

I participated in the conference by giving an oral presentation titled *Investigating Chinese Learners' Perception of English Accent Similarity*. In this presentation, I introduced part of my PhD research at the University of Groningen, which examines how Chinese learners of English perceive similarities and differences among multiple English accents. The presentation focused on both the perceptual structure of accent similarity and the relationship between perceptual distance and acoustic distance.

The main motivation for this study is that accent similarity is important for research on speech perception, intelligibility, and English language learning. Previous studies have often relied on expert-based classifications of accents or have focused mainly on native listeners and American English dialects. My study instead asks how Chinese learners, as L2 listeners, perceive accent similarity across a wider range of English accents. More specifically, the study addressed two questions: first, how Chinese participants group ten English accents based on how similar or different they sound; and second, whether subjective perceptual distance is correlated with objective acoustic distance.

In the presentation, I explained the materials and method in detail. The study included ten accents: Australian English, New Zealand English, Irish English, Northern Irish English, Glasgow English, Manchester English, South African English, Indian English, Chinese-accented English, and Japanese-accented English. The speech samples came from the Speech Accent Archive, and all talkers read the same passage, "Please call Stella...". Participants completed an auditory free classification task in a browser-based drag-and-drop interface. They listened to the recordings and grouped the talkers according to perceived similarity. The participant group reported in the presentation consisted of 68 L1-Chinese listeners, most of whom were young adult students with substantial prior English learning experience.

I also presented how the classification data were analysed. First, I constructed a 20×20 speaker-level similarity matrix by counting how often each pair of talkers was placed in the same group across listeners. This matrix was then normalised, and the data were collapsed into a 10×10 accent-level similarity matrix. Perceptual distance was calculated as one minus the normalised similarity score. I then compared these perceptual distance matrices with acoustic distance matrices derived from LED-A. In this way, the presentation showed clearly how the study moved from listeners' classifications to quantitative analyses of accent relations.

The results showed several important patterns. First, the perceptual structure revealed meaningful clusters among accents. For example, the presentation identified an Australian–New Zealand cluster, a Celtic cluster, and an L2 cluster, as well as a broader native versus non-native split. These findings suggest that Chinese learners do not group accents randomly. Instead, they perceive structured relations among accents, although their classifications are not always identical to expert-based phonological classifications. Some of the observed clusters were nevertheless in line with previous dialectological descriptions.

Second, the results showed a small but significant association between perceptual distance and acoustic distance. At the accent level, the Mantel test showed a Pearson correlation of $r = 0.26$ ($p = .024$). At the speaker level, the correlation was $r = 0.19$ ($p = .002$). These results indicate that objective acoustic distance helps explain listeners' perceptual judgements, but only to a limited extent. In other words, acoustic information matters, but it does not fully determine how Chinese learners perceive accent similarity.

A further important part of the presentation concerned classification accuracy. For the Chinese listener group, the mean percent correct pairing score was 21.6%, the mean percent error pairing score was 16.1%, and the mean difference score was 5.56. These values suggest that Chinese listeners were able to use accent cues, but their perceptual resolution was relatively weak. At the same time, the results show that the listeners did not classify the accents randomly. Rather, they demonstrated a limited but meaningful ability to perceive accent relations across the ten varieties included in the stud.

Presenting this work at the conference was very valuable for my research development. It gave me the opportunity to share my ongoing PhD project with an international academic audience and to communicate both the theoretical and methodological contribution of the study. The conference presentation also helped me clarify how my work connects perceptual methods, acoustic analysis, and questions of English accent learning. More broadly, participating in the conference supported my professional development as an early-career researcher and helped me situate my project within current discussions on L2 speech perception and accent diversity.

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