech (e.g., ‘drawing room’) which again students may be unaware of; this has also been considered in relation to analysis and discussion (highlighted in section 4.2.2. p. 139).

To assess students’ familiarity and ease of understanding of LE and SSB, students were asked to rate on a scale of one to five what they heard after listening to each speech sample. Participants were prompted by the researcher ‘how familiar/easy to understand did you find the speech you heard?’ and shown a visual prompt (Figure 3.2).

To provide quantitative data for analysis, the researcher chose to use a Likert scale for learners to rate their degree of judgement. The standard 5-point Likert scales used the markers from ‘Not Familiar at all’ to ‘Very Familiar’ and ‘Not Easy to understand at all’ to ‘Very Easy to Understand’ (as shown in Figure 3.2, p. 94). Cronbach’s Alpha was used to analyse this scale. This analysis revealed a high level of interval consistency; Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.863. Dörnyei (2003) also highlights the relevance of Likert scales in allowing respondents to reflect their degree of agreement on different statements.

After their first listening of each sample, students were sent a transcript of that sample. Participants were then asked to mark, or highlight, any words or phrases in the text that they noted as difficult. They were asked to do this as they listened to the sample for a second time. This method was chosen over the use of a transcription task. Transcription was not considered the most effective way to gauge students’ perception of difficulties. Transcription methods involve production and repetition of exact discourse; commonly transcription tasks focus on accuracy, rather than meaning. As students are required to demonstrate another skill (writing) this can also cause anxiety in learners (Vandergrift, 2007). This study was focused on where students experience difficulties listening, therefore it was believed that students marking of difficult sections in the transcripts would provide a more indicative representation of where these issues lie.

3.4.2.2 Administration of the Listening Experiences

The listening experiences were administered online via Skype or Microsoft Teams. As discussed earlier in this section, they were originally planned to be administered in a face-

to-face meeting with the researcher. This was, however, impacted by the government restrictions which were put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students studying at the University of Liverpool on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics courses were invited to take part via a link which was posted on the University of Liverpool's VLE pages alongside a participant information sheet. Prior to the pandemic, the researcher also attended students' lectures to introduce the research project and invite participation.

Table 3.8 (below) outlines the procedures used in the administration of this method.

Table 3.8: Procedures used in the Listening Experiences

Data Collection for Listening Experiences					
Time	Procedure		Researcher's role	Student(s)'s role	
<i>Prior to participating in the study</i>	<i>Students have been emailed information sheets and consent forms and asked to contact the researcher if they have any concerns or questions. Students have been invited to meet with the researcher as part of an individual online video meeting via Skype or Microsoft Teams. Students have also been sent a questionnaire (with consent form) and asked to complete and return this to the researcher via email.</i>				
5 minutes	1	Students and the researcher meet in an online video chat.	Welcome student. Introduce the research and what student will be asked to do during the meeting.	Listen to the researcher's presentation. Ask any questions they may have.	
5 minutes	2	Information sheet and consent form.	Check student is happy to participate. Ask student to send over signed copy of consent form.	Complete consent form and return to the researcher via email/document sharing.	Students leave study if consent is not given.
<i>Begin video recording of meeting (via Skype or Microsoft Teams).</i>					
1 minute	3	Play first recording	Start video recording of meeting (check student is happy to do so). Introduce and play first recording.	Listen to recording.	
5 minutes	4	Discuss recording	Prompt students to discuss what they thought of the recording.	Discuss what they thought of the recording with the researcher.	

			Ask student to rate familiarity and ease of understanding on a scale of 1-5 (show Rating Scale visually to ensure understanding of ratings)		
1 minute	5	Play recording again. Highlight difficulties on transcription.	Share transcript of recording (via email/Skype/Microsoft Teams). Ask student to highlight, as they listen, where they find difficulty understanding.	Highlight where difficulties are on written transcript. Send back to researcher.	
<i>Repeat steps 3 – 5 (8 recordings in total- 4 Liverpool English, 4 SSB)</i>					

As demonstrated in Table 3.8, ethical implications were taken in to considerations at all stages of this data collection. Students were also given multiple opportunities to discuss any concerns with the researcher. The researcher also ensured students were happy and understood each stage throughout the data collection.

3.4.2.3 Listening Experiences Participants

11 students met with the researcher to listen to recordings of accented speech. Students studying at the University of Liverpool, enrolled on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics programmes were again invited to take part in this study as they were all experiencing English in a NS country in a SA experience.

Table: 3.9: Participants in Listening Experiences

	Number of Participants (<i>n</i> =11)
Gender	Male – 2 (18.2%) Female – 9 (81.8%)
Age	22 - 27 Mean age = 23.73
Nationality	Chinese – 11 (100%)
L1	Chinese – 11 (100%)
LoR in Liverpool	7 - 10 months Mean LoR = 8.64 months

Table 3.9 (above) outlines the demographic of the students who completed the listening experiences. The students shared a similar demographic to the larger group who completed the questionnaires; there was no significant difference in demographic information between the two groups. As discussed in relation to the questionnaire participants (p. 90), students were asked to record their first language (L1); this data added to the understanding of the demographic of the participants. Whilst there are several languages spoken in China, students did not specify their L1. All students in this stage of the research stated that their L1 was ‘Chinese’.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow for the expansion of students’ reflections on their initial and ongoing experiences understanding spoken English in the UK. This method of data collection allowed for the extrapolation of students’ previous experiences (Van Manen, 2016). This was chosen to respond to two of the research questions, to examine how LE effects learners’ listening and what impact this effect may have. This method was chosen to collect data to answer Research Question 1 (How is LE a barrier to learners’ listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?) and Research Question 2 (What impact does LE have on learners’ experiences communicating in the UK?).

Participants were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interview section of this data collection was designed to gather more in-

depth data regarding students' experience of spoken English, specifically accents, during their time in the UK. Interview and focus groups are a common approach in qualitative research to investigate and reveal findings about participants (Litchman, 2013). In the initial planning stages of this methodology, participants were expected to be interviewed as part of a focus group to allow group discussion and sharing of experiences. The semi-structured interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic; methods were moved online, meeting with the researcher via Skype or Microsoft Teams. Due to this unforeseen change, the planned focus groups were cancelled, and participants completed interviews one-to-one with the researcher. Focus groups allow for the observation of participants' discussion of shared experiences; however, they also require participants to be interactive and for the researcher to be able to monitor the process (Morgan, 1997). As the methods moved online, the researcher chose to meet with students one-to-one as this 'interactive' quality is challenging to foster online. Whilst the interviews were not able to take place in the planned way, all ethical considerations were taken into account (discussed in more detail in section 3.7, p. 119).

In the interviews, students were asked to expand on the questions they responded to in the questionnaire; this gave students an opportunity to consider their listening experiences.

3.4.3.1 Design of the Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were designed to gather rich and detailed perspectives from participants about their listening experiences during their time in Liverpool. Semi-structured interviews were chosen, over structured interviews, as this method is more flexible and allowed students to expand on their responses and experiences. To develop the design of this method, the semi-structured interviews were first piloted.

Pilot Semi-Structured Interviews

A pilot was administered to inform the design and delivery of the semi-structured interviews. 10 students at the University of Liverpool, studying on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics programme, were invited to participate. The details of the participants who took part in the pilot are outlined below, in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Participants in Pilot Interviews

	<i>Number of Participants (n = 10)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male – 0 (0%) Female – 10 (100 %)
<i>Age</i>	22 - 35 Mean age = 26.1
<i>Nationality</i>	Chinese – 9 (90 %) Japanese – 1 (10 %)
<i>L1</i>	Chinese – 9 (90 %) Japanese – 1 (10 %)
<i>LoR in Liverpool</i>	4 – 8 months Mean LoR = 7.1 months

The participants in the pilot interviews shared comparable demographic information as those in the final interviews (detailed on p. 104), specifically in terms of LoR; this was relevant in students being able to reflect on their experiences of spoken English when they first arrived in Liverpool. The data collected in the informative pilot interviews provide an outline of students' perceptions and reflections of their experiences of accents (specifically LE).

The pilot interviews were able to take place face-to-face with the researcher; the pilot took place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic so was not impacted by any restrictions. As these meetings were between the researcher and one participant at a time, the meetings were held in a public place, the University of Liverpool's Sydney Jones library, to ensure both parties were comfortable; this was established during the ethical approval process.

The pilot interviews were recorded with field notes. Audio recordings of this data would have been preferable, however, students' concerns regarding being recorded was taken into consideration (some students reported not being confident in their English skills, others were unhappy to be recorded when they were aware that their peers had not been recorded). In line with the ethical clearance documents given to the participants, the researcher respected their wish not to be recorded. During the note taking process effort

was made to ensure students' responses were recorded accurately, for instance, time was taken to ask students to repeat their responses if necessary.

The use of field notes can be productive in qualitative analysis when combined with other methods, particularly when we consider their close relationship with methods such as classroom observations, a common practice used in ELT research (Johnson, 2010). Field notes are often used by a researcher to make notes about findings in the field; these notes can be subjective but can provide a window into learning experiences (Copland, 2018). Field notes were used in the instance of this study to record students' meaning-focused comments; the notes were not subjective opinions of behaviour, but instead a record of students' reflections.

Tessier (2012) discusses the changing methods of recording interview data and how, whilst the increased use of technology has improved the accuracy of this process, there is still value in note taking to record interview data. There are weaknesses in the use of field notes, however it is 'now possible to combine the strengths of field notes, transcripts and tape recordings' (Tessier, 2012, p.447). Whilst there are limitations to the use of field notes, the data collected from these interviews does provide an interesting initial insight into students' experiences in Liverpool and provides an interesting body of data to support the interviews that followed.

There was found to be value in the interview data collected. This data collection proved to be an informative pilot presenting a picture of students' initial and ongoing experiences. The participants were of the same demographic and had comparable experience in the UK as the participants in the final interviews; therefore, this data has been used to support the additional interview data. Taking into consideration the limitations of the final stage of interviews (relating to the COVID-19 pandemic) the researcher believes this informative pilot data is valid in supporting the data from the final interviews. This data was coded and analysed in the same manner as the final interviews; however, both sets of data were kept separate and not analysed as one. The transcription process of the pilot data caused some limitations; the researcher learnt from this process, and this informed the design of the final semi-structured interview questions and procedures.

Final Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen, over structured interviews, to allow the researcher to be more flexible in their questioning. The research goal of this project was to interpret and understand the lived experiences of learners. Within this interpretivist approach it was important to allow students the opportunity to reflect and expand on experiences that they wished to share. The interpretivist approach focuses on understanding an individual's interpretation of the world around them, and hence this type of interview data allows for an insight into their interpretation and perspectives (Lichtman, 2013). A script of possible prompt questions was created to be used in the final interviews to prompt discussions where necessary. This allowed the researcher to be flexible and allowed students to expand on their responses and experiences. The majority of questions in this stage were chosen to be open-ended; this created 'space for participants to narrate their experiences' (Galletta, 2013, p. 47). For example, initial questions were in relation to the participants' questionnaire responses. These provided a prompt for students to give open, descriptive answers; students were asked to consider their listening experiences overall. As the interview progressed, the design of the questions became more detailed (e.g., asking which specific accents they had encountered). The final stage of the interview was left open so that the researcher was able to return to any areas of exploration (Galletta, 2013). Figure 3.3 (below) shows an extract from the script used by the researcher.

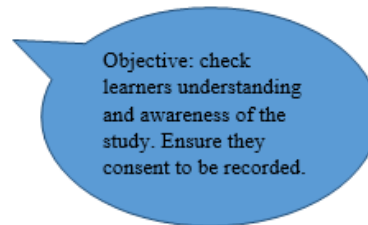
Figure 3.3: Extract of Semi-Structured Interview Script

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Version: Date:

Initial questions:

1. Do you have any questions about the study?
2. Are you happy to proceed?
3. How did you find completing the questionnaire?
4. Do you have anything you would like to share?

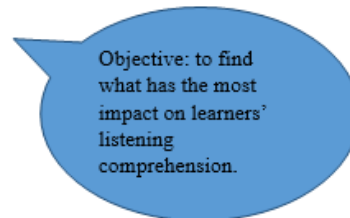


Objective: check learners understanding and awareness of the study. Ensure they consent to be recorded.

In response to the participants' questionnaire responses:

When you first came to the UK/Liverpool what difficulties did you experience understanding spoken English?

1. Please can you expand on your response to the question [above].
2. Which difficulties did you think had the most/least impact?



Objective: to find what has the most impact on learners' listening comprehension.

As shown in Figure 3.3, these prompts were used by the researcher to help guide participants through expanding on their questionnaire responses and sharing any additional experiences they may have had. The full script of prompt questions can be found in Appendix 9 (p. 266).

3.4.3.2 Administration of the Semi-Structured Interviews

As with the Listening Experiences (section 3.4.2), this method was administered online. Participants had a virtual one-to-one meeting with the researcher to complete the

Listening Experiences, and the interviews took place during the same meeting. The interviews followed the completion of the Listening Experiences.

The semi-structured interviews were administered via Skype or Microsoft Teams. Each interview was recorded via the online platform (Skype/Teams); these recordings were converted to audio files and saved so that the interviews could be transcribed. The digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim; the interview transcripts are included in Appendix 10 (p. 268).

Students studying at the University of Liverpool on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics courses were invited to take part via a link which was posted on the University of Liverpool’s VLE pages alongside a participant information sheet. Prior to the pandemic, the researcher also attended students’ lectures to introduce the research project and invite participation.

3.4.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview Participants

The same 11 students that met with the researcher to complete the Listening Experiences, participated in the semi-structured interviews. Table 3.11 shows the demographic information of the interview participants.

Table 3.11: Participants in Interviews

	Number of Participants (<i>n = 11</i>)
Gender	Male – 2 (18.2%) Female – 9 (81.8%)
Age	22 - 27 Mean age = 23.73
Nationality	Chinese – 11 (100%)
L1	Chinese – 11 (100%)
LoR in Liverpool	7 - 10 months Mean LoR = 8.64 months

The students shared a similar demographic with the larger group who completed the questionnaires; there was no significant difference in demographic information between these groups (see section 3.4.1.3, p. 90).

3.4.4 Spoken Interaction Journals

To understand what, and how much, English students in this study were actually engaging with, participants were asked to complete a Spoken Interaction Journal. This method was chosen to collect data to contribute to answering Research Question 2 (What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?). The journals were online, and students were asked to record the type, language and duration of all their spoken interactions across a period of seven days.

3.4.4.1 Design of the Spoken Interaction Journals

Spoken Interaction Journals were employed in this study to gather information regarding students' language use. Students reflected on their interactions across a period of seven days, providing data on how many interactions they had in English and other languages, and in which settings. This reflected the methods used in Taguchi (2008) and Freed et al.'s (2004) research; both studies used similar methods to assess students' language use. Taguchi (2008) asked students to reflect on their language use outside of the classroom environment and Freed et al. (2004) employed Language Contact Profiles to establish students' language use. Similarly to Freed et al.'s (2004) methods, no incentive was given to students to exaggerate their language use in their Spoken Interaction Journals.

Pilot Spoken Interaction Journal

To inform the design of the journals, this method of data collection was piloted with a group of the researcher's peers. The participants who completed the pilot were 7 NNS students at the University of Liverpool and were able to reflect to the researcher the ease of the process and if any features were missed in the research design. An important feature highlighted in this process was ease of completion; as students were being

asked to complete the journals daily, across a period of seven days, it was important to ensure the process was as simple as possible.

The journals were created and completed by students on Google Sheets. This method of delivery was chosen as this meant that students were able to add to their diary online, from their smartphone or computer, wherever and whenever they wanted. Also, if the participants had any questions during the process, the researcher was able to access the journal; the journal was a shared Google Sheets document between the participant and researcher.

In the pilot stage, the form asked students to use a key to identify factors such as ‘interaction type’ or ‘language used’. Pilot participants found this process time consuming and irritating. Each time they wanted to make an entry in the journal, they had to refer to the key to remind themselves. Asking students to type a phrase or number referring to each type of interaction proved laborious. To improve this, a drop-down menu for each category was included to make it easy and convenient for students to record their spoken interactions.

Final Spoken Interaction Journals

Within the pilot questionnaire used in this research project, students were asked to report in what context they took part in spoken interactions. Students’ responses from the pilot questionnaire were categorised as shown below (Table 3.12). These categories, alongside discussions with the researcher’s peers (also NNS postgraduate students studying and living in Liverpool), informed the categories used for the spoken interaction journals. These findings were also used to inform a question in the final questionnaire, where students were asked to reflect on their number of spoken interactions. Table 3.12 shows the development of the categories.

Table 3.12: Categories of Spoken Interactions

<i>Students' responses</i>	Categories defined by students' responses
<i>Shopping</i> <i>While shopping</i> <i>Shops</i> <i>Supermarket</i> <i>Tesco</i>	Cashier (e.g., supermarket, clothes shop)
<i>University</i> <i>In classes</i> <i>Tutors</i> <i>Teachers</i> <i>Tutorials</i>	Tutor/Lecturer
<i>Library</i> <i>Library staff</i> <i>Sydney Jones</i> <i>(library at University of Liverpool)</i>	Library Staff
<i>Coffee shop</i> <i>Starbucks</i> <i>Café</i> <i>Restaurants</i> <i>Waiter</i> <i>Eating Out</i>	Food/Drink services Restaurant (waiter/waitress)
<i>Pubs</i> <i>Train Station</i> <i>Airport</i> <i>Bus</i> <i>Taxi/ Uber</i>	Members of the Public (e.g., people of the train, in a shop etc.) Public Transport staff Taxi Driver
<i>Phone to company</i> <i>Phone to home</i> <i>Phone to Friends</i>	Phone interaction (in English) Phone interaction (in another language)
<i>Peers</i> <i>Flatmate</i> <i>Friends</i> <i>Socialising</i> <i>Classmates</i>	Peer to Peer (in English) Peer to Peer (in another language)
<i>Bank</i> <i>Bank staff</i> <i>Paying bills</i>	Bank staff
<i>Visa people</i> <i>Government</i>	Government staff (e.g., visa department)
<i>Doctors</i> <i>Medical centre</i> <i>Nurse</i>	Medical (e.g., doctors, nurses)

*Accommodation reception
Registering*

Other University staff (e.g.,
administration, accommodation)

As demonstrated in Table 3.12, students' reflections and responses were used to create categories. This increased the ease of understanding for participants and also allowed for quantitative assessment of the data in the analysis.

3.4.4.2 Administration of the Spoken Interaction Journals

Participants who consented to an interview with the researcher, in both the pilot and final stages, were asked to complete a Spoken Interaction Journal. The spoken interaction journals were piloted prior to both stages of the interviews. Students were emailed a link to their online journal by the researcher. The journals were created and shared using Google Sheets; this method allowed students to access the journal online from any location and therefore increased the ease of completion for respondents. To further ease students' ability to complete the journals, students were sent a link to an example journal; a screenshot of the example journal is shown below (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Screenshot of Example Spoken Interaction Journal

Example of Spoken Interaction Journal

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help

50% View only

Spoken Interaction Journal
Week of: 19th February

How to complete your Spoken Interaction Journal:
Please use this journal to keep a record of your spoken interactions day-to-day over a week. Indicate the type of interaction you have taken part in (see below the key of example interactions) and approximately how long this interaction was.
For example you may have had a phone call at 1.15pm on Monday with a friend where you spoke in Chinese for about 10 minutes - this would enter 'Call with a friend', 'Chinese', '10 minutes' in the Monday form box.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	
Time	Interaction	Type of interaction	Language	Length (mins)	Interaction	Type of interaction	Language	Length (mins)
7:00 AM								
8:00 AM	Conversations with friends in Chinese	2. Peer to peer in another language	Chinese	10				
9:00 AM	Bought a bag of coffee (e.g. coffee shop)	15. Food and services		2				
10:00 AM	Phoned friend	9. Telephone	Chinese					
		12. Interaction in another language						
		16. Food and services (e.g. cafe)						
		17. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		18. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		19. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		20. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		21. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		22. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		23. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		24. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		25. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		26. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		27. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		28. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		29. Other services (e.g. bank)						
		30. Other services (e.g. bank)						

Daily schedule Key

The journals were created and completed by students on Google Sheets; the data from the journals was then transferred to Excel to allow for analysis. The data collected allowed for analysis of how much English learners reported that they were speaking and how this may be having an impact on any listening difficulties they were experiencing and for how long these difficulties persisted.

3.4.4.3 Spoken Interaction Journal Participants

21 participants completed the Spoken Interaction Journals. Students that participated in interviews completed a journal. The journals were piloted before the interviews, therefore the students in the pilot interviews took part in the final Spoken Interaction Journal data collection. Table 3.13 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 3.13: Participants in Spoken Interaction Journals

	Number of Participants (<i>n</i> =21)
Gender	Male – 2 (9.52%) Female – 19 (90.48%)
Age	22 - 35 Mean age = 24.93
Nationality	Chinese – 20 (95.24%) Japanese – 1 (4.76%)
L1	Chinese – 11 (95.24%) Japanese – 1 (4.76%)
LoR in Liverpool	4 - 10 months Mean LoR = 7.87 months

The students shared a similar demographic to the participants in the other methods in the study; there was no significant difference in demographic information between these groups (see p. 91, 102 and 108 for details of the other participants).

3.5 Sampling of Data

This research was carried out in Liverpool, UK; since the focus of this study is the impact and influence of LE on students, it was essential for the study to take place in a location with a high population of LE speakers. As defined in section 2.4 (p. 37), within this study LE is defined as the accent associated with and spoken in the city of Liverpool. All participants in this study were students at the University of Liverpool, excluding those in the questionnaire pilot study (these participants were students studying at The Liverpool School of English). The data collected from the 16 students who took part in the pilot study has not been included in the main body of data. This sampling of students, in relation to geographic location and institute of study, ensured all participants will have had consistent opportunity to encounter LE.

In addition to the guarantee of LE exposure for students, the researcher is familiar with the University and the city of Liverpool, enhancing the knowledge and awareness of students' experiences when planning appropriate procedures and protocols for data collection.

The majority of students in the study were Chinese; this reduced the variable of listeners L1 in the data collection. As discussed within the limitations (section 3.8, p. 120), participants of other nationalities were not discouraged from taking part in the research. As the focus of the study was the impact of LE on upper intermediate learners within the SA context, L1 was acknowledged as a valuable variable, however compromising to increase data collection was deemed necessary. As stated by HESA (2021) 'China sent more students to the UK than any other overseas country. In 2019/20, 35% of all non-EU students were from China'. The sampling of participants focused on Chinese students to reflect the increasing number of such students arriving in the UK SA context.

Participants were recruited to take part in four data collection methods: questionnaires, listening experiences, semi-structured interviews and spoken interaction journals. An outline of all the students who participated is demonstrated below, in Table 3.14.

Table 3.14: Participants in each Method

Data Collection Method	Number of Participants
Questionnaire	92
Listening Experiences	11
Semi-structured Interviews	11
Spoken Interaction Journals	21

As shown in Table 3.14, the largest number of participants (92) took part in the questionnaire; this allowed for a quantitative assessment of the findings. Fewer numbers took part in the Listening Experiences, Interviews and Journals; 11, 11 and 21 respectively. These fewer numbers allowed for a closer, more detailed look at the qualitative data collected.

Participants were also chosen as they were upper intermediate level English speakers, and this was their first time in the UK, or they had only visited for a brief period before this. Students were asked to identify how long they have spent in the UK so far; this variable differed, but students were all asked to reflect on their initial experiences in the UK. They were all studying courses designed for B2 CEFR level or above; postgraduate student levels were expected to be at a higher level.

The CEFR (2018) outlines English language users' levels of proficiency; in relation to spoken interaction, at a minimum B2 level, learners are expected to be able to 'interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible' (p. 83). The updated companion to the CEFR (2020) adds to this stating that learners will be able to 'keep up with an animated conversation between proficient users of the target language' (p. 49). Learners at this level were invited to participate as they provided representative data of how factors such as accent may be impacting NNSs who, theoretically, have the language skills to be able to communicate in an English-speaking country effectively.

All students were enrolled on the MA TESOL or Applied Linguistic programmes. This meant that participants may have been more aware of the linguistic challenges they may have experienced; through their studies students will have had an interest in the area of this investigation and some knowledge of the research field in general. Students'

interest in the field of this research will have given them more awareness into the English Language listening difficulties being discussed increasing their ability to reflect on their own listening experiences, however, this was never assumed.

Shared course of study also allowed for a similar background in terms of prior knowledge and topic awareness. It must be acknowledged that due to their programmes of study students may have had a greater awareness and interest in the nature of this study. This will not have skewed the results but may have meant that students had greater knowledge and ability to discuss their linguistic experiences. This was considered to be beneficial to the overall data collection.

Participants were recruited to provide a representative sample of how accents affect learners' listening comprehension. As the majority shared the same first language, were of similar age and shared a similar educational background the data sample provides a level representation of how accents affect these learners when they study in Liverpool. Reducing the variables amongst this data set allowed for analysis of this sole listening difficulty.

3.6 Data Analysis

All the questionnaire responses were collected and were input into a SPSS file; SPSS version 26 was used for quantitative analysis. This allowed for all responses to be collated and analysed in one place. As the questionnaires were distributed using Survey Monkey and questionnaires that were emailed to students (in the form of Word documents) the responses were collected in different formats. Incomplete questionnaires were removed from the data set; only questionnaires where students had completed all questions were analysed to ensure that all information was comparable.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the majority of the questionnaire data; due to the size of the questionnaire data set (n=92) this was both appropriate and effective. Initial research and analysis demonstrated that the use of statistical testing was not appropriate in all cases for my data set. Analytical statistics were used where appropriate.

SPSS was used throughout the analysis of the questionnaire data; it was used to organise and interpret the data. This allowed for descriptive analysis of the questionnaire;

percentage values, averages and other descriptive statistics allowed for an overview of the data collected. Further to this, SPSS was used to analyse standard deviation, compare data sets, create graphs, and identify any anomalies in the data.

The rating scales used in the Listening Experiences (whereby students rated how familiar and easy to understand they found the samples of accent they heard) were also input to SPSS; this allowed for analysis of the responses including statistical analysis of the reliability of the scales used. Within the Listening Experiences, students also marked words and phrases in transcripts of the samples where they experienced difficulties understanding. To analyse the amount and the phonological features present in these marked texts, they were coded and analysed using NVivo 12.

Descriptive statistics were also used to assess data collected from Spoken Interaction Journals. The journals were completed using Google Sheets; to analyse this data, the sheets were converted to Microsoft Excel documents.

Further qualitative data collected through interviews gave a greater insight into students' linguistic experiences in the UK. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. The basis of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was adopted; IPA is an approach which allows for a detailed analysis of participants' lived experiences (Lichtman, 2013). It focuses on interpreting students' experiences within their daily life to gain a greater understanding of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006), such as the observation of how accent impacts on students' spoken interaction experiences in the UK. Using this focused analysis allowed the researcher to explore the perceptions of the participants, capture their lived experiences and interpret the meaning of their reflections.

IPA was adopted over other possible analysis, such as discourse and conversation analysis, to focus on individuals' experiences rather than their language production (Lichtman, 2013). This enabled the researcher to give a detailed examination of how students experienced spoken interactions within the SA context in Liverpool. As discussed by Smith & Osborn (2003), 'IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes' (p. 55) and importantly are not focused in making general claims but wish to give a detailed look at the perceptions and understandings of a small 'purposive sampling' (p. 56) of participants. This aligns with this thesis which endeavours to examine how LE impacts upper intermediate level learners' spoken English experiences in a specific context, rather than claiming to comment how this may impact all learners.

This thematic analytical approach allowed the researcher to explore the qualitative data in detail. To support this analysis, NVivo was used; this software helped in the management and organisation of the data. To inform the reliability of the coding of the interview data, a fellow researcher also coded a sample of the interview transcripts and reviewed the themes and categories identified by the researcher. The transcripts were coded and then compared with those coded by a fellow researcher. The coding was found to be similar with few differences (85% similarity), determining there was little bias in this analysis. This method used to ensure the reliability of coding was developed from the same method used in Sung's (2016) study. In their analysis they also highlighted the importance of including representative extracts from interviews as 'supporting evidence for each category that emerged from the data, allow[ed] learners' voices to be heard' (p. 194). As the current research is focused on learners' experiences of spoken English, where appropriate, additional evidentiary statements from respondents were included in my analysis to ensure 'learners' voices [were] heard'.

3.7 Ethical considerations

In the design and application of this study it was essential to consider ethical issues to protect the participants and ensure the data collected was viable. With both the quantitative and qualitative research elements it was important to consider the research design and the actions of the researcher.

The researcher gained ethical approval from the University of Liverpool ethics committee demonstrating that the researcher understood and considered the ethical issues relating to the study. All ethical approval policies outlined in the ethical approval process were upheld, such as consent forms and participant information sheets (included in Appendix 1 and 2). When alterations were necessary to the original design of the research, such as in moving methods online during the COVID-19 pandemic, amendments were made to the ethics application and were approved.

The main principles of ethics were considered; the anonymity, confidentiality, data ownership and informed consent of the participants were ensured (Cohen et al, 2011; Lichtman, 2013). Personal information was removed from the data and was not published as part of the research. Within the consent form (Appendix 2, p. 247) students were

informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any stage.

An important element within the data collected in this study was the semi-structured interviews and listening experiences, in which students were required to meet with the researcher. When conducting the semi-structured interviews, it was necessary to build a rapport between participant and researcher. Smith & Osborn (2003) discuss the importance of building a rapport with participants, specifically within semi structured interviews, to give them maximum opportunity to discuss their experiences freely. The researcher ensured a trustworthy and appropriate environment was created for students (Lichtman, 2013). As the interviews were administered during one-to-one meetings between the researcher and the participants, the meetings initially were planned to be held in a public place, the University of Liverpool's Sydney Jones library, to ensure both parties were comfortable; this was established during the ethical approval process. This was particularly relevant when the meetings moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To counteract this change in circumstance, the researcher allocated more time within the interview to discuss the research with the participants, allow students to ask any questions and familiarise themselves with the stages of the data collection. To further ensure students were happy with the online format, they were given the option of which online format they wished to use (Skype or Microsoft Teams).

Participants were sent a participant information sheet and consent form. Students were asked to complete the consent form at the beginning of the meeting; the meeting only proceeded once the researcher received the consent form and was comfortable that the student was happy to continue.

3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

Within the four methods that were used to collect data there were limitations. The specific limitations of each method will now be discussed. Following this, a summary of any limitations in the overall methodology will be outlined.

3.8.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire allowed for a quantitative assessment of students' initial and ongoing experiences listening to English in Liverpool. Listeners' own judgments of their experiences of accents and comprehension are important to provide a realistic view of how they experience English (Derwing & Munro, 2009). However, the questionnaire did rely on students' remembering their initial experiences; students had been in the UK for a minimum of 4 months. Students were being asked to think back to what they experienced rather than reporting on something that was happening in the present. Whilst this does limit the reliability of students' reflections to a certain degree, as students had spent no longer than 18 months in the UK (an average LoR of 8.02 months), they were still expected to be able to reflect on their experiences fairly accurately. Furthermore, students were asked to consider how their listening experiences had changed across their time in the UK, therefore it was important that they had spent some quality time in Liverpool at the time of the questionnaire.

3.8.2 Listening Experiences

The Listening Experiences used in this study assessed both students' perceptions of accents and highlighted what they found to be difficult. One limitation of this method was that it was not possible to present all defining features of each accent (LE and SSB) to participants in the brief samples. Brief samples of speech were chosen to reduce listener fatigue and maintain participant's interest. However, this did limit the amount of spoken English features that could be presented to students. To understand students' experience of natural connected speech, compromises were made. Samples including conversation between speakers, where speakers were able to complete their utterances, were prioritised over students simply listening to all features of each accent in isolation. Whilst this was a limitation, the group of sample accents presented provide a representative sample of each accent whilst also being able to present a range of ages and genders of speakers.

3.8.3 Semi Structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews were employed to collect data regarding students lived experiences; the data collected from these interviews aims to provide a picture of what students experience in regard to listening and how and to what degree any difficulties impact them. Valuable qualitative data was collected through this method, however, similarly to the questionnaire method, this relied on students' reflections. This method asked participants to provide anecdotal evidence of their listening experiences. Limitations of this are that participants must be able to remember these instances correctly; it also relies on them being open to discuss them with the researcher.

As commented with the questionnaire method, students' LoR was deemed to be satisfactory in that students were still able to confidently reflect in their initial experiences, whilst also being able to discuss their ongoing experiences. Students who completed the interviews had been in the UK for an average of 8.64 months. It is also important to consider that students may not have been able to identify the accents they refer to correctly. To try and reduce this limitation, participants completed their interviews after hearing samples of LE and SSB (in the Listening Experiences), providing a reminder of what these accents sound like.

To help students feel comfortable and open to discuss their experiences the researcher allowed time to build a rapport with students; this was necessary to give them the maximum opportunity to discuss their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

3.8.4 Spoken Interaction Journals

Spoken Interaction Journals were used in this study to gather information regarding students' language use. Participants were asked to complete an online journal of their interactions across a period of seven days, including information on how many interactions they had in English and other languages, and in which settings.

One limitation to this method was that it relied on students honest and accurate recording of their interactions. This limitation was reduced as much as possible in the design of the journal; for instance, it could be completed online from smartphones and computers. However, it cannot be guaranteed as to how fastidious students will have been in completing this journal. It is unrealistic to assume they would add to the journal

immediately after each spoken encounter; therefore, this method does also rely on students' reflections.

Another limitation of this method is that it only provides a snapshot of students' spoken interactions. Participants completed the journal over seven days; this allowed for an insight into students' encounters across a week of study and weekend activities. However, there was no control as to which seven-day period they chose. A limitation, therefore, is that the seven days they completed the journal may not have been representative of their experience across their time in Liverpool. To try and reduce this factor and provide a representation of an average week for students, weeks where exams were being held or assignments were due were avoided (it was expected that in these weeks their interactions may not be fairly represented).

3.8.5 Overall Methodology

One notable limiting factor across the methods used for data collection is the number of participants. Participant's willingness, availability and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were limiting factors. Fewer participants did allow for more detailed data to be collected and analysed. For example, the Spoken Interaction Journals required contact from the researcher to be completed. It was necessary for correspondents to be sent between the participants and the researcher to encourage completion of the journals.

In the original design of the data collection, students planned to meet with the researcher to complete the Listening Experiences and Interviews. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic these meetings with the researcher had to be cancelled. These meetings were therefore forced to move to online platforms. Due to government restrictions and safety regulations this was an unavoidable change and compromises had to be made to be able to continue the data collection (Leeman et al., 2020). Data collected pre pandemic has been used to support the analysis such as that from interviews collected via field notes.

The data collected from all the methods provides a representation of students' experience when they first arrive in Liverpool. Another limitation within this methodology is that the data collected is specific to individuals studying in the UK, this sample does not represent all NNSs, such as those who may come to the UK to work or live. However, arguably this data still provides an insight into all NNSs' experiences

when they first arrive in the UK as many of the experiences that students reflected on are universal (e.g., shopping, interactions with the general public).

3.9 Summary

The methodology used a mixed methods approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data to respond to the research questions. Methods were piloted and redrafted to inform the design and administration to ensure effective procedures were upheld.

The next chapter will discuss the data collected using the methods outlined in Chapter 3. It will discuss the findings of the data and highlight any areas of significance.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an account of the findings from each of the data collection methods; questionnaires, listening experiences, semi-structured interviews and spoken interaction journals were used to collect data in this study (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). These data collection methods and approaches were adopted to respond to the following research questions:

- Research Question 1:
How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?
- Research Question 2:
What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?
- Research Question 3:
How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?

This chapter outlines the demographic information of the respondents assessed in this study. The chapter will present the quantitative findings, the qualitative findings and finally will highlight the key themes identified from the overall data collection.

Different numbers of participants took part in the data collection methods, this was dependent on numerous factors, such as student availability and the degree to which the research project was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 4.1 outlines the

number of students who participated in each of the data collection methods; the number of participants in each method excludes students and peers who took part in the pilot studies.

Table 4.1: Participants in Each Method

Data Collection Method	Number of Students who participated
Questionnaire	92
Listening Experiences	11
Semi-Structured Interviews	11
Spoken Interaction Journals	21

As shown in Table 4.1, the largest number of participants (92) took part in the questionnaire; this method collected quantitative data. Fewer numbers took part in the Listening Experiences, Interviews and Journals; 11, 11 and 21 respectively. The Listening Experiences and Spoken Interaction Journals collected quantitative data regarding students' perceptions and day-to-day interactions. Detailed qualitative data was collected via the Semi-Structured Interviews. This chapter will now present the quantitative data, qualitative data, summarise the findings and indicate any themes for discussion.

4.2 Presentation of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data collected in this study consisted of questionnaire responses, participants rating of accents (listening experiences), marking of transcripts, and spoken interaction journals. The data collected from each method will now be presented.

4.2.1 Questionnaire Data

92 participants completed the questionnaire; this data contributes to answering, ‘How is LE a barrier to learners’ listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?’. Due to the dichotomous nature of the questions in the questionnaire, no statistical testing was used to assess reliability. To increase the reliability of the questionnaire, the questionnaire design was evaluated and altered in the pilot stage (as discussed in section 3.4.1, p. 78).

Students were asked to reflect on their experiences of accent when they arrived in Liverpool. Questions included ‘When you first came to Liverpool what difficulties did you experience understanding spoken English’ to establish if students identified accent as a difficulty, and ‘Approximately, how long after your first entry to the UK did you feel able to understand the accents you heard’ to assess how long difficulties may persist. The questionnaires also provided background information about students, such as their previous experiences of English, LoR in the UK and accents they have encountered (the full version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 6, p. 254). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the questionnaire data using SPSS.

4.2.1.1 Student background

The questionnaire asked students to reflect on their experiences as well as the factors which may impact or influence their experience of English. Respondents reported their demographic information (e.g., gender, age, nationality) and also identified their LoR in the UK, whether they have grown up in or spent an extensive period in an English-speaking environment, their accommodation type and the language spoken most often in their accommodation. A summary of the demographic information is shown below, in Table 4.2.

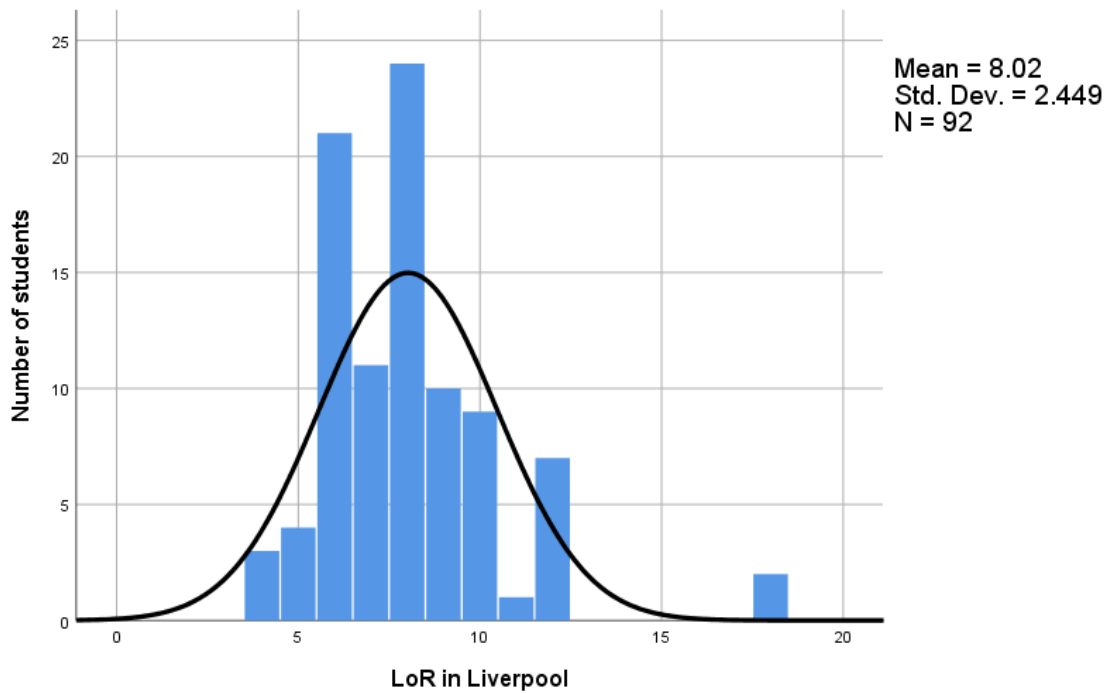
Table 4.2: Demographic Information of Participants in the Questionnaire

	Number of Participants (<i>n</i> =92)
Gender	Male – 14 (15.2%) Female – 78 (84.5%)
Age	21 – 35 Mean age = 23.89
Nationality	Chinese – 89 (96.7%) Japanese – 3 (3.3%)
L1	Chinese – 83 (90.2%) Mandarin – 4 (4.3%) Kazakh – 2 (2.2%) Japanese – 3 (3.3%)
LoR in Liverpool	4 - 18 months Mean LoR = 8.02
Grown-up in an English-Speaking country	Yes – 0 (0%) No – 92 (100%)
Spent an extensive period of time in an English-Speaking country	Yes – 1 (1.1%) No – 91 (98.9%)
Accommodation Type	Student Halls – 86 (93.5%) Host Family – 1 (1.1%) House Share – 4 (4.3%) Other (studio) – 1 (1.1%)
Language spoken in accommodation (most often)	Chinese – 82 (89.1%) English – 10 (10.9%)

As shown in Table 4.2, the majority of the participants were female (78, 84.5%); 15.2% were male (14). The average age of the participants was 23.89 years. The LoR in Liverpool of each student was identified; the average LoR was 8.02 months. The LoR of students meant that students had spent time in Liverpool and therefore, theoretically, will have had significant opportunity to encounter LE; the participant with the lowest LoR had still been in Liverpool for 4 months. Additionally, the LoR of the participants allowed

them to effectively reflect on their initial experiences in Liverpool; the participant with the longest LoR was 18 months. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the standard deviation of students' LoR in Liverpool.

Figure 4.1: Standard Deviation of Questionnaire Students' LoR



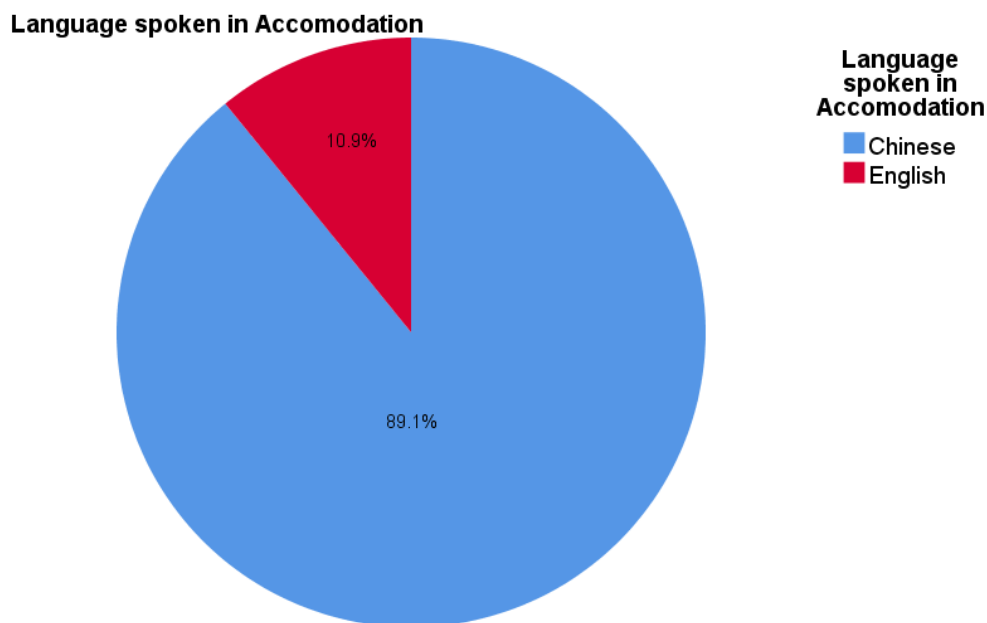
As shown in Figure 4.1, the standard deviation of LoR is 2.449; this low value indicates that most students' LoR was close to the mean value of 8.02 months. This tendency allows for comparison between students' experiences.

As the focus of this study was the impact of LE on students' experiences, participants were also asked to identify if they had spent an extensive period (defined as over a month in this study) in an English-speaking country before; this was an indicator of students' previous English exposure. Only one participant reported having spent an extensive amount of time in an English-speaking country before (discussed in more detail in section 4.3.4.3, p. 201).

A further indicator of students' experiences of and exposure to English is their accommodation type. As demonstrated in Table 4.2, student halls of residence are the most common accommodation type for students in this study; 86 students were living in student halls of residence (93.5%). This provides an indication of participants' language

exposure; if students are living with speakers of their L1 it is likely they will speak their L1 in their accommodation. However, simply students' accommodation type cannot determine this. In discussion with international peers and some participants in the study, the researcher was informed that in the accommodation application process, one can select a preference for 'international' halls of residence, this may therefore reduce the amount of English spoken in this common type of accommodation. This does, however, rely on students sharing an L1. To establish the language that students speak most often in accommodation, students were asked to reflect what language was spoken most often in their accommodation. The result of this question is shown below, in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Language Spoken most often in Students' Accommodation



As presented in Figure 4.2, a significantly high proportion of language spoken in students' accommodation is not English; 89.1% of participants (82 students) reported the language spoken most often in their accommodation was Chinese. This begins to challenge the SA assumption in relation to students' presumed increased use of and exposure to spoken English.

4.2.1.2 Accent

The initial aim of the data collected from the questionnaire was to establish if accent is considered a listening difficulty by learners when they first arrived in Liverpool. To establish whether LE impacts learners' listening experiences, students were asked to reflect on their experiences and consider what difficulties, if any, they had understanding spoken English. They were given the multiple choice options of *Accent*, *Unfamiliar Pronunciation*, *Speed of Speech*, *Word Meaning* and *No Difficulties*. The data collected from this question is presented below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Listening Difficulties that Students reported they Experienced

Listening Difficulties		Responses	
		N	Percent
Listening Difficulties	Accent	80	87%
	Speed of Speech	69	75%
	Unfamiliar Pronunciation	48	52.2%
	Word Meaning	30	32.6%
	No Difficulties	1	1.1%
	Other	4	4.3%
Total number of respondents = 92			

Table 4.3 shows that results from the questionnaire indicate that students reflected they experienced *Accent* as a listening difficulty when they arrived in Liverpool. Due to the associations of LE as distinct and challenging, as discussed in section 2.4 (p. 37), this was expected. *Accent* was also identified as the most common listening difficulty that students experienced when they first arrived in the UK (80 of 92 students identified this, 87%). The second and third most common difficulties were reported to be *Speed of Speech* (69/92, 75%) and *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* (48/92, 52.2%) respectively.

Native speech of any language is frequently perceived as fast by the L2 listener and is often blamed for comprehension difficulties (Cutler, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that this difficulty would rate highly, however it is interesting that there is still a

difference between *Accent* and *Speed of Speech*; accent was reported as a listening difficulty 12% (11 students) more than speech rate.

Unfamiliar Pronunciation and *Accent* were both provided as options for participants to select; in the pilot study, students categorised *Accent* as a person's overall pronunciation, whereas if they only identified certain pronunciation difficulties in an individual's speech, they did not always identify it as their accent (discussed in more detail section 3.4.1, p. 78). This category may therefore also contribute to the findings of *Accent* as a listening difficulty.

The data presented establishes that participants in this study identify accent as a listening difficulty when they first arrived in the UK, however, only analysing this data does not examine how students tolerate this difficulty. To discover the impact of accent, students were asked to reflect on what they did to achieve understanding when they first arrived. Participants were asked in the questionnaires 'When you first came to the UK what did you do to achieve understanding?'. Multiple choice options were provided (as shown in Figure 4.3) and participants were able to select as many options that they felt were applicable to them.

Figure 4.3: Strategies that students reported they used to achieve understanding

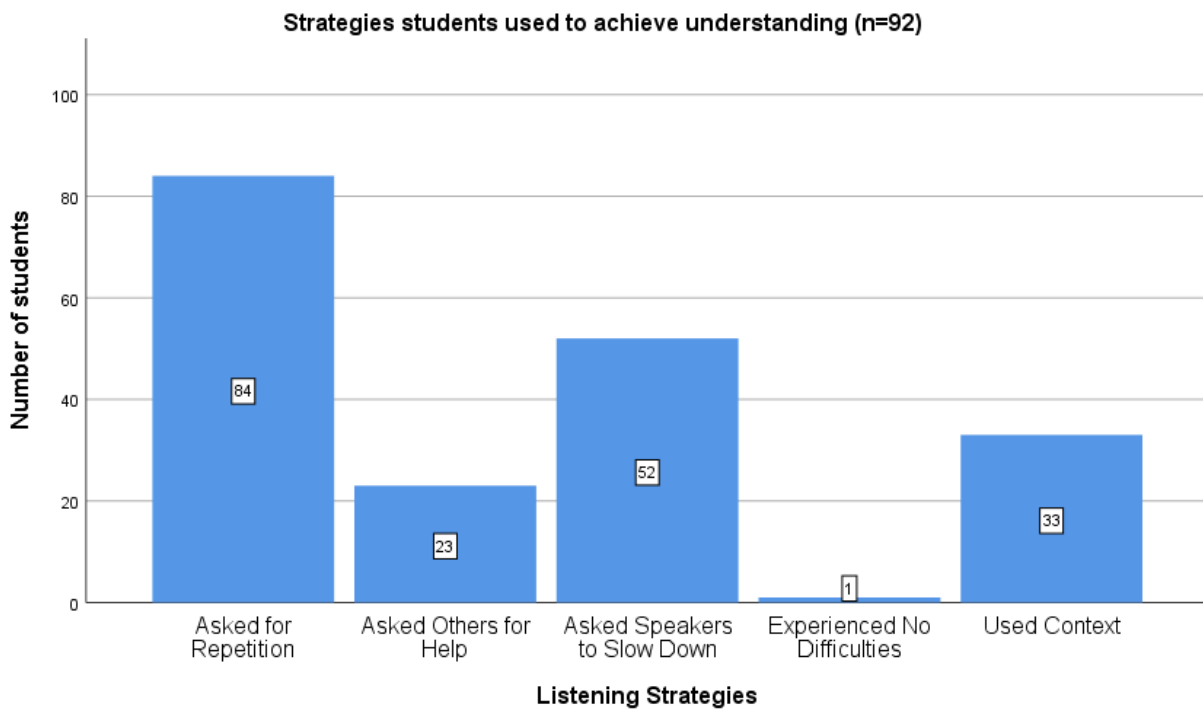
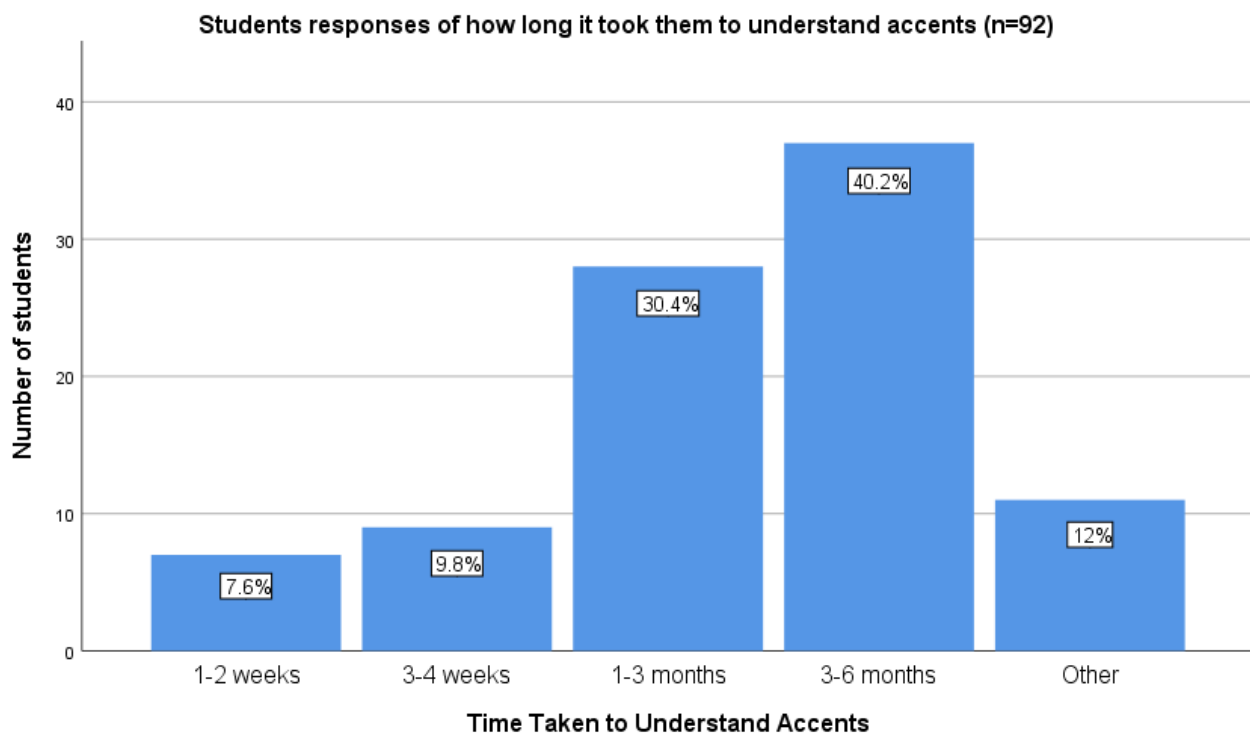


Figure 4.3 highlights that the majority of students in the study experienced some difficulties in understanding the speakers they heard when they first arrived in the UK; only 1 of the 92 participants selected that they ‘Experienced No Difficulties’. This data highlights that listening difficulties create a significant barrier to learners when they arrive in the UK. This supports Hamano-Bunce et al.’s (2019) discussion that there is still a disparity between the level of English language proficiency students feel they have leaving their home country and how easy it is for them to communicate when they first arrive in the UK. Based on their qualifications to commence study at the University of Liverpool, all participants were at B2 level or above, meaning they should be able to interact and converse with proficient users of the target language (CEFR, 2018; 2020).

To further evaluate the impact of accent, specifically LE, students were asked to reflect on how long it took them to understand the voices they heard. Participants were asked ‘Approximately, how long after your first entry to the UK did you feel able to understand the accents you heard?’. The results from this question are presented below in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Students’ response of how long it took them to Understand Accents



As shown above in Figure 4.4, there is an increasing number of participants in each category. The largest group of participants stated it took them 3-6 months to be able to understand the accents they heard; 40.2% (37 students) of respondents reported this.

A separate category of ‘Other’ was provided within the questionnaire so that students could reflect different time periods if the categories supplied did not reflect their experience. The ‘Other’ values are outlined below in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: ‘Other’ Category Responses to ‘Approximately, how long after your first entry to the UK did you feel able to understand the accents you heard?’

Time Taken to Understand Accents

	Number of respondents	Respondents’ comments on questionnaire (in ‘Other’ box)
No time taken	1	‘Immediately’
6-8 months	3	‘6 or 7 months’ ‘8 months’ ‘6-12 months’
12 months	5	‘12 months’ ‘About 1 year’ ‘12 months, some I still don’t like’ ‘1 year’ ‘Approximately 1 year’
Still cannot understand	2	‘I am still not confident with accents’ ‘I still don’t’
Total number of respondents to stated ‘Other’ = 11		

As shown in Table 4.4, the ‘Other’ category accounted for 12% (11 students) of the participants; it is important to consider the values reported by these participants, especially as this accounts for a significant percentage of the total. The majority of the participants used the ‘Other’ category to report times of over six months; 8 participants (8.7%) reported it took them between 6 and 12 months to gain understanding. One participant stated that it took them no time to adjust to understanding the accents they heard when they arrived in Liverpool stating ‘immediately’. On initial analysis, it was expected that this student may have had previous experience in an English-speaking country, increasing their exposure resulting in this ‘immediate’ understanding. However, in this participant’s other questionnaire responses they stated that had not spent an

extensive period in an English-speaking country before and that they experienced ‘no difficulties’ when they first arrived in the UK. This does challenge the hypothesis that students experience difficulties when they first arrive in the UK; however, as this is only 1 participant it cannot be considered as significant.

2 students also stated that they still cannot understand the accents they hear; both these students had been in Liverpool for 8 months at the time of completing the questionnaire. As the 2 participants reported ‘still’ being unable to understand the accents they heard it could be speculated that they were unable to understand for longer than 8 months, however it is only possible to consider these reflections at the time of the questionnaire.

One student also reflected that it took them ‘12 months’ to understand accents but that there are ‘some I still don’t like’. This implies some adjustments are still being made, highlighting that this process of understanding is not definite. Again, as this response is only from 1 participant, its significance is limited.

Whilst the data collected from the question (‘Approximately, how long after your first entry to the UK did you feel able to understand the accents you heard?’) provides an indication of the time taken for students to tolerate the ambiguities in accents they have heard in Liverpool, it cannot determine a specific time when understanding was achieved.

The data collected in this stage of the questionnaire also does not define what accent they have taken time to be able to understand. In investigating why learners note *Accent* as a listening difficulty when they first arrive in the UK and for how long, it is important to consider the accents that they will have encountered when they first arrived. All students who participated in the study were in the UK to study at the University of Liverpool. All but one of the students, had not spent an extensive period (over a month) in a native English-speaking country before. Any brief tourist visits to the UK and other native speaking countries were discounted due to the differences in tourist experience. As discussed by Taguchi (2011), there are significant differences in travelling to a country for tourism to briefly communicate with native speakers in comparison with a quality, SA experience. Quality of stay in a native speaking country can aid language acquisition (Taguchi, 2011).

As all students were studying in Liverpool, the accent they were most likely to encounter was LE (often referred to as ‘Scouse’ by participants). In addition to the unique and distinctive nature of LE, students will have encountered other accents whilst being in the UK. Participants were asked to reflect on whether accent was a listening difficulty they experienced, not just LE, therefore students were also asked to reflect on their other

experiences. The accents that students reported that they had encountered are presented below in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Accents that Students Encountered

Accent Encountered	Number of respondents (n=92)
Liverpool/Scouse	88
London	18
Manchester	11
Chinese	11
American	11
Standard English	8
Indian	7
Japanese	7
Received Pronunciation	5
Southern	4
Scotland	3
York	3
Ireland/Northern Ireland	3
Thai	2
Birmingham	2
European	2
French	1
St Helens	1
Indonesian	1

So not to narrow students' respondents to 'What accents have you encountered since you have arrived in the UK?', this was an open question. Consequently, the categories in Table 4.5 are those defined by the respondents. Due to the demographic of the respondents (as shown on p. 128) it is expected a greater number will have encountered Chinese English accents with their peers, however some students commented to the researcher that they were only considering NS accents or accents other than their own when responding to this question.

As evidenced in Table 4.5, the most common accent encountered was LE (reported by students as 'Scouse' or 'Liverpool'). This was expected, due to the location of study, however there were 4 students that did not identify LE or 'Scouse' as an accent that they encountered. This may indicate students' lack of engagement with those who speak LE, however, as this question relied on students' own ability to identify accents, it is not possible to categorically confirm this factor; there is a possibility students have misidentified accents they have heard.

In discussing students' reflections of the accents that they have encountered it is important to consider the reliability of their reflections. Relying on students' reflections assumes participants will have been able to identify the accents they heard precisely; there is the possibility they may have guessed or assumed based on location. Scales et al.'s (2006) study found that students' perceptions are not always reliable, even in identifying the accents they reported they wanted to emulate. Their study 'revealed a mismatch between [...] learners' own accent goals and their ability to perceive accents' (p. 735).

Students' reports of the accents they have encountered does provide some interesting insight into the voices they may have heard, unfortunately this cannot be considered conclusive or definitive. Table 4.5 demonstrates that there is no consistent variety, other than LE, that students have experienced since arriving in the UK. 88 of 92 students stated that they have encountered LE.

This relates to the inclusion of the *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* multiple choice option in the question 'When you first came to the UK what difficulties did you experience understanding spoken English?'. *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* and *Accent* were both provided as options for participants to select. *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* allowed students to reflect their difficulties even if they were unable to identify it as a particular accent.

4.2.1.3 Unfamiliar Pronunciation

Unfamiliar Pronunciation can be directly linked to accent as a listening difficulty. Both *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* and *Accent* were provided as options for participants to select as in the pilot stages of this study students noted a difference; students categorised *Accent* as a person's overall pronunciation, whereas if they only identified certain pronunciation difficulties in an individual's speech, they did not identify it as their accent. Including

Unfamiliar Pronunciation as an option for participants allowed an insight into the true nature of the listening difficulties that students experience. Some accents students may never have heard before and therefore could not label, further supporting the reasoning for including *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* as an option.

Based on the researcher’s previous research, Hope (2014), the accent that learners of English are most often presented with through teaching materials continues to be a standard form, identified as SSB or RP: 65% of the accents present in listening materials in the previous study were found to be closely associated with RP. The coursebooks analysed in this 2014 study are current publications, those with more recent publications (*Cutting Edge* and *Language Leader*) have been analysed as a part of this research project to update this data. Table 4.6 demonstrates the updated data collected.

Table 4.6: Updated data from Hope (2014) – Analysis of accents in coursebook listening materials

Accent	Frequency of accents					Total	% of total
	English File (2013)	Headway (2012)	Face2Face (2013)	Language Leader (2014)	Cutting Edge (2014)		
Received Pronunciation (defined as SSB in the current study)	193	131	133	73	98	628	65%
British regional	20	67	26	38	36	187	19.4%
Non-native speaker	6	15	3	22	17	63	6.5%
America/Canada	28	5	5	16	24	78	8.1%
Australia/New Zealand	1		2	5	1	9	0.9%
	248	218	169	154	176	965	

Coursebook listening materials are often students’ first or only introduction to spoken English; their only other experience of spoken English is from their peers or teacher. Due to the prevalence of standard accents in coursebook listening materials it was expected that students in this study would be more familiar with SSB and standard varieties of English over other regional accents. As demonstrated in Table 4.6, the highest proportion of accents in coursebooks is standard varieties, such as RP and SSB, accounting for 65% of accents in the coursebooks analysed. A key factor in relation to this study is the low representation of British regional accents; these accounted for 19.4% of accents in

listening materials. It can be presumed that phonology present in regional accents, such as LE, will not be familiar to learners due to this low level of exposure. Furthermore, 19.4% accounted for all the British regional accents presented in coursebooks, therefore this does not indicate that students will have had the opportunity to listen to this volume of LE specifically. The category of ‘British regional’ included accents from different parts of the UK; learners may have only heard a very small amount of LE.

48 of the 92 (52.17%) students who completed the questionnaire in the current study, reflected that *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* caused them listening difficulties when they first arrived in the UK. Major et al. (2005) highlight that accent familiarity can significantly impact learners’ listening comprehension. In addition to the 80 students (86.96%) that reported *Accent* as a listening difficulty, this data corroborates these findings that accent unfamiliarity can cause comprehension issues. To further expand on these findings and establish if there is a direct relationship between familiarity and ability to understand, students were asked to listen to a series of accents and rate their familiarity and how easy to understand they found them.

4.2.2 Listening Experiences Data

11 participants completed listening experiences where they rated accents in terms of familiarity and ease of understanding; students also marked any difficulties they experienced on transcripts. The data from both these methods contributes to answering the research question ‘How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?’. This data provides a representation of students’ responses to both LE and SSB accents as they hear them and their reflections on how easy and how familiar they are. The marking of the transcripts provides further details; the number of references marked in the texts has been examined as well as looking at the specific words and phrases (e.g., do words that have been highlighted by students as difficult contain specific LE features).

As students listened to both LE and SSB English, a direct comparison can be made to begin to examine how learners perceive LE compared to SSB English. Previous research has employed rating scales to examine learners’ linguistic perceptions (Lee & Hsieh, 2019; O’Brien, 2014; Teng, 2010). Listening experiences with rating scales were used in the current research project to understand students’ perceptions of accents.

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 display how students rated the accents they heard in terms of familiarity and ease of understanding. Participants listened to 4 samples of each accent and rated each sample.

Figure 4.5: How easy to understand participants found the accents they heard

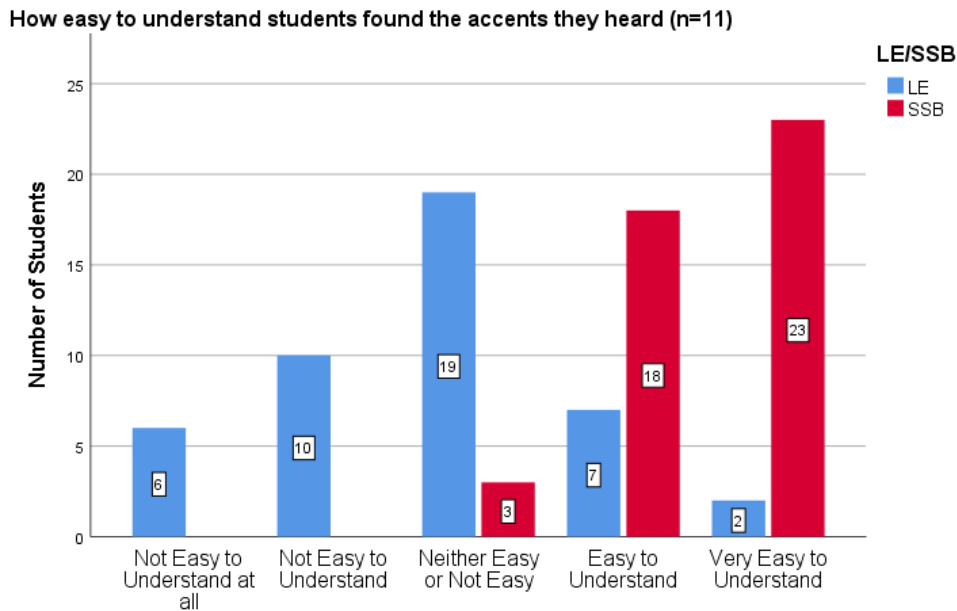
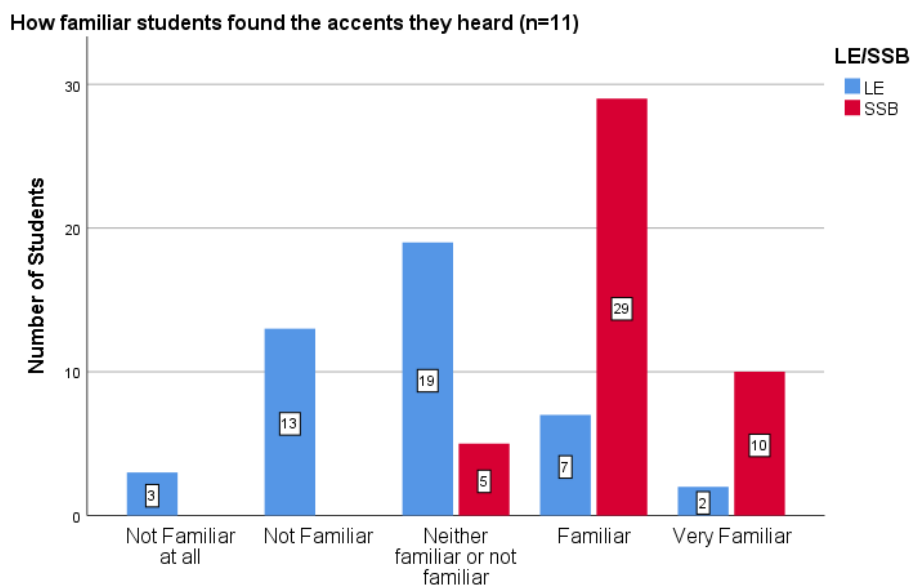


Figure 4.6: How familiar participants found the accents they heard



As demonstrated in Figures 4.5 and 4.6, participants in the study found SSB easier to understand and more familiar. No participants selected ‘Not Familiar/Not Familiar at all’ or ‘Not Easy to Understand/Not Easy to Understand at all’ in relation to SSB.

The findings from the rating scales reflect the accents that are prevalent in listening materials (as highlighted in Table 4.6, p. 138), such as SSB, are shown to be considerably more familiar to learners. The contrast shown between LE and SSB is particularly interesting as the 11 participants had been living and studying in Liverpool for 7 to 10 months (mean LoR = 8.64 months). Regardless of a minimum of 7 months spent in Liverpool, students still found LE to be significantly less familiar.

The findings from the rating scales also demonstrate a similarity between ease of understanding and familiarity; the pattern of the rating of each feature is mirrored. In relation to both features. SSB shows greater values at the higher end of the scale: greater familiarity and ease of understanding. LE shows greater values at the lower end of the scale: lower levels of familiarity and ease of understanding. This mirroring can be seen in Figures 4.5 and 4.6.

These findings show large numbers of participants also place SSB as ‘Easy to Understand’ or ‘Very Easy to Understand’. LE, however is commonly rated in the lower end of the scale; LE was found to be ‘Not Easy to Understand’ and ‘Not Easy to Understand at all’. However, the most common rating of LE in relation to understanding is ‘Neither Easy or Not Easy’. This is also evident in terms of familiarity; the most common rating of LE is ‘Neither Familiar or Not Familiar’. These findings may be indicative of the complexities of LE. The phonology of this accent is distinct and may cause difficulties; however even for those students who find LE difficult to understand, this may not be with not every word or utterance.

The overwhelming familiarity and comfort felt with SSB throughout their language learning experience may have resulted in learners being able to make more definitive ratings of SSB. As students who completed these listening experiences have been living and studying in Liverpool for an average of 8.64 months, their familiarity may have increased but not definitively in comparison to SSB

Regardless of this theory, overall, the data shows that LE is perceived more negatively than SSB by learners. It is perceived as more difficult and less familiar in comparison to SSB. To highlight why this may be students were asked to mark transcripts and highlight the elements they found difficult.

4.2.2.1 Marked Transcripts

Students were asked to highlight the text in the transcripts of the recordings that they found difficult or hard to understand as they listened to the samples of LE and SSB for a second time (the details of these methods are explained in more detail in section 3.4.2.2, p. 99). This gave an insight into what students perceived to be difficult about the voices they heard. The marking or highlighting of the transcripts allowed for a defined picture of where students were experiencing difficulties which have then been able to be analysed in relation to any specific features, such as terminology or accent features, that were present in the selected recordings.

An example of one participant's results from this stage of the methods is shown below (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Participant 1's Marking of Transcripts

Sample	Words/phrases noted as difficult (in red)
R1 E1 (LE)	Line 5 - <i>speaking to like people who I respect and that it's like you use proper words and</i> Line 10- <i>yeah I respect my friends but it's just how they understand you it's just the language</i> Line 13 - <i>way you grow closer to</i> Line 14 - <i>intimate or have a more intimate meaning it means</i>
R1 E2 (LE)	Line 3 - <i>I can say I come from Liverpool</i> Line 4 - <i>I am Muslim and</i> Line 5 - <i>you know stereotyping break stereotypes breaking down before your eyes and</i> Line 9 - <i>I think now more than ever I think</i> Line 10 - <i>between different cultures</i> Line 11 - <i>for us to share our human</i> Line 12 - <i>battle you know</i> Line 13 - <i>we've shared that</i> Line 14 - <i>willing to you know learn and experience life</i>
R1 E3 (LE)	Line 3 - <i>I see in Toxeth now</i> Line 4 - <i>like Pleasure Island the festival place they shut that down said</i> Line 5 - <i>something like Southport there and nothing's been done with it</i> Line 9 - <i>rope right across the street and our mums whenever would turn up for us and then we had</i>
R2 E4 (LE)	Line 3 - <i>the dock even though me dad didn't work down there I mean</i> Line 5 - <i>about apart from losing a good paying job the fact</i> Line 6 - <i>well so it's you know something I haven't</i> Line 6/7 - <i>and like struggling by now it's err the laugh you had down there</i> Line 8 - <i>the money you were</i> Line 11 - <i>families react to it?</i>

	Line 13 - were very <i>supportive</i> the wives and the <i>girlfriends and that</i> but Line 14 - Well they very <i>supportive</i> the wives and the <i>girlfriends and that</i> but I was surprised the way they <i>reacted they're very</i> strong there and they were very <i>supportive and the vast majority of</i> Line 15 - <i>women</i> were right behind the men
R3 E5 (SSB)	Line 3 - <i>internally is important because it's actually that which</i> binds us Line 4 - as a group of <i>employees</i> with a common goal Line 5 - <i>fact that you can</i> go to almost any country with this company and still <i>be able to</i> speak in the Line 6 - from which you get <i>great strength</i> its Line 7 - when <i>people join</i> the organisation Line 9 - very helpful <i>once you get over that initial hurdle</i> Line 11 - don't know what an <i>acronym</i> stands for Line 12/13 - does <i>GTM does that stand for Go To Market at</i> Microsoft Line 13 - just like kind of <i>smiled and nodded</i> and
R4 E6 (SSB)	Line 27 - but I <i>wouldn't be able to live there for a lifetime</i>
R5 E7 (SSB)	Line 3 - I think this <i>arose</i> initially Line 5 - but to <i>distinguish</i> that
R6 E8 (SSB)	Line 3 - here just for six <i>form</i> but Line 14 - we used to erm go out to <i>somewhere called King's Road</i> which

As shown in Table 4.7, participants highlighted the words and phrases that they had difficulty understanding (the full transcripts of the samples of accented speech that were presented to learners can be found in Appendix 7, p. 261). Each participant's responses have been collated, as shown in Table 4.8 (below), and the number of references coded as 'difficult' by respondents has been calculated using NVivo.

Table 4.8: Number of References coded as Difficult in Students' Marked Transcripts

Accent	Number of References coded as difficult	Percentage of total references
LE	213	70.3%
SSB	90	29.7%
Total references in transcripts	303	

Table 4.8 presents the number of references marked as difficult by learners. The most noteworthy finding here is that a significantly higher proportion of LE was marked as

difficult by participants. Of the total marked difficulties, 70.3% of them were in the LE speaker transcripts.

In addition to calculating the number of references in the transcripts marked as difficult by learners, the specific words and phrases that were highlighted were analysed. NVivo was used to code which elements of the text that were highlighted by learners represented a phonological feature associated with either LE or SSB. The results of this analysis in the LE texts are presented in Table 4.9 (below).

Table 4.9: Phonological Features of LE Marked as Difficult by Students

Feature of Liverpool English (LE)	Example	Has Feature been Marked	% of marked text
Consonants:			
TH -stopping: Dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are realised as dental stops [t, d]	‘Those’ - [ðəʊz] becomes [dəʊz]	Yes	21.13%
Dropping of /h/ (present in many other varieties)	‘Him’ – [hɪm] becomes [ɪm]	No	0%
R is pronounced as a voiced tap [ɾ]	In <i>mi[ɾ]or, ve[ɾ]y</i>	Yes	0.96%
Lenition:			
/t/ is realised as a fricative and can also be debuccalised to [h]	‘What’ - [wɒt] becomes [wɒh] ‘Not’ - [nɒt] becomes [nɒh]	Yes	20.19%
/k/ can be lenited to [x]	‘Back’ - [bæk] becomes [bax] ‘Dock’ - [dɒk] becomes [dɒx]	Yes	27.23%
Vowels:			
No distinction between [ɔ] and [ʌ]. Lack of the FOOT/STRUT split.	‘Cup’ as [kʊp] not [kʌp]	Yes	3.76%
Short [a] in words such as ‘bath’ rather than [ɑ:]	‘Bath’ as [bɑθ] not [bɑ:θ]	No	0%

The NURSE/SQUARE merger. Lack of contrast between the lexical sets nurse and square; both realised as a front vowel [ɛ:].	'Hair' and 'her' both [hɛ:] 'Fair' and 'fur' both [fɛ:]	Yes	12.68%
Words ending with long vowel sounds /i:/ or /u:/, the sound starts with an [ɪ]. This also occurs before /l/, so LIVERPOOL has a distinctive [ɪu] sound in the last syllable.	'Book' as [bu:k] not [bʊk] 'Look' as [lu:k] not [lʊk]	Yes	5.63%
Total Marked as Phonological features of LE			91.5%
Other Features (no associated with LE)			
Proper nouns and Unfamiliar terms			6.15%
'Other' (difficulties unclear)			2.35%

Table 4.9 presents the findings of which elements of LE phonology were marked by students. These findings show that 91.5% of the marked LE transcripts included LE phonological features. Other features that were marked included proper nouns and terminology so were removed from this phonological analysis. Place names such as 'Toxteth' and terms such as 'Coronation Day' may not have been familiar to the learners, regardless of phonology; these elements accounted for 6.15% of the marked LE texts.

A final 2.35% of the marked texts accounted for 'other'. This 'other' represented areas of the text that were marked but it was unclear to the researcher as to why; there was no apparent LE phonology that accounted for the difficulty. These difficulties may have arisen due to the natural features of connected speech, however, this could not be determined.

Most LE phonological features were present in the text marked as difficult by learners. Two features that were not present in the highlighted texts were H-dropping and the short [a] (in words such as 'bath', b[a]th rather than b[ɑ:]th). Interestingly, both of these features are commonly found in other accents. The short [a] is a characteristic that varieties across the north of England share (Leach et al., 2016) and H-dropping is even beginning to be heard in some modern SSB speech (Lindsey, 2019).

The most frequently marked feature was found to be the lenition of /k/ to [x]; this was found in 27.23% of the marked texts. This feature of LE is highly recognisable and has been found to be perceived negatively by L1 listeners. This feature is a salient marker of LE and in Watson & Clark's (2015) research, which assessed listeners real-time reactions to accents, was found to cause instant and extreme negative responses. The findings from the marked texts appear to support Watson & Clark's (2015) study in relation to NNS listeners; this feature was marked most frequently as 'difficult' by learners.

These findings demonstrate a correlation between where students perceive difficulties and the specific, distinctive phonology of LE. The same analysis was performed on the text marked as difficult in the SSB texts. Table 4.10 (below) presents these results.

Table 4.10: Phonological Features of SSB Marked as Difficult by Students

Feature of SSB	Example	Has Feature been Marked	% of marked text
Consonants:			
Aspiration of plosives /p/ and /k/ (creating an /h/-like whisper)	[k ^h] in words such as 'kiss' [k ^h ɪs]	No	0%
Affrication of plosive /t/	[tʃ] in words such as 'tea' and 'city'	Yes	8.89%
/l/ and /n/ now pronounced with normally released t/ and /d/ followed by a weak vowel	In 'little' [lɪtəl] and 'certain' [sə:tən]	Yes	16.67%
Glottal Stop common as a form of /t/	'Football' – [fʊʔbɔ:l] not [fʊtbɔ:l]	No	0%
Vowels:			
<i>Anti-clockwise vowel shift:</i>			
Raised vowels: Lot is nearer [ɔ] than [ɒ] and Thought is nearer [o] than [ɔ]	'Lot' - [lɔt] not [lɒt] 'Thought' - [θɔt] not [θɒ:t]	No	12.22%
GOAT backing (GOAT vowel becomes more like the short LOT vowel)	'Old' – [ɒld] not [əʊld]	Yes	13.33%
Total Marked as Phonological features of SSB			51.11%

Other Features (no associated with SSB)	
Proper nouns and Unfamiliar terms	32.22%
'Other' (difficulties unclear)	16.67%

Table 4.10 presents the findings of which elements of SSB phonology were marked by students. These findings show that 51.11% of the marked SSB transcripts included phonological features distinct to this accent. As with the LE transcripts, other features that were marked included proper nouns and terminology so were removed from this phonological analysis. Initialisms such as 'GTM' and terms such as 'acronym' may not have been familiar to the learners, regardless of pronunciations; these elements accounted for 32.22% of the marked SSB texts. This value appears higher than the LE texts yet there were not a greater number of such words in the SSB texts; this difference in percentages is due to the lower amount of SSB coded text.

16.67% accounted for 'other'; elements of the text that were marked but it was unclear to the researcher as to why. There was no apparent SSB distinct phonology that accounted for the difficulty.

In contrast to LE, of the SSB marked text, just over half could be associated with specific SSB phonological features; 51.11% accounted for this. Most LE phonological features were present in the text marked as difficult by learners; not all features of SSB were marked. Of the SSB features that were marked as difficult by learners, no feature was notably more marked than others. The range between features was small; percentage of the marked text ranged from 8.89% to 16.67%. Whilst phonological features of SSB were marked by learners as difficult, no significant correlation can be made. Overall, a far smaller percentage of the text was marked as difficult.

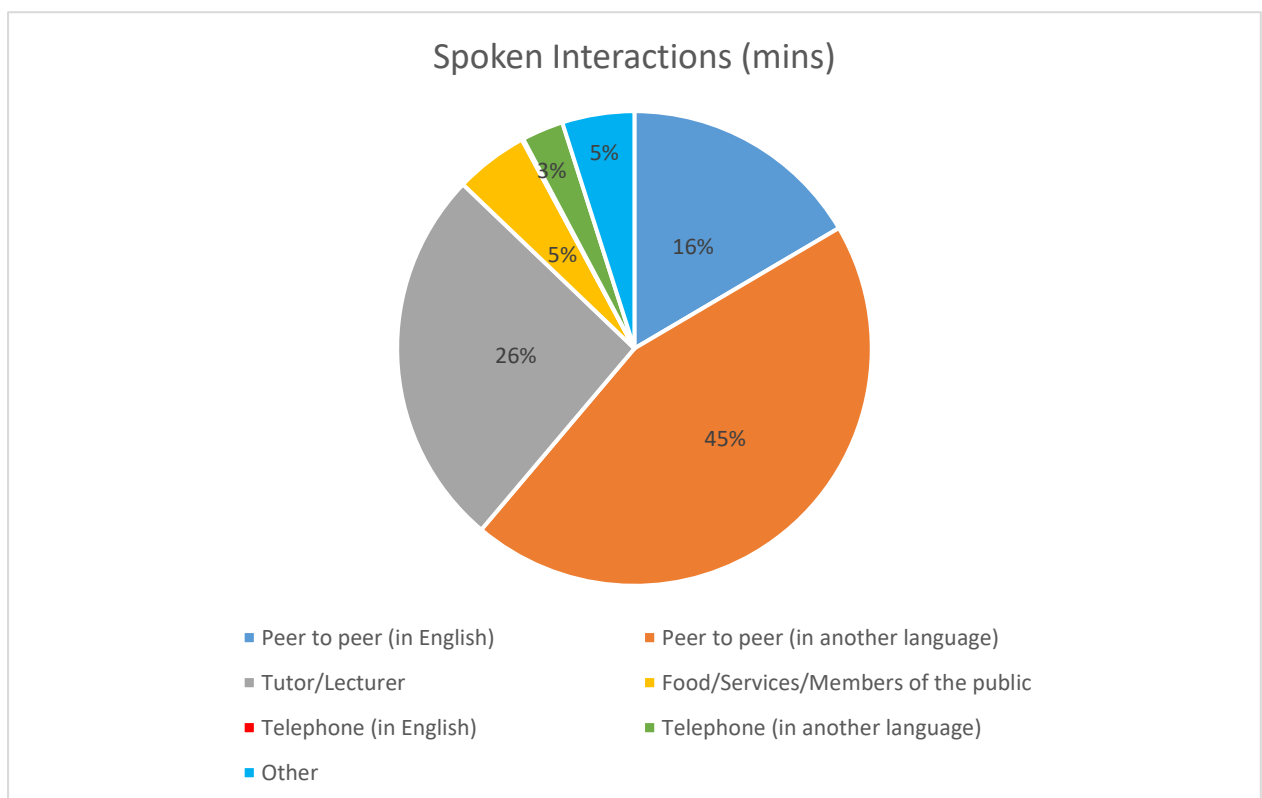
Of the total text marked as difficult to understand by learners, 70.3% were in the LE speaker transcripts and 29.7% were in the SSB transcripts. These findings highlight that students perceive LE to be significantly more difficult to comprehend. Of the marked text, LE text accounted for 40.6% more of the difficulties.

4.2.3 Spoken Interaction Journal Data

21 participants completed spoken interaction journals. This data is being used to answer, ‘What impact does LE have on learners’ experiences communicating in the UK?’. Students reflected on their interactions across a period of seven days, providing data on how many interactions they had in English and other languages, and in which settings.

The journals were online, and students were asked to record the type, language and duration of all their spoken interactions across a period of seven days. The journals were created and completed by students on Google Sheets; the data from the journals was then transferred to Excel to allow for analysis. 21 students completed a full Spoken Interaction Journal. The data collected allowed for analysis of how much English learners reported that they were speaking and how this may be having an impact on any listening difficulties they were experiencing and for how long these difficulties persisted. Figure 4.7 summarises students’ overall spoken interactions (the percentage of minutes recorded in each category).

Figure 4.7: Students’ Overall Spoken Interactions



Participants were given different options to categorise their spoken interactions. As shown in Figure 4.7, 45% of students' interactions were categorised by students as Peer to Peer, in a language other than English. This signifies one of the possible negative effects of the international student experience; it is possible for students to interact for a large proportion of their day with their peers in their L1. Whilst speaking in their L1 is not in itself problematic, if it is resulting in them speaking less English, avoiding communication they are not comfortable with, this can impact their confidence and the further development of their language skills.

To understand exactly how much English students were speaking, students recorded the duration of each interaction. Figure 4.8 shows the number of student interactions in minutes in English and Not English.

Figure 4.8: Interactions in minutes that Students Reported in English and Not English

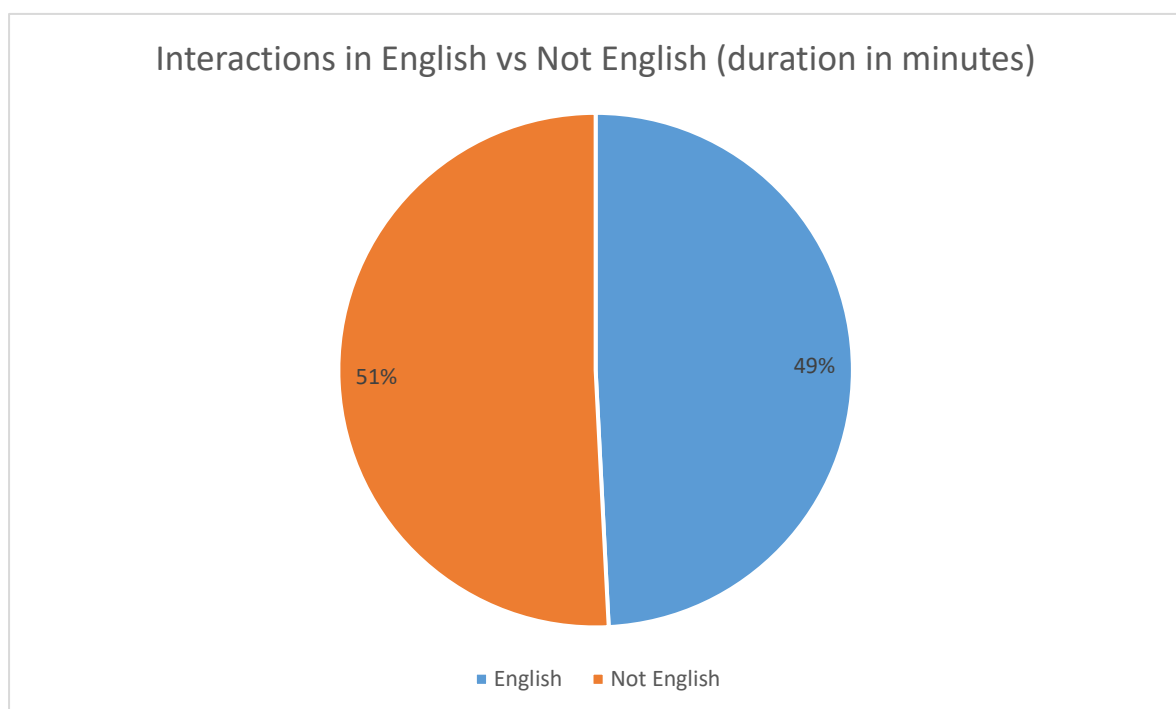


Figure 4.8 demonstrates that participants were interacting in their L1 51% of their time in the UK. This high proportion of non-English interaction indicates that students are not fully engaging with their L2. As Taguchi (2011) comments, the SA experience is valuable in improving learners' language skills, however, this is dependent on the quality of their stay; the amount of English students interact with will impact their exposure to language in use. This data highlights that the assumption that the SA experience will

improve English skills is simplistic; greater value needs to be placed on the English students are actively engaging with.

4.2.3.1 Questionnaire Responses

To support the data collected in the Spoken Interaction Journals students were also asked to reflect on their spoken interactions in the questionnaire. This method used the same categories as the Spoken Interaction Journals but gave a larger quantity of data (n=92), however, this method was not as accurate as the journals. Students were asked to estimate their average interactions over a week rather than recording them as they happened. The journals provided more detailed data of specific encounters students had experienced; the journal was accessible online to encourage students to make entries regularly. The questionnaire asked students to reflect on how much language, of each interaction category, they spoke; these values provide an insight but are only approximations. Students reported the approximate percentage of their interactions that accounted for each category, as shown in Table 4.11 (below).

Table 4.11: Students’ Reflections on their Spoken Interactions

Spoken Interaction categories	Maximum reported %	Minimum reported %	Average reported %
Peer to peer (in English)	65	7	30.4
Peer to peer (in another language)	80	10	50.7
Tutor/Lecturer	50	2	18.1
Library staff	20	0.2	4.7
Other university staff (e.g., administration, accommodation)	10	0.4	2.9
Government staff (e.g., visa department)	5	0.5	1.9
Medical (doctors/nurses)	5	1	3.6
Bank staff	5	0.2	2
Taxi driver	15	0.2	4.3
Public transport staff	5	0.5	1.9
Telephone interaction (in English)	30	0.5	9
Telephone interaction (in another language)	70	1	22.8
Cashier (e.g., supermarket, clothes shops)	30	0.5	5.8

Restaurant (waiter/waitress)	15	0.5	4.4
Food and drink services (e.g., coffee shop)	50	0.5	7.2
Members of the public (e.g., people on the train, in a shop etc)	30	1	5.6
Other	10	5	7.5

As shown in Table 4.11, the data collected supports the data from the Spoken Interaction Journals that students communicate in their L1 for a significant proportion of their time. In the questionnaire data, students reported an average of 50.7% of their interactions to be Peer to Peer, in another language than English. Furthermore, one respondent stated that 80% of their spoken interactions were not in English. These findings indicate that in this SA experience, students are relying on their L1 to communicate. As previously discussed, this in itself is not problematic, but the lack of interactions in English appears to be halting the advancement of their listening skills. 80.6% of the participants in this research project reported it taking them between 1 and 6 months to understand the accents they encountered; some students, who stated they could now understand, commented that ‘some I still don’t like’. To gain a better understanding of why this may be persisting for some learners, it is relevant to consider the context of their interactions in English.

Students were given options to categorise their spoken interactions in their journals, e.g., Peer to Peer. To analyse their language use, students’ spoken interactions in English were further categorised to compare students use of English, as shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Categories of Students’ Spoken Interactions (in English)

Spoken Interaction Categories	
Peer to peer	University environment
Tutor/Lecturer	
Library staff	
Other university staff (e.g. administration, accommodation)	
Government staff (e.g., visa department)	Local environment
Medical (doctors/nurses)	
Bank staff	
Taxi driver	
Public transport staff (e.g., train station ticket staff)	
Cashier (e.g., supermarket, clothes shop)	
Restaurant (waiter/waitress)	
Food and drink services (e.g., coffee shop)	

Members of the public (e.g., people on the train, in a shop etc.)	
Other	

The categories were sub-categorised based on their location (e.g., ‘other university staff’ will have been in a university location) and likelihood of relationship in the interaction. There may have been cross overs in this categorisation, such as with ‘food and drinks services’; there are coffee shops and other facilities on the university campus. As these facilities are open to the public and commonly staffed by local people, they were categorised as ‘local environment’.

Research has highlighted that input types and environment impact listening difficulties; Huang’s (2004) study discussed the difference in language used in academic settings. The university environment is unique, in that the accents and speech heard at a university may not be reflective of the accents of the local area. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2021) findings indicate that in the academic year 2017/18, 27.6% of student enrolments at the University of Liverpool were students from outside of the UK. In addition, Table 4.13 shows the number of the UK-based students enrolled at the University of Liverpool.

Table 4.13: HE Student enrolments at the University of Liverpool (academic year 2017/18) (data from HESA, 2019)

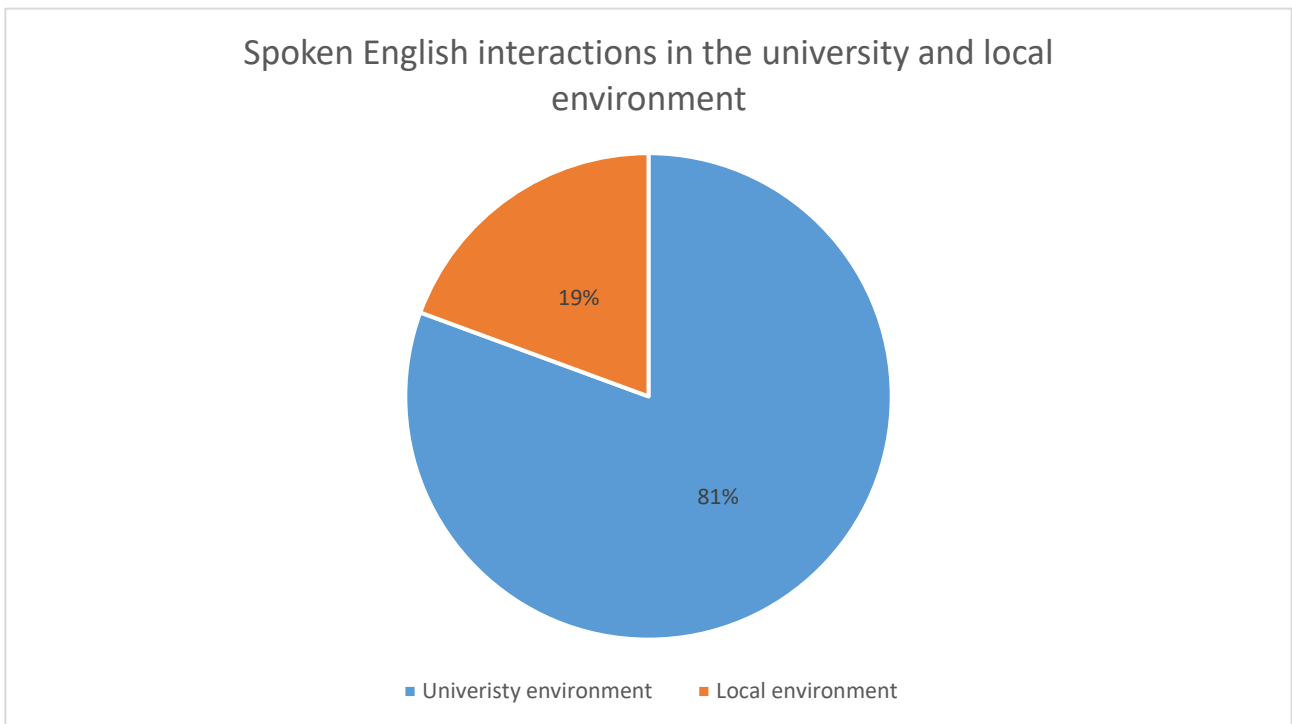
Country of domicile	Number of enrolled students	Percentage (of total enrolled students)
England	19175	66.6 %
Wales	955	3.3 %
Scotland	75	0.3 %
Northern Ireland	505	1.8 %
Other UK	120	0.4 %
Total UK	20835	72.4 %
Total Non-UK	7960	27.6 %
Total	28795	

Table 4.13 highlights the possible variation in speech heard in the university environment. The data of country of domicile does not clarify which accents students will speak but gives an indication of the amount of variety; within each country there will be a number of different accents. This data highlights the diversity of students studying at the University of Liverpool. This is also evident in the staff, including tutors and

lecturers, at the University who will have often come from different parts of the UK and worldwide to work at the university.

Figure 4.9 demonstrates students' university and local environment spoken interactions, in English (data from the Spoken Interaction Journals).

Figure 4.9: Students' spoken interactions (English) in the university and local environment



As highlighted in Figure 4.9, a high proportion of students' spoken interaction are within the university environment; these interactions account for 81%. As has been highlighted in relation the HESA (2019; 2021) data and Huang's (2004) research, the university environment does not reflect the language spoken in the local environment. Consequently, students are not being exposed to the pronunciation differences of the local accent, LE.

4.3 Presentation of Qualitative Data

The qualitative data in this study consisted of 11 students' semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and were unable to take place in person; students met with the researcher online via Skype or Microsoft Teams. The interviews were recorded and transcribed before analysis (this process is outlined in section 3.4.3.2, p. 107). This data is being used to answer, 'How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?'. Students reflected on their initial experiences in the UK and discussed any difficulties they had. This data is also being used to answer, 'What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?'; students were asked to reflect on if accent, specifically LE, has had or is continuing to have an impact on their communication experiences.

In addition to this, 10 students completed semi-structured interviews (recorded via field notes) as part of the pilot study. Due to limitations placed on the current study as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this data is also being used to provide additional support in answering 'How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?' and 'What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?'. As previously discussed in section 3.4.3 (p. 102) this data provided an initial outline of students' perceptions and reflections of their experiences of accents (specifically LE). Students in the pilot and final interviews had comparable demographic information and, importantly, had experienced similar interactions and life in Liverpool in a pre-COVID lifestyle. The data sets have been analysed separately.

4.3.1 Coding of Transcripts

All the interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, investigating and separating the texts into meaningful concepts or themes. The analysis followed a phenomenological tradition to uncover the lived experiences of the participants in the study. The qualitative analysis employed in this study aligns with the IPA approach, using thematic analysis to allow for a detailed assessment of participants' lived experiences (Lichtman, 2013). Using thematic analysis within the IPA approach allowed

the researcher to explore the perceptions of the participants, capture their lived experiences and consequently interpret the meaning of their comments and discussions.

The thematic analysis of the transcripts also echoes Kashiwa & Benson's (2018) study; their study coded transcripts based on types of learning activities and students' responses to different learning methods. The analysis has used a similar method of thematic coding, however, the themes focused on respondents' discussion of listening difficulties and experiences of accents of English.

This thematic analysis allowed the researcher to explore the qualitative data in detail. The interview data was coded following six steps, as outlined by Lichtman (2013, p. 252). The six steps followed were:

Step 1: Initial coding. Going from responses to summary ideas of the responses

Step 2: Revisiting initial coding

Step 3: Developing an initial list of categories

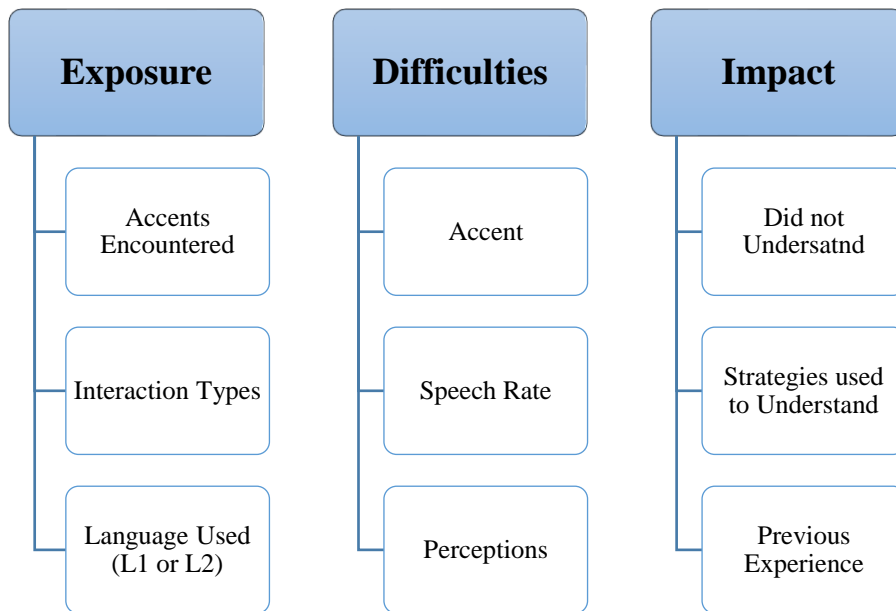
Step 4: Modifying initial list based on additional rereading

Step 5: Revisiting your categories and subcategories

Step 6: Moving from categories to concepts

This coding process allowed for the identification of concepts, or themes, and patterns that emerged in the data. In this process, comments from the interviews were collated into codes, categories, and concepts (a full table of these codes and categories can be seen in Appendix 8, p. 265). From the interviews three main concepts emerged; the key concepts identified were *Exposure*, *Difficulties* and *Impact*. Within these concepts nine categories were identified; the categories in this analysis are shown below in Figure 4.10.

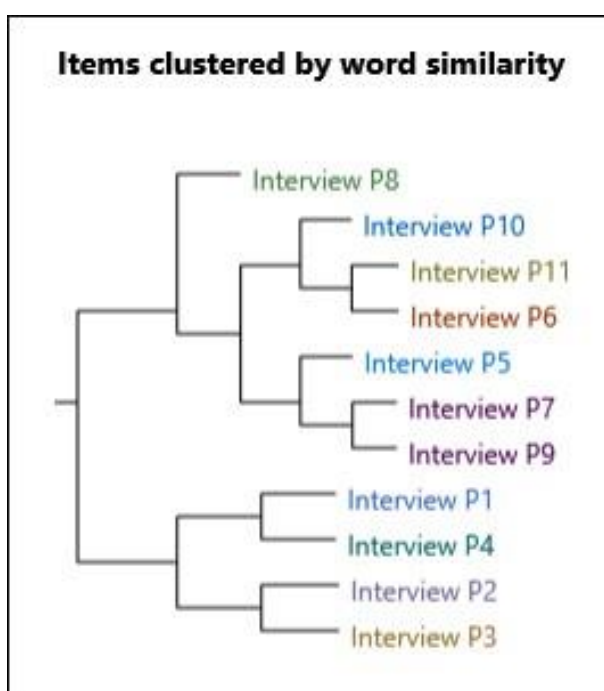
Figure 4.10: Categories Defined in Analysis of Interview Transcripts



The three concepts, and the categories within these concepts, were determined in order to capture participants reflections of their lived experiences of LE and spoken English in the SA context.

To support this analysis, NVivo 12 was used; this software helped in the management and organisation of the data. Within NVivo, a cluster analysis was completed to compare the word similarity of the 11 interview transcripts. This analysis allowed for a judgement on the students' comments establishing whether interviewees were discussing similar topics and issues. Figure 4.11 (below) presents how the interview transcripts were clustered by word similarity.

Figure 4.11: Cluster analysis of word similarity in the final interview transcripts



As can be seen from Figure 4.11, there is a relatively high word similarity between the transcripts, highlighting common themes and responses from all participants. Further to this, the Pearson correlation coefficient was analysed in the cluster analysis. The lowest similarity score was found to be 0.33; most transcripts showing an even higher similarity score of between 0.6 and 0.8. These findings begin to demonstrate that students used related or similar language in their interviews, suggesting shared experiences.

The following sections will discuss the findings identified in each of the three concepts: *Exposure*, *Difficulties* and *Impact*.

4.3.2 Exposure

The research goal of this study is to examine how participants experience LE in the SA context. Therefore, it is important to investigate both students' exposure to spoken English whilst in the SA experience and also how their previous exposure may have had an impact on their communication in the UK. Assessing and examining learners'

exposure to, or lack of, LE and other spoken English is important. Examining this concept begins to describe students' experience in the SA context in Liverpool. As outlined in the presentation of quantitative data (section 4.2.3, p. 148), students have been found to experience an unbalanced amount of spoken language in certain contexts, therefore this qualitative data will contribute to the discussion of how language is used and listened to by the upper intermediate level learners who participated in this study.

4.3.2.1 Accents Encountered

In the questionnaire stage of the study, participants were asked to reflect 'What accents have you encountered since you have arrived in the UK?'. The most common accent encountered was found to be LE; this was predicted due to the location of study. Students also reported a range of other accents they encountered due to the diverse demographic they will have experienced in the university environment. The interviews allowed students to expand on this data and discuss what their experiences of these encounters were.

Liverpool English

As evidenced in in the presentation of quantitative data the most common accent encountered by questionnaire participants was LE (reported by students as 'Scouse' or 'Liverpool'); 88 of 92 students reported encountering LE during their time in Liverpool. How students experienced this exposure to LE could not be fully examined via the questionnaire responses. To examine participants' reactions to LE, students were asked to expand on their encounters of LE in the semi-structured interviews.

Participants highlighted their initial reactions to LE:

I think people sounded different at first. They didn't sound like the English I had heard in China. I could hear they didn't speak standard English, is it Received English?

(Participant 10)

I think it is more difficult than normal English, like the English you [the interviewer] speak.

(Participant 10)

When I came to Liverpool, I found the people didn't speak English as I imagined.

(Participant 2)

I think when I first came to Liverpool it was harder to understand people when I spoke to them. I think it was because of the accent, the Scouse.

(Participant 5)

Participants' reflections highlight how LE phonology was unexpected; participants commented that LE 'sounded different at first', it was 'more difficult than normal English' (Participant 10) and that speakers 'didn't speak English as I imagined' (Participant 2). These findings signify that students were surprised by the English they heard when they arrived in Liverpool as it was not what they were prepared for.

Students were also asked if they noticed a difference in Liverpool accents; the questionnaire asked, 'When you first came to Liverpool did you notice the differences in accents?'. 89 participants (96.7%) reported that they noticed the difference in accents when they arrived in Liverpool. These findings indicate that students can recognise the difference in accents. Through interview discussion students were asked to expand on the 'difference' they noticed; what marked LE as different to them, if at all. A common reflection by students was that LE was simply different in comparison to what they had heard in their previous English language learning experiences. Rather than commenting on specific features of LE, participants highlighted that LE was markedly different to what they had previously been exposed to.

I had never heard accents like Liverpool before. When I learnt English, I would just hear my teacher or in my classes and they didn't sound like here.

(Participant 8)

I haven't heard [LE] before and it sounds very different. I wish I had heard it before I came here.

(Participant 5)

Scouse [LE], is difficult. I think it is because of the accent, they do not speak the same as how I thought they would. I don't think they sound the same as the English that I studied in China. They sound different than what I thought.

(Participant 6)

This data highlights that both students are able to recognise the difference in the accents they hear and also that they have not been exposed to LE before. These reflections indicate that students found this to have had a negative impact on their experiences; Participant 5 commented 'I wish I had heard it before I came here', providing an indication regarding students' perceptions. This begins to challenge the belief that students' want to be exposed to only standard varieties of English; here a participant expresses that they 'wish' they had heard LE before. However, it should be noted that this belief is likely to still exist prior to encountering these accents. Until an awareness of the realities of spoken English are known a preference for standard varieties is common (Sung, 2016).

The reflections from these participants highlights that students had not been exposed to LE before arriving in the UK, noting it as 'very different', in contrast to what they had heard previously. These findings highlight the surprise students experience when they first arrive in the UK; Participant 8 stated 'I had never heard accents like Liverpool before'. Not only does this highlight that there is a stark difference that learners recognise in LE compared to those used in the language learning process but that it also causes problems for learners. Participant 6 highlights that for them 'Scouse is difficult'; here the LE accent is shown to present a direct difficulty to learners. Participants provided further reflections of how they perceived LE:

Scouse is the most difficult [accent].

(Participant 3)

It was hard especially in the supermarkets. Yes, it hard for me, they'd ask me things very quickly and they didn't sound like English for me. I couldn't understand them.

(Participant 6)

I think it is just hard to understand. I think Liverpool accent is just hard to understand.

(Participant 6)

I think this is because this is Liverpool, I think Liverpool is known for this.

(Participant 9)

Participant 6 references that LE ‘didn’t sound like English’ and ‘it is hard to understand’; this indicates negative perceptions of NS accents of English. This is further enforced by participants’ responses that signify an assumption that LE is difficult to understand, that this is a known fact and that it is unavoidable; ‘Scouse is the most difficult [accent]’ (Participant 3), it is ‘hard to understand’ (Participant 6) and ‘Liverpool is known for this’ (Participant 9).

These findings support research such as Sung (2016) which highlighted negative perceptions of non-standard accents of English. Sung’s (2016) study highlighted this in relation to NNS accents; the findings of the current study begin to suggest this same negative perception of British regional accents, such as LE.

Non-Native Accents

The focus of this research was to assess students’ experiences of LE, however, so not to ask leading questions, participants were asked to reflect on their spoken English experiences of accent in general. As highlighted in Table 4.5 (‘Accents that Students Encountered’, p. 136), LE was the accent students had experienced the most since arriving in Liverpool, but through the diverse SA experience students noted NNS accents they had encountered. Participants reflected their experiences of Indian and Mexican accents:

Sometimes when I calling uber or taxi they ask where I would like to go and sometimes they may talk to me when they drive but I couldn’t understand the [Indian] accent

(Participant 1) – reflecting on the Indian accent

I sometimes have to ask them to repeat. But it is ok, they are just short conversations, where am I going and how much and things

(Participant 10) – reflecting on the Indian accent

That's so difficult to understand.

(Participant 2) – reflecting on the Mexican accent

Even within the setting of this study, where NSs are prominent, students' ability to converse with NNSs is important; students also commented on their experiences with NNSs outside the university setting.

The reflections from Participants 1, 10 and 2, shown above, indicate other NNS accents that students may experience in the UK. These students reported finding Indian and Mexican accents difficult to understand. Importantly, both participants referred to English being used in a service encounter; these discussions were referring to experiences taking an Uber (taxi) and ordering food. In these scenarios the interaction with speakers will be brief but often require precise information to be shared, e.g., directions. Both participants state that they found these interactions 'difficult to understand'. Whilst this type of interaction is not isolated to NNSs, this highlights that accents can cause listening difficulties which can impact students' ability to access services. As these encounters will be brief but loaded with important information needed for the service to progress, this highlights that accent can cause a barrier to students' experiences in an English-speaking environment. Other factors may have been present in the speakers' speech, therefore only an estimation can be made that difficulties were solely related to accent.

This possible need to comprehend accents other than NS is also evident within the university environment, as shown with students' reflections in the pilot interviews. As discussed in section 3.4.3.1, the participants the pilot study were of the same demographic and had comparable experience in the UK as the participants in the final interviews therefore, this data has been used to support the additional interview data. This data was, however, analysed separately to the final data, and only provides supporting insights. Pilot Participants 1, 2 and 4 noted their experiences listening to Japanese English speakers.

I do notice that the Japanese students have an accent. They pause in different places and sounds are different. [...] but I can understand them easily.

(Pilot Participant 1)

I do sometimes have some problems understanding. Sometimes with [a Japanese speaker] the speed is different. It's not that it's too fast but that the pace is different. The intonation and the stresses are sometimes different to what I expect.

(Pilot Participant 2)

I can find the Japanese accent difficult to understand. They have different chunks. It is very unfamiliar to me because I don't speak to Japanese students very often.

(Pilot Participant 4)

The participants in the pilot interviews noted the differences in Japanese English that they have heard. Whilst all three students identified different stresses, rhythm and pronunciation in this variety of English, they have different responses to these variations. Pilot Participant 1 comments 'I can understand them easily' but Pilot Participants 2 and 4 state they have problems and difficulties understanding. Pilot Participant 1 expands on their experience with Japanese English.

'I am familiar with the Japanese accent. I have been on holiday to Japan; I cannot speak Japanese, so I spoke English to people there.'

(Pilot Participant 1)

Pilot Participant 1's experience highlights that exposure to accents of English can increase students' ability to understand spoken English. Participant 2 and 4 had not experienced Japanese English before arriving in the UK; they stated having heard Japanese English in the UK from their peers and tutors. This comparison of accent experience provides an insight into the impact of accent familiarity. Such comparisons

cannot be made regarding LE as no participants had experienced this accent prior to arriving in the UK. Major et al.'s (2005) study examines how exposure influences listening comprehension finding that unfamiliar accents of English are more difficult to understand. This interview data contributes to this idea, but also expands on this. Students are shown to be able to identify specific features of spoken English that alter their communication experiences, such as stress or intonation. Not only does this data support the theory that accent familiarity increases listening skills, but it also indicates that accent exposure can increase learners' awareness of linguistic features. Their awareness of different linguistic features in spoken English can improve their ability to tolerate such differences; focusing on one prescriptive norm in the ELT process does not allow for this. These mentions of Japanese English also highlight the relevance of students being able to tolerate ambiguities in a variety of accents, including NNS accents.

Accents in the Media

Participants also noted how through other forms, they had been exposed to accent which may have had an influence on their understanding of speakers' accents. Participants 5 and 10 reflected how they perceived that their exposure to spoken English via TV had positively impacted their abilities.

I have heard American. I think I can understand that from watching TV shows because I watched them in China and here. They sound the English I had in China in the books we used.

(Participant 5)

I have a friend from America. Her accent is ok. I have watched American TV so I had heard these accents before.

(Participant 10)

The extracts from Participant 5 and 10, shown above, highlight that American English is found to be easier to understand. This is an indication of the influence of American English in the media. Jenkins (2014) discusses the increasing impact of the American English dominated media; exposure to such media influences is impacting the

development of varieties of spoken English. In addition, due to the influence of American English in the media students are more familiar with these accents. This also enforces the theory that exposure to accent variety increases the ability to understand them (Major et al., 2005). Participants discussed their experience of television further in the Pilot interviews, highlighting the differences they note in the language used.

I watch the BBC; I can understand, but that is not local accent.

(Pilot Participant 3)

In my house they watch TV with subtitle[s]. If I cannot catch what they say I can see what they have said. But sometimes not good for study because when I speak to you there are no subtitles.

(Pilot Participant 11)

Pilot Participant 3 identifies that the accents they hear on television are not the same as the accents they hear in the local area (such as LE), stating that they can understand them because they are ‘not local accent’. Pilot Participant 11 discusses that they can rely on subtitles if they do not ‘catch’ what is said. Both extracts highlight students’ awareness of the listening challenges they experience, and Pilot Participant 11 shows further awareness of how their actions are impacting the improvement of their language skills. This reliance on technological input also supports Kashiwa & Benson’s (2018) discussion of how technology is changing the use of language outside of the classroom environment. It is now possible, in many instances, for learners to use technology to avoid communication in their L2 or face-to-face interactions (this is discussed in greater detail in section 4.3.4.1, p. 187) As Pilot Participant 11 highlights in their reflection, in face-to-face spoken interactions ‘there are no subtitles’; students’ reliance on technology can halt the development of their language skills. Le et al. (2018) found that self-confidence impacts students’ WTC; the findings from the current study begin to demonstrate that students can rely on technology when they are struggling with linguistic confidence and their WTC is reduced.

Participants’ reflections of their experience of American English also highlighted their awareness of how previous exposure to English varieties may impact their listening abilities.

American is the easiest. Probably because I grew up in environment that, we are taught in American accent English.

(Participant 2)

Participant 2 demonstrated an awareness that exposure to different NS varieties may have impacted their understanding. This data contributes to the findings that the participants in this study are able to identify different accents, including variation in NS speakers. Students demonstrate an awareness of other NS varieties of English, in addition to British varieties, and how they impact their own communication.

Learners' Previous Experiences

Students' awareness of how English varieties impact their listening experiences has been shown in relation to LE, NNS varieties and American English. In their discussion of American English, Participant 2 highlighted the influence exposure to accents in previous language teaching may have had on their understanding. To further understand students' previous language experiences, it is important to consider learners' backgrounds.

As highlighted in Huang's (2004) study, initially using questionnaires to gather background information is valuable in making connections between learner's listening difficulties and their previous experiences. To begin to assess if learners' previous experiences prepare students for English in the SA context, data was collected regarding participants' previous language learning experiences. All participants in the questionnaire study (n=92) reported that they did not learn English in a NS country indicating that the main English input they will have experienced is through the ELT process. In the semi-structured interviews, students were asked to reflect on their previous experiences learning English. Extracts from students' reflections are shown below.

[Speakers in Liverpool] didn't sound like the English I had heard in China. I could hear they didn't speak standard English, is it Received English?

(Participant 10)

London's accent is perfect for me 'cause that's how I, that's familiar to me because I learnt it in English book in China but when I came Liverpool well I didn't know the word even 'do you need a bag?'

(Participant 2)

The English I hear on campus are more standard, it's just what we learnt in China.

(Participant 3)

This contrast between the English previously exposed to and English heard in Liverpool was further highlighted by participants in the Pilot interviews:

[LE] sounds like nothing I heard at home. I think it is has been a shock for my friends too.

(Pilot Participant 16)

The materials we used in China only had an accent like a London accent in them; encountering other accents was a shock.

(Pilot Participant 4)

The impact of students' previous experiences cannot be underestimated, especially in relation to exposure. This data suggests that the exposure in the ELT process did not effectively prepare learners to tolerate ambiguities in spoken English. Participants reported the shock they experienced when they arrived in the UK due to the contrast between materials and real-life spoken English. These findings begin to demonstrate that the contrast between materials and actual language in use may be impacting learners' comprehension. This data supports Song & Iverson's (2018) discussion that the mismatch between learners' listening expectations and the reality increases listener effort.

Participants indicated that they felt their previous experiences did, however, prepare them to understand other accents, such as 'London'. Participant 2 reported that 'London's accent is perfect for me 'cause that's how I, that's familiar to me because I learnt it in English book in China'. Whilst this implies exposure to an English variety improves comprehension, as it is the same as the 'English book in China', the students' reflection of what a 'London' accent is may not be reliable. It may be presumed that the participant

is referring to SSB, or a similar ‘standard’ variety, as such varieties are often associated with the south of England, however, this cannot be determined.

Students highlight a contrast between the English they ‘had heard at home’ in China and the English heard in Liverpool. This shock factor felt by learners caused students to question their language proficiency. Participant 2 reflected being disheartened that ‘I didn’t know the word even ‘do you need a bag?’’. They went on to state:

I am thinking about how poor my English is, I couldn’t even hear ‘do you need a bag?’

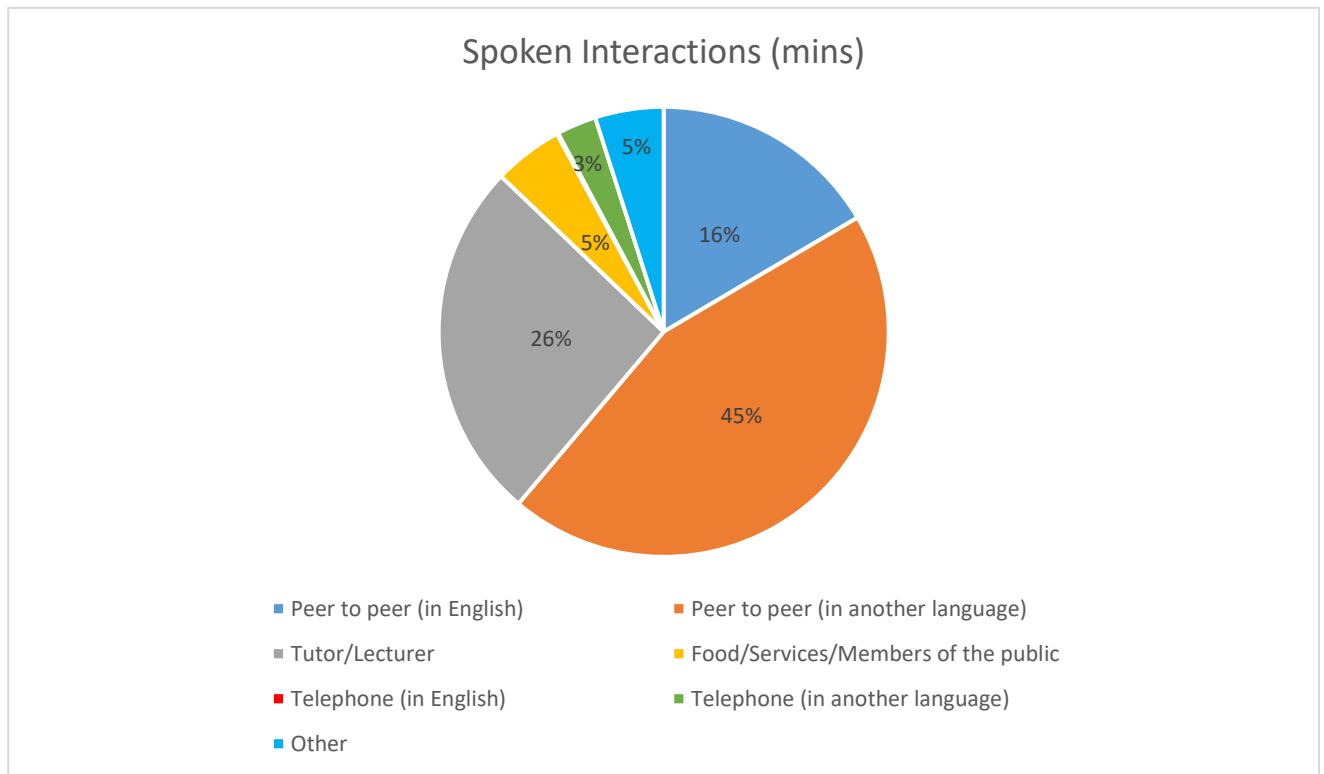
(Participant 2)

This participant’s reflection highlights how the disparity between the realities of spoken English and English in the ELT process can cause upper intermediate level learners to feel their English skills are not good enough. These findings relate to the motivations of this study; in conversation with peers and students, comments were made that this unwelcome surprise stopped them wanting to use English, specifically in certain types of interactions.

4.3.2.2 Interaction Types

There are numerous features which may influence the type of spoken English that is used in different interactions. As discussed in relation to listening processes (section 2.2), speech signals may differ and consequently place different requirements on the listener. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate the interactions students experience in the SA context, and consequently the spoken English they are exposed to. Figure 4.12 shows the percentage of students’ spoken interactions. This data was collected from the Spoken Interaction Journals; the journals were completed by the 11 students who completed the semi-structured interviews and the 10 students who took part in the interview pilot.

Figure 4.12: Students' Spoken Interactions in minutes



As demonstrated in Figure 4.12, the largest proportion of students' interactions was found to be Peer to Peer, in a language other than English. This provides an insight into students' language use during their time in the UK. Students use their L1 for a large proportion of the time in this SA context, indicating that students' exposure to English in other interactions may have more value. In the semi-structured interviews, students were asked to discuss spoken interactions in English to gain a better picture of the English that they are exposed to in their daily life.

Tutors and Lecturers

As has previously been discussed in the presentation of the quantitative data (section 4.2.3, p. 148), students in the SA context will experience a diverse range of accents due to the nature of the demographic studying and working in the university environment. HESA (2019; 2021) data and Huang's (2004) research highlights that the university environment does not always reflect the language spoken in the local environment. Students are therefore not being exposed to the pronunciation differences of the local accent, LE, in their most frequent encounters. Figure 4.12 illustrates that 26% of students'

interactions are with Tutors and Lecturers. In the interviews, participants reported being comfortable in understanding the English they hear from their tutors.

Teachers I think they are all speak very the English what I have been learning.

(Participant 1)

The English I hear on campus are more standard, it's just what we learnt in China.

(Participant 3)

[Southern English] is the English I prefer. That is how my teachers sound, I think.

(Participant 5)

Participants highlighted their comfort with the accents of their tutors. Students reflected a preference for the English they hear from their tutors and that they are familiar with it; Participant 1 states 'it is the 'English [that] I have been learning'. Participant 3 also widens this, commenting that the English that they hear 'on campus' is 'more standard', noting a difference in the wider university environment than just with tutors.

Participants also reflected on their perceptions of their tutors' speech, including the features they think that help them in understanding.

Yes, they speak slower, and they don't have accents. I think they are maybe from different places; I don't know.

(Participant 11)

But they say things differently too. I think change their words to help us sometimes, when we look confused [laughs].

(Participant 11)

Yes, yes. I can understand [my tutors]. They speak with standard English, the received English pronunciation.

(Participant 7)

Participants' reflections highlight that the understanding students experience is often assigned to a perception that tutors 'don't have accents' or that their accent is not

associated with the local accent, LE; ‘they speak with standard English’ or ‘they are maybe from different places’. Whilst it is not possible to evidence what accent the tutors that students refer to have, this difference in ease of understanding does emphasise the difficulties experienced with other accents.

However, in this discussion of accent it is important to acknowledge the accommodations tutors may be making to try and ensure students are able to understand their speech. Tutors may make changes to pronunciation and speech rate to ease this process (Huang, 2004). This active change may be happening in the classroom, consciously or unconsciously, as tutors are finding the best way in which to inform and teach students. These changes are less likely to occur in day-to-day, natural speech. Participant 11 acknowledges how these alterations may be made; ‘I think [tutors] change their words to help us sometimes’.

Nevertheless, Huang’s (2004) previous research did find that students still experienced difficulties with tutors; this contributes to highlighting the contrast that is perceived by learners in the current study between ‘standard’ English and LE.

Whilst LE was shown to be the accent most commonly encountered by learners in the questionnaire data (section 4.2.1, p. 127), there were still 4 of the 92 students surveyed who did not report encountering LE. Participant 3’s reflections demonstrate why this may be in relation to the voices they hear at university.

I haven’t quite experienced the Scouse here ‘cause the teacher and the people in reception, their accent are not strong.

(Participant 3)

This also highlights that, as is shown in the high percentage of spoken interactions with tutors, students may be experiencing other accents, but in their perception they ‘don’t have accents’ or their ‘accent[s] are not strong’. Consequently, these responses could be skewed; LE may not be the accent that students are encountering the most, reducing their exposure.

Peer to Peer Interactions

A high proportion of students’ spoken interactions were found to be with their peers. Data from the spoken interaction journals demonstrated that 61% of participant’s interactions were with their peers, however, the majority of these interactions with peers

were not in English. Students reported that the majority of their peer to peer interactions were spoken in their L1. Only 16% of students' overall interactions were identified as with their peers in English. In interviews, students reflected on these interactions and any difficulties that they had.

[My] classmate he speaks very strong accent of Liverpool, I think the first time when we were doing group work in last semester we talked like a group, I couldn't understand at all.

(Participant 1)

I have a friend who is from Liverpool is a strong Scouse accent. It is difficult sometimes when they speak fast, I still find it hard and I have to concentrate for this, but I can understand the most of what they say.

(Participant 5)

There is one of my classmates who has a strong Liverpool accent and it is difficult for me to understand him. If I am in a group with him I don't understand everything, I try but I don't understand every word.

(Participant 8)

Participants 1, 5 and 8 discussed their experiences with peer to peer interactions in English. As evidenced in their comments they had some difficulties understanding a peer who had a Liverpool accent. Participants reported that they 'couldn't understand at all' in their initial encounters with their LE speaking classmate and that it is 'difficult [...] to understand him'. These findings highlight the initial complications that an unexpected accent can cause. Students' reflections also suggest that time spent listening to an accent may improve students' abilities to understand. Participant 5 comments that whilst they do 'have to concentrate' they can now comprehend 'most of what [the LE speaker] say[s]'. This reflection does, however, also highlight the increased listener effort that is still required.

Participant 1 goes on to highlight the positive effect the significant exposure and experience of a speaker's accent may have on comprehension.

Now this semester when I met [the LE speaker] I talk with him yeah I can understand [...] like over 50 maybe 70 percent.

(Participant 1)

This participant's comments indicate a change from their initial experiences. Across the course of their study in the UK, they have developed from reflecting that they 'couldn't understand at all' to being able to 'understand like over 50 maybe 70 percent' of the LE speaker. At the time of the interview, Participant 1 had spent 8 months in Liverpool. Interestingly, however, across these 8 months, this participant perceived that they had only been able to reach a maximum of '70 percent' of understanding of a speaker of LE. This emphasises the difficulties that distinct accents, such as LE, can cause even upper intermediate level learners. However, these reflections are only related to one participant and, importantly, one speaker. There may be other features, unidentified by the participant, that make this speaker difficult for them to understand; without further investigation of this specific speaker this cannot be determined.

Participant 8 commented that, on conversing with an LE speaking peer, 'I don't understand everything, I try but I don't understand every word'. This participant had been in Liverpool for 9 months and discussed that they still did not understand and instead used other methods to find meaning in what the speaker said. Whilst Participant 1 perceived they had found some improvement in their ability to understand, Participant 8 reflected that they avoided needing to understand.

I don't think I do anything [to understand]. We are in a group so I can understand from my other classmates.

(Participant 8)

Participant 8 highlights that LE still causes a barrier to learners, in this case even after 9 months in Liverpool. This student comments that to overcome this difficulty they look for meaning from peers who they can understand. These findings closely relate to the motivations of this study. As discussed in the Introduction, the researcher has anecdotal experience of often being asked to be an 'interpreter' between NNS peers and LE speaking peers. These findings further highlight the barrier to students' spoken interactions that LE can cause.

Food/Services/Members of the Public

Interviews with students also highlighted additional contexts where students experienced LE. These interactions were often outside of the university setting and presented some initial challenges to listeners. These interactions accounted for a low percentage of students' overall interactions; in spoken interaction journals, 5% of students' overall interactions were found to be related to food and drink (e.g., coffee shops, restaurants), services (e.g., shops, banks) or with members of the public (e.g., asking a passer-by for directions). Participant 10 reflects how it was within these contexts that they first interacted with LE speakers.

I think [LE] was different at first because I had never heard it before, but I heard in shop and at university in the café.

(Participant 10)

In addition to asking students to consider the different contexts where they heard accents, they were asked to expand on this and contemplate on any difficulties they experienced. In the following statements, students are referring specifically to their experiences of LE in service encounters.

[Understanding] was hard especially in the supermarkets. Yes, it hard for me, they'd ask me things very quickly and they didn't sound like English for me. I couldn't understand them.

(Participant 5)

Like when I am in the shop, I think they are trying to do things quickly and I can't understand them.

(Participant 9)

Both Participants 5 and 9 discussed the difficulties they experienced during interactions in shopping environments. As discussed in relation to the speed at which listening processes must occur (section 2.3, p. 23), it was predicted encounters such as in shopping environments may be the instances where students find difficulty. In these scenarios the interaction with speakers will be brief but often require precise information to be shared, e.g., directions or instructions. This is expressed in participants reflections of these

encounters; participants commented that ‘they’d ask me things very quickly [...] I couldn’t understand them’ and ‘they are trying to do things quickly and I can’t understand them’. Here speed of delivery is shown to be a contributing factor to the difficulties students face. Students’ reflections of how speed of speech impacted their experiences is discussed in more detail in section 4.3.3.2 (p. 183). These findings do highlight the difficulties of LE and speech rate, however, it cannot be determined if both difficulties are equal or if one exacerbates the other. Due to the location of the study, a direct comparison of LE and SSB used in real-life service encounters could also not be made; students commented that it was within these contexts that they heard the most LE.

Participant 1 reflected their similar difficulties within a food service context:

I think especially when I was ordering food in a restaurant with the staff every time they ask me like about do you want like a menu thing or what would like to order I can’t understand at all.

(Participant 1)

Similarly, to participants comments about shopping interactions, Participant 1 found that they could not ‘understand at all’ when they ordered food in a restaurant. This type of interaction is perhaps less time sensitive than when paying for goods in a busy shop; there may be time for more negotiation and discussion between the speaker and listener. Here a more confident distinction may be made that LE was a significant factor in causing a barrier to communication.

Students’ accounts of their difficulties in transactions also highlights that unfamiliarity with the script of a scenario may contribute to difficulties caused by LE.

When I came Liverpool well, I didn’t know the word even ‘do you need a bag?’

(Participant 2)

Sometimes [it’s difficult]. I know what I am doing now, like I know when they ask about if I want a receipt or a bag, I can guess what they are asking.

(Participant 5)

Both Participant 2 and 5 noted the difficulties experienced understanding what was being asked of them in a shopping interaction. Often successful listeners are prepared to predict information depending on the interaction type, such as ‘do you need a bag?’ in a shop or supermarket. Being unfamiliar with the script of a certain scenario can exacerbate difficulties. Participant 5 highlights that now they can ‘guess what they are asking’ in these situations. This implies that whilst they now know what is being asked of them, they still cannot understand the speaker clearly as they are required to ‘guess’. These findings highlight that, in these settings, the LE accent is likely to be persisting as a barrier to communication.

Other participants reflected on how they have overcome the difficulties they were presented with.

Yes, I think I am better now. Like when I go to the restaurant I can understand what they are going to ask me. I don't have to ask them to repeat everything to me anymore, yes.

(Participant 8)

Participant 8's comments highlight that over time, the difficulties they experienced in restaurant interactions have decreased. Participant 8 had spent 9 months in Liverpool at the time of the interview; these findings imply that time spent being exposed to accented English improves comprehension abilities. It is important to consider that these differences may be a consequence of personality type. Whilst students may have had the same period of time to encounter accents, they may not have been proactive in doing so. For instance, Participant 8 may have persisted in going to restaurants where they struggled and now, they ‘don't have to ask them to repeat everything to [them] anymore’. Other students may not have persisted, and these difficulties remain, contrasting the SA assumption that time spent in an English-speaking country automatically improves language skills (see section 2.9, p. 56).

This factor also links to the language that students used most often during their time in Liverpool; it is important to evaluate how much English students are actually using within the SA experience.

4.3.2.3 Language Use

Data collected from spoken interaction journals highlighted that participants spend a high proportion of their time communicating in their L1 whilst in the SA environment. The journals found that 48% of students' spoken interactions were in their L1; 45% of interactions were peer to peer interactions and 3% accounted for telephone interactions. Participants highlighted this in the pilot stage of the semi-structured interviews.

99% of my course are Chinese students, they are mainly who I speak to and we all speak Chinese.

(Pilot Participant 2)

All of [our classes] are in English, but in the breaks we speak Chinese.

(Pilot Participant 4)

[I speak Chinese] much more because of all my classmates. [...] if I always speak English to them I would be regarded as a stranger to them.

(Pilot Participant 3)

Last semester we tried to speak English to each other to push ourselves. But now, we don't, we don't this semester.

(Pilot Participant 5)

This data from the Pilot interviews highlights the prominent role Chinese (the majority of students' L1) plays in participants' day-to-day communication. Participants indicate that because '99% of [their] course are Chinese students' they communicate mainly in their L1. Furthermore, Pilot Participant 3 expresses a need to converse with their peers in Chinese; they reflect that if they 'always speak English to [their peers, they] would be regarded as a stranger'. All these participants reflect the realities of speaking a high percentage of their L1, but Pilot Participant 3 notes that communication in English can negatively impact their relationships with their peers.

These findings were further emphasised in the final interviews with participants where they discussed their use of their L1, Chinese, in their accommodation.

We speak Chinese at our accommodation because we are all Chinese, of course.
(Participant 8)

In my accommodation [I speak] Chinese always, I live with Chinese classmates.
(Participant 10)

Participants 8 and 10 commented that in their accommodation they speak Chinese most or ‘always’. The language spoken in an individual’s accommodation accounts for a large amount of their time. Table 4.14 highlights the language that the 92 students in who completed the questionnaire stated they spoke most often in their accommodation.

Table 4.14: Students’ Accommodation in the UK (data from questionnaire)

Language spoken most often in Accommodation	Number of students
Chinese	82 (89.1%)
English	10 (10.9%)

As shown in Table 4.14, the majority of students, 82 of 92, communicated in Chinese in their accommodation while they were studying at the University of Liverpool. This high percentage of L1 communication in place of L2 interactions could impact the time students take to understand the English accents they hear as their exposure to English will be reduced. These findings again challenge the SA assumption regarding the automatic progression of language skills and provide explanation for the why students may continue to experience listening difficulties.

4.3.3 Difficulties

The research goal of this study is to examine how participants experience LE in the SA context and assess the difficulties that they experienced in their initial and ongoing interactions. As discussed in the presentation of quantitative data, students were asked in the questionnaire to reflect on their initial listening difficulties when they arrived in the UK. Participants were then asked to expand on their questionnaire responses to ‘When you first

came to Liverpool what difficulties did you experience understanding spoken English?’ in the semi-structured interviews.

4.3.3.1 Accent

The findings of the questionnaire demonstrated that 87% of participants found accent to be a listening difficulty; accent was identified as the most common listening difficulty encountered by learners when they first arrived in Liverpool. Participants expanded on their initial reactions to LE in the interviews:

I couldn't understand the [LE] accent.

(Participant 8)

I think it is more difficult than normal English, like the English you [the interviewer] speak.

(Participant 10)

That day when I came Liverpool I found the people didn't speak English as I imagined

(Participant 2)

I think when I first came to Liverpool it was harder to understand people when I spoke to them. I think it was because of the accent, the Scouse.

(Participant 5)

Participants' reflections demonstrate that students recognised the difference in LE when they initially encountered LE speakers and noted it as difficult. Participants commented that they 'couldn't understand' LE, it was 'more difficult' and 'it was harder to understand people'. Participant 2 also reflected that they 'found people didn't speak English as [they] imagined'. These findings demonstrate the initial obstacles that LE can cause and indicate that these phonological differences are unexpected to learners. Participants' responses regarding LE were also predominantly negative. 80 references in students' interview transcripts were coded as LE; of these 80 references, only 2 were positive responses regarding their experiences.

Participant 4 was the only participant to discuss their experiences of LE positively stating, in relation to the LE accent, ‘I enjoy it here very much’. Participant 4 went on to expand on one of their positive interactions of LE when they visit the barbers.

They always speak Scouse, we will talk, and they will use the word sometimes the accent I think is not important, I think it's sometimes very funny and interesting, [...], if they are different from the received English it is sometimes very difficult to understand. But I can understand most of these words and the conversation can keep go on.

(Participant 4)

Participant 4's reflections demonstrate that, even in their positive reaction to LE, they still experienced difficulties; ‘it is sometimes very difficult to understand’. However, importantly the participant found these interactions ‘funny and interesting’ and, as they understand most of the interaction, ‘the conversation can keep’ going. These findings indicate that the shock students experience from the unexpected phonology of LE is not always a negative to learners.

Further to this, participants discussed specific features of LE that they found difficult. In the pilot interviews, students commented that they perceived intonation to be a difficult feature of LE.

I do find Scouse sometimes difficult to understand; the intonation is difficult, it is more raising.

(Pilot Participant 2)

Their intonation [is difficult]. Scouser often speak like [raises intonation] or might [raises intonation]. They go up at the end.

(Pilot Participant 5)

Watson (2007) comments that LE is known to have different intonation than standard English accents; this variety is known to have ‘intonational differences to other northern English accents’ (p. 358). Participants noted this difference and found that it influenced their listening comprehension negatively. Whilst this is not an accent specific

phonological feature as outlined in section 2.4 (Table 2.1, p. 39), these findings do further highlight that students are able to isolate specific features that they find cause them difficulties.

In the final interview data, participants also reported other features of LE that they found caused them listening difficulties.

The pronunciations is about the vowels and the pronunciation of some letter, if they are different from the received English it is sometimes very difficult to understand.

(Participant 4)

When I came Liverpool I found the people didn't speak English as I imagined [...] so like 'chic[x]en' 'chic[x]en', I didn't know, something, what is chicken.

(Participant 2)

Participant 2 highlighted a specific feature of LE; as outlined in section 2.4 (p. 37) /k/ can be lenited to [x] in the phonology of LE. Participant 2 reflected how this feature caused them difficulties in relation the pronunciation of the word 'chicken'. In their interview they pronounced the word chicken with this lenition, 'chic[x]en'; [tʃixɪn] rather than the SSB form [tʃɪkɪn]. This reiterates the findings from the Listening Experiences; this salient feature in LE was most commonly marked as difficult by learners (see Table 4.9, p. 144). This distinctive, but often negatively perceived feature (Watson & Clark, 2015), is shown to cause listening difficulties for learners.

The reflective data from the participants in this study highlights that accent is perceived as a significant factor in listening when students arrive in the UK and can act as a barrier to communication. Table 4.15 (below) shows the number of participants who identified *Accent* as a listening difficulty in the questionnaire and how long they reported it took them to understand the accents they encountered in the UK.

Table 4.15: Participants who reported *Accent* as a listening difficulty

Time Taken to Understand Accents	Number of Students who identified <i>Accent</i> as a listening difficulty
1-2 weeks	7

3-4 weeks	8
1-3 months	23
3-6 months	33
More than 6 months	9
Total number of students that reported <i>Accent</i> and stated how long it took them to understand accents	80
Total number of students who completed the questionnaire	92

As shown in Table 4.15, of those that reported *Accent* as a listening difficulty when they first arrived in the UK, 33 stated it took them 3-6 months and 9 stated it took them more than 6 months to understand accents. This accounts for 45.65% all of the 92 students who completed the questionnaire. This data signifies the relevance and important impact that accents, such as LE, can have on learners' experiences in the SA context.

In the pilot interviews, students also commented that, after 8 months, they still cannot understand LE accented English.

I still can't understand the Liverpool accents.

(Pilot Participant 13)

These findings were confirmed in the final interviews; participants commented on having continuing difficulties. At the time of the interviews, Participants 2 and 5 had both spent a minimum of 8 months in the UK; 8 and 10 months respectively.

Yeah, I feel like I am a beginner in English.

(Participant 2)

But a little is still hard for me.

(Participant 5)

The extracts from Participant 2 and 5 highlight that, in addition to the 45.65% who identified that they could not understand accents for over 3 months, there are some

students that still cannot understand accents they encounter. This continues to enforce that accent remains a barrier to communication for a significant period of time; the local accent, LE, which learners are surrounded by continues to cause listening difficulties.

4.3.3.2 Speech Rate

In addition to pronunciation features, participants reflected other factors that they found caused them difficulties understanding LE. A predominant factor, reported in both the questionnaires and interviews, was speech rate. Speech rate was the second most reported listening difficulty by learners; 75% (69 students) stated in the questionnaire that they found speech rate to be a listening difficulty. It is important to note, however, that in students reporting speech rate, it cannot be determined whether this was the sole barrier to their communication. It is possible that students' reflections of speech rate difficulties may have also included connected speech features. This data provides an insight into student's own perception of their listening, specifically in relation to LE. Participants reflected on their perception of speech rate as a listening difficulty in the interviews.

Of course, with Liverpool [laughs] they speak so fast.

(Participant 11)

They speak too fast and I can't catch up with what they are saying.

(Participant 8)

I couldn't catch what they were saying. They spoke so fast to me and I would just not know what they were saying to me.

(Participant 7)

Participants' reflections signify that both students found speech rate to be a difficulty and that students have associations of faster speech rate. Participants 7 and 8 both commented on not being able to 'catch what [speakers] were saying'. As discussed in section 2.2 (p. 10), listening processes happen at a fast rate, therefore, this difficulty was expected to be reported by participants. However, students also showed a perception that fast speech

rate is expected and associated with LE; Participant 11 reported ‘with Liverpool [...] they speak so fast’. This perception, however, is unfounded; the conversational speech rate of LE is considered no different than other natural speech. It aligns with native British English conversational speech rate of between 190 and 230 wpm (Huang & Graf, 2020). This is evidenced in the measurement of speech rate in the LE samples used in the Listening Experiences in this study.

Nevertheless, participants reported needing to ask speakers to slow their speech rate to help them understand. 52 of the 92 participants who completed the questionnaire (56.5%) reported that they *Asked speakers to slow down* in order to gain understanding. Additionally, in interviews, Participant 11 reflected that when speakers slowed their speech rate they could then understand.

I think their accent is ok when they slow down.
(Participant 11)

It is important to acknowledge that it may not only be speech rate that is altered when a speaker is asked to slow down or repeat their utterance; often loudness, pronunciation and even vocabulary can be altered by the speaker to aid communication and reduce ‘speaker factor’ (Chang et al., 2013). These findings highlight how students’ perception of spoken English are critical in gaining an insight into their comprehension.

4.3.3.3 Perceptions

The data collected from interviews also highlights students’ perceptions of the LE accent. As highlighted in the previous section, speech rate has been found to be a feature which is associated with LE by learners. This was also suggested in the pilot interview data; participants reported an assumption that LE, or Scouse, has a notably faster speech rate.

The Scousers often speak very fast which is difficult.
(Pilot Participant 5)

[Other accents] were not like Scouse, they were slower.
(Pilot Participant 1)

As demonstrated in the extracts above, participants reflected an assumption or finding that LE is spoken at a higher speech rate than other accents; the ‘other accents’ referring to the English they have heard from their tutors at university or when learning English in their home countries. Beal & Cooper (2015) comment that features of speech can become associated with certain accents. In the case of speech rate and LE, the assumption or belief that individuals with a Liverpool accent speak faster could be attributed to NNSs’ listening difficulties. This perception is not just an associated feature, but a factor that NNSs find to be a listening difficulty. 69 of 92 students identified *Speed of Speech* as a listening difficulty they experienced in Liverpool in the questionnaire.

These findings can be related to the importance of students’ perceptions of accent throughout the learning process. Sung’s (2016) study highlights students have a negative perception of non-standard English accents; they have concerns over the negative impact they may have on language acquisition. If these perceptions persist and are not broken or explored in the learning process assumptions, such as ‘Scouser[s] often speak very fast’, can impact listening comprehension in reducing confidence in language abilities and learners’ WTC.

Participants’ responses in the final interviews highlighted students’ negative perceptions of LE.

Well, I know the accent is strong in Liverpool. It is Scouse.

(Participant 10)

Because Liverpool is very difficult.

(Participant 6)

Learners’ perception that LE is ‘strong’ and ‘very difficult’ because it is Liverpool may create a negative attitude towards speakers of LE, impacting their WTC. As previously discussed, when speakers are asked to slow their speech, other factors as well as speech rate are altered making understanding simpler, further enforcing perceptions such as the belief that LE is spoken faster than other English accents.

These negative perceptions of LE speakers were further emphasised with students’ comments regarding other accents that they perceived positively. Participants reflected their positive perceptions of the ‘London’ accent.

I think it's better in London especially in London.

(Participant 1)

London's accent is perfect for me 'cause that's how I, that's familiar to me because I learnt it in English book in China.

(Participant 2)

I think they speak clear in the south of England, that is the English I prefer. That is how my teachers sound, I think.

(Participant 5)

I have heard standard accents, like London.

(Participant 6)

These comments highlight that students perceive other accents as more 'standard' and therefore 'better' or preferable. Students report that they prefer these accents because it is how their 'teachers sound' and it is 'familiar to [them] because [they] learnt it in English book[s] in China'. This highlights the significance of students' experience of accents prior to arriving in the UK and reinforces Scales et al.'s (2006) findings that students' perception of accents is often based on their ability to understand an accent.

Such assumptions may be reinforcing students' negative perceptions. Previous research, such as Coupland & Bishop (2007), has highlighted NSs' negative perceptions of LE, commenting on the stigma attached to its pronunciation. Montgomery (2012) comments that there are still ideas of 'good' and 'bad' language use. Students' lack of awareness of the realities of spoken English before they arrive in the UK could contribute to such negative perceptions of accents. Participants in the current study stated that LE 'didn't sound like English' (Participant 6). Not only is this a negative view of varieties of English but this appears to be creating a disassociation between what standard English is and other variations. Enforcing this difference can lead to ingrained perceptions that NNSs cannot and will not be able to understand certain varieties of English; there is an implication that accent is out of their control, and they will not be able to understand. This can be seen in findings from the pilot interviews; Pilot Participant 11 reflects on other accents they have heard.

Before I came [to the UK] I looked at Newcastle or Liverpool universities; I heard Newcastle was more strong so I came here.

(Pilot Participant 11)

Pilot Participant 11's reflection on their assumptions of accents highlight that their beliefs impacted their choice of university. Their belief that they would not be able to understand a certain English accent (Newcastle English) resulted in them choosing a different place to study. This data indicates that accent perception, as well as impacting listening experiences, is having some impact on NNSs' choices about what English they choose to engage with. Montgomery (2012) comments that 'people's perception may determine who they interact with, when they do, and the length of time they do' (p. 639).

4.3.4 Impact

As has been demonstrated in relation to *Exposure* and *Difficulties*, participants have identified the factors which impact their ability to comprehend spoken English within the SA context. These findings have presented a picture of the language that students use and interact with and has shown the difficulties that learners perceive they have experienced during their time in Liverpool. To further evaluate the relevance of these findings, it is important to next consider how this exposure and these difficulties have impacted students' experiences.

4.3.4.1 Did Not Understand

Participants discussed their interactions in spoken English in the semi-structured interviews. They shared anecdotes with the researcher of experiences they had had. In analysis of the final interview transcripts 79 references were coded as *Anecdotal Experiences*. Within these categories, 47 references were instances where students did not gain understanding; 59.49% of students' anecdotal experiences were coded as *Did Not Understand*.

Students' references to interactions where they did not understand the English they

heard allows for further investigation into the impact that accent has on participants' listening experiences.

I remember when I first arrived, I asked for directions at Lime Street for Mount Pleasant, and I didn't understand at all. He got frustrated I think, he just pointed for me in the end.

(Participant 11)

I think the Manchester accent is the most hard, the hardest. Because I go from Manchester airport I want to know where I can take the tram and I ask a walker and I cannot understand any of his words.

(Participant 4)

But I think because it is not polite. I have to ask them to repeat and again and again, and sometimes they [get] frustrated with me.

(Participant 7)

I remember when I first arrived, I was trying to take a tour and the guide kept saying something to me, asking me something, but I could not understand. Even after they said it again and again for me. I felt so bad, my English was so bad.

(Participant 8)

Participants' reflections highlight the negative impact accented speech can have on learners, especially when they first arrive in the UK. Participants 11 and 4 both reported having difficulties when they first arrived in asking for directions. They comment that they 'didn't understand at all' and that they could not 'understand any of [the speaker's] words'. Participant 4 does, however, refer to the Manchester accent rather than LE; whilst this does not add to the discussion of LE in this thesis, it does contribute to the overall hypothesis that unexpected phonology causes problems for upper intermediate level learners. These interactions also highlight the problems this unexpected phonology and shock factor can cause when key information needs to be shared. As previously discussed in relation to transactions such as supermarket shopping (p. 168), accent can create a barrier in the sharing of information in a time sensitive scenario.

Participant 8 also commented how these difficulties made them feel, stating 'I felt so

bad, my English was so bad'. These findings highlight that the difficulties accented speech cause can impact students' attitudes and feelings regarding their English language use; this difficulty made Participant 8, an upper intermediate level learner, feel 'so bad'. Participant 8 expanded on their experience of this interaction.

Oh no, I didn't [understand]. They stopped asking and moved to the next thing. I felt my English was so bad, I think I have got better since then.

(Participant 8)

These reflections signify there are situations where accent causes or contributes to learners having such difficulties that understanding cannot be achieved and the interaction has to end; the speaker in this interaction 'stopped asking and moved to the next thing'.

Participants' reflections also emphasise other negative consequences that can occur when accent is perceived to cause a barrier to understanding. Participant 11 and 7 both report that they felt speakers became frustrated with them; students commented that 'he got frustrated I think' and 'sometimes they [get] frustrated with me'. These reactions will have a negative impact on students' confidence and WTC. These extracts also highlight that participants are not communicating at their expected proficiency. All participants in the study were at a minimum upper intermediate level meaning they should be able to communicate without imposing strain on either party (CEFR, 2018; 2020). Listening difficulties causing frustration will impose strain on interactions resulting in unproductive communication.

Students' perception that speakers will view them negatively, as their ability to understand may cause people 'frustration', could impact learners' future interactions significantly, resulting in them avoiding certain speakers.

Avoidance

Difficulties in listening comprehension can impact students' future interactions and influence their WTC. Decreased confidence can result in learners being less willing to communicate; it can also reduce students' persistence in gaining understanding when they experience difficulties. Due to accent causing unexpected listening problems, this could be impacting students' language development. This was initially raised in the pilot interviews;

Pilot Participant 13 highlighted avoiding communication when they experienced difficulties.

When I was in term one, when I first came here, I just used the machine to pay my bills. I didn't want to interact with [LE speakers].

(Pilot Participant 13)

Pilot Participant 13's reflections demonstrate students avoiding spoken interactions in their initial experiences in the UK. Their comments show them using other methods ('the machine to pay [their] bills'), actively avoiding communication with LE speakers. Pilot Participant 13 states that they 'didn't want to interaction with [LE speakers]', highlighting that their perception or comprehension of LE was causing them to avoid interactions.

Findings from the final interviews further emphasised this impact on students' interactions. Participants 7 and 5 discuss how they continue to avoid some interactions; this behaviour was found to be not just within students' initial experiences in Liverpool.

Now I know to use the machines at the supermarket, then it is all in the screen for me and I have no problems.

(Participant 7)

I know what to say to [cashiers]. Or I can use the checkout machines, they are easier for me.

(Participant 5)

Participants 7 and 5 had spent 9 and 10 months respectively in Liverpool at the time of the interviews. Both students report that they now use self-checkouts, or 'checkout machines', in supermarket interactions; they comment that this is 'easier' for them and in doing so they have 'no problems'. Whilst the use of self-checkout machines in supermarkets is not necessarily problematic or detrimental to students' language skills, it does signify students actively avoiding spoken interactions where LE is spoken and where they experience difficulties.

Participant 7 expanded on their experience, commenting on other instances where they used technology to avoid spoken interactions.

I have to ask them to repeat and again and again, and sometimes they [are] frustrated with me. I think it is easier to use apps and online to order things for me. That works for me better.

(Participant 7)

As previously discussed, Participant 7 reiterates the perception that speakers become frustrated with learners when they have difficulties. They discuss that due to people becoming frustrated, they avoid spoken interactions and ‘use apps and online’ methods to shop. As with the use of self-checkout tills, ordering products online is not necessarily problematic. Online shopping is becoming increasingly prevalent in most individual’s lives, regardless of language skills. However, these reflections highlight why students are choosing these methods. The reasoning behind using online methods is shown to be to avoid face-to-face spoken English interactions. It is, however, important to consider that this behaviour may be significant to only a selection of participants. This may be due to numerous additional factors such as an individual’s personality traits or their language proficiency levels. This data provides an interesting insight into how students may be avoiding ‘difficult’ interactions where possible, but no definitive claim can be made in relation to the occurrence of this phenomenon.

These findings also related to Participant 8’s comments regarding how accent impacted how they felt during spoken interactions. As previously highlighted, Participant 8 commented:

I felt my English was so bad

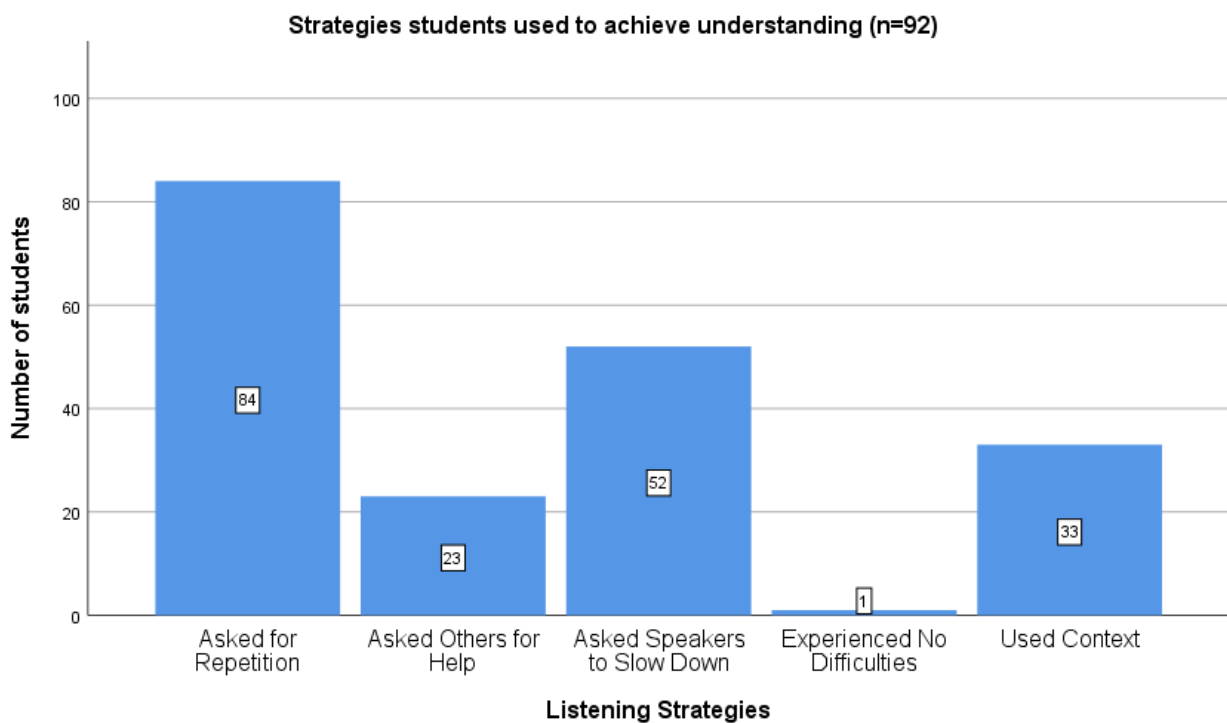
(Participant 8)

Self-confidence can impact students’ WTC in their L2 (Le et al., 2018). Here the unexpected difficulties encountered can be seen to diminish a participant’s confidence in their abilities. This impact caused through concerns over their abilities can be further enforced when the language they hear does not meet their expectations.

4.3.4.2 Strategies used to Understand

In interviews, students reflected on how accent impacted their listening experiences. To further understand this impact, participants were also asked to consider what they did when they faced listening difficulties. Investigating the strategies used by learners to gain understanding also gives an insight into students' experiences in the UK and how listening difficulties may be impacting their encounters. The questionnaire data, presented in Figure 4.13 (below), offered an insight into the frequency of strategies used by students.

Figure 4.13: Strategies that Students reported they used to Achieve Understanding



As shown in Figure 4.13, findings from the questionnaire highlighted that *Asking for Repetition* was the most common strategy used by learners to gain understanding. 84 of the 92 students who completed the questionnaire reported that they *Asked for Repetition* to achieve understanding. The data collected through interviews expands on this and highlights the impact of this strategy.

Asking for Repetition

91.3% of students reported that they used *Asked for Repetition* as a strategy to achieve understanding, however, this strategy resulted in different effects. Participants' interview responses show that *Asking for Repetition* does not always result in the speaker repeating their utterance verbatim.

Table 4.16 presents participants' reflections on how they used *Asking for Repetition* as a strategy and the outcome they perceive that it had.

Table 4.16: Extracts where participants reported *Asking for Repetition* in their interviews

Extracts where Asking for Repetition was reported in interviews	Result of Asking for Repetition				
	<i>Speaker's speech slowed down</i>	<i>No change made by the speaker / Did not Understand</i>	<i>Unspecified Change</i>	<i>Avoidance</i>	<i>Listener pre-empts difficulties</i>
1		<i>I remember the first time I met with him [LE speaker] he's basically like what sorry I don't understand I ask him to repeat again again but still may be three four times have to repeat I still cannot understand (Participant 1)</i>			
2			<i>I just asked people to say again and then I would catch the words they were saying. (Participant 10)</i>		
3		<i>Yes, I ask people to say again, but if their accent is too strong I just nod. (Participant 11)</i>			

4	<i>I think sometimes it is that people speak to fast for us. But then when they say again, I think they slow down (Participant 11)</i>				
5				<i>I would ask them to say again or slow down. But now I don't. Now I know to use the machines at the supermarket, then it is all in the screen for me and I have no problems. (Participant 7)</i>	
6				<i>I have to ask them to repeat and again and again, and sometimes they frustrated with me. I think it is easier to use apps and online to order things for me. (Participant 7)</i>	
7			<i>I asked for directions from a woman at the station and she had to repeat for me, she was very helpful. She changed what she said so that I could understand her. (Participant 8)</i>		
8		<i>I could not understand. Even after they said it again and again for me. I felt so bad, my English was so bad. (Participant 8)</i>			

9					<i>Like when I go to the restaurant, I can understand what they are going to ask me. I don't have to ask them to repeat everything to me anymore, yes. (Participant 8)</i>
10		<i>Sometimes I ask them to repeat, but when I first came here that didn't even help me. I couldn't understand the accent. (Participant 9)</i>			
Total number of extracts	<i>Speaker's speech slowed down</i>	<i>No change made by the speaker / Did not Understand</i>	<i>Unspecified Change</i>	<i>Avoidance</i>	<i>Listener pre-empted difficulties</i>
10	1	4	2	2	1

The extracts reported by students, as shown in Table 4.16, indicate that in asking a speaker to repeat what they have said some change in their speech is expected and needed to achieve understanding. This data demonstrates students trying to alter, or in some way control, the speech they are interacting with. This relates to Chang et al.'s (2013) discussion of 'speaker factor'; they report that a large proportion of respondents considered 'speaker factor', including speech rate, loudness, pronunciation and accent, as a major hindrance in listening comprehension. As demonstrated through both the quantitative and qualitative findings in this study, it is evident that elements of 'speaker factor', specifically accent and speed of speech, cause listening comprehension difficulties when students first arrive in the UK. From the examples shown in Table 4.16, strategies that students employ to try and understand spoken English try to control 'speaker factor', regardless of whether this is a conscious or unconscious process. As shown through the interview data, this can be effective and result in understanding when a change is made, however, this is not always the case. *Asking for Repetition* places the

responsibility on the speaker to alter their utterance and, if they do not, understanding may not be achieved (as shown in Extracts 1, 3, 8 and 10 in Table 4.16).

The idea of ‘speaker factor’ and the strategies that students employ to achieve understanding relates closely to the ELT process and the spoken English that is included within listening materials. Unlike real-life communication, listening materials may manage ‘speaker factor’, reducing features that can make spoken English difficult to understand (Hope, 2014). Ghaderpanahi (2012) comments on the importance of using authentic listening materials and that they are needed to reflect more real-life scenarios. In presenting students with more authentic spoken English through the ELT process, students may be more prepared to tolerate features of ‘speaker factor’.

The extracts presented in Table 4.16, highlight the problems that can occur if learners rely on *Asking for Repetition* to gain understanding. Extracts 1, 3, 8 and 10 all demonstrate where this strategy has been used and it has not been effective, but they also highlight how using this strategy can have an adverse effect on speaker and listener relationships. In Extracts 1 and 6 it is evident that *Asking for Repetition* may annoy or frustrate the speaker to some degree; ‘sometimes they frustrated with me’ and ‘maybe three four times have to repeat I still cannot understand’. Whilst these experiences may not happen with every speaker, and may only be reflective of certain individuals, these examples do highlight the realities of relying on this strategy day-to-day. Not only is it not always effective and assumes the speaker will make a change to their speech, but it can also irritate and frustrate speakers, halting or altering further communication. It is important to acknowledge that not only the words that are spoken are important in effective communication. There are many other features that students need to develop to effectively converse with others; if accent is causing students to rely on *Asking for Repetition* to communicate, it is getting in the way of fluent and intelligible communication (CEFR, 2018; 2020). Needing to continually ask for repetition imposes strain on the interaction and does not allow for fluent and spontaneous conversation. This is demonstrated in Extract 1; Participant 1 asks the speaker to repeat three or four times and still no understanding was achieved.

These negative responses could also impact students’ confidence and consequent WTC. If students’ self-confidence is affected then the improvement of their language skills can be halted (Le et al., 2018). If students rely on *Asking for Repetition* to understand accents for long periods of time the frustration it may cause them and others in their interactions could also impact their WTC.

As demonstrated in Table 4.16, students reflected that after asking for repetition they still did not understand what they heard. Statements from Participants 1, 8 and 9 reflect students' experiences of this in their initial experiences in Liverpool.

I remember the first time I met with him [LE speaker] he's basically like what sorry I don't understand I ask him to repeat again again but still maybe three four times have to repeat I still cannot understand.

(Participant 1)

I could not understand. Even after they said it again and again for me. I felt so bad, my English was so bad.

(Participant 8)

Sometimes I ask them to repeat, but when I first came here that didn't even help me. I couldn't understand the accent.

(Participant 9)

These findings indicate instances where asking for repetition did not help students understand the spoken English they were encountering; participants commented that 'even after they said it again and again' and 'I ask him to repeat [...] maybe three four times have to repeat I still cannot understand'. This data signifies the degree of difficulty that LE can cause learners as after several repetitions they reported being unable to comprehend. However, these difficulties were reduced across students' time in Liverpool. Students reflected that this degree of difficulty was specifically in their initial experiences in Liverpool when they 'first came' to the city. Additional participants did report continuing to have such difficulties.

Participant 11 reported how they continue to have comprehension difficulties even when they ask for repetition.

Yes, I ask people to say again, but if their accent is too strong I just nod.

(Participant 11)

Participant 11's comments reference how accent strength persists in impacting their communication. They also reflect that when they cannot understand they do not persevere

or use other strategies to gain understanding, they ‘just nod’. These findings both signify the degree to which accent can cause a barrier in listening comprehension, but also may contribute to the discussion regarding students’ perception of LE and other distinct accents. As previously discussed (p. 185), students comment that LE is known to be ‘strong’ and ‘very difficult’. Interview responses are indicating that this perception or assumption, may lead students to avoid interaction and not persevere in developing their listening comprehension abilities; as the LE accent is ‘strong’ it is too difficult to understand, therefore students may ‘just nod’. However, as discussed previously in relation to students actively avoiding interactions, these findings may relate to personality type. The perseverance necessary to overcome difficulties may be influenced by an individual’s personality traits; if an individual is not out-going or lacks confidence they may be less likely to challenge themselves in difficult interactions. This relates to Kashiwa & Benson (2018) comments that, in the SA experience, ‘students must exercise agency’ (p. 741). This agency, or perseverance, is something that may be developed through experience of real-life interactions but can also be significantly impacted by learners’ confidence levels. Findings from the pilot interviews also demonstrated similar indications.

If I asked so much we cannot continue conversation. So, I pretend to understand.

(Pilot Participant 11)

This reflection from Pilot Participant 11 further demonstrates this experience of students ‘pretend[ing] to understand’ in spoken interactions to keep the conversation going or to be polite.

Other Strategies

Participants recalled other instances where LE impacted their communication and other strategies that helped them to understand.

I don't know some place, I don't know how to go there, like a park, station bus station, I can't find any so I ask someone and those that people is Scouse I think. I can only understand if she use figure, gesture, body language.

(Participant 3)

Sometimes I think they say things differently to help me, like they say single words, like 'left' 'right' instead of the full sentences. I think they break it down for me to help me understand. But not everyone does this.

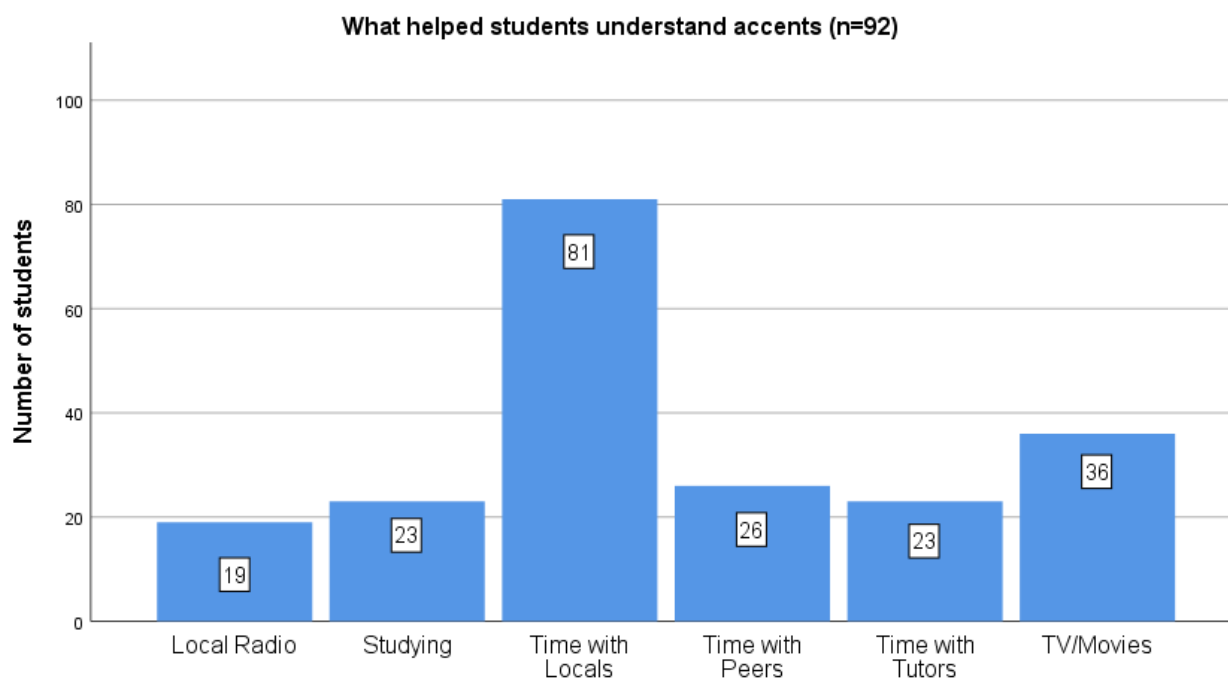
(Participant 5)

Both Participants 3 and 5 reflected factors that speakers used to assist them in understanding when asking for directions. From their comments it is evident that the changes speakers made helped students to understand. Speakers used 'gestures' and 'single words [...] instead of the full sentences'; students were then able to interpret the meaning of what speakers were saying. As Participant 5 highlighted, the speaker in their anecdote broke down what they were saying to help the listener 'but not everyone does this'. Due to other factors, such as time constraints or an individual's level of tolerance or consideration, this may not always be possible. Further to this, Participant 3 commented that they could 'only understand' if the speaker used gestures. Whilst finding meaning in other aspects of communication is reasonable, relying on this strategy is not feasible. In interactions such as directions, gestures may portray a lot of the meaning expressed but this is very specific to this type of communication. These findings emphasise that students can often depend on speakers altering their speech or relying on other signals (such as gestures) to help with their communication difficulties with LE speakers.

What Helped Students

As well as the strategies used within interactions, participants were asked to reflect on what they think helped them in becoming able to understand the accents they encountered in the UK. Participants were asked 'What do you think has helped you to understand the accents you have encountered in the UK?' in the questionnaire. Figure 4.14 presents the data collected from the questionnaire.

Figure 4.14: What helped students understand the accents they have encountered.



As shown in Figure 4.14, the most common experience that learners reflected helped them with understanding accents was *Time with Locals*; 81 of the 92 questionnaire participants selected this (88%). This data continues to support that exposure to accents increases students' ability to comprehend spoken English. *Time with locals* allows students to hear language in use.

These findings were highlighted in the interview data. In the transcripts, 18 references were coded as factors that *Helped students improve their understanding*; of these, 12 references were coded as *Time with Locals/Time spent in Liverpool* and 2 were coded as *Time with Peers*. This analysis emphasises the impact that exposure to natural spoken English can have. Participants' comments reiterated this:

I think being around [accents] has helped me because I have heard them more.

(Participant 8)

I think it is just time, I think. I think it is just hearing [LE] a lot more.

(Participant 7)

These findings signify that students perceive exposure to be a key factor in improving their ability to comprehend accented speech. Participants 8 and 7 state that ‘time being around [accents]’ and ‘hearing [LE] a lot more’ helped in being more comfortable understanding spoken English in Liverpool. Only one student in the questionnaire reported having spent an extensive period in an English-speaking country before, therefore no significant comparison can be made between these students and students who have been exposed to NS spoken English extensively. However, students’ reflections do support the suggestion that such exposure and familiarity to accents may increase ability and comfort in LE listening experiences.

4.3.4.3 Previous Experience

Only one student reported they had spent an extensive period (over a month) in an English-speaking country before. This participant completed the questionnaire and took part in the pilot interviews. The information collected from Pilot Participant 13 provides an interesting insight to support the data collected from the final interviews.

Pilot Participant 13 reported that they lived in ‘Australia being an exchange student to study in Western Australia University’; they spent 6 months in Australia and stayed with a host family. Interestingly, this participant reported *Accent* as the only listening difficulty they experienced when they first arrived in the UK. They did, however, also report that it took them only 1-2 weeks to understand the accents they heard. This provides an insight into the advantages of accent exposure; whilst accent was a problem that this learner experienced when they first arrived in the UK it lasted for only a small amount of time. Pilot Participant 13 had not experienced LE before, but had experienced other, non-standard forms of English whilst in Australia for a significant period of time. They had been exposed to accents, preparing them to tolerate ambiguities in spoken English. Table 4.17 outlines the profile of Pilot Participant 13.

Table 4.17: Pilot Participant 13 profile (data from questionnaire)

Pilot Participant 13 profile

Gender	Female	Listening difficulties experienced when first arrived in the UK	Accent
Age	24	Accents experienced in the UK	Scouse
Nationality	Chinese	Did they notice the difference in accents when they first arrived in Liverpool?	Yes
First Language (L1)	Kazakh	Time taken to understand accents in the UK	1-2 weeks
Course of study	MA TESOL	What helped them to understand accents in the UK	Time with locals
Accommodation	Student Halls	Previous time in an English-speaking country	6 months
LoR in Liverpool	6 months		

As only one participant in the study had spent an extensive period in an English-speaking country, there is not enough data to confirm that solely exposure to non-standard accents improves students' ability to tolerate ambiguities. This data does, however, contribute to the discussion and understanding that exposure is key in helping students prepare for the realities of spoken English. As evidenced in the interview data from Pilot Participant 13, exposure to non-standard pronunciation helped them develop listening skills. Pilot Participant 13 identifies specific features of spoken English that they noticed.

I think [Australian accents] are same for the British accent, but the 'a' and 'U' sound are different. But Australia is a very friendly country, so they speak slow for foreigners.

(Pilot Participant 13)

[Australian English speakers] often don't speak in short sentences, they use the full sentences, like 'I've been to' they would say 'I have been to'.

(Pilot Participant 13)

Pilot Participant 13 identifies the features that they noticed were different in Australian and British accents, for instance they noted that ‘the ‘a’ and ‘U’ sound are different’. They also note differences they heard in features of connected speech such as contractions; ‘[Australian speakers] use the full sentences’. These findings regarding accent and other spoken language features, such as contractions, indicate the need to raise learners’ awareness of the realities of spoken English. This contributes to the idea that learners are arriving in the UK without informed expectations of the varieties of English, such as LE. Students arrive expecting to hear only what they have heard in class.

In addition to linguistic features of spoken English, Pilot Participant 13 suggests that the attitude or personality of a speaker also influences their ability to understand. Pilot Participant 13 comments that ‘Australia is a very friendly country, so they speak slow for foreigners’. This perspective is further expressed in their responses regarding LE.

First, I ask to repeat, but they [LE speakers] are sometimes rolling their eyes, I try to push myself. I try and understand from context, if they want my student ID or something, or I ask them ‘are you saying I want your student ID’ or something like that.

(Pilot Participant 13)

Some of them have bad attitudes, so you push yourself to get some meaning or just give an answer to them.

(Pilot Participant 13)

These responses reflect how speaker attitudes appear to influence learners’ communication encounters. It is not evident if they find this attitudinal difference because they cannot understand, or that there are many speakers who are not accommodating or understanding of NNSs. Regardless of the reasoning behind the ‘bad attitudes’ that Pilot Participant 13 reflects they have experienced, they report that in both instances they ‘push[ed]’ themselves to gain some understanding. This raises interesting questions regarding persistence in communication and if this is a skill that is developed from previous experience in L2-speaking countries. This agency, ‘push[ing]’ themselves to interact and ‘get some meaning’, is something that may be developed through experience of real-life interactions. From the researcher’s experiences teaching English, students

often report developing confidence in interacting, realising that they do not need to understand every word, but learn to focus on the meaning. Buck (2001) comments that conversational English does not require understanding of every single word. Developing the skills and confidence in doing this as an L2 speaker is challenging and often requires learners to ‘push’ themselves outside of where they are comfortable.

4.4 Summary

The findings from the data collected in this study highlighted the difficulties students experience in listening interactions, the language that they are exposed to in a SA context and how both these difficulties and exposure impact students’ initial and ongoing spoken interactions. Quantitative and qualitative data has signified the realities that LE pronunciation has on learners’ interactions. Findings have also highlighted that learners identify distinct features of LE phonological variation as factors that cause difficulties. The majority of respondents also demonstrated that they perceive LE negatively; this was highlighted in contrast to SSB.

4.4.1 Themes for Discussion

In analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data, themes were highlighted. Three overarching themes were identified in the analysis of the interview data; these were *Difficulties*, *Exposure* and *Impact*.

Difficulties that participants encountered in their initial and continuing experiences of spoken English appear to be highly influenced by accent, specifically the phonology of LE. In students reports accent was found to be barrier to students’ interactions, leading to students altering their encounters or requiring a speaker to alter their speech.

Exposure to English in real-life communication was identified as significant in preparing students for the SA context. Learners’ previous experiences were found to contribute to their listening abilities.

Impact was highlighted in the findings in relation to students’ perceptions and future language use. Accent was found to impact learners’ initial and ongoing spoken interactions, in some instances causing participants to actively avoid spoken English.

The themes identified in the qualitative analysis have been found to also effectively encompass the key elements identified in the quantitative findings. Therefore, after also evaluating and reflecting on the literature, the themes of *Exposure*, *Difficulties* and *Impact* will now be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion focusing on the *Difficulties* that students experience, highlighting what it is that causes problems for learners in their listening experiences within the SA context. The difficulties that students experience with LE will be contrasted with SSB. Following this students' *Exposure* to spoken English will be examined, considering both how their previous and ongoing experiences of English result in building or breaking down communication. This chapter will continue by evaluating the *Impact* that both difficulties and exposure have on learners' during their SA experience. Finally, the chapter will respond to the research questions, outlining how the data collected answers them.

5.2 Difficulties

The motivations for this study were based on reports from peers and students of the researcher that when arriving in Liverpool, the English they heard 'didn't sound like' English. Whilst the researcher had anecdotal evidence of accent being a barrier to learners' understanding of spoken English, findings from the study begin to demonstrate that this difficulty was shared by a sample of upper intermediate level English language learners.

5.2.1 What causes difficulties?

The main focus of this study was participants' reflections of what factors caused them listening difficulties in the SA context. Questionnaire data has highlighted that accent is one of the key elements in causing learners' listening difficulties. Other factors, including *Speed of Speech* and *Unfamiliar Pronunciation*, were rated highly by respondents but *Accent* was the most commonly reflected listening difficulty during students' initial experiences in Liverpool. *Unfamiliar Pronunciation* can also be closely related to the difficulty of *Accent*. A speaker's accent has previously been noted as key in listeners' understanding; Goh (1999) and Chang et al. (2013) report it as one of the predominant factors contributing to listening difficulties. However, further investigation of participants' reflections of how and why accent is a difficulty increases its relevance. The findings of this study highlight that, in the context investigated, accent is a primary difficulty, not just one of the predominant factors.

The findings of this study highlight that listening difficulties were a direct consequence of the phonological features that define LE. LE is distinctive, notable and persistent. Researchers have highlighted both the salience of certain features of LE and how its phonology resists change (Cardoso, 2015; Clark & Watson, 2011; Hickey, 2007; Honeybone & Watson, 2013; Knowles, 1973; Watson & Clark, 2017; Watson, 2007).

Clark & Watson (2016) comment that whilst the levelling of accents in the UK has been common, LE has resisted such changes. This lack of levelling has further emphasised LE's distinctive phonology and marks it as all the more different in contrast to standard varieties of English that students may be more familiar with. Participants' reflections highlighted this contrast; students commented that speakers are 'clear in the south of England, that is the English I prefer' (Participant 5).

This contrast with standard pronunciation is shown to be a key factor in what causes difficulties for learners. Participants made references to the 'clear' accents of the South of England; due to the focus in ELT materials on standard varieties of English (Hope, 2014), this accent was presumed to be SSB, or an accent closely related to this. The contrast between LE and SSB, or other standard pronunciation, is shown to lead to a disparity between learners' expectations and the realities they find in the SA context.

Findings in this study indicate the degree to which students experience more difficulties understanding LE than SSB. LE was shown to be perceived more negatively

than SSB by learners; LE was placed as more difficult and less familiar in comparison to SSB in rating scales. Furthermore, students marked a higher percentage of LE speech as significantly more difficult to comprehend; in the marking of transcripts, LE text accounted for 40.6% more of the difficulties. This investigation into what students marked as difficult also highlighted that phonology, in relation to LE, plays a crucial role in what causes upper intermediate level learners to encounter difficulties. Findings established that 91.5% of the marked LE transcripts included phonological features associated with LE. It is important to note that there may be other features within the speakers' utterances that could have caused difficulties, such as features of connected speech. Research has highlighted that connected speech processes, common in natural conversational speech, cause learners difficulties (Brown & Kondo-Brown, 2006; Carney, 2020; Kennedy & Blanchet, 2014; Koster, 1987). Students can be comfortable with the citation form but how words sound when spoken in natural conversation can be challenging. The samples of speech used in this study consisted of NSs conversing with each other; common features of connected speech were present in all samples. It is realistic to consider that features may have been highlighted where there also happened to be a phonological LE marker. However, the interesting findings of this study highlight the difference between how students respond to connected speech when it is presented through LE or SSB phonology. Here the contrast can be seen between how learners experience connected speech features within a familiar and unfamiliar accent. The findings that 91.5% of the marked LE transcripts included phonological features are notable in their contrast to the same investigation of SSB. 51.11% of the marked SSB transcripts included phonological features distinct to this accent, significantly less than in LE. The findings indicate that phonology is playing a significant role in what is causing learners' difficulties; connected speech processes were present in both sets of speech samples yet a clear difference has been identified.

A specific feature of LE was highlighted in the data; lenition is one of the most recognisable features of LE (Honeybone, 2007; Watson & Clark, 2015) and was identified as a factor causing difficulties for learners. In LE speaker transcripts, analysis identified that the most frequently marked feature was the lenition of /k/ to [x]; this was found in 27.23% of the marked texts. One participant also highlighted this feature in their discussion of their initial listening difficulties in Liverpool, stating 'like 'chic[x]en' 'chic[x]en', I didn't know, something, what is chicken' (Participant 2).

This salient feature of LE pronunciation was highlighted as causing difficulties for learners. This feature of LE is both highly recognisable and has been found to be perceived negatively by L1 listeners. Watson & Clark's (2015) research, which assessed listeners real-time reactions to accents, found this feature caused instant and extreme negative responses in NS listeners. The current investigation aligns with Watson & Clark's (2015) findings, adding that this negative perception may also be prevalent in NNSs.

Phonological features of LE have been identified as key in what causes listening difficulties for learners. The participant's reflection on the impact of lenition refers to their initial experiences in Liverpool, whilst the marked texts were completed by students who had spent an average of 8.64 months in Liverpool. Therefore, it can be concluded that these difficulties related to the LE accent continue; features such as lenition are still being frequently recognised as difficult by upper intermediate level learners who have spent a significant period of time in Liverpool. Further investigation in the current study provides an indication of why these difficulties may continue.

5.2.2 Why do they continue?

The research aim of this study was to examine how and why the LE accent causes difficulties for learners. Accent was identified as a considerable listening difficulty; why this difficulty may continue has also been examined. Students noted that they recognised 'Scouse is the most difficult [accent]' (Participant 3) and that it was different to the 'clear' English pronunciation they had heard in their ELT experiences in China. Findings have demonstrated that accent is an immediate and impactful barrier to learners' listening comprehension, but there are additional factors, other than the phonology of LE, that may be why these difficulties continue.

Research has highlighted that accent, and its associated degree of accentedness, can be identified by learners and can cause difficulties (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Issacs & Trofimovich, 2012). Participants recognise the distinct accent of LE, perceiving it as difficult to understand. Students noted LE as instantly more difficult than other English they had experienced in their reflections in interviews and their ratings

of samples of spoken LE. In listening experiences, LE was also rated as more difficult and less familiar in comparison to SSB.

Participants' reflections intimated that students share a perception that LE is 'strong' and 'very difficult' and that this is unavoidable; it is simply because 'it is Scouse' (Participant 10). Students were also found to perceive other accents as more 'standard' and therefore 'better' than LE. Such perceptions present a probable link as to why accent persists as a listening difficulty. The findings of the current study indicate that NNSs identify LE as unclear and incorrect in some way. These findings link to the theories that still persist within L1 and L2 speakers that there are ideas of 'good' and 'bad' English use (Montgomery, 2012).

Interview data from Sung's (2016) study highlighted ingrained negative views of non-standard varieties of English and that there continues to be a belief that one 'native-speaker English is the 'best' and the 'standard'' (Sung, 2016, p. 196). This brings up interesting questions regarding native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006) and the preference for NS ideals by both students and teachers (Seidlhofer, 2011). Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018) discuss that the "'perfect native-like English" myth as an ultimate target' (p. 228) is still shared by many stakeholders in the language learning process; the findings from the current study confirm that these NS norms are only perceived when this English is a standard variety. There is practical value in presenting L2 learners with a widely used form of English, however this may contribute to negative perspectives of other varieties.

LE is a stigmatised accent and it is often attributed to negative social associations (Montgomery, 2007) and consequently can be perceived by some as 'bad' English. Within the SA context, or simply due to its contrast to accents such as SSB, such perceptions appear to be being passed on to NNS students. These perceptions of varieties of English, such as LE, as being lesser and the assumption that they will not be able to understand accents because 'this is Scouse' can reduce interactions and cause the difficulties to persist. These findings reinforce Scales et al.'s (2006) findings that students' perceptions of accents are often closely related to their ability to understand an accent.

Comparing LE to standard varieties, such as SSB, also highlighted that unfamiliarity plays a key role in why accent may persist as a listening difficulty. Research studies have evaluated that familiarity to an accent can aid comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Wilcox, 1978). Major et al.'s (2005) study concluded that unfamiliarity and prestige are two of the most relevant factors in learners being able to comprehend

accented speech. The current study highlights that LE is viewed as having low status and as being less prestigious. Participants emphasised the difficulties that accent caused in comparison with standard varieties, demonstrating that accent does continue as a problem when pronunciation is unfamiliar.

Findings in this study reinforce previous research, such as Major et al. (2005), which highlights the value of accent familiarity. In ratings of familiarity, samples of LE accented speech were scored low. Furthermore, participants reflections detailed that individuals ‘didn’t speak as [participants] expected’ and LE ‘sounded very different’ to what they expected. Students lack of familiarity to LE is shown to both present them with a surprise when they arrive in Liverpool and impacts their understanding and interactions. Valuable exposure to LE is predicted to improve comprehension with increased familiarity to phonological variation; this valuable exposure is assumed in the SA context but it not always achieved (Freed et al., 2004; Hamano-Bunce, et al, 2019; Taguchi, 2011). Exposure and what learners actually encounter in their SA environment was examined further in the current study.

5.3 Exposure

Difficulties associated with the LE accent were found to be impacted by both students previous and ongoing exposure to the realities of spoken English. This study investigated both students’ exposure to spoken English whilst in the SA experience and also how their previous exposure may have had an impact on their communication in the UK. Assessing and examining learners’ exposure, or lack of, to LE and other spoken English is important; examining this concept created a picture of students’ experience in the SA environment in Liverpool.

5.3.1 SA Context

The SA experience can be invaluable in exposing learners of a language to a wealth of spoken and written communication (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019; Taguchi, 2008; 2011). Research has highlighted the useful exposure gained through SA (Taguchi, 2008); however, it is important to note that there is often an

assumption that being in a native-speaking country will automatically improve language skills. The current study evaluated the quality of exposure to spoken English; previous research has identified that it is in fact quality exposure in this context that can aid acquisition (Hamano-Bunce, et al., 2019; Taguchi, 2011).

Participants recorded their spoken interactions in journals; the findings demonstrated that participants were interacting in their L1 51% of their time in Liverpool. This high proportion of non-English interactions in an English-speaking country indicates that students are not fully engaging with the spoken language opportunities afforded to them in the SA context. This relates to Taguchi's (2011) comments that the SA experience is valuable in improving learners' language skills but this is highly dependent on the amount of English that students interact with. The assumption that the SA experience will improve English skills regardless of other factors is simplistic; greater value needs to be placed on the English students are actually engaging with and therefore being exposed to.

In assessing students' listening difficulties experienced with LE, the amount of English interactions were established. In addition to this, the type and context of interactions were also evaluated. A key finding within this investigation was that a high proportion of students' spoken interactions are within the university environment; these interactions account for 81%. As participants were studying at the University of Liverpool this finding was not surprising; however, it may be telling as to why students' difficulties with LE, the local regional accent, persist. The university environment is not representative of the language spoken in the local environment (Huang, 2004). Students attending university come from a diverse range of linguistic backgrounds (HESA, 2021) as do students' tutors. Huang (2004) noted that tutors may also alter their speech to aid comprehension. This change may be happening in the classroom, consciously or unconsciously, as tutors are finding the best way in which to inform and teach students. These qualities may justify participants' reflections that all their tutors 'speak with standard English' (Participant 7). As a consequence of these factors, students are not being exposed to the pronunciation differences of the local accent, LE.

These results are reinforced by students' language use in their accommodation. 89.1% of questionnaire participants reported that they speak their L1 in their accommodation; participants reflected that they 'always' speak Chinese. Students speaking their L1 to each other, especially in the comfort of their accommodation, is not surprising. Within the challenges of the SA experience this may provide some comfort or simply be for ease.

Nevertheless, this is an important factor to consider in relation to students' exposure to LE. A significant period of an individual's time is spent in their accommodation; if students are speaking their L1 at home and with their peers in class, their exposure to spoken English is extremely limited. This lack of exposure causes unfamiliarity to pronunciation and the realities of spoken English to continue. Participants also reflected, that whilst their classes are in English, in any break or group discussions they speak in Chinese. This level of exposure is not reflective of the SA context and therefore, may be contributing to the extended period of time that it takes students to understand the local English variety, LE.

40.2% of questionnaire participants reported it took them 3-6 months to be able to understand the accents they heard. A further 8.7% reported it took them 6 – 12 months; with an additional 2 participants (2.17%) commenting that they are 'still not confident with accents' (Questionnaire Participant 32). This lack of exposure impacts students' listening experiences. It is also possible that students' increased use of their L1 may be a consequence of the difficulties they experience with LE speech as it unexpected to learners. Students arrive in Liverpool to find an unexpected disparity between their proficiency and their ability to comprehend spoken English (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019) and therefore may rely on their L1 where and whenever they can.

These findings were reiterated by students' reflections on what helped to improve their ability to understand accented speech; 88% reported that Time with Locals helped them to improve their listening skills. Valuable exposure to accents was found to increase students' ability to comprehend spoken English. When students avoid L1 use and engage with local speakers, they are able to familiarise themselves with language in use. A considerable barrier to learners is shown to be that in their previous language learning experiences they have become familiar with one form of English.

5.3.2 Previous Experience

As previously discussed, in relation to why listening difficulties persist for high level learners, unfamiliarity has been found to play a key role in the comprehension of accented speech (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al., 2005; Wilcox, 1978). The impact of students' previous experiences can therefore not be underestimated; previous experiences can result in learners being more or less familiar to certain accents.

Students' responses to LE in the Listening Experiences (where students were asked to listen to samples of LE and SSB and complete rating scales) signify that learners have had little to no previous experience of LE. LE was perceived as more difficult and less familiar in comparison to SSB. A high proportion of learners' previous listening experience is expected to have been through teaching instruction and listening materials (Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014); this was further highlighted in the questionnaire data as no students reported having learnt English in an English-speaking country. The accents predominant in these listening materials continue to focus on standard varieties, such as SSB (Hope, 2014). Listening materials are an important element within the ELT process to allow students to hear spoken English, other than from their teacher; the materials can be used as a model to practice and learn from (Wilson, 2008).

This prevalence of standard English in materials validates participants' overwhelming familiarity and ease with SSB; both familiarity and ease of understanding were rated highly in the Listening Experiences. Participants also reflected that they felt their previous experiences prepared them to understand standard accents, such as those spoken by their tutors and the 'London' accent; 'that [accent is] familiar to me because I learnt it in English book in China' (Participant 2). In reference to a 'London' accent it may be presumed that the participant is referring to SSB, or a similar 'standard' variety. Such varieties are often associated with the South of England; their reference to it being the same as in the 'book in China' also suggests it is likely SSB.

The discussion of previous experience indicates that exposure via the ELT process did not effectively prepare learners to tolerate ambiguities, such as those in the phonology of LE. Participants also reported the shock they experienced when they arrived in the UK due to the contrast between the language that they had heard previously and real-life spoken English. These findings demonstrate that the contrast between materials in ELT and actual language in use may be impacting learners' comprehension. This data supports Song & Iverson's (2018) discussion that the mis-match between learners' listening expectations and the reality of spoken English can increase listener effort. Hamano-Bunce et al. (2019) also expand on this increased listener effort, commenting on the 'rude awakening' (p.116) that students can experience when their believed proficiency does not allow students the ease of listening and interaction that they expected. The current study contributes to these findings, expanding on them by identifying one specific cause for this disparity as phonology. This study also highlights the impact that it has on students' daily experiences and encounters,

not simply their proficiency scores; data collected demonstrated emotional and behavioural impact on students.

Participants highlighted a contrast between the English they ‘had heard at home’ in China and the English they heard in Liverpool. This discrepancy felt by learners caused students to question their language proficiency. Participants discussed the impact that this had on them emotionally; one participant reported feeling disheartened, stating ‘I felt so bad, my English was so bad’ (Participant 8). This effect on students’ self-confidence can impact learners’ ongoing language use.

5.4 Impact

To assess the impact that LE has on learners’ listening experiences this study has assessed the factors which impact their spoken English interactions within the SA context. As has been already highlighted, the findings of students’ journals demonstrated that participants were interacting in their L1 51% of their time in Liverpool. These findings have presented a picture of how students behave linguistically. The findings demonstrate the language that students use and interact with and has shown the difficulties that learners perceive they have experienced during their time in Liverpool. How these factors impact their day-to-day communications and behaviours will now be discussed.

5.4.1 Day-to-Day Interactions

Findings of the study have highlighted the impact that listening difficulties can have on students’ day-to-day interactions. In interviews, students discussed anecdotes with the researcher; these reflections were later analysed in the interview transcripts. The analysis highlighted that 47 of 79 references were instances where students were not successful in gaining understanding; 59.49% of students’ anecdotal experiences were coded as *Did Not Understand*. The findings highlighted the negative impact that accents had on participants, especially in their initial encounters. One participant provided an example of when they were asking for directions around the city; they commented that they ‘didn’t understand at all’ and the speaker became ‘frustrated [and] just pointed for me in the end’ (Participant 11).

Following on from such interactions, where there was some difficulty, participants reflected making different choices about their interactions. These choices were dependent on the accents they would likely experience; students reported avoiding specific encounters where LE was spoken. Difficulties in listening comprehension are shown to impact students' future interactions and influence their want to interact further. Le et al. (2018) comment that students feel most self-conscious and lacking in confidence during face-to-face communication and the data collected in the current study found that there were difficulties in such interactions. This results in decreased confidence, exacerbating students' existing listening difficulties and can result in them being less willing to communicate in the future.

Factors such as self-confidence and anxiety are key elements in impacting students' WTC (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018; Le et al., 2018; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 1998). These factors were found to be impacted by interactions with LE speakers. Participants reported instances where they had to ask a speaker to 'repeat and again and again' (Participant 7); the listener still could not understand the speaker and then appeared frustrated. These interactions were found to impact students' confidence in their own language abilities; as previously mentioned, after an interaction, one participant reported 'I felt so bad, my English was so bad' (Participant 8).

Investigation highlighted that students actively avoided specific encounters where LE was spoken. To avoid speakers becoming frustrated with them, participants reported using 'machines', 'apps and online' methods to shop. Online shopping and the use of self-service tills are becoming increasingly prevalent in most individual's lives, regardless of language skills. It is, however, important to consider that this behaviour may be indicative of the problem that accented speech can cause upper intermediate level learners. Students are finding methods to avoid LE; the surprise of this listening difficulty is seemingly reducing students' persistence and agency.

Persistence and agency have been highlighted in Kashiwa & Benson's (2018) research as necessary qualities to develop skills and communicate outside of the classroom. Due to accent causing unexpected listening problems, this could be impacting students' language development. Participants' responses demonstrated their use of technology to understand spoken English. This relates to Kashiwa & Benson's (2018) discussion of how technology is changing the use of language outside of the classroom environment. However, whilst Kashiwa & Benson (2018) indicate that technology is resulting in positive behaviour (i.e., more L2 use outside of the classroom), the current study

demonstrates how it can be easily and effectively employed to avoid L2 use. It is now possible, in many instances, for learners to use technology to avoid communication in their L2 or face-to-face interactions. Le et al. (2018) found that self-confidence impacts students' WTC; the findings from the current study begin to demonstrate that students can rely on technology when they are struggling with such linguistic confidence. The perseverance needed for effective communication outside of the classroom (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018) was further assessed in an analysis of the strategies that students employed to gain understanding.

5.4.2 Strategies to Understand

In addition to the impact on student's avoidance or choice of interactions, the significance of LE as a listening difficulty was found to impact students' behaviour in trying to gain understanding. Participants were asked to reflect, when faced with listening difficulties which strategies did they employ. Investigating the strategies used by learners to gain understanding gives an insight into students' experiences in the UK and how listening difficulties may be impacting their encounters.

91.3% of students reported they used *Asked for Repetition* as a strategy to achieve understanding. This was expected by the researcher; the strategy is common, even in L1 communication, to clarify what was said when an utterance may be unclear. However, participants' use of *Asking for Repetition* often places the obligation on the speaker to adapt or alter what they have said.

Participants' reflections highlighted their need to alter 'speaker factor' (Chang et al., 2013) to be able to understand LE. The findings of the current study highlight students often need to alter or control 'speaker factor' in to order to gain understanding. The data collected shows that in asking a speaker to repeat what they have said some change in their speech was expected and needed to achieve understanding. *Asking for Repetition* placed the responsibility on the speaker to alter their utterance and, if this change did not happen, understanding was often not achieved. Upper intermediate level learners should be able to converse 'without unintentionally amusing or irritating [speakers] or requiring them to behave other than they would with another proficient speaker' (CEFR, 2018, p. 85). Here accent was found to impact learners' ability to communicate at their expected proficiency level. Students also reported 'pretending' or abandoning communication;

students commented that in some instances they ‘just nod’ (Participant 11) or ‘pretend to understand’ (Pilot Participant 11).

Participants reflected on other factors that assisted them in understanding difficult interactions. In addition to altering ‘speaker-factor’, one participant explained how gestures and body language helped them interpret what a speaker was saying; in this instance the learner was asking for directions. The participant commented that they could ‘only understand’ (Participant 3) if the speaker used gestures. Whilst finding meaning in other aspects of communication is reasonable, relying on this strategy is not feasible. In interactions such as directions, gestures may portray a lot of the meaning expressed but this is very specific to this type of interaction. These findings further emphasise that students often depend on speakers altering their speech or relying other signals (such as gestures) to help with their communication difficulties.

Accent was found to impact learners’ listening experiences for a prolonged period of time. As discussed in relation to the SA Context, 40.2% of questionnaire participants reported it took 3-6 months to be able to understand the accents they heard. Accent persisting as a barrier to listening experiences for 3-6 months is particularly relevant for the students in the current study who were enrolled on the MA TESOL and Applied Linguistic programmes. These were 12-month long courses; accent causing a barrier to communication for up to half of their time studying in the UK will significantly impact their SA experience. A further 8.7% reported it took them 6 – 12 months, highlighting an even more significant issue.

Research suggests that exposure to language in use can reduce the impact of ‘speaker factor’ (Chang et al., 2013). As well as examining the impact of LE on learners, the study also assessed what factors in the SA experience impacted learners positively. Questionnaire participants reported that the most common experience that helped them with understanding accent was *Time with Locals*; 81 of the 92 students selected this (88%). These findings support that exposure or increased familiarity to variation in accents may improve students’ ability to comprehend spoken English. Exposure to local speakers enables students to hear language in use. This supports Taguchi’s (2008) comment that providing learners with out-of-class exposure is invaluable; not only does this increase their awareness of linguistic variation, but it also increases their familiarity to features, giving them something to ‘refer back to’ (p. 569).

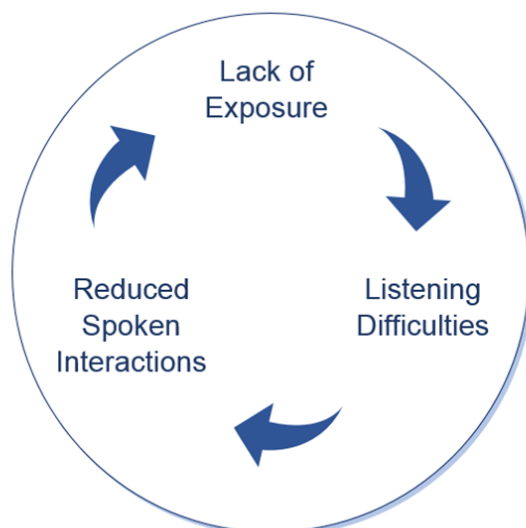
The data collected from interviews was also analysed to examine these specific findings. In the transcripts, 18 references were coded as factors that *Helped students*

improve their understanding; of these, 12 references were coded as *Time with Locals/Time spent in Liverpool* and 2 were coded as *Time with Peers*. This emphasises the important impact that exposure to natural spoken English can have; familiarity to spoken English features improves learner's ability to comprehend (Major et al., 2005). If LE, or other unexpected pronunciation, impacts students' interaction choices, they will not gain this valuable exposure.

5.6 Cycle of Unfamiliar Phonology

The findings related to *Exposure*, *Difficulties* and *Impact* all represent a negative cycle experienced by learners. Figure 5.1 demonstrates how students' lack of exposure to ambiguities in spoken English can lead them to have listening difficulties when they arrive in the UK. The unexpected nature of such difficulties can impact students' confidence and the spoken English they choose to interact with. This lack of interaction with accented English then perpetuates the initial listening difficulties. Based on the findings of the current study, the following diagram (Figure 5.1) is proposed to represent this continued cycle of unfamiliarity.

Figure 5.1: Cycle of Unfamiliar Phonology



This study has identified that LE does cause listening difficulties for learners. This has been found to be in contrast with familiar standard phonology, such as SSB. Students' reflections on their previous experiences indicate that they have not been exposed to LE before; this was further underlined in participants rating of samples of LE as unfamiliar. As shown in Figure 5.1, this leads to listening difficulties. These difficulties are especially relevant in students' initial experiences, however, they have been found to be prolonged for a significant proportion of students. These prolonged difficulties can be linked with students' increased use of their L1 and avoidance of certain spoken interactions. Figure 5.1 presents how this can then complete the cycle, leading to students not being exposed to the English they are having difficulties with.

Exposure to, or an awareness of, the variation in spoken English may be important in breaking this cycle. Whilst students cannot be introduced to LE throughout their language learning just in case they visit Liverpool, this distinct accent provides an indication of how unfamiliarity to the realities of accented speech can cause real-life problems for learners of English. These difficulties can be further exacerbated through negative perceptions of such accents. Learners' comfort with and view of standard pronunciation of English as the only English can be seen, in the context of this study, to be creating a cycle of listening problems. The following section will consider these findings in relation to the research questions.

5.7 Answering the Research Questions

5.6.1 Research Question 1

How is LE a barrier to learners' listening comprehension when they first arrive in Liverpool?

LE has been found to be a barrier to learners' listening comprehension. This has been evidenced most significantly in students' initial experiences in Liverpool; students reported a surprise or disparity between the English they expected and the English they heard. These findings corroborate with existing research on the realities of the SA experience (Hamano-Bunce et al., 2019) however, also adding evidence that phonology of accented speech is a predominant feature that causes this comprehension barrier.

Literature has highlighted that accent can cause listening comprehension difficulties; familiarity to an accent has been noted as a factor which can aid comprehension (Major et al., 2005). The results from the current study indicate that increased familiarity to LE speech improved comprehension; listening difficulties were found to lessen over time spent in Liverpool. However, these difficulties did persist; for some participants this was found to be for a prolonged period. The findings of this study also highlight how the specific phonological features of LE cause difficulties for listeners. Distinct and salient LE features were found to be a direct barrier or challenge to students comprehending speech. This study reinforces existing research and adds a new dimension to this discussion, highlighting how specific variation, or specific phonology, can cause a barrier to learners' listening experiences when they first arrive in the UK.

5.6.2 Research Question 2

What impact does LE have on learners' experiences communicating in the UK?

Research has highlighted that learners may arrive in the UK or other NS countries and be confronted by a wealth of unexpected pronunciation (Hughes et al., 2012). Results from the current study found that this unexpected pronunciation impacts learners. LE has been shown to impact learners' experiences communicating in the UK negatively. Findings of the current study have demonstrated students' avoidance of interactions with speakers of LE. This was found to be exacerbated by students' increased use of their L1. As students were found to be actively avoiding certain interactions where LE was spoken, it can be suggested that both the comfort of speaking one's L1 and the difficulties presented with LE, encourage and allow students to avoid L2 use. Students were also found to abandon or feign understanding, further highlighting the negative impact LE has on learners' communication experiences. Previous research has identified that accent is a difficulty (Chang et al., 2013; Goh, 1999; 2000) but has not fully established what impact this has on students' lived experiences; research relating to this area has often focused on testing of listening proficiency. The current study has been able contribute to this area finding that students avoid interactions, feel disheartened by the difficulties they experience and require speakers to change their speech to gain understanding. These findings demonstrate the significant impact that the difficulties associated with LE are having on learners' experiences communicating in the UK, adding to the discussion of accent as a listening difficulty.

5.6.3 Research Question 3

How do learners perceive LE in comparison to SSB English?

Students were found to perceive LE negatively in comparison to SSB. SSB was rated more familiar and easier to understand than LE. LE was also marked as significantly more difficult to understand by learners; these difficulties were identified as being directly associated with LE's distinct phonological features. Further to this, participants reflected on their negative perceptions of LE in terms of clarity and correctness. SSB was found to be perceived positively by learners; students comments signified this accent to be one they were comfortable and familiar with. In contrast, LE presented a surprising amount of unexpected pronunciation to learners; the most common perception of LE by learners is that it is difficult.

The findings from this research question adds to existing research on NNSs' perceptions of accented speech. Previous studies have identified that students' negative perceptions of accents can contribute to listening difficulties (Eisenstein & Verdi, 1985; Major et al., 2005; Sung, 2016). The current study aligns with such research and adds to the discussion of which accents students perceive and understand differently. Whilst LE has been examined in relation to L1 perception (Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Montgomery, 2007), it has not been fully examined in relation to NNS perception.

The current study underlines existing research, highlighting students' preference for standard native varieties of English (Holliday, 2006; Sung, 2016; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). However, this research project adds additional evidence to highlight learners' negative view of one native variety, LE, and how this perception may impact their comprehension and language use.

5.8 Summary

This chapter began by outlining the difficulties students reported that they encountered in response to LE. The study identified that LE is notably harder to understand for NNS students than standard varieties, such as SSB. The discussion then explored how other factors, such as students' exposure or unfamiliarity to spoken English may have caused or exacerbated these difficulties. Finally, the impact of LE on students' interactions was

discussed. The next chapter will discuss the final conclusions, limitations and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The objective of this research project was to discover how and if LE impacts upper intermediate level learners of English when they arrive to study at university in the UK, specifically in the city of Liverpool. The study aimed to examine the impact of LE on learners' listening experiences and their perceptions of English.

This research project was formed of four methods; questionnaires, listening experiences, semi-structured interviews and spoken interaction journals were used. These methods collected quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions posed. The study assessed learners' ability to tolerate ambiguities presented to them in LE. This chapter will present the conclusions of this study, its implications and any limitations.

6.2 Summary of Findings

This study has identified that LE can cause listening difficulties for learners when they first arrive in the UK. The problems this unexpected pronunciation causes in listening comprehension result in learners needing to alter or control 'speaker factor' in spoken interactions. Students reported having to ask speakers to change or repeat their utterances in order to gain understanding. In employing such strategies, participants reported experiencing negative reactions from speakers; interactions were impacted as speakers demonstrated annoyance and irritation.

The data collected also highlighted that when students arrive in the UK their expectations of language, in relation to their own listening proficiency levels, are not met. Accent was found to be a prolonged listening difficulty for students regardless of their proficiency level. The results from the study highlighted the disparity between students' expectations of their listening performance and how effectively they were able to communicate in the SA environment. The upper intermediate level of the participants analysed in this study highlights the significance of accent as a listening difficulty.

Participants also demonstrated some ability in identifying isolated linguistic features that impacted their listening experiences. This metacognition allowed students to effectively reflect on when, how and why they experienced difficulties. This was supported by students listening to samples of speech and recording the difficulties they encountered.

This study reflects learners' continuing preference towards NS forms of English, however, the data collected highlighted that this preference remains focused on standard NS forms, such as SSB. Regional variations, such as LE, were perceived as unclear and incorrect even though this is also a NS variety.

Over half of participants spoken interactions in the UK were found to be in their L1; for the majority of students this was Chinese. This suggested a connection between students' confidence in their abilities and their WTC. Students' opportunities to avoid spoken interactions in English, via communication in their L1 or the use of technology, has been related to the extended time taken to understand LE.

Students highlighted that the English accents they had heard before arriving in the UK did not prepare them for real-life spoken interactions. Participants reflected the disparity between their proficiency level and how effectively they were able to communicate when they arrived. Students noted they heard the difference in accents immediately and that they did not expect this. Participants reflected that exposure to LE speakers helped them to bridge this gap; *Time with Locals* was found to be the most beneficial factor. These findings highlight that exposure to accents is relevant and valuable in improving learners' out-of-class listening skills.

It is not feasible to present every learner with every accent of English. It is also impractical to suggest all ELT materials should be adapted to pre-empt each individual students' expected use of English. Nevertheless, the data collected highlights the necessity to raise learners' awareness of the realities of spoken English. Learners' awareness of, and exposure to, variation in spoken English will more effectively prepare

them to communicate. Raising awareness throughout the language learning process will decrease the degree of unexpected pronunciation, increasing their ability to tolerate ambiguities. This is expected to increase learners' confidence, persistence and WTC, reducing the length of time accents, such as LE, may act as a barrier to students' effective and productive listening experiences.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

One limitation to consider in this research project is the small sample of participants in some methods. This project focuses a large proportion of its in-depth analysis on interview data and students' experiences listening to samples of accented English. A notable factor in this analysis is the smaller data set. This was influenced by several factors including participant's willingness to participate, availability and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst this should be noted, the purpose of this research project is not to provide generalisations about all learners of English. The thesis instead provides an insight into a sample of selected learners.

This study also relied on a wealth of qualitative reflective data; the researcher is aware of the limitations of this. Factors included that participants may not remember their experiences correctly, may not identify the accents they refer to correctly or may have tried to please the researcher by responding with what they thought was appropriate. To try and reduce these limitations, participants who had not spent an extremely long time in the UK were assessed; students were therefore able to reflect on their initial experiences more accurately. Participants also completed their interviews after hearing samples of LE and SSB (in the Listening Experiences). This provided a reminder, or signifier, of what these accents sound like. Finally, the researcher aimed to maintain a neutral stance on the topic; conveniently, the researcher does not speak with a LE or SSB accent, so it was hoped that students felt open to discuss their positive or negative views of these accents without causing offence.

A limitation of the listening experiences was that it was not possible to present every feature of the accents discussed (LE and SSB) in the short clips. Moreover, the listening experiences were not able to fully represent listening in real-life experiences. Variables,

such as background noise and visuals, were removed from the listening experiences to ensure that all participants were responding to the same features. Whilst this allowed for a view of how students understood accented features, this did not fully represent real-life communication. Additionally, in only listening to extracts of accented speech, there was no conversational interaction which may assist the listening process.

The current study gives a snapshot of how students are experiencing language for a specific and limited period of time (for example, students completed spoken interaction journals over a period of 7 days). Whilst this provides an insight, a longer study, collecting data across a period of the SA experience may provide further insights.

This study also collected data that is specific to individuals studying in the UK, this sample does not represent all NNSs, such as those who may come to the UK to work or live. However, arguably this data still provides an insight into all NNSs' experiences when they first arrive in the UK as many of the experiences that students reflected on are universal (e.g., shopping, interactions with the general public).

Another limitation of this research may be that it did not allow for analysis of students' personality types. A psychological assessment of students' personality differences may have allowed for a more in-depth assessment of how students were impacted by the difficulties they experienced. For example, it could not be determined if an individual's lack of WTC or avoidance of spoken English was solely a consequence of the LE accent. Less out-going individuals may be inclined to avoid spoken interactions regardless of listening difficulties.

Further to this, it must also be noted that participants in the study chose to participate. This could also indicate that students may have been more motivated than others who chose not to participate. As in all research with voluntary participants, there is speculation that the participants' responses and interaction in the project may have been motivated by their own interests in the research or an indication of them having a more outgoing personality.

Students' proficiency may be a further limitation to consider. The proficiency of students listening skills were not directly assessed in this study. An assessment of students' proficiency prior to being exposed to LE, i.e., before they arrived in Liverpool, and after time in Liverpool may provide additional information regarding the impact of exposure.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

In data analysis, an area for possible further research was identified. Only one participant in the research project had spent an extensive period in a NS country before they arrived in the UK. The data collected from this participant supported interesting discussions, especially in comparison to students who had not spent any time in a NS country. The participant had not experienced LE before, but their experience encountering real-life spoken English and the variation this includes, appeared to have prepared them to tolerate ambiguities. This however is still unconfirmed; using a similar methodology, focusing on student's reflections and their instant reactions to accents, could provide more evidence to support or contradict this theory.

The data collected in the current research project suggests that the development of listening comprehension skills could be improved through time spent in a NS country, however, other factors, such as having a more outgoing personality, could explain a participant's persistence and confidence in communication. As previously highlighted, limitations of this research did not allow for analysis of students' personality type. Further research could assess the influence of personality type as well as comparing a larger number of students who had experience in a NS country with those who had not.

In this study there was perceived to be little variation in proficiency between the learners; all were deemed to be minimum upper intermediate level. The data collected suggests that proficiency may not be an indicator of accent as a listening difficulty as even those at upper intermediate level experience this difficulty. To examine this further, future research may examine how different proficiency levels react to and comprehend LE.

Another recommendation for further research may be to examine students' experiences across a longer time period and to examine students' reactions and reflections of accent prior to spending time in the UK. The current study is unable to answer if students' perspectives of accented English changed after they arrived in the UK. Whilst the current study identifies that students did not expect the spoken English they encountered in the UK, their unfiltered view of what accents will be like in a NS country could not be identified. Further research may be able to examine both students' understanding and perspective of accents. Evidence to highlight what students predict

accents to be like may indicate why students experience the disparity that was highlighted in the current study's data collection.

It may also be interesting to compare other British regional accents and their impact on students' listening experiences. LE was chosen due to its distinct nature, however, accents that are distinct in different ways could be evaluated and compared. Further research may assess if their distinctions have the same impact as those found in relation to LE or is LE unique in the complications that students reported experiencing.

A further area for research may be to employ the use of the Listening Experiences methodology which was developed in the current study to gather more data. In introducing students to samples of speech and asking them to both report back their thoughts and to mark transcripts of the recordings, it was possible to assess perception and comprehension. This method also highlighted where specific difficulties were found (such as students noting the lenition of /k/ to [x] in the LE accent). In further research, specific phonological features may be isolated and examined further. For instance, in a comparison where one specific phonological feature is present and not in another, it could be confirmed where exact phonological changes were having the most impact on learners' comprehension of spoken discourse.

Finally, this research project focused on Chinese students. Analysis of students experience who share the same L1 reduced the variables in relation to previous language experiences and L1 influence; this allowed for an analysis between students' experiences. This did, however, limit the scope of the study; an area for possible future research would be to analyse students' experience of accents who had different L1s. Such research may assess if L1 influence leads to different responses to LE, or other accents.

6.5 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study indicate that LE is impacting students' ability and confidence communicating. The findings of the study have highlighted a cycle of lack of exposure to unfamiliar pronunciation, leading to difficulties which cause students to interact with less accented English (demonstrated in Figure 5.1, p. 219). This research may implicate

the development of awareness raising teaching methodologies in ELT; raising students' awareness of ambiguities may break this cycle.

One pedagogical implication that the findings of this study may support is the use of more varied listening materials in classrooms, especially prior to the SA experience. Exposing students to varied English in use has been found to improve students' listening experiences in relation to familiarity (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al, 2005; Song & Iverson, 2018). The data collected from the current study highlights the necessity and relevance of increasing students' awareness and familiarity to differences in spoken English prior to the SA experience. In not doing so, students experience difficulties and complications that can lead them to avoiding L2 use.

This may also have implications regarding the use of listening materials in the classroom whilst within the SA context. To encourage greater engagement with different varieties of spoken English outside of the classroom, variation may need to be presented to learners in the SA classroom. Within the security of the educational setting, students could be introduced to variation to reduce the 'shock factor' experienced outside of the classroom. This may also assist in breaking down any negative perceptions of non-standard pronunciation.

The data collected in this study confirms that students' preference for native norms is associated with standard varieties, such as SSB; the regional NS variation in LE was negatively perceived by learners. There is value and practicality in presenting a standard form, however, this study provides evidence that focusing ELT on these specific native norms may have a negative and prolonged impact on students' ability to communicate with speakers of, and their response to, unfamiliar accents. This research can be used to provide a perspective into the realities of students' communication in the SA experience. Highlighting these findings to stakeholders across the ELT process could impact the development of listening materials and teacher training.

In addition to the pedagogical implications that may impact teachers' lesson design and choice of materials, there may be additional implications. Teachers, as well as other stakeholders in the language learning process, may now be more aware of student's experiences outside of the educational setting and the reasoning behind possible interaction choices or specific language avoidance. Whilst this may not directly impact teaching practices, it may influence perspectives of how English is being used by students outside of the classroom. Assumptions can be made regarding the amount of language

input students are having in the SA context; the findings of this study indicate the input may be lower than expected.

The evidence from the current study may be used to highlight the realities of English language used in the SA environment to students and teachers. In addition to this, the methods employed to collect this data may be used in teaching practices to examine students' interactions, progress and identify specific difficulties they may be experiencing whilst studying on English language courses.

Teachers may wish to employ the same methods used in the Listening Experiences in this study to identify listening comprehension difficulties. As highlighted in section 2.3 (p. 23), testing proficiency is not always the most effective way to highlight learners' listening difficulties and may not uncover exactly where a difficulty lies for each individual listener. In employing the same methods used in the Listening Experiences teachers may identify where specific features or areas are that cause difficulties for their learners. The Listening Experiences used in the current study (discussed in more detail in section 3.4.2 and 4.2.2) gave students the opportunity to reflect on what they thought of samples of accents and highlight any specific difficulties they had in a transcript of the sample. Students could highlight sounds, words or phrases where they experienced some difficulty. This may give a teacher opportunity to reflect on their approaches to both their listening and speaking skills teaching. It may allow teachers to identify individual student difficulties and tailor their teaching accordingly.

Further to this, the methods used for the spoken interaction journals may be applied in teaching practices from both a teaching and student perspective. As evidenced in the data from the current study, students' interactions outside of class, and more so outside of the university environment, are low. In employing similar methodologies across an English course, teachers may be able to highlight whether students are experiencing difficulties and direct students to more out-of-class learning opportunities. Such methodologies would also provide a useful self-reflection process for students themselves. The data collected in the current study challenges the SA assumption that L2 interactions will be greater; students may use this to see how they are engaging with English and begin to question what they could do to improve. In both reflective processes, the evidence from the current study and that which may be collected by teachers and students, could improve perceptions of English phonological variation. Those who perceive accent to be a barrier and are actively not engaging with accented speech may

begin to see the value of exposure to variation or to English that they find more challenging than standard forms.

Further to this, there can be practical implications for institutions who invite students to study in a SA context. Whilst value continues to be based on English for university studies, the impact accent has on communication outside of the classroom has been shown to be impacting the student experience as a whole. Institutions may need to address how students' listening comprehension of spoken English outside of the university environment may reduce or halt listening development and cause students to engage less with the speakers in and around their university experience. These findings may impact the development of materials and support offered by student experience teams at universities. The impact on students' apparent motivation and WTC may not only impact their results but also their reports of the student experience; both of which are factors monitored closely by universities.

These findings may also impact the development of pre-sessional teaching and learning programmes. In the researcher's experiences, courses designed to prepare students to study in the UK and at other native-speaking universities, focus on developing learners' use of English in the university environment. Their focus is mainly on EAP and subject specific study skills (Ding & Bruce, 2017). This focus is relevant, and often limited by time constraints and outside influence (such as visa requirements). The current study does however, highlight that the SA experience incorporates a wider range of English use which learners are not effectively prepared for. The data collected could have implications in the development of programmes and teaching materials. This may increase learners' confidence in communicating outside of the university environment to fully experience life in a NS country such as the UK.

The current research project indicates the value in familiarity and preparation in relation to accents. It highlights how lack of awareness of phonological variation can cause perpetuating problems for learners' listening abilities and their communication choices outside of the classroom. A cycle of unfamiliar phonology (Figure 5.1, p. 219) has been proposed by the researcher which demonstrates the negative communication cycle learners can find themselves in. These findings emphasise the need for teachers, institutions and stakeholders across the ELT process to acknowledge the variation in English pronunciation and act on the difficulties it creates. There will be a different focus on which elements of the student experience are impacted. For instance, teachers may be more focused how these difficulties impact their language skills development, whereas institutions may be more

focused on how this impacts students' want to study in a certain university or city. Importantly, the findings of this study demonstrate that such difficulties are actively changing student behaviour.

The SA experience can surprise learners in many ways; they are presented with cultural, social and linguistic differences to what they are familiar with. This study has identified that, in regard to day-to-day communication, the surprise of how English is actually spoken can impact learners' English language use. This study identified that within the already challenging SA environment, the LE accent causes further complications. The unexpected pronunciation gets in the way of the delicate and time pressured listening processes that students have honed in their previous language learning. Difficulties that may be tolerable or easily adjusted to in the L1, are heightened in the L2 and this is especially evident in the fast-paced interactions outside of the classroom setting. Students' low-confidence can be exacerbated when the English they hear does not meet their expectations, leading to them reducing their exposure to English. This avoidance of spoken interactions results in LE being a barrier to listening experiences for a prolonged period. This thesis provides an insightful and new perspective on how learners experience LE when they arrive to study in Liverpool; it highlights the need to increase learners' awareness and perception of the great range of variation found in spoken English.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Participant Information Sheet (Example)



Investigating Non-Native Speakers' experience of native English accents

Participant Information Sheet

Version: Date:

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study is being undertaken by a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. The study involves a questionnaire, interview questions and a listening experience. The purpose of the study is to investigate Non-Native speakers' experience of native English accents.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part as a non-native speaker of English.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without any disadvantage to you.

What will happen if I take part?

For the study, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire; this will take no longer than ten minutes. You will also be asked to listen to audio recordings and rate what you hear on scale. Additionally, you will be invited to take part in an interview with the researcher and complete an optional journal of your spoken interactions.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without any disadvantage to you.

Expenses and/or payments

There are no reimbursements involved in taking part.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no perceived disadvantages or risks to you in taking part.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

Through taking part in the study, you will gain experience conversing with a native speaker, the researcher.

There are no other obvious benefits to you in taking part, but in doing so you would help the student in completing a necessary component of his or her study, and you may find the process itself interesting and enjoyable.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Dr Hitomi Masuhara (details below) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 (ethics@liv.ac.uk). When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

The data collected from you will not be labelled or identified in any way with your name. Once the data has been collected, the researcher will use only random letters or numbers to identify and distinguish participants, not personal names.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The researcher will keep one copy of the data, and one copy will be stored along with the research project in the files of the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. Only the researcher and the primary supervisor will have access to it.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw from this research study at any time, without explanation.

Results up to the time when you withdraw may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Primary Supervisor:

[Supervisor's contact details]

If you wish to find out the results of the study, please contact Kathryn Hope (the researcher) after October 2018 at hskhope2@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 2- Participant Consent Form (Example)



Participant Consent Form

Version: Date:

Title of Research Project: Investigating Non-Native Speakers' experience of native English accents (PhD Research Project)

Researcher: Kathryn Hope

Please place an 'x' in the following boxes to indicate that:

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [...] for the above study.
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.
4. I understand that should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
5. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish
6. I give permission for the researcher and her primary supervisor at the University of Liverpool to have access to the data collected from my institution.
7. I understand that the data collected from my institution will be stored on a secure file server at the University of Liverpool and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor at the University of Liverpool.
8. I confirm that I am aged 18 or older.
9. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name:.....

Participant Signature:..... **Date:**

Researcher Name: Kathryn Hope

Researcher Signature: **Date:**

The contact details of the Researcher are:

Kathryn Hope
hskhope2@liverpool.ac.uk

The contact details of the Primary Supervisor are:

[Supervisor's contact details]

Appendix 3- Institutional Information Sheet (Example)



Investigating Non-Native Speakers' experience of native English accents

Institution Information Sheet Version: Date:

Your institution is being invited to participate in a research study. This information sheet provides a brief explanation of the research study and what it will involve. I would appreciate you taking the time to read this. Please feel free to ask if you would like more information or have any questions.

Thank you.

Purpose of the Study

This study is being undertaken by a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. The study involves a questionnaire, interview questions and a listening experience. The purpose of the study is to investigate Non-Native speakers' experience of native English accents.

Your institution has been invited to take part as your students are non-native speakers of English.

Process of the Study

For the study, students will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire; this will take no longer than ten minutes. They will also be asked to listen to audio recordings and rate what they hear on a scale. Additionally, students will be invited to take part in an interview with the researcher and complete an optional journal of their spoken interactions.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you or your students are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without any disadvantage to you.

Benefits and Risks in taking part

There are no perceived disadvantages or risks to your institution or students in taking part. Through taking part in the study, students will gain experience conversing with a native speaker, the researcher. There are no other obvious benefits to your institution or students involved in taking part, but in doing so you would help the researcher in completing a necessary component of his or her study.

There are no reimbursements involved in taking part.

Data Use and Data Storage

The data collected from your students will not be labelled or identified in any way with students' names. Once the data has been collected, the researcher will use only random letters or numbers to identify and distinguish participants, not personal names.

The researcher will keep one copy of the data, and one copy will be stored along with the research project in the files of the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. Only the researcher and the primary supervisor will have access to it.

Withdrawals and Complaints

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Dr Hitomi Masuhara (details below). If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 (ethics@liverpool.ac.uk). When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

You can withdraw from this research study at any time, without explanation.

Results up to the time when you withdraw may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Primary Supervisor:

[Supervisor's contact details]

If you wish to find out the results of the study, please contact Kathryn Hope (the researcher) after October 2018 at hskhope2@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 4- Institutional Consent Form (Example)



Institution Consent Form

Version: Date:

Title of Research Project: Investigating Non-Native Speakers' experience of native English accents (PhD Research Project)

Researcher: Kathryn Hope

Please place an 'x' in the following boxes to indicate that:

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [...] for the above study.
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information my institution provides and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish, before it has been anonymised.
4. I give permission for the researcher and her primary supervisor at the University of Liverpool to have access to the data collected from my institution.
5. I understand that the data collected from my institution will be stored on a secure file server at the University of Liverpool and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor at the University of Liverpool.
6. I understand that should my institution wish to withdraw from the study at any time, I will be free to do so and that the data produced up to the point of my institution withdrawal may still be used, if I am happy for this to be done.
7. I agree for this study to be advertised in my institution.
8. I agree to take part in the above study.

Institution Name:

Institution Representative Name:

Institution Representative Signature (this may be electronic):

Date:

Researcher Name: Kathryn Hope

Researcher Signature (this may be electronic): Kathryn Hope

Date:

The contact details of the Researcher are:

Kathryn Hope

hskhope2@liverpool.ac.uk

The contact details of the Primary Supervisor are:

[Supervisor's contact details]

Appendix 5- Questionnaire (Survey Monkey version – first page and consent form)

Your Views on Native British Accents

Hi, my name is Kathryn.
I am a PhD student at the University of Liverpool. I am interested in what kind of difficulties, in relation to spoken English, non-native speakers' experienced when they first arrived in the UK.

You are invited to participate in this study as a non-native speaker of English.
Please may you answer the following questions; your answers will remain anonymous and there are no right or wrong answers.
If you feel uncomfortable, you can withdraw from this research study at any time, without explanation.
This questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes or less to complete.


If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire, please email me (Kathryn Hope) at hskhope2@liverpool.ac.uk.

On the next page you will find a consent form. Please complete this and then move on to the following page where the questions begin.

Thank you very much for your time.

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Next

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Your Views on Native British Accents

Consent Form Version: 3 Date: 12/1/16

Title of Research Project: Investigating Non-Native Speakers' of English experience of native English accents (PhD Research Project)
Researcher: Kathryn Hope

*** 1. Please read and tick all of the following statements to indicate your consent**

I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 12/1/16 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.

I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.


I understand that after my responses have been anonymised, it will no longer be possible to withdraw from the study or request that responses are destroyed.

I confirm that I am aged 18 or older.

I agree to take part in the above study.

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Appendix 6- Questionnaire (Email version)

QUESTIONNAIRE: YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ACCENTS

Thank you for agreeing to fill in this questionnaire. Firstly, please read the following information about the background of the research.

This study is being undertaken by a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. The purpose of the study is to investigate Non-Native speakers' experience of native English accents.

Your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without your rights being affected.

Under the Data Protection Act, you can at any time ask for access to the information you provide and you can also request the destruction of that information if you wish.

Please turn to the next page to begin the questionnaire. If you have any questions or there is anything you are unsure of please feel free to ask.

Questionnaire

1. When you first came to the UK what difficulties did you experience understanding spoken English? (please tick which apply to you)

- Accent
- Unfamiliar pronunciation
- Speed of Speech
- Word meaning
- No difficulties
- Other (please specify)

2. When you first came to the UK what did you do to achieve understanding? (please tick which apply to you)

- Asked for repetition
- Used context
- Asked others for help
- Asked speakers to slow down
- I experienced no difficulties understanding

Please turn to the next page.

3. Have you spent an extensive period (e.g. over a month) in an English-speaking country before?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, please provide more details (e.g. Where? For how long?)

.....
.....

4. How long have you spent in the UK this time?

.....

5. Did you grow up or learn English in an English-speaking environment (e.g. English-speaking relatives)? Please specify.

.....
.....

Please turn to the next page.

Your life in Liverpool

6. What type of accommodation have you lived in since you arrived in the UK this time?

- Student halls
- Host family
- House share
- Stayed with relatives
- Other (please specify)

7. In your accommodation, what language do you speak most often?

.....

8. Please tick which spoken interactions you have experienced. Please indicate, approximately, what percentage of your overall interactions does each interaction account for.

Interaction	✓	Percentage of overall interactions
Peer to peer (in English)		
Peer to peer (in another language – please specify)		
Tutor/Lecturer		
Library staff		
Other university staff (e.g. administration, accommodation)		
Government staff (e.g. visa department)		
Medical (doctors/nurses)		
Bank staff		
Taxi driver		
Public transport staff		
Telephone interaction (in English)		
Telephone interaction (in another language – please specify)		
Cashier (e.g. supermarket, clothes shops)		
Restaurant (waiter/waitress)		
Food and drink services (e.g. coffee shop)		
Members of the public (e.g. people on the train, in a shop etc)		
Other (please specify):		

Please turn to the next page.

9. What accents have you encountered since arriving in the UK?

.....
.....

10. When you first came to Liverpool did you notice the differences in accents?

- Yes
- No

11. Thinking about the accents you have encountered in the UK, in what context did you encounter them? (e.g. peers at university, whilst shopping, in your accommodation...)

.....
.....
.....

12. Approximately, how long after your first entry to the UK did you feel able to understand the accents you heard?

- 1-2 weeks
- 3-4 weeks
- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- Other (please specify).....

13. What do you think has helped you to understand the accents you have encountered in the UK? (please tick which apply to you)

- Time with locals
- TV/movies
- Local radio
- Language classes
- Time with peers
- Time with tutors
- Other (please specify).....

Please turn to the next page.

Finally, please provide some information about yourself.

Gender:

Age:

Nationality:

First Language:

Course:

Appendix 7- Transcripts of Samples of LE and SSB Speech

Liverpool English (LE)

Recording 1 (Liverpool, Merseyside): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices/021M-C1190X0022XX-0201V0> [Accessed on 10/2/2020]

Extract 1 – 7.02-7.43 [Male, 19; Male, 29]

But yeah the same for me as well it's like it does depend who you're talking to really like to me friends like I use most slang I don't use like words that everyone understands like really. When I'm speaking to like people who I respect and that it's like you use proper words and stuff do you know what I mean

So you don't respect your friends?

Well yeah I respect my friends but it's just how they understand you it's just the language yeah with your friends

And again it's a way you grow closer to people because if you can use words which are more intimate or have a more intimate meaning it means I find that it means your relationship develops

Extract 2 – 21.23-22.33 [Female, 26]

I can say I come from Liverpool I can say I come from Somalia I can say my faith is is is I am you know I am Muslim and people you can see you know people's perceptions and people's you know stereotyping break stereotypes breaking down before your eyes and in a way I do love that challenge because I do feel like I'm actually I'm communicating with people and people are beginning to understand me and we're having real cultural exchange to me that's cultural exchange it isn't necessarily you know what nationality are you so I do I find it interesting and I think now more than ever I think particularly younger people erm they don't see those separations they don't see those differences between different cultures they just see them as people and and for us to share our human experiences and I think it's a constant battle you know media is projecting an image of what you people and what black culture is and for us it's been part of day to day life and we've shared that with anyone who who's willing to you know learn and experience life

Extract 3 – 44.28- 45.20 [Male, 19; Female, 61]

Really alls I see in Toxteth now is a basketball court and football fields when we used to have like Pleasure Island the festival place they shut that down said that they was going to make something like Southport there and nothing's been done with it

But then we didn't have that you see we had the street there were only about four people with cars in our street and the dockers would come up and give us a rope so we'd have the rope right across the street and our mums whenever would turn up for us and then we had the smaller rope for playing oh what would we used to do with it we had to skip so quick I could and the little song we had the songs that we used when we were playing as well it was different and I think as well there's only one person had a television and that was on coronation day so we had to go out we listened to the radio a lot and the pictures, I used to go to the pictures every week

Recording 2 (Liverpool, Merseyside): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices/021M-C1190X0022XX-0401V0> [Accessed on 10/2/2020]

Extract 4- 8.00-8.55 [Male, 56; Male, 61]

So I was made to work down the dock even though me dad didn't work down there I mean I was lucky to get down there but like it was like the best thing that happened to me so that's what makes me sick about apart from losing a good paying job the fact I enjoyed me job as well so it's you know something I haven't got back and I've lost a couple of jobs since and like struggling by now it's err the laugh you had down there the people you were with as much as the money you were earning that makes you miss it makes me sick about losing me job

How did like your families react to it?

Well they were very supportive the wives and the girlfriends and that but I was surprised the way they reacted they're very strong there and they were very supportive and the vast majority of women were right behind the men

Standard Southern British (SSB)

Recording 3 (Reading, Berkshire): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices/021M-C1190X0006XX-0201V0> [Accessed on 10/2/2020]

Extract 5- 14.05-14.56 [Male, 39; Female, 31]

The language the we use internally is important because it's actually that which binds us together as a group of employees with a common goal and a common mission and so the fact that you can go to almost any country with this company and still be able to speak in the same terms is something that that from which you get great strength its its sometimes seen as a barrier when people join the organisation 'cause they've got a learning curve to go through but once you've got that then your part of the club and that's actually something that's very welcoming it's actually very helpful once you get over that initial hurdle

And and no one erm thinks your stupid when you don't know what an acronym stands for I even put my hand up in a marketing meeting and said does GTM does that stand for Go To Market at Microsoft as well? And everyone just like kind of smiled and

nodded and I thought well you can't take anything for granted erm you can't assume that it is the same I think as you said earlier erm but no it's not exclusive

Recording 4 (Ely, Cambridgeshire): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices/021M-C1190X0008XX-0301V0> [Accessed on 10/2/2020]

Extract 6 – 31.16-31.58 [Male, 18; Female, 18]

It's is I've only lived three places before and yeah I'd say this is as good as an area I've lived in but I can't remember the first one that much and the second one just isn't something to talk about so

Ok, so where else would you like to live if you could?

Oo Buckingham Palace.

Anywhere else you'd want to move to when you finish?

New Zealand

Just out of the city not in the city

No, I've never, I don't think I could ever live in a town or a city

Well yeah yeah

'Cause I've grown up in the countryside.

Is that why, do you all feel the same?

Plus the whole pollution thing

I could in a town or city for a while but I wouldn't be able to live there for a lifetime

Recording 5 (Devizes, Wiltshire): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices/021M-C1190X0034XX-0301V0> [Accessed on 10/2/2020]

Extract 7- 51.10-52.02 [Male, 69; Male, 57]

I think this arose initially because my parents in-law were living with us as well so there's a large sort of room and a smaller room we had the smaller one which is our sitting room so but to distinguish that from where Anne's parents were we used different words so they they didn't have a sitting room they had the drawing room and they've died now and gone obviously but we still stick to that so there is the drawing room and what was our sitting room is my study so the sitting room has disappeared and it's the it's the drawing room

Nobody would use the word lounge?

Pat was telling me that when we got married I insisted that she call it the sitting room and not the lounge and this really comes out from a today I wouldn't worry at all about it but my mother was frightfully conscious of these sort of distinctions and lounge was frightfully common

Recording 6 (Reading, Berkshire): <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices/021M-C1190X0006XX-0101V0> [Accessed on 10/2/2020]

Extract 8- 23.54-24.31 [Female, 17]

I've been to school in I came here just for six form but other than that I've been to school in London all the time

And tell me a bit more, you know you said your friends said 'oh my god you've got really posh'

Yeah

What did you think when they told you that?

Erm I was annoyed because I didn't think I sounded at all different I just I didn't understand but we used to erm go out to somewhere called King's Road which is really like posh in London and I know that when they came with to there they would change as well so they would become they would sound posher

Appendix 8 – Codes, Categories and Concepts Defined in Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Codes	Categories	Concepts
American/ Birmingham /Cambridge/ European/ French/ London or South/ Manchester/ Mexican / Oxford/ RP or SSB / LE/ York	Accents Encountered	Exposure
Cashier/ Food and Drinks services/ Members of the Public/ Peer to Peer/ Restaurant/ Taxi driver/ Tutors or Lecturers	Interaction Types	
Chinese / English	Language Used (L1 or l2)	
Accent difficulties / Unfamiliar pronunciation	Accent	Difficulties
Speed of speech/ Cannot understand quick enough	Speech Rate	
Negative perception/ Positive perception	Perceptions	
Gained understanding/ Did not gain understanding	Did not Understand	Impact
Asked for repetition/ Asked others for help/ Asked speakers to slow down/ Physical gestures/ Used context	Strategies used to Understand	
Previous Learning/ Reference to China/ Unexpected	Previous Experience	

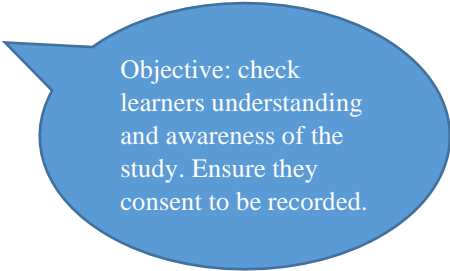
Appendix 9 – Semi-Structured Interview Script

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Version: Date:

Initial questions:

1. Do you have any questions about the study?
2. Are you happy to proceed?
3. How did you find completing the questionnaire?
4. Do you have anything you would like to share?

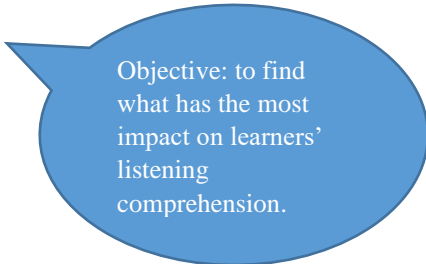


Objective: check learners understanding and awareness of the study. Ensure they consent to be recorded.

In response to the participants' questionnaire responses:

When you first came to the UK/Liverpool what difficulties did you experience understanding spoken English?

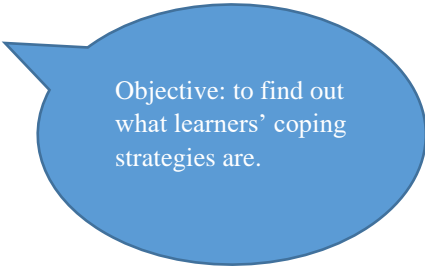
1. Please can you expand on your response to the question [above].
2. Which difficulties did you think had the most/least impact?



Objective: to find what has the most impact on learners' listening comprehension.

When you first came to Liverpool what did you do to achieve understanding?

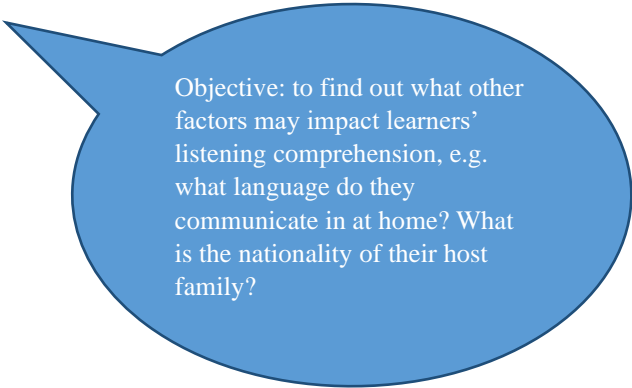
3. Please can you expand on your response to the question [above].
4. What did you do the most/least often?



Objective: to find out what learners' coping strategies are.

What type of accommodation have you lived in since you arrived in the UK?

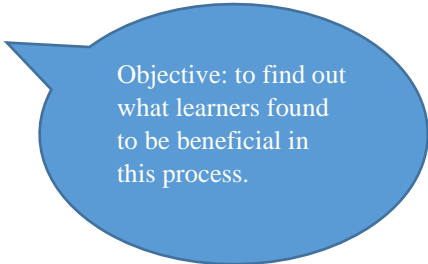
5. Please can you expand on your response to the question [above].



Objective: to find out what other factors may impact learners' listening comprehension, e.g. what language do they communicate in at home? What is the nationality of their host family?

What do you think has helped you to understand the accents you have encountered in the UK?

6. Please can you expand on your response to the question [above].

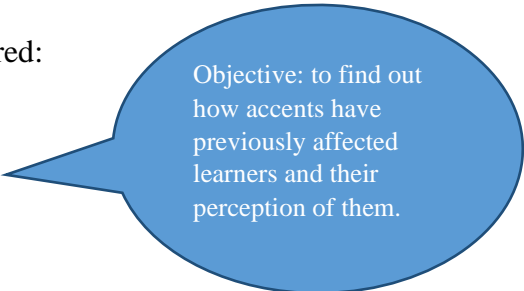


Objective: to find out what learners found to be beneficial in this process.

Additional questions:

Think back to accents that you have encountered:

1. What do you think of them?
2. What did you like about them?
3. What did you dislike about them?



Objective: to find out how accents have previously affected learners and their perception of them.

Appendix 10- Interview Transcripts

Interview Transcript 1

Participant number: 1

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that clip, how easy was it to understand for example?

P: Yeah, I think the beginning it's a little bit not difficult for me to understand I think they talk something about like slang with friends. They use slang with friends. And later yeah I don't think I understand much

I: So it changed over the recording

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok so what did you think of that recording, for example, compared to the other recording the we listened to?

P: I think the two speakers speak like more clear than the first one. But they speak too fast. It's really hard to follow them.

I: So more clear but too fast? That makes it more difficult?

P: Yeah.

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: So what did you think of that one? Easier, harder, the same?

P: The same I guess

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

P: Yeah, I think that is the easiest one to understand.

I: The easiest one to understand. Is there anything in particular that made it easier do you think?

P: Yeah they speak slowly and the pronunciation is clear, they don't have any accents so I think they are reasons I can understand it clearly

I: Ok, so to your ear they don't have an accent in particular?

P; Yeah

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I; Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

P: Yeah, the beginning is hard, but in the end they are the lady is clear

I: So, a difference between the two speakers maybe?

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: Yeah, I would give it 4, 4

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one??

P: Yeah, it's its for familiarity I would say it's very unfamiliar

I: Very unfamiliar?

P: So it's 1, right?

I: Yeah, 1. Right ok yeah

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok so what did you think of that one?

P: Yeah, I would say it was quite familiar, I would give 5 for familiarity and it's not difficult so I would give 5 as well.

I: So ok it's opposite to the last recording in terms of familiarity and difficulty. Ok

I: Other than that I just wanted to know if you had any experiences, any anecdotes, about your understanding or experiences of Liverpool English. For example, when you first arrived in the UK was it difficult to understand or the same as everyone else, any other accents you heard?

P: I think the first when I first came here in Liverpool I everyone I communicate with is really hard to understand what they are talking about especially I think it's because their accent

I: Right

P: I think especially when I was ordering food in a restaurant with the staff every time they ask me like about do you want like a menu thing or what would like to order I can't understand at all

I: Right

P: And sometimes when I calling uber or taxi they ask where I would like to go and sometimes they may talk to me when they drive but I couldn't understand the accent

I: Right

P: But for teachers I think they are all speak very the English what I have been learning yeah

I: So was it mainly outside of university that you had these problems ?

P: Yeah also I got a friend from Liverpool I guess he lives not far from the city centre I remember the first time I met with him he's basically like what sorry I don't understand I ask him to repeat again again but still may be three four times have to repeat I still can not understand

I: So can you understand him now?

P: A little bit I think its much better. There is a classmate he speaks very strong accent of Liverpool, I think the first time when we were doing group work in last semester we talked like a group, I couldn't understand at all, but now this semester when I met him I talk with him yeah I can understand you like over 50 maybe 70 percent

I: Ok that's good, you've noticed a change in how you can understand this particular accent?

P: Yeah

I: Yeah, so have you been to anywhere else in the UK at all?

P: I've been to London, I've been to Manchester and oxford, Cambridge, yeah I guess that where I've been to

I: And did you find that people you spoke to there were easier to understand or the same as in Liverpool do you think?

P: I think it's better in London especially in London

I: Oh ok

P: But in Manchester I think its exactly the same. I still need to ask people to repeat

I: Right, can you hear the difference between the Liverpool accent and the Manchester accent? Or do you think they sound similar?

P: Yeah sound similar but I can still figure out the difference because I think I have teacher from Manchester

I: Ok, so you've heard that voice before and can hear the difference a little bit?

P: Yeah

I: Ok that's great, all I'm going to so now is I'm going to stop the recording. So thank you very much for doing that, that's great.

Interview Transcript 2

Participant number: 2

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: No, ok, that's fine for now, I'll reshare it after. So what did you think of that clip?

P: I think its bit unclear and I cannot follow the conversation totally I just know some of the words. I'm sure it's Liverpool accent

I: Right, ok. But it's a bit unclear.

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

P: Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

I: Well I think it's more clear

P: More clear?

I: It's clearer

P: Yeah

I: Yeah

P: So compared to the first one you noted a definite difference?

I: Yeah

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

P: Well I think this woman talks very clear but there are some consonants or there are some links that I couldn't hear

I: Ok

P: Yeah

I: Ok

P: I will highlight them in the document.

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: Well it's very clear, totally.

I: Very clear?

P: Yeah, very clear.

I: You could understand, you felt really confident in understanding all of that recording?

P: Yeah, mostly

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: Well I think this one is difficult and especially for the first two speakers. They are super difficult to understand, I couldn't even follow what the conversation is about. I just know some places

I: Ok, so just little bits of information but you couldn't follow easily what was being said?

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, what did you think of that one?

P: I think this one is clear, I know what it's about and I can follow it quite well but I didn't like the accent

I: You didn't like the accent?

P: Not about the accent, I don't like man's voice. I think in Liverpool man's voice is more difficult than females voice

I: Right ok, so you didn't, so you found this male voice harder than the female voice?

P: Yeah, yeah, that's weird.

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: Well I couldn't follow the man's voice as well, but this one the most difficult one. There are some noise in the background

I: Right

P: The train noise I think

I: So it's not just the speaker it's other elements that are making it harder to understand?

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok, what did you think of that one?

P: It's easier than the difficult one before but it's less easier to compared to the easiest one.

I: Right

P: So it's in the middle

I: In the middle somewhere, ok

I: That's great, thank you. Ok, so yeah when you first arrived in the UK did you notice any difference in the accents or any experiences that you had?

P: Well the first day I came to the UK was in London. So London's accent is perfect for me 'cause that's how I, that's familiar to me because I learnt it in English book in China but when I came Liverpool well I didn't know the word even 'do you need a *bag*'?

I: Yeah

P: I am thinking about how poor my English is, I couldn't even hear 'do you need a bag?'

I: Yeah, so it made you feel like your English wasn't up to scratch?

P: Yeah, I feel like I am a beginner in English but actually I haven't done any language courses before I came to the UK so I go directly from my course to the masters degree course, directly

I: Right, ok

P: And that day when I came Liverpool I found the people didn't speak English as I imagined

I: Right, so as you'd heard before?

P: Yeah, so like ‘*chicken*’ *chicken*, I didn’t know, something, what is *Chicken*

I: Chicken, yeah

P: Yeah, and ‘do you need a *bag*?’. Yeah things like that.

I: So it’s those certain words were hard to pick up on. So do you find it easier to understand now? Now that you’ve been in Liverpool for a while?

P: I didn’t think I’m that familiar with it but I can make sense

I: Right

P: Yeah, they make sense to me

I: So it’s improved over time would you say?

P: Yeah, I improved, but I am curious about how this accent is developed

I: Because it sounds so different?

P: So different yeah

I: Yeah, have you heard any other accents since you have been in the UK? Have you been to anywhere else or?

P: I have Thailand accent and American accent before, and I also heard some accent from Europe

I: Ok, yeah

P: Like, what’s the city? Holland?

I: Yeah

P: Some accents, from Europe. And I heard one accent from Mexico

I: Yeah ok

P: That’s so difficult to understand

I: Right, ok

P: I think American accent is much easier for me

I: Right, so out of all those different accents you’ve heard, would you say Liverpool’s the hardest, or are other ones harder or easier? What do you think?

P: I would say Liverpool is the most difficult one

I: Right, ok, yeah. And did you say American was the easiest?

P: Yeah, American is the easiest. Probably because I grew up in environment that, we are taught in American accent English

I: That's what you're used to hearing English being spoken in?

P: Yeah, yeah

I: Yeah

Interview Transcript 3

Participant number: 3

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, I'll just unshare my screen so we can go back to seeing each other. There we go. So what did you think of that?

P: I think it's about the friendship of people, with each other.

I: Ok, so did you think was quite an easy recording to understand or were the voices a little bit difficult?

P: I can't understand every word but I can understand the general meaning

I: You can get the general gist of what is being said?

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

P: I think the one, the intonation and the pronunciation is much easier to understand

I: Ok, so compared to the first one it was easier to understand, yeah?

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: I think this one is the most easy one

I: Ok, the most easy one?

P: Yeah, the words are simple and the pronunciation are intelligible.

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: I think this is easy too

I: Yeah ok

P: Maybe because after I listen to so many I my listening is better than the first one

I: Yeah, so you sort of tuned into to the listening a little bit yeah. Ok

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, what did you think of that one?

P: The intonation is different, the accent.

I: Ok, yeah. Did that make it easier or harder do you think?

P: I little bit hard than the one before

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, what did you think of that one?

P: It's more easy to understand. But I have one question, what is drawing room?

I: A drawing room? It's the same as like a lounge or a sitting room, so the family room that you sit in in an evening but it's quite an old fashioned term, so I wouldn't call my front room or lounge my drawing room it's quite an old fashioned term

P: Ok

I: So it's the room you have your sofa in and your tv in, that kind of room

P: Ok

I: So don't worry about not being able to understand that, that is quite an old fashioned term.

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, what did you think of that one?

P: I think this one is a bit hard

I: Bit harder this one, yeah? Anything in particular that you think makes it harder?

P: The voices are a little bit thick

I: Thick, yeah?

P: I can't understand, I can't hear clearly I think

I: Ok

P: And I'm familiar with that too

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: It's easy to understand

I: Yeah

P: I don't know the word 'posh'

I: Great, ok so at the end if you could send me back those eight documents that'd be great. Other than that, I just wanted to know if you had anecdotes about your experiences when you first arrived in Liverpool? How did you experience understanding Liverpool English?

P: Actually, I haven't quite experienced the Scouse here 'cause the teacher and the people in reception, their accent are not strong. Maybe the people from reception their accent a little bit strong but I can understand the general meaning of early word.

I: So have you experienced Scouse anywhere else do you think? Any stronger accents anywhere else?

P: Maybe sometimes I go out for travel in the, that place, I forget the name, that place you can buy cheaper things. The, a place, I want to say where I go out and I don't know some place, I don't know how to go there, like a park, station bus station, I can't find any so I ask someone and those that people is Scouse I think. I can only understand if she use figure, gesture, body language

I: Yeah

P: I couldn't really understand

I: So do you notice a difference between that kind of English out and about in the city to the English that you hear on campus at university?

P: The English I hear on campus are more standard, it's just what we learnt in China.

I: Ok, so it's sounds the same?

P: But Scouse is different. Just like in China there is some local accent, like that I think

I: Yeah

P: Even, even Chinese people couldn't understand all the accents in China.

I: Yeah, it's the same thing isn't it, it's just two different languages. We all have different varieties within it, yeah. Are there any other English accents that have experienced since you've been in the UK? From any other parts of the UK?

P: I think London accent

I: Yeah, and did you find that easier or harder to understand?

P: Easier than Scouse

I: Easier than Scouse, ok.

P: Scouse is the most difficult one

I: Ok, so out of all the one's you've experienced you'd say Scouse is the hardest to understand?

P: Yeah

I: Yeah. Ok, great, so I'll just stop the recording.

Interview Transcript 4

Participant number: 4

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so that's the first recording. What did you think of that, of those voices that you heard?

P: I think that's very easy to understand

I: Ok

P: Yes, I think that just the tongue and the accents it's a little bit interesting and you can very easy to understand because I used to go to a barber shop and I barbers have the same accent and I can have no difficulty to chat with them

I: Ok, ok, that's great.

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of those voices?

P: I think the pronunciation is easy to understand but there is one problem, I think my instant memory can not let me to remember what they have said. When I hear the words can know the words, but after that I think I cannot clearly remember what they have said

I: Ok, so it's more about the, you can understand the words individually but you can't remember afterwards what has been said?

P: Yeah

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: I think there are some words I cannot clearly understand, some adjectives I think. What is, I don't understand the adjective, and some pronunciation is not familiar, such as an necessary, I think their 'necessarily' or anything else is very difficult from the received or formed pronunciation I think

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, what did you think of that recording?

P: I think it's very similar to the third one. Think just some pronunciation or the ellipses between two words and the link between words, it's not as very formal, or not very usual so I can not understand some the link between two words. Yes

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, what did you think of those voices then?

P: It's only a bit difficult to understand, I think the speed and the stop of the words, is confusing I think

Yeah, ok

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, what did you think of those voices?

P: I think this one is easy to understand, and very clear their pronunciation.

I: Ok, great

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, what did you think of those voices?

P: It's a little bit challenging to understand

I: Yeah

P: Because I think their pronunciation you can feel that some vowels and some of the later they didn't speak out they just lay in the mouth and the roll and run were like that

I: Yeah, so it was harder to, it was less clear

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok, what did you think of those voices?

P: It is easy to understand

I: Yeah

P: Yes, and their speed and their ways of speaking is very comfortable

I: Ok, very comfortable, ok great.

Ok, so let me know when you're ready and we'll have a quick chat about a couple of other things.

P: I'm all ready

I: Ok great, so thank you for doing that, I know it's a little bit sort of repetitive of a process, but it'll give me some really interesting data so that's great. I just wondered if you had any other anecdotes or experiences that you've had of Liverpool English since you've been in the UK? Have you found it generally easy or generally difficult would you say?

P: Yes, I always go to a barber shop where the barbers are Scouse

I: Yeah

P: I always talk to them and you know when you have to cut your hair you must tell them how the style

I: Yeah

P: Or the length. And you have to answer your question and then give you some advice. So they always speak Scouse we will talk and they will use the word sometimes the accent I think is not important, I think it's sometimes very funny and interesting, and the pronunciations is about the vowels and the pronunciation of some later, if they are different from the received English it is sometimes very difficult to understand. But I can understand most of these words and the conversation can keep go on.

I: Ok, that's good, that's great. When you first came to Liverpool did you have any difficulties compared to now? Have you noticed a difference?

P: I think there is no difficulty

I: Ok

P: Yeah

I: That's great

P: I enjoy here very much

I: Ok, and have you been to anywhere else in the UK?

P: I've been to London, I've been Manchester, I've been to York.

I: Ok, and did you notice any difference in peoples' speech there? Anything easier or harder?

P: I think the Manchester accent is the most hard, the hardest. Because I go from Manchester airport I want to know where I can take the tram and I ask a walker and I can not understand any of his words.

I: Ok

P: And they always figure out and point them to me, and also I can understand, and I go back to the airport and ask the reception and the customer advice and they tell me the, but it's also very confusing. I think London, I think I call it Cockney, I think it's very interesting because I used to love music, I know that Amy Winehouse sings in Cockney, so I can understand his speech and his talking so I can also easy to understand London

I: Ok, great. Do you notice a difference between the people that you speak to on campus and the people that you speak to in maybe the city centre or around the university?

P: Yeah, I think campus they try to revise their accent and try to do as much as possible to the normal the received English, especially in the NHS. I think the reception sometimes they have some accent but in the, the doctor, or you call it prescriber?

I: Yeah, or the pharmacist? Yeah

P: They will speak as slow as possible and use clear pronunciation to us

I: Ok, so you notice them sort of making a change to make things clearer for you?

P: Yeah

I: Yeah, ok great. So that's pretty much it for the interview, so what I'll do now is stop the recording then we can continue to have a chat if there's anything you want to ask about. So I'll just stop the recording

Interview Transcript 5

Participant number: 5

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of the voices you heard there?

P: Yeah, it is definitely Liverpool

I: Ok, and what did you think of the speakers? How easier were they to understand for example?

P: Yes, it is difficult, I didn't understand it all. They speak too fast I think but I think the accent is the most difficult thing for me

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what about that recording? Was that easier or harder to understand do you think?

P: That one was ok, it was a lot easier to understand than the first one

I: Ok

P: But they are a bit fast I think, but they are more clear I think

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

P: That was better than the first one. I think I like the voice more, I think I can understand because it is not as strong Liverpool

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

P: That one is easy. They speak clearly I think

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, what did you think of that one?

P: That was ok, I don't think I could catch all the words, but I think it is ok

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

P: That one is very easy I think, but I think maybe they have an accent too. But not a Liverpool one, but a different one, I think they have some kind of accent but I can understand them

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think the voice you heard there?

P: I did not understand [laughs]

I: Ok, so what you do think stopped you from understanding?

P: The accent, the strong Liverpool, I can tell it is Liverpool but I can't hear the words clearly

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: That one is ok, that is very clear for me

I: Ok, thank you. That's great. So now I'd like just like to ask you a few questions about your experiences with understanding English since you arrived Liverpool? Have you had any difficulties? Was it easier or harder than other accents you heard?

P: Yes, I think when I first came to Liverpool it was harder to understand people when I spoke to them. I think it was because of the accent, the Scouse.

I: Right

P: It was hard especially in the supermarkets. Yes, it hard for me, they'd ask me things very quickly and they didn't sound like English for me. I couldn't understand them

I: Right, ok. Do you still have these difficulties?

P: Yeah, not always. Sometimes. I know what I am doing now, like I know when they ask about if I want a receipt or a bag, I can guess what they are asking, I know what to say to them. Or I can use the checkout machines, they are easier for me

I: Ok. Were there any other times you had these problems understanding?

P: Yes. Sometimes when I ask for where to find things, if I ask for directions to things it is always difficult for me at first, but when they repeat sometimes it is easier I think

I: Ok, did asking people to repeat help you to understand them?

P: Yes, sometimes. But not always. Sometime I think they say things differently to help me, like they say single words, ilke 'left' 'right' instead of the full sentences. I think they break it down for me to help me understand

I: Right

P: But not everyone does this

I: Ah ok. Do you still need people to repeat things to help you to understand now?

P: No. Yes some people, some with accents. I don't need to with you, or with my teachers. Your English is very good

I: Thank you. Ok, what accents do you still need to do this with do you think?

P: With Scouse, yes definitely

I: Any other accents?

P: I don't think so. I think they speak clear in the south of England, that is the English I prefer. That is how my teachers sound I think

I: Ok. Have you heard any other accents?

P: Yes, I have heard American. I think I can understand that from watching TV shows because I watched them in China and here. They sound the English I had in China in the books we used

I: Do you think watching TV has helped you with understanding accents?

P: Yes, I think maybe, but not all. I think they helped me with my English but not with Scouse, with here in Liverpool. I haven't heard it before and it sounds very different. I wish I had heard it before I came here

I: Ok, thanks. So, overall do you find it easier to understand Liverpool English, or Scouse, now?

P: Yeah. Yes but a little is still hard for me. I have a friend who is from Liverpool is a strong Scouse accent. It is difficult sometimes when they speak fast, I still find it hard and I have to concentrate for this, but I can understand the most of what they say

I: Ok, great. That's great to hear.

Interview Transcript 6

Participant number: 6

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, great. So what did you think of the speakers you heard there? Were they easy to understand for example?

P: No, I don't think it was

I: Ok, what did you think wasn't easy to understand?

P: It is Scouse I think

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: So what did you think of that?

P: They were better. I think they were clearer

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of the voices you heard there?

P: Ok

I: So would you say it was easier or harder than the last recording?

P: I think it was the same, yes, it was ok

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

P: They speak very clear. I think they are very easy to understand

I: What do you think makes them easy to understand?

P: They use clear pronunciation, and they are slower. I can hear almost all the words they say

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: That was a bit harder I think. The accent again I think

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think those voices?

P: Yeah, it's more easy

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: It is a challenge [laughs]

I: What do you think makes it challenging?

P: I just can't make out the words, it is too thick, the accent is just too thick

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

P: That is better, they are very clear. I can understand their pronunciation clearly

I: Ok, great. Thank you for that. So, now I'd just like to have chat about your experiences of spoken English since you've been here in the UK.

P: Ok, yeah

I: So when you first arrived in the UK, did you notice any differences in the accents you heard?

P: Yes, yes, definitely. They sounded very different than I expected when I arrived here, everyone spoke to me very fast. It was very difficult for me to understand them when I was asking for information for things. It was a shock to me

I: Right

P: Liverpool is very difficult

I: Ok, why do you Liverpool is particularly difficult?

P: Scouse, it is called Scouse?

I: Yes, you can call the Liverpool accent Scouse

P: Yes Scouse, is difficult. I think it is because of the accent, they do not speak the same as how I thought they would. I don't think they sound the same as the English that I studied in China. They sound different that what I thought

I: Right. In what way do you think they sound different?

P: Well it is not what we would hear. I have heard standard accents, like London

I: Ok, so the Liverpool accent, or Scouse, is not familiar to you?

P: No

I: Ok, do you think this unfamiliarity has caused you any problems?

P: Erm, maybe yes. I think it is just hard to understand. I think Liverpool accent is just hard to understand.

I: Ok. So are there any particular experiences you've had because of this since you have been in the UK?

P: When I could not understand people?

I: Yes

P: Yes, of course, yes. I have it a lot at the shops. And yes when on the phone, I had to call a customer service. That was very difficult. I couldn't make sense of what they were saying.

I: Ok. Was that someone with a Liverpool accent?

P: Oh no, I don't know, I just couldn't get what they were saying to me

I: Ok, that's ok. Have you had any other experiences of accents you'd like to share?

P: No, I don't think so

I: Ok, thank you. Ok, so I'll just stop the recording and then you can me any questions you have

P: Ok, yeah

Interview Transcript 7

Participant number: 7

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so can you tell me what you think of that recording? Do you think it was easy or hard to understand?

P: It was ok, I could understand it

I: Ok

P: Yes, I think it was Liverpool.

I: Ok, do you think that made it easier or harder to understand?

P: I don't think it made any difference to me. I could understand

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of the voices you heard there?

P: Yes, that was ok too. I think they spoke faster though, I think that always makes it harder for us to understand

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: I think that was ok

I: Ok, do you think it was easier or harder than the last recording we listened to?

P: I think it was better, there were a few words I think I didn't know, but I think I understand more this time

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

P: It is ok, it is clear pronunciation. It very standard English

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of this one?

P: This one was harder to understand than the last one. I think it sounded like what I hear at the library when I get a coffee, yes, I think it sounds like that

I: Ok, what do you think made it harder to understand?

P: I think it is the accent, but I can understand it. I only miss some of the words

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what about those voices?

P: This is very easy, this is very clear

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

P: I think this one is harder, it is very hard

I: Ok, what do you think made it harder to understand?

P: I just didn't understand, it was very hard to understand. It didn't sound like words I know

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: And that's the last one. What did you think of those voices?

P: That one was a lot better I think. It was a lot clearer to me what they were saying. Ok, that's great. Thank you for doing that. So if we could just have a bit of a chat about experiences with English since you arrived in the UK.

I: Yeah, ok

I: So, what accents have you experienced since being in the UK?

P: Well I have heard lots of Scouse in Liverpool. And I have been to Birmingham. And I think, I have heard some others maybe from people at, from students I think

I: Ok, yeah. And what did you think of these accents?

P: I think they are ok. I think they speak too fast for me sometimes. I think that is a problem for me, especially at first

I: Right

P: I couldn't catch what they were saying. They spoke so fast to me and I would just not know what they were saying to me.

I: Right

P: It was not the English I thought that I knew, it didn't sound like the English I learnt in China

I: Ok, and how did you cope with those difficulties?

P: I would ask them to say again or slow down. But now I don't. Now I know to use the machines at the supermarket, then it is all in the screen for me and I have no problems

I: Ok, so do you still have problems understanding the English you hear around Liverpool?

P: Well yes maybe. But I don't speak to many people with these voices. In classes it is easier for me

I: So with your tutors and classmates?

P: Yes, yes. I can understand them. They speak with standard English, the received English pronunciation

I: Do you think you avoid speaking to people with the accents you struggle with?

P: Erm, yes maybe. But I think because it is not polite. I have to ask them to repeat and again and again, and sometimes they frustrated with me. I think it is easier to use apps and online to order things for me. That works for me better

I: Ok

P: Yes, it is better. I still speak to people, when I get coffee and things, I just can make it quick

I: Ok, ok. So have you had other experiences with accents that you would like to tell me about?

P: I'm not sure

I: Ok, no problem. So, for example, when you first arrived in the UK was it easier or harder than you expected to understand the accents you heard?

P: Oh ok, yes. It was definitely harder, it was a shock to me I think. I don't know if that was the accents though, I think everyone, just all English speakers are very fast, because it is their language

I: Ok

P: It is a bit better now, sometimes.

I: What do you think has helped you with this?

P: I think it is just time I think. I think it is just hearing it a lot more

I: Ok, great, thank you

Interview Transcript 8

Participant number: 8

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: So, what did you think of the voices you heard there?

P: I don't know, I couldn't follow what they were saying very well

I: Ok, why do you think that was?

P: I don't know, it was just unclear. I think maybe they were speaking too fast with their accents

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one? Any easier or harder to understand than the first one?

P: It is clearer definitely, that is the English I can understand

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: So what did you think of that one?

P: It was just ok, but I think I missed some words

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so can you tell me about that one? What did you think?

P: Well, that is very clear, that is much better than the last one I think

I: Ok, why do you think that?

P: It is clearer. They use better pronunciation

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

P: I think was one was difficult again, it is the accent, I think they speak too fast

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, what do you think of the voices you heard there?

P: I think I missed some words

I: Ok, did you find it easy to understand otherwise?

P: Yes, yes, it was ok

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

P: I couldn't follow this one, this was very difficult

I: Ok, what do you think made it difficult

P: It didn't sound like correct pronunciation

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok, and finally, what did you think of that one?

P: That was better, but I lost some of the words. I don't understand, were they talking about rooms?

I: Yes, they were, about rooms in a home

P: Ok, ok, I think I understand what they were saying

I: That's great, thank you. So if we could now just have a chat about your experiences since you've been in the UK. So, when you first arrived did you have any difficulties understanding the English you heard?

P: Yes, ok. When I first arrived I arrived in London, so I didn't hear the accents like I hear in Liverpool at first. They sounded like Southern English, like the English I have heard, like like the English the Queen speaks?

I: Yes, sometimes called the Queen's English?

P: Yes, that's it. They had the Queen's English. I could understand most people I think. But I asked for directions from a woman at the station and she had to repeat for me, she was very helpful. She changed what she said so that I could understand her

I: Ok. And what about when you arrived in Liverpool?

P: That was different, very different [laughs]

I: Right, ok. How was it different?

P: The accent, how fast they speak, everything, it was really difficult. I remember when I first arrived I was trying to take a tour and the guide kept saying something to me, asking me something, but I could not understand. Even after they said it again and again for me. I felt so bad, my English was so bad.

I: Ok, so how did you understand them in the end?

P: Oh no, I didn't. They stopped asking and moved to the next thing. I felt my English was so bad, I think I have got better since then. I hope my English is better now

I: I think your English skills are great, don't worry.

P: Thank you, thank you

I: So, do you have any difficulties understand the English accents you hear now? Since you have been here for awhile?

P: Yes, I think I am better now. Like when I go to the restaurant I can understand what they are going to ask me. I don't have to ask them to repeat everything to me anymore, yes

I: Ok, great. What do you think has helped with understanding the accents you hear?

P: I think being around them has helped me because I have heard them more. I had never heard accents like Liverpool before. When I learnt English I would just hear my teacher or in my classes and they didn't sound like here.

I: Right. Ok, so what other accents have you heard since being in the UK? Have you been to anywhere else?

P: Well I started in London, so I have heard the Queen's English. But I have not been to anywhere else yet.

I: Ok, have you heard any other accents since you have been at university here? In Liverpool?

P: Well, I, yes I think. Do you mean people who are not from Liverpool? Like my classmates?

I: Yes, maybe. Or any other voices that you have heard that you don't think were a Liverpool accent?

P: Yes, my classmates definitely. We are mostly all from China, so we can all understand each other. There is one of my classmates who has a strong Liverpool accent and it is difficult for me to understand him. If I am in a group with him I don't understand everything, I try but I don't understand every word

I: Ok, what do you do to help you understand?

P: I'm not sure, I don't think I do anything. We are in a group so I can understand from my other classmates

I: Ok

P: That is bad I know [laughs]

I: No, not at all, no problem. Have you had any other experiences with accents you are unfamiliar with?

P: No, I don't think so, I don't think I can remember any to tell you now.

I: Ok, no problem, that's great thank you for your time

Interview Transcript 9

Participant number: 9

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, ok, so what did you think of that first recording?

P: I think they are talking about friends and how they talk to each other

I: Ok, great. And how easy to understand do you think it was?

P: I think it was difficult, I couldn't catch all the words they were saying

I: And why do you think that is?

P: It was too fast I think. And the pronunciation

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

P: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

I: Much easier, I prefer this one

P: Ok, so was it easier than the first recording we listened to?

I: Yes

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

P: It was ok, I think it was still better than the first one

I: Ok, what about compared to the one we listened to before this one? The second recording?

P: It wasn't as easy as that one

I: Why do you think that?

P: They spoke faster I think

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of the, of the voices you heard there?

P: I think was easy. Like the second one

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

P: The words are harder I think, I don't think they say all the words, they don't finish them I don't think

I: Ok, and that makes it harder to understand?

P: Yes, definitely

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

P: It was ok, I think it is clearer than the last one

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: I could not understand this one I don't think. I will be happy to see the transcript [laughs]

I: Ok, what do you think made this challenging for you?

P: It is the pronunciation; I have never heard pronunciation like this

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Final one. What did you think of the voices you heard there?

P: It's easy. It is very easy compared to the last one. Definitely easy

I: Ok, so I'll just stop sharing my screen, ok, there we go, ok great. Thank you for that. So if we could just have a quick chat about your experiences of accents or of understanding spoken English since you've been UK. So, let's start with did you have any difficulties understanding when you arrived in Liverpool?

P: Yes, I think they have a very strong accent here. Everyone I spoke to when I first came here is really hard to understand

I: Right

P: Like when I am in the shop, I think they are trying to do things quickly and I can't understand them

I: Ok, so when that happens does anything help you to understand?

P: Sometimes I ask them to repeat, but when I first came here that didn't even help me. I couldn't understand the accent.

I: Ok, so do you think it was the speakers' accents that stopped you from understanding?

P: Yes, yes I think so. But also how fast they speak to me. They speak too fast and I can't catch up with what they are saying

I: Right

P: I think this is because this is Liverpool, I think Liverpool is known for this

I: For their accent?

P: Yes but the fast talking too. This is why we all have some difficulties, my classmates, we have talked about it and we have all had these problems. It is not just me, I am glad it's not just me [laughs]

I: Yes, ok. So do you still have these difficulties now?

P: A little bit, I think I am better now. I don't always have to ask people to repeat things for me.

I: Ok, that's great. Have you experienced any other accents?

P: Well I have been to London, but I don't think I heard any there. I think they sounded the same

I: Did you hear any other accents in London?

P: No, well, I don't think so. I think everyone spoke a standard accent, a standard English.

I: Ok. So have you experienced any other accents in the UK?

P: No I don't think so. I been to other places but I didn't need to speak to people, I was with my friends

I: Ok, thank you

Interview Transcript 10

Participant number: 10

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Can you tell me what you think of the voices you heard in that recording?

P: Yeah, I think it is a little bit difficult for me to understand. I think they talk fast and I can't catch up with what they say

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: That one was ok. I think they are more clear

I: Ok, why do you think that is?

P: They are more clear, they use better pronunciation

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: So what did you think of that one? Was that easier, or harder? The same?

P: I think it was similar, the same

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: I think that one was easier to understand.

I: Ok, what about compared to the other recordings we've listened to?

P: Yes, the easiest I think

I: Ok, is there anything that made it the easiest do you think?

P: They are very clear with no accents. They speak slower too and I think that is very helpful

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

P: I think I find this one a bit more difficult

I: Than the last one?

P: Yes

I: Why do you think that is?

P: Because there is a Liverpool accent

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

P: This one is ok, yes

I: Ok, is it any easier or harder than the other recordings?

P: I think it is the same. Except for the ones with the Liverpool accents

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that one?

P: Yes, difficult

I: Ok, what do you think makes it difficult for you?

P: The pronunciation is very unclear. It is not like any English that I have heard before

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

P: This is better, this is a lot easier than the last one

I: Why do you think that is?

P: It is clear, they don't have accents like the last one

I: Great, thank you. Ok, so let's start with your first experiences in the UK. Did you notice the difference in the accents you heard? Did you have any difficulties?

P: Yes I think people sounded different at first

I: How did you think they sounded different?

P: They didn't sound like the English I had heard in China. I could hear they didn't speak standard English, is it Received English?

I: Yes, yes. So you could hear the difference?

P: Yes, but it was ok. I just asked people to say again and then I would catch the words they were saying.

I: Ok, good. So have you had any problems since you arrived in Liverpool understanding speakers?

P: Well I know the accent is strong in Liverpool. It is Scouse.

I: Ok, do you find it difficult to understand? Or is it ok?

P: I think it is more difficult than normal English, like the English you speak, but I think I am used to it now.

I: Ok, great. How long do you think it took you to be able to get used to it?

P: Not too long. I think it was different at first because I had never heard it before, but I heard in shop and at university in the café

I: So can you tell me how long you think it took you to understand the accents you have encountered?

P: It still took me quite a few months to know them all, but they are ok now.

I: Ok, great. Have you encountered any accent other than a Liverpool accent?

P: Yes, I have heard Indian and American and, I think that is all

I: And where did you encounter these accents?

P: I have heard Indian in the taxi, a lot of the drivers I think are Indian

I: Can you understand that accent ok?

P: Yes, I sometimes have to ask them to repeat. But it is ok, they are just short conversations, where am I going and how much and things

I: Ok, great. And what about American accents?

P: I have a friend from America. Her accent is ok. I have watched American TV so I had heard these accents before.

I: Ok, thank you

Interview Transcript 11

Participant number: 11

Interviewer = I

Participant = P

Listening Experience: 1 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so let's start with talking about that recording. What did you think of the voices you heard?

P: I think they were interesting

I: Ok, great. What about understanding? How easier or hard to understand do you think the voices were?

P: It was ok I think, but I think I missed quite a few words

I: Why do think that is?

P: I'm not sure. They were speaking fast to each other, I don't know if they were words I don't know or if I just missed them when I was listening. Maybe I can see on the transcript

Listening Experience: 2 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what did you think of that recording?

P: I think that was a little bit better maybe. I still can't understand all the words, I think I need to listen to them again to do that

Listening Experience: 3 (LIV ENG)

I: Ok, so did you think of the voice there?

P: It is Scouse I think

I: Great, yes. Did you think it was easy or hard to understand?

P: I think it was ok, I am used to it now

I: Do you think it was easier or harder than the last recording?

P: I think it was maybe the same, it was just a bit different. I think I got a bit confused in some places but I could keep going

Listening Experience: 4 (SSB)

P: I think this is a lot easier for me

I: Why do you think that is?

P: There is no accent I think. And I think they are speaking slower, it is easier to keep going without missing words when I was listening to this one

Listening Experience: 5 (LIV ENG)

I: So, what did you think of that one?

P: Yes, that is more difficult. I didn't get the end, I'm not sure what she was talking about I'm sorry

I: It's ok. What do you think made it harder for you to understand?

P: I'm not sure, maybe just the words

I: So maybe their choice of words? The vocabulary they use?

P: Yes, the vocabulary. Maybe the vocabulary

Listening Experience: 6 (SSB)

I: Ok, so what about that one? What do you think of that one?

P: Yes, I think that one is better again

I: Better than the last one? As in easier to understand?

P: Yes, that's it. It is clear pronunciation, it is easier.

Listening Experience: 7 (LIV ENG)

P: This one is very difficult

I: Why do you think that is?

P: I don't know, but I can not tell you what they were saying. Were they talking about jobs?

I: Yes, jobs, that's great

P: Oh good, yes

I: What do you think made this one more difficult for you?

P: Their English, I can't hear the words clearly

Listening Experience: 8 (SSB)

I: Ok, we're on our final one. So what did you think of the voices on that recording?

P: They were easy, they were clear.

I: That's great, thank you very much for sending those over. So know, let's just have a chat about your experiences with accents.

P: Yes, ok

I: So, have you experienced any difficulties since arriving in the UK?

P: Yes, of course with Liverpool [laughs] they speak so fast

I: Ok, has anything helped you understand?

P: Yes, I ask people to say again, but if their accent is too strong I just nod

I: Right, ok, so you still struggle with the Liverpool accent sometimes?

P: Yes, I think I do. I have got better but it is difficult. But my classmates and tutors are ok so it is ok here

I: Ok, so you can understand your tutors easily?

P: Yes, they speak slower and they don't have accents. I think they are maybe from different places, I don't know

I: Right

P: But they say things differently too. I think change their words to help us sometimes, when we look confused [laughs]

I: Right

P: Everyone doesn't do this. I remember when I first arrived I asked for directions at Lime Street for Mount Pleasant and I didn't understand at all. He got frustrated I think, he just pointed for me in the end

I: Ok, so do you still have difficulties understanding some people?

P: Yes, of course. I was talking to one of my friends, we don't like going to some shops if they are busy, it is too confusing. Especially when you can do it online, it is easier for me

I: Ok, ok. So do you avoid some places because of accents? Or the voices you expect to hear?

P: Well maybe yes, but not always. I used to shop online anyway, I like it, it is just calmer for me

I: Ok, yes, I can understand that

P: Yes, it is more relaxing I think

I: Have you heard any other accents since you've been in the UK? Other than the Liverpool accent?

P: Yes, I have visited York so I heard the accent their in the restaurants and shops

I: Ok, and how did you find the accents you heard? Easier to understand? Or harder than Liverpool?

P: I don't know, maybe some were the same. I think sometimes it is that people speak to fast for us. But then when they say again I think they slow down. So I was ok in York

I: Right

P: Yes, I think their accent is ok when they slow down

I: Ok, good. Have you had any other experiences with accents since being in the UK?

P: No, I think I am used to them now. It has taken a while but I think they are ok for me now

I: Ok, thank you for your time. I'll just stop the recording and you can ask me any questions you may have

P: Ok, thank you