

## **World Englishes Communication and Challenges: A Qualitative Study of Three Vietnamese University Graduates**

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### **Abstract**

The wide use of English has given rise to the World Englishes (WE) paradigm, within which there has been a growing interest in the pedagogical implications of the varieties of English. A frequently documented rationale for the marriage between second language education and WE is that WE users should be aware of the potential problems in WE communication. This study adopts a qualitative case study, employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) to explore the perception and experience of three Vietnamese university graduates of such WE communicative problems. The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed through the lens of existing WE theories, especially the theory of intelligibility in communication. The findings confirm problems concerning sound recognition as the most frequent and dominant intelligibility issue while comprehensibility and interpretability problems vary and depend on the contexts of use. The data also yield information about the effects of WE problems on both the participants' feelings and their English proficiency. Findings from this study urge the integration of WE into current English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practice in Vietnam as a WE awareness can help build a critical understanding of languages and contribute to the formation of a positive identity of EFL/ English as a Second language (ESL) users.

Keywords: World Englishes, intelligibility, communicative problems, Interpretative Phenomenological Approach

### **Introduction**

World Englishes, or the varieties of English developed as a result of indigenization when the language comes into contact with local cultures (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008), has become a growing research trend with a burgeoning of scholarly works on this topic (Bruthiaux, 2010; Chang, 2014; Jenkins, 2006; Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011). As non-native speakers of English (NNS) vastly outnumber the native speakers (NS), it is more likely for NNS of English to use the language to communicate with other NNS rather than with NS (Chang, 2014; Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Matsuda, 2002; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011; Tran & Moore, 2015). Given this trend, a proper understanding of WE, especially the potential problems in WE communication is of great importance. On the one hand, this understanding prepares ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) users for effective communication with both NS and NNS of English (Chang, 2014). On the other hand, an awareness of the nature of WE communication and the problems present in these settings helps WE users gain a critical insight into their identity as NNS of the language, as well as encourages their confidence in their own English varieties (Jenkins, 2006).

A frequent argument for the acknowledgement of WE is that WE research has yielded significant pedagogical implications for language teaching, especially in

ESL/EFL settings (Bruthiaux, 2010; Chang, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2013; Matsuda, 2002; Matsuura, 2007; Mukminatien, 2012). In a similar vein, the issue of WE communicative problems advocates the incorporation of WE into English Language Teaching (ELT). Considering the aforementioned argument that understanding the challenges of using WE will empower and encourage ESL/EFL learners to be confident and critical users of the language, and better the chance for successful use of English in real life situations, raising English learners' awareness of challenges facing WE interlocutors should be a major goal in ELT (Chang, 2014).

Central to the literature on WE communicative problems is the theory of intelligibility, or "understanding" in the most basic meaning of this concept. As argued by Pickering (2006), research on intelligibility problems in WE conversations mainly focuses on the NS's judgment of NNS's Englishes. This study, however, targets the NNS group who experiences WE problems through real life communication. This resonates with Matsuura's (2007) call for the need to investigate intelligibility problems with NNS as the studied group.

In Vietnam, although English is a *de facto* foreign language (Ton & Pham, 2010), WE remains quite an uncharted land, especially for EFL practitioners. Many EFL users in Vietnam are confronting problems using the language in daily communication, especially with NNS of English. This inefficacy may be explained by the fact that one single variety of English cannot satisfy students' real communicative needs (Jenkins, 2006). Research on such WE communicative problems in the context of Vietnam is imperative.

Although WE has become an increasingly acknowledged paradigm (Bruthiaux, 2010), there is still a need for more WE research, especially the empirical ones given the fact that WE is enthusiastically promoted in theory but not in reality (Chang, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2013; Jenkins, 2006). Bruthiaux (2010) criticizes much of the available WE literature for being "producer-centered" rather than "consumer-centered", ignoring the learners' learning conditions and needs. He further argues that much of the work is on postcolonial settings, featuring urban classrooms. This echoes the calls for evidence of English language use from contexts other than the classrooms, such as the workplace, which is one of the major sites for cross-cultural communication as a result of globalization (Nair-Venugopal, 2003; Pakir, 2010; Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011).

Ton and Pham (2010) argue that current WE research tends to disregard the dynamics of particular speech communities, raising the need for investigations in specific contexts. Within the context of Vietnam, there has been a paucity of WE research in EFL (Tran & Moore, 2015). Considering the aforementioned gap between scholarly discussions of WE at theoretical levels and grass-roots research at practical levels, Nguyen (2008) observes that although the concept of WE is not strange to many linguists and language practitioners, it remains unfamiliar to Vietnamese learners and users of English. Besides, most of the available WE studies within the context of Vietnam's EFL practice target teachers' perspectives (Tran & Moore, 2015), teachers and students' attitudes towards WE in college settings (Ton & Pham, 2010), or overseas Vietnamese students' understanding of WE (Nguyen, 2008). There has been no such research that focuses on university graduates in Vietnam. These subjects may voice valuable perspectives regarding WE uses and challenges as well as its pedagogical implications, thanks to their practical experience with both WE and the current EFL practice in Vietnam. Research targeting this group, therefore, is needed as it adds an objective and convincing voice to the current WE research in Vietnam.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of Vietnamese university graduates with communicative problems arising from the use of WE. This study will provide insight into WE in EFL contexts in general and in Vietnam in particular. The findings of this study will be a source of reference for educational policy makers and EFL practitioners in Vietnam and other similar contexts who work towards raising WE awareness among EFL users through introducing WE perspectives into EFL training programs.

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, employing Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). This method is appropriate with the explorative purpose of this research, for the interpretative nature of IPA enables close-as-possible insight into the experience of the phenomenon (the participants) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Furthermore, the approach maximizes the participation of the informants by minimizing the interference of the researchers during data collection process; therefore, rich and detailed information on the research problem is often obtained.

The paper is organized into five chapters, including: the introduction, the literature review of existing knowledge in WE paradigm, the methodology section describing how the research was conducted, the analysis section of collected data, and a discussion of the findings, followed by the conclusion.

The research will answer the question, What are the Vietnamese university graduates' experiences of and perceptions towards communicative problems raising from the use of WE?

In particular, the data collected and hereby analyzed will investigate these two questions:

1. What communicative problems do Vietnamese university graduates face in WE conversations?
2. What are the effects of such problems on Vietnamese university graduates?

## **Literature Review**

### **World Englishes**

The contemporary postmodern setting has raised new communicative needs and trends in English language communication, which has hitherto been most widely used for international communication (Canagarajah, 2006). The increasing use and recognition of World Englishes (WE) is among such trends (Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011). Braj Kachru is among thinkers who laid the foundation for the study of WE (Kachru, 1986). He proposes a model of WE composed of three concentric circles: the inner circle where English is used as a native language (ENL); the outer circle where English is spoken as a second language (ESL) and the outermost, expanding circle consisting of English as a Foreign Language countries (EFL). Although this model is criticized by its legitimizing English variants in terms of its national identity, thus ignoring the trans-boundary spread of English, and emphasizing the dichotomy of NNS and NS (Bolton, 2005; Jenkins, 2006), its attempt to establish the legitimacy of new varieties of English in ESL and EFL settings is significant. This study adopts the definition of WE as an umbrella term under which is a wide range of new Englishes developed and used in EFL and ESL settings.

Recently, there has been a rapid growth of WE research in both volume and quality (Bruthiaux, 2010). The WE paradigm has given space to academics from all circles whose concerns embrace a multitude of aspects, from applied linguistics and

lexicography to socio-linguistics and second language acquisition. Recent issues that have attracted attention of WE scholars include the studies of linguistic features of new Englishes (Bolton, 2005), the debates against Standard English or the mono-centric view of English (Jenkins, 2012), the empowerment of new variants of English and challenging of the superiority of NS norms (Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011), and especially the increasing focus on the implications of WE for ELT (Bruthiaux, 2010; Chang, 2014). This study locates itself within the focus on WE pedagogical implications; therefore, some WE studies of this kind will be discussed.

Chang (2014) conducted a qualitative study to explore the effects of incorporating WE in ELT. Participating in the study were 22 Taiwanese students who enrolled in a semester-long WE course. The researchers analyzed the reflection papers written by the participants at the end of the course, in which the students were asked to reflect on what they have experienced during the course. The findings of this study yielded important pedagogical implications of WE. The participants believed that WE knowledge equipped them with new lenses to notice the politics of English language as well as the values of different English varieties. Being WE conscious also made the participants confident with their own English variety and to promote their forms/variety.

Another qualitative research was conducted by Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) who problematize the lack of WE research in an Iranian ELT setting. The research involved 25 EFL Iranian teachers and students who participated in interviews exploring their attitudes and adherence to the concept WE. Data were also collected through observations of seven teachers to gain better insight into what actually happened in class and the consistency in which people's beliefs matched their actions. The findings show that most participants believed in the superiority of Standard English while devaluing English varieties as a deviation. The study calls for the need to raise WE awareness as the current adherence to Anglo-American norms has significant influences on pedagogical practice of the studied EFL teachers.

The available research on WE pedagogical implications has several limitations. Firstly, there is a theory and practice gap as the pedagogical proposals which have been tried and tested remained scant in number (Galloway, 2013). Secondly, many studies take place in classroom settings (Bruthiaux, 2010); this practice risks ignoring the settings which are actual sites of WE uses, such as the workplace (Pakir, 2010; Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011). Moreover, much of the available literature targets ESL/EFL teachers and students' practices and attitudes. This problem echoes what Bruthiaux (2010) criticizes as "producer-centered" rather than "consumer-centered".

In Vietnam, WE, albeit an alien concept to many EFL teachers and learners, starts to attract the attention of linguists and educational practitioners (Ton & Pham, 2010). Available literature on WE in Vietnam demonstrates a major, if not to say exclusive, focus on teachers and students' perceptions and attitudes towards the concept WE. To my knowledge, there is only one project that touches on the issue of intelligibility, a central issue of WE problems; however, this topic was not fully explored then. It can be concluded that WE research in Vietnam is still in its infancy; therefore, attempts to explore and provide different insights into this construct should be encouraged.

### **Problems in WE communication**

Why are WE communicative problems a significant issue? Crystal (2012) attempts to quantify the wide currency of English language as he suggests the nonnative users of

English (both as first language (L1) and second language (L2)) outnumber the native speaker by about three to one. This spread of English results in the fact that the language is no longer used exclusively among its NS, or between NNS-NS, but also often for communication exclusively among NNS (Matsuda, 2002; Young & Walsh, 2010). This status quo raises the need for English users to be ready for communication involving the use of different varieties of English. However, there are growing concerns over the possibility that speakers of different English variants will fail to reach mutual understanding (Smith & Nelson, 2006). Problems that might jeopardize WE communication are inevitable as a result of variability, which requires more than knowing about the way of using language and being able to accurately produce particular features of language (Berns, 2008). Furthermore, the potential problems present in WE communication merit consideration for the direct pedagogical implications they carry. Problematizing WE communication advocates the need for building a comprehensive WE awareness of ESL/EFL users as well as a shift in pedagogical approach, for it is the communicative competence not the ability to produce native-like linguistic proficiency that matters in WE interlocutions (Kaur, 2010). Besides, discussion on WE communicative problems contributes to building a critical view of what often conceived as second language errors (Hamid & Baldauf, 2013), which, in turn, encourages NNS of English to be confident in their own variety and identities (Chang, 2014).

Central to much of the research that has emerged from the WE paradigm is the concept of intelligibility (Sewell, 2010). In a broad sense, intelligibility can be interpreted as the ability to fully participate in international business and technological activities (Schneider, 2014). Matsuura (2007) approaches the concept at a conversational level, defining it as the extent to which utterances are actually understood by listeners. However, the most common conceptualization of the construct is proposed by Smith and Nelson (2006) who frame intelligibility within the tripartition of: (a) intelligibility, the ability of the listener to recognize the words or utterances, (b) comprehensibility, the ability to understand the meaning of the words or utterances, and (c) interpretability, the listener's ability to understand the speaker's intentions behind such words or utterances. These three concepts vary in terms of degree of understanding, from phonological to pragmatic levels. This tripartition has provided a framework for much research on WE communicative problems, regardless of the perspective taken by the inquirers, linguistic or pedagogical. However, it is also worth mentioning the classification of intelligibility into three levels: international, national and local (Melchers & Shaw, 2003), is useful because it captures the complexity of intelligibility as that intelligibility might not be a problem at local level does not mean that it will not be problematic at a global level (Hamid & Baldauf, 2013).

Upon reviewing current intelligibility research in the light of WE theories, Pickering (2006) groups factors influencing intelligibility into two major sources, namely speakers and listener factors. Examples of speaker factors include the speaker's pronunciation and accent, which are the two most salient factors, grammatical/ syntactic miscues, lexical variation, discourse structure, and so forth. Listeners' factors can be named as the degree of familiarity with variables such as phonological forms, lexicology, topics; listeners' attitudes; listeners' specific factors such as level of tiredness, environmental noise, and the like. This categorization is congruent with the interactional nature of intelligibility which is neither listener-centered nor speaker-centered (Pickering, 2006; Sewell, 2010).

Thus, intelligibility is a central issue in understanding WE communicative problems (Rooy, 2009). Intelligibility is closely linked to the central tenet of WE, commu-

nicative competence. Intelligibility, as argued, is the goal of WE conversations (Kaur, 2010). Given the fact that WE interlocutions are characterized by variability, being communicatively competent in such settings is about being intelligible. In a similar vein, intelligibility can be regarded as a prerequisite for successful communication because within WE paradigm, native-like proficiency or linguistic competence in one single variety of English fails to prepare the interlocutors for impediments or problems attributed to differences of phonology, syntax, lexis or “cultural load” embedded in the messages (Nair-Venugopal, 2003; Sewell, 2010). Furthermore, the classifications of intelligibility, either in terms of level of understanding (Smith & Nelson, 2006) or the level of usage (Melchers & Shaw, 2003), provides a framework with much space for research in WE communicative problems, regardless of the inquirers’ perspective.

Given the aforementioned salience of intelligibility in WE communications, scholars from all circles of English have engaged in hectic discussions, expressed their concerns on various aspects of WE intelligibility, making intelligibility a key element of the WE framework (Berns, 2008; Kachru, 2008). Matsuura (2007) argue that research on intelligibility of different varieties of English appears to become more important than ever as a result of the increasingly significant roles of English as an international language. Major themes in WE intelligibility research will be introduced below through a discussion of notable works.

Smith and Nelson (2006) report a quantitative study involving three groups of English users from all three backgrounds: ELN, ESL and EFL. The participants were placed into non-native speaker, native speaker and mixed groups. The groups were asked to do tests on intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability by doing listening tasks and answering a questionnaire survey. The results reveal that there are considerable differences among intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability, with the first level to be easier to deal with than the other two, and being able to do well in one component does not ensure that one will do well with the others. The study advocates pedagogical implications of WE when showing the positive effect of familiarity with English varieties and NNS on the participants’ performance. One striking finding of the study was that the native speakers of English were not found to be the most easily understood, nor were they the best able to understand different varieties of English. Thus, being a native speaker does not seem to be as important as being fluent in English and familiar with Englishes.

Another quantitative research study was conducted to deal with the problems of inappropriate ELT methods leading to unintelligibility in WE communications (Jung, 2010). Altogether 91 Korean university students of different English proficiency levels participated in a questionnaire survey on their understanding and opinions about different elements of intelligibility and comprehensibility in WE communication. The results demonstrate that comprehensibility factors were perceived as the most difficult and important in NNS – NNS communication. Miscommunication may occur due to differences in phonology, speech style as well as wider socio-cultural and pragmatic competence. Thus, the participants believed that the most crucial factors to successful communication in WE are being confident, able to adjust to different cultural norms and to understand each other.

Matsuura (2007) studied the relationship between intelligibility and individual learner differences by collecting quantitative data from 106 Japanese participants. The participants listened to a number of recordings spoken by both NS and NNS of English and did comprehension tests as well as a questionnaire on their WE experiences. One notable finding was that anxiety, a psychological factor, seemed to considerably

affect intelligibility, regardless of the varieties of English the participants listened to. Similar to Jung's (2010) finding, the more varieties students are exposed to, the better their understanding of a non-standard variety will be.

In the EFL context of Vietnam, Nguyen (2008) conducted a mixed-method study on the WE awareness of 17 Vietnamese students. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey and close group interviews on the participants' awareness of WE and their attitudes towards intelligibility. Regarding the intelligibility topic, the participants showed an inadequate understanding of intelligibility, ignoring the cultural and pragmatic levels of the concept. From this finding, the research highlighted the need for raising WE awareness through changes made to English curriculum and ELT materials in Vietnam.

These studies all relate their findings to the need for incorporating WE perspectives into language teaching. This trend is also observed by Kachru (2008), who argues that intelligibility continues to be constructed in terms of traditional pedagogical norms. However, much of the available research employed one-directional test instrument in which the participants passively listened to recorded speech (Matsuura, 2007). This practice limits the findings to some extent as intelligibility is not co-constructed and achieved in an interactional fashion (Kaur, 2010; Pickering, 2006; Sewell, 2010). More empirical inquiry should be conducted to unpack other intelligibility influencers such as psychological effects, cultural conventions and discourse structure rather than adhering to issues of pronunciation, accent and speech accuracy as many existing studies do (Nair-Venugopal, 2003). Another gap in current intelligibility literature, which is taken into account in this study, is the ignorance of NNS-NNS interactions and the exclusive focus on the inner-circle speaker-listener (Pickering, 2006).

All in all, the literature demonstrates an increasing interest in different aspects of the WE paradigm, of which one central issue is problems present in WE communications. Research on WE communicative obstacles mainly evolves around the construct of intelligibility, the different aspects of which has provided much space for inquiries from different perspectives, especially the second language teaching one. This study approaches WE paradigm from an EFL perspective and lends itself to the intelligibility theory. The research attempts to fill in the aforementioned gaps in WE and intelligibility research by targeting university graduates in an EFL context, whose experiences of WE communication as active interlocutors, not as passive listeners, will be explored. This also resonates the call for WE research in settings beyond the classroom walls.

## **Method**

Taking into account the nature of the research question, which is to explore new Vietnamese graduates' experience and perception of WE communicative problems, the study employed a qualitative approach. Qualitative approaches value context sensitivity by prioritizing the examination of the researched event in its full complexity and within a particular context (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Therefore, given the aforementioned need to contextualize WE research, and that the targeted participants of the proposed study remained an under-researched group in the WE paradigm, this approach helped to build deep insight into the issue. Furthermore, qualitative methods are suitable for the proposed research because of their flexibility and fluidity (Liamputtong, 2013), which allows the researcher to deal with the challenges posed by the scarcity of literature on WE communicative problems in the proposed context.

Specifically, the research question focuses on the participants' personal experience (Vietnamese university graduates facing WE communicative problems) and their making sense of such experience (their perceptions) in a particular context (Vietnam). Consequently, the most suitable qualitative approach in this case is the IPA. The aim of IPA is to scrutinize how participants are making sense of their personal and social world and how such processes make sense to them (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) argue that the choice of IPA over other qualitative approaches should be primarily based on its consistency with the epistemological position of the research question. Epistemology embraces the origins and nature of knowing and the construction of knowledge. The research question, which aims at exploring the perception of university graduates, posits that knowledge is co-constructed and the knower and the known are interdependent (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). IPA is a suitable approach to answer such questions as it allows the stories of the participants to be recounted through the perspective of the researchers, which emphasizes the salience of both parties in the research process.

The study takes the form of a case study design. This research design is consistent with the IPA approach as in case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right, of which the inquirer strives to gain an in-depth insight (Bryman, 2016). Berg and Lune (2012) describe the process of case study as involving systematically gathered information about a particular person, social setting, event or group to enable the researcher to produce holistic description and explanation, thus to understand how the phenomenon functions or operates. These authors further argue that the case study method is suitable for the study of any phenomenon.

## Participants

Mai, An and Chi were graduates taking part in this study. They had completed their bachelor degree and started to work or study further in environments that involve WE communication between one and two years of the time of this study. Mai and An were working as interpreters in EFL countries while Chi was studying in an English speaking country. This group was selected because they were "new" to WE problems and they also had experience with the most up-to-date EFL program in Vietnam. Details about the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participant demographics*

Participant	Gender	Occupation	Year(s) since graduation	Frequency of English use (day per week)
Chi	Female	Student Sale assistant	2	7
Mai	Female	Project assistant	1	5
An	Male	Interpreter	1	7

These participants were recruited through purposive homogenous sampling strategy, which is an idiosyncratic feature of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). However, homogenous sampling does not mean all participants must be the same. In fact, variability among the participants gives rise to patterns of convergence and divergence, which are crucial to understand the phenomenon's complexity (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The

participants of this study experienced WE in different settings, from the workplace in EFL countries to the classrooms in an inner circle country. In addition, three participants were selected, reflecting the idiographic nature of IPA in which samples are small in size and carefully selected.

Snowball sampling techniques were employed to recruit these participants. This form of opportunistic sampling allows the researcher to take advantage of the participant's network and contacts. This is crucial given the challenging task of obtaining a list of graduated students after their graduation. Besides, a sampling profile was used to aid selection of participants. Factors such as participants' gender, setting of WE use, and the amount of time using WE were considered to obtain both homogeneity and variability among the participants.

In particular, An's contact and information were first obtained by the researcher's network. The researcher then contacted this participant via telephone to introduce the project and invite his participation. An invitation letter containing information about the project, the benefits and rights of the participant followed. After accepting this invitation letter, An received a copy of the consent form and explanatory statement of the project for consideration and proposed his preferred date for the interview. The same procedure was applied to the Mai and Chi whose information and contacts were recommended by An.

### **Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were the instruments to collect data in this study. This instrument is argued by Bryman (2016) to comply with the flexible nature of qualitative inquiry. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews are the preferred means for collecting rich, detailed experience in IPA inquiry (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Besides, this kind of in-depth interviews is easily managed, facilitates rapport and encourages participants to think, voice and be heard (Smith et al., 2009). The three participants were interviewed, using Skype application due to geographical distance between the researcher and participants. The participants were encouraged to decide the language of the interviews; therefore, the three interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. These interviews were recorded under the consent of the participants. The length for each interview was around 30 minutes.

The interviews were grounded on five basic questions related to the central issue, WE problems, as shown in Table 2. The first three questions explore the participants' experience with WE problems and the effects of these problems, while the last two questions focus on the participants' opinions of the causes of WE problems and the need for introducing WE into EFL programs in Vietnam.

Table 2  
*Interview Questions*

No.	Question
1	Please tell me how often do you use English, in which situation and with whom?
2	What are the problems that you have when using English to communicate with other English non-native speakers?
3	What do you think might be the causes of such problems?
4	What impacts do such problems have on you?
5	What do you think of introducing WE to English training program in your (old) university?

An interview protocol was developed to facilitate the discussions of these questions, or in other words, to act as a virtual map of the interview (Creswell, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). Then, to aid preparing for and conducting the interview, an interview checklist was also employed. A unique feature of qualitative inquiry is its employment of human-as-instrument, in which the researcher per se is an instrument, thus both the interviewer and interviewee are active participants within the research process (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, upon conducting the interviews, strategies such as probes, which are questions to clarify and elaborate information, and active listening techniques such as avoiding interruption, paraphrasing and summarizing were utilized to actively engage the participants. At the same time, the interviewer participated by bracketing her concerns and indwelling into the interviewees' stories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

### **Data analysis**

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Notably, in IPA, transcription is itself an interpretative activity (Smith et al., 2009); therefore, in this project, the researcher took part in the transcription process. Furthermore, due to the time and funding constraint, the transcribed data were then translated from Vietnamese into English also by the researcher. However, to ensure reliability, the translation was reviewed by a professional translator who is an acquaintance of the researcher.

Although IPA does allow the researcher to be innovative in approaching the data, the study adopted Smith et al.'s (2009) iterative and inductive procedure of IPA data analysis. Accordingly, the analysis process was as follows:

1. Reading/ listening and re-reading: First, the researcher read the transcript and listened to the recording of the interview at the same time to recall the interview. The researcher engaged in the recorded conversation by bracketing her concerns, ideas and impressions of the other two interviews, keeping in mind that the participant is the focus of the analysis. Then, re-reading allowed the researcher to see the overall structure of the interview as well as attach special attention to richer and more detailed sections. The researcher's impression and opinions about the interview were then written down.
2. Initial noting: This stage involved the examination of the transcript in details to ensure the researcher becomes more familiar with the transcript. The particular way that the participants talk about and think of the issues were initially explored at this stage. To do this, the researcher made descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments on the transcript whenever possible;
3. Developing emergent themes: Completing the second stage, the researcher had a considerable amount of data including the original data and the exploratory comments. In the third stage, the initial notes were transformed into phrases capturing the essential of what was found. This stage required a higher level of abstraction and interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Intelligibility theories discussed earlier in the literature review provided the researcher with a theoretical resource to interpret and analyze the data.
4. Connecting themes: In this step, the researcher connected the themes obtained in the previous stage by putting them together. Some themes emerged as super-ordinate themes while other themes were subordinate. The researcher, on the one hand, relied on her own understanding to make sense of what is being

said by the participant, and, on the other hand, continuously checked her own sense-making with what the person is actually saying by looking back at the transcript. This practice reflects the phenomenological and hermeneutic natures of IPA. The outcome of this stage was a table of super-ordinate themes with extracts from the interviews as supporting evidence for such themes.

5. Moving to the next case and cross-case analysis: Each interview was analyzed separately, following a similar procedure; then, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify convergent and divergent themes among the cases (Creswell, 2015). At the end of this stage, a table of emergent themes with supporting evidences from three interviews was developed. By this practice, the analyzed data was presented and arranged in a convenient way to facilitate the writing stage.

This data analysis process reflects the double hermeneutic of IPA. Although the primary focus of IPA is the participants' experience and how they make sense of such experience, the final outcome of IPA inquiry is how the researchers make sense of what the participants perceived. Therefore, IPA analysis gradually "takes you further away from the participant and includes more of you" (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 91-92).

## Results

### Intelligibility problems in WE communication

**Phonological elements as the most prominent WE problems.** One of the most emergent themes found across the cases is that phonological elements, namely, pronunciation, intonation and stress are the most frequent and notable problems in WE communication.

Phonological problems are usually the first to emerge and most observable when these graduates participate in a WE conversation, as Mai says:

[... in the first meeting in which I worked as an interpreter, the meeting between the Korean, and... and... the Vietnamese contractors and my boss, my first impression was... was... I could not understand what they were talking about because they spoke so fast, so fast as I felt as if I were able to hear the sound only, and catch a few simple words, such as numbers, such as one, two, three, or... words in... which are common words.]

She further confirms that WE problems of this kind (phonological problems) are common, and most fresh graduates encounter such issues when they use English in WE contexts:

[Eh... eh... yes, actually.... for those fresh graduates like me, I have encountered quite a few problems... , some problems with using English to communicate with non-native speakers of English. Eh... eh... for example.... with the Japanese.... actually.... their speech... is not,... in the beginning,... not easy to understand, or in the beginning they did not speak Standard English as we expected.]

In this extract, Mai recounts that as a fresh graduate, she had faced challenges posed by WE. The change in her use of quantifiers, from "quite a few" to "some", together with the repetitive use of "in the beginning" demonstrate a change in the frequency that WE problems occur. The problems happened more when she first came in contact with the variety of WE and occurred less as she became more familiar with the variety of WE. The intelligibility problem is perceived as a consequence of the

NNS's failing to adhere to Standard English. Hence, a strong sense of preference for Standard English is evoked, which can also be found in An's narration:

[The major... major problem I usually find is their pronunciation which does not ... not... follow standards. Although my English is not standard-like, I strive hard to follow... the standard. I often look up the dictionary and strive to alter my accent to sound standard. But... actually, actually my accent cannot be standard-like. When I listen to English, at least, I always try to pronounce correctly; however, their pronunciation is so wrong. My pronunciation is correct, following standards, but they think it is wrong. For example, the technical drawing, I say /'drɔ:ɪŋ/ while they always say /dra: ŋ/, /dra: ŋ/, so I had no idea of what it was then.]

An asserts that the most dominant WE problem is an intelligibility problem (sound recognition) which is mostly a result of one's failed attempt to follow standards. On the one hand, he demonstrates a strong aspiration to achieve a native-like proficiency in English; on the other hand, he is aware of the unattainability of such aspirations. The use of the contrastive conjunction "but", the pause and lowering of his voice when admitting that his non-native accent is unchangeable reflects both a sense of disappointment and preference for NS accent. His expectation of other NNS to follow Standard English and his own adherence to Standard English were attributable to his confusion when experiencing sound recognition problems because in WE conversations Standard English is not always intelligible ("they think it is wrong").

Among the phonological elements that pose intelligibility challenges to WE interlocutors, pronunciation is the most frequent and has detrimental effects on sound recognition:

[Interviewer: So, those [problems] are due to their level of English proficiency in general or just pronunciation?

Chi: Well... It's pronunciation. So that is why I have said that most of the time misunderstanding is due to pronunciation.]

She further exemplifies this misunderstanding due to pronunciation:

[For example, I ask my friend about the lesson, her ... pronunciation is very different, for example /ʃ/ or/s/, they [the sounds] are very different, they [the Chinese] cannot make these fricatives... well... they speak English in their own way, not following any standards.... yeah... Well.... eh... as I remember.... I once asked the girl sitting next to me to give me a pen, then I said "Can you grasp me a pen?" and then... ah, and then to my surprise ...um... she gave me the book (laugh), I said "pen, not book" and then... um... and.... Because their [the Chinese] pronunciations of the sounds /p/ and /b/ are quite similar, so they could not catch the correct sound.]

In this extract, Chi demonstrates an awareness of the existence of varieties of English ("their own way") featured by their own pronunciation, which is perceived as a consequence of the difference in the sound mechanisms of English and the NNS's first language. Notably, this understanding was acquired through her experience with the problem ("to my surprise").

Then she further describes other intelligibility problems resulted from phonological elements, such as intonation:

[when I communicate with the Afghanis, well.... well.... Their way of speaking English is like.... they speak like... because it's not their language, like.... um.... They.... They just express what they want to say. Normally, for instance, when we speak English, we have to.... when it comes to a question, we have to raise our voice at the end of the sentence, but they just say it without intonation,

they speak their own way, as if it is Afghanis intonation, not English intonation, yeah.]

The issue of the ownership of English was brought to the fore, in which Chi perceives the identity of NNS as the user, not the owner of the language. On the one hand, the perception of English ownership raises the issue of reconsidering the goal of communication using English, which is to communicate the ideas rather than to showcase one's level of proficiency. Accordingly, WE interlocutors just "speak their own way", which is first language interference (Afghanis intonation). On the other hand, the use of the modal verb of obligation "have to" reflects her belief that NNS must follow NS rules. It was the Afghanis speakers' failure in delivering the interrogative function of raising tones of speech that might lead to intelligibility problems regarding the types and functions of sentences. These conflictive thoughts resulted in a negative feeling of confusion about what she always believes (following NS rules) and what she must do (ensuring intelligibility).

Phonological problems is a typical WE problem that challenges even NNS of high English proficiency:

[For the French people, the French speaks English quite.... well; however, they still confront the... the problem of intonation, and sometimes their pronunciation, or the words they say, they follow French rules, not English.]In this narration, Mai first acknowledges that NNS can become fluent users of English. However, the interference of their first language is a hindrance to their achieving native-like proficiency.

On summary, problems with sound recognition found by the three participants when using WE are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Examples of intelligibility problems in WE Communication*

Phonological element	Example
Pronunciation	Confusing /θ/, /r/, /l/ sounds (Mai) Water vs. quarter (An) Close /p/ vs. /b/ sounds (Chi)
Intonation	"English" with high tone and no /ʃ/ ending (Mai) Afghanis intonation (Chi)
Stress	No stress at all (Mai)
Accent	Local Korean accent, high rate of speech (Mai) French accent: gentle and soft (Mai) Vietnamese accent (Chi)

Comprehensibility (meaning) and interpretability (intention) problems are also WE issues facing the interviewees; however, these problems are much dependent on the contexts of use. To be specific, they are less frequent and less severe in engineering contexts.

Mai recounts her experience with grammar problems, one influencer of comprehensibility:

[Actually, regarding grammar problems, I find that, grammar mistakes are very common, for both Koreans and Vietnamese. Eh.... for the Korean.... in fact, in the project that I am working for... the use of English is just to make people understand, just for people to understand what the issues are, because they use a lot of technical terms. Eh, but they, they can make grammar mistakes. For ex-

ample, to talk about a certain event, “I did it yesterday”, but they, instead of using past tense verb, they still say “I do something” or “I work for something”, or the like, which means they still use present tenses. They will not care about grammar, they will use the content words directly “I need this”, “I need that”, without using past tense verbs.]

She recognizes that grammar mistakes are common in WE conversations; however, these mistakes are not detrimental to comprehensibility. She emphasizes that the ultimate goal of WE dialogues is intelligibility or successfully communicating ideas rather than showing ones’ proficiency of the language; therefore, grammar and other linguistic elements are no longer of the utmost importance. This change also reflects the significance of the work environment in determining the feature of language use. The engineering sector is characterized by peculiar systems of terminology, the understanding of which is more important than following grammatical rules to ensure comprehensibility.

In a similar vein, An justifies:

[they work, they themselves work in multicultural, multinational environments; they have worked there for ages. There are people working for many years and using English for many years, but their English is still not standard-like. They speak [English] frequently, they use it a lot, they use it everyday but they speak..., because ... their English does not follow any standard, they just... concentrate on how to make their ideas understood. As a result, there is no grammar, no stress, no... no word stress at all.]

Again, the salience of achieving intelligibility comes to the forefront. Paradoxically, even though during the interview An preferred Standard English and showed a strong aspiration to obtain native-like proficiency through a strict adherence to standard rules, he concedes here that standards play a minor role in WE communication. In fact, comprehensibility can be attained without following standard grammar or pronunciation rules. He also acknowledges that this is a feature of cross-cultural conversations.

Likewise, the influence of the work environment is evident in interpretability issues. While An and Mai use English mainly in their work in engineering disciplines, Chi’s experience with WE conversations is within a wider range of contexts, from everyday talk to communication at work and in academic settings. As a result, An and Mai rarely face interpretability problems due to the prominent use of specialized vocabulary and the importance of precision, as Mai mentions:

[Because the project I am working for is an engineering project, all the words used are technical terms, which are very, very clear, they do not cause much mis... misunderstanding.]

Or as An suggests:

[Misinterpretation is never... if it is saying “yes” instead of “no”, then I have never encountered such problem, because this matter [precision] is very important. If you misinterpret, for example if they ask to pull the crane up but I translate it into “pull the crane down”, the crane might fall down, killing many people. Although I am just a translator, it... it... I am under the pressure that my work has tremendous effects on other people. Or... or if the machine is broken, the cost is significant if I misinterpret the information. Then when I don’t understand, I always verify the information before doing the translation.]

Meanwhile, Chi illustrates her experience with interpretability problems through an incident at work:

[The... the Af...., yes, they are Afghans, the ones who use the... veil for their face that just leaves only the area around their eyes clear... um... then... I remember once I sold our product to her.... eh... that woman... and then... her husband accompanied her then. One workmate of ..., one of my workmate... is a man, he worked with me ... then... when she took the product... my workmate helped her take it and touched her hands, and looked straight into her eyes, and... and then he said while taking the item, "Let me do this..." something like that. He spoke and looked at her eyes and touched her hands, but it was by accident only. And... her husband called him rude and ... um... said, "you shouldn't say that", and then "you shouldn't say that", and then they walked away, and they talked with the center management (Laugh). We did not know what had just happened then (laugh).]

Clearly, in this incident, the sentence "Let me do this..." was completely intelligible and comprehensible to both the speaker and the listener. However, the intention of the speaker was misinterpreted as flirting instead of offering help because:

[When we use language, use English to talk with them, we are not allowed to look into their eyes, and then if we look into their eyes, we should not speak (laugh), like... this will lead to misunderstanding... even if we say something different, they will pick it as flirting or the like, yeah...yeah... That's the experience that I remember most.]

Chi's job requires more daily conversations which give more space for interlocutors to show their cultural codes and social conventions more frequently than in the cases of An and Mai. Her emphasis that this incident is the most memorable reflects the remarkable effect of the problem. She also raises the issue of non-linguistic elements such as eye contact, body language, and body contact in WE communication. These aspects of context of situation are equally important with linguistic elements in achieving interpretability.

### **The effects**

The most direct effects that WE intelligibility problems have on the participants are the psychological effects.

[So, I usually... when I first did the job, I was very shocked because the way they speak the words is so different from ours, so I had no idea of what they spoke then. However, as time goes by, I have become more familiar with this.]

An recalls his feeling when first experiencing WE intelligibility problems. This feeling of shock is a result of the conflict between the fact that NNS may pronounce English words differently as a result of their first language interference or level of proficiency and his expectation of NNS to follow Standard English conventions. However, he admits that this feeling is not insurmountable as the more he is exposed to the problems, the more familiar he gets and the less shocked he feels. This confession touches upon the issue of increasing familiarity with a variety leading to increasing intelligibility.

The psychological effects of WE intelligibility become more serious partly because of the importance of intelligibility in Mai's work as a translator:

[Eh... yes... because as a fresh graduate working as a translator, when I... for my first meeting with the Korean and the French, using both English and Vietnamese, I should be able to understand English to translate into Vietnamese and vice versa. So, my first feeling when attending such meetings was... very worried. I worried because, firstly, I could not understand what they wanted to

say... I could not get what they wanted to say to retell the Vietnamese sitting next to me about that... about what the French contractor wanted to say...”]

However, these effects soon disappeared as she became more familiar with the variety of English spoken by her interlocutors:

[Eh... about, about the Koreans, it was very challenging to work with them at first, but after three or four consecutive meetings, I found that their speech was clear, and their ideas were quickly expressed, and even (laugh) when the Korean contractor finished his talk my New Zealand boss had to ask me, “What has he just said?” (laugh). This means that although he is a native speaker of English, he still has to ask me to interpret English into English (laugh).]

The feelings of shock and worry were replaced by confidence, which then resulted in a positive attitude towards the NNS’s English variety (“their speech was clear”; “ideas were quickly expressed”) and even her identity as a NNS of English because her boss, despite being a NS, could not overcome intelligibility problems with WE as she did. This also means that NSs are not always better at understanding NNS’s English than NNs.

“A man is known by the company he keeps”. While psychological effects of WE problems such as worries, confusion, disheartenment, and shocks are decreased as the participants grow more familiar with the problems, the detrimental effects of WE problems on the interviewees’ English proficiency might be harder to overcome.

An shows a negative attitude towards the WE problems that he has encountered at work:

[Yes. The effects... are... the first one is the so called ‘A man is known by the company he keeps’. I have to make my pronunciation sound like theirs, so the... the English that I have tried to make standard-like is remarkably deteriorated, deteriorated.]

To ensure intelligibility, An adopted the accommodation strategy of modifying his pronunciation to make it intelligible to his interlocutors. However, his negative attitude toward this change is apparent. Here he makes it clear that his English and “theirs” are different because of his efforts to follow standard English rules, and he had to go against his desire for the sake of intelligibility. He also expressed the fear that his English might stray away from standards despite his aspirations to achieve a standard-like proficiency. This conflict is the major factor that led to this negative attitude.

To be specific, An pointed out two aspects that have significantly deteriorated due to the aforementioned WE problems of pronunciation and grammar:

[For example ... it is... when I have to change my pronunciation, I always have to say the words that way in order for them to understand. Consequently, my... my pronunciation is degraded remarkably. Secondly, in terms of, say, my grammar, I have lost my grammar gradually. If I insist on following grammar rules, they will not understand.]

An emphasizes the detrimental effects of WE and ensuring intelligibility on his English proficiency through the use of such words as “degraded”, “lost”, “remarkably”, which also reflects his negative attitudes towards these changes. Again, intelligibility won over his aspire to subscribe to NS norms.

On the one hand, Mai recognizes the importance of intelligibility in WE communication; on the other hand, she admits the negative effects of such awareness on her efforts to achieve Standard English competence:

[Sometimes, I must admit that, when they [her NNS interlocutors] do not ask for clarification about what I have just said, about my pronunciation, I don't want to correct my pronunciation then. And since then I just speak in whatever way I like as long as I can make them understand.]

Here, she is aware of her pronunciation not following standards; however, as such mistakes did not interfere with intelligibility, she felt less motivated to correct it. Later in the interview, she concedes that this in turn becomes a source of WE problems.

Likewise, Chi acknowledges the influence of WE on her English,  
[Once you live with the Asian, you will speak [English] in Asian ways. Your English will... will be not fluent like the native speakers.]

In this extract, she expresses the view that NNS is always in an inferior status compared to the NS, and that the NNS Englishes cannot be as "fluent" as the NS English. Like An, she ascribed her lack of success in achieving NS fluency to her being with NNS. Despite frequently encountering WE communication and increasing familiarity with Englishes, she admitted,

[Most of the time... actually I prefer working with native to non-native speakers (laugh).]

This preference for NS English is explained by the ownership of the language, as Mai suggests,

[Eh... in fact eh... because we, the Vietnamese, speak English, our English is not Standard English, because... our mother tongue is Vietnamese.]

This stance on the ownership of English has become deeply entrenched due to the advocacy of native-speakerism in EFL practice,

[Eh, yes, in fact... during my study at... my university, the teachers always want to introduce the best, the Standard English for their students.]

Here Mai turns the spotlight on the schools' critical role in promoting the hegemony of Anglo and American Englishes. NS's English is considered the best variety to be learned and used by EFL learners. The desire of reaching NS-like proficiency is passed from the teachers to the learners, which has also become a goal of EFL education.

In summary, the interviews demonstrate problems in all three levels of intelligibility that the interviewees encounter in WE communication. Intelligibility (sound recognition) remains the most common and severest WE problems while comprehensibility and interpretability issues vary in frequency and intensity, depending on the settings that the conversations take place. Among the influences of WE intelligibility problems, the most notable one is the detrimental effects that these problems have on the interviewees' English proficiency.

## Discussion

The findings of this study show frequent and dominant communicative problems experienced by the participants as well as their perceptions of the effects that such problems have on them. Firstly, among the three levels of intelligibility, problems with intelligibility (sound recognition) most frequently occur; however, these problems become less severe and decrease as the participants grow familiar with such issues. This result echoes Nguyen's (2008) finding that Vietnamese EFL users' understanding of intelligibility remains superficial, ignoring the cultural and pragmatic levels of the concept. However, while Nguyen's study focuses on the understanding of intelligibility of a group of overseas Vietnamese students, this research draws its conclusion

on the participants' narration of their real experience with intelligibility. Therefore, besides acknowledging the participants' perception of sound recognition as the main intelligibility problems in WE conversations, this study yields a deeper insight into the issue by identifying problems associated with sound recognition as temporary in nature and transient as the participants' familiarity with the varieties of English increases. Previous research conducted in other contexts also reports the proportional relation between ones' familiarity with WE varieties and his or her performance in WE conversations (Matsuura, 2007; Pickering, 2006). Furthermore, while this study reports the participants' acknowledgment of the significance of familiarity with varieties of English, Nguyen's (2008) study describes a contrast trend, arguing that Vietnamese users of WE are not aware of such importance. This interesting contradiction is likely to result from the aforementioned different aims of the two studies: one exploring the participants' understanding (Nguyen's study) and the other investigating their real experience with WE communication (this study).

Another important finding is that comprehensibility and interpretability problems are perceived as less common problems, the intensity and frequency of which vary according to the context of use. These problems are less frequent and less severe in technical contexts. From a socio-linguistic perspective, this finding can be justified in the light of J. R. Firth's (1957) theory of context of situation. Accordingly, different styles of utterance are identified by reference to the relevant features of the appropriate situations, making the description of such utterance in its situation a unique occurrence (Robin, 1971). Therefore, communicative events in technical contexts should be treated differently with those happening in daily interaction. Technical contexts constitute unique terminology as well as the demand for succinctness and precision. These characteristics are responsible for minimizing comprehensibility and interpretability problems in technical contexts. This finding provides new insight into current research on WE communicative problems. On the one hand, it resonates other WE intelligibility studies' findings that comprehensibility and interpretability are more challenging to deal with (Jung, 2010; Smith & Nelson, 2006). On the other hand, it emphasizes the importance of context of use, thus questioning the generalization of intelligibility issues across contexts of use. Given the lack of WE research on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), findings of this study importantly indicate the potential and idiosyncrasy of WE uses in technical contexts.

In order to fill the gap in existing WE intelligibility literature about the need for unpacking non-linguistic issues arising from WE uses (Sewell, 2010), this study reports common psychological effects facing users in WE communication. The data yield a rich and complex picture of the participant's feeling and attitudes towards the effects of WE problems. To begin with, such psychological effects as feelings of shock, disheartenments, or worries are direct, immediate yet become less severe as the participants grow familiar with WE. In fact, in some cases, these negative effects even transform into positive ones when the participants eventually feel comfortable and confident in WE communication. This transformation can be explained by documenting the aforementioned proportional relation between WE familiarity and performance in WE conversations. However, positive attitudes towards WE resulted from the overcoming of WE problems and the familiarity with WE varieties are in stark contrast with the negative feelings arising from the perceived detrimental effects of WE on the participants' English proficiency. On the one hand, the participants express a fear of having their Anglo-American norms adhering to standard English pronunciation and grammar destroyed by modifying these elements. On the other hand, they (the participants) concede that achieving intelligibility in WE communication is a

must, as a condition to complete their tasks at work. This requirement is against their effort to follow standard English rules, and they even start to feel comfortable with “making mistakes” to ensure intelligibility, which is later blamed for the reoccurrence of WE problems. Such complex psychological developments, the underlying cause of which will be analyzed later in this chapter, lead to a feeling of confusion and a negative attitude toward WE.

Another critical issue arising from the analysis of WE effects is the participants’ perception of their identity as a user of English. The strong aspiration to reach a native-like proficiency and the effort to follow Anglo-American English norms are the demonstration of their beliefs that the NS are the owner of the language and always have superior status over NNS. Therefore, WE, no matter how important and frequent it is, is always at the inferior end of the Standard English and WE dichotomy and regarded deficit rather than difference (Jenkins, 2009). This carries an important implication for EFL practices in NNS countries, which calls for the introduction of NNS varieties of English not only to build a proper WE understanding but also to help reform WE user identity as the owner of their varieties.

The data indicated a conflict between the participants’ desire and awareness regarding the use of English. On the one hand, they express a strong aspiration to obtain native-like proficiency of English; on the other hand, they acknowledge the unattainability of such a goal. In the same vein, they form a negative attitude toward WE problems, claiming that such problems detrimentally affect their English proficiency; meanwhile, they enjoy the confidence and even the rewarding feeling of getting familiar with non-native varieties of English. This conflict can be rationalized by the clash of the deeply entrenched native-speakerism, a term coined by Holliday (2007) to refer to the assumption that NSs are always superior to NNSs, and the increasing awareness concerning the importance of WE and intelligibility.

First, the promotion of NS Englishes and Anglo-American cultures by the existing EFL practice as well as other socio-economic forces such as the media, publishing industry and so forth, is responsible for the bias against NNS Englishes and a strong preference for NS norms. Second, as analyzed above, through their own experience with WE, the participants develop an awareness of WE as a status quo inevitable trend. Regardless of their inclination towards Standard English, they all, at least, acquiesce that achieving intelligibility is the most important aspect in communication, especially in conversations using WE. Interestingly, their experience with WE even starts to build up positive feelings and attitudes toward the NNS Englishes as they realize NS are not always better and the most understood in WE communication. This is also congruent with Smith and Nelson’s (2006) aforementioned report. Hence, the mismatch between what these participants experience as EFL learners (at school) and as WE users (at work) is accountable for the conflicting findings found here. On this point, an important pedagogical implication of WE arises. Respectively, EFL programs should be developed with a WE perspective, introducing both NS and NNS varieties of English and encouraging learners to critically think about the politics of languages (Matsuda, 2002). Some initial recommendations for such a marriage are as follows:

- For low level learners, varieties of English should be exploited as a source of teaching materials together with the traditional Anglo-American English(es) in teaching four skills as well as grammar and pronunciation;
- For higher level learners, WE courses on the history of Englishes, trends as well as the politic power of languages should be piloted (Chang, 2014).

## Limitations

The use of IPA research methodology has provided the researcher with useful tools to explore the participants' world, thus generating rich, detailed data to delineate the complex psychological picture of this group of WE users. However, there remain some limitations that should be considered by future research on similar topics. First, concerning the methodology, due to a constraint in time as financial support, the recorded interviews were translated from Vietnamese into English by the researcher without back-translation. However, to ensure objectivity and the accuracy of the information, the translation was then proofread and edited by a professional translator. Besides, the sampling population was confined to graduates from only one university; therefore, one should be cautious when generalizing the results of this study to all Vietnamese WE users. Another limitation of this study is that it fails to cover issues of WE intelligibility in written language, which is, in fact, an important part of WE communication. Finally, the data were analyzed and synthesized in the light of intelligibility theory (Nelson, 2011). As a result, this research risks ignoring other possible types of problems arising from WE communication, such as the participants' characteristic, psychological effects, cultural conventions, discourse structure and so forth. Although thanks to the IPA approach, the data on WE problems collected in this study touch upon issues of both psychology and linguistics, the data was structured and presented around the core concept of intelligibility.

## Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this research add a new insight to the current picture of WE communication as participated by Vietnamese users of English. On the one hand, it confirms notable findings from previous studies concerning the most typical intelligibility problems; on the other hand, it compares interestingly with the findings of the only available study targeting Vietnamese WE users to date (cf., Nguyen, 2008). This contrast again highlights the importance of research aims and targets. Given the fact that research on WE communicative problems is still limited in number, this study's findings about both psychological and linguistic effects of WE on the users might have important implications for future research. Research should also be conducted to explore WE problems in written communication, which involves reading and writing skills, yet remains unexploited. Then, elements other than intelligibility and its three levels should also be taken into account in enquiry about WE problems. Hark back Firth's (1957) context of situation, this theory also highlights the importance of non-linguistic elements to intelligibility. This view is exemplified in Chi's experience with her Afghanis customers. Regarding the research problem of Vietnamese university graduates' experience and perception on communicative problems arising from the use of WE, this research is in fact the first investigating such issues in the context of Vietnam; thus the findings can become a source of reference for future research on similar topics. Specifically, data about types of intelligibility problem, its causes and effects can be employed in future quantitative studies which might wish to explore the comprehensive picture of problems in WE uses, either in Vietnam or in any other EFL/ ESL contexts.

Finally, this research locates itself among the studies advocating for developing a WE integrated EFL pedagogy. One prominent theme found across the cases in this study is the deeply rooted issue of native-speakerism. The study depicts this belief from the way the participants perceive intelligibility problems to how they express

their feelings towards the effects of WE intelligibility problems. By highlighting the conflict inside the participants to maintain intelligibility and their native-speaker proficiency dream, this research calls for the need to include WE perspectives in EFL.

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