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Thai Learners' Attitudes toward English Accents: Fields and Stages of Study

Atikhom Thienthong[a,*], Kanyarat Uthaikorn[b]

[a] atikhom.k@ubu.ac.th, English and Communication Program, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand
[b] kanyarat.pekky@gmail.com, English and Communication Program, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand
[*] Corresponding author, atikhom.k@ubu.ac.th

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes of 90 Thai learners toward English accents in relation to differing fields and stages of study, using a verbal-guise test (VGT) and a questionnaire. Respondents listened to and evaluated five speakers of English as a native language (ENL): American English (AmE) and British English (BrE), a second language (ESL): Indian English (InE) and Filipino English (FiE), and a foreign language (EFL): Thai English (ThE). The results reveal that most respondents hold significantly more favorable attitudes toward the ENL varieties than the non-ENL varieties with regard to status, solidarity, and speech. The former group is perceived as standard, proper and prestigious, but the reverse is true of the latter group. The ESL varieties, especially FiE are judged negatively for intelligibility while ThE is perceived as the most intelligible, followed by AmE and BrE. The results also show that Thai learners, irrespective of their field and stage of study, have similar attitudes in terms of social status. However, secondary-school students judge the non-ENL varieties more favorably than university students. These results suggest that teachers should expose students to different varieties of

English in the early years of English language teaching (ELT) since they may not have acquired a deep-seated native-speakerism ideology.

Keywords: accents, language attitudes, fields and stages of study, secondary-school students, university students

Introduction

Attitudes matter in terms of status and solidarity because people act based on how they think and feel. With respect to language use, one aspect of spoken language which is easily noticeable and prone to judgment is accent. Buckingham (2015) states that listeners can deduce a speaker's socio-biographic information from their speech accent, such as provenance, native language, social class, and educational level. Moreover, accents can cause speakers to be judged more or less as intelligible, competent, educated, friendly, pleasant, and confident (Chan, 2016). These traits reflect two social values: status and solidarity. With respect to these social values, people often automatically and unconsciously judge how others speak and sound (Dragojevic, 2018). Stewart et al. (1985, p. 98) state that speakers' accents "can have evaluative consequences in terms of traits assigned them, decisions made about them in applied contexts and in behaviors directed toward them." Mounting evidence shows that language learners often associate native speakers with higher status and solidarity while they tend to judge non-native speakers less favorably (e.g. Chan, 2016; Meer et al., 2021; Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021).

Language learners' attitudes are subject to their acceptance of English varieties, and these language attitudes are vitally important for teaching and learning. Given this importance, in Thailand, there has recently been an increasing amount of research on English varieties. For instance, Juntanee et al. (2020) examined the orientation of Global Englishes (GE) in 12 ELT textbooks at the secondary level (Grades 10-12) in Thailand. The authors found that all the textbooks codified BrE and AmE as the linguistic norm. In addition, a greater number of studies have explored the perceptions and attitudes of Thai university students and teachers toward English varieties in general (e.g. Boonsuk, 2021), native and non-native teachers of English (e.g. Watson Todd & Pojanapunya, 2020), and accents in particular (e.g. Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Choomthong & Manowong, 2020). These studies have yielded similar results: most participants prefer BrE and AmE as the teaching model and depend on ELT textbooks that mainly use these native varieties. They also show a stronger preference for native teachers of English and native speakers' accents.

Despite a number of studies on English varieties and accents, there does not seem to be any research, especially in Thailand, to investigate students' attitudes in relation to their differing fields and stages of study. It is generally agreed that "most social attitudes are acquired, not innate" (Ajzen & Gilbert Cote, 2008, p. 290). This indicates that students of different stages of learning English may hold different language attitudes. This is because as time passes, their attitudes may change. This change can occur as a result of shifts in sociolinguistic context (Watson Todd & Pojanapunya, 2020) and formal education (Dragojevic, 2018). Moreover, pre-university students are underrepresented in applied linguistics research (Andringa & Godfroid, 2020), despite the fact that English learning takes place in schools more frequently than at universities (Kormos & Sáfár, 2008). This research gap merits an investigation of high-school or secondary-school learners who are younger and less exposed to English than university students. It is also evident that a field of study is subject to attitude. Supporting this premise, a study by Thienthong (2022) indicates that students and teachers who concentrate on language rules tend to hold prescriptive attitudes and conform to a standard-language ideology.

Even though the belief that native speakers are better language models and teachers remains widespread in ELT in Thailand, there have been calls for a more inclusive pedagogy that incorporates other varieties of English in order to respond to the global use of English among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds (e.g. Boonsuk, 2021; Jindapitak et al., 2022; Prabjandee & Fang, 2022). Previous literature indicates that students who are widely exposed to and familiar with different Englishes and their speakers tend not to develop linguistic stereotypes and negative attitudes (Tan & Castelli, 2013). Based on this rationale, it is worthwhile to explore Thai students' attitudes toward English varieties with respect to their fields and stages of study. It is hoped that this present study can contribute to insights into students' language attitudes from different fields and levels of education. These insights into language attitude can provide useful data for introducing English varieties to ELT classrooms at secondary and tertiary levels. To this end, the present study sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Thai learners' attitudes toward the varieties of English accent in terms of attitudinal dimensions?
2. Do their evaluations of the varieties of English accent vary according to their differing fields and stages of study?
3. What English varieties do they prefer and how do they justify their preferences?

Literature Review

English Language Teaching in Thailand

Thailand, like many other expanding-circle countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, Japan), is a norm-dependent country where English has no official status and is taught as a foreign language. This EFL status "implies conformity to native English models and standards" (Trakulkasemsuk, 2018, p. 99). Thus, since Thailand has no local codified norms of English, ELT in Thailand depends on native-speaker (NS) norms of English (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Boonsuk, 2021; Jindapitak et al., 2022). BrE and AmE are two mainstream native Englishes which are represented as standard English varieties in ELT in Thailand (Boonsuk, 2021). These NS standard models of teaching have been underpinned by second language acquisition (SLA) theory whose dominant constructs are "founded on monolingual norms and practices" (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 934). This monocentric treatment of English has implications for ELT principles and practices. Primarily, ELT is intended for educational purposes (Mauranen, 2012) and regards native English as a yardstick of competence (Galloway & Rose, 2015). It is assumed that EFL students should acquire native-like competence, and they are strictly evaluated with reference to native standards. Thus, native English has always been established as "the only conceivable benchmark" by most providers of standardized proficiency tests (Jenkins, 2020, p. 473) and classroom assessments (Seidlhofer, 2017). In practice, ELT activities tend to emphasize native-like correctness (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Galloway & Rose, 2018). It is reasonable to say that native-speakerism associated with standard language is still widespread in ELT discourse in Thailand.

The tradition of regarding native-English norms as the sole learning goal has a long history and still persists today. In terms of pronunciation, two classroom models commonly adopted in ELT and widely promoted in society are Received Pronunciation (RP) for BrE and General American (GA) for AmE (Deterding & Gardiner, 2018; Jenkins, 2002). In many countries, RP and GA are equivalent forms of native English (Schneider, 2007). They are recognized and described as typically BrE and AmE and standardized for phonemic transcriptions in dictionaries (Robinson, 2019). In instructional and social discourses, the mainstream RP and GA models predominate in commercial listening materials in ELT (Chan, 2016) and popular culture (Choomthong & Manowong, 2020). With respect to EFL teaching and its purposes, students are instructed to facilitate communication with native speakers of English and expected to closely approximate NS pronunciation and accent (Jenkins, 2002). Given this goal, students are evaluated based on a native-standard benchmark (Galloway & Rose, 2018). This native-

speakerism ideology is influential and perpetuated in ELT worldwide (Matsuda, 2021), including Thailand (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Jindapitak et al., 2022).

However, international advances in GE research have prompted applied linguists and practitioners to call for a broader perspective in ELT by including a wide range of non-native English varieties. These advances have posed challenges to traditional ELT practices. Recently, in Thailand, several GE programs have been introduced to ELT classrooms to develop students' awareness of GE (e.g. Boonsuk et al., 2021; Jindapitak et al., 2022) and teachers' pedagogical competence for implementing GE (Prabjandee & Fang, 2022). Research on these GE programs revealed participants' positive attitudes and increased pedagogical knowledge, thus making a call for more GE-aware practices in ELT. Despite this call for a paradigm shift in ELT, native-speakerism continues to prevail (Matsuda, 2021; Seidlhofer, 2017). In Thailand, as Jindapitak et al. (2022) observe, GE research is still in its infancy. Native-speakerism is still "deeply ingrained in socio-linguistic theory and methods" and entrenched in language users' mindsets (Coupland, 2000). In fact, it is reflected in many aspects of ELT and social discourses. Recent studies have found that native speakers and accents are preferred by Thai students and teachers (e.g. Boonsuk, 2021; Choomthong & Manowong, 2020). Native-speakerism is dominant in ELT writing textbooks produced by Thai authors (Rerkwanchai & Gadavanij, 2022). There is also evidence indicating that Thai parents prefer NS teachers, and they wish to develop native-like proficiency (Jindapitak, 2019). This evidence shows that native-speakerism is still alive and well in academic and public discourse.

Attitudes toward English Accents

The belief that only native speakers are linguistic experts and exclusive norm-setters of English (Matsuda, 2021) is a socially constructed ideology. Language ideologies operate at a subconscious level. They usually manifest themselves through people's attitudes (Dołowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021). Dragojevic (2018, p. 179) defines language attitudes as "evaluative reactions to different language varieties". They embody positive and negative evaluative responses (Garrett, 2012) which are explicitly expressed through people's opinions and beliefs, and more negatively, prejudices (Dołowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021). Thus, language attitudes can reflect social categorization and stereotypes (Dragojevic, 2018). The ways people express their language attitudes are determined by a certain ideology. van Dijk (2013) defines ideology as a set of social beliefs shared by members in society. This means that ideology reflects a dominant cultural view. It governs people's attitudes which in turn reinforce and perpetuate that

ideology. In Thailand, native-speakerism is still a dominant standard-language ideology (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). Therefore, there seems no doubt that many Thai students and teachers have positive attitudes toward native-English varieties while being reluctant to accept other non-native varieties.

In terms of pronunciation, the pervasive language ideology is that of native-speakerism (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Jindapitak et al., 2022; Matsuda, 2021). Given this ideological influence, accent is viewed as playing an intricate role as not only linguistic but also socio-linguistic and socio-political phenomena. It is "an integral and mostly permanent part of a person's social identity" (Puhacheuskaya & Järvikivi, 2022, p. 1) and indicative of their provenance, social class, ethnicity, and educational level (Buckingham, 2015). These stable markers are often associated with two attitudinal dimensions: status and solidarity (Dragojevic, 2018). Lyons (1977) defines status as a scale of social standing realized in relation to other varieties while Brown and Gilman (1960) define solidarity as a scale of perceived like-mindedness and group membership. Status traits can include prestigious, educated, standard, proper, and competent characteristics (Meer et al., 2022; Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021). Solidarity traits reflect in-group loyalty or membership (Dragojevic, 2018) and social attractiveness (Chan, 2016). They encompass impressive, likeable, funny, friendly, confident, and global attributes (Cavallaro & Chin, 2009; Chan, 2016; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; McKenzie, 2008). In addition, speakers are evaluated in terms of speech traits related to speech features and characteristics, such as intelligibility, naturalness, and strangeness (Galloway & Rose, 2014; Meer et al., 2022).

Researchers have adopted different data-gathering methods to elicit language attitudes. They can be divided into two methods: direct and indirect. The direct method can be either qualitative or quantitative by using in-depth interviews and questionnaires (e.g. Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). However, a number of attitude studies (e.g. Chan, 2016; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Hänsel & Meer, 2022; Meer et al., 2022; Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021) have employed an indirect VGT method to investigate language attitudes by means of speaker or speech ratings. In these studies, respondents listen to audio recordings of natural speech from speakers of different accents and then evaluate each speaker along attitudinal dimensions on semantic-differential scales with bipolar adjectives used as endpoint labels, such as 1 = not confident, 7 = confident (McKenzie, 2008). In attitude studies (e.g. Chan, 2016), bipolar semantic-differential scales are combined with five- or seven-point Likert scales which indicate the extent of negative, neutral, or negative attitudes (Brewer, 2013). These quantitative methods can be complemented with qualitative data (e.g. Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021). Such indirect VGT methods are more effective than direct questions in that they use authentic

stimuli to which respondents tend to provide answers that they believe to be socially acceptable and that they are more likely to elicit private attitudes (Garrett, 2012).

Methods

Participants

The study sample was 90 Thai-speaking students who were divided into three categories: 30 senior-secondary (SS), 30 non-English-major (NEM), and 30 English-major (EM) students. For purposes of comparison, they were selected by means of purposive quota sampling to obtain a balanced number of participants based on their fields and stages of study. Fields were two areas of academic studies: English and non-English, while stages referred to two levels of education: senior-secondary and tertiary. This sampling method enabled an investigation of whether the two variables (i.e. field and stage of study) contributed to different language attitudes.

The SS participants were Grade 11-12 students, aged between 17 and 18 years from a high school in Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand. They were composed of 25 females and 3 males. Two students identified themselves as non-binary. They had 11-12 years of experience in studying English. The NEM and EM participants were undergraduate students. They were third-year and fourth-year students whose ages were between 20 and 21 years. They were studying at a public university in Northeastern Thailand where the present study was conducted. They had 15-16 years of experience in studying English. The NEM students were from other non-English fields of study (i.e. Social Science, Law, Nursing, Science, Public Health, Engineering, Liberal Arts, Pharmaceutical Science, and Agriculture). They comprised 15 third-year students (10 females, 5 males) and 15 fourth-year students (10 females, 5 males). The EM students consisted of 14 third-year students (10 females, 4 males) and 16 fourth-year students (12 females, 4 males). They majored in English and Communication. A summary of the participants' information is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Information

Participants	Sample size	Age range	English-learning experience (years)
SS	30	17-18	11-12
NEM	30	20-21	15-16

Participants	Sample size	Age range	English-learning experience (years)
EM	30	20-21	15-16
Total	**90**	**-**	**-**

Speech Samples

The present study employed the VGT method which involved five speakers of different English varieties as stimulus speech samples to elicit the participants' attitudes. The five speakers were chosen based on the high likelihood of them being heard in Thailand. They represent English varieties as classified in Kachru's (2005) three-circle model of Englishes: inner, outer, and expanding. The three circles view English as a native language, a second language, and a foreign language, respectively. The inner circle is represented by AmE and BrE, the outer circle by InE and FiE, and the expanding circle by ThE, the participants' own type of English. In Thailand, the inner-circle varieties are regarded as the dominant teaching models of English and native speakers are hired for most English programs. Even though the native-English varieties predominate in ELT classrooms and materials, teachers of English are mostly Thai speakers, and Filipino speakers also have teaching roles in Thailand. InE was included for comparison as it has distinctive linguistic features which mark its identity, like ThE and FiE. The speech details are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Overview of Stimulus Speech Samples and Meta-information on Speakers

Speakers	Ages	Genders	Countries	Length (Seconds)	Topics	Distinctive phonological features
1	30	Female	United States	34	Feminism	- /ɑ:/ in *mom* and *promptly* - /t/ → /d/ in *water* and *little* - /æ/ in *past*, *paradox* and *feminism* - /ɹ/ pronounced in *water*, *girl* and *world*
2	25	Female	India	34	No plan	- clear /l/ in *control* and *tell* - trilled /r/ in *resilience* and *very* - /θ/ → [t] in *something*
3	36	Male	United Kingdom	32	Brexit	- /ɑ:/ in *ask* - /ɔ:/ in *all* - /ɒ/ in *shock* and *what*

Speakers	Ages	Genders	Countries	Length (Seconds)	Topics	Distinctive phonological features
						- /r/ silent in *where*, *world* and *deeper*
4	42	Male	Philippines	28	Heritage	- /p/ and /t/ unaspirated in *webpage* and *time* - /k/ dropped in *network* - /θ/ → [t] in *theatre*
5	33	Female	Thailand	34	Business	- /d/ dropped in *food* and /t/ in *fast* and *perfect* - /ð/ replaced with [t] in *other* and /tʃ/ with [tɕʰ] in *chicken* - The final syllables *perfect* and *successful* stressed

Unlike previous studies which used self-recorded speech or speakers reading the same text (e.g. Chan, 2016; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Meer et al., 2022), the present study featured natural speech from five speakers obtained from TED talks, following Choomthong and Manowong (2020). TED talks are considered more natural and authentic than self-produced recordings as they occur in real-world contexts of language use. Moreover, they are increasingly used in ELT textbooks and classrooms (Wingrove, 2022). The speech samples were partially taken from TED talk videos, with special attention given to their similar volume, voice quality, and fluency. The main criterion for selecting the speech samples was the speakers' distinctive phonological features typical of accent variation patterns in each variety, as illustrated in Table 2.

Intended to be meaningful in content, the shortened videos were then converted into audio clips as vocal stimuli. They lasted between 28 and 34 seconds, similar to those of Meer et al. (2022). The short clips were used to avoid fatiguing the respondents since there were five identical sets of rating-scale items and open-ended questions. Since the speech samples were of natural speech, they were relatively heterogenous in terms of topics and speakers' gender and age. The topics were considered not culturally biased or culturally specific. They were not fully revealed to protect the speakers' identity. The speakers were both males and females aged between 25 and 42.

Questionnaire

As the respondents listened to the recordings, they completed a questionnaire that aimed to evaluate the speakers. The questionnaire comprised two main sections which were the same for the five speakers under investigation. The first section sought to obtain the respondents' demographic

information, such as field of study, level of education, and gender. The second section examined their awareness of and attitudes toward the accent varieties spoken by the five speakers. The respondents were also requested to provide reasons for their preferences for speakers. This extended response allowed them to express and justify their views more extensively. In evaluating their awareness of accent varieties, the participants had to identify the country of origin of the speakers in the speech recordings. To facilitate their identification, they were provided with eight choices: five target varieties, two distractors (i.e. Australian English and Japanese English), and one 'unsure' option. The distractors made it more challenging for the respondents while the 'unsure' option was included to prevent the respondents from making a guess in case they were not confident.

The respondents' attitudes toward the five speakers were measured on the three dimensions of status, solidarity, and speech. They covered 10 items of stereotypic traits which are often used to describe and evaluate accent varieties. They were adopted from previous studies (e.g. Cavallaro & Chin, 2009; Chan, 2016; Galloway & Rose, 2014; Jindapitak &Teo, 2012; McKenzie, 2008; Meer et al., 2022; Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021). The status dimension, linked to social standing and recognition, consisted of four traits: *prestigious*, *standard*, *educated*, and *proper*. The solidarity dimension, related to like-mindedness and group membership, comprised three traits: *impressive*, *acceptable*, and *funny*. The speech dimension, associated with speech features and characteristics, included *intelligible*, *natural*, and *strange*. These 10 traits were presented in a mixed order in 10 statements to which the respondents (dis)agree with a five-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Collection

The study used paper and online questionnaires due to the emergency COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaires were written in Thai to facilitate the respondents' comprehension. Before the actual study, the questionnaires and data-gathering procedures were tried out to enhance their validity. The tryout phase was conducted with six participants from three groups: two SS, two NEM, and two EM students. They shared similar demographic characteristics to the actual participants, but they were excluded from the main study. The pilot results demonstrated that a suitable time for completing the questionnaire was 10-15 minutes. The respondents suggested that they should proceed one page per speaker at a time and be allowed to listen to each speaker more than once, that is, three times. It was felt that multiple listening times would increase confidence in their judgments (e.g. Chan,

2016). As a result, the participants' comments and suggestions in the pilot study were addressed in the main study.

In the actual study, the respondents were informed that they were participating in a study which sought to assess their impression of five speakers in the audio recordings. The recordings were played according to the order in Table 2. For each recording, the respondents listened to and evaluated the speaker by completing a questionnaire with scale ratings and open-ended questions. There was a 20-second pause after each clip and the respondents were able to listen to each recording three times on request. In terms of delivery, the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents through face-to-face and online modes. The face-to-face mode was used with the NEM and EM respondents. They were a convenient sample which was arranged for their preferred time and place. However, because of the sudden COVID-19 pandemic, the SS respondents received the questionnaire online which was designed using a Google form. Some instructions (e.g. listening times and the duration of the pauses) were not controlled.

Data Analysis

Both statistical and content analyses were performed on quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. For the statistical methods, the scales of the negative items *funny* and *strange* were recoded into their positive counterparts *not funny* and *not strange*. The results were also presented using these positive phrases (see Figure 2). This scale inversion was done to prevent numerical confusion and to correspond to the other positive items (Meer et al., 2021).

Then, two main statistical tests were employed. First, one-way repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were carried out on overall mean scores to determine the significant effects. Since the assumption of sphericity was violated, as indicated by Mauchly's tests, the degrees of freedom were corrected using the Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity to enhance robustness (Larson-Hall, 2010). Therefore, the statistical results of ANOVAs were reported using the Greenhouse-Geisser correction. Second, one-way between-groups multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted to examine the significant effects of the fields and stages of study (fixed factors) on the ratings for the five speakers (dependent variables). Effect sizes were also reported using partial eta squared (η_p^2) which was interpreted as small ($0.01 < \eta_p^2 < 0.06$), medium ($0.06 < \eta_p^2 < 0.14$), or large ($\eta_p^2 > 0.14$) (Cohen, 1988).

The content analysis method was employed on the qualitative data from the respondents' extended written responses provided as reasons for their speaker choices. The analysis involved three phases: (1) pre-coding,

coding and categorizing, (2) comparing and contrasting categories, and (3) interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions (Dörnyei, 2007). The coding scheme (see Table 4) was adapted from Meer et al. (2021). The final version had 12 themes, including *others*. During the analysis, both researchers immersed themselves in the data, regularly meeting to develop the initial codes and categories and to discuss any discrepancies, and to finally resolve the discrepancies.

Results

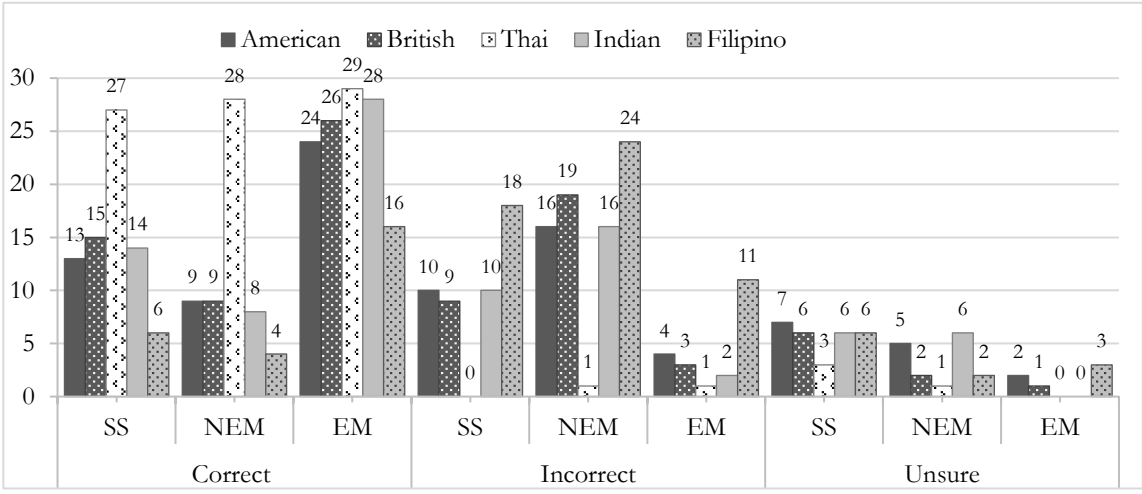
This section consists of three parts: (1) recognition of accents, (2) perceptions of accents with respect to attitudinal dimensions and fields and stages of study, and (3) preferences and justifications for accents.

Recognition of Accents

This section presents the results of the identification of the five speakers by three groups of respondents, which reflects their recognition and awareness of accents and also confirms their language attitudes. The responses for each speaker are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Rates of Speaker Identification



The EM respondents were generally better than their SS and NEM counterparts at identifying and categorizing the speakers. It was expected that most of the respondents would be able to distinguish ThE from the other varieties. Unlike the EM respondents, many of the SS and NEM respondents were unable to identify the non-local accents correctly, with the latter being less successful than the former, considering the number of incorrect responses. Notably, while the NEM respondents could not recognize the variety speakers within the same circles, the SS respondents' identifications were somewhat different across the circles. In fact, 13 NEM respondents identified BrE as AmE and 12 of them AmE as BrE. In contrast, 10 SS respondents evaluated AmE as Austrian English (n = 4), BrE (n = 3), and FiE (n = 3). A similar trend was also true for BrE. Moreover, 21 NEM and 17 SS respondents mistook FiE for InE and vice versa. The 'unsure' responses were found most frequently among the SS respondents.

Perceptions of Accents

This section reports the results regarding the respondents' attitudes in terms of attitudinal traits and dimensions and in relation to fields and stages of study.

Attitudinal Traits and Dimensions

A series of one-way repeated-measures ANOVAs with one within-subjects factor at five levels, that is, five speakers, were conducted on the overall mean values of the speaker ratings and on the mean values for the three respondent groups separately. The results revealed an overall significant difference with a very large effect for accent variety, $F(2.18, 194) = 296.16$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.77$. Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons found that there were significant differences for most paired comparisons ($p < 0.001$), except for the American and British speakers ($p = 0.083$) which both received similarly high positive ratings. The results also showed that the ratings of the five speakers differed significantly with very large effect sizes for the three respondent groups: the SS group, $F(2.43, 70.59) = 29.24$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.50$, the NEM group, $F(1.41, 40.85) = 275.24$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.90$, and the EM group, $F(1.78, 51.52) = 418.41$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.94$. The overall results are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Means for Individual Traits across Variety Speakers (1 = Most negative, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Most positive)

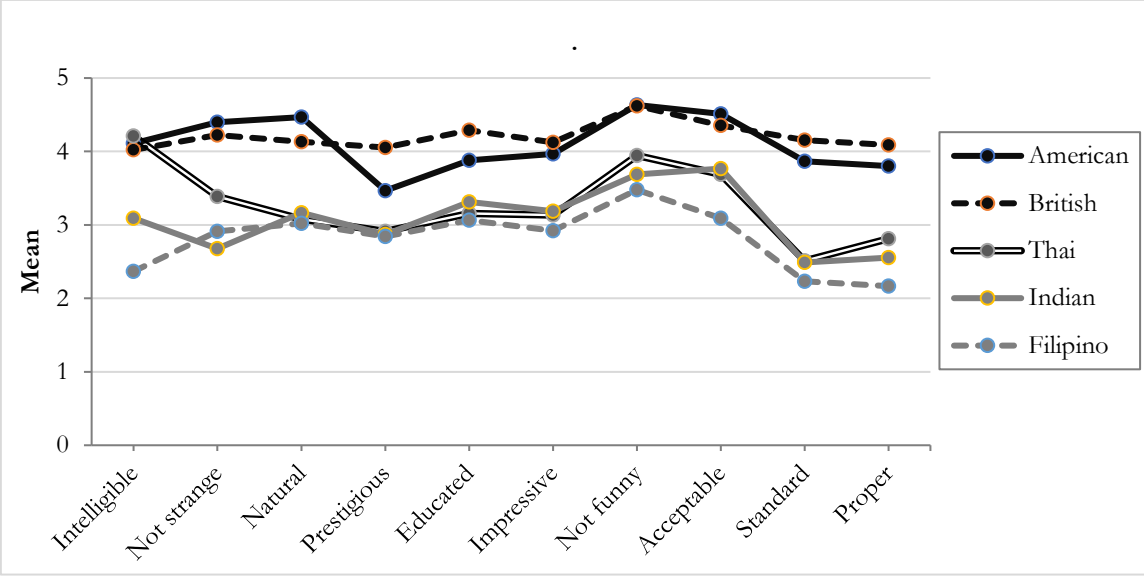


Figure 2 provides the mean ratings of individual traits according to the status, solidarity, and speech dimensions. The ENL speakers were evaluated significantly more positively than the non-ENL speakers on the three dimensions. The British speaker was the most favored, but the reverse was found for the Filipino speaker. For almost all items, except *intelligible*, the ENL speakers were rated the most positively. The British speaker was preferred to the American speaker on the status traits, *educated*, *prestigious*, *standard,* and *proper* while the American speaker received slightly higher ratings on the speech and solidarity traits, *natural* and *not strange*.

As regards the non-ENL varieties, there were similar rating tendencies, except for *intelligible*. For this speech trait, the Thai speaker received the highest rating score among the five speakers, but the Filipino and Indian speakers were judged negatively and neutrally, respectively. For the solidarity traits, *not funny* and *acceptable*, the Thai and Indian speakers received similarly positive ratings. The Filipino speaker was also rated positively for *not funny*, but the opposite was observed for the other nine traits, especially *intelligible*, *standard*, and *proper*.

Table 3

Ratings for Status, Solidarity, and Speech (1 = Most negative, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Most positive)

Speakers	Dimensions		
	Status	**Solidarity**	**Speech**
British	4.15 (0.85)	4.37 (0.53)	4.13 (0.51)
American	3.75 (0.87)	4.37 (0.50)	4.33 (0.51)
Thai	2.85 (0.86)	3.59 (0.53)	3.56 (0.46)
Indian	2.81 (0.88)	3.55 (0.51)	2.98 (0.67)
Filipino	2.58 (0.89)	3.16 (0.55)	2.77 (0.52)

Table 3 shows similar patterns of speaker evaluations with respect to status, solidarity, and speech. On these three dimensions, the ENL varieties were evaluated more positively. The British speaker was rated the most favorably on status while the American speaker received the highest overall speech rating. In contrast, the non-ENL varieties were downgraded on the three dimensions. While they were rated more positively on solidarity, they were judged more negatively on status. In terms of speech, the Indian and Filipino speakers received the lowest rating scores.

To determine the significant differences across the five speakers, three one-way repeated-measures ANOVAs together with Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were separately performed on the three dimensions. The overall results showed that the five speakers were evaluated significantly differently with very large effect sizes on status, $F(2.23, 198.62) = 220.33$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.71$, solidarity, $F(2.20, 195.83) = 208.48$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.70$, and speech, $F(3.26, 290.06) = 219.51$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.71$.

Likewise, pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences for most paired comparisons ($p < 0.001$). However, there were no significant differences in status between the Indian and Thai speakers, $p > 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.18, 0.09], in solidarity between the American and British speakers, $p > 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.10, 0.10] and the Indian and Thai speaker, $p > 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.16, 0.07], and in speech between the Filipino and Indian speakers, $p > 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.42, 0.00].

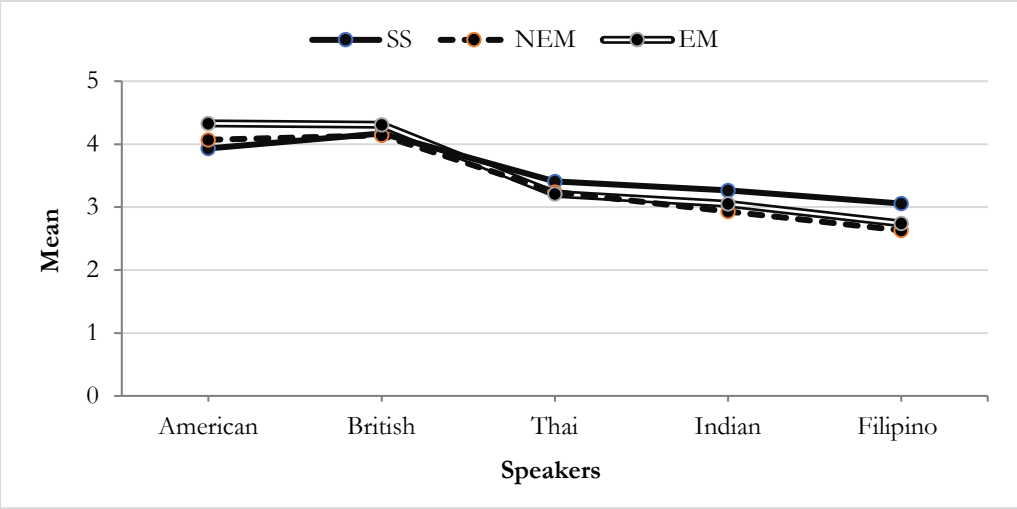
Effects of Fields and Stages of Study

The main effects of the stages and fields of study (3 levels) as fixed factors on the ratings for the five speakers (5 levels) as dependent variables were examined by one-way between-groups MANOVAs. Using Pillai's trace (equal variance not assumed), the results showed that there was an overall significant difference with a large effect size between the three respondent

groups in the ratings of the five speakers, $V = 0.49$, $F(10, 168) = 5.43$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.24$, indicating that there was at least one between-group difference. However, separate ANOVAs with Bonferroni adjusted at 0.01 found that the three respondent groups rated only the Filipino speaker significantly differently with a medium effect size, $F(2, 87) = 4.70$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$. When subsequent pairwise comparisons were conducted, Games-Howell post hoc tests revealed that the ratings of the American speaker were significantly different between the SS and EM respondents, $p = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.73]. Figure 3 shows a similar rating pattern across the respondent groups. Generally, the SS students were more positive toward the non-ENL varieties than the other two groups.

Figure 3

Mean Ratings for Five Speakers by Respondent Groups



In addition, three separate one-way MANOVAs with Pillai's trace (equal variance not assumed) were performed on the overall rating means for status, solidarity, and speech (dependent variables) in relation to the fields and stages of study (fixed factors). The results showed that there was a significant difference with a large effect size across the respondent groups on status, $V = 0.32$, $F(10, 168) = 3.22$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$, solidarity, $V = 0.38$, $F(10, 168) = 3.98$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0\ .19$, and speech, $V = 0.60$, $F(10, 168) = 7.14$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0\ .30$.

Post hoc analyses using Games-Howell indicated that there were significant differences in the solidarity ratings of the Filipino speaker between

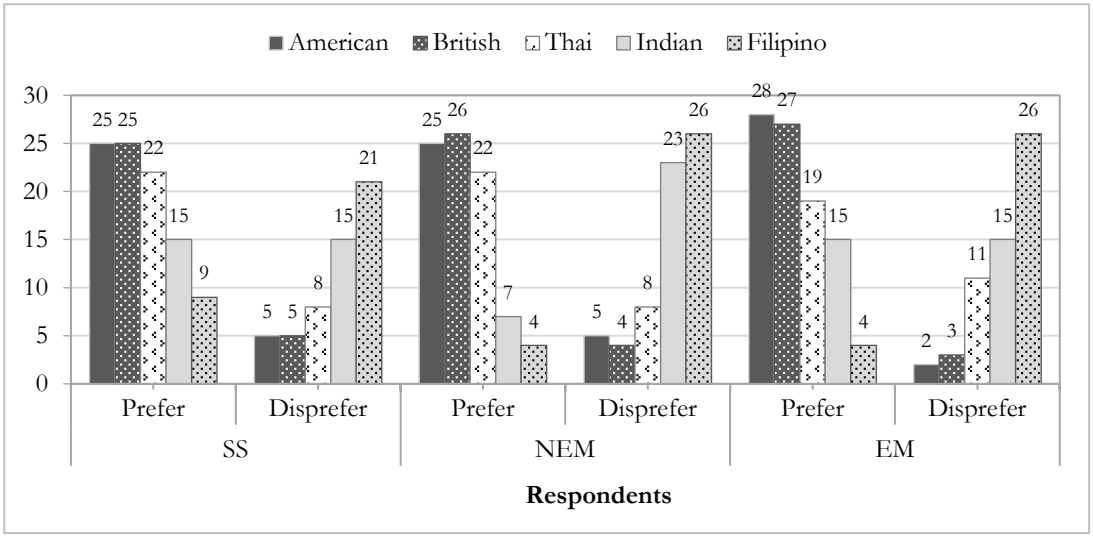
the NEM and EM respondents, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.15, 0.52] and the SS and NEM respondents, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.23, 0.94] and of the Indian speaker between the NEM and EM respondents, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.50]. With regard to speech, significant differences were identified in the ratings of the American speaker between the NEM and EM respondents, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.37, 0.79] and the SS and EM respondents, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.29, 0.87]. For this dimension, however, the SS and NEM respondents rated the Filipino speaker significantly differently, $p = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.80].

Preferences and justifications for speakers

The respondents were asked directly which speakers of English varieties they preferred. They were also required to provide reasons in support of their speaker choices. The results are illustrated in Figure 4 and Table 4.

Figure 4

Preferences for Speakers by Respondent Groups



As Figure 4 illustrates, it is clear that the respondents preferred the ENL speakers over the non-ENL ones. More than 25 respondents (83.33%) from each group showed a clear preference for the American and British speakers. Similarly, more than half of them favored the Thai speaker. This deference to their own type of English predominated among the non-English

majors, with 22 respondents (73.33%) from each group. Apparently, the Filipino speaker was least favored, especially among the university respondents.

Table 4

*Number of Comments per Variety and Category (Highest Frequency per Variety in **Bold** and per Category Underlined)*

Reasons	Prefer *	American	British	Thai	Indian	Filipino	Total
Intelligibility	+	**29**	**29**	23	16	1	98
	–	6	11	4	**36**	**55**	112
Comprehensibility	+	**29**	25	**28**	6	2	90
	–	1	1	1	11	15	29
Affectivity	+	25	19	4	10	6	64
	–	2	0	6	11	3	22
Dynamism	+	20	11	4	3	1	39
	–	5	1	7	4	2	19
Familiarity	+	9	6	13	2	1	31
	–	0	0	0	5	7	12
Uniqueness	+	2	4	2	13	3	24
	–	0	0	0	0	0	0
Identification	+	1	6	9	1	1	18
	–	0	0	5	2	3	10
Culturedness	+	6	6	0	1	0	13
	–	0	0	2	2	2	6
Comparison	+	1	4	4	0	0	9
	–	1	0	1	0	0	2
Teaching model	+	2	1	2	0	0	5
	–	0	0	2	1	0	3
Linguistic analysis	+	2	1	0	0	1	4
	–	0	1	3	2	5	11
Others	+	1	1	3	1	0	6
	–	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	+	127	113	92	53	16	401
	–	16	14	31	74	92	227

* + means preference for speakers, – means dispreference for speakers

As Table 4 shows, the reasons given by the respondents for their (dis)preferences were numerous. The largest number of comments was found in the two related categories of intelligibility and comprehensibility which clearly distinguished the ENL varieties from the non-ENL and -local varieties. The Filipino and Indian speakers were not preferred because they were not easy to understand. Thus, many respondents reported having difficulty in recognizing words and meanings expressed by these speakers. For example, one comment reads, "*It's hard to listen. His speech sounds not like a*

native speaker.". In contrast, many comments revealed that the ENL speakers were intelligible and comprehensible. The Thai speaker received similar positive comments in these categories, such as "*The speaker's pronunciation is clear and easy to understand, despite her Thai accent*." and "*[Her speech is] easy to listen. I can understand every word she says*.". It is notable that intelligibility and comprehensibility were associated with familiarity, the category where the Thai speaker was identified the most frequently, followed by the ENL speakers.

Respondents also related their preferences to evaluative reactions. In this affectivity category, the ENL speakers were judged more positively than the non-ENL speakers. Most comments described the American speaker as *pleasant*, *competent*, *confident*, *charming*, and *friendly* and the British speaker as *pleasant*, *posh*, *cool*, and *prestigious*. In the same category, while some positive comments viewed the Indian speaker as *pleasant*, *confident*, and *challenging* and the Filipino speaker as *cute*, *cool*, and *confident*, these ESL varieties were similarly judged negatively as *strange* and *funny*. Furthermore, the positive attitudes toward the ENL varieties dominated the dynamism category. In this category, the American speaker received the largest proportion of positive comments, closely followed by the British speaker. They were mostly described as having *natural* and *fluent* speech with proper speed and vocal pitch.

Since respondents tended to have divergent attitudes toward the varieties, they categorized the speakers differently. In a non-evaluative way, when they preferred a specific speaker, they were inclined to judge that speaker as being unique. The uniqueness category revealed that the Indian speaker was favored because her accent was indicative of her uniqueness and identity. Similarly, instead of linking the speakers' accent to their identity, some respondents simply identified their accents and provenances, as evidenced in the identification category. However, the culturedness category showed that the speakers were associated with socio-political values. The ENL speakers were exclusively upgraded on social status and standardness.

Discussion

The overall results have shown that the majority of respondents have significantly more positive attitudes toward the ENL speakers than their non-ENL counterparts. Overwhelmingly, BrE and AmE were correctly identified, positively evaluated, and strongly preferred. These results agree with much of the existing literature on language attitudes in that both ENL varieties are associated with social status (Chan, 2016; McKenzie, 2008; Meer et al., 2022). They are usually described through positive stereotypic traits, such as educated, proper, standard, and prestigious (Meer et al., 2022; Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021). In accordance with Chan (2016), BrE is evaluated more

favorably than AmE in terms of social status. With respect to solidarity, the present study supports the results of Chan (2016) and Seyranyan and Westphal (2021) that the respondents judge ENL varieties more positively for solidarity than non-ENL varieties, even their own English. The positive judgments for BrE and AmE are unsurprising, given that they are firmly established as NS norms of teaching and learning on an ideological level worldwide (Matsuda, 2021), with BrE regarded as "the original English with high cultural value" (Seyranyan & Westphal, 2021, p. 83). This native-speakerism ideology socializes people through ELT discourse to believe that BrE and AmE are superior language models. This phenomenon applies to ELT in Thailand; native speakers and their accents are favored by ELT stakeholders, such as students, teachers, textbook authors, and policy makers (e.g. Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Boonsuk, 2021; Choomthong & Manowong, 2020; Rerkwanchai & Gadavanij, 2022). The results of the present study confirm those of previous studies into the attitudes of Thai students and teachers toward English varieties, clearly indicating that native-speakerism is still a powerful language ideology in Thailand.

Intelligibility is a primary goal for international communication among different lingual-cultural speakers. A variety is legitimate as long as its intelligibility is maintained. With respect to the evaluations of varieties, intelligibility which is linked to speech can lead to positive speaker ratings. In the present study, ThE was perceived as the most intelligible, closely followed by AmE and BrE. These results are confirmed by the respondents' written comments and also supported by previous studies. Ambele and Boonsuk (2021) found that ThE is preferred as long as it is comprehensible. Similarly, Choomthong and Manowong (2020) indicate that non-ENL accents are the most intelligible and likely to be favored among Thai learners. However, at least as far as the standard and proper models of teaching are concerned, respondents still show a strong preference for ENL varieties. Similar to most attitude studies (e.g. Boonsuk, 2021; Meer et al., 2022), BrE and AmE are strongly perceived as reference norms. Supporting this view, Boonsuk (2021) argues that non-ENL varieties serve as a tool to express their speakers' identity and culture. In this respect, ThE, InE, and FiE tend to be positively rated as acceptable and not funny, yet they remain perceived negatively with regard to social status and standardness (e.g. Meer et al., 2022). These negative perceptions which are socio-politically motivated seem to take precedence over intelligibility.

Results indicate that in terms of social status, Thai learners have similar language attitudes toward the ENL varieties regardless of their field or stage of study, which lends empirical support to most VGT studies. Scholars recognize that social status is governed by social perceptions and that it is more stable than solidarity (Dragojevic, 2018). These results suggest

that senior-secondary-school students are already in possession of positive attitudes toward the mainstream ENL varieties, which accords with previous studies into pre-university students' attitudes (e.g. Chan, 2016; Meer et al., 2022). This can be explained in terms of their exposure to the dominant varieties (i.e. BrE and AmE), as a result of which they gradually acquire positive attitudes toward those varieties. During the early years of formal schooling, school students demonstrate a clear preference for standard over non-standard varieties (Dragojevic, 2018). However, the field and stage of study were observed to have significant effects on the accurate identifications of language varieties, confirming the fact that students' greater levels of familiarity and proficiency are strongly associated with their awareness and recognition of accent varieties. These results support those of Chan (2016) who found that the university students of English were more successful in identifying most of the speakers under investigation. There are two plausible explanations for the consistency of these results. First, while already being fully aware of NS accents taught at schools and universities, university students are "readily exposed to diverse accents in their life experience" (Chan, 2016, p. 12). English varieties have been increasingly promoted in ELT and are prevalent in informal personal domains. For example, TED talks by international speakers which use natural speech are available online and increasingly incorporated into ELT classrooms (Wingrove, 2022). Second, university students of English are expected to possess a high level of proficiency, and they normally study standard phonetic and phonological forms which are shaped by AmE and BrE. Thus, their linguistic knowledge can be an advantage in helping them to recognize accent varieties.

The field and stage of study are also found to be associated with the evaluations by the SS students and EM university students, especially with regard to solidarity. The three groups rated FiE the least positively, followed by InE. In particular, the SS respondents were significantly more positive than the EM respondents in their evaluations of FiE and InE, but the opposite pattern was true of AmE. These results clearly indicate that EM students' linguistic competence and extensive exposure as well as their concentration on the standard norms of BrE and AmE can contribute to their prescriptive attitudes. By focusing on the standard native norms, EM students are cognitively attuned to them and predisposed to use them correctly like a native speaker (Mauranen, 2012). Some of them may have already acquired or closely approximated those standard norms and so may have wished to display their membership. As a consequence of linguistic purism, they perceive InE and FiE as language varieties with lower solidarity; they are not as socially attractive as AmE. Previous research (e.g. Meer et al., 2022) indicates that InE and FiE are often subject to social categorization and stereotypes (Dragojevic, 2018). The speech contents may have influenced

these results as they may have been (un)familiar to the respondents. In the light of these results, however, many respondents made comments about being unable to recognize words rather than meanings. In contrast, SS students who develop general English skills tend to perceive InE and FiE as more socially attractive than do their EM counterparts. They believe that these non-standard varieties are not strange even though they may not be intelligible. This positive view is probably due to the fact that they have not yet been fully influenced by the dominant language ideology.

Conclusion

Pedagogical Implications

The results reflect the dominant standard-language and native-speakerism ideologies in Thailand and suggest that Thai learners at their early stages of formal education need to develop their meta- and socio-linguistic knowledge and awareness (Meer et al., 2022). The standard ENL varieties shaped by BrE and AmE have been firmly established as the norms of teaching in Thailand for more than a century (Trakulkasemsuk, 2018). These standard norms are codified in curricula, textbooks, and examinations, thus dominating pedagogical and social discourse. There is no doubt that Thai learners are familiar with and have positive attitudes toward BrE and AmE. As a result of greater exposure and familiarity, they find BrE and AmE easier to understand. However, in today's globalized world where English is used among global users of diverse languages and cultures, it is imperative that teachers equip students with meta- and socio-linguistic knowledge by introducing different varieties of English into classrooms. The results of the present study suggest that teachers should expose learners to different varieties during the early years of schooling since they begin to form certain language attitudes during those early years (Dragojevic, 2018). Such exposure would increase learners' familiarity with English varieties and hence may mitigate the formation of linguistic stereotypes and prejudices.

Research Limitations

This study has some limitations which should be addressed for future research. First, the present study is a cross-sectional investigation which measured the "present" attitudes of three participant groups at the same point in time. While the study offered insights into language attitudes across the groups, it would be more interesting for other studies to use a longitudinal approach with the same group of participants to observe any changes in their attitudes over a period of time. Second, the present study investigated only

two variables, that is, field and stage of study. Future research should consider other variables related to speech stimuli, such as different domains and levels of formality. These variables could lead to additional insights into language attitudes from different dimensions. Third, the present study investigated only students who may not directly affect ELT. Thus, future studies should focus on the perspectives of teachers from different levels of education, pre-service teachers, and teacher supervisors or educators. These people's attitudes are worthy of investigation since they have very important and influential roles in ELT.

About the Authors

Atikhom Thienthong: A lecturer in English and Communication Program, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand. His research interests include collocation, synonymy, pattern grammar, written discourse, corpora, and language attitude.

Kanyarat Uthaikorn: A senior student in English and Communication Program, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand when this study was conducted. Now, she teaches English at Anuban Ubonratchathani School, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. Her research interest includes language attitude and teaching young learners.

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