

“My accent is not okay.”: Exploring Thai Students’ Attitudes towards English Accents

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Abstract

Native English speakers’ accents are generally regarded as ideal models of English accents. However, in real-world communication, where English is used as a lingua franca for intercultural communication among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, English users inevitably encounter a wide variety of accents. This paper presents part of a broader study that explores the attitudes of Thai students and teachers toward native speaker accents, Asian accents, and their own accents (i.e., Thai accents). Specifically, we focus on the attitudes of 123 Thai students attending a public secondary school in Thailand. We collected data through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and analyzed it using descriptive statistics and thematic coding. Our findings indicate that American accents were overwhelmingly viewed as the most favorable and served as the standard for pronunciation. While Asian English accents were generally perceived as intelligible and acceptable, some participants expressed negative attitudes toward their own Thai accents, considering them to be deficient. These findings highlight the importance of raising awareness about the diversity of English accents in both English language teaching and policy.

Keywords: attitudes, English accents, native speakers’ accents, English as a lingua franca, Thailand

Introduction

English has emerged as the primary global language that caters to various international fields, including but not limited to the operational language of financial sectors, economics, international tourism, and education (Graddol, 1997; 2006; Jenkins, 2015a.; Inkaew, 2018). English language communication today involves people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who use English as a lingua franca (ELF) for intercultural communication—dynamic personal interactions between

people from differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Baker, 2016). ELF users will inevitably encounter a wide range of English varieties and accents—the distinctive mode of pronunciation of a language associated with speakers' regions and social groups (Montgomery, 1995; Lippi-Green, 1997). In addition to the variations in English accents among speakers from different communities, accents may also exhibit variability within a single speaker and may change over time (Harrington et al., 2000).

Despite the recognized diversity of English varieties, many English speakers still hold favorable or unfavorable opinions toward certain accents. British English and General American English accents are predominantly regarded as the most favored models for English language classrooms in many parts of the world (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Matsuda, 2021). However, it is important to note that both the United States and the United Kingdom have a variety of accents that vary depending on geographic location and social background. At the same time, many English users exhibit negative attitudes toward accents of non-native speakers (NNS) that deviate from the NS norms (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013). Negative attitudes toward accents can impact not only English language teaching and learning but also the opportunities available to English speakers (Garrett, 2010).

The preference for native speakers (NS) accents and negative attitudes toward certain accents apply to Thailand and many other Expanding Circle countries—i.e., countries where English is used as a foreign language as defined by Kachru (1992) (Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018; Thienthong & Uthaikorn, 2023). English plays various pivotal roles and serves diverse functions within Thai society, consequently occupying a significant position in Thai education, spanning from elementary to higher education levels. As outlined in the English Language Curriculum for Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2008), English is mandated as a compulsory subject for all students, commencing from Prathomksa Level 1, typically corresponding to the first year of primary school, generally for students around seven years of age. Examining the attitudes of both teachers and students toward English accents can provide insights into the prevalent preference for British English and General American English accents, as well as the unfavorable perceptions of NNS accents like Thai English. These findings have the potential to promote more inclusive approaches to English language education in settings not only limited to Thailand but also extending to other regions.

Literature Review

The concept of NS as idealized models has long been a subject of discussion and debate in the field of English language teaching. It has profound implications for the ownership of English and the perpetuation of standard language ideology in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) paradigm and intersects with broader questions about the globalization of the English language and language attitudes toward NNSs.

NS as Idealized Models in EFL and Ownership of English

The concept of NS is intricately linked to questions of ownership of English and the authority to define what constitutes *correct* English. This connection is closely related to standard language ideology, which promotes the belief in a singular, *correct* form of a language. This monolithic view of a language has an impact on English language teaching and learning (Matsuda, 2021), and learners tend to maintain stereotypes of English as a homogenous language, placing great importance on the concept of *standard English* and attributing ownership of it to the Inner Circle (Galloway & Rose, 2015). According to Seyranyan and Westphal (2021, p. 83), American English and British English are considered to be *the original English*. According to Widdowson (1994), standard English serves as both an *entry condition* and *the gatekeepers*, i.e., individuals who persist in using non-standard varieties may ultimately experience marginalization (p. 381). Within the context of EFL, this standard English ideology has resulted in the elevation of NS varieties as the benchmarks against which all other forms are judged.

The dominance of NS in EFL has perpetuated the notion that English is *theirs* in a way that NNSs can never fully possess because, by definition, one can only be a native speaker of their first language (Cook, 2007, p. 240). NNSs, regardless of their proficiency, are often perceived as straying from this idealized standard (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 284). In the Thai language, the term *native speaker* can be equivalently translated as *chaokhongpasa*, which means *the owner of the language* (Methitham, 2009, p. 94; Tantiniranat, 2017, p. 187). This entrenched ideology can impact NNSs in both educational and professional settings (Galloway & Rose, 2015). It is worth noting that this traditional notion of NS has played a role in reinforcing linguistic imperialism, as outlined by Phillipson (1992).

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the limitations of the NS paradigm in EFL. Many scholars and educators now recognize that language proficiency and teaching effectiveness are not exclusive to NSs. Efforts to challenge standard language ideology and promote linguistic diversity have gained momentum. This shift in perspective acknowledges that English is no longer solely *owned* by native speakers but is increasingly seen as a global lingua franca.

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

ELF can be defined as the English that is used by speakers who do not share a common first language (Jenkins, 2009; 2015a.; Seidlhofer, 2011). According to Hülmbauer et al. (2008) and Jenkins (2017), ELF users comprise both NSs and NNSs from the Inner Circle (i.e., native-English speaking countries), Outer Circle (countries where English holds legal or official status) and Expanding Circle. However, research in ELF tends to focus more on English-medium interactions between NNS in which the norms are negotiated to suit their communicative purposes (Hülmbauer et al., 2008; Seidlhofer, 2011). ELF is characterized by its functional usage in intercultural communication, rather than by its adherence to the formal conventions of NS norms (Hülmbauer et al., 2008; Jenkins, 2015b). This shift

in focus toward ELF interactions among NNS has significant implications for language attitudes, especially concerning accents.

Attitudes toward Accents

Language attitudes—evaluative responses to language and its various forms when used in society (Dragojevic, 2017)—are particularly pertinent when considering English accents. English accents vary widely, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of speakers and even evolving within an individual speaker over time. This results in a broad spectrum of accents, from collective to individual levels. Within the context of ELF, speakers encounter and utilize different English accents, which can elicit both favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward these accents. Accent attitudes are evaluated based on social dimensions such as status (connected to intelligence and education) and solidarity (associated with friendliness and pleasantness) (Dragojevic, 2017), as well as speech-related factors, including social attractiveness, personal integrity, and linguistic quality (Rindal, 2014; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006).

Numerous studies have investigated attitudes toward various English accents, both NS and NNS, and revealed the impact of negative attitudes on accents. For example, Galloway and Rose (2015) emphasize how specific accents might be considered *inappropriate* in certain contexts. A case study conducted by Holmes and Wilson (2017) illustrated the relationship between attitudes and accents. It explored the preference for pronouncing or dropping [r] and how this preference is influenced by individuals' attitudes. According to Garrett (2010), accent attitudes, such as regional accents, can substantially influence one's life opportunities. Together, these studies collectively shed light on the critical role accents play in shaping social perceptions and the possibility of prejudice based on accent variations. They also highlight how important accents are in determining how people are treated in society, with individuals with a standard accent often being viewed more favorably. This might be explained by the association of standard accents with higher socioeconomic status and education. Meyerhoff (2011) expands on this discussion by pointing out the relationship between attitudes and intelligibility and makes the case that personal preferences might affect an accent's overall intelligibility and comprehensibility. Holmes (2013) further supports this view by emphasizing the role of attitudes in intelligibility. The scholar explains that people tend to comprehend languages and dialects spoken by those they like or admire more easily. These related studies collectively show the complex link between language attitudes, intelligibility, and the treatment of individuals depending on their accents.

In the context of Thailand, previous research has offered valuable insights into the attitudes of English users toward various accents. Notably, studies on NS accents typically yield favorable perceptions of British and American accents as pronunciation models. For example, Jindapitak (2010) conducted a study with 52 Thai university students using a questionnaire for data collection. The

findings revealed that American and British accents were highly regarded as pronunciation models, representing *international* and *intelligible* speech standards.

A later study by Jindapitak and Teo (2013) confirmed that Thai students prefer NS accents while simultaneously displaying positive attitudes toward NNS accents and an appreciation of English diversity. Prakaianurat and Kangkun (2018) further supported this preference for native norms. The researchers used a Verbal-guise test and semi-structured interviews to gather data. The findings showed that the participants preferred the American because of its perceived intelligibility and associations with ownership of English and professional identity. Interestingly, the study also demonstrated acceptance of Asian accents for communication and learning goals, although to a lesser extent than NS accents.

Studies have also reported the acceptance of NNS varieties by Thai students. Jidapitak (2015) found that 116 Thai university students recognized the importance of learning NNS varieties in a classroom setting. Similarly, Suwannasri (2016) examined the awareness of ELF in the ASEAN region among 250 vocational students and found that the participants agreed that English, as a tool for communication, belongs to everyone, not only NS, as long as mutual intelligibility is maintained. Additionally, Suebwongsuwan and Nomnian (2020) studied 28 undergraduate interns and found positive attitudes toward NNS varieties for ELF communication.

Recently, Thienthong and Uthaikorn (2023) examined the attitudes of 90 Thai students from various academic fields and educational levels toward different English accents. The participants evaluated five speakers (American, British, Indian, Filipino, and Thai), and the findings showed a preference for NS varieties due to status and prestige. Conversely, NNS varieties, especially Filipino English, were negatively perceived for intelligibility while Thai English was considered the most intelligible. Despite being from different academic fields, students shared similar attitudes regarding social status associated with NS varieties. However, secondary school students showed more acceptance toward non-native varieties than university students. This highlights the importance of exposing students to diverse English accents at an early age to counter native-speakerism.

Regarding attitudes toward Thai English accents, Jindapitak (2015) revealed that some university students expressed dissatisfaction with their accents and wished to achieve a native-like accent. However, Ambele and Boonsuk (2021) examined the attitudes of 100 Thai university students across five institutions and produced varying results. Although some students desired native-like pronunciation, most had positive attitudes toward their own accents since they could communicate effectively and be understood by others.

In sum, research studies examining Thai English users' attitudes toward a range of accents, including NS, Asian, and Thai, consistently highlight the preference for NS accents as pronunciation models. Nevertheless, these studies also indicate the emergence of positive attitudes toward Thai and NNS accents. These collective findings underscore the importance of exposing learners to a diverse range of English accents, which will ultimately improve their ability to communicate effectively in ELF

contexts. The majority of past research has concentrated on university students and young adults. Only Thienthong and Uthaikorn (2023) investigated the attitudes of early-stage English learners, i.e., secondary school students. Exploring attitudes toward accents in this age group can offer valuable insights into English teaching and learning at an earlier developmental stage. Understanding students' attitudes toward accents can enable educators to design more effective language learning programs that align with students' needs while fostering positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity. The study as reported in this paper, therefore, aimed to investigate the attitudes of Thai lower secondary school students toward various English accents, including native speakers' accents, Asian accents, and their own accents.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gather data on the participants' attitudes toward various English accents. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, while a semi-structured interview was employed to gather qualitative data. The data collected from diverse perspectives offered detailed insights and served to triangulate the information obtained. Before the participant recruitment and data collection, the researchers obtained ethical approval from the Research and Innovation Administration Division, Burapha University (IRB4-108/2564).

Participants and Context

The study included 123 Thai students drawn from a total population of 180 using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) Sample Size Determination table, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Participation in the study was voluntary, with students expressing their interest through online recruitment advertisements facilitated by their advisor teachers. Enrollment was on a first-come, first-served basis.

Among these participants, there were 58 males and 65 females, all aged between 17 and 18 years. These students were enrolled in Mattayomsuksa 6 or Grade 12 in a Thai public secondary school, specifically during the second semester, which marked their final semester in basic education. They were pursuing education in three distinct programs: Mathematics-Science, English-Chinese, and Computer. The students have had chances to encounter various English accents through their teachers and everyday life situations such as entertainment and social media.

The school is considered a large size Thai government secondary school, accommodating a total of 1,400 students. It holds a central position within the district as the primary educational establishment. The teaching staff comprises 57 educators, including three foreign teachers of Asian and African origin. It is situated in Chon Buri, one of the three provinces within the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), an

economic development initiative encompassing these three Eastern Seaboard provinces (Eastern Economic Corridor, 2019). In alignment with this development project, the workforce is required to possess proficiency in foreign languages, including English (Academic Office of the Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2018). As a result, the school has been complying with the Educational Development Plan for Eastern Economic Corridor A.D. 2017-2021 (Ministry of Education, n.d.) to equip its students with the necessary skills for educational and professional opportunities within the EEC region.

Instruments

This study employed an online questionnaire and semi-structured telephone interviews as data collection tools.

Online questionnaire.

The online questionnaire was employed since the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was divided into two parts: 1. the participants' attitudes toward different English accents and 2. the participants' attitudes toward their own accents.

In Part 1, the researchers employed a Verbal-guise test (VGT), a method that involves presenting speakers with different accents to participants and asking them to rate the speakers based on various dimensions (Garrett, 2010). The participants listened to voice recordings of six different accents before evaluating each accent based on the provided aspects. The American, British, Filipino, Chinese, and Indian accents were selected because they are the top six nationalities of temporary workers in Thailand (Article 59, Foreign Workers Administration Office, 2020), and a Thai English accent was selected to represent the participants' native accents.

To record the voices of these six accents, each speaker (as shown in Table 1) read the same script adapted from the Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger, 2015). Considering the participants' language ability, the original text was adapted to suit Thai secondary students' context. Each recording was no longer than 35 seconds. Being mindful of the diversity of accents while also aware of the purposes of the study, each speaker was instructed to use the *general accent* of their English variety, which is the accent that is more commonly recognized. For example, a speaker from Manchester was instructed to speak with Southern British English. Each recording was verified for its representativeness by three native speakers of each English variety. The audio recording files of the six accents were labeled as Speaker 1 to Speaker 6.

To determine the questionnaire items, the semantic attributes provided by Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) and Rindal (2014) were adapted to examine the participants' reactions to the six English accents in three dimensions as presented in Table 2. The questionnaire in this part consisted of nine items which were arranged on a 5-Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). When taking

the questionnaire, the participants listened to the six recordings. Then, they rated their preference according to the provided items from Speaker 1 to Speaker 6 respectively. At the end of this part, the participants were asked to select their model of pronunciation and provide their reasons in an open-ended question.

Table 1

The Order of Audio Recording and the Information of the Six Speakers

Speaker	Age	Occupation	Hometown	Education	Mother tongue
1	54	University teacher	Manchester, England	Bachelor degree	British English (Cheshire)
2	27	Public school teacher	Panabo, Davao del Norte, the Philippines	Bachelor degree	Bisaya/ Tagalog
3	35	Employee	Yunnan, China	Bachelor degree	Mandarin Chinese
4	27	Music producer	New York, U.S.A.	Bachelor degree	English (New York)
5	27	Software developer	India	Bachelor degree	Punjabi
6	29	Health worker	Sukhothai, Thailand	Bachelor degree	Thai

Table 2

The Semantic Attributes of Preference for Accents

Dimensions	Semantic attribute
Social status and competence	education, self-confidence, social status
Social attractiveness and personal integrity	reliability, friendliness, attractiveness
Quality of language	intelligibility, correctness, model of pronunciation

Note. Adapted from Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) and Rindal (2014)

In part 2, the items were also adapted from Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) and Rindal (2014). After conducting a pilot study, some items were removed, leaving five items that focused on confidence, intelligibility, correctness, communication, and accent judgment (self-image). These remaining items were arranged on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. In this section, the participants rated their own English accents based on the provided items.

All of the items were written in Thai to avoid the participants' misunderstanding. To measure the reliability of all items in the questionnaire, 30 Thai students at the same level of education were selected to take a tryout. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for a group of Thai students was found to be 0.98. Three experts also evaluated the items to check the content validity by using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). The items were acceptable when they were $0.5 < \text{IOC} < 1.00$. If any items were not acceptable, they were withdrawn or revised according to the experts' comments.

Semi-structured interview.

A VGT, a questionnaire, and an interview are frequently used in previous studies, and two of them are normally used together in previous studies (e.g., Jindapitak, 2010, Jidapitak, 2015; Suwannasri, 2016; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018; Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020). Therefore, a week after the administration of the questionnaire, the first author of this paper conducted a semi-structured telephone interview in Thai with six participants. According to Garrett (2010) and Robson (2011), semi-structured interviews are a frequently used method for eliciting language attitudes, including participants' perceptions of different varieties of English accents (see e.g., Jindapitak, 2015; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018; Boonsuk & Fang, 2022). The telephone interviews were utilized to comply with social distancing measures amidst the COVID-19 situation.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data.

After 123 Thai students were asked to complete an online questionnaire, the quantitative data from the questionnaire were calculated by using descriptive statistics to represent the mean as the criteria for interpreting levels of the participants' reactions to each accent. The interpretation of the results from the questionnaire employed the method of Class Interval provided by Dean and Illowsky (2009) which is divided into a scale of five as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The Mean Scores for Interpretation

Range of mean scores	Interpretation
4.21–5	strongly agree, the very favorable degree of attitudes
3.41–4.20	agree, the favorable degree of attitudes
2.61–3.40	moderate, the moderate degree of attitudes
1.81–2.60	disagree, the unfavorable degree of attitudes
1.00–1.80	strongly disagree, the very unfavorable degree of attitude

The qualitative data.

Six out of the 123 participants were chosen to take part in the interview phase. Eighty-three students had expressed interest in participating in the interviews, but the researchers selected two students from each of the three programs involved in the study. To analyze the qualitative data, thematic coding analysis (Robson, 2011) was employed to interpret the data which consisted of four steps as follows: the familiarization process, generating initial codes, identifying themes, and synthesizing the data. MAXQDA Software was also used as the data analysis tool.

Findings

This section is divided into two parts regarding participants' attitudes toward 1. native speakers' (RQ 1) and Asian accents (RQ2); and 2. their own English accents (RQ 3). To facilitate a comparative analysis of attitudes toward English varieties beyond participants' own accents, the results of RQs 1 and 2 are presented together. Each section is presented with the results from the questionnaire first, then followed by the findings from the interviews.

Thai Students' Attitudes toward Native Speakers' and Asian Accents

Questionnaire results.

AmE was the most favorable among the participants followed by FiE, BrE, ChE, ThE, and InE respectively. AmE, FiE, and BrE were rated with a favorable degree of attitude while ChE, ThE, and InE were rated as having a moderate degree. This suggests that NS accents are preferable to NNS accents. Interestingly, FiE was more favorable than BrE, and it is the only accent that received a favorable degree of attitude among Asian accents. InE was the least favorable with the lowest mean scores of almost all items except for the item "I think the speaker is confident.," where the Thai accent received the lowest mean scores. In overview, even though Asian accents were less favorable than native speakers' accents, they were still rated with a moderate degree of attitude or viewed neutrally. Therefore, it suggests that all varieties of English accents seem to be accepted by the participants.

Table 5 shows the results of the open-ended question of the questionnaire. AmE was chosen the most as a model of pronunciation followed by the FiE, BrE, ThE, ChE and InE respectively. These results seem to be consistent with the results from the questionnaire presented in Table 3 as ChE was in fourth while ThE was in fifth place. Remarkably, the participants provided the same reason for choosing their model of pronunciation which was intelligibility. This implies that NS and Asian accents were intelligible and could be models of pronunciation for the participants.

Table 4

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations toward Native Speakers' and Asian Accents (*n* = 123)

Dimensions	Item	Mean (SD)	Native speakers' accents		Asian accents			
			AmE	BrE	FiE	ChE	ThE	InE
Social status and competence	I think the speaker is educated.	Mean (SD)	4.04 (0.80)	3.81 (0.76)	3.85 (0.81)	3.37 (0.88)	3.28 (1.05)	3.27 (0.83)
	I think the speaker is confident.	Mean (SD)	4.06 (0.87)	3.67 (0.92)	3.74 (1.00)	3.30 (1.05)	2.93 (1.06)	3.06 (0.91)
	I think the speaker is in a high social class.	Mean (SD)	3.75 (0.88)	3.39 (0.70)	3.48 (0.83)	3.12 (0.78)	2.96 (0.96)	2.94 (0.89)
	I think the speaker is reliable.	Mean (SD)	3.80 (0.96)	3.48 (0.75)	3.37 (0.93)	2.98 (0.95)	2.95 (1.01)	2.84 (0.92)
Social attractiveness	I think the speaker is friendly.	Mean (SD)	3.85 (0.84)	3.46 (0.80)	3.68 (0.86)	3.09 (0.92)	3.22 (0.96)	3.00 (0.00)
	I think the speaker is attractive.	Mean (SD)	3.86 (0.96)	3.29 (1.04)	3.36 (1.08)	3.02 (1.08)	2.82 (1.11)	2.73 (1.06)
Quality of language	I think this accent is intelligible.	Mean (SD)	3.93 (0.87)	3.22 (1.21)	3.40 (1.05)	3.18 (1.08)	3.29 (1.15)	2.74 (1.00)
	I think this accent is correct.	Mean (SD)	3.82 (0.90)	3.33 (0.89)	3.41 (0.94)	3.09 (1.03)	3.03 (1.07)	2.78 (0.93)
	I think this accent is a model of pronunciation.	Mean (SD)	3.77 (0.98)	3.20 (0.97)	3.37 (0.97)	2.95 (1.09)	2.81 (1.13)	2.61 (1.09)
	Overall	Mean (SD)	3.87 (0.74)	3.42 (0.61)	3.51 (0.67)	3.12 (0.75)	3.03 (0.86)	2.88 (0.73)
Interpretation			Favorable	Favorable	Favorable	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Table 5

Thai Students' Model of Pronunciation and Their Reasons ($n = 123$)

Accent	n	Percentage	Reasons
AmE	62	50.40%	Intelligible, Attractive, Confident, Fluent, Native, reliable, International, educated
FiE	25	20.32%	Intelligible, Attractive, Confident, Fluent, Beautiful
BrE	14	11.38%	Intelligible, Attractive, Confident, Fluent, Native
ThE	12	9.75%	Intelligible
ChE	7	5.69%	Intelligible, Fluent
InE	3	2.43%	Intelligible
Total	123	100%	

Interviews results.

Six main themes have emerged from the data analysis.

1. Native speakers are models of pronunciation.

All participants answered that native speakers' accents, especially the American accent is their models of pronunciation for several reasons, including intelligibility and positive self-image. One was inspired by a famous person and some have a dream to work in an English-speaking country. The following excerpts exemplify the participants' preferences.

Student A: *[I prefer] the American accent because it is easier to understand than the British accent. I want to speak like a native speaker because if we can speak with anyone like a native speaker, we might receive some compliments.*

Student C: *There is a Korean idol. He practices his English from some English series by himself without attending any English language classes. His accent is like American. My model of accent is [an] American accent. I want to speak with [an] American accent.*

Student D: *I want to speak like English people. I want to go to England. I dream about working in England.*

2. The owners of English are native speakers.

The participants' views predominantly indicate that native English speakers, particularly English people, are considered the owners of the English language, given that its name suggests so.

Student A: *The owner of English is the people of the country, England. I think its name [English] comes from the name of the subject. English must belong to English people.*

Student E: *The owner is England because the name of the language is English.*

3. Everyone can be the owner of English.

Despite the majority expressing a preference for NS's accents, particularly American, two participants held contrasting views regarding the ownership of English. These participants believed in the right to learn and speak languages of other geographical areas, including English and its various accent.

Student B: *Anyone can speak English, right? Anyone can learn another person's language. Everyone can speak the language they want to learn.*

Interviewer: *Can anyone be the owner of English?*

Student B: *Yes.*

Student C: *There are so many different forms of English. The British and Americans speak differently. I think it does not depend on who is the owner, but it depends on where one lives. One might use English with this accent or that accent. It cannot specifically identify who is the exact owner of a language.*

4. There is no standard English accent.

The participants demonstrated an awareness of the diverse English accents used in real-world communication, as they had been exposed to various spoken English varieties through media. They emphasized the importance of effective communication over adherence to a standard English accent, which is commonly associated with native speakers and regarded as a right to use.

Student A: *I think there is completely no standard. For example, in English movies on Netflix, Indian people have their own accents. Thai people have a Thai accent. There is no standard to exactly follow.*

Student C: *There is no standard. Anyone can use English.*

Student E: *If we can communicate with each other, it is not necessary to have a standard.*

5. Asian accents are intelligible.

Regarding Asian accents of English, most participants expressed positive attitudes toward their intelligibility, stating that they are easy to understand. They attributed this to the status of English in the Asian region and their familiarity with these accents.

Student A: *Asian speakers use and study English as a second language like us [in Thailand], so we might understand each other.*

Student E: *There are similarities among Asian accents. They are easier to understand than the American accent which is a native speaker. I think I rather understand Asian accents.*

Student F: *I prefer our foreign [Filipino] teacher in the school because it [his or her accent] is more understandable.*

6. Native speakers' and Asian accents are acceptable.

The participants exhibited a positive attitude toward the acceptability of various English accents, as they expressed indifference toward both native speakers' and Asian accents.

Student A: *I am okay with both [native speakers' and Asian accents] because each country has different accents.*

Student C: *I am okay with both native speakers' and Asian accents. Accents in audio recordings [of American and British accents attached with students' textbook] are not better [than Asian accents of the Filipino teacher in the school].*

Also added: *I am okay with both [native speakers' and Asian accents]. It had no effect on me.*

Thai students' attitudes toward their own English accent (Thai English accents)

Table 6

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations toward Their Own English Accent (n = 123)

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I think I am confident with my English accent.	2.52	1.02	Unfavorable
2. I think my English accent is intelligible.	2.73	1.02	Moderate
3. I think my English accent is correct.	2.79	0.88	Moderate
4. I think my English accent can communicate effectively.	2.62	0.97	Moderate
5. I do not worry that my interlocutor judges my education, social status and profession from my English accent.	2.86	1.18	Moderate
Overall	2.70	1.01	Moderate

Questionnaire results.

The participants seemed to be concerned with their English accents with a neutral view; however, they were not confident with their own English accents. As illustrated in Table 6, accent judgment (Item 5) was rated with the highest mean score followed by correctness (Item 3), intelligibility (Item 2), and communication (Item 4) respectively at a moderate level while only confidence (Item 1) was rated with an unfavorable degree of attitudes.

Interview results.

The findings from the analysis of the interviews revealed five main themes.

1. Their Thai accents are deficient.

The majority of Thai students identified their accent as a Thai accent and viewed their accent as an inferior accent concerning the inability to build mutual intelligibility. They also believed that their Thai accent was not attractive.

Student A: *I know that my accent is not good enough. It is absolutely poor. I know that my accent is not ok. I have recorded my voice while speaking English to check whether my accent is okay. Every time that I listen to all the recordings reveals my Thai accent.*

Also added: *I still insist that speaking with native speakers' accents can give me a sense of attractiveness. Speaking English like a native speaker is better than our hometown [Thai] accent.*

Student C: *My accent is quite difficult to understand. Thais might understand it, but foreigners might be quite difficult because my accent is absolutely Thai.*

Student D: *My accent is rather poor because my accent is absolutely Thai. When I speak, it reveals a completely Thai accent.*

2. Thai students are not confident with their own English accents.

Thai students were also unconfident with their English accents. They have anxiety about their ability on linguistic quality.

Student A: *I am not confident with my accent. When I pronounce some words, I do not know whether my accent is good enough [compared with native speakers' accents].*

Student C: *I am completely not confident with my accent because I am not good at English.*

Student D: *I am not confident with my accent. It must sound like native speakers.*

3. Their English accents are being judged.

Regarding the issue of accent judgment, Thai students had been exposed to accent judgment experiences; as a result, they were fearful of negative evaluations by their listeners. As shown in the following excerpts:

Student A: *As I experienced by myself, I speak with an accent that is not good enough. Then, Thai people bullied me over my accent, so I want to speak with a native-like accent so that those Thais cannot say 'speaking English but [with] completely Thai accent'.*

Student C: *I worry about how other people look at my accent. I am afraid to be looked down on my accent. As I know, people are judged by their accents. I am not sure about other communities because I have never been to them. But, in the Thai community, I feel that accents definitely have an impact on self-image.*

Student F: *My friends criticize my accent by saying that my accent is not like how a native speaker would say it.*

4. The participants are not proud of their accents.

The participants reported that they were not proud of their own accents; hence, they felt that they needed to improve their English accents in terms of linguistic quality and for their profession in the future. It seems that achieving native-like competence is their learning goal.

Student A: *I am not proud of my English accent. It seems like it is not yet improved.*

Interviewer: *When will you be satisfied with your English accent?*

Student A: *It should be understood by native speakers or foreigners without repeating.*

Student C: *I am not proud of my English accent yet. I want to improve my English accent to be better. I do not mean that I am definitely not proud of my accent, but I think it can be better than now. It might be that my English accent will be important to my future career.*

5. The participants' accent is communicable.

Although the first four themes reveal Thai students' negative attitudes toward their own English accents, the majority of participants regarded their accents as communicable.

Student A: *I think it is not a problem. I can communicate. If we can pronounce it correctly,*

but an accent is not correct, my listeners might understand.

Student B: *An accent might be a little bit necessary to help us to be able to understand easily, but I think it is ok if we can communicate. We don't have to speak with perfect accents.*

Student C: *There is no problem in communication because in my opinion, in communication or interaction, if we can understand each other, it is successful.*

Discussion

Attitudes toward Native Speakers' Accents

The themes that emerged from both the questionnaire and the interview data reflect a positive perspective on NS accents, especially AmE, regarding their role as pronunciation models and in terms of ownership of the English language. This aligns with several previous studies, focusing on university students, including those by Jindapitak (2010), Prakaianurat and Kangkun (2018), Boonsuk and Fang (2022), and Seyranyan and Westphal (2021). However, our study, which focused on secondary school students, suggests that these attitudes may be formed early in the educational process. This shows that preferences for NS accents, notably AmE, are formed well before university, especially in contexts where students have limited exposure to diverse accents, as observed in the Thai public school under investigation. A reason why Thai students hold positive attitudes toward native speakers' accents could be due to the persistent standard language ideology related to NNS' view in the Expanding Circle (Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. 176). One possible explanation for the popularity of AmE among Thai students is its prevalence as the primary English variety taught in Thai schools and universities. This popularity may be attributed to the influence of American media and the significant presence of American teachers in Thailand, often facilitated through exchange programs (Tantiniranat, 2017, pp. 27–28). Given the limited exposure to a diverse range of English accents, secondary school students may develop a narrow view of acceptable English pronunciation, reinforcing the dominance of NS accents.

Attitudes toward Asian Accents

The findings from the questionnaire revealed the participants' neutral views on Asian accents. All Asian accents were also chosen as models of pronunciation because of intelligibility which was consistent with the findings from the interviews. The findings are coherent with Jindapitak and Teo (2013) and Jindapitak (2015). How the participants are concerned with Asian accents' intelligibility can be possibly explained by the connection between familiarity and intelligibility. As explained by Kirkpatrick (2005), listeners' familiarity with speakers' varieties is one of the key factors of

intelligibility. Since Thai students were usually exposed to Asian accents especially FiE and ThE in schools, they might be more familiar with them. This is also supported by the number of students who selected FiE and ThE as the first two Asian accents as models of pronunciation. It can be assumed that Asian accents are intelligible for Thai students because the students are more familiar with these English varieties frequently spoken around them (Thienthong & Uthaikorn, 2023).

Attitudes toward Their Own Accents (Thai Accents)

The overview of the results from the questionnaire revealed that Thai students expressed a moderate degree of attitude toward their own accent except for the item of confidence which was rated with an unfavorable degree. The results of the interview indicated that Thai students tend to hold negative perceptions of their own accents as inadequate. They lack confidence in their accents and fear being judged. Additionally, there was a concern with maintaining a sense of pride. These negative attitudes toward their own accents might be shaped by a predominant view in the EFL paradigm in that the standard by which the use of NNS is evaluated is the native norms, and any deviations from it are typically viewed as *deficient*. These NS norms are seen as a *yardstick* against which NNSs' language use is measured (Jenkins, 2015a, p. 45). Even though the status of English has changed, these negative attitudes are still prevalent in NNS evidenced by previous studies (Jindapitak, 2015; Fang, 2016; Boonsuk & Fang, 2022).

Overall, the results from the questionnaire showed the acceptability of all accents as shown in Table 3 supported by the interview findings. In terms of the owners of English, some participants mentioned the right to speak and learn English. Besides, the participants mentioned the importance of mutual intelligibility rather than achieving NS competence. Hence, the participants' attitudes toward diverse English accents reveal their understanding of the idea of English as a lingua franca, covering the aspects of acceptability, global ownership, non-standard English varieties, and communicative effectiveness, as discussed in previous studies (Seidlhofer, 2011; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Jindapitak 2015; Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020).

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine Thai students' attitudes toward different accents of English, focusing on attitudes toward NS, Asian, and Thai students' own accents. The main findings reveal that the participants showed positive attitudes toward NS accents, especially the American accent. This was supported by the interviews, as NS accents were viewed as the models of pronunciation, and English was believed to be owned by NS. Although the participants preferred Asian accents less than NS accents, they still viewed these Asian varieties with a neutral view. The participants also showed a positive view of Asian accents in terms of acceptability and intelligibility.

Regarding their attitudes toward their own English accents, they reported a neutral view of their accents, except for the notion of confidence. In the interview section, the participants provided a

negative view of their own accents as deficient Thai English accents. They were also unconfident with their own accents and not proud of them. Moreover, some students reported that their accents had an impact on their self-image, and their accents were being judged by others. Nevertheless, the majority of participants seemed to have a positive attitude toward their accents as they can be used to communicate with others.

The findings also provided a positive view on the varieties of English accents related to the notion of ELF. Although native speakers' accents were viewed as a priority at the top of the hierarchy of all accents, Thai students were concerned about the significance of Asian accents in terms of intelligibility and communication, including their own accents. Therefore, the participants' attitudes toward different accents of English suggest their awareness of the notion of ELF in terms of acceptability, global ownership, non-standard English forms, and communicative success (Seidlhofer, 2011; Galloway & Rose, 2015).

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, there are several implications for English language teaching policy and practice. Firstly, the study highlights the impact of accents on self-image and the negative attitudes students hold toward their own accents. Thus, it is important for English language teachers to acknowledge and address these negative attitudes. This can be achieved by creating a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment where students feel comfortable practicing their English without fear of being ridiculed or judged based on their accents (Jindapitak, 2015). One practical approach is to incorporate linguistic contexts into the classroom. For example, teachers can facilitate online intercultural exchanges where students interact with peers from various linguistics and cultural backgrounds. Such interactions can help challenge students' preconceived notions about the superiority of Inner Circle English speakers. Engaging in communication with NNS students from other countries provides opportunities for students to recognize the existence of diverse linguistic varieties and fosters confidence in intercultural communication (Schreiber, 2019).

Secondly, English language teachers should recognize the importance of exposing their students to a variety of English accents, including those of NS and NNS from different regions. For instance, teachers can use audio recordings, videos, and guest speakers to expose students to diverse accents. Classroom activities should include discussions on the value of linguistic diversity and the benefits of understanding different English accents in real-world communication. Teachers may use role-playing to include interactions with various accents. This can help students develop a more diverse and inclusive view of English as a global language and increase their ability to communicate with people from different linguistic backgrounds (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022).

Thirdly, English language teachers should focus on teaching English as a lingua franca (ELF), rather than emphasizing the notion of *standard English* (Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020). This means teaching students to use English as a tool for successful communication (Seidlhofer, 2011), rather

than as an end in itself. Group discussions can simulate real-life intercultural interactions which enables students to practice flexible and adaptive communication strategies. By doing so, students can develop a more flexible and adaptable approach to using English in a variety of contexts and with different interlocutors.

Finally, English language teaching policy and practice should be informed by research on the attitudes of learners toward different English accents to ensure that teaching methodologies and materials are relevant and effective for learners to use English in real-world communication.

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