

ทัศนคติของผู้เรียนชาวไทยต่อภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง ในประเทศไทย

Attitudes of Thai Learners towards English as a Lingua Franca in Thailand

สุธิณี พีรราชชญาณี¹, รัชฎาภรณ์ เจนวชิรพงศ์² และ ออมบุญ บุรุษภักดี³

Suthinee Peerachachayanee¹, Ratchadaporn Jenwachirapong²

and Aomboon Burutphakdee³

^{1,2,3}สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

^{1,2,3}English Department

^{1,2,3}คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และนิเทศศาสตร์

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Humanities and Communication Arts

^{1,2,3}มหาวิทยาลัยพายัพ

^{1,2,3}Payap University

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจความคิดเห็นของผู้เรียนชาวไทยต่อภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง ผู้วิจัยได้รับสมัครนักศึกษาจาก 7 มหาวิทยาลัยในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่จำนวน 225 คน โดยใช้รูปแบบการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง เครื่องมือหลักที่ใช้ในการศึกษานี้ประกอบไปด้วย แบบสอบถาม และแบบสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้าง แบบสอบถามประกอบไปด้วยข้อคำถามมาตรฐานวัดเจตคติแบบลิเคิร์ท ใน 4 ประเด็นที่เกี่ยวข้องกับภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง ได้แก่ 1) การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษโดยมีเจ้าของภาษาเป็นต้นแบบ 2) ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง 3) การยอมรับภาษาอังกฤษสำเนียงไทย, และ 4) ความโปรดปรานต่อผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษ ผลการศึกษาแสดง

ให้เห็นว่าผู้เรียนชาวไทยยังคงมีทัศนคติเชิงบวกต่อการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษโดยมีเจ้าของภาษาเป็นต้นแบบ ($\bar{x}=3.56$) และยังมีทัศนคติค่อนข้างดีต่อภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง ($\bar{x}=3.49$) อย่างไรก็ตาม ภาษาอังกฤษสำเนียงไทยยังไม่เป็นที่ยอมรับอย่างแพร่หลาย ($\bar{x}=3.18$) และความโปรดปรานต่อผู้สอนที่เป็นเจ้าของภาษาและผู้สอนชาวไทยมีเทียบเท่ากัน ($\bar{x}=3.36$) โดยรวมแล้ว การศึกษานี้แสดงให้เห็นว่าผู้เรียนชาวไทยยังคงให้คุณค่าแก่การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษโดยมีเจ้าของภาษาเป็นต้นแบบ และยังคงเล็งเห็นความสำคัญของภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง ทั้งนี้ ภาษาอังกฤษสำเนียงไทยยังไม่เป็นที่ยอมรับมากนัก นอกจากนี้ ทั้งผู้สอนที่เป็นเจ้าของภาษาและผู้สอนชาวไทยต่างมีส่วนช่วยเหลือผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยในการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลาง, ภาษาอังกฤษสำเนียงไทย, ทัศนคติ, นานาภาษาอังกฤษโลก

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate attitudes of Thai learners towards English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The researchers recruited 225 students from seven universities in Chiang Mai using a purposive random sampling method. The main instruments used in the study were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items related to four issues regarding ELF. These issues were: 1) Native-speaker Model of English, 2) English as a Lingua Franca, 3) Acceptance of Thai English, and 4) Teacher Preferences. Results indicated that Thai learners still held strong attitudes on Native Speaker Model ($\bar{x}=3.56$) while they also tended to be more positive on English as a Lingua Franca ($\bar{x}=3.49$). In addition, Thai English was not so widely accepted ($\bar{x}=3.18$), and learners' preferences on native and non-native teachers were equally perceived ($\bar{x}=3.36$). Overall, the study suggests that while Thai learners still value the Native Speaker Model of English, they also recognize the importance of English as a Lingua Franca. However, Thai English may not be widely accepted, and both native and non-native English teachers are proved helpful among the participants in learning English.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, Thai English, Attitudes, World Englishes

Introduction

Presently, there has been a significant increase in the number of English speakers globally. English has emerged as a primary means of communication for countless people worldwide. Due to this rapid expansion, it is widely acknowledged that non-native speakers (NNSs) now outnumber native speakers (NSs). English has gained the role of an international lingua franca in the 21st century, with a vast majority of speakers being non-native. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as "English as a Lingua Franca" (ELF) or "English as an International Language" (EIL).

Seidlhofer (2006) defines English as a Lingua Franca as the utilization of English among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, irrespective of their mother tongues. This concept encompasses all three circles of World Englishes as proposed by Kachru (1985) which include the Inner, the Outer, and the Expanding circles. These circles, frequently cited in academic literature on World Englishes, provide a framework for understanding the various contexts in which English is used. Countries falling within the Expanding circle, such as Japan, China, and Thailand, are commonly considered "norm-dependent" nations that heavily rely on established standards set by native English speakers. Consequently, the traditional English ideology of the Inner Circle dominates these Expanding Circle countries, often serving as a benchmark for linguistic correctness. Any deviations from the norms associated with English as a Native Language (ENL) are generally deemed incorrect or insufficient (Baker, 2012).

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thailand, the prominence of English as a Native Language (ENL) is also widespread across many educational institutions. The strict conventions associated with native English speakers, particularly those from British and American backgrounds,

continue to exert significant influence. In terms of pronunciation expectations, it is evident that Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA) accents hold prestigious status. Consequently, L2 learners are encouraged to closely imitate the RP or GA accents and other phonetic characteristics of native English, despite some of these features impeding mutual understanding among non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2000). Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) have deliberated on concerns pertaining to the ENL model, highlighting that if RP or GA is regarded as the standard, the pronunciation would become unduly tied to notions of correctness rather than prioritizing mutual intelligibility and accommodation.

Numerous scholars in ELF have raised concerns regarding the widespread adoption of native norms, particularly in countries belonging to the Expanding Circle. Recent research (e.g., Seidlhofer, 2006; Jenkins, 2012) has aimed to challenge the prevailing EFL paradigm by asserting that English is increasingly oriented towards international communication among individuals with different first language backgrounds, rather than exclusively emphasizing native-speaker communication. Furthermore, Widdowson (1994) posited that English is no longer solely owned by its native speakers in the Inner Circle, but has become a language of global communication. Consequently, attaining native-like fluency is no longer the primary objective for most English learners, nor is interaction with native speakers. In other words, non-native speakers employ English to effectively communicate with other non-native interlocutors, with the ultimate goal of successful communication. In Thailand, it is also commonplace for Thais to engage in English communication with other non-native speakers from various parts of the world. Kirkpatrick (2017) discussed the significance of ELF and emphasized the need for English language learning based on global uses. Baker (2012) advocated for the implementation

of ELT in Thailand that aligns with the usage of English as a lingua franca, challenging the prevailing dominance of native speaker models.

As mentioned earlier, the likelihood of Thai people interacting with non-native speakers is increasing, thereby contrasting with the belief to adhere strictly to native standards. Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the attitudes of Thai learners toward English as a Lingua Franca, as well as their perceptions of Thai English. This research, thus, further aims to determine whether these attitudes have evolved and to ascertain how Thai people currently perceive the current status of English in Thailand.

Literature Review

Notions of World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca

A comprehensive perspective on the global spread of the English language is provided through the framework of “World Englishes”. Kachru’s model of World Englishes (1985), widely referenced in scholarly discourse, elucidates this linguistic concept. This model delineates English into three distinct circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The model has emphasized the evolution of diverse English varieties since the 19th century (Holmes, 2013).

Nations within the Inner Circle include the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, employing English as their first language (L1). English in this realm often functions as a benchmark or norm for other English varieties. The Outer Circle pertains to regions where English has been formalized and cultivated through educational institutions, thereby functioning as a second language. Over time, these locales have imbued English with localized nuances and linguistic attributes, resulting in their own linguistic rules and features (Ishikawa, 2016). Countries such as India, Singapore, and the

Philippines, historically colonized by the UK, constitute the Outer Circle, where the emphasis lies on the divergence of English into regional forms that epitomize local identities.

In the Expanding Circle, nations like China, Japan, and Turkey incorporate English as an “additional” language, serving non-essential “inter-communicative” functions. As noted by Davies (2014), English in these expansively adopted regions has not yet given rise to native-inflected English variations. Although English is widely taught, it is neither the official language nor the dominant first language (Mooney & Evans, 2015). Notably, the demographic scale of English speakers in the Outer and Expanding Circles supersedes those within the Inner Circle, classically perceived as native speakers. These Expanding Circle countries typically perceive English as a “foreign language”, pursued by learners aiming to adeptly engage with native speakers and conform to Inner Circle linguistic norms. The tenets of “standard” English are robust here, and learners’ language proficiency is often benchmarked against native standards.

As a result of the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the adoption of English as the medium for globalisation and modernization, English has become the exclusive working language within ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Bolton (2008) estimated that there are approximately 800 million English speakers in Asia, indicating that there may be a greater number of non-native speakers at present. Therefore, English has become a lingua franca among multilingual Asians from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The primary utility of English among Outer and Expanding Circle users lies in local communication rather than vying for employment opportunities. Kachru (1985) notes that English is presently the language of

choice for communication among non-native speakers, fostering intercultural exchanges among various nationalities.

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), defined by Murata and Jenkins (2009), denotes English as a mode of communication between individuals of varying native languages. This concept heralds a paradigm shift, deviating from conventional theories of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In terms of language acquisition achievements, adherence to idealized native speaker norms holds limited relevance; learners' proficiency is gauged by their ability to effectively utilize the language, without restriction from native speaker benchmarks (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Contrary to viewing non-native English speakers as deficient in their second language skills, ELF casts them as adept multilingual communicators equipped with their own repertoire of linguistic and communicative assets (Baker, 2012).

Attitudes on English accents

Accents encompass divergences in pronunciation and speech patterns exhibited by individuals when speaking a particular language. These variations arise due to a confluence of factors, including regional, cultural, and social backgrounds (Roach, 2009). Distinctions in accents manifest through dissimilarities in the articulation of sounds, intonation patterns, rhythmic qualities, and overall speech patterns. Ultimately, accents serve as distinctive linguistic markers that embody the idiosyncratic traits of a particular geographic region or community.

In addition, according to Jenkins (2012), accent is a crucial factor that influences culturally based attitudes. The concept of accent, as described by Lawrence (2014) encompasses suprasegmental characteristics in addition to the articulation of individual sounds or components. Coupland (2000) also

characterizes accents as fluid collections of prosodic and segmental attributes dispersed across geographical and/or social domains.

Previous research on English accents has revealed that many English teachers and learners hold biased views regarding accents in the English language. They believe that accents of native speakers are more favourable and genuine (McKenzie, 2008). In addition, in regard of native English speakers, many Thai people consider those from the Inner Circle as authentic ones. This view is supported by the Teachers Council of Thailand (TCT), stating that the six countries—namely, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are only legitimate native English-speaking nations. Apart from this, they sometimes view their own English accents as impure, inferior, or inadequate. This perception is linked to the socio-political aspects of the "preferred" and "appropriate" English accent ideology prevalent in Thailand.

Jindapitak (2014) conducted a study on Thai students' perceptions of English pronunciation, revealing that native English-speaking teachers were viewed as the most suitable for teaching speaking and listening skills, whereas Thai English teachers were viewed as a secondary option. Similarly, Jindapitak and Teo (2012) investigated the perceptions of Thai university students regarding the accents of native English teachers and non-native English teachers. Due to their shared living and learning environments with non-native English speakers, the majority of Thai students viewed the accents of native English speakers as the ideal models. However, they also acknowledged the significance of the accents of non-native English speakers.

This suggests that some Thai learners of English place importance on how native speakers use the language and indicated that native English accents are more significant than their own Thai-English accents. Several studies

propose that Thais tend to view English word pronunciation by native speakers not only as an indicator of personal ability but also as a symbol of social class. Consequently, many Thai individuals attempt to pronounce English words like native speakers to avoid discrimination by others. In light of this prevalent English language ideology in Thailand, and considering current English Language Teaching (ELT) practices, this research was conducted to explore Thai learners' attitudes towards native-speaker models, Thai-English accents, and other English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) issues.

Research Methods

Participants:

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), interviews were conducted with students from various universities in Chiang Mai. The selection of participants followed a quota sampling method for a total sample size of 225 individuals from seven universities, with 30 participants selected from each university.

Prior to participating in the study, all participants were requested to provide their informed consent by signing a consent form. They were then required to complete a questionnaire comprising four parts. Subsequently, a subset of 21 students (three individuals from each university) willingly volunteered to take part in semi-structured interviews. The selection of interviewees was based on their voluntary participation, giving an equal opportunity to all students who had completed the questionnaires.

Instruments:

This research employed a mixed-method design in which a questionnaire and an interview were used as the primary tools. The two instruments are outlined below.

Questionnaire

To assess learners' attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), a questionnaire consisting of four parts was administered.

Part I gathered general information about the participants' backgrounds.

Part II comprised sixteen statements that explored students' attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca in Thailand. Participants indicated their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

Part III focused on the purposes of learning English. Students were asked to rank the importance of their learning objectives on a scale of 1 (most important) to 5 (least important).

Part IV consisted of open-ended questions that sought participants' opinions on three main aspects: 1) Native-Speaker Pronunciation model, 2) ELF and Thai English accent, and 3) Teacher preferences.

The content validity of the questionnaire items was evaluated using the Indexes of Item-Objective Congruence for Multidimensional Items (IOC). Three experts in ELT, Phonetics, and Linguistics reviewed and rated the items, leading to necessary revisions based on their suggestions. Subsequently, the revised questionnaire was pilot tested with 28 participants. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, which yielded a reliable result with a value of .842.

Semi-structured interview

Following the distribution of the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected group of participants to gain additional insights into their perspectives on ELF. These interviews served to complement the questionnaire results and provided a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Data collection and data analysis

The administered questionnaire targeted university students in Chiang Mai. After that, statistical analysis was conducted on the collected data using a statistical software. Mean scores and standard deviation were calculated and interpreted to gain insights into participants' attitudes towards ELF from the Likert part. In addition, regarding the ranking items in Part III, where participants prioritized their purposes of learning English on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most important), mean scores and rankings were analyzed and interpreted.

Moreover, the open-ended questions and interview data provided valuable in-depth information on ELF-related issues, yielding extensive findings. The researcher categorized and coded the participants' responses, assigning main themes to each data group. This process enhanced the understanding of the topic under investigation.

Results

Part I: General information of the participants

This part summarizes the background information of the research participants taken from Part I in the questionnaire. The information is divided into three sub-sections including Gender, Year of Study, and Field of study.

Table 1 Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	88	39.11%
Female	137	60.89%
Total	225	100%

Table 1 shows that the total number of respondents was 225. The majority of them were female (60.89%), while about one-third (39.11%) were male.

Table 2 Year of study

Year of Study	Number	Percentage
1	51	22.67%
2	32	14.22%
3	43	19.11%
4 or more	99	44.00%
Total	225	100%

The participants in this study included students ranging from the first to the final year. The majority was in the fourth year (44.00%), followed by the first year (22.67%), the third year (19.11%), and the second year (14.22%), respectively.

Table 3 Field of study

Fields of Study	Number	Percentage
Business-related fields	88	39.11%
Law and Political Sciences	29	12.89%
Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences	46	20.44%
Engineering	25	11.11%
General Sciences	29	12.89%
Medical Sciences	8	3.56%
<i>Total</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>100%</i>

Respondents came from a variety of study fields. It included business-related fields (39.11%), Law and Political Science (12.89%), Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (20.44%), Engineering (11.11%), General Sciences (12.89%), and Medical Sciences (3.56%).

Part II: Thai Learners' attitudes on issues related to English as a Lingua Franca

Table 4 Native-Speaker Model of English

Statements	Mean Score	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1. British English and American English are major varieties of English in the world.	4.17	0.74	Highest
2. Non-native speakers have to strictly follow the standard accents e.g. USA, UK.	3.19	0.91	Moderate
3. Other varieties of English (except British and American) are considered non-standard.	3.00	1.09	Moderate
4. When I learn English, I want to aim towards a native speaker model of English.	3.77	0.90	High
5. When I speak English, I want to sound like a native speaker	3.65	3.65	High
<i>Average Scores = 3.56 (High)</i>			

Table 4 illustrates learners' attitudes in regard to the Native-Speaker model of English, which is claimed to be the standard norm of English around the globe. The study found that the students still held a strong belief that British English and American English were two major varieties of English ($\bar{x} = 4.17$).

In addition, they also agreed with the two items — “When I learn English, I want to aim towards a native speaker model of English,” (\bar{x} = 3.77) and “When I learn English, I want to sound like a native speaker” (\bar{x} = 3.65). However, items No.2 and No.3 — “Non-native speakers have to strictly follow the standard accents e.g., USA, UK” and “Other varieties of English (except British and American) are considered non-standard”—were items that students were not certain about. The overall score of perceptions toward the native-speaker model of English was 3.56, which was considered at a “high” level.

Table 5 English as a Lingua Franca

Statements	Mean Score	SD.	Level of Agreement
6. I speak English with other non-native users e.g. Thai, Chinese, Korean, etc. more than with native speakers.	3.32	0.96	Moderate
7. I don't think English only belongs to native speakers. It can be my language too.	3.53	0.99	High
8. English is not only a language that native speakers use, but a language that I may construct/modify for my communicative purposes.	3.73	0.96	High

Table 5 English as a Lingua Franca (cont.)

Statements	Mean Score	SD.	Level of Agreement
9. As long as people understand me, it is not important which variety of English I speak.	3.69	0.99	High
10. I don't care which accent of English I sound like.	3.20	1.08	Moderate
<i>Average Scores = 3.49 (High)</i>			

When looking into the perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca, 3 out of 5 items were rated as “high” by the participants. The highest score was “English is not only a language which native speakers use, but a language that I may construct/modify for my communicative purposes” (\bar{x} = 3.73). The two items which were followed closely included “As long as people understand me, it is not important which variety of English I speak” (\bar{x} = 3.69), and “I don't think English only belongs to native speakers. It can be my language too.” (\bar{x} = 3.53). In addition, the perception was at a moderate level on “I speak English with other non-native users e.g. Thai, Chinese, Korean, etc. more than with native speakers” (\bar{x} = 3.32) and “I don't care which accent of English I sound like” (\bar{x} = 3.20). Still, the overall scores of this aspect can be interpreted that the students' perception was at a “high” level on this aspect (\bar{x} = 3.49).

Table 6 Acceptance of Thai English

Statements	Mean Score	SD.	Level of Interpretation
11. English spoken by Thai people is also considered real English.	3.12	1.04	Moderate
12. I am confident in speaking English, even with my Thai accent.	3.30	0.97	Moderate
13. When I speak English, I want to be identified clearly as Thai.	3.00	1.00	Moderate
14. Thai English should be accepted as well as other varieties of English.	3.31	0.99	Moderate
<i>Average Scores = 3.18 (Moderate)</i>			

Regarding the acceptance of Thai English, the overall scores of this category were 3.18 (moderate), which showed that the respondents were not sure or neutral about the status of Thai English in ELF contexts. This also suggested that most students have not held much confidence in using English with the Thai accent. However, it should be noted that item#14 “Thai English should be accepted as well as other varieties of English” received the highest scores (\bar{x} = 3.31), while “When I speak English, I want to be identified clearly as Thai” (\bar{x} = 3.00) received the lowest scores.

Table 7 Teacher preferences

Statements	Mean Score	SD.	Level of Interpretation
15. I prefer Thai teachers rather than native speakers as my English teachers.	3.13	1.05	Moderate
16. Thai teachers are particularly more helpful when I don't understand English lessons.	3.59	0.98	High
<i>Average Scores = 3.36 (High)</i>			

Table 7 investigated Thai students' perceptions of their teacher preference. Results from the questionnaire indicated that students' perception was at a high level on that Thai teacher could be more helpful when they had difficulties learning English ($\bar{x} = 3.59$). However, their preference for Thai teachers over the native ones was at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.13$), and this suggested that both native and non-native teachers are of equal preference.

Upon comparing the four categories, the highest level of agreement fell on the Native Speaker Model, followed by English as a Lingua Franca Model, Thai Teacher Preference, and Acceptance of Thai English as illustrated in the following figure.

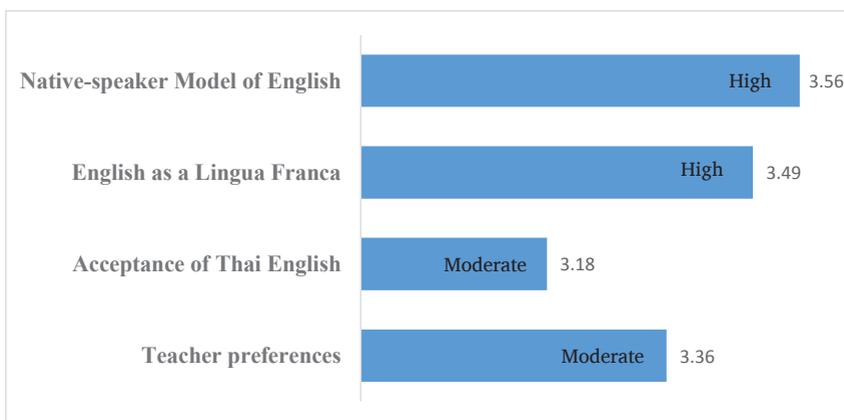


Figure 1 Level of Agreement on ELF issues

Part III: Purposes of learning English

Table 8 Purposes for Learning English

Statements	Mean Score	Ranking
I learn English in order to		
1. obtain high scores in English examinations, such as IELTS, TOEIC, and TOEFL.	3.42	4
2. get better job opportunities.	2.32	2
3. communicate with other English speakers in daily life.	2.12	1
4. go abroad and use English as a medium language with other people.	3.14	3
5. catch up with economic and technological developments in the world.	3.80	5

This section reveals that English was learned with the goal of successful communication in daily situations ($\bar{x} = 2.12$). This was followed closely by “get better job opportunities” ($\bar{x} = 2.32$), go abroad and use English as a medium language with other people ($\bar{x} = 3.14$), and obtain high scores in English examinations, such as IELTS, TOEIC, and TOEFL ($\bar{x} = 3.42$), respectively. The last item which ranked as least important to students was to “catch up with economic and technological developments in the world” ($\bar{x} = 3.80$).

Apart from the information above, the results from Question 1 in the interview, “*What is the ultimate goal of your learning English?*” revealed more in-depth information about the Thai students’ purposes in learning English. There were three main themes extracted from the participants’ responses as follows.

- Communicate with people (both native and non-native) in daily life and in foreign countries.
- Get better job opportunities /Benefits in job settings.
- To be competent in the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) and use in exams.

In regard to purposes of learning English, the majority of the respondents reported that English was useful particularly in communication contexts. They would like to learn English to use in daily life as well as to use it as a medium language when they travel abroad. The extract below illustrates this.

“Umm.. the purpose of learning English.. I just want to be able to speak and communicate in daily life.”

In addition, about a half of them stated that they would like to use English in their career. They also thought that English could help them to get better jobs.

“As we know, English is now a medium language for people all over the world. So, English is important at work. When you apply for a job, you will be more likely to get accepted if you can speak English. So.. we need to learn English.”

Apart from that, a few people wanted to be fluent in all English skills and use English in formal examinations.

“Beside communication, I want to get high scores in exams.... And in order to get high scores, my four English skills have to be strong. I'm not quite good at reading though.”

Part IV: Results from Open-ended questions and Semi-structured Interview

This part of the findings presents the opinions of Thai learners regarding three main aspects related to English as a Lingua Franca: Native-Speaker pronunciation model, attitudes on English as a Lingua Franca and Thai English, and teacher preferences. The data was obtained from the open-ended part of the questionnaire and responses from the interview. Similar responses were categorized under the same themes.

Opinions on Native-Speaker pronunciation model

The information below summarizes the responses collected from question 1 in the questionnaire *“Do you think it is important to speak like a native e.g. with British/American accents? Why?”*. The responses were grouped into two major themes, i.e. ‘important’ and ‘not important’.

- **Important**

When asked about whether it was important to speak like a native, most of the participants agreed that having a standard accent can ease communication and prevent misunderstanding between different speakers. Many of them added that a native-like accent creates mutual intelligibility with people all around the world. It also leads to effective communication.

“For this question, I have to say that it’s important [to speak like a native]. We need to speak like them.. because if we use a Thai accent, farangs (foreigners) may be confused. We need to make more effort to make them understand what we say.”

“For me, I think it is very important. I used to talk to foreigners who were not native speakers. They are Filipinos, they spoke so fast and used some English accent which was so difficult to understand. So, I think speaking with the accent close to natives is the best.”

Moreover, the respondents further stated that British and American accents were generally accepted on a global level. Thus, possessing a near-native accent is a desirable goal, and it is the accent we should follow.

“The reason why most people understand English resulted from the use of a global accent (British & American). So, I think we have to go with the flow.. Use the accents that most people use.”

A few responses collected from the participants were that accents could illustrate the level of education and the manner of speakers.

“Accent can illustrate the speaker’s educational background. It shows how much you’ve tried to learn the second language.”

- **Not important**

On the contrary, there were also a large number of respondents mentioning that accent was not important in communication; mutual

understanding between interlocutors was more important. Here are some examples.

"It's not important at all. I've worked part-time in many places and met a lot of tourists. Most of the tourists I met in Chiang Mai are from Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, etc. and they don't really care what accent I speak. Even native speakers all understand what I say. I think if they understand us.. understand the meaning of what we say is fine. Don't need to worry about the accent."

"Who cares about accent these days? They understand you and you understand them. We just want to communicate. The purpose of communication is to get the message through, right? Then accent is not necessary by this definition."

Some other respondents also claimed that English is different in each country and we need to focus on speaking clearly more than accent.

"Whatever accent you speak is still English. And each country has a different accent. So, just focus on communication."

"Accent is like an identity of that country. It doesn't affect the communication that much."

In summary, there were opposing perspectives on the Native Speaker model of English. Some people remain attached to the native model and consider that speaking like a native is important to make communication more effective. In contrast, others think that accent is no longer crucial concerning communication but should instead focus on making the meaning clear and understandable.

Opinions on English as a Lingua Franca and Thai English accent

This section concludes the responses collected from question 2 in the questionnaire, “*What do you think of the term “Thai English”? For communication purposes, do you think “Thai English” is acceptable? Why?*”. The responses can be grouped into two major themes, i.e. ‘positive’ and ‘not positive’ about the Thai English accent.

• **Positive**

Like the previous question, the majority of respondents reported that accent was not important in communication when speakers could understand each other during conversations.

“Whatever accent you speak does not define you. You still speak English. Just speaking clearly is okay.”

Furthermore, many participants said that Thai English should be accepted as other varieties of English as each country has its own unique characteristics. In addition, they thought that English speakers (especially native speakers) could understand any accent.

“I think each country has its own identity. Thai English is not like what foreigners speak. For example, farang may say “how are you?” (with proper intonation), Thai people may use “how are you?” (with Thai consonant sounds and no rising intonation). But I think it’s okay to use it this way.. Well, I guess most people understand.”

• **Not positive**

On the contrary, contrasted opinions also sprung from the participants who did not show approval on the use of Thai English. Some of the responses are disclosed below.

“I think accent affects how much people understand. And Thai English may make native speakers misunderstand the meaning which leads to communication failure.”

“Probably, some words are not so clear when we speak in a Thai way. People may or may not understand us and ask, “what do you mean?”.

Additionally, some people mentioned the originality of the native accents and said that Thai people should only follow the native norms.

“Thai accent is not accepted globally... It’s not so popular in a global level. We should follow the standard”.

In summary, this section shows opinions on English as a Lingua Franca and the acceptance of Thai English which varied among Thai learners. Some respondents were optimistic about speaking English with any accent while concentrating on having clear pronunciation. In addition, they also reported that Thai English was generally used in everyday life and accepted by users of English. In contrast, some people thought that the use of Thai English was limited and may not be widely accepted or understood by foreigners. Therefore, everyone should follow the standard norms.

Opinions on Teacher preferences

This question *“Do you prefer native or non-native teachers in an English classroom? Why?”* reveals various opinions regarding students’ perceptions of their English teachers. This part reveals the opinions of Thai learners in regard to teacher preferences. It was found that both native and non-native teachers have some strong points over others.

- ***Native teacher preference***

One of the most popular reasons why students favored native teachers was that students can learn language skills, especially the accent directly from

the first-hand language users. In addition, they also liked learning about different cultures and perspectives from the native teachers.

“Native teachers can directly teach me how to speak correctly and I can learn about Western cultures from them.”

“Native teachers.. because it’s their language, so they can show us how to use the language correctly like vocabulary or accent. It’s like we get the experience while learning more than just memorizing or parrot-talking.”

Apart from that, a few other students also reported that there was less pressure when learning with the natives because they usually knew the students’ problems and helped them improve.

“I like native teachers because they don’t put too much focus on grammar. They just help us to communicate in English. So, I don’t feel pressure. They often encourage students to speak in class. So, we gain more confidence.”

“I like to study with the natives because I’ll need extra effort while studying in order to grasp what they say.”

- ***Non-Native teacher preference***

On the other hand, non-native teachers, particularly Thai teachers, also offer some advantages. It is agreed among the respondents that Thai teachers are often more helpful when students get into problems and helped inspire students.

“I like Thai teachers because I can directly ask questions when I don’t understand the lessons. Well, my English is not so strong. So, I often struggle a lot if I have to communicate in English all the time.”

“I have more motivation to learn English because of Thai teachers. They showed us that we can be trained to use English fluently.”

- **Both**

Lastly, many students indicated that they were willing to study with any teachers and suggested that both native and non-native teachers helped students in different ways.

“I like both of them because I think they have different teaching styles. Native teachers focus on doing activities, while Thai teachers focus on teaching lessons by lessons and practice assignments.”

“Whatever.. it depends on each individual. They have different strong and weak points. We can learn the accent and speaking skills better with the natives. But we can understand something more deeply with Thai teachers.”

All in all, the findings reveal that both native and non-native teachers can help students in different ways. Relying completely either on native or non-native teachers could inhibit students' acquisition of a second language. It is inevitable, from the researcher's perspective, that learning speaking and listening skills are more practical with native teachers. However, learning with non-native teachers who share the same mother tongue with students is also helpful to a certain degree, particularly when students do not understand the lessons. Native and non-native teachers can complement each other to enhance the learners' understanding of a second language.

Discussion and Conclusion

Figure 2 below summarizes the findings regarding students' perceptions on English as a Lingua Franca and other related issues based on the interviews.

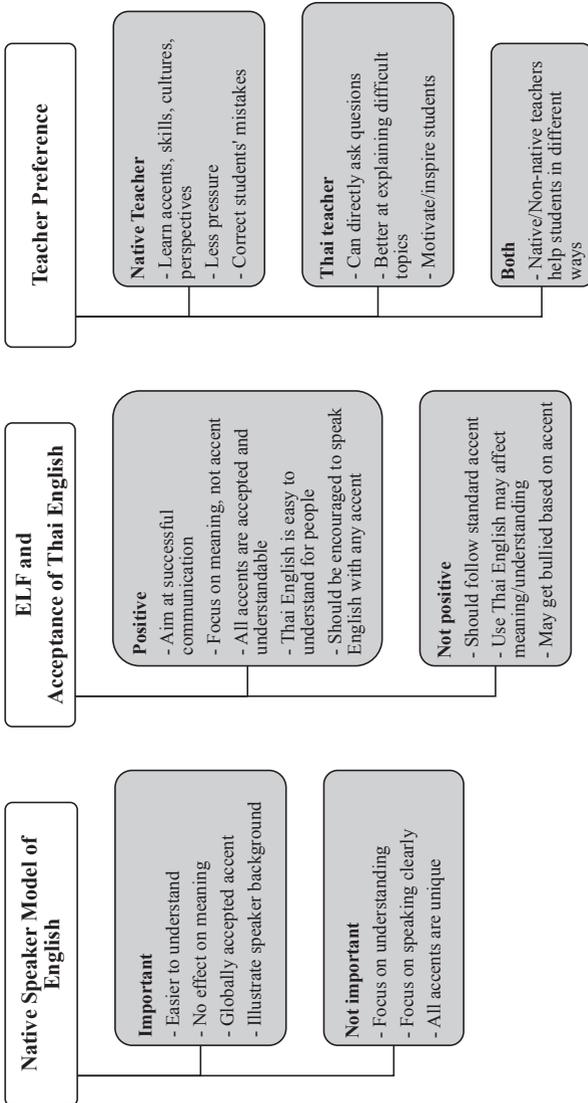


Figure 2 Summary of Thai learners' attitudes on ELF- related issues

The results from this study revealed that items in Category 1 (Native-Speaker model of English) received the highest agreement level with the mean score of 3.56, particularly item#1 “British English and American English are major varieties of English in the world” ($\bar{x} = 4.17$), in which the majority perceived that British and American accents are still the main accents of the world. Additionally, the two accents were often regarded as a reference for other English varieties. This means that the native-speaker model of English still has a strong influence in Thailand. This is not surprising considering the materials available in the country, both in education and in the media, which are mostly produced in British or American. Many people, then, felt they needed to acquire ‘near-native’ English accents with the notion of good English as strongly bound to a native speaker ideal (Jenkins, 2009).

However, the mean score from the first category showed only a slight difference from attitudes toward English as a Lingua Franca ($\bar{x} = 3.49$). This suggests that the two models are very competitive nowadays as people become more aware of using English for communicative purposes with a focus on achieving understanding between speakers. Compared to previous studies of Thai scholars (Phusit & Suksiripakonchai, 2018; Katchamat, 2017; Jindapitak, 2014), Thai students previously held a strong belief towards native-speaker ideology and strictly clung to British and American baselines. Any deviations from standard norms were often previously considered deficit or incompetent. This study, however, found that while it was true that Thai students still aim towards a native speaker model of English, they have begun to realize that it is not important which accent or variety of English they speak. Many respondents agreed that it was not necessary concerning what accent they sounded like. Instead, they supported that speakers had better focus on meanings at a discourse level with mutual intelligibility as a goal.

However, this is not to say that English standards should all be abandoned or neglected. Students should learn the native norms, together with exposure to other varieties of English in order to raise their awareness of Global Englishes. Most importantly, they should be placed in a position where they can make informed choices on which English they wish to use (Jenkins, 2009).

In addition, the results from Table 4.5 (item #8 - “English is not only a language which native speakers use, but a language that I may construct/ modify for my communicative purposes”, $\bar{x} = 3.73$) suggested that students tended to adjust their speech for effective communication. We can say that English is a communication tool that can be modified in any community for adequate and efficient communication. The use of English nowadays is for effective communication in lingua franca situations across the world and does not necessarily need to be connected to specific countries (Seidlhofer, 2013). Many respondents perceived that all English accents around the world are different and unique; thus, they should be accepted as long as intelligibility exists. Besides, the results from the interview also supported that most students paid more focus on the meanings and understanding between interlocutors rather than accents. Nevertheless, some other students still showed their concerns that using accents other than the standard ones may lead to misunderstandings.

Concerning the acceptance of Thai English, this category ranked the lowest among the other categories ($\bar{x} = 3.18$). Like most varieties in the Expanding Circle, Thai English has not really developed its own English (like Singapore or India). The use of Thai English or English with a local Thai accent has not been widely accepted. Item 11 from Table 4.6, which states, “English spoken by Thai people is also considered real English” ($\bar{x} = 3.12$), indicated that students are

still undecided about this issue. Some comments from the open-ended questions disclosed a few negative attitudes on Thai English; for instance, the Thai English accent was seen as ridiculous, people with a Thai English accent might get bullied or looked down from other people, and using Thai English is not widely accepted. On the other hand, many respondents perceived that it was not a problem to use a Thai accent. Some of the reasons were that it was understandable among Thai people and other English speakers and Thai English is often spoken in a slower manner, Thai English has unique characteristics and shows the Thai identity. Clearly, some participants expressed their desire to project their local identity in their English, and some of them even felt themselves to be part of a World Englishes community.

In order to enhance students' confidence in their accent, it is essential to familiarize learners with various English varieties and to facilitate discussions between teachers and students of other types of English used across the globe (McKenzie, 2013). The Center for English as a Lingua Franca (CELFL) in Japan reported that Japanese students gained more positive attitudes and became confident in their Japanese accent as a result of ELF implications in English classrooms (Leichsenring et al., 2015). Not only that, for non-native teachers, it is vital that they move away from a long-standing assumption that native speaker competence should be a primary focus in language teaching (Seidlhofer, 2013), but instead, intelligibility and accommodation should be prioritized. According to the study of Rubdy and Saraceni (2006) who interviewed ELF English teachers, they confirmed that "the freedom to express their own local and ELF identities in their English would give them greater confidence as English speakers". Likewise, if Thai learners are more optimistic about their Thai English, it is likely that they would be more confident to use the language with other English speakers.

Finally, the last issue on teacher preferences from Table 7 demonstrated that students had preferred both native and non-native teachers in their English class. It is evident from the interview that native teachers can improve the students' accents and skills. They also loved to learn about western cultures and perspectives which are different from the eastern world. Additionally, some students added that they felt considerably less pressure when learning with native teachers as they do not put much focus on grammar aspects, while Thai teachers do so. On the other hand, studying with Thai teachers also offers some advantages. The majority of students are positive that Thai teachers could be very helpful, especially when the lessons are complicated. The interview responses indicated that Thai teachers often code-switch in class to help students understand the lessons. Therefore, students felt more comfortable asking questions in class by directly using their mother tongue language (Thai). Some students also showed their admiration toward non-native English teachers as these teachers can be motivating and inspiring for students. The result from this study was similar to Phothongsunan and Suwannarak (2008) as they suggested that native teachers have more advantages in terms of appropriate language use, linguistic competence, and pronunciation while Thai teachers are better at content and grammar. In summary, both native and non-native teachers can help Thai learners achieve their language goals in different ways. It is undoubtedly the role of teachers to help students reach their goals of using English.

As indicated from the findings, most of the students ranked '*to communicate with other English speakers in daily life*' as the most important purpose. Besides, English has become a vehicle or a tool to get better job opportunities, catch up with technological developments, and communicate with other multilingual speakers around the world. To strengthen greater English

proficiency of students and teachers in the expanding circle nations, Kirkpatrick (2011) recommends using a multilingual model for English language teaching while also integrating sociocultural elements into the teaching so that learners will be more aware of local and global issues of World Englishes. Further professional development opportunities for teachers are, thus, necessary to help broaden ELF awareness and promote positive attitudes of learners toward other varieties of English.

Pedagogical implications

As a final remark, it is advisable for non-native English and multilingual teachers to set appropriate objectives and aspirations for learners, focusing not solely on adhering to native standards, but rather on their capacity to proficiently employ the language within lingua franca environments. The prevalent inclination among Thai instructors to excessively emphasize English grammar and attainment of native-like fluency has been shown to impede learners' practical application of English in their daily lives. This undue emphasis not only burdens learners but also erodes their self-assurance and motivation (Kongkerd, 2013). Consequently, learners should be guided towards attaining a comfortable mastery of fundamental linguistic elements that cater to their communicative necessities.

Therefore, the primary objective remains to instill in students the confidence and clarity to engage in English discourse, as well as the conviction that their Thai English and adaptability skills can effectively convey meaning in international contexts. Thai language learners should strive to develop a sense of self-assurance rather than experiencing nervousness when it comes to their English language usage.

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