Students' Perspectives on Perceived Levels of Intelligibility and Comprehensibility: Comparing the Accents of Native English Teachers (NETs) with Those of Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs)

Valentin Tassev

Woosong Language Institute, Woosong University

Corresponding email: valentinetassev@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The overall objective of this study was to investigate adult Thai students' perspectives on perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility by comparing the accents of native English teachers (NETs) with those of non-native English teachers (NNETs) through the means of a questionnaire as part of a mixed methods research design. The study found that from students' perspectives, the accents of NETs are more intelligible than the accents of NNETs on phonetic and grammatical levels. Nevertheless, when examining students' perspectives on perceived levels of comprehensibility, it was found that the accents of NETs are not necessarily more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs. The findings of this study, thus, imply that in terms of overall comprehension of an utterance, students have the ability to comprehend and interpret non-native speech equally well as native speech throughout their daily interactions in English. Thus, in terms of students' ever-day communication in English, communicative efficiency ends up being more important and necessary than native-like competence and performance. In the long-term, this ability ends up being even more of a necessary prerequisite, especially in international and intercultural environments where English functions in various forms, serves different purposes and where the internationalization of the language is highly evident, such as Thailand.

Keywords : Accent, Comprehensibility, Intelligibility, Native versus non-native English teacher, Perspectives

Introduction

As English has become an international language of communication and given that nowadays non-native speakers (NNSs) of English outnumber native speakers (NSs) of

English (Hwang & Yim, 2019; Ishaque, 2018), it is therefore an imperative to acknowledge and take into consideration varieties of English and, especially, varieties concerned with pronunciation and accents. Varieties concerning pronunciation are particularly important for the purposes of communication among NSs and NNSs in international contexts. In this regard, it is increasingly important to be able to identify and establish certain benchmarks and criteria for what constitutes correct and acceptable pronunciation in English. This will help inform instructors and educational policy-makers as to how English should be both taught and assessed from one context to another.

Such knowledge is particularly important for a local Thai context too. Given that nowadays lots of NSs and NNSs communicate through a shared and common language in Thailand, here English, students' views on pronunciation thus could provide valuable insights into how to better facilitate and promote levels of communication and interaction among those in this highly internationalized context. As Nanni (2021) asserts, Thai students are more and more likely to use English in the future to communicate with other learners of English and English is on the road of becoming the lingua franca of Southeast Asia. Kirkpatrick (2020), moreover, argues that English will continue to play more diverse and wide-ranging roles in the future in the Expanding Circle (EC) countries of Asia as it is being increasingly used as a lingua franca for a variety of purposes by multilinguals in Asia. This present study, therefore, could provide insights into the implications of English language education on Thailand's future role in global and regional/local contexts and, especially, within the EC countries of Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In order to establish certain benchmarks as to what constitutes correct and acceptable pronunciation in English, it is firstly vital to determine the levels of comprehension of English or how well English is being understood provided that there are so many various accents, pronunciation models as there are speakers of English. In determining the degree of listening-comprehension, Smith (1992, 2009) proposed a three-dimensional approach to assessing one's English speech in inter-cultural settings. The first level is intelligibility, which measures the listener's ability to identify and recognize words or utterances. The second level is comprehensibility which measures the listener's ability to understand the meanings of words or utterances in their given context. The third level is interpretability, which measures the listener's ability to perceive and understand the intention of the speaker (Natiladdanon & Thanavisuth, 2014). The level of interpretability is not assessed and explored throughout this study as it involves issues of pragmatics and social context, which despite being crucial for determining levels of understanding of one's speech, will move the study beyond the focus on pronunciation and accents.

Examining the levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility is particularly important for highlighting whether accuracy or rather mutual intelligibility is more

important for the purposes of international and inter-cultural communication. In light of this, it is crucial to find out whether from students' perspectives, accuracy and correctness on a word level (hence intelligibility) or rather communicative efficacy on a sentence level (hence comprehensibility) is more important for negotiating and reaching meaning among speakers from various language backgrounds in highly international and multi-cultural contexts as Thailand being one of them. Again, information of this kind will not only have implications on how English should be both taught and assessed in Thailand, but also it will make contribution as to how the levels of communication and cooperation in Thailand involving various groups of English speakers could be increased through the use of a common and shared language, here English.

Despite recent and current trends in the evolution and globalization of language, such as English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as an international language (EIL), or World Englishes (WEs), the teaching of the language has been dominated for a long time by a movement or trend, known as native speakerism. As a large number of previous studies suggests, native speakerism is an ideology that favours the NS, as well as NS English and NS methods (Comprendio & Savski, 2020; Holliday, 1994; 2006, cited in Copland, Mann & Garton, 2020; Jindapitak, 2014; Jindapitak & Teo, 2011; Suwanarak, 2010).

The ideology of native speakerism has also largely affected the methodology of English language teaching in Thailand. Thus, depending on teachers' nationalities and language backgrounds, they have been assigned different teaching roles and different courses to teach, especially within a Thai university setting: listening or speaking, or reading and writing. Thus, it has been decided by the Ministry of Education that only NETs would be allowed to teach listening and speaking courses, as they are suitable models for students to improve their levels of English proficiency and communicative skills (Suwanarak, 2010). Moreover, there is still a widely-spread assumption among teachers, Thai students and parents of students that the most important qualification of an English teacher is their nationality (Haeg, 2020).

Learners' opinions on their desired English pronunciation models have been examined extensively in previous research studies. In this regard, learners have been asked repeatedly to express their opinions as to how English pronunciation should be both taught and assessed. For example, in a study conducted with university students in Vietnam and Japan, Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) found that the participants felt the pronunciation of NETs was clearer, more authentic and a desired model in terms of linguistic output. Diaz (2015) conducted a study investigating the preferences of students at the University of Rennes towards their NETs and NNETs. Most students expressed preferences for NETs in the areas of pronunciation and oral exercises. Investigating Hong Kong secondary school students' attitudes towards both NETs and NNETs, Cheung (2009) also found that the majority of the participants preferred NETs as their oral teachers,

because NETs' pronunciation was better in terms of accuracy. Participants also stated that they preferred NETs as they could correct students' pronunciation and help them lose their accent when communicating in English. Students felt that, as a result, they were becoming more confident and believed they would be able to speak with other foreigners more effectively on a later stage.

Learners' views on their desired English pronunciation models have been examined extensively in previous studies conducted in Thailand too. In this regard, students have been asked repeatedly to express their views as to how English pronunciation should be both taught and assessed in a local context. Thus, it was found that native varieties of English still prevail and are rated more favorably and positively than non-native varieties by Thai speakers of English (Goldsmith & Dennis, 2016; Kanoksilapatham, 2013; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018). It was also found that NS accents were still the desired models and standards to be learnt and used in a local, Thai context (Jindapitak, 2014; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Kalra & Thanavisuth, 2018; Snodin & Young, 2015).

Nevertheless, there have been other studies conducted in Thailand too, which support the idea that awareness and recognition of NNS varieties of English, including those concerned with pronunciation, are important for the purposes of international and intercultural communication, especially when conducted between various speech communities. Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian (2020), for example, explored the awareness and attitudes of Thai undergraduate hotel interns/students towards varieties of spoken English. Thus, whereas participants still expressed preferences for NS accents, at the same time they accepted and expressed positive attitudes towards varieties of NNS accents. Thus, they showed favorable attitudes towards the global status of ELF and recognized its importance for the purposes of intercultural and international communication.

Moreover, Jindapitak & Teo (2013) conducted a study investigating university students' preferences for varieties of English and their attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English. According to the findings of this study, despite the fact that the majority of learners preferred NS accents, they still considered non-native English varieties worth understanding and learning. Rattanaphumma (2013: 458) examined the attitudes of 348 English language university students towards both NETs' and NNETs' English accents and teaching practices. Referring to the area of English accents, it was found that learners exhibited positive attitudes towards both NETs and NNETs. On the one hand, respondents perceived NS accents as "authentic, proper and classical". On the other hand, they considered Thai English accents as easy and clear to understand. As so far illustrated, with regard to the area of correct pronunciation and accent, the results are not as definitive and pronounced as they first might appear to be in favor of NS accents.

Objective

This particular study is driven by the following main objective. This study aims to investigate adult Thai students' perspectives on perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility by comparing the accents of NETs (and respectively, NSs) with those of NNETs (and respectively, NNSs).

It should be mentioned here that the notions of intelligibility and comprehensibility are derived from Smith's (1992) definition of both terms. In determining the degree of comprehension, Smith (1992; 2009, cited in Natiladdanon & Thanavisuth, 2014) thus proposed a three-dimensional approach to assessing one's English speech in intercultural settings. The first level is intelligibility, which measures the listener's ability to identify and recognize words or utterances. The second level is comprehensibility which measures the listener's ability to understand the meanings of words or utterances in their given context. This study will identify with these two dimensions when assessing listening-comprehension. Keeping the research objective in mind, this research study will address the following four main research questions (RQs):

1. What are students' perspectives on levels of intelligibility when comparing NETs with NNETs' pronunciation/accent?

2. What are their perspectives on levels of comprehensibility?

3. Is there a relationship between the levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility and, thus, should one look at them interchangeably or rather separately?

4. What are their preferred accents in terms of their daily usage of English and interactions?

Methodology

1. Population and Sample

1.1 Population

The subjects of this study were adult students who were enrolled in an English language course, focusing on listening and speaking at the Ramkhamhaeng Institute of Languages (RIL) at Ramkhamhaeng University (RU), Thailand. The RIL at RU functions like a weekend language school offering a variety of language courses for adults for non-degree purposes. Most of the students had already done 5 levels of listening and speaking courses run by the RIL, prior to the time the research study was conducted. These courses are usually based on the textbook, Passages, by Jack Richards and Chuck Sandy. However, it is mostly up to the instructor to decide how to teach the lessons and what information from the textbook to include.

1.2 Sample

Those exact participants were chosen with a rationale behind. Thus, it was of particular interest to investigate adult students' perspectives on the matter being discussed, who unlike regular university students, might not have been informed as thoroughly about recent and current trends related to native speakerism and ELF, EIL etc. The research study was distributed to all participants in that class: 12-14 participants. However, in total, only 8 students responded and participated in the study. All the participants are Thai, whose mother tongue is Thai.

2. Aims

As mentioned earlier, the main aim of this study is to investigate Thai students' perspectives on perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility by comparing the accents of NETs with those of NNETs, as well as their possible inter-relationship. On a further level, this study also aims to investigate students' preferred accents in terms of their daily usage of English and daily interactions.

3. Research Scope

This study employed a mixed methods research design. In particular, it employed an explanatory sequential design, which allows for the integration of findings by drawing upon the strengths of both methodologies: quantitative and qualitative research methods combined consecutively. The design implemented here consisted of two phases. The first phase was a quantitative instrument phase whereby the data was collected quantitatively or numerically. The data in the first phase was later supported and validated by the qualitative phase, consisting of open-ended information. The second qualitative phase was, thus, built upon the results found in the quantitative phase. The qualitative phase is, therefore, data driven and data dependent as it further explains and explores the quantitative results. In other words, the intention here is to explain qualitatively the quantitative results found earlier. In this particular case-study, the choice of a Likert scale allowed for numerical, objective measurement of the findings while the open-ended questions that followed allowed for subjective interpretation of these same findings.

The idea behind this approach is that the quantitative data and results provide a broad picture of the research problem and later on, the qualitative data helps refine, explain and expand on that broad picture by adding more concrete and detailed analysis (Subedi, 2016). As this mixed method research design allows for the possibility of triangulation or the use of several means to examine the same phenomenon, it thus helps ensure validity and reliability of the research study. As Subedi (2016) argues, the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as their analyses, helps make the relationship between statistical results and identifiable themes and categories

more convincing and apparent, especially when exploring and dealing with participants' views.

4. Research Instrument

This study employed the use of a single research instrument, a questionnaire (see Appendix). The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part (Part 1) asked for information concerned with the participants' backgrounds and other personal information: their first language and nationality, and how many courses or levels of English they have done at the RIL, prior to when the study was conducted. This information is found in Question 1-Question 3, including (see Appendix).

The second part (Part 2) asked students to indicate their perspectives and views regarding their perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility on a 3-point Likert scale (containing the categories Agree; Neutral and Disagree). The students were also asked to respond to two open-ended questions, related to each variable (intelligibility and comprehensibility). The questions asked students to provide any extra information concerning those two levels/variables in their own words in support of their answers. Thus, students were asked to elaborate in more details on why they agreed or disagreed that the accents of NETs were more intelligible and/or more comprehensible than those of NNETs, respectively. In addition, participants were asked to indicate which accents of NETs or NNETs they were referring to in support of the choices and opinions they had given earlier. All this information is found in Question 4-Question 9, including (see Appendix).

Regarding the open-ended questions, the findings are categorized and analyzed through qualitative means whenever there are recurring patterns, consistencies and similarities among students' responses. Thus, the procedure that was adopted here is a key word analysis, which generates and establishes categories from the statements made by the respondents. These categories are coded themes or thematic areas registered and identified on the basis of how frequently they appear amongst respondents' answers. Whenever existent, these themes have been presented and displayed in italics font when providing students' original quotes (see Results and discussions section).

Questions 4-6, including, addressed RQ 1. Questions 7-9, including, addressed RQ 2. Here it should be noted that students had been informed about the notions of both intelligibility and comprehensibility prior to the research study. RQ 3 and RQ 4 were addressed by looking at the consistencies and patters that emerged between RQ 1 and RQ 2, and the data found there.

5. Data Collection

The questionnaire was submitted online and students sent their completed questionnaires online. The data was collected and analyzed between January to May 2020.

As mentioned earlier, this study employed a mixed methods research design. The findings in Part 2 are, thus, presented both quantitively and qualitatively. Regarding the closed-ended questions and items/options, the findings are displayed quantitively through numbers and percentages. These figures are presented below (see Results and discussions section). Regarding the open-ended questions, the findings are categorized and analyzed through qualitative means as mentioned above.

Results and Discussions

1. Students' perspectives on levels of intelligibility comparing NETs with NNETs (RQ 1)

Among all 8 respondents, 6 participants (75%) agreed that the accents of NETs are more intelligible than the accents of NNETs by ticking the category *Agree* on the 3-point Likert scale. The remaining 2 participants (25%) were neutral as they ticked the category *Neutral*. Students' responses thus showed that NS accents were more intelligible than the accents of NNSs. In addition, the results indicated no preference at all for NNS accents. Figure 1 below presents all the results.
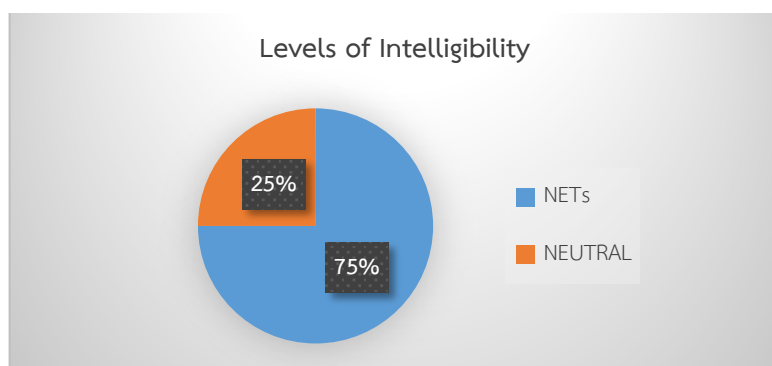

Figure 1. Levels of Intelligibility

As to the underlying causes for their preferences, most participants justified their answers and provided elaborate answers as to the causes of what their preferences were in support of intelligibility. Here it should be noted that students' original quotes were mostly cited throughout this study (i.e., as they were given). However, whenever needed, very small corrections were made if, for example, students had made grammatical mistakes and/or what they had written was somehow unclear and ambiguous. The answers given were as follows:

"NETs are better for primary learners to recognize and identify syllables, sounds and words *correctly*." (Participant 1)

"In my opinion, the accent/pronunciation of native English teachers helps the learner to learn the *correct* accent." (Participant 2)

"We should start with NETs speakers, because you will learn to speak and practice *correctly*." (Participant 3)

"Accents and pronunciation of NETs are *correct* and when we hear English sound of them, we can understand." (Participant 4)

As evident, correctness emerged as a category given in support of the pronunciation and accents of NETs perceived as more intelligible. The 4 participants explained their reasons for NET preferences by using the words "*correct*" and "*correctly*". This thematic category has been highlighted in italics above.

The statements quoted above reveal that students' positive attitudes towards NS accents might largely be a result of students' direct experiences of being exposed to these accents the most. As evident from the answer particularly given by Participant 4, this participant thus has found the accents of NETs more familiar, therefore easier to recognize and identify, and, as a result, more *correct*. Another participant (Participant 5) also expressed a similar idea and shared that familiarity with NS speech was a result of students' prior English language learning experiences and exposure to NETs. Furthermore, the participant shared that she, therefore, favored the NS model more in terms of her future use of English. Her answer was as follows:

"Because we study English with the native English teacher. I think we can have accent/pronunciation like the native speaker. When we speak with foreigner or native speaker, they can understand more." (Participant 5)

In this regard, the issue of familiarity could be an important factor in influencing students' views and preferences regarding their desired accents and pronunciation model(s). One could conclude, therefore, that students' existing levels of familiarity with certain accents could affect their beliefs about such accent(s) in a positive way and, as a result, students would end up favoring the use of such accents, at least from the perspective of intelligibility on a word level. If students consider an accent familiar, they would therefore find it easily-recognizable, intelligible and acceptable in terms of levels of *correctness*.

These findings support the findings of Kaur & Raman (2014: 258), who state that familiarity with certain accents results in having learners develop more "favorable and positive" attitudes towards those particular accents. As a result, they therefore consider them more acceptable, pleasant and correct.

Students' answers also reveal another interesting phenomenon. Provided that students have been exposed to NS accents the most, one could assume that this

phenomenon is rather an indication or a reflection of prevalent teaching and learning practices existing in educational settings and in the academia at large, which revolve around the NS construct and the widely-accepted belief that NS varieties are perhaps the only ones acceptable and correct models in terms of pronunciation. Thus, students' views might simply reflect and reaffirm already widely-known trends in support of native speakerism, largely prevalent in the teaching industry and the literature on the NS/NNS dichotomy.

Certainly, this issue needs further and careful re-examination because, as mentioned earlier, nowadays NNSs of English outnumber NSs of English (Hwang & Yim, 2019; Ishaque, 2018), and Thailand has followed the trend of comprising of lots of NNSs communicating with each other on a daily basis (Todd, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate whether the NS norms are perceived as the only legitimate and acceptable (and also desired) models in terms of pronunciation in a country with constantly evolving sociolinguistic realities and landscapes in terms of the usage of English, such as Thailand. Moreover, it is worth investigating whether accuracy or rather mutual intelligibility is more important for the purposes of successful communication again in a largely international and intercultural setting, such as Thailand. These issues would be a matter of discussion throughout the following sub-section.

2. Students' perspectives on levels of comprehensibility comparing NETs with NNETs (RQ 2)

Among all 8 respondents, only 4 participants (50 %) agreed that the accents of NETs are more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs by ticking the category *Agree* on the 3-point Likert scale. 3 participants (37.5 %) were neutral as they ticked the category Neutral. Only 1 participant disagreed that that the accents of NETs are more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs, and ticked the category *Disagree*. Figure 2 below presents all the results.
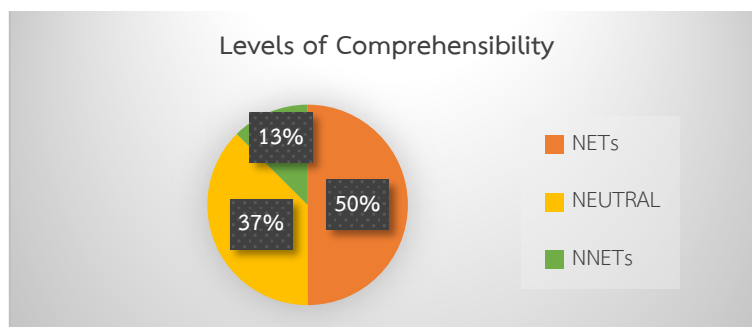

Figure 2. Levels of Comprehensibility

As this figure suggests, in contrast to the variable on intelligibility above (RQ 1), NS accents are not necessarily more comprehensible than the accents of NNSs. Thus, half of the participants did not exhibit preference(s) in support of NS accents when asked about perceived levels of comprehensibility (RQ 2). Also, students' answers on this particular question did not indicate any consistencies and emerging categories as in the previous issue on intelligibility.

3. Students' perspectives on the relationship between intelligibility and comprehensibility (RQ 3)

With regard to RQ 3, the findings do not reveal a strong correlation or inter-relationship between the levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility as perceived by students. Thus, while most of the participants found the accents of NETs more intelligible than those of NNETs (75 %), only half of the respondents found the accents of NETs more comprehensible than those of NNETs (50 %).

Also, out of the 6 respondents who initially found the accents of NETs more intelligible, just 4 of those found the NETs' accents also more comprehensible. Regarding the remaining 2 participants, one of them was neutral in terms of comprehensibility (Participant 3) while the other one disagreed that the accents of NETs were more comprehensible (Participant 1). These variations too suggest a weak correlation between perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility. Their answers were as follows:

"NETs are better for primary learners to recognize and identify syllables, sounds and words *correctly*. NNETs are better for primary learners to understand the meaning of the whole sentence because of similar pronunciation (Asian). But for long-term meaning, NETs and NNETs are the same. It depends on teaching skill, facilitating technique and learner's practice." (Participant 1)

"We should start with NETs speakers, because you will learn to speak and practice *correctly*...but I think the accents of NETs are sometimes difficult to hear. Because they speak fast and if your listening skills are not good, then it makes you confused and misinterpret. While the accents/pronunciation of NNETs might not be better than NET speaker, but you are able to understand and communicate." (Participant 3)

In light of this, students' answers perhaps indicate that intelligibility and comprehensibility could be evaluated separately or as two separate entities and variables in the process of listening comprehension. In other words, while students might grasp and recognize an utterance of a NS on phonetic and grammatical levels (or on a word level), it does not always mean that they would be able to interpret the underlying message of such an utterance-thus, its meaning on a sentence level. Alternatively, the answers might suggest that while students might not be able to interpret NNS speech on phonetic and

grammatical levels as expected by prevailing norms, they could still be able to interpret its meaning on a broader level or semantically (i.e., on a sentence level).

In addition, their answers perhaps also indicate that students might have been exposed to NS speech and trained extensively to recognize it successfully in terms of its expected and, therefore, supposedly accurate sound. Yet, they are equally capable to uncover the meaning of NNS speech on a semantic level even without being able to judge it phonetically (and grammatically); moreover, they would not go as far as to define it as wrong or inaccurate simply because it does not conform to NS speech and thus the supposedly right sound.

Nevertheless, this study does not suggest that these statements necessarily represent one of the study's clearly- defined and distinguished findings, because, as illustrated above, only 2 participants answered the open-ended questions convincingly as to reveal any insights into the likely inter-relationship between levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility. The finding to this RQ was, therefore, based on frequencies and numbers rather than categories and consistencies obtained from answers to the open-ended questions.

4. Students' further perspectives as to their preferred accents in terms of their daily usage of English and interactions (RQ 4)

The weak correlation between these two variables also suggests that in daily situations and communication encounters, what is more important is whether the meaning of a communicative act has been successfully communicated to the interlocutor rather than whether the NS phonetic and grammatical features and standards have been applied successfully. In other words, the principle of overall intelligibility or communicative efficiency is more important in the processes of international and cross-cultural communication and, especially, in international and intercultural settings, such as Thailand.

Even though students' answers do not reveal explicitly any strong preferences for NS or NNS speech, they still do imply that in terms of overall comprehension, students cope with NNS speech equally well or almost equally well as with NS speech in terms of their daily interactions in English or within the public spectrum. Therefore, this study suggests implicitly that students' exposure to NS speech might prevail to a great extent in educational settings, such as university settings and/or school settings, where instruction by native instructors might be prevalent and preferred. However, in terms of students' daily interactions in English, they might be exposed to varieties of non-native norms and models, which subsequently increases their awareness of the existence of those and their ability to negotiate meaning and reach understanding, while being participants in those cross-cultural acts of communication. Again, the answers

of 2 of the participants quoted in the previous sub-section (Participant 3 and Participant 1) reveal these existing trends and practices. Their answers were as follows:

"NETs are better for primary learners to recognize and identify syllables, sounds and words *correctly*. NNETs are better for primary learners to understand the meaning of the whole sentence because of similar pronunciation (Asian). But for long-term meaning, NETs and NNETs are the same. It depends on teaching skill, facilitating technique and learner's practice." (Participant 1)

"We should start with NETs speakers, because you will learn to speak and practice *correctly*...but I think the accents of NETs are sometimes difficult to hear. Because they speak fast and if your listening skills are not good, then it makes you confused an misinterpret. While the accents/pronunciation of NNETs might not be better than NET speaker, but you are able to understand and communicate." (Participant 3)

In today's globalized world and the constantly changing nature and status of English, it is, therefore, a must for learners of English to be exposed to varieties of English, both NS and NNS varieties. As much as the debate on ELF, and/or EIL, and/or WEs, has been a hot topic of discussion especially in recent years, more pedagogical steps and measures need to be taken to introduce learners to how English functions in various cultural and social settings, as well as the communicative purposes it serves in each of those settings.

Moreover, learners' exposure to those varieties of English need to be planted from an early age and start right from the academia and the early educational settings, whose role is crucial in terms of increasing learners' awareness and learners' abilities to engage successfully across cross-cultural boundaries through the use of a common, yet diversified language: English. In Thailand, this is even more the case as the role of English in Thailand is multi-faceted, multi-layered and crucial for promoting intercultural awareness and positioning Thailand's presence and roles in regional and international contexts even more strongly through the use of the language (Akkakoson, 2019).

Lastly, it should be noted that this research study did not indicate any preferences for certain NS or NNS models of pronunciation, such as, for example, American English accent, or British English accent, or Thai English accent etc. Thus, from students' perspectives, the issue at stake was whether an accent was native or non-native rather than whether it belonged to a particular group of NS or NNS accents. On a further note, their lack of answers on this issue perhaps suggests that students still might not be able to identify both certain NS and NNS accents because of lack of enough information, knowledge and exposure; yet, such a statement would be a speculation at this stage. In light of this, a future research study of similar kind might look into more details at

students' preferences for certain NS or NNS accents, as well as at the underlying causes behind their preferences.

Conclusion and Further Work

This study primarily examined adult Thai students' perspectives on perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility while comparing the accents of NETs with those of NNETs. As the findings suggest, the accents of NETs (and respectively, NSs) are more intelligible than the accents of NNETs (and respectively, NNSs). In contrast, when investigating students' perspectives on perceived levels of comprehensibility, it was found that the accents of NETs (and respectively, NSs) are not necessarily more comprehensible than the accents of NNETs (and respectively, NNSs). Furthermore, the findings suggest implicitly a weak correlation between perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility as from students' perspectives.

Even though these findings do not reveal explicitly any strong preferences in support of NS or NNS speech in terms of overall comprehension, they do reveal implicitly that when it comes to overall understanding of an utterance, students are able to comprehend and cope with NNS speech equally well as with NS speech in terms of their daily interactions in English. Thus, while students might find NS speech more intelligible (on grammatical and phonetic levels) and therefore, preferable, as an accent or a pronunciation model, when it comes to every-day communication, overall intelligibility and communicative efficiency are more important than native-like competence and performance. These findings thus prove the point that in the wake of ELF, EIL, WEs, and Thailand's constantly increasing role in ASEAN and Southeast Asia, exposure to varieties of English, both NS and NNS varieties, is essential as it strengthens and develops peoples' competencies, readiness and abilities to communicate across socio-linguistic and cross-cultural barriers in international and inter-cultural settings as Thailand being one of them.

This study is not without limitations. First of all, the sample is too small so as to claim that these results could provide a generic picture of Thai adult students' perspectives on intelligibility and comprehensibility, as well as their attitudes to English pronunciation models and accents. Thus, a future study of this or similar kind should include a much larger number of participants so as to account for more validity and applicability of the research study and, especially, its findings.

Secondly, the English course the participants here were enrolled in is not a regular university English course with very strict and clearly-specified learning outcomes and expectations. It might be therefore argued that students' perspectives on NETs and NNETs still need further re-examination and evaluation that would take place in the future preferably in a longitudinal study and also in a standardized, regular type of English course

or a series of English courses, whereby the choices of NETs and NNETs are seriously pre-determined, planned and both groups of teachers have clear and specific prescribed roles and objectives to follow and accomplish. These factors would most likely largely impact on how they are seen and perceived by their students.

Lastly, a further research study should also perhaps include semi-structured interviews as an additional research instrument and a follow-up to the questionnaires, whereby participants would be able to justify and elaborate more on their perspectives and views that were given earlier in the questionnaires.

References

Akkakoson, S. (2019). Thai language learners' sense of English ownership. *PASAA, 58*, 235-263.

Cheung, M.S. (2009). Native or non-Native? Exploring Hong Kong students' perspectives. *Papers from the Lancaster University Postgraduate Conference in Linguistics and Language Teaching, 4*.

Comprendio, L., & Savski, K. (2020). 'Asians' and 'Westerners': Examining the perception of '(non-)native' migrant teachers of English in Thailand. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 41*(8), 673-685. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1630419

Copland, F., Mann, S., & Garton, S. (2020). Native-English-speaking teachers: Disconnections between theory, research and practice. *TESOL Quarterly, 54*, 348-374. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.548

Diaz, N. (2015). Students' Preferences regarding native and non-native teachers of English at a university in the French Brittany. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences, 173*, 93-97. DOI:10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.036

Goldsmith, A., & Dennis, N. (2016). An illumination of 3rd year, Thai-English major undergraduate students' perceptions of native and Thai English teachers. *International Journal of Research-GRANTHAALAYAH, 4*(7), 27-65. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.58690

Haeg, E. (2020, February 19). *3 solutions to Thailand's English teacher shortage*. The Taiger. https://thethaiger.com/news/national/3-solutions-to-thailands-english-teacher-shortage

Hwang, K., & Yim, S. (2019). The negative influence of native-speakerism on the sustainability of linguistic and cultural diversities of localized variants of English: A study of local and expatriate teachers in South Korea. *Sustainability, 11*(23), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11236723

Ishaque, R. (2018). Empowering English speakers through diversification and promotion of World Englishes. *Advances in Language and Literacy Studies (ALLS)*, *9*(6), 93-100. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.9n.6p.93

Jindapitak, N., & Teo, A. (2011). Linguistic and cultural imperialism in English language education in Thailand. *Journal of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University*, *3*(2), 10-29. https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/journal-la/article/view/64759/53112

Jindapitak, N., & Teo, A. (2013). Accent priority in a Thai university context: A common sense revisited. *English Language Teaching*, *6*(9), 193-204.

Jindapitak, N. (2014). English pronunciation teacher preference: Thai university English learners' views. *Proceedings of INTED2014 Conference, 10th-12th of March 2014* (4982-4991). Valencia, Spain.

Kalra, R., & Thanavisuth, C. (2018). Do you like my English? Thai students' attitudes towards five different Asian accents. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, *9*(4), 281-294. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no4.21

Kanoksilapatham, B. (2013). Thai university students' voices heard: Aspired pronunciation model. *Journal of English Studies*, *8*, 124-153.

Kaur, P., & Raman, A. (2014). Exploring native speaker and non-native speaker accents: The English as a lingua franca perspective. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *155*, 253-259. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.288

Kirkpatrick, A. (2020). Englishes in the Expanding Circle: Focus on Asia. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, *24*(3), 551-568. https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2020-24-3-551-568

Nanni, A. (2021). Educational entrepreneurship in an intensive English program in Thailand: A case study. *SAGE Open*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244021998694

Natiladdanon, K., & Thanavisuth, C. (2014). Attitudes, awareness, and comprehensibility of ASEAN English accents: A qualitative study of university students in Thailand. *Catalyst*, *9*(1), 16-30.

Prakaianurat, P., & Kangkun, P. (2018). Language attitudes of Thai working adults toward native and non-native English varieties. *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities*, *21*(2), 92-111.

Rattanaphumma, R. (2013). Reconsidering objectives of English language learning in English as a lingua franca context. *Proceedings in the Third Conference on Foreign Language Learning and Teaching (FLLT2013)*. Thammasat University, Bangkok. http://litu.tu.ac.th/FLLT2013/www.fllt2013.org/private_folder/Proceeding/456.pdf

Smith, L.E. (1992). Spread of English and issues of intelligibility. In B. Kachru (Ed.). *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. University of Illinois Press.

Smith, L.E. (2009). Dimensions of understanding in cross-cultural communication. In K. Murata & J. Jenkins (Eds.). *Global Englishes in Asian Contexts: Current and Future Debates*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Snodin, N., & Young, T. (2015). 'Native-speaker' varieties of English: Thai perceptions and attitudes. *Asian Englishes*, *173*, 248-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2015.1083354

Subedi, D. (2016). Explanatory sequential mixed method design as the third research community of knowledge claim. *American Journal of Educational Research*, *4*(7), 570-577. DOI:10.12691/education-4-7-10

Suebwongsuwan, W., & Nomnian, S. (2020). Thai hotel undergraduate interns' awareness and attitudes towards English as a lingua franca. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *9*(3), 704-714. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v9i3.23221

Suwanarak, K. (2010). Can only native English speaking teachers teach aural and oral skills? *ABAC Journal 30*(2), 43-63.

Todd, R. (2006). The myth of the native speaker as a model of English proficiency. *rEFLections-KMUTT Journal of Language Education*, *8*, 1-7.

Walkinshaw, I., & Oanh, D. (2014). Native and non-native English teachers: Student perceptions in Vietnam and Japan. *SAGE Open*, *4*(*2*), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014534451

Appendix

Description No1: Intelligibility-the listener's ability to recognize and identify syllables, sounds and words (on a word level)

Description No.2: Comprehensibility-to understand meaning on a sentence level and in the given context

Description No.3: Native English Teachers (NETs): teachers from the United States of America; Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

Non-native English Teachers (NNETs): teachers from all other countries

Part 1:

1) Are you Thai? Put an X next to the correct answer!
   a) Yes
   b) No

2) If no, what is your nationality and first language? Please, explain!

....

3) How many English levels or English courses have you done at RIL, RU?

....

Part 2:

4) The Accents/ pronunciation of NETs are more intelligible than the accents/pronunciation of NNETs. Tick the correct box!

Agree	Neutral	Disagree

5) If you ticked 'Agree', why did you do so and which accents/ pronunciation of NETs exactly do you find more intelligible and why? (Look at Description No.3 above!)

....

6) If you ticked 'Disagree', why did you do so and which accents/pronunciation of NNETs exactly do you find more intelligible and why? (Look at Description No.3 above!)

....

7) The Accents/ Pronunciation of NETs are more comprehensible than the Accents/Pronunciation of NNETs. Tick the correct box!

Agree	Neutral	Disagree

8) If you ticked 'Agree', why did you do so and which accents/ pronunciation of NETs exactly do you find more comprehensible and why? (Look at Description No. 3 above!)

....

9) If you ticked 'Disagree', why did you do so and which accents/pronunciation of NNETs exactly do you find more comprehensible and why? (Look at Description No. 3 above!)

....