



## One Step Forward to the World: Developing EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension of Various Accents of English Through Learning Transfer\*

Joonwon Lee (Gyeongsang National University)



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Lee, Joonwon  
Assistant Professor, Department  
of English Education  
Gyeongsang National University  
501, Jinju-daero, Jinju-si  
Gyeongsangnam-do, Korea  
Tel: 055)772-2193  
Email: [joonwon@gnu.ac.kr](mailto:joonwon@gnu.ac.kr)

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### ABSTRACT

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English is used among speakers from different language backgrounds, and accent plays an important role in listening comprehension. To help Korean EFL learners improve their ability to understand various English accents, this study investigated effects of a treatment using CSAT listening materials recorded with different accents. The results showed that the experimental group not only improved their comprehension of the accents included in the treatment but also transferred this improvement to unfamiliar accents and authentic listening situations, showing both near and far learning transfer. In addition, questionnaire responses showed that participants recognized the effectiveness of the treatment and had positive attitudes toward listening to various English accents in school. Based on these findings, this study suggests including various English accents in the CSAT listening section to apply the principles of Teaching English as an international language (TEIL), to promote positive washback effects, and to support the development of listening skills needed for international communication.

### KEYWORDS

L2 listening, accents, World Englishes, EIL, learning transfer, Korean EFL learners

## 1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, English is a language which makes it possible for people using different languages to communicate with each other. In fact, English is no longer a means of communication between English L1 speakers, rather, English is increasingly used in diverse communication situations. For example, English communication frequently occurs between both native and non-native speakers, as well as among non-native speakers themselves. In other words, English is now being used as an international language.

Among the four language skills, listening is the most frequently used (Field 2009, Morely 2001), and plays a central role even in international communication done with English. In addition, listening is considered as the most challenging language skill to develop (Graham 2005).

Therefore, it could be said that English listening situations of the current era are getting diverse following English communication situations becoming diverse. As a result, English learners of the current era are required to develop listening ability for diverse situations not to fall behind in international communications. In this situation, accent can be an important factor in English listening because English communication happens with English speakers from various L1 backgrounds. As previous studies showed that accent is the factor that affects listening comprehension considerably (Bloomfield et al. 2010, Harding 2008), therefore, it is essential for English users of this era to be prepared to understand various English accents spoken not only by English L1 speakers but also by English L2 speakers. In light of this, the present study investigated how to prepare Korean EFL learners for English listening comprehension in international communication focusing on various English accents.

## 2. Research Background

### 2.1 World Englishes and English as an International Language

English is currently used as an international language (EIL) which enables communication “between speakers coming from different cultural and national backgrounds” (Sharifian 2009, p. 3). Consequently, English communication often involves English L2 speakers. Furthermore, considering that English L2 speakers already outnumbered English L1 speakers (Jenkins 2006), English communication occurs even without the participation of English L1 speakers involved. That is, English is no longer a language of English L1 speakers who use so-called standard English. English L2 users also exploit the language for different purposes and English varieties that they use often diverge from the languages of English L1 users.

The situation regarding different English varieties used is well reflected in Kachru (1985)'s three concentric circles model of World Englishes. He grouped varieties of English in the world into 3 categories: the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The inner circle includes countries where English is a primary language dominated by the mother-tongue varieties (e.g., the U.S. and the U.K.). The outer circle includes countries where English plays an official or institutional role widely because of their colonial history (e.g., Philippines and Singapore). Finally, the expanding circle includes countries where English is used as a foreign language, however, does not have an official or institutional role (Kirkpatrick 2014) (e.g., Korea and Taiwan). With the three concentric circles model, it is perceived that English speakers from the outer and the expanding circle countries have their own legitimate English varieties with processes of nativization, systematic changes in formal features of language such as pronunciation and grammar (Kachru 1985). Therefore, English has evolved into “a heterogeneous language with multiple norms and grammars” (Canagarajah 2006, p. 232) and speakers of English as a second or foreign

language should not be overlooked. In other words, mutual accommodation among English users is essential in EIL context regardless of their linguistic backgrounds or English varieties.

However, in terms of English education, Quirk (1990) asserted that English education should be done with standard English previously, emphasizing 'intercomprehensibility'. However, considering that English interactions among L2 speakers constitute the majority of global communication (McKay 2012), 'intercomprehensibility' must extend beyond comprehension of standard English. In addition, the focus in the EIL situations is on whether English users can communicate with each other regardless of which English varieties they use. In other words, English varieties that English speakers use became less important and users of the language in EIL contexts should be equipped with abilities to deal with different English varieties to communicate with other English users (Matsuda 2012b).

To this end, English education should incorporate the principles of teaching English as an international language (TEIL), extending beyond a sole emphasis on standard English. In EIL situations, proficient English users should have the "ability to interact with others in a broad range of contexts and situations, which often requires switching across varieties and dialects, lexicons, styles, and discourse strategies" (Lowenberg 2012, p. 97). That is, accommodating TEIL, English education should be a process of "preparing English learners to become competent users of English in international contexts" (Matsuda 2012a, p. 7). This pedagogical shift is particularly important in the Asian context, where most countries fall within the outer or the expanding circles countries and English accents spoken by Asian English users are different from the ones of the speakers from inner circle countries. In response, Asian researchers suggested ways to accommodate TEIL such as including different varieties of English in teaching materials (Chen 2011, Hu 2017, Matsuda 2003), providing teacher training with EIL perspectives (Shim 2015) and including various English varieties in assessment (Lee 2020), etc.

## **2.2 Listening Comprehension in Language Learning**

As Morley (2001) mentioned that listening takes place more than any other language skills, listening is the most frequently used language skill. Yet, despite its centrality, listening was historically undervalued and even neglected in L2 learning (Brown 1987), partly due to the perception that listening can be developed without instruction. In recent years, however, the importance of teaching listening has increasingly been recognized. Recent studies have emphasized that explicit and systematic listening instruction is essential for developing learners' listening proficiency (Emerick 2019). In other words, effective L2 listening instruction is necessary to cultivate L2 learners' listening ability to understand spoken language for communicative purposes.

### **2.2.1 Accents affecting listening comprehension**

With volatile spoken input (Buck 2001), listening comprehension is a transient and ephemeral phenomenon happening in real-time. As a result, listeners usually have little control over the input they receive (Osada 2004, Underwood 1989) and they should comprehend input immediately, often without opportunities for clarification and repetition. This nature of input contributes to the difficulty of listening comprehension, particularly when compounded by features such as fast speech rate (Choi 2010) and background noises (Chen and Ou 2021, Fujita 2022, Peng and Wang 2019).

In today's EIL contexts, where English is used by speakers with diverse L1 backgrounds, encountering a wide range of accents has become inevitable. Given this reality, accent should be considered a key factor in listening comprehension and not overlooked. In fact, previous studies showed that accent affects listening comprehension

both perceptually and in terms of actual performance (Bloomfield et al. 2010, Chang et al. 2013). For instance, Harding (2008) found that L2 listeners perceived different English accents as a barrier to comprehension although their actual listening performance was not influenced significantly. On the other hand, Flowerdew (1994) reported that unfamiliar accents caused non-native English users' difficulties in comprehending listening input. Therefore, the influence of accents on listening comprehension, especially of accent familiarity (Amru et al. 2024, Yaw 2022), has been investigated widely in L2 learning fields and L2 assessment is a field that investigated how accents affect listening comprehension.

In L2 assessment, shared-L1 advantage, which means that a test taker who shares L1 with speakers of listening input might be advantaged and it might lead the test to be biased (Major et al. 2002), has been investigated. For example, Shin et al. (2021) found through a different item functioning analysis that shared-L1 advantage exists, however, it is not influential enough to make the test biased. In addition, it was shown that shared-L1 is not consistently beneficial (Kang et al. 2019) and even shown a case of shared-L1 making listeners distracted (Harding 2008). In contrast, Major et al. (2002) found some cases of English L2 listeners getting advantaged when listening to English speakers with the same L1. As the examples show, empirical findings show mixed results in that listening to their L1-accented English can make listeners either advantaged or disadvantaged. Despite the mixed results of the previous studies, it is clear that accents influence listeners' comprehension regardless of whether the influence is positive or negative. Thus, accents should be considered as an important factor in L2 listening comprehension.

### 2.2.2 Accents in listening comprehension in Korean English education

Although accent is considered as a factor affecting listening comprehension, the Korean English education system have shown strong preferences for inner circle accents of English, particularly American accents. Since its beginning, English education in Korea has been influenced heavily by inner circle accents of English (Lee 2020). This preference is institutionalized through policies such as the E-2 visa, which permits English teaching positions for nationals only from the U.S., the U.K., Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Tanghe 2014). Along with the visa requirement, Lee (2024) reported that more than 60% of EPIK (English Program in Korea) teachers who were teaching in 2024 were from the U.S. and the U.K. As a result, Korean EFL stakeholders tend to consider inner circle English varieties as a target of English learning and to express negative opinions on English varieties other than inner circle ones (Breaux and Brown 2011, Kim 2018, Kim and Kim 2018, Shim 2015). Furthermore, even among inner circle accents, American accents are the most preferred ones (Jung 2005, Kang 2017). For example, Kim (2014) reported Korean EFL learners' negative opinions on British accents included in a nationwide listening test and Chang (2005) found that no parents want English teachers from Australia and New Zealand for their children.

In contrast, despite the strong and prevalent preferences for inner circle English varieties, some Korean EFL stakeholders seems to recognize the need for learning different English varieties. Previous research showed that Korean EFL learners recognize the increasing diversity of English communication situations and the importance of the ability to comprehend different English varieties in international communication (Byun 2016, Song 2011, Yoon 2007). Ahn (2015) showed that, having positive images of English L2 speakers, students responded that there is no such 'standard English' since English is used as an international language. Also, some English teachers recognized the need for dealing with various accents and expressed their willingness to teach different English varieties in their class to help their students become more proficient English users (Ahn 2014, Park 2017). In line with this, pre-service English teachers similarly expressed their willingness to teach and assess listening using

various English accents, despite having had little exposure to such varieties in school as a student (Lee 2023b).

In addition to examining Korean EFL stakeholders' perceptions of English varieties, previous studies have explored the pedagogical impact of exposure to diverse accents in Korean English education. First, Ahn (2015) showed that Korean high school EFL learners have difficulties understanding Singaporean and Indian accents of English, attributing these difficulties to students' unfamiliarity with the accents caused by rare chances to listen to those accents. Next, Hong (2012) and You (2015) investigated whether having students listen to various accents of English can help them develop their listening comprehension of various accents. Hong (2012) found that listening to various English accents with dictation was not effective enough for Korean EFL learners to develop their listening comprehension of various accents. On the other hand, You (2015) found that listening to various English accents followed by filling in blanks activity seemed helpful for Korea EFL learners to develop their listening comprehension. However, the improvement found in the two experimental groups were not significant, compared to the improvement found in the control group who listened to American accents. All in all, the effectiveness of having Korean EFL learners listen to various accents of English remains unclear and further research on the topic is required to support Korean EFL learners.

### **2.3 Learning Transfer**

A central goal of education is to provide learners with chances to create foundations of knowledge and skills that can be applied to novel situations. When prior learning influences learning or performance in a new situation, this phenomenon is referred to as learning transfer (James 2018b) and it plays a vital role in motivating language learning and teaching (Larsen-Freeman 2013). Thus the importance of learning transfer should not be underrepresented.

Among different taxonomies to describe learning transfer, a taxonomy of near/far transfer has been widely accepted (Larsen-Freeman 2013). Near transfer refers to the application of knowledge across contexts that are closely related. For example, a learner applying knowledge acquired from TOEFL preparation materials while taking the actual TOEFL exam demonstrates near transfer, as the practice materials and test items share similar characteristics. In contrast, far transfer occurs when knowledge is applied across significantly different contexts. An example would be a student using the "divide and conquer" strategy learned in a computer science course to solve issues while gardening because the contexts are cognitively and functionally distant. Building on this concept, Barnett and Ceci (2002) proposed a multi-dimensional taxonomy to assess the degree of transfer distance more precisely by including six dimensions: knowledge domain, physical context, temporal context, functional context, social context, and modality. These dimensions help classify whether a transfer is near or far with greater specificity.

Since learning transfer has been an important topic in language learning (James 2018a), previous studies showed both near and far transfer in relation to listening comprehension. First, both near and far transfer observed in relation to L2 listening comprehension in general (Herron and Seay 1991, Rose and Oh 2020), listening strategies (Thompson and Rubin 1996, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari 2007) and bottom-up listening skills (Hamada 2011, Matthews and Cheng 2015). On the other hand, far learning transfer in relation to L2 listening has been reported from other domains of L2 abilities to L2 listening, such as from pronunciation (Han 1996), linguistic abilities like vocabulary, grammar and sentence processing (Oh and Lee 2014) and reading fluency (Wolf et al. 2019) to L2 listening. Therefore, learning transfer is a significant component of L2 listening development and should be actively considered in instructional design to enhance learners' ability to apply listening skills flexibly and effectively across a variety of communicative contexts.

### 3. Research Method

This study addresses the need for pedagogical approaches that promote listening comprehension of diverse English accents in Korean EFL contexts, particularly with evidence of learning transfer. To investigate this, the following research questions were posed.

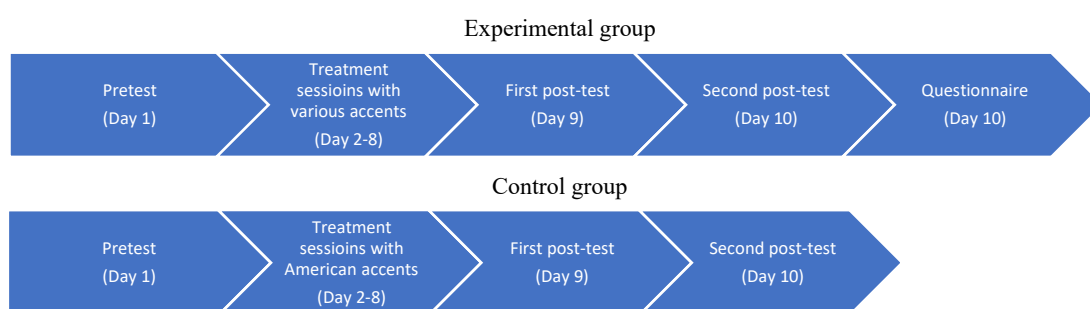
#### 3.1 Research Question & Design

Building on the previous discussion, this study aimed to investigate how to help Korean EFL learners to understand different English accents for future listening situations with the research question<sup>1</sup>.

RQ 1. Does exposing Korean EFL learners to different English accents in listening materials enhance listening comprehension of those accents and other accents?

RQ 2. If so, does the development in listening comprehension transfer to listening to real-life listening materials?

To address these research questions, this study was conducted as an experimental study with a pretest, treatment sessions and two different post-tests. Figure 1 below illustrates the general design of the study. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group prior to the pretest. After the pretest, each group had 7 treatment sessions. After the treatment sessions, participants took two post-tests. The first post-test assessed comprehension of the English accents used during the treatment as well as additional unfamiliar accents. The second post-test evaluated comprehension of the treatment accents with real-life listening materials, allowing for an assessment of learning transfer. Following the post-tests, participants in the experimental group completed a questionnaire regarding their treatment experience and opinion on listening to various accents of English. Including all the processes, the experiment was conducted in 10 class sessions.



**Figure 1. Research Design of this Study.**

#### 3.2 Participants

Since College Scholastic Ability Test (henceforth CSAT), a national standardized university entrance exam in Korea, was supposed to be used as materials, 71 high school 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students (seniors), who are familiar with

<sup>1</sup> In this study, understanding different accents means comprehensibility, the degree to which one is able to ascertain a meaning from another's word or utterance, instead of intelligibility and interpretability (Smith and Nelson 2019).

CSAT, were recruited from four classes in high school X located in Seoul, Korea. They were randomly divided into the experimental group and the control group at the class level. However, several participants were excluded from the analysis due to missing one or more stages of the experiment. As a result, the final sample consisted of 66 students, 34 in the experimental group and 32 in the control group respectively. Importantly, all the participants reported that they did not engage in any additional listening practice outside of regular class hours because they think the reading comprehension part of the CSAT is more important and difficult.

### 3.3 Treatment

Each treatment session lasted approximately 15 minutes. In each session, participants first solved three or four CSAT-type listening comprehension questions. After checking their answers, they listened to the same materials again while reading the corresponding scripts, which reflects the process of reading while listening. Since reading while listening is known to improve students' listening comprehension in terms of auditory discrimination skills and word recognition (Chang 2011, Vandergrift 2007), implementing reading while listening seemed helpful for both the experimental and control group. The key difference in treatment was that the experimental group listened to listening materials recorded with various accents of English and the control group listened to original CSAT materials recorded exclusively with American accents.

### 3.4 Materials

CSAT English includes 17 listening comprehension questions in the format of multiple-choice with 5 options. In this study, listening materials of the previously administered CSATs were used for the pretest, treatment and the first post-test with some considerations. First, CSAT is considered as one of the important exams in the Korean education system, therefore, it is one of the main targets of English class in school (Jung 2006). Second, due to its high stakes, CSAT has strong washback effects on classroom practices (Park and Chang 2016). For example, Park (2017) showed that teachers tend to refrain from incorporating British accents of English in their class, as CSAT includes American accents exclusively. Finally, CSAT is considered as a highly reliable test. According to Song (2013), substantial investments in its development have ensured its reliability. As such, it can be considered a valid instrument for measuring learners' consistent listening comprehension ability (Bachman and Palmer 1996).

#### 3.4.1 Selection of CSATs to be used

Among previously administered CSATs, the 2007 and 2009 exams were selected for the pretest and the first post-test, respectively, while the 2014 CSAT was used for the treatment sessions. The selection of tests for the pretest and post-test was based on considerations of speech rate and overall test difficulty. Regarding the speech rate, it was found through the previous study that CSATs for 2007 and 2009 had average speech rates of 135.60 WPM and 136.90 WPM respectively (Lee 2021), suggesting that the two tests were comparable in terms of speech rates. In terms of the difficulty, although detailed data about CSAT results was unavailable, CSATs for 2007 and 2009 were found to have similar difficulties with each other through an inferential way to estimate the difficulty based on the test type (Lee 2021). In contrast, CSAT for 2014 included 22 listening comprehension items, unlike other typical CSATs including 17 listening questions. Therefore, this extended format made it suitable for use in treatment sessions, allowing for a longer exposure and practice compared to the other CSAT versions.

### 3.4.2 Selection of English accents to be included

Since instructional varieties should be selected with consideration of the local context (Matsuda and Friderich 2012), the English accents to be included in the experiment was decided with consideration of the Korean situation. Although Korea is an EFL country, the country has a significant number of foreign visitors from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, it is likely that Korean EFL learners will have opportunities to communicate with English speakers visiting Korea, making visitors' nationality a relevant criterion for accent selection. To determine which accents to include, data on international visitors to Korea from the three years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic (2017–2019) were obtained from the Korea Tourism Knowledge & Information System (<https://know.tour.go.kr>). The data were sorted by nationality in descending order, and then analyzed according to Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles of English. Based on the number of visitors, two countries were selected from each circle, resulting in six English accents to be used in the experimental treatment. In this process, visitors from the U.S. were excluded from this selection because it was supposed to be used in the control group's treatment materials.

In addition, three additional accents, one from each concentric circle, were selected to be included in the first post-test. The first post-test was designed to check the learning transfer of the improved listening comprehension to a listening comprehension of untrained accents if participants' listening comprehension of the six accents selected improved. These three accents were chosen using the same procedure described above<sup>2</sup>. Table 1 below presents the English accents selected to be included in the experiment.

**Table 1. The Number of Visitors to Korea from the 9 Countries during 2017 to 2019 by Nationality and Concentric Circle Category**

Nationality	Number of visitors to Korea	Concentric circle	Included in
China	12,506,784	Expanding circle	Pretest, treatment, post-tests
Japan	8,377,953	Expanding circle	Pretest, treatment, post-tests
Hong Kong	2,003,099	Outer circle	Pretest, treatment, post-tests
Philippines	784,407	Outer circle	Pretest, treatment, post-tests
Australia	429,578	Inner circle	Pretest, treatment, post-tests
Canada	426,215	Inner circle	Pretest, treatment, post-tests
Thailand	140,9374	Expanding circle	First post-test
Singapore	640,381	Outer circle	First post-test
U.K.	340,235	Inner circle	First post-test

### 3.4.3 Process of making listening materials in the pretest, treatment and the first post-test

When recording the listening materials, the proportion of each English accent among the nine selected countries was determined based on the number of visitors to Korea. This proportion guided the number of words assigned to each speaker. For instance, in the listening materials for the pretest and the treatment recorded with the 6 experimental treatment accents, the Chinese English speaker, who represents the country with the highest number of visitors, was assigned to read the greatest number of words of the scripts. In contrast, the Canadian English speaker was assigned to the fewest words. A similar approach was applied to the first post-test, which included materials recorded with nine English accents. Again, the Chinese English speaker read the most words, while the

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Taiwanese accents of English should have been the additional accents from the expanding circle. However, as Taiwanese visitors have L1 of Mandarin Chinese as Chinese visitors do, Taiwanese English accents did not seem appropriate as an additional accent. Instead, Thai accents were selected as an additional accent from expanding circle.



British English speaker read the fewest. At the level of the three concentric circles, speakers from expanding circle countries were consistently assigned the greatest proportion of the script, while speakers from inner circle countries read the least. This distribution reflects the relative presence of speakers from different linguistic backgrounds in Korea, as indicated by tourism data. The allocation of accents and word counts is summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Number of Words Each Accent Read and Their Concentric Circle in the Listening Materials**

Accents	Number of words read			Concentric circle
	Pretest	Treatment	First post-test	
Chinese	416	749	396	Expanding circle
Japanese	370	582	253	Expanding circle
Thai (additional)	Not included	Not included	225	Expanding circle
Hong Kong	284	463	190	Outer circle
Filipino	229	316	156	Outer circle
Singaporean (additional)	Not included	Not included	203	Outer circle
Australian	198	298	145	Inner circle
Canadian	149	233	126	Inner circle
British (additional)	Not included	Not included	197	Inner circle
Total	1646	2641	1891	

To record listening materials, English speakers from the 9 countries were recruited. except for the Hong Kong speaker who was residing in Korea to learn Korean language, all the speakers recruited were fluent English speakers whose primary language was English at the time of recruitment.

#### 3.4.4 Listening materials for the second post-test

To examine whether the treatment of listening to various English accents with CSAT listening materials can help students to develop their listening comprehension of those accents in authentic listening situations, an additional post-test was administered. This test consisted of 8 questions based on 6 authentic listening materials that were not originally created for testing purposes. Among 6 listening materials, two were dialogues featuring Filipino and Japanese English accents and each was accompanied by two comprehension questions. The remaining four were monologues spoken in Chinese, Hong Kong, Australian, and Canadian English accents, each followed by a single comprehension question. These materials exhibited linguistic features commonly found in real-world spoken English, such as fast speech rates, simplification, colloquial expressions, and incomplete or ungrammatical utterances. Therefore, the materials were considered to represent authentic listening conditions. The format of the questions in this post-test was modeled after the CSAT to maintain consistency in question types and the number of answer choices with the purpose of ensuring participant familiarity. To evaluate the test's validity, in-service high school English teachers and the author of this study who has experience of teaching Korean high school students reviewed the test and confirmed its similarity to the CSAT in format and difficulty.

### 3.5 Analysis

This study analyzed quantitative test performances data by using different types of *t*-tests depending on situation. For the efficiency of analysis, all the questions were regarded as a 1-point-question. To analyze data from the questionnaire, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and then the frequencies of answers were calculated. All the statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 27.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Pretest Analysis

Participants had been assigned to classes by school administration without consideration of their English proficiency and were then assigned to the experimental group or the control group randomly. Therefore, the pretest was administered to assess their listening comprehension ability prior to the treatment

**Table 3. Independent Samples *t*-test Results of Comparing Means in the Pretest**

	Experimental group (n = 34)		Control group (n = 32)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Pretest	6.88	3.16	6.50	2.48	-.545	.588

Note 1. The full scores are 17.

Table 3 presents the results of the independent *t*-test for comparing the mean scores of the groups. Since the two separate groups took the same test, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. According to the result, the difference of 0.38 between the pretest scores of the experimental group ( $M = 6.88$ ,  $SD = 3.16$ ) and the control group ( $M = 6.50$ ,  $SD = 2.48$ ) was not statistically significant with  $t = -.545$ ,  $p = .588$ . In other words, in the pretest, there was no significant difference in listening comprehension ability on various accents of English between the groups. Therefore, it would be possible to show the effectiveness of the treatment on developing listening comprehension of the various accents in the treatment, in case of performance differences in the post-tests. That is, if there is a difference in post-test results between the groups, it would be probably because of the treatment.

### 4.2 First post-test

#### 4.2.1 Total scores on the first post-test for the experimental and control groups

Analyzing the first post-test results, analyses on comparing mean scores within groups were conducted first to check whether the treatment helped participants to improve their listening comprehension ability.

**Table 4. Paired Samples *t*-test results of Performances**

	Pretest		1 <sup>st</sup> post-test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Experimental group (n = 34)	6.88	3.16	9.32	2.38	-5.318	.000
Control group (n = 32)	6.50	2.48	7.41	3.63	-1.478	.149

Note 1. The full scores are 17.

First, test performances of the experimental group were analyzed. To compare test scores from the same group gathered at different times, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted. As shown in Table 4, it was found that the difference of 2.44 between the mean scores in the first post-test ( $M = 9.32$ ,  $SD = 2.38$ ) and in the pretest ( $M = 6.88$ ,  $SD = 3.16$ ) was statistically significant with  $t = -5.318$ ,  $p = .000$ . In contrast, the control group showed a mean difference of 0.91 between the post-test ( $M = 7.41$ ,  $SD = 3.63$ ) and the pretest ( $M = 6.50$ ,  $SD = 2.47$ ), which was not statistically significant with  $t = -1.478$ ,  $p = .149$ .

In conclusion, while both groups performed better in the first post-test than in the pretest, only the experimental

group showed statistically significant improvement, on the other hand, the control group did not. In other words, listening to various accents significantly contribute to the development of listening comprehension of the experimental treatment accents, however, listening to American accents did not.

Following the within-group comparisons, mean scores on the first post-test were also compared between the two groups.

**Table 5. Independent Samples *t*-test Results of Comparing Means in the First Post-test**

	Experimental group (n = 34)		Control group (n = 32)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1 <sup>st</sup> post-test	9.32	2.38	7.41	3.63	-2.480	.016

Note 1. The full scores are 17.

According to Table 5, the difference of 1.91 found between the first post-test scores of the experimental group ( $M = 9.32$ ,  $SD = 2.38$ ) and the control group ( $M = 7.41$ ,  $SD = 3.63$ ) was statistically significant with  $t = -2.480$ ,  $p = .016$ . In other words, the experimental group performed significantly better in the test than the control group, which also shows that the treatment of listening to various accents of English has a significant effect.

#### 4.2.2 Category scores on the first post-test for the experimental and control groups

One of the important aspects of the research question is whether the treatment could influence on developing listening comprehension of other accents that were not included in the treatment. Therefore, with the three additional accents (Thai, Singaporean, and British) included, the first post-test included two types of questions; questions recorded only with the 6 experimental treatment accents used in the treatment (8 questions) and questions recorded with the 3 additional accents (9 questions). To more clearly evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment, participants' performances were analyzed separately for each question type, allowing for a distinction between comprehension of trained and untrained accents.

**Table 6. Paired Samples *t*-test Results of two groups' Performance on Questions Recorded with the Experimental Treatment Accents Only**

	Pretest		Questions recorded with the experimental accents only		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Experimental group (n = 34)	40.5	18.59	54	17.06	-4.225	.000
Control group (n = 32)	38.2	14.57	42.6	24.97	-1.121	.271

Note 1. Scores analyzed were percentage scores instead of raw scores.

First, each group's performance on questions recorded only with the experimental accents was compared with their own pretest performances. Since all items in the pretest were recorded with the experimental accents, this analysis was intended to determine whether or not listening comprehension of the experimental treatment accents of each group was improved. In this analysis, since the full scores of the pretest and the questions recorded only with the experimental treatment accents in the first pretest were different, percentages of their scores in the full scores each were compared instead of raw scores. In Table 6, the paired samples *t*-test results revealed that difference between the experimental group's performances in the pretest ( $M = 40.5$ ,  $SD = 18.59$ ) and in the

questions recorded with the experimental treatment accents only ( $M = 54$ ,  $SD = 17.06$ ) was 13.5 and the difference found was statistically significant with  $t = -4.225$   $p = .000$ . On the other hand, difference of 4.4 between the control groups' performances in the pretest ( $M = 38.2$ ,  $SD = 14.57$ ) and in the questions recorded with the experimental treatment accents only ( $M = 42.6$ ,  $SD = 24.97$ ) was not significant with  $t = -1.121$   $p = .271$ . These results suggest that listening to the experimental accents had significantly positive effects on listening comprehension of the experimental treatment accents, whereas listening to American accents did not.

In addition to the within-group comparisons, between-group differences across all three types of post-test questions were also examined.

**Table 7. Independent Samples *t*-test Results of Comparing Scores Depending on Question Type**

	Experimental group (n = 34)		Control group (n = 32)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Questions recorded with the experimental treatment accents only	54	17.06	42.6	24.97	-2.165	.035
Questions including the additional accents	5.00	1.60	4.00	2.31	-2.032	.047
Questions recorded the additional accents only	1.29	0.84	0.75	0.84	-2.633	.011

Note 1. The full scores for the questions including the additional accents are 9.

Note 2. The full scores for the questions including the additional accents only are 3.

Table 7 shows results of the independent sample *t*-test. First, the difference of 11.4 in the questions recorded with the experimental treatment accents only between the experimental group ( $M = 54$ ,  $SD = 17.06$ ) and the control group ( $M = 42.6$ ,  $SD = 24.97$ ) was statistically significant with  $t = -2.165$ ,  $p = .035$ . That is, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in listening comprehension of questions recorded only with the experimental treatment accents.

Second, the groups were compared on questions involving the three additional accents. The difference of 1.00 found between the mean scores of the experimental group ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) and the control group ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 2.31$ ) in this type of questions was also significant with  $t = -2.032$   $p = .047$ . In other words, the experimental group performed significantly better than the experimental group in questions including the additional accents.

Finally, questions including the additional accents should be looked carefully because this type of question includes questions recorded with the additional accents only (monologue questions) and questions recorded both with the additional accents and the experimental accents (dialogue questions). In other words, it might be possible for the experimental group to get higher scores than the control group in questions including the additional accents because of the experimental treatment accents included in the dialogue questions. Therefore, a separate analysis of the monologue questions recorded solely with the additional accents was required. In this analysis, the difference of 0.54 found between the experimental group ( $M = 1.29$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) and the control group ( $M = 0.75$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) was significant with  $t = -2.633$  and  $p = .011$ . It means that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group even in comprehending English accents that were not included in their treatment.

Until now, it has been shown that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the first post-test after the treatment. While both groups showed improvements in the first post-test, only the experimental group's improvement was statistically significant. In other words, the treatment of listening to various accents of English with CSAT listening materials positively influenced on developing listening comprehension of

those accents. Furthermore, more detailed analyses on the first post-test showed that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in all question types including questions recorded only with the additional accents. It means that the treatment for the experimental group was effective in developing listening comprehension of untrained additional accents, however, the treatment for the control group was not.

### 4.3 Second Post-test

Through the previous analyses, the precondition of the second research question was fulfilled with the experimental group's significantly better performances than the control group in comprehending the experimental treatment accents and the additional accents. Based on this, the second post-test performances were analyzed to investigate whether the listening comprehension ability developed through the treatment could be transferred to comprehending real-life listening materials or not.

**Table 8. Independent Samples *t*-test Results of Comparing the Second Post-test Scores**

	Experimental group (n = 34)		Control group (n = 32)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
2 <sup>nd</sup> post-test	3.76	1.50	2.78	1.54	-2.629	.011

To check the difference between the groups, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. According to Table 8, the difference of 0.98 between the experimental group ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) and the control group ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) was statistically significant with  $t = -2.629$ ,  $p = .011$ . Considering that there was no significant difference between the groups in the pretest, the result suggests that the listening ability developed through listening to the experimental accents with CSAT listening materials was transferred to a novel situation, listening to authentic materials.

### 4.4 Questionnaire Analysis

In addition to the test score analyses, the questionnaire responses were analyzed to explore how participants perceived the effectiveness of the treatment and how they think about listening to various accents. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the questionnaire was .725, indicating that the responses provided were sufficiently consistent and reliable for analysis.

**Table 9. Responses to the Questionnaire**

Question	Definitely yes (%)	Maybe yes (%)	Not sure (%)	Maybe no (%)	Definitely no (%)	Total (%)
1	10 (29.4%)	19 (55.9%)	3 (8.8%)	2 (5.9%)	0 (0%)	34 (100%)
2	5 (14.7%)	20 (58.8%)	7 (20.6%)	2 (5.9%)	0 (0%)	34 (100%)
3	8 (23.5%)	16 (47.1%)	10 (29.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34 (100%)
4	10 (29.4%)	15 (44.1%)	8 (23.5%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	34 (100%)
5	16 (47.1%)	15 (44.1%)	2 (5.9%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	34 (100%)
6	12 (35.3%)	14 (41.2%)	7 (20.6%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	34 (100%)

Note. In the question column,

1 = "To prepare for the post-test 1 (CSAT-type), do you think listening to various accents of English during training was more helpful than listening to American accents only (as you usually do in school)?" ;

2 = "In the post-test 1, there were some English accents included that you did not listen to while practicing. Did the listening training with the various accents help you to understand the new accents in the post-test 1?" ;

3 = “To prepare for the post-test 2 (with real-life listening materials), do you think listening to various accents of English during training was more helpful than listening to American accents only (as you usually do in school)?”;

4 = “Do you think listening to various accents of English during training was more helpful to improve your overall listening comprehension than listening to American accents only (as you usually do in school)?”;

5 = “Do you think being exposed to various accents of English is important to improve your English listening ability (not for a test)?”;

6 = “Do you think that school English class should have students listen to various accents of English to improve your English listening ability (required in international communication)?”

According to Table 9, 29 participants (85.3%) of the respondents answered positively to question #1. In other words, most of the participants thought that the treatment helped them to prepare for the post-test, which corresponds with the results showing their significantly better performance than the control group in the first post-test. For question #2, 25 respondents (73.5%) answered positively, which shows that the participants' positive perception on the treatment matches their actual performance in the questions recorded with additional accents. For question #3, 24 participants responded that treatment was more helpful than listening only to American accents in preparing for the test with real-life listening materials (70.6%), which corresponds with the result of the second post-test analysis. For question #4, 25 participants (73.5%) answered that listening to various accents was more helpful than listening to American accents only. It shows participants' opinion that the treatment was helpful to develop their overall listening comprehension. Next, in question #5, 31 participants (91.2%) responded that listening to various English accents is important to improve their listening comprehension ability. Finally, in question #6, 26 participants (76.5%) answered that school English classes should provide students with chances to listen to various English accents. All in all, participants who received the treatment tend to perceive that the treatment was helpful for developing their listening comprehension of various accents in many ways and they tend to think listening to various English accents is important and it should be done in school.

## 5. Discussion

This study investigated the effects of listening to various accents of English using CSAT listening materials to prepare Korean EFL learners for EIL listening situations. The results of this study confirmed that exposure to various English accents significantly improved Korean EFL learners' listening comprehension. The experimental group not only outperformed the control group in comprehending the treatment accents, but also demonstrated superior performance in tasks involving unfamiliar accents and authentic listening materials. These findings provide strong evidence for both near and far transfer of listening comprehension and it is a result that previous studies had struggled to establish. Building on these findings, the following discussion explores their theoretical and pedagogical implications.

To address existing gaps in the literature, this study adopted several key innovations. First, unlike earlier studies, it included English accents from all three of Kachru's (1985) concentric circles. As English is now used globally, Korean EFL learners need to understand a wide range of accents across these circles. Second, this study employed a reading while listening approach, which has been shown to support learners' comprehension of oral input (Rozak et al. 2019, Wang and Tragant 2020). Compared to earlier approaches such as dictation (Hong 2012) and filling in blanks (You 2015), this method offers a more effective way to develop listening skills. Importantly, the treatment led to measurable improvement in comprehension and clear evidence of transfer to novel listening situations. Building on these results, the following section discusses how learning transfer was observed in participants' performance and perceptions, focusing on both near and far transfer across different types of listening tasks.

### 5.1 Learning Transfer in Participants' Performances and Perception

In this study, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group even in listening situations different from the situation in which they practiced listening comprehension. This indicates the occurrence of learning transfer.

The first type of transfer observed was near transfer in terms of accent. Again, the experimental group showed a significant improvement between the pretest and the questions recorded only with the experimental treatment accents in the first post-test. In other words, the experimental group successfully transferred their listening comprehension of those accents developed through the treatment to questions recorded with the experimental treatment accents only in the post-test. Given that the two listening situations are similar in terms of accent, a task feature related to modality, this improvement qualifies as a near transfer in terms of modality (Barnett and Ceci 2002).

In addition to the near transfer, two cases of far transfer were also found, which seems more meaningful than the near transfer. The first far transfer happened in terms of accent. In the first post-test, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group not only in questions recorded with the experimental treatment accents and the additional accents, but also in questions recorded exclusively with the additional accents. This indicates that the experimental group experienced a far transfer in that listening comprehension of various accents improved through treatment was transferred even to listening to untrained additional accents. Since the additional accents were not included in the treatment, the listening situation during the treatment and listening to the additional accents are different from each other. Therefore, this finding can be considered a far transfer to a novel listening situation.

The second case of far transfer was observed in terms of task-type, another aspect of modality. In the second post-test, which used authentic listening materials recorded with the experimental accents, the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group. This suggests that listening comprehension improved through the treatment transferred to a different type of listening task, authentic listening situations, which constitutes a case of far transfer. In fact, CSAT listening materials are often considered inauthentic because of characteristics such as slow speech rate, absence of natural language phenomena and background noises, etc. (Lee 2016). Therefore, the finding that participants who practiced listening comprehension of the experimental treatment accents with CSAT listening materials performed significantly better even in listening to authentic materials seems particularly meaningful. All in all, the two cases of far transfer seem meaningful in that Korean EFL learners will probably face various accents including the ones that they did not practice in authentic listening situations.

In addition to the objective evidence of learning transfer, the questionnaire results indicated that participants also perceived the positive effects of the treatment in facilitating transfer across different listening contexts. A large majority of respondents indicated that the treatment helped them prepare for the first post-test (85.3%), understand previously untrained accents (73.5%), and perform on the second post-test involving authentic listening materials (70.6%). These perceptions align with the objective test results and support the idea that exposure to diverse English accents during the treatment contributed not only to improved listening skills but also to learners' confidence and motivation to engage with different varieties of English (Boström and Bostedt 2020). This finding is meaningful in that participants perceived the usefulness of the treatment, which might lead them to continue to use similar strategies when preparing for listening to various accents of English (Wang et al. 2022).

## 5.2 Including Various Accents of English in CSAT

The results of this study suggest that listening to various English accents can effectively enhance Korean EFL learners' listening comprehension across different contexts, including unfamiliar and authentic situations. Despite this, English listening instruction in Korean schools has largely focused on American accents, mostly due to the CSAT, which has only included American-accented listening materials so far (Lee 2020). Because of its strong washback effects, the CSAT has led many teachers to avoid using other varieties of English in the classroom (Park 2017), narrowing down the scope of learning (Pan 2009, Whitehead 2014) and limiting students' exposure to the diverse English accents. To address this issue, including various English accents in the CSAT can be considered a meaningful step toward broadening the scope of English listening instruction.

While washback has often been viewed negatively, it also has the potential to create positive change when the test content supports broader learning goals. Prior studies have shown that changes in high-stakes tests can lead to instructional improvements (Cheng 1999, Hatipoğlu 2016). For example, the introduction of the TELC (Test of English Listening Comprehension) in Taiwan encouraged English teachers to start teaching listening in school (Chou 2017). In addition, there is growing support for integrating different accents into education. Some Korean teachers who had previously avoided British accents mentioned that they would include them if the CSAT reflected such diversity (Park 2017). Pre-service teachers also expressed willingness to teach listening using various English accents to help students prepare for international communication (Lee 2023b). Participants in this study also supported the idea of dealing with different English accents in school. These responses indicate that including diverse accents in the CSAT could lead to a positive washback effect, encouraging schools to adopt more inclusive listening instruction.

In addition to its impact on classroom practice, incorporating multiple accents into the CSAT could support learners' preparation for future learning (PFL) (Bransford and Schwartz 1999). PFL, a framework of learning transfer, emphasizes the learner's ability to adapt and grow, highlighting how individuals can modify aspects of themselves, such as their beliefs about prior knowledge and their awareness of future learning opportunities, in order to improve through reflection on past experiences and engagement in extended learning. Therefore, when learners are exposed to unfamiliar accents in a test setting, they may become more aware of the limits of their existing knowledge and recognize the need for new strategies. This type of experience encourages deeper learning and adaptability and will ultimately help learners build the capacity to deal with new listening situations in the future. In this way, the CSAT would not only assess listening comprehension but also promote long-term learning and transfer.

Of course, making changes in the high-stakes national university entrance exam is a complex process. It may raise concerns among students, parents, and teachers. Therefore, before such a reform is implemented, appropriate preparations in educational policy and teacher support should be made. Although some teachers already acknowledge the importance of teaching different English accents (Ahn 2014, Shim 2015), they may lack the training or confidence to do so. Therefore, teacher training programs with TEIL aspects should be prepared to provide opportunities for teachers to experience the multiplicity of current English (Bayyurt and Sifakis 2017) and to learn how to integrate various English accents effectively in the classroom (Kang 2017, Lee 2020).

## 6. Conclusion

With the purpose of preparing Korean EFL learners for listening comprehension required in EIL situation, this



study investigated the effects of listening to various accents of English using CSAT listening materials. The findings revealed that participants who listened to various English accents demonstrated significantly greater improvement in their listening comprehension than the participants who listened to American accents only. Furthermore, they showed enhanced comprehension even in listening situations different from the one in which they received the treatment, confirming both near and far transfer of listening comprehension developed through the treatment. Unlike previous studies that failed to demonstrate the effectiveness of listening to various accents, this study offers meaningful evidence in multiple aspects. With the growing importance of the ability to understand various English accents, English education in Korea should look for ways to foster Korean EFL learners' listening comprehension required in international communication. In this regard, the findings of this study offer a promising direction.

Naturally, this study has some limitations that should be handled. This study has a limitation in terms of the relatively small number of samples and a gender imbalance among of participants. Moreover, although it is important to investigate which specific aspects of the treatment facilitated development of listening comprehension of various accents, the study lacked qualitative data to address this issue. Therefore, future research should consider incorporating retrospective techniques for qualitative data such as interview and thinkaloud to yield more comprehensive insights (Yeldham 2016). Such approaches would help researchers and teachers understand the strategies learners use to comprehend diverse accents and guide the development of effective instructional techniques.

Despite these limitations, the study supports the proposal to incorporate various accents of English into CSAT listening comprehension section. Given the CSAT's strong washback effect on classroom instruction, this change would likely lead to increased exposure to diverse English accents in Korean secondary schools. This shift could establish a stronger foundation for learning transfer and contribute to the development of more proficient English listeners in EIL contexts. Furthermore, including various accents of English in university entrance exam is expected to be influential not only in Korea but also in other Asian countries which have university entrance exam with strong washback effects such as Japan and Taiwan (Lee 2023a). In this sense, it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of listening comprehension of various accents of English among Asian EFL learners and support their proficiency in global English usage.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Secondary