# Thai Tertiary Learners' Attitudes towards Their Thai English Accent

**Eric A. AMBELE**
English Section,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
Email: agrie.a@psu.ac.th

**Yusop BOONSUK***
English Section,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
Email: yusop.b@psu.ac.th

**Abstract**

The global spread of English nowadays has led to a shifted role in the use of English as an international lingua franca in expanding-circle contexts like Thailand. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine Thai university students' attitudes towards their own Thai-English accent, in addition to how the notion of standard language ideology in Thailand plays an influential role in their English accent attitudes. The research further explores the perspectives of the students regarding their acceptability of Thai-English accent by adopting a mixed-method approach using both questionnaire and interview as research instruments. The findings reveal a controversial perspective in the attitudes of the students towards their own Thai-English accent. While most participants show a positive attitude towards their own Thai-English accent as they reported that the Thai English accent is good as long as one can be understood, some of them still attempt to sound as native-like as possible because they think that Thai-English accent is unintelligible. This finding calls for a reconsideration in pronunciation teaching in universities in

Thailand in order to address these emerging practical and communicative requirements inspired by English diversity where non-mainstream Englishes are now gaining acceptance.

***Keywords:*** *Accent, attitudes, English as a lingua franca, Global Englishes*

## Introduction

In recent decades, the English language has witnessed a dramatic change in the way it is used around the globe as an international language. This is because there has been an increasing number of non-native speakers over native speakers of English. The global spread of English as a global language has given rise to concerns and debates over people's perception of this phenomenon and how the English language can be taught in such a global context. English has now been divided into several distinctive varieties, resulting in studies on World English (WEs) (Kachru, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Such "nativized" or "indigenized" varieties have been used to refer to the word "New Englishes" (Platt et al., 1984). These English variants have been proposed in order to show individuals' social identities (Kachru, 1992). Notably, the native speakers are no longer the sole owners or users of the English language (Waelateh et. al., 2019; Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019). By comparison, English now is commonly utilised among non-native speakers as a lingua franca (ELF) for interaction (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011; Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020). English is no longer the sole property of native speakers, as it has been argued (Widdowson, 1994), but should belong to all those who use it. Under such conditions, language users may not always comply with conventional native norms. WEs and ELF's paradigms questioned all traditional English language teaching (ELT) philosophies and methods.

Considering Thailand as a case (the context of this study), the ideology that native Englishes such as British and American are collectively accepted to be the only ELT standard and model remains deeply rooted (Buripakdi, 2012; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012). Such idealism promotes a sense of direction in English language

learning that a well-performed student is reflected in the ability to produce a sameness British or American English accent. On the other hand, other English accents, including Thai-English, are perceived undesirable. Since this conception contradicts the current English linguistic landscapes and practical needs which involve multiple varieties, this research, therefore, seeks to explore Thai university students' attitudes towards their own Thai-English accents, and how the concept of standard language ideology in Thailand influences the students' attitudes towards their English accent. Since this study focuses on Thai university students' accent attitude towards their own Thai-English accent across different universities in Thailand, as well as the degree to which these views are influenced by the traditional language ideology in Thailand, the findings will be able to propose a more effective teaching and learning method of English pronunciation for both teachers and students in Thailand. There will also be an increase awareness among educational stakeholders (teachers, administrators, policy makers, and curriculum designers) who still heavily rely on traditional native-speaker norms even with the global roles and spread of English nowadays that has impacted, in very practical ways, changes in ELT in different English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. Today's global roles of English, contrary to the traditional English language ideology in Thailand where emphasize has always been on native competence, consider other English varieties including Thai-English as legitimate varieties, given that Thai English learners (in particular) mostly interact with people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds. As a result, this study provides more practical teaching and learning practices in Thai ELT community. By extension, it would be more realistic to recognize other English accents other than the British and the American English accents that have been (for long) rooted in the Thai society as the benchmark for correct English usage.

To address the aims of the study, two research questions were identified:

1. What is the attitude of Thai university students towards their own Thai-English accent?

2. How does the standard language ideology in Thailand influence the student's attitudes towards their own Thai-English accent?

**Language attitudes**

The value of language attitudes is made clear by Garrett (2010, p. 2), who notes that "our skills, intellect, friendliness, trustworthiness, social status, group memberships, and so on are often measured by the way we communicate" and that "even the pace at which we speak will elicit reactions". He also explains the importance of attitudes in language standardization, for example in high school education. He mentions that there is now a great emphasis on correctness emphasized by the authority. For example, standard languages are "codified and distributed across educational systems in dictionaries and grammar books" (Garrett, 2010, p. 7). Attitudes to languages and varieties may cause them to standardize, but they may also disappear, making them a topic of discussion of great importance.

Garrett et al. (2003) opined that language attitudes are people's feelings about their language or other people's language. People's attitudes towards a language can also be reflected in how they feel about the speakers of that language. So, by looking at the concept of language attitude, we are trying to look at how Thai university students who use Thai accent to speak English feel about themselves; the reaction to the speaker of the language and how other students who listen to them use Thai accent to speak English respond. And all of these can affect people's choices of whether to use Thai accent or British or American to speak English. Furthermore, different scholars have explained the reasons for investigating language attitude (Baker, 1992; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006; Garrett, 2010; Garrett et al., 2003). Baker (1992), for example, discusses that understanding the language attitudes of people will lead us to discover what they are feeling about a language, how a language makes them feel and what they are willing to do about it. However, regarding language policy and learning, language attitude research will allow researchers to identify language learner's language attitudes and expectations. It

can also help teachers and policymakers in meeting learners' needs (Bartram, 2010; Garrett et al., 2003; Friedrich, 2000).

## English accent attitudes

Attitudes on accent is one vital area of English language teaching and learning (Lippi-Green, 2012; Moyer, 2013). Accent forms an important aspect in the use of foreign language and "exerts the greatest influence on (culture-based) attitudes" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 78). Defining this word, though, is not an easy task. For example, Moyer (2013, p. 10) broadly describes "accent not only to refer to the articulation of individual sounds, or parts but also to suprasegmental characteristics". Even though accent as a linguistic phenomenon is displayed whenever people speak, it has "no real or specific significance" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 44). Lippi-Green (1997, p. 42) describes accents as "loose bundles of prosodic and segmental characteristics distributed across geographical and/or social space." We must understand, however, that accent is a rather complicated issue and there is no mutually agreed meaning of accent, especially from an ELF perspective. This research focuses on accentuation since accent "is more than anything else a strong linguistic indicator of age generation, social identity, social class, level of education, and ethnicity" (Luk & Lin, 2006, p. 6). The definition of accent has beeen examined and debated, including recent studies on language teaching and attitudes (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Garrett et al., 2003; Jenkins, 2000, 2007; Levis, 2005; Lippi-Green, 2012; McKenzie, 2010; Moyer, 2013; Munro, 2008), but still, few studies focus on researching accent attitude from an ELF perspective in Asian context (see Galloway, 2017).

It can be found from earlier research on English accent that many English teachers and learners possess an etched view on English language accents. Such views are based on the assumption that native-speaker English accents are more genuine and effective without the teachers knowing the practical purposes of interaction and the nuanced picture of accents. Nevertheless, it seems that both language learners and teachers still prefer native English accents, particularly British and American accents (Friedrich,

2000; Groom, 2012; McKenzie, 2008). A noteworthy argument that arose from job advertisements for the case of Thailand where this study was conducted is that Thai people view native English speakers as a (group of) people from the Inner Circle countries. The new rule adopted by the Teachers Council of Thailand (TCT) supports this view. TCT is Thailand's leading teaching professional organization. This organization's main duty is to monitor and maintain the standards of knowledge of those in the education profession. With regard to native English speaking teachers NESTs, TCT (2012) enumerates only people from six countries, namely the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ireland, the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as legitimate native speakers of English. The origin of a person from one of these countries is judged on the basis of the nationality appearing on their passports. As a result, many Asian employers, including those in Thailand, are still assessing, considering, and recruiting their employees based on their accents, especially those with traditional English accents (British or American). Meanwhile, they view their own English accent as impure, incomplete, defective, inferior and inadequate. Moreover, Watson Todd (2006) notes that educational institutions report that white-skinned and blond-haired candidates are favoured in their advertisements. This notion is linked to the socio-political aspects of the "preferred" and "appropriate" English accent ideology in Thailand. More precisely, other communities that have a more native-like pronunciation look down on Thai people who pronounce in English with a "Thai accent". Jindapitak (2014) has reviewed several studies that support this notion. His study attempts to investigate Thai (tertiary-level) students' attitudes towards English pronunciation. 104 students were his research participants in a university in Thailand. The study aimed to examine whether or not Thai English teachers were qualified English pronunciation teachers. The results showed that native English speaking teachers (NESTs) were thought of as the most suitable to teach aural and oral skills, including pronunciation, whereas Thai English teachers were viewed as teachers of a second choice. Similarly, another study conducted by Jindapitak and Teo (2013) investigates the perception of Thai university students towards NESTs and non-native English

speaking teachers' (NNESTs) accents. The results reveal that while most Thai students regarded the accents of native speaker to be the best models, it was also found that non-native English speakers' accents are important given their living and learning environments which is composed of non-native English speakers. Buripakdi (2008) study on the attitudes of Thai professional writers towards Thai English corroborated the studies presented above. The findings show that mainstream English was considered beautiful, articulate, foreign, ideal, good, and skilled, whereas non-mainstream English, for example, was considered unfavourable, fractured, stigmatized, non-standard, and wrong. In connection to this phenomenon, a recent qualitative study conducted by Akkakoson (2019) with Thai postgraduates on their feelings towards owning English as they use the language as a lingua franca in ASEAN seems to suggest that some Thai EFL learners still attach importance to how native speakers use English. By extension, this could indicate that native English accents (especially British and American English) are still valued by Thai learners as more important than their own Thai-English accent. Studies suggest that Thais appear to consider English word-pronunciation as native speaker as not just a sign of one's personal ability but also a symbol of one's social class. Thus, English pronunciation has become a key criterion for Thais to distinguish the social class (higher or lower) of a person. For this reason, many Thai people try to pronounce English words like English native speakers to avoid losing face or being discriminated against by others. If the majority applauds and supports this idea, then there may be no place in society for the Thai-English accent. Those who speak Thai-accented English will be oppressed or treated as second-class citizens in society (Buripakdi, 2008). Following this prevalent English language ideology in Thailand, in relation to the current ELT and learning practices, some educational stakeholders have had a negative attitude towards other English varieties (or accents), including Thai-English accent, that are not British or American. Therefore, it is unsurprising that ELT in Thailand still prioritize native-oriented teaching and learning pedagogy where the focus is on native-like competence. This also has impacted how Thai learners perceive

their own Thai-English accent in terms of their confidence in English speaking.

## Research methodology

### Participants

The study participants in this research were third-year and fourth-year students at the undergraduate level who study in English across five selected universities in Thailand. The goal was to capture a wide range of the attitudes of these Thai university students towards their own Thai-English accent. In this light, therefore, two criteria were germane in the selection of the participants for this study. The participants were selected on the basis that they were: (1) Thai university students studying in English, and (2) those in their fourth and fifth year of studying in English. By this second criterion, the researchers assumed that the students would have gained experiences in learning and using English with people of different English accents in and out of their classrooms, and thus, would have a better insight into the realities of Thai-English accent attitudes in Thailand. The total number of students considered from each university was fifty (50), with a total of 250. The actual number of students whose data were considered for quantitative analysis in all universities was 100. Fifteen (15) students were randomly selected across the universities and interviewed in order to get more in-depth information on their attitudes towards their own Thai-English accent.

### Instruments

This study adopted a mixed-method research design since it attempts to explore deeper insights and patterns into the attitudes of the participants towards their own Thai-English accent. The mixed-method approach was employed by means of two research instruments: questionnaire and semi-structured interviews for both quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The questionnaire was adapted from Loisa (2014), consisting of 2 parts. In part one, the questionnaire included variables such as age, major, year of study, English fluency and comprehension, and gender. The students were further requested to elicit some adjectives describing

their own Thai-English accent in this part. Part two included exposure to and use of English, as well as the participants rating their own Thai-English accent in based on their satisfaction degree level in learning English. In evaluating the accent, different evaluation scales were used for each investigated item, such as: not satisfied at all, not very satisfied, uncertain, satisfied, and very satisfied. The second instrument was the semi-structured individual interview. Interviews serves as a reliable instrument to access in-depth information on people's attitudes, as well as understand their personal views in ways only possible by this tool as opposed to others like surveys or observations (Dörnyei, 2007). By utilizing the semi-structured interview, the aim was to gain further insights into the students' attitude towards their own Thai-English accent, and to further probe into how the prevalent English language ideology in Thailand shapes and/or influence their Thai-English accent attitudes. To address the research questions of the study, the core themes of the interview questions included experiences of the students towards learning and using English with Thai and foreigners, their attitudes towards English language ideology, standard English, and Thai-English accent.

### Data collection and analysis procedures

The process of collecting data started with the administration of the questionnaire on the students' attitudes towards their own Thai-English accent. It was administered to approximately 50 students at each university based on the university student enrolment for the 3rd and 4th year. The total number of participants that were finally considered for analysis from all the universities were 100 based on practical reasons and on the fact that others declined continuation with the research or provided incomplete data. With the permission of their teachers, the questionnaire was circulated to them during class time. At the end of the questionnaire, if they were interested in participating further with the interviews, their contact information was indicated. With respect to the language used in data collection, the questionnaire was designed in Thai and English to facilitate comprehension. The students had a choice to complete the questionnaire using either Thai or English. After the questionnaire administration, the

information gathered was then statistically analysed. To be able to generate detailed information from the students on their perception of their own Thai-English accent, 15 students were randomly chosen for the interview. The interviews with the students took place in Thai, with each interview lasting around 15-25 minutes. The descriptive statistical approach (Dörnyei, 2007) was used to analyse the quantitative questionnaire data, while qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the interview data. In presenting the interview as a tool that offers in-depth information to understand the participant's attitudes, it was anticipated that some salient and implicit biases towards the participants' accent would be addressed.

## Findings and discussion

### Questionnaire findings

The findings from the questionnaire are reported here in relation to how the students perceive their own Thai-English accent.  The original questionnaire had two parts; however, because this paper stems from a research project, due to space, only questions that are relevant to the focus of this paper are analyzed here. In Part 1, the students were asked to elicit some adjectives describing their own Thai-English accent. According to the student's responses to this first part, majority of them (around 65%) generally felt happy with their own Thai-English accent. The students used adjectives like: "comprehensible", "intelligible", "natural", "legitimate variety", "Thai style", "comfortable", "clear", "acceptable", and "sexy" to describe their Thai-English accent. Nevertheless, not surprising, some other students felt otherwise (around 21%). When looking at the responses of such students, they generally felt unsatisfied with their own Thai-English accent as they do so in comparison to their admired native British and American accents. Such descriptive responses that they used included: "local style", "primitive", non-standard", "non-American", "non-British", "broken", "bad", "unintelligible", and "shameful". Around 14% of the rest of the students used neutral descriptions to describe their Thai-English accent, such as "so-so", and "normal".

This leads to the next part of the questionnaire regarding the student's degree of satisfaction with their own Thai-English accent. In this part (Part 2), they were asked to rate their attitudes towards Thai-English accent based on their degree of satisfaction in learning English. Their responses are diagrammatically represented in the figure below (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Student's self-satisfaction of their own Thai-English accent**
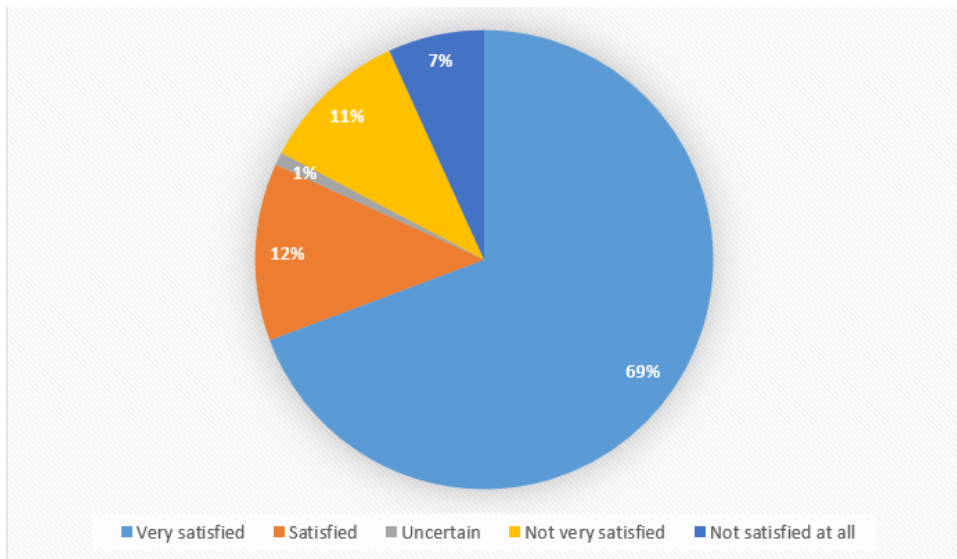


Surprisingly, when looking at the responses, most of the students (around 81%) positively felt satisfied with their own Thai-English accent although it does not have native-like pronunciation. Even though some of the students feel they should still improve their accent to be more native-like (around 18%) so that they can be understood by others, generally, the majority of the students perceive Thai-English accent as still understandable by others like the accents of other varieties of English. It can also be seen from another perspective that some students (around 1%) show a neutral attitude towards their own Thai-English accent. As pointed out above in Part 1, such students rated their Thai-English accent to be: "normal", "not bad", and "so-so". However, the students generally have a positive attitude towards their Thai-English accent. The students acknowledged the fact that they are Thais speaking with Thai accent, however, they do not feel ashamed to do so; they

hope to keep their own Thai-English accent.  As presented in Figure 1, one can see that most of the students are satisfied with their Thai-English accent, however, very few of them still aim for the native-like accent as it portrays them as being international, foreign and of a higher class.

### Interview findings

*Student perception of their Thai-English accent.* In this section, the participants were asked to indicate their attitudes and perceptions of their own Thai-English accent. The findings show that the participants generally hold a positive attitude towards their Thai-English accent (see Informants 5, 7, and 10)**.**

**Informant 5**

> *I'm Thai. I can't speak like a native speaker. I don't have a native-speaker accent, but I don't feel ashamed of my Thai English accent either. My Thai accent is my identity and I think it makes me unique and special in my own way.*

**Informant 7**

> *Although my parents did not speak English to me when I was a baby, I always listened to English songs and learned English through this process. My accent, though Thai, was then becoming accurate as I could speak with foreigners and they could understand me even though I do not have a native speaker-like accent.*

**Informant 10**

> *It is normal for people's native accent to show up in their speech when they speak, especially in a second or foreign language that is not their first language. Every country has its mother tongue like Thai language in Thailand. Although it might feel good to speak English using an American or British accent, the bottom line is, it doesn't really matter what accent one speaks with. Language is for communication and if others can understand what we say, then, it's ok, irrespective of the accent.*

Evidently, the participants did not see their Thai-English accent as something to be ashamed of. Contrarily, they felt proud to use it because they perceived it as a symbol that represents their unique identities. As Jenkins (2011), Friedrich (2000), and McKenzie (2008) have discussed, produced accents are the most noticeable feature in spoken language that reflects speakers' mother tongues, identities, and cultures. More importantly, it can also be used to assess how fluent or proficient a speaker is towards a language. Therefore, accents and pronunciation are verbal and linguistic markers that could be utilized to instantly signify the "age generations, social identity, social class, education level, and ethnicity" of a speaker (Luk & Lin, 2006, p. 6) and could "have conveniently provided a form of social and cultural symbol" (Luk & Lin, 2006, p. 15).

*Student's experiences with Thai-English accent.* The students were asked about their experience with using their Thai-English accent in order to know what they thought about it, likewise their interlocutors. As seen in Informant 1, 4, and 6, it is clear that most of participants portray a very positive attitude towards their experiences in using their Thai-English accent in Thailand.

**Informant 1**

> *My Thai-English accent is natural and am so happy and proud of myself when I speak using it (Thai-English accent). I do not feel annoyed when my friends speak to me using their Thai-English accent, neither do I feel bad about myself when I use it too.*

**Informant 4**

> *In my experience of using Thai-English accent, most foreigners are happy to be introduced to this other kind of English accent. They always listen to me with great admiration and sometimes try to imitate me so that they can be able to communicate with other Thai people who cannot understand native accent. More so, with globalization and increased immigration, English now has different varieties which are a true reflection of the different realities of the roles of English around the world.*

**Informant 6**

> *Well, it happens sometimes that people teased me with my Thai-English accent but I really do not care. However, most of the people that I have interacted with do not really care so long as they can understand me. Generally, friends don't tease me when I speak English using my Thai accent because my accent simply identifies me for who I am.*

As seen from Informant 1, the student does not feel annoyed when they speak English to their friends or hear their friends speak English to them using Thai-English accent. The finding also shows that the student (in Informant 6) never looks down on his/her friends when they speak English with their Thai-English accent. In addition, when looking at Informant 4 regarding the acceptance (or not) of Thai-English accent by native speakers (in this case, the foreigners living in or visiting Thailand), Informant 4 reports that Thai-English is one of the English varieties that native speakers find interesting.

> *Students attitudes towards intelligibility in communication.* Regarding intelligibility in communication using their own Thai-English accent, the students elucidated their own opinions towards their aspired accents with emphasis on intelligibility. This idea was strongly echoed as the key purpose of every communication by Informant 2, 8, 9, 13, and 14.

**Informant 2**

> *When I speak English, I aim for whether others can understand my accent, while I can also understand their own accent. It is normal to have a Thai-English accent as a Thai as long as it does not impede communication.*

**Informant 8**

> *My knowledge of Global Englishes makes me to understand that the notion of a standard worldwide English accent is a fallacy. I feel this is even true when I started my internship and was engaged in communications with people from different parts of the world; they all sounded so different, yet, intelligible.*

**Informant 9**

> *To focus on the basic elements of pronunciation, and speak with an accent that can be understood is the key. It is not really necessary to sound the same as a native speaker of English even though if I were to choose my own accent I would prefer a native American or British accent. I think it is easier for most people to recognize these native accents and understand them.*

**Informant 13**

> *I think that English, like every other language, is used for communication. As long as one can express oneself in a manner that others can understand in return irrespective of the accent, then, communication has taken place. In my opinion, Thai-English accent has a very insignificant impact on interpersonal communication.*

**Informant 14**

> *I want to use my own style of accent which can make people understand me well and also make me feel comfortable, even when that style is British or American. I always try to sound British or American because it is easier for people to understand me when compared to other accents like my Thai-English accent.*

An option of providing additional comments was given to the participants to enable the researchers to understand the respondents' preferential attitudes towards English accents from a broader perspective (as seen from Informants 2, 8, 9, 13, and 14). Although some of the students could hardly abandon the privilege of and preference for standard English or native English accents, they yet expressed some differing opinions with regards to the importance of communication strategies in using English as not only limited to the accent that one uses in communication.

Based on the above expressions (see Informants 2, 8, 9, 13, and 14), the participants valued communicative intelligibility more than assessing how native-like a language user sounds. This notion corresponds to MacKenzie (2014, p. 115) argument that "speakers of English as an international language – provided that they ensure intelligibility, […] should otherwise express their (national and

linguistic) identity by speaking with their natural L1 accent, rather than seeking to imitate a NES accent". The findings also illustrated that language users might find messages more intelligible when they are expressed in a familiar accent and not when they can imitate a native English accent. This notion states the fact that accent-specific familiarity and exposures are key to determining how intelligible an accent is to a language user. Furthermore, since Thailand uses English as a lingua franca (ELF), the notion of correctness is not a paramount concern in ELF communication in which language use is dynamic and fluid. Therefore, it is not required for speakers who use English in the lingua franca contexts to be as fluent in communication as native English speakers. Conversely, the success factor of ELF "prioritizes successful communication over narrow notions of correctness" (Jenkins, 2011, p. 284). It embraces intercultural communication techniques, e.g., linguistics, speech, and communication accommodations which interlocutors prioritize meaning negotiations through the adaptions of "their speech patterns to make themselves more understandable by their interlocutors" (Cogo, 2012, p. 99).

*English language ideology vs. students' attitude.* Based on research question 2 which focused on the students' perception of the English language ideology in Thailand and its influence on their Thai-English accent attitude, it can be clearly seen that there is a relationship between how Thai student perceive their own Thai-English accent and the prevalent English language ideology that has been existing in ELT practice in Thailand. As earlier discussed, the notion of standard English ideology is primarily based on the EFL-oriented pedagogy where native norms are prioritised and considered as the best model of teaching and learning English. Most of the participants seem to support this notion as Informants 2, 5 and 8 in the examples below explained.

**Informant 2**

> *Since I started learning English in Thailand, I have always been taught by my teachers that British and American English varieties are the best model of learning English. My classes were heavily based on native speaker examples, and the learning goal was for me*

*to reach native-speaker competence. This played a huge role in influencing my English accent preferences in most of my communicative encounters.*

**Informant 5**

*Throughout my learning English, I noticed that the kind of textbooks we used and the manner in which we were assessed all emphasized this standard English language ideology view. That is why I think some Thai students show a negative attitude towards their Thai-English accent since they have been made to believe that anything other than the British and the American accents is wrong.*

**Informant 8**

*I have always known that correct English must be those from native English speaking countries like UK and USA. Many times when I speak English with our local Thai-English accent, my teachers will reprimand me for speaking wrong English. This makes me to be shy or demotivated to speak in English classes since I cannot imitate or speak like native speakers.*

From these examples, it is clear that the English language ideology has a great impact on students' attitudes towards their Thai-English accent. What and how they have been taught by their English teachers in schools, in addition to the textbooks used and their teachers' attitude any time they speak English with a Thai-English accent greatly influenced how they perceive their Thai-English accent and their experiences thereof as seen through the results for research question 1 above. To clarify, for example, Informant 8 captures this point when he says that "This makes me to be shy or demotivated to speak in English classes since I cannot imitate or speak like native speakers". This might be because these Thai English teachers do not seem to realize the fluidity and diversity of English language usage, regardless of any particular geographical variety. Thus, English, as it is currently used nowadays is in state of constant and continious change depending on the communicative circumstances (Boonsuk et al., 2018; Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020; Sewell, 2013).

### Conclusion and implications

Overall, it can be seen that most participants have a very positive attitude towards their Thai-English accent. As we can see from the first question, when their friends speak English with them with their Thai-English accent, most of the participants did not feel irritated. Furthermore, the findings show that most participants never look down on their friends when they speak English with their Thai-English accent. When considering whether or not Thai English is recognized by native speakers, they agreed that Thai-English is one of the English varieties that English native speakers are happy to embrace, especially living and working in Thailand. More importantly, the use of English goes beyond native speaker users only. On the contrary, English is now commonly used as a lingua franca for interaction by non-native speakers (Jenkins 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Put differently, English today has become a Lingua Franca and is more likely to be used as a communication tool among non-native users than native users.

As we know, English has now become a global language, and the role of English has also changed from the native variety to now different varieties of English use with different accents such as British, Indian, Singaporean, Malaysian and Thai English accents. These different accents have been well acknowledged by scholars in the field. For example, according to David Crystal (2003), there are more than 2 billion English speakers in the world, 400 million of whom are native speakers and the remaining 1.6 billion non-native English speakers. That means the number of non-native English speakers outnumbers that of native English speakers by 5:1 ratio (Bolton, 2008; Dröschel, 2011; MacIntyre et al., 1994). It can be seen in this regard that the Thai-English accent can also be regarded as one of the recognized English accents varieties in the world. Furthermore, Jenkins (2005, 2013) opined that speaking English with the L1 accent of the learners will highlight the inherent identities of the speakers and this may be one explanation why some non-native English users want to preserve their accents while speaking English. Therefore, it seems appropriate for Thai English users not to be overly concerned with their Thai-English accents as this could be a good way for them to project their Thai

identity. However, the findings have also shown that what and how these Thai students feel about their local Thai-English accent has been greatly influenced by the standard English language ideology in Thailand that seems to prioritise native accents over the local Thai variety.

The positive attitude of the students towards their own Thai-English accent, as the results show, can contribute to the teaching of English in Thailand in varied ways. Due to existing linguistic diversification of English nowadays, ELT in Thailand should be tailored on exposing Thai learners to different English accents. By so doing, this would equip the learners with varied speech styles that will enable them to have a smooth interaction with other interlocutors from different lingua-cultural backgrounds (Boonsuk & Fang, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2008). Furthermore, based on the results, the teaching of English pronunciation in Thailand should be re-assessed and reconceptualised to capture the global manner in which English is used and how different interlocutors, based on their varied experiences with using English, vary their English accent used in order to serve different communication goals (Baker, 2012; Peng, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2011). In other words, with regards to the teaching of pronunciation, the emphasis should not only be on sound production but also on receptive skills such as listening comprehension too. Therefore, even though we think our students might be unable to sound like native speakers with a perfect English accent, they should be able to understand what other speakers are saying as they too would understand what is being said in return. Besides, in order to attain a more practical teaching and learning of English in Thailand, teachers might need to employ a more authentic local teaching and learning materials that would increase the English learning motivation of Thai students to explore real-world Englishes, particularly as it relates to the diversity of English accents.

## Acknowledgement

## About the authors

Dr. Eric A. Ambele holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics and currently works as a lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. His research interests include Global Englishes, Sociolinguistics, Teacher Education, Discourse Analysis, Intercultural Communication and Innovative Research Methodology. ORCid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2206-8746

Asst. Prof. Dr. Yusop Boonsuk is an English lecturer/researcher at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. His research interest focuses on Global Englishes, English as an International Language, Intercultural Awareness, English Language Teaching, English Medium Instruction, and English Language Beliefs, Attitudes, and Identity. ORCid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3923-6163

## References

Akkakoson, S. (2019). Thai Language Learners' Sense of English Ownership. *PASAA, 58*, 235-263.

Ambele, E. & Boonsuk, Y. (2020). Voices of Learners for Thai ELT Classrooms: A Wake Up Call Towards English as a Lingua Franca. *Asian Englishes.* https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1759248

Baker, W. (2012). English as a lingua franca in Thailand: Characterisations and implications. *Englishes in Practice, 1*(1), 18-27.

Baker, C. (1992). *Attitudes and language* (Vol. 83). Multilingual Matters.

Bartram, B. (2010). *Attitudes to modern foreign language learning: Insights from comparative education.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bolton, K. (2008). English in Asia, Asian Englishes, and the issue of proficiency. *English Today*, *24*(2), 3-12.

Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E., & Buddharat, C. (2018). Reconsidering the Practical Aspects of ELF in Thai ELT Classroom. *Journal of Human Sciences*, *19*(1), 93-121.

Boonsuk, Y., & Fang, F. (2020). Perennial Language Learners or Competent Language Users: An Investigation of International Students' Attitudes towards Their Own and Native English Accents. *RELC Journal.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220926715

Buripakdi, A. (2012). The marginalized positions of Thai professional writers on the global hegemony of English. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 22*(1), 41-59.

Cogo, A. (2012). English as a lingua franca: Concepts, use, and implications. *ELT Journal*, *66*(1), 97-105.

Crystal, D. (1997). English as a global language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2009). Putting accent in its place: Rethinking obstacles to communication. *Language teaching, 42*(4), 476-490.

Dörnyei, Z., Csizér, K., & Németh, N. (2006). *Motivation, language attitudes and globalisation: A Hungarian perspective.* Multilingual Matters.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dröschel, Y. (2011). Lingua Franca English. *The Role of Simplification and Transfer.* Bern, Berlin ao: Peter Lang.

Friedrich, P. (2000). English in Brazil: functions and attitudes. *World Englishes, 19*(2), 215-223.

Galloway, N. (2017). *Global Englishes and Change in English language teaching: Attitudes and impact.* Routledge.

Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to Language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Garrett, P., Coupland, N., & Williams, A. (2003). *Investigating Language Attitudes: Social Meanings of Dialect, Ethnicity and Performance.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Groom, C. (2012). Non-native attitudes towards teaching English as a lingua franca in Europe. *English Today*, *28*(1), 50-57.

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2005). Implementing an international approach to English pronunciation: The role of teacher attitudes and identity. *TESOL Quarterly*, *39*(3), 535-543.

Jenkins, J. (2013). *English as a lingua franca in the international university: The politics of academic English language policy.* Routledge.

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity.* Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2011). Accommodating (to) ELF in the international university. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *43*(4), 926-936.

Jindapitak, N., & Teo, A. (2012). Thai tertiary English majors' attitudes towards and awareness of world Englishes. *Journal of English Studies, 7*, 74-116.

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

Jindapitak, N., & Teo, A. (2013). The emergence of world Englishes: Implications for English language teaching. *Asian Journal of social science and Humanities*, *2*(2).

Kachru, B. B. (1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd Ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2008). English as the official working language of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): features and strategies. *English today*, *24*(2), 27-34.

Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (2nd ed.). Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Luk, J. C., & Lin, A. M. (2006). Uncovering the sociopolitical situatedness of accents in the World Englishes paradigm. In *Spoken English, TESOL and applied linguistics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 3-22.

Levis, J. M. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, *39*(3), 369-377.

Loisa, J. (2014). Japanese attitudes towards their English pronunciation. Published PhD's thesis. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.

Moyer, A. (2013). *Foreign Accent: The Phenomenon of Non-native Speech*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language learning*, *44*(2), 283-305.

McKenzie, R. M. (2010). *The social psychology of English as a global language: Attitudes, awareness and identity in the Japanese context* (Vol. 10). Springer Science & Business Media.

Munro, M. J. (2008). Foreign accent and speech intelligibility. *Phonology and second language acquisition*, 193-218.

Peng, J. (2014). *Willingness to Communicate Inside the EFL Classroom: An Ecological Perspective*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Platt, J. T., Weber, H., & Ho, M. L. (1984). *The New Englishes*. London, Melbourne: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Seidlhofer, B. (2005). English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal*, *59*(4), 339-341.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). Conceptualizing 'English' for a multilingual Europe. *English in Europe Today: Sociocultural and educational perspectives*, 133-146.

Sewell, A. (2013). English as a lingua franca: ontology and ideology. *ELT Journal, 67*(1), 3.

Todd, R. W. (2006). The myth of the native speaker as a model of English proficiency. *Reflections*, *8*, 1-7.

Waelateh, B., Ambele, E. A., Boonsuk, Y., & Wasoh, F. (2019). What Constitutes an Effective English Teacher: Perceptions of Thai Tertiary Learners in Thailand. *Academic Services Journal, Prince of Songkla University*, *30*(3), 201-209.

Widdowson, H. G. (1994). The ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*(2), 337-389.