LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF THAI WORKING ADULTS TOWARD NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE ENGLISH VARIETIES[1]

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บทคัดย่อ

บทบาทของภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษานานาชาติ ก่อให้เกิดการเรียกร้องให้ปรับเปลี่ยนกระบวนทัศน์ การเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษจากเดิมคือ "การสอน ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ" เป็น "การ สอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษานานาชาติ" (ไพสิฐ บริบูรณ์ 2011; Jenkins 2007; Kirkpatrick 2010; McKay 2002; McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008) ถึงแม้ว่ากระบวนทัศน์ดังกล่าวดู เหมาะสมกับยุคปัจจุบันซึ่งใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็น "ภาษากลาง" ของโลกแต่ในการปรับเปลี่ยนดังกล่าว ยังมีความจำเป็นที่จะต้องศึกษาทัศนคติต่อ ภาษาอังกฤษในสำเนียงต่าง ๆ เนื่องจากสามารถส่งผล โดยตรงต่อการเรียนการสอนและการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ ของผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษ งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาทัศนคติของ ชาวไทยในวัยทำงาน 80 คน ที่มีต่อสำเนียงของผู้ที่พูด ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ (ภาษาอังกฤษสำเนียง อเมริกันและอังกฤษ) และผู้ที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็น ภาษาที่สอง (ภาษาอังกฤษสำเนียงฟิลิปปินส์ สิงคโปร์ และไทย) ในสภาพแวดล้อมที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็น ภาษากลางในการสื่อสาร ในแง่ของสถานะทางสังคม และความสามารถ ความมีเสน่ห์ และคุณลักษณะทาง ภาษา ผู้วิจัยใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์ (10 คน) และ แบบทดสอบทัศคติที่มีต่อภาษา (80 คน) โดยให้กลุ่ม ตัวอย่างฟังสำเนียงแต่ละสำเนียงและพิจารณาให้ คะแนน ผลการวิจัยพบว่าสำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษของผู้ที่ พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ยังคงเป็นที่นิยมชื่นชอบ นอกจากนี้ยังเป็นสำเนียงที่กลุ่มสำรวจต้องการเรียนรู้ และใช้พูดมากกว่าสำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษของผู้ที่ไม่ได้ พูดอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ ผลวิจัยยังชี้ให้เห็นว่า ผู้พูดชาว ไทยต้องการเรียนและใช้สำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษในแบบ ของผู้ที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่เนื่องจากเหตุผล ด้านความเข้าใจง่ายของสำเนียง ความเป็นเจ้าของ ภาษา และการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของตัวผู้พูด ผลวิจัย ดังกล่าวชี้ให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของการสร้างความ ตระหนักรู้ด้านความหลากหลายของสำเนียงใน ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อลดทัศนคติการเหยียดภาษาของ ผู้เรียน และเพื่อเตรียมผู้เรียนให้มีความพร้อมกับการ ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางในการติดต่อสื่อสารกับ ผู้พูดที่มีภาษาแม่แตกต่างกัน

[1] ทัศนะคติต่อภาษาของผู้พูดชาวไทยในวัยทำงานที่มีต่อสำเนียงของ ผู้พูดที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่และของผู้พูดที่ไม่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ เป็นภาษาแม่

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Abstract

The role of English as an international language (EIL) has prompted scholars to call for a shift in paradigm from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to teaching English as an international language EIL (Boriboon 2011; Jenkins 2007; Kirkpatrick 2010; McKay 2002; McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008). While this view seems practical at a time when English is increasingly being used as a lingua franca, it also calls for a study of people's perceptions toward different English varieties since people's attitudes can have a direct impact on educational practices, second-language learning, and identity construction of English speakers. This present study investigates language attitudes of 80 Thai working adults toward native (American and British) and non-native (Filipino, Singaporean, and Thai) varieties in terms of social status and competence, attractiveness, and linguistic quality through the use of the Verbal Guise Test (VGT) (80 participants) and semi-structured interviews (10 participants). The results showed that the dominance of native varieties still prevails as native varieties are perceived more favorably than non-native counterparts in all dimensions, and remain the English accents that Thai speakers of English want to learn and use. The results also indicate that Thai speakers of English aim for certain native-based varieties due to intelligibility, the ownership of English, and identity reasons. Findings suggest the importance of awareness-raising of the diversity of English varieties among Thai speakers of English in order to promote a sense of linguistic tolerance and prepare them for interactions in ELF contexts where English is used as a default language for those whose native language is not shared.

Introduction

Given the increasing number of people using English as a means of communication worldwide, many scholars and researchers have been interested in investigating attitudes of native and non-native speakers of English toward different varieties of English in terms of social status and competence, social attractiveness, and linguistic quality, since attitudes can play a key role in stylistic variation, identity construction, and the design of language policy and educational practices (Edwards 1999; Jenkins 2000; Juhi 2012; Kirkpatrick 2010; Labov 1979; Ladegaard, 2000; Li 2009; Pullen 2011; Rindal 2010; Sung 2014). In Thailand, where English is taught as a foreign language and increasingly used as a *lingua franca*, the two dominant English accents used as pedagogic models are British English (BE) and General American English (GA) as in most other ASEAN countries. Although these two mainstream English varieties are set as a pedagogic goal for Thai English learners, it should also be noted that the number of Filipino teachers teaching English in Thailand is increasing (Wongsamuth 2015), not to mention Thai English teachers who teach English with a Thai English accent (TE). In addition, with Singapore being an English-speaking country whose economic development surpasses that of other ASEAN nations (Jones 2015), Thai people may choose Singapore as a destination to improve their language skills or they may have an opportunity to do business with Singaporean people. As a result, some Thai people may

hear or choose Singaporean English as a model of pronunciation. It is thus worthwhile to examine how Thai people perceive these aforementioned English varieties, especially with the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, where English has been chosen as the default language to communicate with not only native speakers but also among non-native speakers themselves. Although some research has been conducted to examine how Thai speakers perceive different varieties of English (Baker 2009; Jindapitak 2010; Prakaiborisuth and Trakulkasemsuk 2015), most of the previous attitude studies have tended to focus solely on social dimensions (Jindapitak and Teo 2013; Prakaiborisuth and Trakulkasemsuk 2015), paying no attentions to linguistic quality. In addition, the participants in these studies were also university students (Baker 2009; Jindapitak 2010; Prakaiborisuth and Trakulkasemsuk 2015). It is therefore interesting to see if perceptions toward different varieties of English among working adults who have spent some time in the workforce and for whom communicating in English is important for achieving their professional goals are different from or similar to those found in previous studies. This present study aims to fill this gap by investigating how Thai working adults, who may use English as a part of their jobs, perceive different varieties of English in terms of status and competence, social attractiveness, and linguistic quality, differently from university students who have not had a chance to use their English in the workplace. This, then, could help shed more light on attitude studies and yield some pedagogic implications for English language policy and English language teaching in Thailand.

Literature Review

Since English is increasingly being used as an international language (EIL), the role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has undoubtedly become a focus of attention for many researchers in the fields of World Englishes and sociolinguistics, who, over the last decades, have examined the perceptions of native and non-native English speakers toward different varieties of English. Following McKay (2008), ELF in this study refers to interactions whereby English is chosen as a default language by non-native speakers to communicate with other non-native English speakers who do not share a common native language.

Given the role of English as a *lingua franca*, with the number of non-native English users surpassing that of native speakers, many researchers have been critical of the hegemony of native English varieties, claiming that non-native speakers should be allowed to speak their own 'accented' English as an expression of their ethnic distinctiveness since accent is a dominant social marker for individuals. Therefore, they need not be expected to follow native norms as long as their communicative goals are achieved (Jenkins 2007; Kirkpatrick 2010; Seidlhofer 2005). As Walker (2001) proposed, since accent is in relation to several different issues ranging from sociopolitical power to a sense of identity felt by individuals, non-native speakers should be given the choice to retain their identity. Following this line of thought, several scholars (Boriboon 2011; Jenkins

2007; Kirkpatrick 2010; McKay 2002; McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008) have also called for a shift away from teaching English as a second or foreign language, with their focus on native norms, to a teaching paradigm such as World Englishes, English as an international language, and English as a *lingua franca*.

Such arguments, however, seem to be based solely on assumptions made by linguists and researchers about what learners need, ignoring the preferences of learners for which English accent they want to set as their pedagogic models and the extent to which they feel it is important to show their identity, whether local or global, in English-language interactions. According to Mollins (2006: 52), learners' voices about which English accent they want to learn and set as a pedagogic model should be heard. Insights into the attitudes of learners toward different English varieties are certainly important because positive attitudes toward the target language and the sense of belonging to the target language group can be beneficial to second-language learning (Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006: 93).

While the body of investigating attitudes of native English speakers toward different English varieties has been growing, many researchers are also interested in examining how non-native English speakers perceive different English varieties. In Thailand, a number of studies have been conducted to gain insight into this question. For instance, Jindapitak and Teo (2013) investigated the attitudes of Thai university students majoring in English, the reasons for their accent preferences, and to what extent learning different English varieties is

important to them. It was found that American English was the most preferred accent, while British English was the second most preferred, with prestige, status, and linguistic reasons cited as the main reasons for their accent preferences rather than aesthetic, economic or identity reasons. Yet, despite the preference for native English varieties, the participants also believed that non-native varieties are worth learning and understanding. In a follow-up study, Jindapitak (2015) confirmed the results of the previous study: that among eight English accents (American, British, Australian, Indian, Filipino, Singaporean, Malaysian, and Thai), native varieties such as American, British, and Australian English were rated more favorably than non-native accents and remained the accents that Thai university students wished to acquire. They also stated that the role of English as a *lingua franca* should be highlighted in English classrooms, possibly suggesting the participants' awareness of the role of English as a global language.

For ASEAN English accents in particular, Prakaiborisuth and Trakulkasemsuk (2015) investigated the attitudes of 100 first-year students from different fields of study toward 10 ASEAN English varieties, namely Brunei, Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Indian, Laotian, Malaysian, Singaporean, Vietnamese, and Thai. The results showed that Malaysian English was rated most favorably, while Cambodian English received the lowest ranking. The researcher concluded that these attitudinal preferences were not based on how close to native norms the accents were, as some English varieties from the outer circle, which are held to be closer to native norms, were not rated as

significantly preferable to those of expanding circle English varieties. It is also interesting to note that ASEAN English accents were rated moderately, which is different from previous studies which showed strong negative attitudes toward non-native varieties of English.

Although the previous studies help us see perceptions of different English varieties and the complexity of factors affecting accent preferences, they are still somewhat limited due to methodological design or oversimplification of the issues under discussion. For example, these studies focus mainly on the social dimensions helping to share attitudes toward different English varieties, while ignoring other dimensions worth investigating, such as linguistic quality or intelligibility, thus presenting an incomplete picture of people's attitudes toward certain English accents. At the same time, few attitude studies pay attention to the concept of identity and the role identity can play in people's linguistic choices and to what extent it is necessary for Thai speakers of English to retain their local identity through L2 pronunciation, as many ELF scholars have suggested (Jenkins 2007; Kirkpatrick 2010; Seidlhofer 2005). Although the study conducted by Jindapitak and Teo (2013) may throw some light on how a factor like identity can affect people's English preferences, it appears that how identity is conceptualised in this study is limited to the idea of Thai ethnic identity only, not taking into account the possibility that "people can have multiple identities" (Derwing and Munro 2009: 485), or the possibility that people can choose native-based varieties or other English varieties for

the sake of constructing positive self-images (Sung 2014: 546).

In addition, the participants in most of the studies in a Thai context are university students whose main exposure to English is largely from the English classroom. Further study on the perceptions of Thai working adults toward different English varieties is thus needed since working adults are more likely to participate in ELF interactions with a more diverse body of L1 speakers and in more diverse contexts than university students, and for working adults, the aim in speaking English is to achieve professional goals rather than focusing on language assessment like university students. Although university students may perhaps be exposed to English through face-to-face interactions or internet access like working adults, it should be noted that university students have not used their English in the workplace like working people, making it worthwhile to examine how people in the workforce perceive different English varieties.

For the above reasons, further study of attitudes toward different English varieties in a Thai context is warranted. This study aims to provide such insights into attitudes by investigating how white-collar Thai workers perceive native varieties and non-native varieties of English in terms of both social dimensions and linguistic quality, the relationship between accent and identity in an ELF context, and the extent to which it is important for Thai people to retain a Thai identity in ELF settings. The specific research questions are:

1.What are the attitudes of Thai working adults toward native varieties of English – British English (BE) and General American English (GE) – and non-native varieties – Philippines English (PE), Singaporean English (SE), and Thai English (TE)?

2. Which variety of English do they aim to acquire?

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 80 Thai working adults, aged 25-35, who may be said to belong to Generation Y (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008: 892). According to Cennamo and Gardner (2008: 893), Generation Y are those who grew up in the early years of the internet, value new experiences from travelling overseas, and are entering the workforce now. They were also born at a time – the 1980s – when , in Thailand, the ability to speak English was seen as a necessary skill for promoting tourism and the country's economy as a whole (Bennu and Hashim 2014: 222). It was during this time, too, that English was made a compulsory subject starting in Grade 1 (Chamcharatsri 2013: 22). Therefore, members of Generation Y are considered to have had greater exposure to English through classroom instruction, face-to-face interactions, and internet access than members of Generation X (born 1960-1979). The participants' professional backgrounds were business (38 participants), and service and hospitality (42 participants), fields in which English is seen as the default language to communicate with both native speakers and non-native speakers whose native language is not shared (Foley 2005; Wongsothorn et al. 2003) There were 35 males and 45 females.

Procedure

The study was divided into three phases: an evaluation of English proficiency levels, a perception task (VGT), and semi-structured interviews. In the first phase, 114 participants who took a language course in a tutorial school in Bangkok were recruited and an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OOPT) (2001) was administered to assess their English proficiency levels. As this study would like to examine the attitudes of those who are able to use English to communicate with others in daily life, those who scored between 30 and 47 out of 60 were considered English independent users (intermediate and upper-intermediate levels) and included in this study. Of the 114 participants tested, 80 met the criterion (no participants scored higher than 47 points which would be the level of proficient English users). A week after the Oxford Quick Placement Test (2001) was given, these 80 participants were then asked to participate in the verbal guise test to elicit their attitudes toward different English varieties.Then, 10 participants who had participated in the perception task were asked to take part in the third phase of the study, a semi-structured interview, in the following week to further discuss their accent preferences. In short, each phase of the study was conducted on a weekly basis to avoid a lengthy process that might affect the reliability of the findings.

Perception Task

A week after the participants completed the English proficiency test, 80 participants of intermediate and upper-intermediate levels were asked to do a verbal guise test (VGT), an indirect approach used to study people's attitudes. The VGT was selected as a research instrument in this study as this technique is believed to be able to elicit the attitudes of people that might not be revealed through observation or a direct interview, allowing us to see the true perceptions of people toward different English varieties (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003). In this method, the participants were asked to listen to stimuli guises and rate them in terms of ten bipolar adjectives, which were written in Thai to ensure that the participants understood them clearly, on a scale of 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest) (see appendix 1). It should also be noted that, apart from the instructions provided on the VGT questionnaire, instructions for how to do the VGT and the meanings for each semantic label were also given before the participants started to listen to the guises so as to assure that they fully understand. Following Ladegaard (1998) and Rindal (2010), the ten sematic attributes were categorized into three main dimensions: status and competence, social attractiveness, and linguistic quality as follows:

1. Status & competence: intelligence, education, leadership, social status

2. Social attractiveness: attractiveness, reliability, and friendliness.

3. Linguistic quality: intelligibility, model of pronunciation, good for job seeking

Five English varieties were included in this study, namely BE, GA, PE, SE, and TE. BE and GA are mainstream varieties of English generally used as models for Thai learners. PE and SE are two English accents from the expanding circle which Thai people are likely to hear since the number of Filipino English teachers are increasing in Thai society (Wongsamuth 2015), while Singapore is an English-speaking country, which because of its high degree of educational and economic success (Jones, 2015), Thai people might choose as a place to learn English. TE was also selected as the participants are Thai speakers of English. Therefore, all of these English varieties were selected as they are believed to be the English accents that may be heard and chosen as models of pronunciation for Thai people.

To make the guises for the VGT, a native speaker of each variety was given a map and asked to give directions as they would to friends or tourists, while their voices were recorded. While the content and speech style were still controlled by the prompt the guises were more naturalistic than reading a passage. The five native speakers of the selected accents were carefully chosen based on a number of criteria, such as gender, age, and voice quality to improve the authenticity and reliability of the guises. Specifically, all selected speakers were male ranging in age from 25 to 30 (similar to the participants), and their voice quality was clear and their speed was neither too fast nor too slow. Brief personal information about each speaker and their distinctive phonological

features are detailed as follows. Speaker A, a 30-yearold business owner from Warwickshire, England had phonological features considered typical of RP standard English (referred to in this study as BE). His accent included the use of non-rhotic [r] in post-vocalic contexts, [ɒ] in a word like 'got' [gɒt], and aspirated [t] in a word like 'center' [ˈsɛntə] (Wells, 1982). Speaker B, who was in his late twenties and came from Los Angeles, spoke with a Standard American or General American accent without "marked regional characteristics". His speech contained the usual American alveolar tap [ɾ] and a rhotic [ɹ] in words like 'water' [ˈwɔɾər])Wells 1982: 470(. The speech style of Speaker C, a 26-year-old math teacher from the Philippines, included unaspirated]p[in a word like 'airport' [ˈɛrpɔːrt] and the substitution of [t] and [d] in words like 'thing' [tɪŋ] and 'then' [den] respectively. Speaker D was a 27-year-old Singaporean teaching biology in a Thai international school. His salient phonetical features included the use of unaspirated [p] and [t] in words like 'airport' [ˈɛrpɔːrt] and 'center' [ˈsɛntə] respectively. Speaker E was a 27-year-old Thai human resource officer who grew up and lived in Bangkok. His phonological features included unaspirated /t/ in a word like 'center', the substitution of [ʃ] and [tʃ] in words like 'fish' [fitʃ], and [t] in place of the sound [θ], and [d] as a substitute for the sound [ð]. The latter three English accents were relatively characteristic of many ASEAN speakers, and their English was moderately accented with suprasegmentals such as intonation and stress that can show their ethnic distinctiveness (Deterding 2007; Kirkpatrick 2010; Leimgruber 2013; Trakulkasmsuk 2012; Wells 1982).

The Semi-Structured Interviews

In phase 2, 10 participants who took part in the perception task were randomly asked to participate in semi-structured interviews a week after the VGT to discuss which English they aim for and what the reasons behind their decisions might be. Conducted by Thai and Filipino interviewers simultaneously, the interview lasted approximately ten minutes and was conducted in English in order to avoid a lengthy task, and the ambiguity and bias that might occur in the process of translation (Snodin and Young 2015: 252). Semi-structured interviews were selected to supplement the findings of the VGT since this direct approach can examine the complex or ambivalent feelings that people might have (Sung 2013: 547). It also yielded further information in cases where they provided insufficient information or an incomplete picture of the ideas being investigated (Phothongsunan and Suwanarak 2008: 4), enabling us to have better understanding of how the participants perceive different varieties of English. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews were related to their perceptions of toward their own English accent and the English accents of others as follows:

1. How do you feel about your spoken English?

2. Do you want to sound like a Thai speaker of English as long as other people can understand you, or do you want to sound like a native speaker? Why?

3. What is the English accent that you aim for? Why?

4. If you aim for American English or British English, why do you not aim for other accents?

5. Is one of the accents more difficult to pronounce than the other? Why?

6. To what extent is it important for you to retain your Thai identity and show other people that you are a native speaker of Thai when you speak English?

Results

Perception Task

Table 1 Mean scores and standard deviations
of the evaluation of five speakers

Speaker	Mean	SD	N
GA	4.01	0.144914	80
BE	3.97	0.149443	80
PE	3.53	0.235938	80
TE	2.95	0.397911	80
SE	2.74	0.348835	80

Findings from the VGT clearly showed that native varieties were rated more favorably than non-native counterparts, with GA the most preferred English variety and BE the second most favored English accent. For non-native varieties, PE scored higher than the other two accents, and was the only non-native variety to receive a relatively positive evaluation exceeding 3.0. Both TE and SE were rated relatively moderately with SE the

least favored English accent. As can be seen from Table 1, both native varieties (BE and GA) were rated as more favorable and prestigious than the non-native varieties (PE, SE, and TE) in all dimensions, and remained the dominant English accents that Thai speakers of English want to learn and use. The results also indicated that the standard deviations for the stereotyped evaluations of non-native varieties were higher than those of native varieties, suggesting that the participants tended to have more diverse attitudes toward non-native varieties than native-based norms.

Specifically, as Table 2 shows, between the two native varieties, GA received more favorable evaluations than BE in six dimensions, i.e. intelligence, leadership, social status, reliability, attractiveness, and intelligibility. Although the participants rated GA higher than BE in more dimensions, especially in terms of social status and attractiveness, it is interesting to note that BE was still seen as a better model for English learning and job seeking, suggesting that it is possible for Thai speakers of English to favour one English variety while still believing that another English accent is more suitable as a pedagogic model. In terms of intelligibility, native varieties were considered more intelligible than non-native varieties (4.0 for GA and 3.9 for RP), while all non-native varieties also received quite positive evaluations for this dimension, with the mean value exceeding 3.0 (3.8 for PhiE, 3.5 for Thai, and 3.2 for SE). Among non-native English varieties, PE scores were higher than those of SE and TE in all dimensions, showing that PE was the third most preferred English model for the participants.

For the other two non-native varieties, TE was rated most favorably in terms of its intelligibility (3.5), but least in terms of attractiveness (2.3), while SE scored as the least preferred model of English for the participants with a relatively negative evaluation of 2.1, which was lower than the neutral point of 2.5.

Table 2 Mean dimension scores for attitudes of Thai speakers of English toward
different varieties of English in terms of social status and competence,
social attractiveness, and linguistic quality

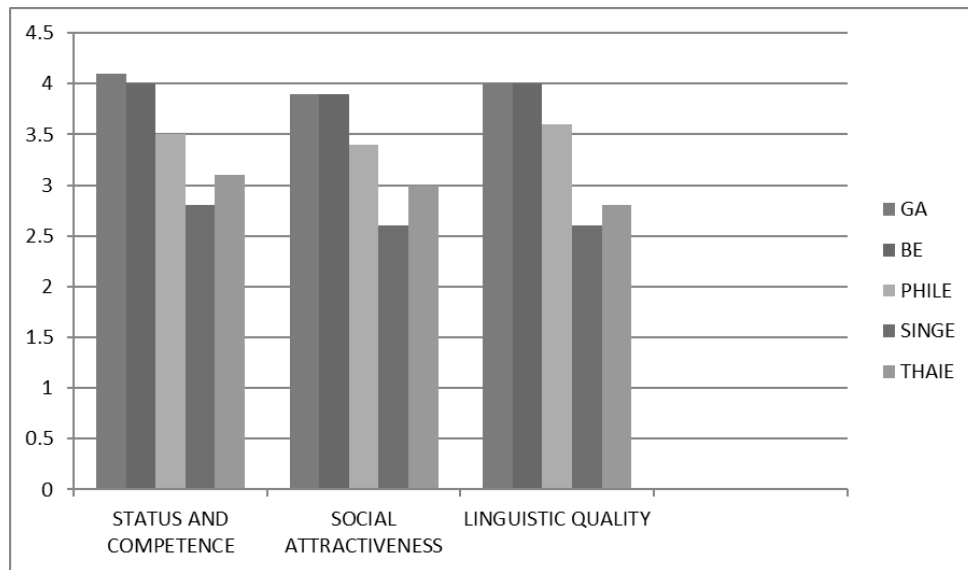| DIMENSIONS	GA	BE	PE	SE	TE
Status & Competence					
Intelligence	4.3	4.1	3.6	2.9	3.2
Education	4.0	4.1	3.7	3.0	3.2
Leadership	4.1	3.9	3.4	2.5	2.9
Social Status	3.9	3.8	3.4	2.9	3.0
Social Attractiveness					
Reliability	4.1	4.0	3.6	2.9	2.9
Friendliness	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.0	3.4
Attractiveness	3.9	3.8	3.0	2.5	2.4
Linguistic Quality					
Intelligibility	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.2	3.5
Good model of English	3.9	4.1	3.4	2.1	2.3
Good for job seeking	4.1	4.2	3.7	2.4	2.7

Figure 1 Mean scores for different English varieties grouped by three semantic categories

As described in the methodology section, ten semantic labels were classified into three major categories – status and competence, social attractiveness, and linguistic quality. Each category was calculated in order for us to see the data in a broader sense (Figure 1). Both native varieties (GA and BE) were rated somewhat equally in terms of social attractiveness and linguistic quality with mean values of 3.9 and 4.0 respectively, but in terms of status and competence, GA was rated higher than BE and other non-native varieties with a mean score of 4.1. Among non-native varieties, the graph (see Figure 1) showed consistent results in that PE was ranked as the third most favorable English variety in all three categories, followed by TE, which scored lowest in terms of its perceived social attractiveness. SE was ranked as the least preferred variety of English in all dimensions with the lowest mean evaluations for its perceived social attractiveness and linguistic quality (both at 2.6).

Semi-structured Interviews

The following week after completing the VGT, ten participants were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview and answer questions about which English accent they aimed for and what the reasons for their preferences were. The results showed that nine of the ten participants chose the native varieties as their target English models (seven participants aimed for GA and two participants aimed for BE), while only one person said that he aimed for a local accent like TE. In order to gain more insights into their accent preferences, the reasons as to why they aimed for certain English varieties are examined in the next section.

Intelligibility as a Reason for Accent Preferences

One of the primary reasons why the participants wanted to sound like native speakers concerned intelligibility as those who aimed for native varieties remarked:

1. *I think if I have to choose, I prefer to sound like a native speaker. The most important part of using English is pronunciation and maybe accent, but I think we have to focus more on pronunciation. If you stress in the wrong position, foreigners don't understand you.* (Participant no.1, GA aimer)
2. *I prefer to sound like a native speaker because it is international. You know, when you speak with the correct pronunciation, it makes other people understand what you say.* (Participant no. 4, GA aimer)

It was also found that most participants prioritised intelligibility as the reason for their accent aim as Participant no.1, Participant no.3, and Participant no.4 specifically pointed out that between native varieties GA was more favoured because it was perceived as easiest to understand.:

3. *Personally, I aim for American English because […] I think American English is very clear and very easy to understand* (Participant no.1, GA aimer).

4. *To me, American English is more universal. It's easy to understand by other English users, so that's why I think it's good because the most important thing in communication is to make other people understand what you are saying, so that's why I think using an American accent is the*

most effective way. (Participant no. 3, GA aimer).

5. *I aim for an American English accent because I think British English is hard to understand and I'm also more familiar with GA* (Participant no.4, GA aimer).

The excerpt above suggests that GA was perceived as more intelligible, universal, and effective as a means of communication than BE, comments which were consistent with the VGT findings in that GA was rated more favorably in these dimensions than BE, and these perceived characteristics of GA might be the overriding reasons why participants aimed for GA.

The Ownership of English as a Reason for Accent Preferences

The results also showed that three participants regarded the ownership of English as one of the possible reasons why they aim for a native accent. They stated:

6. *As long as your listeners understand you, whatever accent is okay, but if you have a chance, why don't you learn from the owner of the language?* (Participant no.1, GA aimer)

7. *Actually, English is from the United Kingdom, right? So, Singaporeans, they were colonized by the UK, so, of course they use English because they were colonized. But, I like the original and authentic one.* (Participant no.2, BE aimer)

8. *I think everyone wants to talk like natives of that language when learning another language. For Singaporeans, I think it's not*

their mother tongue. Actually, it might be said that English is their first language, but the way it sounds is different from American and British accents. I think Filipino English is okay for me. But, if I can choose, it would be British English because Filipino is not wow (Participant no.5, BE aimer)

Interestingly, these excerpts indicate that participants believe English belongs to American and British people. Although Singapore is a country where English is spoken as an official language and used in daily life, the participants still believed that they are not the owners of English and their English should not be seen as an appropriate norm to use.

Identity as a Reason for Accent Preferences

Beyond the ownership of English, the issue of identity was also mentioned as one of the reasons why people aimed for native varieties. Identity in this sense means "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space" (Norton, 1997: 410). For example, Participant no.4 said that he would speak like a native speaker when he applied for a job since he associated native varieties with "correctness. " This would enable him to construct his identity as a "professional" in his field and suggest that he is qualified for the position.

9. *When I apply for a job, I prepare myself and I have to speak English correctly like a native speaker because it's one of the ways to show how you are professional* (Participant no.4, GA aimer)

Participant no.5 and Participant no. 8 also explained that they aimed for native accents because native varieties are perceived to be more standard and "noble", which makes the speakers look better and more knowledgeable because of the perceived attractiveness and higher social status and competence.

10. *Sure, I want to sound like a native speaker. You know, it can make you look good in the eyes of other people and look like a knowledgeable person [...] I aim for a British accent because I think it looks more standard, looks very noble*. (Participant no. 5, BE aimer).

11. *I think everyone wants to sound like native speakers because it can prove that you are well-educated or like a professional* (Participant no.8, GA aimer).

These extracts suggest that the participants see language as a means to construct their identity and present a positive image in addition to a means of communication.

Although almost all participants aimed for native varieties, Participant no.7 said that he aimed for TE. It is interesting to note that he aimed for a non-native variety not because of a desire to express local identity, but due to practical reasons as well as his "lack of ability":

12. *I'd say I aim for a Thai accent because I can't change myself. Maybe, I don't try enough to speak like native speakers. I think I can speak with a Thai accent and if the listeners understand me, that's all. I think a Thai accent is not bad.* (Participant no. 7, TE aimer).

This means that Participant no. 7 considered TE the inevitable choice for him as he cannot change his accent because of a lack of effort. Thus,his identity as a Thai remains with him through his use of the local accent. This is similar to Participant no. 2, who highlighted:

13. *I don't want to retain Thai identity, you know. Thailand doesn't have a good reputation that much, but I can't escape the fact that I was born here.* (Participant No.2, BE aimer)

It was also found that the majority of participants felt it is important for them to learn and understand other English accents aside from GA and BE:

14. *Sure, because English is a global language, so you can't pick one of them to learn. […] It's like the improvement of Thai education to step up the English curriculum.* (Participant no.1, GA aimer)

15. *It is important because, as I said, we cannot correct other people. It is the way to understand them. […]You cannot ask other people to speak the way you speak, so it is the way to make people learn and understand.* (Participant no.3, GA aimer)

All in all, the findings point to a range of reasons why people prefer to use certain English accents, indicating that participants' perceptions toward different English accents can be varied and complex. That is, some might prioritize the communicative goal and chose a certain English accent as it is perceived to be easier to understand, while others might consider ownership of English and the language ideology attached as

factors to construct a positive identity through their use of linguistic repertoires.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

Linguistic Superiority of Native-based Varieties

The results in this study showed that among these Thai working adults, native varieties (BE and GA) were perceived as more prestigious than non-native varieties (PE, SE, and TE) in all dimensions. These native varieties are the preferred English models that they wanted to learn and use, with GA as the most favorable English accent (with the mean evaluation of 4.01 in the VGT and seven out of the ten participants reporting the aim of GA in semi-structured interviews). Such findings are in line with most previous studies on attitudes (Jenkins 2007; Jindapitak 2010, 2015; Juhi 2012; Li 2009; Prakaiborisuth and Trakulkasemsuk, 2015), and confirm the idea that GA is more likely to be positioned as a global English language rather than BE (Crystal 2003). A similar conclusion can also be drawn from the second research question concerning the English accent participants aimed for: nine out of ten said they aimed for a native-based accent (Seven are GA aimers and two are BE aimers), while only one aimed for a local variety (TE). Jenkins (2007: 32-33) explained such stereotyped evaluations of native varieties as "standard native-speaker English language ideology in linguistics", which is "historically deep-rooted" and whereby the norms are based on inner-circle countries. That is, the dominance of political power and social status of native varieties as a global English model may be recognized

in Thai society through language use, language policy and educational practices. According to Canagarajah (1999: 22), educational policy and pedagogic practices can play a key role in influencing language learners' attitudes toward the dominance of native varieties. This is found to correlate with the study by Jindapitak (2015: 270), who observed that language learners are influenced by Thai language policy, which places an importance on native varieties and makes learners believe that native-like competence is important to achieve. According to Snodin and Young (2015: 256), the influence of American culture, and its social and economic status have been more significant than BE in Thailand since the Second World War. The sociopolitical power of America, the vitality of its culture, and the influence of English language teaching in Thailand, which has usually set GA as a pedagogic goal for language learners, might thus account for why the participants perceived GA as the most dominant English accent to learn and use. In addition, the dominance of GA in Thailand can also be seen in the media such as TV shows, films, and music that are widespread and popular in Thailand. Such media can therefore influence how Thai people perceive GA as a more prestigious English accent than any other.

Constructing Positive Self-images through L2 Pronunciations

It can also be observed that participants associated native varieties with several positive attributes such as status and competence ('authentic', 'knowledgeable', 'well-educated', 'correct', 'superior'), social attractiveness ('elegant', 'noble'), the

ownership of English ('the owner of the language', 'the origin, mother tongue'), and linguistic quality ('easy-to-understand' and 'clear'). The results found are relatively similar to those in Jenkins (2007), Li (2009), and Snodin and Young's (2015), whereby participants tended to have different positive attitudes toward certain native varieties of English, suggesting that native varieties were "not viewed equally as the target varieties" (Snodin and Young, 2015: 253). It may be that the participants aimed for native varieties for the sake of expressing a positive self-image as a sophisticated English speaker of the world (Participant no.4). Such an argument supports the notion of human agency: that people make linguistic choices and create their own linguistic behaviour to resemble the group they want to be identified with (Le Page and Tabouret Keller 1985: 181), and construct a positive identity with native-based accents (Sung 2014: 554). However, it should be noted that the findings in this study were based on the participants' perceptions only. Thus, further research and analysis on actual production is needed to see how people use different English varieties in their daily interactions and whether or not they can achieve the accents that they aim for to construct positive identities. This would help us gain more insights into the relationship between accent and identity.

Local and Global Identities in ELF Interactions

Since the results of both the VGT and semi-structured interviews showed that Thai working adults believe that native-based varieties (especially GA) are the English accents they want to learn and use, they

should be allowed to orient toward these native-based norms. With positive attitudes, learners' motivation and learning performance may be improved, thus increasing their language proficiency (Snodin and Young 2015: 257). Interestingly, the result of the VGT also revealed that, despite their lower mean evaluations than native-based standards, the mean scores of non-native varieties were still above the neutral point of 2.5, suggesting that participants seemed to have neutral rather than negative attitudes toward non-native accents. However, when looking at certain linguistic labels in the VGT, it was found that the least preferred English accent, namely SE, was rated negatively (2.1) as a good model of English, suggesting that participants still express prejudiced and stereotyped views of certain non-native varieties. This may simply be due to the fact that most participants are less familiar with SE than the other four English accents, which emphasizes the importance of including examples of the diversity of English varieties and "L2-L2 interactions" in English learning materials. Doing so would promote a sense of linguistic tolerance and give non-native speakers a broader range of tools for achieving their communicative goals when facing gaps between English proficiency levels (McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008: 196-197). It is more important than ever for English users in this globalized world to be aware of the diversity of English varieties since English now serves as a global language or *lingua franca*. In other words, English speakers should have an awareness of both native and non-native varieties. They should "recognise the legitimacy of different English varieties in this postmodern world" (Canagarajah 2006:

234). Just as Matsuda (2002: 438) pointed out, exposure to English varieties should not be limited only to native-based standards; other English varieties should be introduced to learners. . In an effort to build a socially sensitive pedagogy, learners' needs should be revisited, and English language teaching should prepare learners for interactions in today's multilingual and multicultural contexts (Alsagoff, McKay, Hu, and Renandya 2012: 337). When asked whether it is necessary for them to understand and learn non-native varieties, most participants indicated that it was, and that learning non-native varieties would represent a 'great improvement of the Thai education system' (Participant no.1). This implies that the participants recognize the role of English as a *lingua franca* (Jindapitak 2015: 270) and appreciate the importance of raising awareness of existing world Englishes (Jindapitak 2015; Jenkins 2007; Li 2009; Kirkpatrick 2004; Seidlhofer 2004). In short, English learners should be allowed to orient toward native or non-native varieties based on their preferences as they should be seen as "unique individuals who can exercise their agency in their use of ELF" (2014: 555). At the same time, it is necessary for us to raise people's awareness of the diversity of English varieties, which should be viewed as linguistic variations rather than errors (Kirkpatrick 2010; Seidlhofer 2005). This will prepare learners for interactions in ELF contexts where English is used as a means of communication with those whose first language is not shared.

Conclusion

Given the call for a teaching paradigm shift that moves toward a more socially sensitive

English language teaching concept like English as an international language (EIL), this study aims to examine how Thai working adults perceive native and non-native varieties of English in terms of social dimensions and linguistic quality, and investigate to what extent it is important for them to retain their Thai identity through L2 pronunciation. The findings indicate the linguistic superiority of native-based standards as native varieties were still rated as more prestigious than non-native varieties in all dimensions in the VGT, while seven of the ten participants said that they aimed for native varieties, with GA being the most prestigious English accent, supporting the view that GA serves the role as the global language rather than BE (Crystal 2003). It was also found that their accent choices might be based on intelligibility, the ownership of English, and identity reasons. In terms of identity, it seems that the participants may aim for native varieties to construct positive self-images as they associate native-based norms with several positive attributes such as 'welleducated', 'knowledgeable', or 'clear', while the participant who aimed for a Thai accent (Participant no. 7) did so for practical reasons or a perceived lack of ability rather than the intentional process of identity construction. As the participants expressed negative reactions toward nonnative varieties in certain aspects, this study underscores the importance of raising awareness of linguistic diversity as a means to help promote a sense of linguistic tolerance and prepare learners for real-world ELF interactions.

It is hoped that this study can yield some productive insights into how Thai working adults perceive different English varieties. Although this study focuses solely on attitudes of people working in the fields of business, service and hospitality, it is interesting to note that the results appear consistent with those previous attitude studies which examined the perceptions of teachers and university students toward native and non-native varieties. In both instances, participants found native varieties of English to be more prestigious and favorable to learn and use. In light of these findings, future research might investigate learners' motivation when they have to study English with non-native teachers and how much such motivation might influence their success in second language learning (Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006: 93). Furthermore, additional research on the relationship between language attitudes and identity construction is needed to shed light on the extent to which human agency can influence the way people construct their identity through pronunciation.

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Appendix 1 VGT in Thai

ส่วนที่ 1 ฟังเสียงพูดของผู้พูดแต่ละคนและวงกลมตัวเลขเพื่อระบุทัศนคติที่มีต่อเสียงพูดแต่ละคน

ผู้พูดคนที่ _____						
ไม่ฉลาด	1	2	3	4	5	ฉลาด
การศึกษาไม่สูง	1	2	3	4	5	มีการศึกษา
ไม่มีความเป็นผู้นำ	1	2	3	4	5	มีความเป็นผู้นำ
สถานะทางสังคมต่ำ	1	2	3	4	5	สถานะทางสังคมสูง
ไม่น่าเชื่อถือ	1	2	3	4	5	น่าเชื่อถือ
ไม่เป็นมิตร	1	2	3	4	5	เป็นมิตร
ไม่มีเสน่ห์	1	2	3	4	5	มีเสน่ห์
เข้าใจยาก	1	2	3	4	5	เข้าใจง่าย
เป็นต้นแบบที่ไม่ดีในการออกเสียง	1	2	3	4	5	เป็นต้นแบบที่ดีในการออกเสียง
ไม่ดีต่อการหางาน	1	2	3	4	5	ดีต่อการหางาน

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