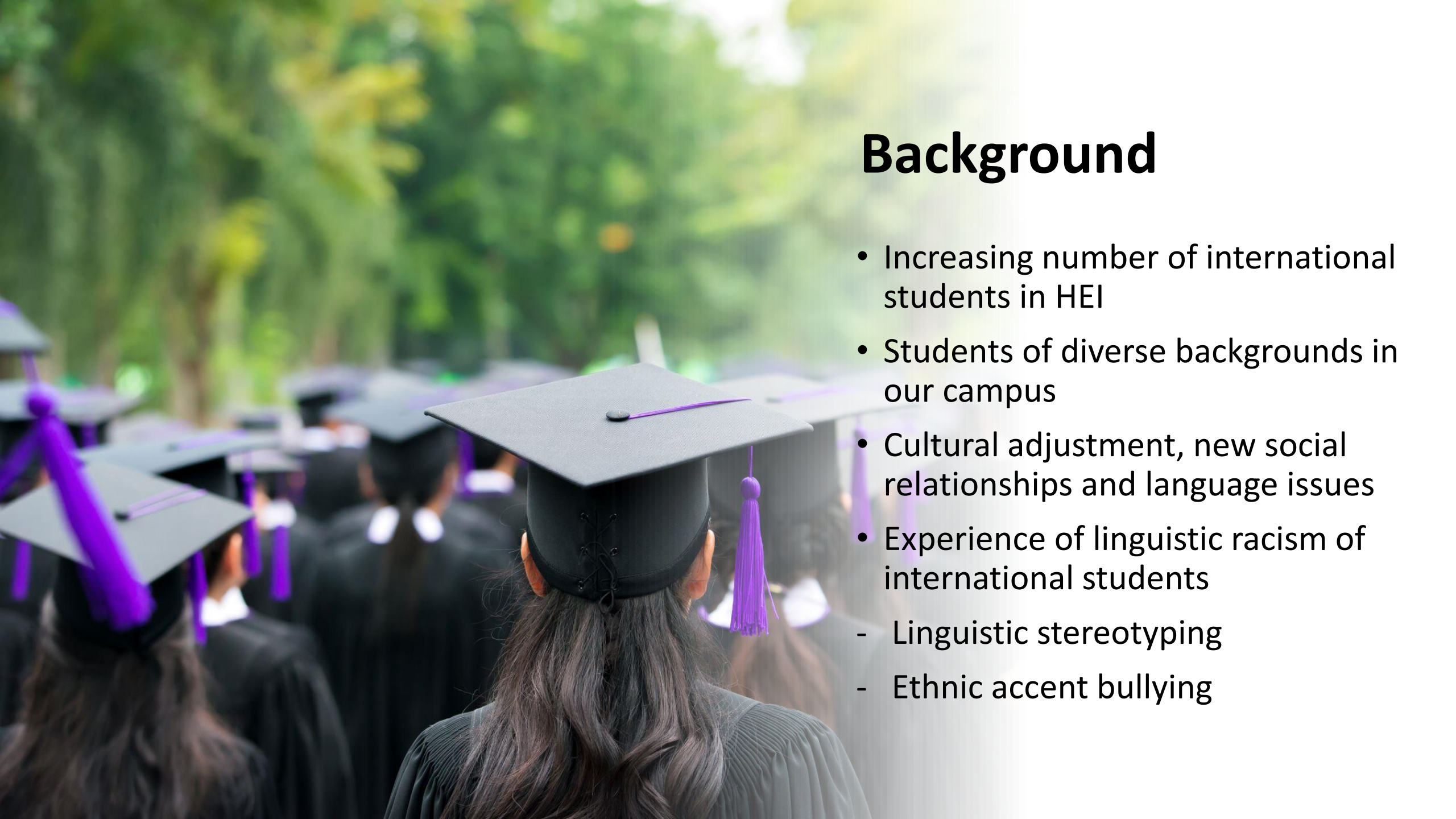


Embracing Diverse Accents in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Dr Echo Yuet Wah Yeung
Dr Godfrey Muchena



Background

- Increasing number of international students in HEI
- Students of diverse backgrounds in our campus
- Cultural adjustment, new social relationships and language issues
- Experience of linguistic racism of international students
 - Linguistic stereotyping
 - Ethnic accent bullying



Aim and objectives

Aim: To enhance the learning experience of international students

Objectives:

- To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of non-native English accent on the classroom learning and practice learning experiences of international students
 - To identify challenges international students experienced in classroom and practice learning
 - To explore and develop different strategies to address the above challenges experienced by international students
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Research Method

- A qualitative study
- Individual interviews and focus group
- Intersectional position of research team



Participants

- 20 international students: 13 Social Work / 7 Mental Health Nursing
- 16 Females / 4 males
- 19 master's level and one at BSc level
- 14 Black Africans, three Indians, one Chinese, one Trinidadian and one Hungarian
- 14 said English was the most competent spoken language



Characteristics of individual participants

PSEUDONYM	NATIONALITY	SELF-ASSESSED SPOKEN ENGLISH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE (AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW)
Petra	British / Hungarian	60% (80%)
Mei	Hong Kong	30% (80%)
Danai	Zimbabwean	90% (90%)
Farai	Zimbabwean	100% (100%)
Ariko	Zimbabwean	80% (80%)
Meera	Indian	20% (90%)
Esther	Zimbabwean	98% (75%)
Sarika	Indian	40% (90%)
Jaya	Zimbabwean	98% (98%)
Janet	Trinidadian	100% (101%)
Uma	Indian	40% (70%)
Abebi	Nigerian	85% (85%)
Chichi	Zimbabwean	40% (80%)
Agu	Nigerian	100% (95%)
Joy	Nigerian	100% (90%)
Kebe	Nigerian	100% (100%)
Blessing	Nigerian	100% (100%)
Kojo	Ghanaian	80% (80%)
Osei	Ghanaian	80% (80%)
Abigail	Nigerian	100% (100%)

Study Findings



1. An intimidating experience

- The fear that not being understood and being laughed at
- Students made them feel stupid and embarrassed

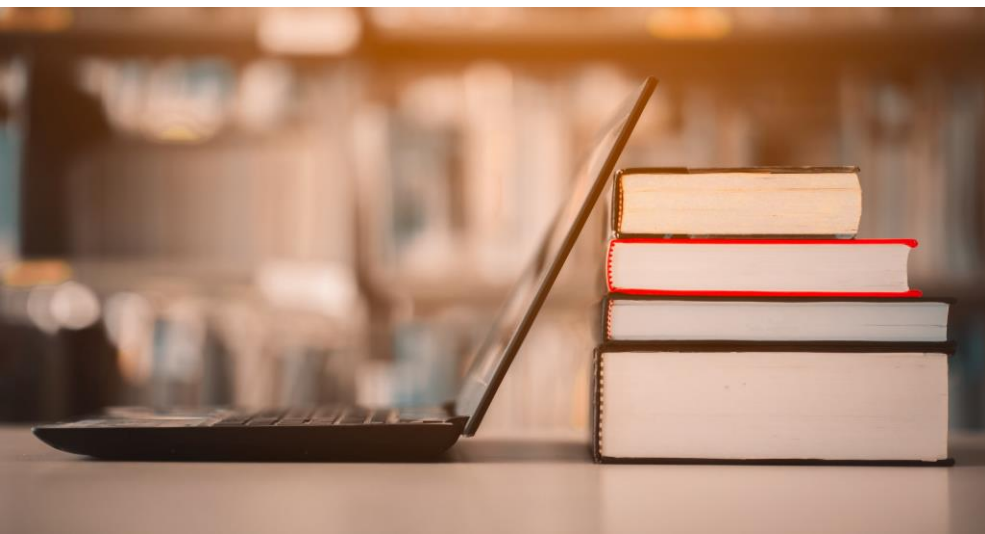
- *“Even though they're not saying, their facial expression speaks a lot, like, they were not able to understand. When I'm seeing it in front of me, I don't feel like, oh, I don't want to talk anymore, because those people are not understanding me at all. . . we were just silent in the class”.*
- *“I know she (tutor) didn't understand my question, because that was not the response I was expecting, and the response was embarrassing . . . and then someone gave you an answer that made you feel stupid, and then everyone was laughing. So, naturally, you think they're all laughing at your stupidity. . . I can't remember the question I asked ‘but the affect-effect stayed with me”.*



Initial response from students

Affected their confidence to speak up in the class. *'staying at the background' and 'hide their voices' by:*

- muting themselves
- switching the camera off
- staying behind the lessons
- sending emails *'as emails have no accent'*



Other responses which demonstrate students' resilience

- It was nerve-racking but keep trying
- Other people in the class inspire me
- Have belief in yourself



- *“In the beginning, it was embarrassing, yeah, but I didn't let that stop me. But I have a couple of friends in class who stopped asking questions, because of the kind of feedback they're getting, because they were not understood. “So it's very easy for the lecturer to assume that I don't know, but that's not the case, because I know, I just don't know how to express myself” When being called out by lecturer to answer question, ‘my heart is racing’*
- *“I can only speak for where I'm from, I'm from Nigeria, and English might be a second language, but it's the main language that we speak. We were all taught in English. Everything we did is in English. I feel that people who say they do not understand us when we speak, are probably just pretending most of the time, so I'm not bothered by it”.*

2. An isolating experience

- Feeling of excluded, left out and being silent
- Fellow students were not prepared to give them time to try to understand them
- Feeling being judged



“Everybody's accent is different. And if you do not understand, it's okay to ask, but you can't just blankly say that you do not understand someone. Because definitely, if you're an educator, it's not the first time you're meeting with someone who is from another country”.

“As a student from another country, where we didn't have any idea about what they're talking. Why everybody is laughing. It was such a bad moment for us, like, we really feel excluded. That was, I should say that was from both tutors, and from the students as well”.


‘they think I am being rude, but your don't mean it that way . . . How you communicate in your own culture, in your own language, but when you say it in front of different people, than you just got misinterpreted. I will say frustrated and you just don't feel connected’.




An isolating experience during the pandemic

- *“I actually know that there were some local students who were upset that we were seemingly getting extra support that they weren't getting, but we were just trying to make up that time that we'd lost, because the others had started without us”.*
- *“Starting your studies in a foreign land when the pandemic is really at its peak was very challenging, like I said initially, and it felt really isolating. It felt like you don't really understand what's going on, because things that were normal or that I would have learned earlier, like small things, like terms, like local authority”.*


3. Working through the landscape of different accents :



2. It may make them feel uncomfortable if I ask them to repeat.



1. Other students and tutors have accents too, I don't understand them either, what do I do?



3. I will politely ask them to repeat, even it means to repeat 3 times. It's about respect.

Compartmentalised speakers with different accent

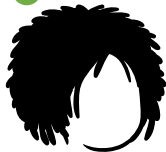
1. Some accents are easier to understand than others



2. I want to have a posh / perfect English accent



3. Be careful, we are internalising an inferiority complex



4. There are different accents here, shouldn't we celebrate our diverse accents



Be careful to internalise linguistic inferior complex

2. Why do you need to apologise ?



1. At the beginning, I worried people do not understand me, I apologised all the time

3. Don't you ever apologise for your accent!



What helped students

- Being proactive, resilience
- Solidarity , 'someone like me'
- Support and encouragement by tutors
- Respect diversity and promote meaningful conversation



Recommendation

- **Induction** at the beginning: workshops regarding language and accent should be organised in class when the course first started
- **Raising awareness** about the complexity and variation of diverse accents for tutors and academic staff: respect for diversity
- **EDUCATION** –Everyone has accent. The key is to accept individuals as they are, it is also important to accept that accent forms part of our identity. People should be able to process the way speakers talk to accommodate the understanding of others. However, It is important to recognise that the listener may probably be nervous as well.
- Nobody should feel superior or inferior or be made to feel inferior. **No one should apologise** for their accent.
- **More workshops** to be organised not only for international students but for **home students** too.