



## Awareness of China English: Chinese Vocational and Technical College Students' Views

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### Abstract

The English language has become globally prevalent as an International Language (EIL), achieving legitimacy in outer-circle regions where localized varieties have developed and gaining significant status in expanding-circle areas like East Asia. In China, English has grown remarkably over the past thirty years. This study examined Chinese Business English major students' awareness of China English and their preferences for English varieties used in Chinese classrooms within the context of EIL. Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (QCA). Findings revealed that students generally prefer British or American English due to their early exposure through formal education, but increased global interactions are fostering greater acceptance of China English as a legitimate variety. This study contributes to the World Englishes framework, offering theoretical and pedagogical insights into English learning and teaching in China. The findings highlight the need for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges both global and local English varieties, enhancing the pedagogical framework to better reflect the evolving global landscape of English.

**Keywords:** China English, English as an international language (EIL), English language teaching (ELT), World Englishes

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## Introduction

Every language appears in various forms and with different characteristics. Once primarily associated with native speakers from countries like the UK and the USA, English has expanded worldwide, leading to its role as a language with global ownership, allowing any individual or nation to adopt and utilize it for diverse purposes (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Galloway & Rose, 2018). This expansion has led to the emergence of various terminologies, including English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WE), and more recently, Global Englishes (GE), which describe the multifaceted roles of English in global communication. Kachru's (1985) seminal model of "World Englishes" categorizes English into three concentric circles: the Inner Circle (Native English-speaking countries), the Outer Circle (Countries where English functions as a second language), and the Expanding Circle (Countries where English is a foreign language). As English has spread worldwide, it has undergone processes of indigenization, leading to the emergence of distinct varieties such as "China English" (CE), which reflects local linguistic and cultural adaptations.

This global proliferation of English has also had significant implications for English Language Teaching (ELT). In the Chinese context, English has traditionally been taught per native speaker norms, with local varieties, such as CE, often marginalized. However, the rise of World Englishes and the principles underlying ELF, which emphasize the adaptability and fluidity of English in cross-cultural communication, challenge the rigid adherence to native norms. Despite growing recognition of non-native varieties, CE continues to face resistance within educational settings. Research indicates that while university students in China are increasingly accepting of CE, they remain influenced by standard English norms, and there is ongoing debate regarding the extent to which CE can be recognized as a fully legitimate variety of English (Fang, 2017; Yang & Zhang, 2015). Given the rapid global spread of English, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift in ELT that embraces the linguistic diversity of English varieties, including CE, in response to the changing global linguistic landscape.

Moreover, Chen (2022) noted that Chinese learners of English, particularly Business English majors, use English more frequently with non-native speakers than with native speakers. Previous studies have primarily examined university students' awareness of different English varieties, the pedagogy of World Englishes, and the impact of these attitudes on identity construction and language learning experiences (Pan et al., 2021). The results showed Chinese students expressed a 'welcoming attitude' towards the notion of World Englishes and various English varieties, it appears necessary to modify the pedagogy model used in ELT and challenge the exclusive focus on ENL to make English-language learning more consistent with the learners' goals for global communication. However, this study explores insights from vocational and technical college students majoring in Business English, focusing on their

perceptions of China English and their preferred English varieties in Chinese English language classrooms.

## Literature Review

### *1. English in China and China English*

Since the 17th century, English has played a key role in international communication and business, becoming integral to Chinese society. During this time, China increasingly embraced foreign ideas, recognizing English as a tool for modernization and Westernization. Throughout this process, English has not only served as a communication tool but has also become part of language identity. For some English learners, proficiency in English is closely associated with modernization and internationalization, while for others, using English with distinct local characteristics reflects a commitment to maintaining national linguistic identity. In the 1960s and 1970s, during the Cultural Revolution, English was largely sidelined. However, in the past two decades, English has gained popularity in China due to reforms and greater global engagement. As China's global visibility grew, interest in its culture also increased, with some Chinese terms, such as "taichi," entering English dictionaries. Media outlets like *Beijing Review* and *China Daily* have adopted English expressions to explain Chinese concepts to a global audience. Terms like "barefoot doctor," "Little Red Book," and "paper tiger" are examples of Chinese cultural references incorporated into English, reflecting China's growing global influence (Wang, 2015).

Today in China, the English language is the most commonly studied foreign language. Meanwhile, China also has the largest English-learning population in the world (Wei & Su, 2015). Despite widespread English learning and usage among the population, it has never been adopted as a means of communication among native Chinese speakers but rather for interactions with foreigners. Throughout Chinese history, English, as a language introduced to Chinese culture, has never been formally integrated into institutions. Its primary role remains utilitarian or instrumental, serving economic and political purposes, or both. The English proficiency of students in China's vocational colleges often falls short of expectations, particularly in terms of oral communication and classroom performance. Wei and Su (2015) encourage English teachers and learners to combine the English language with their own local culture and use English to express their unique ideas and consciousness of their own culture. In terms of English variety in China, two terms have raised much debate and argumentation: one is "China English", and the other is "Chinglish" or "Chinese English". "Chinglish" has long been labeled "rigid, stubborn"; it is not considered a variety of English since it does not follow the convention of Standard English. The negative perception of "Chinglish" reflects the dominance of Standard English norms and the influence of linguistic imperialism. Native

English-speaking countries often determine the mainstream standards of English, while variations used by non-native speakers are more likely to be regarded as “errors” or “inferior” forms. However, as China’s global influence grows, the acceptance of China English has also increased. It is not merely a collection of linguistic mistakes but a distinct form of English expression shaped by Chinese cultural and linguistic features, gradually gaining international recognition. As the previous researchers defined: “Chinglish is not, in fact, an interlanguage, but a nonsensical, problematic form of English that is the result of poor translation, misspelling, and errors.” (Eaves, 2011). Chinglish is a linguistic deviation that is expected to diminish over time as English becomes more widespread and Chinese English users develop greater self-awareness in their language use. Often, Chinese English is the product of mistakes made by learners as their fluency level increases. It may use Chinese syntax or sentence structure, or at other times use incorrect but understandable grammatical patterns. These forms of interlanguage do not constitute a new variety in and of themselves but are usually still understandable to native speakers despite the errors. When using English, individual learners often translate to some extent from Chinese and may overlook fundamental English grammatical structures. Thus, Chinese English functions as an interlanguage that learners use while progressing toward fluency, whereas China English is an emerging global variety of English (Eaves, 2011).

On a theoretical level, China English is distinguished systematically from Chinese English, Chinglish, Pidgin English, etc. Chinese English refers to varieties of English used by Chinese learners (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002). Therefore, this article will use the term “China English” to conduct research.

## *2. Features of China English*

Kirkpatrick and Xu (2002) described China English as a variety rooted in standard English. It conveys Chinese culture and exhibits Chinese-specific lexical, syntactic, and discourse features without reflecting any first-language interference. Similarly, Liu (2008) defines China English as “an English variety used by Chinese people, with Normative English as its core. It displays Chinese characteristics, influenced by both the Chinese language and Chinese ways of thinking, and exhibits linguistic features at the levels of phonology, lexis, and syntax” (p. 30).

### *2.1 Phonological Features*

Each variety of English has its own characteristics in pronunciation. As long as these differences do not alter meaning, they are acceptable and reasonable at least at the phonological level, allowing people from different countries to communicate freely. In the past, tapes and teacher speeches were generally considered “standards”, but in fact, they were just excellent examples worthy of imitation, and were by no means a “framework” for English learners to

unconditionally confine themselves. Tapes and Chinese EFL teachers are far from meeting the needs of future cross-cultural communication. Different varieties of English have their supra-linguistic features, the main features of which are syllables, stress, tone, and intonation, which can naturally express the national identity of the speaker.

In terms of China English's phonological features, this article can be summarized into the following three points: replacement of similar sounds, addition of extra tail sounds, and changing the stressing of syllables.

First, speakers of China English often substitute /s/ where a Standard English speaker would use /θ/. This is because Mandarin has no sound equivalent to the English /θ/, an unvoiced dental fricative, so speakers choose the next closest linguistic component available to them, an unvoiced alveolar fricative, as a substitute. For instance, "Think" in Standard English is often pronounced as "Sink" in China English, and "Both" is often pronounced as "Bose". There are similar situations as well, as Eaves (2011) pointed out: "/ð/ to /z/ or /ð/ to /d/ similarly, the voiced dental fricative /ð/ changes to voiced alveolars, which are the closest phonemes available in Mandarin.". This is also a commonly heard pronunciation of China English: in standard English, "This" is pronounced as "Zis" or "Dis", and "Brother" is pronounced as "Brozer" or "Broder".

Secondly, because Mandarin is a monosyllabic, tonal language, there is a tendency for China English speakers to use a very staccato style of speaking, where an additional /ə/ is sometimes added to the end of a morpheme or lexical item to make it more readily pronounceable. Here are some examples illustrating how Mandarin's influence can lead China English speakers to adopt a staccato style of speaking and add an extra /ə/ sound: "Book" (Standard English) changed into "Bookə", "Cat" changed into "Catə".

Thirdly, the tonal nature of Mandarin results in China English often involves adding tones to English words where they do not exist or changing the stressing of syllables. A few examples are provided to illustrate how the tonal nature of Mandarin can affect the pronunciation of English words by China English speakers:

Standard English: "record" (*noun: RE-cord, verb: re-CORD*)

China English: "record" (*both noun and verb pronounced with varying tones, potentially confusing the intended meaning*)

Explanation: The speaker might add a rising or falling tone to syllables, changing the natural stress pattern of the word.

Standard English: “*banana*” (*ba-NA-na*)

China English: “*banana*” (*BA-na-na*)

Explanation: The first syllable might be stressed more heavily, or a tone might be applied to the first syllable, altering the natural stress pattern.

Standard English: “*important*” (*im-POR-tant*)

China English: “*important*” (*IM-por-TANT*)

Explanation: Equal stress or tones might be applied to all syllables, resulting in a more monotone or incorrectly stressed pronunciation.

## 2.2 Lexical Features

As Yang (2005) points out, “borrowing has long been recognized as an important part of the nativization that English has undergone” (p. 425). To accurately talk about borrowings, this study will use Romaine’s (2007) definitions, as follows:

Loan blend – one part of a word is borrowed and the other belongs to the original language. For example: “*Kara OK bar*”. “*Kala OK*” (卡拉 OK) is the Chinese transliteration of “karaoke,” and “bar” is borrowed from English. Together, they form “*Kara OK bar*,” meaning “karaoke bar.”

Loan shift – taking a word in the base language and extending its meaning so that it corresponds to that of a word in the other language. “*CP*” comes from the word “couple”, which means two, plus, or a pair of people in love. Chinese people like to call their favorite on-screen couples (in TV dramas or reality shows) “*CP*”. Similarly, the Internet buzzword “*emo*” is an abbreviation for “emotional”, the original meaning is exciting and easily moved. In the tone of sadness, all emotional instability can be “emo”.

Loan translation – rearranging words in the base language along a pattern provided by the other and thus creating a new meaning. The phrase *color wolf* is a direct loan translation from Mandarin “色狼”, roughly equivalent to “sex maniac”. Red envelope is another well-known word full of Chinese colors, although a speaker of other varieties of English would easily be able to visualize a red envelope in its literal sense, within the Chinese cultural context, the phrase refers to a special monetary gift, often given at Chinese New Year or to exchange favors. Distinctive examples of China English lexical items include such terms as *dragon boat*, *little red cap*, *Mid-Autumn festival*, *one country two systems special administrative region*, and so on.

Lexical innovations in China English mostly fall into one of these three categories, in short, China English lexical items are words that can be easily recognized as English; however, they generally express ideas or things specific to Chinese culture. Although these words and phrases are easily identifiable as English, English speakers outside of China often fail to understand their meaning. Therefore, lexical items in China English are deeply rooted in Chinese culture and context, making them less easily understood by English users unfamiliar with the Chinese setting (Eaves, 2011).

### 2.3 Syntactic (Sentence) Features

#### 2.3.1 Adopting Chinese Sentence Structure

In Chinese, it is very common to put the cause in the first clause and the effect in the second clause. For instance: this structure is adapted into China English, making the sentence *Because they are naughty, they are punished* an acceptable form in China English while the speakers of native English prefer to say *They are punished because they are naughty* (Liu, 2008).

We can find that this sentence follows the pattern of main clause + subordinate clause. Kirkpatrick and Xu (2002) state briefly that this phenomenon frequently happens when ‘because’ is used as a forward-pointing discourse marker at the start of a sentence. This might be confusing for native English speakers, who associate ‘because’ with the idea that important information has already been conveyed. However, China English speakers often place ‘because’ at the beginning of a sentence, so this structure is commonly transferred from Chinese to English.

#### 2.3.2 Piling Clauses Together without Using Conjunctions

At the syntactic level, Chinese sentence structures, often characterized by stacking clauses without conjunctions, can lead to weak coherence in narration (Fang, 2011). This is because, for Chinese speakers, the logical relationship between two sentences is sometimes self-evident and can be easily understood, leading to sentences that are not explicitly connected. For example, in China English, one might say, “*The weather is very cold; I wore many clothes,*” whereas in standard English, with a conjunction, it would be phrased as, “*The weather is very cold, so I wore many clothes.*”

#### 2.3.3 Extending Meanings Beyond the Literal Meaning

Without violating the norms of Inner-Circle Englishes that govern sound, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, China English can embrace words or phrases that use simple words and sentences to extend meanings beyond their literal interpretation. For example, the Chinese expression “*Draw water with a bamboo basket*” (竹篮打水一场空) means that all efforts will be in vain because water will leak out from an ordinary bamboo basket. Its English equivalent is “*Like*



*trying to catch the wind*,” which conveys the idea of attempting something impossible or futile, where success is unattainable. Another example is the phrase “*Paper cannot wrap up a fire*” (纸包不住火), which means that the truth will come to light sooner or later. Its English equivalent is “The truth will out,” meaning that no matter how much one tries to hide it, the truth will eventually be revealed. These sentence-level features of China English highlight how unique syntactic and lexical structures can express Chinese concepts in English, enriching the global language (Fang, 2011).

## 2.4 Discourse Features

At the level of discourse, the goal of China English is to facilitate clear communication between Chinese individuals and both native and non-native English speakers, all while preserving the unique characteristics of Chinese culture. Like all cultures, Chinese culture has its own set of customs and practices, including how to greet, apologize, express gratitude, and especially how to respond to compliments. In Chinese culture, greetings often involve inquiries about someone’s health or family before getting to business. In China English, you might see this reflected in phrases like: “Have you eaten yet?” (a common greeting in Chinese, reflecting the cultural importance of food and well-being). Chinese culture values modesty, so expressions of gratitude might be more understated. In China English, facing compliments from others, the Chinese may answer this way: “You look wonderful today.” “No, I’m not that pretty” instead of “Thank you for your compliment” (downplaying the favor received).

These cultural norms are neither superior nor inferior to those of English-speaking nations. Traditionally, English speakers in China have tended to abandon these norms in favor of Western behaviors. However, China English, as a form of English that has evolved within Chinese culture, should embody these cultural traits. This is a key rationale behind the promotion of China English. These features of China English all indicate that China English can be a useful and valuable stylistic device in English. Different languages possess distinct sentence structures that can produce the same aesthetic effect, as beauty is not an inherent quality but rather an outcome, with each language having its way of pursuing beauty.

## Relevant Studies

### 1. China English as a World Englishes Variety

Compared with the linguistic landscape and the popularity of English learning in China, the variety of English in China tends to be neglected. From a World Englishes (WE) perspective, it has been argued that China English (CE) is a developing variety of English, with features of phonology and morphology, syntax being codified (Xu et al., 2010). Besides, in the ELF



framework, the English used in China is viewed as more fluid with certain features from people's first languages (L1s) being recognized.

Nonetheless, nearly two decades after Kirkpatrick and Xu's (2002) remarks, there remains a gap in Chinese people's English proficiency. Wang (2015) looked into how university students and teachers view language learning methods. They discovered that many are hesitant to adopt CE as an educational approach. Because for many years, English education in China has taken "standard pronunciation" as a prerequisite for learning English. This uncertainty also raises questions about whether CE can be sustained and accepted by Chinese people in the future (Fang, 2017; Yang & Zhang, 2015). Furthermore, there is ongoing debate regarding the recognition of the various forms of English in China. CE might still be seen as a form of English used for performance rather than a fully established native variety (He & Li, 2009; Yang & Zhang, 2015). This parallels the situation observed in Hong Kong, where few local Chinese use English entirely for interethnic communication.

In China, English is adapted to better reflect local communication needs and cultural context. Some Chinese expressions, such as "long time no see," "kowtow," and "dim sum," have been incorporated into Inner-Circle English and included in dictionaries like the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Additionally, certain cultural concepts, like "spring transportation" (the traffic around Chinese New Year) and "fire cupping" (a traditional therapy), lack direct equivalents in other languages. As Chinese culture gains global prominence, an increasing number of linguists and educators are advocating for the localization of English, promoting China English as a means to enhance cross-cultural communication and reinforce cultural identity.

## *2. Awareness of WE and CE in ELT*

Studies across different countries highlight varying awareness toward incorporating WE into ELT. In Thailand, efforts to raise awareness of WE among university students have shown limited success, indicating the need for more comprehensive strategies to shift learners' awareness (Ambele, 2022). Meanwhile, in Australia, educators are increasingly aware of the WE issue, but challenges such as resource limitations and preferences for native norms hinder practical integration into teaching. These findings underscore the complexities and contextual variations in adopting WE in ELT.

This also prompts changes within the ELT field. Traditionally, English in China has been perceived as a foreign language, with teaching standards predominantly oriented towards native norms. Local variations of English in China have often been overlooked in language classrooms, resulting in students not considering their China English accents as integral parts

of their identities. In terms of phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, English varieties in the Expanding Circle tend to adhere more closely to established norms, whereas the concept of English as a Lingua Franca emphasizes the adaptability and fluidity of English in communication, thus challenging the notion of a rigid “standard”.

Within the broader context of over 400 million Chinese individuals learning English for various purposes, the study of Chinese learners’ awareness of China English is particularly pertinent (Wei & Su, 2015). Research has shown that students in vocational and technical colleges commonly face poor English foundational knowledge and lack confidence, with their learning motivation heavily influenced by external factors and insufficient intrinsic willingness to learn. Also, previous studies have indicated a mismatch between the English professional competencies of these students and employer expectations, as well as lower motivation and academic performance levels (Chen, 2022), highlighting the importance of this research focus. These findings provide a theoretical basis for exploring vocational students’ perceptions of China English and underscore the significance of this research focus. Despite extensive research on university students’ perceptions of China English, there is a notable gap in understanding the awareness among Business English majors in vocational and technical colleges in China. This study aims to address this gap, aligning with the need to explore the specific challenges and competencies of this demographic.

## Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of awareness among Chinese Business English major learners towards China English
2. To investigate the preferred English varieties of students in Chinese English language classrooms

## Methodology

This research aimed to deeply understand Chinese vocational and technical college students’ awareness of China English and their preferences for using these varieties in the classroom. By using semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights, a case study provides a strong theoretical foundation for interpreting the role and influence of China English in Chinese classrooms.

### *1. Context and Participants*

In the context of over 400 million Chinese and 13 million vocational and technical college students, this study was conducted with Business English major students at a vocational and technical college in northern China. This college is a comprehensive higher vocational and

technical college with a history of over 60 years, so it is meaningful to explore the awareness of English varieties among students majoring in Business English at this college in the context of globalization.

To reach the aims of this study, the participants chosen were nine Chinese Business English major students studying in the first and second year in the Foreign Language Department (see Table 1). The Business English major comprises only two academic levels. Consequently, the researcher employed a convenient purposive sampling method, selecting nine students who were both willing to participate and had broader exposure, including international experiences, meanwhile scored higher on professional exams and had more effective interactions with teachers in class. These participants were thus more likely to have formed diverse perspectives on China English. Ambele (2022) points out that the main objective of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best qualify them to answer the research questions. They can provide more valuable answers and meaningful opinions for the subsequent interviews, thus enriching the findings and conclusions of this study. Another prerequisite was that all students in the respective grade and major had completed a minimum of one semester of professional courses, such as International Trade Theory and Practice, Overview of Britain and the United States, Cross-border E-commerce English, among others. This meant that they already had a certain understanding of the diversity of English. Meanwhile, they were adults aged 18-20 years old who could think independently and provide insights from a neutral perspective. At the same time, as Chinese students, they also had their views on China English. This made them suitable participants to provide meaningful insights into this study.

**Table 1**  
*Participants' Information*

Participants	Age	Educational subjects	Grade
9 Chinese Business English major students	18+ years 6 (67%)	Liberal arts 7 (78%)	First-year 5 (56%)
	20+ years 3 (33%)	Science 2 (22%)	Second-year 4 (44%)

## 2. Data Collection Method

The research utilized semi-structured individual interviews to collect data from the participants. The purpose of utilizing this research tool was to understand students' awareness of different varieties of English and the factors that influenced the formation of such perceptions. Using semi-structured interviews is a great way to gather in-depth insights from participants into understanding a phenomenon (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021), allowing participants to express

themselves while at the same time allowing them to access their thoughts, ideas, and memories in their own words rather than the researcher's. In other words, this interview method guides the interviewer while also allowing the interviewee to develop his or her ideas. Another obvious benefit of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility to gain unexpected new ideas during the interview process. Meanwhile, open-ended questions encourage participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses. The purpose of the interview questions designed in this study was to allow participants to reflect on their awareness of China English (see questions 1-2), and their preference for Chinese English learning classrooms (see questions 3-4). The Interview questions for this study were adapted from articles of Mr. Ambele (2022) and Chaengaksorn (2021) on world Englishes, English ownership, and topics related to the teaching field, with the addition of aspects of China English and influencing reasons to align with the context and objectives of the current research.

Inference quality was crucial for ensuring the validity, credibility, and reliability of the findings. It ensured that conclusions were logically coherent, empirically supported, and aligned with the study's objectives. Logical coherence was maintained by ensuring interpretations were directly derived from data and consistent with the theoretical framework. Empirical support was prioritized, with inferences backed by relevant evidence. The study also emphasized relevance, transparency, and consistency by cross-checking inferences across data types and considering alternative explanations. This rigorous approach ensured robust, reliable findings that contributed meaningful insights.

### *3. Data Collection*

The data were collected from vocational and technical college students in northern China. Interviews took place in a relaxed, comfortable environment to help participants feel at ease. Before beginning, each participant was provided with an overview of the interview process and asked to sign an informed consent form to confirm their willingness to participate. Each interview lasted approximately 10–20 minutes. The researcher adopted a listening-focused approach, encouraging participants to freely express their viewpoints without feeling pressured. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission, using a recorder provided by the researcher. Participants were informed that the recordings were solely for accurately documenting their views and assured that the material would remain confidential. The interviews were conducted in Putonghua, as it allowed participants to provide more detailed and thoughtful responses. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher had the flexibility to ask additional questions based on participants' responses, enriching the data collected.

#### *4. Data Analysis*

The data was collected from interview analysis using qualitative content analysis (QCA) in a systematic, consistent, and transparent manner. Qualitative Content Analysis is a method used to analyze text-based data in qualitative research. Dörnyei (2007) presents two broad phases of content analysis: (1) analyzing each individual's response sequentially, identifying distinct content elements, significant statements, or key points; (2) using the highlighted ideas and concepts from the texts to create broader categories that describe the response content, enabling comparison with other responses. Therefore, this study will use the content analysis procedure proposed by Dörnyei (2007).

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed during fieldwork, and translated into English. Participants reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. In the second analysis phase, coding was applied to structure and interpret data, identifying emerging themes. Relevant codes were categorized, while irrelevant ones were discarded.

Following Dörnyei (2007), this study employed coding to categorize data and identify patterns. Both deductive (predefined codes) and inductive (emerging codes) approaches were used. After initial coding, data were refined, grouping two themes—awareness of China English and perceptions of English teaching—while discarding irrelevant codes. Memos documented key insights, supporting theme development. Finally, findings were interpreted, and conclusions were drawn.

### **Results**

This section discussed the findings from the semi-structured interview. The findings presented in this section were discussed in terms of two salient themes: awareness of China English and perceptions of English language teaching in China. For the interview data excerpts provided in this section, and to ensure the anonymity of the participants, generic pseudonyms were assigned to all nine student participants. Each participant was identified by a pseudonym followed by a number (e.g., S-1 to S-9) for differentiation. Among the nine respondents, one had engaged in international competitions, two had experience in online cross-border communication, and each interviewee has received face-to-face tutoring from a foreign teacher who is a native speaker of English.

#### *1. Awareness of China English*

The awareness of China English among Chinese vocational college business English students is often mixed and reflective of broader societal attitudes toward non-native English varieties.

The four positive participants (S-2, S-3, S-4, S-9) out of nine hold the view that as long as they can express their meaning clearly and others can understand them, China English is a good choice (Participants S-2 and S-3), and different accents like China English are “funny and cute” (Participant S-2) and China English “make the whole conversation easier and more interesting especially with Chinese” (Participant S-4), the last respondent represented “strong China makes us confident to speak China English” (Participant S-9), for example. Excerpts 1 and 2 support this view:

**Excerpt 1:**

*If a person makes fun of me because of my China English grammatical structure or pronunciation, that's his problem, not mine. We can understand each other's words when we communicate, so we are not too concerned about which English variety is used. I saw Thais and Indians speaking English with strong accents on short video platforms and I thought it was funny and cute. (S-2)*

**Excerpt 2:**

*Especially when talking with Chinese people, China English can help us understand each other well and make the whole conversation easier and more interesting. (S-4)*

However, five out of nine respondents (S-1, S-5, S-6, S-7, S-8) expressed that they did not want to be identified as speaking China English, viewing such identification as “discriminatory” (Participants S-1), and standard English expression “make people think I am professional in my future career” (Participant S-5) and “make people feel comfortable” (Participant S-6), the other students responded as “I still wish I spoke English more like a native speaker” (Participant S-7), “For communication, standard English is the best choice” (Participant S-8). The negative respondents’ answers were as follows:

**Excerpt 3:**

*I do not want people to think I speak China English because I think he said that to me is discriminatory. Being told that I speak “China English” is a blow to me and a sign that I need to improve. (S-1)*

**Excerpt 4:**

*To be honest, I still wish I spoke English more like a native speaker. I want foreigners to feel that Chinese students are very capable of learning. If I hear China English spoken abroad, I feel very friendly. But if you are talking to foreigners, it is better to use native English. (S-7)*

**Excerpt 5:**

*For communication, the most important thing is to understand each other, Standard English is the best choice. Or as close as possible to British or American English. (S-8)*

## *2. Preferences for English Varieties in ELT in China*

The following excerpts reflect the mixed preferences about their English varieties in Chinese English language classrooms.

The results show that eight respondents (S-1, S-2, S-3, S-5, S-6, S-7, S-8, and S-9) still prefer native English variety including British or American English:

### ***Excerpt 6:***

*I prefer British English. Because we Chinese students have been learning British pronunciation since the third grade of primary school. I identify with British pronunciation and British English from the bottom of my heart. (S-1)*

### ***Excerpt 7:***

*Native language varieties. I think the native varieties are the ones most people are more willing to accept. Other varieties of English may affect the accuracy of English. (S-9)*

On the contrary, only one respondent (S-4) prefers the local English variety, referring to China English:

### ***Excerpt 8:***

*China English is easier to understand. Like a sentence, China English may be expressed by the habits of Chinese speech, which is more in line with my “Chinese thinking”. If I can understand what the teacher says well in class, I will be confident and interested in continuing my studies. (S-4)*

Regarding which English variety they think should be dominant in the English Language Teaching field in China, all participants unanimously agreed that it should be a combination of both the native English variety and China English. Although the respondents generally shared the same view, some expressed divergent perspectives, as one participant mentioned, “The participation of native English varieties will improve learning efficiency” (Participant S-1). Other participants further reported that “still a priority to learn native English varieties” (Participants S-2, S-3, and S-6). Two participants agree that they “prefer a combination of the two, with China English dominating the teaching and not excluding the involvement of native varieties” (Participants S-5 and S-9).

## **Discussions**

Excerpts 1-5 illustrate that participant, drawing on their long-term experiences in China, prioritize clear communication and a standard accent. They emphasize that in ELF interactions,



comprehensibility and intelligibility should take precedence over adherence to specific English varieties, particularly in academic and professional settings (Galloway & Rose, 2018). Kirkpatrick (2009) similarly advocates for localized English varieties, highlighting the importance of mutual comprehensibility rather than conformity to native-speaker norms. The linguistic features and increasing acceptance of China English reflect a growing confidence in using a distinct variety that embodies Chinese cultural identity (Xu et al., 2010). This shift suggests a rising sense of linguistic ownership and national pride, particularly in intra-China communication, where China's global influence further reinforces confidence in a localized English variety.

Despite the widespread emphasis on English learning in China, China English remains relatively marginalized (Pan, 2019). While participants expressed acceptance of China English, their attitudes are shaped by standard language ideologies and the perceived prestige of native-speaker varieties (Wang, 2015). The excerpts reveal a complex negotiation between linguistic identity and global expectations. Many students favor standard British English for its perceived professionalism, yet they also acknowledge the cultural authenticity of China English, even if it holds lower social prestige. As Fang (2017) observes, despite challenges related to accent and identity, attitudes toward China English are shifting positively. Some students seek to reconcile native-like fluency with elements of China English that reflect their heritage, illustrating the interplay between language ideology, identity construction, and evolving perceptions of linguistic legitimacy.

Excerpts 6-8 indicate that Business English major students in China predominantly favor British or American English, influenced by early exposure to these varieties throughout their education. They strive for native-like accents, associating them with professionalism and fluency. This preference reflects dominant language ideologies that position native-speaker norms as superior, reinforcing a perception that British and American English are more prestigious and globally accepted. However, students also acknowledge the practicality of China English, which aligns with their native linguistic and cognitive patterns, fostering confidence in learning and communication. Despite students' openness to China English, teachers often emphasize standardized varieties such as British or American English (He, 2015), highlighting a discrepancy shaped by institutional norms and pedagogical priorities. These differing perspectives underscore the need for a curriculum that integrates China English while maintaining communicative effectiveness. Ambele (2022) further supports these findings, noting that native English norms frequently serve as the benchmark for evaluating both verbal and nonverbal English proficiency. This reliance on native-speaker models reflects broader societal expectations and professional pressures, reinforcing the complex interplay between language ideology, identity, and educational practices in shaping students' perceptions of China English.

Regarding which variety of English, they believe should be predominant in the English Language Teaching sector in China, these findings align with research emphasizing the role of exposure to multiple English varieties in enhancing linguistic awareness and adaptability in global contexts (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In EFL settings, the widespread use of ELF necessitates a shift away from privileging only British or American English (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Weerachairattana et al., 2019). Given English's global status, educators should implement policies that foster intercultural awareness and recognize the legitimacy of diverse English varieties (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). However, language ideology and institutional norms continue to influence students' perceptions of which English variety should be used in education. While native-speaker norms remain dominant, the growing presence of non-native English speakers worldwide has challenged traditional ELT frameworks. Participants noted the tension between learning native and non-native varieties, highlighting the complexity of navigating World Englishes in formal education (Jenkins, 2015; Gao, 2010). Furthermore, exposure to digital media was instrumental in broadening students' understanding of English diversity, emphasizing the importance of real-world interaction beyond classroom instruction (Seidlhofer, 2011). To prepare students as "global intercultural citizens," ELT must move beyond rigid native-speaker models and adopt a more inclusive approach to English varieties.

## **Conclusion**

The awareness of China English among Chinese vocational and technical college Business English students is often mixed. Their views reflect broader societal awareness towards non-native English varieties. Similar to the situation with other English varieties, China English is frequently viewed with skepticism and perceived as inferior to native English varieties, particularly British and American English (He & Li, 2009; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002). Despite a growing academic recognition of China English as a legitimate and distinct variety characterized by Chinese cultural influences, many students in business English programs still express a preference for mastering standard English accents due to perceived professional advantages and the desire to avoid being labeled as non-standard English speakers. Additionally, the lack of consensus among both educators and students on the legitimacy and utility of China English in formal settings leaves the question of whether China English can be fully embraced in educational and business contexts open for further investigation (Wei & Su, 2012).

## **Implications**

This implicates that in an EFL context like China, where English functions as a lingua franca, strict adherence to native English standards cannot be entirely replaced by local varieties. In the Chinese vocational and technical college, business English major students' perceptions of

China English are complex and multifaceted, reflecting the tension between the adherence to native English standards and the recognition of local English varieties. While there is a strong emphasis on mastering standard varieties like British and American English due to their perceived professional utility and the need to perform well in international exams (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002), there is also a growing awareness of the importance of understanding and embracing China English as part of a broader global English landscape. China English, characterized by its integration of Chinese cultural and linguistic elements, offers students an opportunity to become more effective intercultural communicators in diverse global contexts (He & Li, 2009). However, due to the standard English varieties dominating the educational landscape, China English is often seen as less prestigious, and students may worry that using it could negatively impact their professional opportunities (Wei & Su, 2012). This reflects a broader challenge in ELT in China, where balancing the need for standard English proficiency with the recognition of local varieties is crucial for preparing students to navigate the fluidity and diversity of English communication in the globalized world (Fang & Ren, 2018). Thus, ELT policies in China might benefit from incorporating a greater awareness of China English, promoting its legitimacy while ensuring that students are equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in both local and international contexts.

## Limitations

Given the limitations of this study, the small sample size and the specific research population—students from a vocational and technical college in northern China—constrain the generalizability of the findings to all English learners in China. The focus on a particular academic context may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives across different educational backgrounds and regions. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a larger and more diverse sample, including students from undergraduate and postgraduate programs, as well as those from various disciplines. Additionally, adopting mixed-method approaches, integrating longitudinal studies, and utilizing a wider range of data collection tools and analytical frameworks could provide more comprehensive insights into Chinese learners' attitudes toward China English, and its role in English language teaching.

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