

Thai Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Notion of World Englishes and “Thai English”

Eugenio Jr. Sta. Romana De Luna

br.eugene@delasalle.ph

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand

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Abstract

This mixed-method study aimed to determine Thai teachers' attitudes towards the emerging local variety of English in Thailand tentatively called Thailish (Thai English). Results of online surveys and semi-structured interviews with 60 Thai high school teachers in Bangkok revealed that they are highly aware of Thailand's emerging local variety of English, especially Thailish. The majority of the respondents stated that they are proficient in the emerging local variety of English in the four primary English language skills. However, it can be noted that despite a substantial number of respondents indicating their strong familiarity and competence with Thailish, a significant portion of them prefer that the use of Thailish be limited particularly in academic and formal contexts.

Keywords: World Englishes, Thai English (Thailish), teachers' attitudes, acceptability, language attitudes

Introduction

English, one of the world's lingua francas, has transformed its status and is seen as a global language rather than only the language of its original native users (Boonsuk, 2021). According to Boonsuk and Ambele (2021), the term *English as a lingua franca* has emerged to represent communicative exchanges among individuals speaking different original languages; hence, English is no longer *owned* by native speakers, but by all users of English. The use of English has expanded globally, particularly in education, technology, journalism, international politics, and commerce (Bautista & Gonzalez, 2006). Moreover, the concept of World Englishes (WE) recognizes that English has become widely used by non-native speakers due to its global emergence (Bernardo, 2013). WE is defined by Kirkpatrick (2010) as indigenous, nativized language varieties that have developed and been influenced by the local culture of non-native users. Braj Kachru (1986), an Indian sociologist, further emphasizes the concept of nativization, arguing that Asian nations have developed specific English varieties, adapted to local users, particularly in everyday communication. The discussion of nativization and English varieties remains relevant in the Expanding Circle of Kachru, which includes countries

such as Thailand, where English is considered a foreign language with little or no official recognition in government, law, and administration.

As part of the Expanding Circle, Thailand continues its journey to improve its English usage in the tourism and medical industries (Talerngsri, 2019). These opportunities have encouraged Thais to learn English and to meet the needs and demands of the twenty-first century in business, entertainment, health care, and academia. Thailand has heightened its focus on English Language Teaching (ELT) and embraced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in line with its drive for internationalization and cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In learning English as a foreign language, Thais can maintain connections with other Asian nations that support free market principles, allowing for the free movement of investments, products, and services.

Although English is regarded as a foreign language in Thailand, it is evident in many aspects of ordinary Thai people's lives through pop culture, such as music, television, films, print media, and advertisement. English has become associated with modern technology, economic progress, and internationalization, making it a valuable asset in business and education. Although Thais may not extensively use English, they are eager to learn it to improve their career prospects, especially in fields related to science and technology, business administration, and tourism (Watkhaolarm, 2005).

With the presence of English in the local context and its use in the daily lives of Thais, a possible local variety of English, *Thailish* (Thai English), is slowly emerging. Tarrayo et al. (2021) stated that the academe recognizes the existence of *Thailish* as a local variety of English due to its distinct accent and pronunciation, exclusive vocabulary, unique spelling, and grammatical structure. Its existence in the Thai media and casual conversation with foreign tourists shows its distinct features.

Several studies on the usage of *Thailish* have previously been published, forming the foundation of this research. *Thailish* as a new and emerging local variety of world English is evident in different media platforms such as the Internet and print media. Watkhaolarm (2005) observes that Thai authors use strategies at the lexical and thematic levels in composing their Thai English literary texts. These strategies involve the integration of Thainess in the text resulting from context transfer, which includes social, cultural, and religious elements, as well as lexico-grammatical transfer, which includes translation, lexical borrowing, shifts, hybridization, and reduplication.

Buripakdi's (2012a) investigation further indicates that participants from Thailand recognized their employment of the English language as representative of a diverse array of WE. This perception stems from their belief that their linguistic practices mirror both the distinctiveness of Thai culture and the socio-cultural facets intrinsic to their nation. Additionally, Rajprasit and Marlina (2019) mention YouTube videos that depict *Thailish* as a form of comedy, imitating Thai accents and presenting them as a subject of humor and discrimination.

Although Thailand continues its journey to globalization through learning and using English in different educational institutions, *Thailish* has become a center of controversy as various studies counter its importance and usage. For example, Tarrayo et al. (2021) found that although Thai EFL teachers

agree that Thai English exists as a local variety of English, as evidenced by the way Thai speak and use grammar rules in writing and speaking, they still prefer to teach language skills using standard English as mandated by the Ministry of Education, American and British English. Thailish is not given importance as Tarrayo et al. (2020) and Buripakdi (2012b) observed; the academe continues to believe that this local variety is unacceptable and broken as it is full of errors with regard to grammar and syntax and is only useful in comedic acts in media to make fun of the Thai distinct accent, rather than to educate its possible users. The attitudes of Thais toward Thailish are then affected as they perceive it as substandard English because of its broken accent and form. In the study of Kalra and Thanavisuth (2018), the attitudes of Thai students towards Thailish became negative after they were exposed to different varieties of WE such as Chinese English, Indian English, Burmese English, Japanese English, and Vietnamese English. The study mentioned that after being exposed to the different varieties of WE, Thai students became more uncomfortable and ashamed of their local accent as it is used in the media as a form of comedy.

This reality affects attitudes toward different WE, particularly Thailish. This present study thus aims to clarify and investigate Thai teachers' attitudes towards WE and their understanding of the slowly emerging nativized English known as Thailish. This study also aims to explore how these attitudes can help the world of research and academia understand why Thais still prefer standard English over the familiar and local varieties of Englishes.

Specifically, this study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the proficiency level of the Thai high school teachers in English in terms of listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills; and writing skills?
2. What are the attitudes of the Thai high school teachers toward WE and Thailish?
3. How acceptable is Thailish among the Thai high school teachers ?

Literature Review

English in Thailand

When assessing the role of the English language in Thailand, it is essential to know that the Kingdom of Thailand is a diverse nation with various ethnicities. It has a population of 69 million people and recognizes 70 official dialects, with *Standard Thai* serving as the national and standardized language of government and education (Statistics Portal, 2020; World Population Review, 2020). According to the 2010 census, 96.4% of the population was literate in Thai. Nevertheless, minority languages in Thailand include Malay, Burmese, Thaikeung, Karen, Lao-Krung, Cambodian, Hmong/Mea, Chinese, and Japanese (Thailand National Statistical Office, 2010).

Thailand belongs to the Expanding Circle in Kachru's (1992) categorization of English spread, indicating that it has no history of British colonization and that English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) and used for communication, particularly with foreigners (Sarmah, et al., 2009). As a migration

and tourism hub in Southeast Asia, Thailand continues its efforts to improve its English proficiency especially the tourism and medical industries. These opportunities have encouraged Thais to learn English to meet the needs and demands of the twenty-first century in business, entertainment, healthcare, and academia.

Apparently, the Thais realize the importance of English to their industries and daily lives, with approximately 6.5 million Thais having an excellent command of English (Bolton, 2008). The English language's public profile has never been higher among the young urban middle class, who are more likely to speak English than their parents and grandparents. The Thai educational system offers compulsory English subjects from the primary to the university level to enhance its global competitiveness (Akkakoson, 2019). Moreover, many universities in the country require students to take an English language proficiency test, and the availability of English-medium programs has increased in recent years (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014).

Many Thai people consider having a good command of English as a privilege and an advantage (Pechapan-Hammond, 2020) as it enables them to communicate with foreigners both inside or outside the country. However, Thailand's English proficiency level remains low. In fact, according to the EF English Proficiency Index of 2021, Thailand ranked 100th for English proficiency among 112 listed countries and placed 22nd among 24 Asian countries, with only Myanmar and Cambodia having lower rankings (Education First, 2021; Mala, 2018).

The low performance level of English as EFL in Thailand can be attributed to demographic and ethnic concerns within the kingdom. The remote, isolated, and impoverished regions of the country have limited exposure to English. In addition to this, Thailand's population consists of large ethnic groups with diverse cultures, locations, histories, languages, and religions. These ethnic groups include Siamese Thai, Thai Lao, Thai I-sarn, Phuthai, Shan, Thai Lue, and Southern Thai (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2020; Whittal, 2020).

Thailish (Thai English)

The phrase *Thai English* has been used in research (Watkhaolarm, 2005; Sarmah et al., 2009). Bennui (2017, as cited in Ambele, 2022) defines Thai English as a variant of English spoken by Thai people. Tarrayo et al. (2021) asserted that Thai English should be academically recognized as a local variant, evident in its unique accent, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. Its distinct attributes are evident in Thai media and casual dialogues with foreign tourists. In the study of Trakulkasemsuk (2012) on Thai literature, there are numerous examples of Thais' unconscious use of Thai English. The author listed common language contact processes affecting Thai English, including transfer, translation, shift, lexical borrowing, hybridization, and reduplication.

The **transfer** of Thainess to English is evident when Thai individuals adapt the language and incorporate their cultural and social norms. Watkhaolarm (2005) provides examples of this phenomenon, highlighting how Thais use kinship terms to express politeness and humility toward their

elders. For instance, using phrases like *Grandmother Dhang* signifies respect and adherence to Thai cultural norms, as it is considered impolite to address a senior person solely by their name. Additionally, the use of titles, birth ranks and social status terms such as *Acharn Ploy* or *Khru Chan* (which mean Teacher Ploy and Teacher Chan) reflects Thais' consciousness of social hierarchy and it is transferred into their usage of English.

Translation also plays a role when Thai speakers encounter concepts, ideas, and idioms that have no direct equivalent in the foreign language. Chutisilp (1984, as cited in Trakulkasemsuk, 2012), provides an example where the phrase *the sixth cycle of age* is used. In Thai culture, one cycle of age is equivalent to twelve years, and the term *cycle* is used instead of *jubilee*. Therefore, the phrase refers to someone who is 72 years old.

The **shift** described by Watkhaolarm (2005) refers to the process by which Thai authors shift from a Thai writing style to an English writing style which includes the use of proverbs and old sayings.

As an example, the author cites the following passage:

Father was inclined to favor his third wife, the old saying, "New rice tastes better than the old one, still held good" (p.150)

Lexical borrowing occurs when Thai words are incorporated into English statements due to the lack of direct translation. Examples of lexical borrowing, also known as *loanwords*, include Thai place names like Bangkok, the Chao Praya River, and Chiang Mai Province. Cultural and religious terms also retain their Thai linguistic identity, such as the *wai* greeting gesture, the *Songkran* water festival, and the Buddhist temple or *wat*.

Hybridization occurs when Thai language users combine Thai words with English, resulting in constructions like *Farang lady* (meaning *a foreign lady*). This process allows Thai English users to be creative in forming compound words.

Reduplication involves the repetition of words to exaggerate or emphasize expressions, as seen in phrases like *big big school* and *many many building* (Trakulkasemsuk, 2012).

However, the recognition of these language phenomena does not necessarily mean that the local variety is widely used in educational settings. Thais continue to imitate and adopt the accents, vocabulary, and grammar of other standardized varieties of English, such as American and British English (Tarrayo et al., 2020).

Language Attitudes

The attitudes of learners can vary, ranging from favorable to negative. Visser (2008, as cited in Imsa-ard, 2020) emphasizes the significant impact of attitudes on language learning. Imsa-ard (2020) defined attitude as the response and reaction of language users towards various aspects related to a specific situation, including people and subject matter. In the glossary of linguistics and language teaching, Rungruangsuparat (2010), defines attitudes as the way language learners perceive, evaluate, and respond to the target language and the society in which it is spoken. According to McKenzie (2010),

and Ellis (1994) variables such as learning attitudes have an influence on second language performance. Furthermore, Karahan (2007) confirms that language learners with positive attitudes toward language acquisition are more likely to become proficient language users.

Positive attitudes toward a wide variety of languages are significant variables and causes of the global reach of WE. Language attitudes have been shown to be one of the influential factors in the spread or decay of language varieties. McKenzie (2010) corroborated the study of Fishman and Rubal-Lopez (1992) and found that user attitudes and language usage play a role in the dissemination of languages. These attitudes influence the behavior of second language (L2) users leading to shifts in language acceptance and use, as well as denial and rejection of the target language.

Attitudes represent favorable or unfavorable views on behavior, while subjective norms encompass opinions about behavior within one's societal, economic, political, and demographic context, particularly among family, friends, and loved ones. These two variables have a significant impact as determinants of a person's intention before coming up with a final behavior (Nickerson, 2022).

The current study aims to investigate how Thai teachers' language attitudes lead to acceptance or rejection of Thailish as a slowly emerging English variety using lexical and grammatical features present in their society, and how this relates to individuals' sense of linguistic identity and pride in their cultural heritage.

Methodology

Research Contexts and Participants

This study aimed to identify Thai teachers' attitudes towards WE, and Thailish and utilized a mixed-method design. This research method suits the study as the researcher intended to explore quantitative and qualitative data using online survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The online survey questionnaire was a tool to gather the quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to clarify the patterns observed in the quantitative results.

The participants were 60 Thai high school teachers of various ages from a Catholic school in Bangkok who teach culturally and linguistically diverse learners from various provinces. They were selected because they worked with adolescent students at a critical stage in their physical and psychological development (Zaky, 2016). Purposive-convenience sampling was employed in selecting the participants, based on the following criteria: 1) employed in an institution that hires teachers from different cities and provinces in Thailand, 2) encouraged to use English as a medium of instruction, as some of them are part of the English Intensive Program, and 3) teach culturally, and linguistically diverse learners from different provinces.

At the time of the study, the majority of the participants (43.33%) were between the ages of 41 and 50. In terms of educational attainment, 91.61% held bachelor's degrees, while only 8.33% had

completed their master's degree. In addition, 33% were English teachers; however, only 40% of these English teachers had received training in World Englishes.

A request letter was sent to the school's administrator to secure permission for data collection via an online survey. The letter emphasized that the participants' participation was voluntary, and that their responses and identities were to be confidential and anonymous. Upon getting permission from the school administrator, the researcher sent an email to identify representatives of the identified institution for them to share the survey link with the participants with the purpose of the study and the ethical agreements stated in the e-mail. The online survey was available for one week to complete and the responses were counted and assigned their equivalent percentage to establish the respondents' attitudes toward World Englishes and Thai English. After the data collection and analysis, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview sessions with 20 teachers who agreed to be part of the interview to validate their attitudes toward WE and Thailish and how they adapt to this reality regarding EFL learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through an online survey which is a convenient, and low-cost form of data collection. (Duangsaeng & Chanyoo, 2017). A modified questionnaire adapted from Mann and Pirbhai-Ilicj (2007), Mann (2007), and Borlogan (2009) was used to identify the language use and attitude of Singaporeans and Filipinos toward their own varieties of Englishes.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments the following were utilized: For content validity, the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index was used to screen the item quality; the items from the online survey were rated by experts, who are English professors, on World Englishes to check if the items are appropriate and essential to the study. All experts agreed that the questionnaire was suitable for use in the study, as it obtained an absolute agreement of 1.0. The researcher then pilot tested on 10 high school teachers who were not part of the primary participants. After the pilot testing, the researcher checked the instrument's Cronbach's Alpha coefficient level which yielded a positive result of 0.87, which can be interpreted as acceptable and appropriate to use.

The 65 item online questionnaire has four main sections: personal information and background of participants', language choice, language attitudes towards WE and Thailish, and the level of acceptability of Thailish. A checklist is also provided at the end of the questionnaire so that the participants could decide whether or not to participate in the online semi-structured interview.

The responses were tallied and assigned their equivalent percentages to establish the participants' attitudes toward WE and Thailish. After the data collection and analysis, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview sessions with the participants who agreed to be part of the interview to validate and clearly state their attitudes on WE and Thailish. The discussion also included questions relating to how they adapt to EFL learning.

The semi-structured open-ended sessions were conducted on both the researcher's and participants' convenient schedules. These interviews were conducted in English and lasted 15 minutes each. For the convenience of both the researcher and respondents, a Thai interpreter was available so teachers could be confident in answering in English or Thai based on their preference. The interviews were recorded using Zoom with the respondents' permission. The interview transcripts were then sent back to the respondents for possible corrections, additions, and validation. The collected transcripts were then categorized based on themes through the thematic-analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The transcripts were identified by codes for the respondents (i.e., T1 [Teacher 1], T2 [Teacher 2], etc.) to anonymize the participants' identities. The data were processed using Microsoft Excel 2020 and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) in order to obtain the frequencies. The data were tallied and given their equivalent percentages to determine the respondents' attitudes on WE and Thailish. Nominal data such as age, sex, highest educational attainment, usage of language, and view on Thai English are analyzed and presented as percentages to reveal the total number of respondents. With this, rational data such as mastery and language proficiency, attitudes towards Thailish and World Englishes, and the extent of acceptability of Thailish were calculated to find the mean value of the results. To successfully perform this, the standard deviation was also calculated to provide a measure of dispersion closer to the size of the mean deviation.

Findings

Language Proficiency in Thai English

The proficiency levels of the respondents were based on their skills in Thailish. Most respondents stated that they have good language proficiency in the four major English language skills.

Table 1

Language Proficiency in Thai English

Language Skills	Very Good (f)	Good (f)	Poor (f)	Very Poor (f)	Mean	Median
Listening	8	30	17	5	2.68	3
Speaking	7	29	20	4	2.65	3
Reading	7	31	17	5	2.67	3
Writing	6	28	20	6	2.57	3

Even if there was a high frequency of respondents that indicated that they have a very good to good proficiency in Thailish, many of the interview participants of this study preferred Thailish not to gain more visibility for many reasons such as the following:

No, as it is consider as wrong English. (T1)

No, the students must learn the correct use of English for Thailand to develop and understand other countries as well. (T8)

No, as it cannot be replace the standard English that is use globally (T17)

Attitudes of Thai Teachers on World Englishes and Thailish

The majority of the participants agreed that Thais speak and write English differently compared to the Americans and the British. Most of them agreed that the way they speak and write English is known as Thailish (T11). Further, they mentioned that Thailish is mixing Thai and English in order to use it in everyday lives (T5) (T13), and that this local English variety is now existing (T17). Most of them agreed that Thai English, like American, British, Indian, and Singapore English, exists. Most of them somewhat agreed that they know Thailish and its features. Furthermore, the majority of the participants somewhat agreed that they were able to distinguish Thailish (Thai English) from American English and other Asian Englishes, such as Singapore English and Philippine English.

Thai English is shown by locals through distinct accent, pronunciation and intonation in Thai style. (T11)

Thai English is mixing Thai and English for us to communicate in our daily lives. (T5)

Thai English is the easiest way of using both Thai and English in explaining difficult English lessons to my students. (T13)

Thai English exist and use when locals try to mix Thai and English to communicate and share about their business or their particular regional and cultural context. (T17)

There are a handful of participants who agrees that they were not ashamed, hence they were proud of the existence of Thailish. (T14)

I am proud of my Thai English, as it can be used to communicate my culture to foreigners, and it is very unique; it is very Thai. (T14)

There are also participants who somewhat agreed they performed duties and responsibilities in working with Thailish which did not negatively affect the English language learning of their students. However, the majority of them somewhat disagreed that the use of Thai English did not matter to their students and employers or bosses.

The majority of the participants strongly agreed that they used English in their everyday life to connect and identify with their fellow Thais, not necessarily with Americans and British, and with this they strongly agreed that using English does not make them less Thai. There are participants who strongly agreed that the English language is not only limited to users from the United States and the United Kingdom. There were also some respondents who somewhat disagreed that using English is an act of favoring American and British ideals. The participants also somewhat agreed that like Phasa Thai, Isan, and other Thai dialects, English is also a language of Thailand and Thais.

In the education realm, many of the participants strongly agreed that the use and teaching of English in Thailand must be expanded and not limited. A subset exhibits strong agreement with the notion of allocating greater temporal and cognitive investment toward the instruction of indigenous Thai languages within educational settings. Conversely, there was a number of them who leaned towards dissent in this matter, expressing reservations regarding the proposition of diverting resources away from English education in favor of an intensified focus on teaching Thai languages within schools.

Additionally, the majority of the participants expressed a moderate level of agreement regarding the potential utility of Thailish as a preferable mode for English instruction within Thai educational institutions, as opposed to American English.

While a significant portion of the participants held a negative stance concerning their adeptness in utilizing the English language, a prevailing majority maintained the conviction that their proficiency therein remains satisfactory for executing their instructional responsibilities as teachers and instructors.

Acceptability of Thai English Lexical and Grammatical and Features

Table 2

Interpretation Criteria of Mean Score

Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.75	Unacceptable
1.76 - 2.50	Somehow Unacceptable
2.51 - 3.25	Somehow Acceptable
3.26 – 4.00	Acceptable

Table 3 presents the common language contact processes affecting Thai English as identified by Watkhaolarm (2005). These processes included transfer, translation, shift, lexical borrowing, hybridization, and reduplication. The respondents were asked to evaluate the acceptability of these language contact processes.

Table 3

Acceptability of Thai English Lexical and Grammatical and Features

Grammatical/Lexical items With Thai/ish	Mean	SD	Interpretation
<i>Khun Thomas</i> will tour us around Chiangmai this weekend.	3.00	0.88	Somehow Acceptable
So end my biographical sketch from the early part of my life to the completion of the <i>sixth circle of age</i> .	2.58	0.83	Somehow Acceptable
Father was inclined to favor his third wife. The old saying, " <i>New rice tastes better than the old one</i> ," still held good.	2.77	0.87	Somehow Acceptable
The <i>forest monk</i> learns to meditate fast.	2.38	0.94	Somehow Unacceptable
Tears and heartbreak as flight ban keeps <i>Farang</i> -Thai families apart	2.12	1.01	Somehow Unacceptable
The <i>Momchao</i> Subhadradis Diskul Library, with a mezzanine, offers a wide range of rare books written by its noble namesake and photos and film slides of many historical places taken during his travels abroad.	2.52	0.97	Somehow Acceptable
'He, Sansak, and one of Sansak's men have been following a <i>farang couple</i> since last night.'(p. 100)	2.12	0.96	Somehow Unacceptable
He then kicked Leskov in the <i>Muay Thai style</i> [a Thai kickboxing style], hoping to hit the Russian left temple	2.78	0.99	Somehow Acceptable
Ike Cadell stepped from the landing on the eastern bank of the Chao Praya River <i>onto a long-tail boat, a popular river taxi in Bangkok</i> .	2.70	1.01	Somehow Acceptable
I started dreaming about walking in the street with <i>many, many buildings on both sides</i> .	2.42	1.00	Somehow Unacceptable
His folks used to tell their children that if someone stole food after he had died and been reborn, <i>his mouth would be as small as a needle hole</i> .	2.48	1.00	Somehow Unacceptable
The hideout is surrounded by <i>pong grass</i> .	2.28	0.90	Somehow Unacceptable
Two large bull elephants, each of which had <i>a mahout, who was the elephant's controller</i> , riding on its neck.	2.60	0.89	Somehow Acceptable

Most respondents answered that seven out of 13 Thai English statements were somehow acceptable. Meanwhile, the respondents found the other two Thai English statements, which are about *farang*, to be unacceptable. *Farang* is a Thai term that refers to foreigners from western countries.

Furthermore, based on the interview participants of the study, they have an overall negative feeling when they heard or used the word *Farang* in English. For these participants, such use was deemed uncomfortable and unacceptable. However, there are still a few of them who were comfortable with such use and deem it acceptable as shown below:

The word seems impolite if we are using it to our foreign guests. (T2)

I feel uncomfortable as I know it is use to call the foreigners especially those with white skin. (T5)

Acceptable as it is not offensive and non-prejudice. It just mean people who doesn't have the same skin color with Thais. (T15)

Acceptable it means that the language develops through time. It is just an integration of language. (T14)

In addition, based on the data gathered from the interviews, Thais believed that there are avenues in which Thai English was acceptable and there are also avenues in which such use of the said language was unacceptable, most especially in the school or university set-up. To further the claim, some of the responses of the interview participants are presented below:

Thai English is acceptable whenever we use it in informal situations and unacceptable if used in academic and formal matters like teaching English. (T8)

It is acceptable if used to connect and communicate with foreigners and unacceptable when teaching English. (T2)

It is acceptable to use Thai English when talking and communicating with tourists and unacceptable when teaching proper English. (T1)

Discussion

This study provided further support for previous research on the attitudes of Thais towards WE and Thailish. The results from online surveys and interviews with 60 Thai high school teachers confirmed that, despite their limited English proficiency, they still utilized their knowledge and vocabulary of the language in their daily lives. This was found to be consistent with the findings of Watkhaolarm (2005) and further collaborated Choksuansup's (2014) work which stated that English was widely used as a means of communication worldwide. It was equally worth noting that Thailand is

unique in a way that it has never been legally colonized by another nation that primarily uses English as its lingua franca, thus distinguishing it from other variations of English. Given the increasing global significance of the English language and its usage in multilingual and multicultural contexts, new concerns and considerations have emerged.

One concern was determining the point at which a new variant of English might be regarded as a distinct language comparable to a native variety. Choksuansup (2014) outlined English's diverse applications in Thailand. These encompass its role as a working language in international forums and conferences, its application in international finance, economics, and trade. It also remained as the primary method of communication when it comes to global trend advertising and its integration into audio-visual media such as films, TV, and music. Moreover, there must be given importance in how English is used in tourism, and its role in higher education. Additionally, it is pivotal in interpretation, translation, scientific publications, technology transfer, and internet communication. All these domains relate to commercial or professional language use.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be inferred that many of the participants hold strong beliefs in favor of expanding the usage and teaching of English in Thailand, rather than restricting it. Additionally, there were also people who strongly believed in allocating more time and attention to the teaching of Thai languages in schools. They also agreed that, like Phasa Thai, Isan, and other Thai regional languages, English is also a language of Thailand and the Thai people. Moreover, for most of them, using English did not diminish their sense of being Thai.

These positive attitudes toward expanding language learning provided hope for the vitality and global spread of WE and the Thai language. It has been demonstrated that language attitudes and the spread of language varieties are influential factors in the expansion or decline of language variants. This notion, as supported by McKenzie (2010), who found that user attitudes and the usage of the target language play a role in its spread. These attitudes shaped the behavior of second language (L2) users, leading to changes in language acceptance, usage, and even rejection of the target language. Attitudes in this context referred to the favorable or negative evaluation and feelings towards engaging in the behavior. Subjective norms, on the other hand, involve opinions about the behavior from the user's society, economy, politics, and demographic factors, particularly their family, friends, and loved ones. These two elements significantly influence a person's intention prior to engaging in a particular behavior (Nickerson, 2022). In line with Imsa-ard (2020), attitude can be defined as the responses and reactions of language users to various aspects within a specific context, including individuals and topics. Considering this definition, the study's findings were indicative of the positive responses and attitudes of the respondents towards English, recognizing it as an accepted part of Thailand's language landscape. These results highlighted the favorable acceptance of English among the respondents, further supporting the notion that English was considered as one of the languages in Thailand.

The current study's findings shed light on the recognition and awareness of Thailish as a local variety of English among Thais. Consistent with the research by Tarrayo et al. (2021), the respondents

acknowledged the existence of Thailish, characterized by its distinct accent and pronunciation, unique vocabulary, spelling variations, and grammatical structures. The study also revealed that the majority of respondents express proficiency in Thailish across the four major English language skills. However, despite the respondents' high awareness and competency in Thailish, many participants in the study expressed a desire to limit its prominence. They viewed Thailish as incorrect English and believed that its usage may have hindered the acquisition of standard English, as noted by Tarrayo et al. (2020) and Buripakdi (2012b). Interviews conducted for this study highlighted that Thais accept the usage of Thailish in certain contexts, such as tourism, as appropriate for showcasing Thai culture and engaging in non-formal communication. However, formal and academic settings were considered inappropriate for its use.

The study also highlighted that even though Thai teachers accepted the existence and the usage of Thailish in informal settings, they still remained conscious of using some terms that may offend foreigners. One given example was the term *farang*, commonly used to refer to foreigners. The study revealed mixed reactions among the respondents. While some expressed negative emotions when hearing or using the term in English, a few respondents found it as acceptable and appropriate. These differing attitudes reflected the complexity and diversity of perspectives toward language and cultural interactions. Overall, the findings of the study demonstrated the nuanced views and attitudes of Thais toward Thailish, recognizing its existence while also highlighting concerns about its impact on English language proficiency and its appropriateness in different settings.

This study provided validation for the existence of Thailish as a local variety of English, as it was actively used by Thais in their communication with both tourists and fellow citizens. The findings also revealed a significant shift in the perspective of educators regarding Thailish, moving away from a rigid avoidance due to its previous classification as incorrect English by the academe (Tarrayo et al., 2020). Instead, there is a growing acceptance of Thailish as a means to highlight Thailand's vibrant culture, and unique identity, and to enhance daily communication convenience.

However, these findings should be viewed with utmost caution, and a variety of limitations should be considered. As the study was conducted during the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic and face-to-face interaction was very limited; hence the online conduction of the survey and semi-structured interviews. Another limitation of the study is that the usage of Thailish inside the classroom was not documented. The usual Thailish terms used by the teachers and students can be a source of data that can affect their level of acceptance of the emerging local variety.

Conclusion

The results show that most Thai high school teachers are highly aware of the possible emerging local varieties of English in Thailand, notably Thailish. The participants express positive attitudes and acceptance towards WE and Thailish, as most agree and believe that the use and teaching of English in Thailand should be expanded rather than restricted.

While most of the participants acknowledge Thai English as an acceptable part of the language in Thailand, they perceive Thai English primarily as an informal language associated with tourism, capable of promoting Thailand's unique and culturally rich identity. However, the use of Thai English in academic and formal settings remains a contentious matter, as some educators consider it to be incorrect and substandard English.

The findings emphasize the significant roles of language users' attitudes in determining the acceptance of a language variety. Despite the participants' high levels of proficiency, knowledge of the existence of the local variety, exposure to and usage of the local variety, and even acceptability, its future status ultimately depends on the willingness of its users to embrace it as part of their language and overcome the wrong judgment of it as incorrect and substandard English. This study introduces the notion that educators and the academe, as gatekeepers of language, hold the power to influence the growth and acceptance of a local language variety. Thai English, as a slow-emerging variety of English in Thailand, sparks a discourse within the research community, as its recognition and status hinge on the actions and perspectives of Thais. Although Thai English may face prejudice and skepticism, particularly in academic circles, its continued usage to communicate and connect with the global community has the potential to position it as one of the local varieties of World and Asian Englishes. This study highlights the dynamic relationship between language users' attitudes and the development and acceptance of language varieties, underscoring the crucial role that collective actions and attitudes play in shaping the trajectory of Thai English within academia and society.

Recommendations for Further Studies

The researcher hopes that more investigations on Thai English will be conducted. At the same time, educators, teachers, and program committee alike should take responsibility for designing and providing suitable programs and resources to effectively develop and integrate the formal use of Thai English, if deemed necessary, in a way that the concerns in Thai English in relation to their grammatical and lexical context will be properly addressed, to improve students' competence in using the English language in Thailand.

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About the Author

Eugenio Jr. Sta. Romana De Luna is a De La Salle Brother and a graduate student at Mahidol University in Thailand. His research interests include Migration Linguistics, World Englishes, language learning, and teaching. He is a member of the International Association for Migration Linguistics under the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) and the International Association of World Englishes (IAWE). Currently, he is exploring Thai English as an emerging local variety of English in Thailand.