



English Accent Attitudes : Voices of Thai Multilingual University Students

Panupan Panthong*

Waridtha Rattanawaropas*

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Abstract

English in an expanding circle especially in Southeast Asia goes beyond the recognition of a foreign language, but it becomes the lingua franca among ASEAN countries. Previous studies explored the attitudes toward English accents in many different aspects while few pieces of research lay an emphasis on the multilingual context. The aims of this research are to investigate the attitudes of a variety of English accents and to explore the attitudes of Thai multilingual university students toward their own English accents. 472 participants responded to the online questionnaire, and 12 informants volunteered to engage in the online interview sessions. The results found that most of the participants favor native English accents (American and British) while a Thai accent is moderately satisfied. For the data coded from the interviews, participants would like to peruse the native-like accents when speaking with the foreigners. However, a Thai accent is acceptable when they communicate with Thais. Additionally, some of them are proud of keeping their accents and identities when speaking English. It is suggested that the various accents of Englishes should be presented in the classroom and the teaching materials in order to enhance the communication among multilingual groups.

Keywords : Language Attitude / English as a Lingual Franca / Multilingualism /
English Accent / World Englishes

*English Lecturer, Business English Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram
Rajabhat University e-mail: pt.panupan@gmail.com

Statements of the Problem

English now goes beyond the recognition of English as a foreign language (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2017), becoming the English as a lingua franca (ELF) where the interlocutors from multilingual backgrounds succeed in their communication (Deterding, 2013; Jenkins, 2007, 2009, 2011; Jenkins & Leung, 2013; Mauranen, 2017; Seidlhofer, 2011). In this English model, Kachru (1997) theorized the concepts of World Englishes and situated the variety of Englishes in three eccentric circles. e.g., inner circle (The U.S.A, The U.K., Australia, Canada), outer circles (India, Singapore, the Philippines), and expanding circles (Thailand, Vietnam, China). In the expanding-circle countries, Asian countries are now regarded as the central gravity of diverse Englishes (Bolton, Botha & Kirkpatrick, 2020), and in the same fashion ASEAN community including Thailand and others regard English as the lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014; Phattaraphakin, Skulkhu, Phothisuk & Yongsorn, 2020). With the diversity of Englishes, the opportunity to communicate between native and non-native speakers is relatively rare since the number of non-native English speakers is higher than native speakers (Bolton & Bacon-Shone, 2020). In other words, English is used between interlocutors in multilingualism in the ASEAN context (Kirkpatrick, 2017a, 2017b), so this context also encourages the teaching model of English language teaching (ELT) by not relying on the native norm as the correctness (Canagarajah, 2004, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Such an idea puts forward the idea that English accents should be flexible and diverse in order to encourage the successful communication rather than the ambitious goal of a native-like accent of the inner circle. (Karakaş, 2019; Kung & Wang, 2019). In practice, teachers may adapt English to ‘*glocalise*’ their context to expose their learners to variations of English and identity for multilingual communities (Fang, 2018, p.37).

Multilingual students show the distinctive characteristics which the educational stakeholder should take a glimpse of designing the policy, classroom management, and teaching method (Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Haukås, 2016; Lundberg, 2019). As Jessner (2007) claimed, These students have a great deal of advantages such as metalinguistic capability to study the new language more quickly and effectively than those who are mono- or bi-lingual people. In Thailand, there are some ‘major flaws in the education policy’; for this reason, this prevents the learning achieve of English langue (Pechapan-Hammond, 2020, p.641). Widiawati and Savski (2020) reported that the policy ‘English only’ under the ministry of education requires that teachers not speak other languages expert English. According to a group of

researchers (see Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Cummins, 2021; Gramling, 2021; O'Regan, 2021), this would prevent the process of learning because scholars in translanguaging claimed that the allowance of other languages in the multilingual community during the class could optimize the full linguistic repertoires among students.

Therefore, one key element to design and implement the education or language policy to fully benefit the learners is to study the language attitude (Almusharraf, 2022). It is the way in which the researchers investigate the feeling toward the foreign languages. Linguistic experts postulated that studying language can create the understanding of learners (Ahmed, 2015; Garrett, 2010; Pham & Nguyen, 2021) and the room where the educational stakeholders such as policy makers, language teachers, and other agents compromise the demands of learners (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). To this end, it is worth exploring the attitude of English accents in order to disclose the engaging truth of non-native English speakers (Jenkins, 2007, 2009; Sung, 2016) because the accents could possibly bring some ideologies of speakers. Previous studies of accents of ELF has extensively contributed a great deal of knowledge and explored many different aspects. Osatananda and Salarat (2020) conducted the research on tolerance of teachers toward Thai-English accents, finding that teachers can accept the native-like accents. Apart from teachers' views, the accent attitudes of learners grab much attention from the researchers. Si (2019), for example, investigated the attitudes of ELF and proposed that native English is still dominant among Chinese learners. In the Thai context, Ambele and Boonsuk (2021) researched Thai university students in the territory and explained that the Thai accent is acceptable for communication. Some scholars e.g., Weerachairattana, Duan and Buripakdi (2019) compared both Chinese and Thai students as the expanding circle community, and they subscribe the previous research by showing that the participants have positive attitudes with native accents. Afterwards, the mainstream of research is shifted to the context of multilingual context because ELF is mainly used in such context. Kim (2021) further investigated the accent attitudes of prostrate students and found the native opinion on diverse accents. Similar to Wang's (2020) work, Chinese English major learners favor native-like accents. To the best of our knowledge, little research was done on multilingualism in Thailand especially the lower north-eastern region (Lower Esan) context. These areas are adjacent to the boarder of Cambodia and Loa, and solid evidence of the linguistic landscape found that there are Khmer and Loa languages in the signs of the government and private sections particularly in the hospital (Siwina & Prasithratsint, 2020). To address these gaps, this present

study proposed two objectives below. It is expected that the results of this study will rebound the benefits of educational stakeholders who would like to develop the new teaching paradigm as English as a Lingual Franca in the ASEAN context.

Objectives

1. To investigate the preferred English accents of Thai University multilingual students
2. To explore the attitudes of Thai University multilingual students toward their own accents

Methodology

Participants

Four hundred seventy two participants responded to the questionnaires, and 12 volunteers consented to join the online interview sessions. The participants enrolled in English for Academic Purposes (the foundation course), and they are from a variety of majors e.g., English, Business English, English Language Teaching, Social Education, Physical Education, Business Administration, Business Computer, Music, Thai dance, Architecture, Agriculture, Early Childhood, Nurses, and Engineer. Indeed, there are 401 participants speaking central Thai and another language, 69 participants speaking central Thai and two languages, and 2 participants speaking central Thai and three languages. These participants study in an area-based university in the lower northeastern part of Thailand where many languages are spoken: Esan, Khmer, Kuay and other languages (Nomnian, Trupp, Niyomthong, Tangcharoensathaporn & Charoenkongka, 2020; Smalley, 1988a, 1988b). As the English language is highly demanding especially the listening and speaking skills among people in this province (Nuemaihom, 2016), this area-based university aims to promote people in the used-to-be-rural town to work in an economic hub for the sport tourism such as football and car racing; henceforth, an increasing number of several different foreigners across the globe would visit this town (Attakit, Kongwongsa, Palawat, Sawadpong, Sintusiri, & Passako, 2022; Leruksa, Chaigasem,& Suephakdee, 2019). Such foreigners would trigger the communication in lingual franca mode. The rationale of these participants was because of two reasons. First, it correlates with the research purposes which aims to explore the English accents attitudes of multilingual speakers. Another reason is that they had previously experienced the English for Communication course which presented the speaking models in the class. It is likely that they have gained experience with English accents. For the number of informants, the research

follows Dörnyei (2007)'s suggestion that the interview data from 6 to 10 informants can reach the data saturation.

Research Instruments

1. Questionnaire

English accent questionnaire invented by Wang (2020) was adopted and translated. This questionnaire is the five-point Likert scale ranking from 1 as the strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree. The first one includes the demographic information about their backgrounds (e.g., majors, experience to English language learning, dialects, age). The second parts include 23 statements in the following constructs e.g., English accent learning preference, native English accents motivation, attitudes to instructors' accents, English pleasant quality, and standard English accents. These five constructs were constructed based on the Kristiansen (1991)'s taxonomy of English accents attitudes which is composed of three elements: knowledge, emotion and behaviors. Additionally, the accents presented in this part of the questionnaire is related to the World Englishes (WE) conceptual frameworks (Kachru, 1997), so those accents consist of the well-known accents in the worlds namely, American, British, Thai, Singaporean and Chinese accents (Wang, 2020). The final part is the opened questions and rating scales, introducing Fang (2017)'s taxonomy of accent attitudes including the description of their own English accents, the degree of the satisfaction degree, aspired English accents, and the reasons behind the satisfaction of their accents. The motivation for this questionnaire is that this questionnaire was purposely designed for an attitude accent survey and checked for validity and reliability in the original work. Apart from that, this questionnaire was translated from English to Thai and the translation expert was asked to check the accuracy to ensure usability.

2. Interview

Interview questions (Wang, 2020) were adopted. This set of interview questions includes the perception of English accent preference (Kung & Wang, 2019), and the attitudes of their own individual accents (Fang, 2017) in congruence with the second research objective. Those questions were translated into a Thai language. The research consults the experts to check such interview questions and researchers piloted with two informants to ensure validity.

Data Collection

The research introduces two stages of data collection. Both stages were conducted online because of difficulties accessing the research site and participants during the pandemic. The first stage involves the online questionnaire. The participants were randomly asked to fill

out the online questionnaire and forward it to their friends. This snowball sampling method allows the researchers to access the various participants with the same characteristics as Dörnyei (2007) and Cresswell and Poth (2013) mentioned. The next stage is the interview. For the interview, the participants can volunteer themselves to join the interview session by dropping their contact information in the questionnaire. Therefore, 12 informants participated in the online interview via Google Meet approximately 15 - 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, the analytical process also introduces two phases based on the research objectives.

In the first phase, the numerical data of the second part of the questionnaire was calculated by the computational software SPSS those data were interpreted and presented by the mean and standard deviation. The scale in the Table 1. below was used to interpret the attitudes of participants. It should be noted that this scale was adopted from Wang (2020)'s work because it allows the research to compare the results in the discussion part.

Table 1 The Questionnaire Evaluation Criteria

Score Interval (Mean)	Score Interval (Mean)
1.00-1.79	Very low level
1.80-2.59	low level
2.60-3.39	Medium level
3.40-4.19	High level
4.20-5.00	Very high level

Another phase is associated with the second research objective. The data from the their part of the questionnaire (the open-ended questions) together with the qualitative data from the online semi-structure interview were used to analyze the attitudes of their own accents. The questionnaire was analyzed by using the number and percentage while the analysis of contents from the open ended questionnaire followed the Heigham and Croker (2009)'s guidelines. Additionally, the interview data were transcribed, translated and coded. Likewise, inter-coders conducted the context analyses to ensure the trustworthiness of the two sources of data.

Research Results

This result sessions reports the results arranged by the result objectives as mentioned above. The first part is dedicated to reporting the quantitative results of the preferences of English accents while another one illustrated both quantitative and qualitative results related to the attitudes of their own English accents.

1. The preferred English accents of Thai multilingual university students

In line with the first research objective, the results of quantitative data retrieved from an analysis of the second part of the questionnaire responses found that the participants express the preference on a Thai accent as well as native accents (British and American). However, the participants have less preference on Chinese and Singaporean accents. The following constructs inform the results in each construct of the questionnaire.

1.1 Accent Preference

Generally, Thai university multilingual students show the preference for Thai accents and native English accents (British and American) while others e.g., Chinese, Singaporean, and are less popular as shown in Table 2. The first construct reveals that the most favorite accents for the participants are Thai (\bar{X} =3.5, SD=1.27) accents whilst both British (\bar{X} =3.47, SD=1.1) and the American accent (\bar{X} =3.47, SD= 1.18) are equally preferable. However, the other two accents, China (\bar{X} =2.42, SD=1.14) and Singaporean (\bar{X} =2.65, SD=1.12), show the less preferable accents for the learners.

Table 2 Accent Preference

No.	Statements	Means	S.D.	Interpretation
1	I preferred to learn a British accent.	3.47	1.1	High
2	I preferred to learn a American accent.	3.47	1.18	High
3	I preferred to learn a Chinese accent.	2.43	1.13	Low
4	I preferred to learn a Indian accent.	2.67	1.09	Medium
5	I preferred to learn a Thai accent.	3.5	1.27	High

1.2 Instrumental motivation

Native English accent learning motivation shows that a majority of the participants are strongly motivated that learning native English can possibly bring a better-quality life. Participants strongly agree that acquiring native-like English accents can encourage

job opportunity (\bar{X} =4.27, SD=0.95). Similarly, they express their strong agreement that a native-like English accent can facilitate them to achieve in academic paths including oral English test (\bar{X} =4.11, SD=0.97) while they agree that English can help them interview for graduate schools (\bar{X} =4.23, SD=0.94) as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3 Instrumental motivation

No.	Statements	Means	S.D.	Interpretation
1.	To acquire a native-like English accent is helpful for me to achieve a high score in an oral English test.	4.11	0.97	high
2.	To acquire a native-like English accent is helpful in getting a well-paid job.	4.27	0.95	Very High
3.	To acquire a native-like English accent is 4.03 helpful for me to succeed in a master admission for an interview for graduate students	4.23	0.94	Very high

1.3 English teachers' accents

According to Table 4, the third construct points out that most of the participants are pleasant with English language teachers who can speak in native English accents, namely British (\bar{X} =3.91, SD=1.99) and American (\bar{X} =3.54, SD=1.16). Teachers with Thai accents were moderately accepted (\bar{X} =3.41, SD=1.23) while those teachers with other accents including Singapore (\bar{X} =2.73, SD=1.15) and Chinese (\bar{X} =2.49, SD=1.15) are less preferable.

Table 4 English teachers' accents

No.	Statements	Means	S.D.	Interpretation
1	I prefer to be taught by an English teacher with a British English accent.	3.91	1.00	High
2	I prefer to be taught by an English teacher with an American English accent.	3.54	1.16	High
3	I prefer to be taught by an English teacher with a Chinese English accent.	2.49	1.15	Low

Table 4 (continued)

No.	Statements	Means	S.D.	Interpretation
4	I prefer to be taught by an English teacher with Singapore English accent	2.73	1.15	High
5	I prefer to be taught by an English teacher with a Thai English accent.	3.41	1.23	High

1.4 English pleasant quality

In the case of English pleasant quality as displayed in Table 5, the evidence manifests that most participants are satisfied with native English quality. The highest satisfaction belongs to British English (\bar{X} =3.77; SD=1.02), followed by American English (\bar{X} =3.38; SD=1.13), Thai (\bar{X} =3.18; SD=1.18), Singapore (\bar{X} =2.67; SD=1.05) and Chinese (\bar{X} =2.54; SD=1.08), respectively.

Table 5 English pleasant quality

No.	Statements	Means	S.D.	Interpretation
1	British English accent sounds more pleasant, compared with that of any other form of English.	3.77	1.02	High
2	American English accent sounds more pleasant, compared with that of any other form of English.	3.38	1.13	Medium
3	China English accent sounds more pleasant, compared with that of any other form of English.	2.54	1.08	Medium
4	Singapore English accent sounds more pleasant, compared with that of any other form of English.	2.67	1.05	Medium
5	Thai English accent sounds more pleasant, compared with that of any other form of English.	3.18	1.18	Medium

1.5 Standard English accent

Standard English accent, the fifth construct, provides the following results. Most of the participants acknowledge that the standard English accents should be native accents, namely Received pronunciation (\bar{X} =4.12, SD=0.96), American (\bar{X} =3.47, SD=1.18) while the stand of Thai-English accents (\bar{X} =3.10, SD=1.29) and Chinese accents (\bar{X} =2.52, SD=1.10) are still

moderately acceptable (see Table 6). Nevertheless, Singapore English (\bar{X} =2.64, SD=1.09) are not seen as the standard for the participants.

Table 6 Standard English Accent

No.	Statements	Means	S.D.	Interpretation
1	Received Pronunciation accent is a standard one.	4.12	0.96	High
2	General American accent is a standard one.	3.47	1.18	High
3	China English accent is a standard one.	2.52	1.10	Low
4	Singaporean English accent is a standard one.	2.64	1.09	Medium
5	Thai English accent is a standard one.	3.10	1.29	Medium

2. The attitudes toward their own accents

In line with research objective 2, the results from the third part of the questionnaire found that degree of satisfaction of the participants is moderate at 45.5% contrary to 6.2 % of those who claim the high satisfaction of their own accents. Also, the content analysis of the reasons behind their accents describes their accents as ‘Thai-English’, ‘Khmer English’, ‘acceptable’ and ‘My own way’ although a minority of participants described their unsatisfactory accents as ‘unprofessional’ ‘intelligible’ ‘not able to communicate’ ‘shame’ and ‘funny’. Regarding the linguistic behaviours, 73.6 % of the participants opined that they wish to sound like the native accents, but 22 % prefer their own accents. Only 17 % expressed the idea that they do not care about their own English pronunciation.

When it comes to the semi-structure interview, the results broke down into three theme: (1) Native accent oriented, (2) Thai accent oriented (3) Multicultural Accent oriented.

2.1 Native accent oriented

For native accents oriented, the participants claim the ownership of the English language that we should speak English with native accents. Some of them think that blending English accents to some languages or culture is not a proper manner. Therefore, when it comes to speaking English, it is more appropriate to speak and keep native accents (see Excerpt 1 to 3). The responses of Excerpt 4 referred to the native-like accents, and they suppressed their own identity as the unprofessional and uneducated charisma (see Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 1

“When speaking English, we need to aware that our accents should be native-like because it is their language. We should respect and use the correct accents.” (Informant2)

Excerpt 2

“If I could, I would speak British accents with other people. It presents the professional look of me. It makes me look like the international business workers.” (Informant 4)

Excerpt 3

“I totally believed that English accent is very important to speak because we speak their language, and this language should not be contaminated by any other accents.” (Informant 11)

Excerpt 4

“My own accent has the problem because it is not very good and seems like the poorly educated person. It can’t be like the native accent like British English which is original. I have a chance I will practice more.” (Informant 9)

2.2 Thai accent oriented

The natural feeling toward Thai-English accent is another theme. Such accent is acceptable when the participants speak with other Thai people because they do not have to worry about the understanding negotiation according to Expert 5. Moreover, Excerpt 6 indicated that The participant feels comfortable to use Thai accent because this participant does not need force his own accent.

Excerpt 5

“I think that Thai accent should be used when we speak with other Thai because I think they can understand me well. If I speak with foreigners, I think I need to practice more, but for Thai friends I don’t think so” (Informant 2)

Excerpt 6

“Because I am not native English speaker, I don’t think I should speak their accent. I should speak in my own accents. It is more comfortable, and more fluent in the communication.” (Informant 5)

2.3 Multicultural accent oriented

The last theme emerged as the multilingual accent oriented. Some of the multilingual students assert that their accents which are influenced by their dialects as their

identity should be shown and proudly spoken to speakers either native or non-native speakers. This, as their claim, reflects their identity in international communication as their own identity to speak English.

Excerpt 6

“I was born in the rural area, and I think that I am not embarrassed to use Thai-Khmer-English accent because it reflects who I am. But I will use this accent with my friends, teachers, Asian friends, and those who I know well.” (Informant 7)

Excerpt 9

“When I was in high school, I worked the voluntary job for [tourism organization] as the guide assistant. I noticed that Spain people spoke in their own accent and in the same way Japanese people also spoke in their own way. So I have my Khmer-English accent. It is cute and unique, and I am comfortable with my accent.” (Informant 1)

Discussions

Based on the results presented above, the discussions introduce two critical points regarding each research purpose. The first point is related to the preference of the English accent, and another part is related to the attitudes of their own accents.

Firstly, the research result regarding the preference of the English accent shows that a majority of the participants have positive attitudes toward native accents (British and American) and surprisingly the Thai accent. Based on the evidence above, it can be tentatively suggested that the native accents are still prevailing in the English language teaching communities in multilingualism in an Asian context. This result is consistent with the previous research (see Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Kim, 2021; Osatananda & Salarat, 2020; Si, 2019; Wang, 2020; Weerachairattana, et al., 2019). A possible explanation of this phenomenon could be linked to the way in which the deeply rooted concepts of nativism in the English language coursebook and model (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2015; Blair, 2020; Buripakdi, 2012).

In the second place, once again, the results found that Thai multilingual university students have fallen into two categories: (1) negative feeling, and (2) strong self-identity. As a result, this would suggest that the attitudes toward their own English are relevant to their own dialects considered as their own identity. The findings of this research are partially similar to the previous research. For the negative feeling, it is similar to previous studies in Chinese contexts that some learners regard their own Chinese-English accents as negativity. The reason may be explained by the fact that the English ideology is firmly held in the ELT community

(Buripakdi, 2012). However, in case of strong self-identity, this result is in an agreement with learners in the southern

Thai context investigated by Amber and Booksuk (2021). This point can be explained by the notion that accents are embedded with the target place, especially their mother tongue (Jenkins, 2007a, 2209, 2011).

Conclusion

Once again, this present work investigated the attitudes of a variety of English accents and explored the attitudes of Thai multilingual university students toward their own English accents.

472 participants the online questionnaire, and 12 informants participated in the online interview sessions. It was found that native English accents (American and British) are more preferable to their counterparts. Also, the interview showed that the participants have a common endeavor to achieve a native-like accent when speaking with foreigners. In contrast, they accept the Thai accent when speaking with Thai peers. Some informants keep their accents and identities when speaking English.

Recommendations

The results of this present study could rebound the benefits for many research areas. In term of the pedagogical implications, the results of this present study inform the pedagogical uses. The ELT stakeholders in the higher education level should take the deeply rooted notions of native English into the consideration by embracing the variety of Englishes to their classroom because this flexibility of accents apart from native ones is likely to enhance the successful communication among multiculturalism (Karakaş, 2019; Kung & Wang, 2019). Moreover, English language teachers may present the native English accents in their classroom for communicative purposes, but in practicality, the other diversities of accents should be allowed to globalise English in the target context (Newton & Nation, 2020; Nguyen & Newton, 2020).

Language teachers can also encourage a variety of accents in the class by operating the speaking activities such as the role-play situation as the multilingual community, dialogue, and computer-assisted learning media to enhance the social interaction and speaking competency (Sanboonvej, Manoosawet & Sinlarat, 2020; Winaitam & Suppasetseree, 2012; Yuh & Kaewurai, 2021). This course of action is subject to encourage communicative achievement. In case of

Language assessment, using the native norm to examine the students' accents may no longer be eligible and valid because it may cause bias under the shadow of nativism (Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Geranpayeh, 2011).

For further study, it is recommended that further research should be undertaken in the following areas. First, the self-report questionnaire of multilingualism is fragile. Because of the disruptive time of the global pandemic, the researchers have no chance to access the participants directly. Therefore, further research may take this advantage to ensure the participants' backgrounds. Secondly, with the limitation of the time, the interview questions adopted from the previous study wasn't conduct the IOC to evaluate the validity, so the other researchers may conduct the IOC process to confirm the interview questions systematically. Moreover, the result of this present research may not claim the board generalization, but

the instructional one. This present research was undertaken in only one area-based university: therefore, further work may consider a wider range of participants in other universities.

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