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Global or Local Identities? How Thai Learners in an English Program Project Themselves through L2 Pronunciation in ELF Encounters

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ABSTRACT

This study combines qualitative and quantitative methods to explore 15 English program (EP) students' attitudes toward English varieties and how they negotiate social meanings and construct their identity through stylistic practices in classroom discourse and English as a lingua franca (ELF) interactions. Through a verbal guise test, semi-structured interviews, and auditory impression analysis, the results indicated a strong preference for native-based English varieties, with American English linguistic resources being more prevalent in the speech of EP students than those of British English. The findings revealed that in ELF talks all EP students adopted native-like speech styles, which were perceived as more socially prestigious and communicatively advantageous, to indexically construct a "proficient" English speaker identity and establish a sense of in-group global community membership. However, within EP classroom discourse, certain participants demonstrated style-shifting by the local variants of Thai-accented English to

project a "Popular" identity, distancing themselves from the "Bookishness" group within the EP community of practice. The study underscores the importance of native-based norms and socially sensitive pedagogical approaches, enabling students to construct their distinct identities through L2 pronunciation while also recognizing the plurality of English varieties present in their particular linguistic landscape.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca (ELF), attitudes and identity, stylistic practices, L2 pronunciation, classroom context

Introduction

English as a lingua franca (ELF) has gained considerable attention among sociolinguists and educators, offering insights into the complexities of interactions among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. With non-native English speakers now outnumbering native speakers, there is a growing call for a paradigm shift toward a socially sensitive pedagogy (Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2005). Scholars recognize the intricate connection between language and identity (Joseph, 2004) and express reservations about the dominance of native norms as the sole pedagogical model. With that said, L2 speakers should be recognized as legitimate English users who may prefer to speak with local(ized) linguistic features to show their ethnic distinctiveness, distancing themselves from native speakers' cultures.

While there have been debates surrounding the hegemony of native-based norms, the concept of "identity" in most previous studies is mainly linked to presumed ethnic identity, overlooking identities as emergent and negotiated entities in local discourse, and possibly multiple (Bucholtz, 1999). In the context of today's globalized culture, it is argued that L2 English speakers should have the freedom to construct new identities beyond their pre-determined national identities (Higgins, 2010) by speaking a native variety that provide them with "a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture" (Arnett, 2002, p. 777), presenting themselves as global citizens through their L2 pronunciation. From this perspective, L2 English speakers are viewed as active agents who deliberately draw on the linguistic resources of other social groups, including native-based English, to project their desired self-images (Bucholtz, 1999, 2004; Coupland, 2007; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). In light of these controversial arguments, English language teaching calls for further research to explore language learners' genuine needs and how they

discursively construct their identities through L2 pronunciation in today's globalized culture with speakers from diverse social backgrounds.

In the Thai context, little empirical evidence exists on whether Thai English (TE) speakers desire to present themselves as global or local citizens in ELF interactions, and the relationship between attitudes and identity remains understudied. Some studies have explored Thai people's attitudes toward different English varieties and their preferred identities (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Kangkun, 2018; Ploywattanawong & Trakulkasemsuk, 2014; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018; Snodin & Young, 2015), but few have included participants' linguistic performance in actual speech, focusing only on surveys, questionnaires, or interviews. This gap in evidence that takes into account both attitudes and linguistic practices leaves us with only a partial understanding of how identity is constructed in interactions, as speakers may favor specific English accents but choose not to adopt them in speech (see Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006) or speak certain accents despite negative attitudes (see Edwards, 1985). Additionally, the impact of globalization on perceptions of global/local identities in ELF settings and the presence of "hybrid identity", which combines both global and local identities among L2 speakers (Pennycook, 2006), remain relatively unexplored in Thailand. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating how Thai learners of English construct their identity in academic discourse and ELF interactions, examining the correlation between attitudes and linguistic repertoires, as well as their perceptions toward global/local identities in ELF settings.

English education in Thailand has undergone significant changes, becoming compulsory from primary school and increasingly used as a lingua franca. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community has underscored the value of English for job seeking and career advancement (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In response to the global demand for English skills, the government introduced English-language-learning policies in Thailand, allowing schools to implement an English program (EP) as the medium of instruction (Punthumasen, 2007). In line with other ASEAN countries, the two English varieties set as the primary pedagogical objectives in English classrooms are British English (BE) and American English (AE), with their dominance also extending to entertainment industry where Thai citizens enjoy music and movies from the USA and the UK. Given the fact that L2 Thai learners of English studying in English programs are extensively exposed to English in unprecedented ways through formal classroom instruction, media, international travel, and possible ELF encounters in the globalized world, it is crucial to explore the relationship between their attitudes and identity by examining how they negotiate social meanings as well as purposefully create linguistic patterns to construct their identity in academic discourse and ELF interactions. The insights gained could lead to

pedagogical implications in English language policy and instruction in Thailand.

Literature Review

Attitudes, Identity, and ELF

In response to such calls of paradigm shifting that move toward a more socially sensitive pedagogy, a range of studies have been conducted to throw light on how L2 learners of English perceived different English accents and their preferred identities in ELF settings. The term *English as a lingua franca* (ELF) in this study entails the interactional discourse where English is used as a chosen language, and often the only option, among L2 speakers who do not share a native language and a common national culture (Jenkins, 2007).

Numerous studies regarding the relationship between language attitudes and identity have provided insights into how different English varieties are perceived in terms of intelligibility and accent prestige, as well as their preferred identities by diverse groups of people. The results consistently showed that native varieties of English such as AE and BE are considered to be a more desired variety due to their positive attributes and are recognized as a more preferable model of pronunciation (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Ploywattanawong & Trakulkasemsuk, 2014; Rindal, 2010; Snodin & Young, 2015; Sung, 2014). Even so, some studies also revealed that L2 speakers of English sometimes want to avoid associating themselves with native speakers' cultures and choose to speak with a localized accent because local linguistic features, which are stigmatized in a global discourse, give them more positive social value in the local discourse (Rickford, 1986, as cited in Eckert, 2012; Sung, 2016).

In Thailand, an attitudinal study that attempted to explore the relationship between language attitudes and identity construction by Prakaianurat and Kangkun (2018) also helps shed light on how Thai working adults, the users rather than learners of English, perceived native (British and American) and non-native (Filipino, Singaporean, and Thai) English varieties. They found that Thai English users in the workplace still favored and aimed for native-based English varieties as their pronunciation models, mainly due to intelligibility, the ownership of English, and identity reasons. In addition, Kangkun's (2018) study on the relationship between attitudes and identity construction in a public speaking classroom context showed that the majority of participants aimed for AE due to its ease of pronunciation, familiarity, and intelligibility and almost half of them successfully produced the English accent of choice, highlighting the significance of human agency of Thai users of English.

Speech Style and Identity

People can use different styles or ways of talking to project their identities in varying social contexts. According to Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985, p. 181), linguistic choices are "acts of identity" in which speakers can purposefully create linguistic patterns to project their identities in relation to the groups that reflect their desired affiliations or distinctions with specific groups, underlining human agency. Rather than being viewed in the restricted sense of a static or pre-determined entity, identity in this study is viewed as dynamic, (co)constituted, and multifaceted in ongoing moments of local interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Coupland, 2007), as well as the outcome of person's inner and outer worlds, which can vary depending on the contexts.

To analyze the complex idea of identity and show how linguistic resources in English are used to project personas in L2 context, this study uses a sociolinguistic approach of '*indexicality*', a mechanism whereby linguistic features are linked with social meanings (Ochs, 1992). According to Eckert (2003), *stylistic practice* refers to "adapting linguistic variables available out in a larger world to the construction of social meaning on a local level" (p. 44), and social meanings in this sense refer to the meanings ascribed to and derived from shared cultural values, historical backgrounds, and societal standards within a given society (Coupland, 2007, p. 18). The concept of *style* in sociolinguistics provides insights into how a repertoire of linguistic resources index social meanings below the discursive level and how linguistic structures are indexically tied to specific personas or identity categories. For example, Kiesling's (1998) study on the use of the apical variant of (ING) revealed that fraternity brothers used apical (-in) ('goin') to evoke a sense of power and indexed confrontational stances. Podesva (2008) investigated the use of /t/ and /d/ in speech styles of a male medical student, Heath. While using considerably more instances of /t/ release in a professional context where he projected a competent and educated persona, he was found to shift his speech style in a social context using /t/ with a significantly longer burst of aspiration to project a 'diva' persona among friends at a barbeque. In an ethnic-sensitive context of Asian African youth, Bucholtz (2004) studied on how two Laotian American girls in a California high school produced their speech styles to project their identities in a way they wished to be seen, distancing themselves from each other through the use of slangs and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) features. In the context of L2 speakers, Rampton (2016) examined the style-shifting in linguistic variables such as (t), postvocalic (l), and a lexical set of GOAT and FACE by an Indian immigrant who had moved to London and learned English in his adulthood.

It was found that in his English speech style, Indian variants were more likely to be used when talking with his Punjabi friends at home and least likely to be used at work with his Anglo colleagues, allowing him to project himself as "a now-established citizen of multi-ethnic London".

While the body of literature on stylistic practices and style-shifting across contexts is growing in Asian countries and L2 learners, little attention has been paid to how Thai speakers of English make use of linguistic resources to construct their identities, especially in ELF interactions. In several earlier studies, participants' preferred identities when speaking English were examined based on their attitudes toward different English varieties and their self-reported linguistic behaviors, disregarding the actual productions of linguistic resources into their analysis. Just as Rampton (2016) proposed, linguistic resources, discursive practices, and language ideology need to be investigated together to avoid misleading assumptions. Furthermore, since learning another language involves the process of associating our sense of self to new worlds and new ways of projecting personas through L2 pronunciation (Ushioda, 2013), insights into identity construction are critical for L2 learning, especially when "the global spread of English challenges learners of English to develop both a global and a local voice" (Kramsch, 1999, p. 131). Therefore, it is of interest to explore how learners shift or reshape the social meaning of phonological features to a local construction of identity. The purpose of the current study was to investigate how Thai learners of English project their personas in academic settings and in ELF encounters, the degree to which their attitudes are correlated with their linguistic repertoires in the formation of identity, and their perceptions toward global/local identities in ELF settings. The research questions were:

1) What are the attitudes of Thai learners of English in English programs toward different English varieties, especially American English (AE), British English (BE), and Thai English (TE)?
2) What is the dominant English accent that Thai learners of English in English program aim for?
3) To what extent does their L2 speech style correlate with desired pronunciation?
4) How do Thai learners of English in an English program project their personas in an academic context and in an ELF conversational setting?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 15 male EP student volunteers aged 16 to 17 years old, who were studying in Mathayom 5 (grade 11) in a Thai public school's English program. The program includes subjects such as English, mathematics, science, and physical education — all taught in English by foreign or Thai teachers. The majority of EP students have been part of the EP programs since Mathayom 1, which means they have approximately 5 years of experience in the program. This duration of shared educational experiences has played a pivotal role in forming in-group solidarity and establishing certain ways of talking within the EP classroom. Consequently, this context can be recognized as a community of practice (CofP), where students with a common interest and goals engage in shared language practices, fostering a sense of belonging within the program. Since the objective of a sample here is to explore the probability of making inferences about the population rather than forming "a miniature version of the population" (Sankoff, 1998, as cited in Buchstaller & Khattab, 2013, p. 78), this research study used a purposive sampling technique to target specific self-defined groups of people as informants to gather data and answer research questions. The informants and this public school were chosen as a research site based on convenience sampling as one of the researchers is an acquaintance with a biology teacher in an English Program (Mr. Bio), who assisted in recording the data and allowed the researcher to observe the classroom teaching. The biology classroom activities also suited the research design as participants were required to discuss biology lessons with classmates in English. This allowed an observation of participants' linguistic resources used in an academic context where students focused on message delivery rather than their manner of speech or whether their English in terms of grammar or pronunciation was being graded, unlike a classroom where English is taught as a subject. The positive student-teacher relationships with Mr. Bio also helped to minimize the effect of distance and power, as well as observer's paradox that might arise if data were collected purely by an outsider.

The research study ensured ethical considerations by providing participants with an information sheet and informed consent (See more details in Ethical Concerns). After one week, they were administered an Oxford Placement test (OQPT) (2001) to evaluate their English proficiency. The students included in the study were upper-intermediate level learners of English, who had a minimum of three years of experience studying in an English program and over six years of studying English as a second or foreign language.

Research Procedures

The research consisted of two major phases: the production tasks and the perception tasks. The production tasks involved a classroom presentation, ELF interactions, and a reading of the wordlist, while the perception tasks involved semi-structured interviews and a verbal guise test (VGT). The breakdown of each step is provided below.

Production Task

The linguistic data were sampled from recordings of (1) a project presentation in the classroom, (2) a casual conversation in an ELF setting, and (3) a reading of the wordlist. The data were transcribed and analyzed based on auditory impression using seven phonological variables, namely (r), (t), (ɵ), (ð), GOAT, FACE, and consonant cluster to determine whether each variant showed stronger global or local affiliations.

At the initial stage of data collection, participants' linguistic behaviors were recorded during a class presentation. Since school is where students learn not only a new language, but also "new socio-academic identities" (Cummins, 1994), it is interesting to observe how EP students make linguistic choices to discursively construct their identity, especially while giving a presentation in a classroom where their 29 fellow EP student classmates acted as the audience. To observe the class, the researcher was introduced to the class as someone who was interested in learning how different schools teach the subject and requested permission to observe and record the events in the classroom.

One week after the class presentation, 15 volunteers engaged in a casual conversation about topics, such as games, Netflix series, and travel. It was considered that questions relevant to their daily life should therefore make the participants feel comfortable expressing their opinions and speaking openly, which should minimize the observer's paradox, as the participants would not be overly self-conscious about their manner of speech while being observed. The interview was conducted by a Chinese research assistant (RA) who was fluent in English but spoke with a noticeable Chinese accent. This set the context of talk as an ELF encounter where interactions occur among those who do not share their first language and without the involvement of native speakers. The researcher assistant was trained by the researcher to ask a series of targeted questions designed to elicit the necessary data that aligned with the research objectives.

Following the EFL interactions, each of the participants was asked to read a wordlist while being recorded by the researcher. In total, 46 linguistic

variants were included, 6 tokens of which were (ɵ), (ð), (t), FACE, and consonant clusters, while 8 tokens of which were (r) and GOAT (See appendix). These sociolinguistic variables represent salient phonological features used to determine whether participants' speech styles in all three speech situations examined in the study were associated with global or local affiliations.

The linguistic data was analyzed based on the transcription of recordings from 15 participants across three speech situations by one of the researchers with prior experience in teaching English phonetics and conducting sociolinguistic research. Phonological variable tokens were coded for analysis using an auditory impression technique. Subsequently, the researcher listened to the recordings and determined whether the tokens aligned with BE, AE, or localized TE based on the targeted phonological features outlined in Table 5. With the researcher's background in the field and the perceptual salience of the selected phonological features (for example, the distinction between a monophthongal [e] and a diphthongal [eɪ] in the word "day", the contrast between a non-rhotic [r] and a rhotic [ɹ] in the word "water", or the perceptible nature between a more rounded diphthong [oʊ] and a narrower [əʊ] in the word "show"), it is anticipated that the analysis, although conducted by a single researcher, maintains a necessary level of precision. Tokens that did not conform to AE, BE, or TE were excluded from the analysis. The study applied descriptive statistics to compute mean scores for each phonological variant in different contexts, enabling comparisons among individuals.

Phonological Variables

Building upon the research of Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006), Kirkpatrick (2010), and Wells (1982), the researchers carefully selected a set of seven phonological variables — (r), (t), (ɵ), (ð), GOAT, FACE, and consonant cluster — as criteria in our production tasks. These variables enabled us to assess the extent to which participants' speech aligned with BE, AE, or TE.

These phonological features were chosen for their salient distinctions of one English variety from another. For example, the GOAT vowel (in words like "boat" or "soap") is pronounced as a more rounded diphthong [oʊ] in AE, a narrower [əʊ] in BE, and a monophthong [o] in TE. Variable (ɵ) (in words like "thing" or "three") is consistently pronounced as a voiceless interdental fricative [ɵ] in both BE and AE, while it tends to be pronounced as an unaspirated [t] in TE. These criteria are instrumental in determining whether speakers adopt AE or BE in their speech through variables (r), (t),

GOAT, as well as whether native or non-native speech styles are utilized through variables (t), (ɵ), (ð), GOAT, FACE, and consonant cluster. Detailed descriptions of selected phonological distinctions (adapted from Prakaianurat, 2016) are provided in the appendix.

The term 'British English' (BE) in this study refers to Standard British English or Received Pronunciation (RP), while American English (AE) refers to General American English (also known as Gen Am). Despite debate over whether it has already been formed as a "full-fledged" variation of English, Thai English (TE) in this study refers to "Thai-accented" English, which appears to be phonologically comparable to Kirkpatrick's (2010) ASEAN ELF model in terms of both segmental (the reduced consonant clusters and the substitution of some consonant and vowel sounds) and suprasegmental levels (the syllable-timed rhythm or the stress position in a pronoun or the end of a sentence). While such suprasegmental levels and other connected speech features, such as assimilation, elision, or pitch movement, are also crucial for assessing speakers' alignment with native speech patterns, this study focused on segmental levels. This choice aligned with the research objectives, seeking to determine not only whether participants used native or non-native varieties but also whether they used AE or BE. By examining the phonological similarities and differences among AE, BE, and TE at the segmental level, we can gauge the extent to which participants' linguistic resources reveal a stronger affiliation with the global community (BE or AE) or the local Thai community (TE). Furthermore, although the pitch movement and intonation could have helped determine the English variety in question, other phenomena such as linking and assimilation in connected speech are more optional in actual production and would not be as accurate in determining the variety in question.

Perception Tasks

The participants were asked to participate in two attitude tests: semi-structured interviews and a VGT. Due to limited space at the research site, the study commenced with conducting the semi-structured interviews to uncover the nuanced complexities of participants' attitudes and provide a foundation for understanding participants' attitudes before incorporating VGT to complement and further enhance the findings.

In the semi-structured interviews, the participants engaged in one-on-one conversations with the researcher where they were asked a series of questions to elicit their attitudes toward different English varieties, their preferred English variety in ELF encounters, and the rationales behind their choices. Each interview lasted approximately from 10 to 15 minutes. The interview sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and subjected to analysis

using the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), as applied in Sung's (2014) study. This approach was chosen to allow themes to naturally emerge from the data based on recurring and significant findings, without imposing predetermined categories. Themes were compared and contrasted within each participant's data and across all participants, utilizing two levels of case analysis (within-case and cross-case) to refine and reassess the findings.

Following the interviews, participants listened to the VGT and rated different English varieties on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Building upon Ladegaard's (2000) and Rindal's (2010) studies, this study specifically focused on eight semantically labelled dimensions — education, intelligence, friendliness, formality, casualness, intelligibility, good for job seeking, and good for academic purpose. These dimensions were purposefully selected to avoid a lengthy task and to align with our research objectives, particularly examining participants' perceptions of English in educational and ELF settings. Notably, certain semantic dimensions previously included in similar studies yet deemed least relevant to our research questions, such as leadership or ambition, were excluded from this study. Instead, we added the dimensions of "good for job seeking" and "good for academic purpose", since they precisely suited our research goals. The VGT used carefully selected native speakers of each accent, who provided directions on a map as they would to their friends. This method ensured more naturalistic stimuli compared to reading passages, while still maintaining content control. To analyze the VGT data, this study used the calculation of descriptive statistics (mean value and standard deviations, SD) for the participants' overall evaluations into the three speaking types with different English varieties.

While a semi-structured interview can be used to elicit attitudes and beliefs that cannot be directly observed (Kvale, 1996), VGT helps elicit people's covert attitudes that cannot explicitly be observed by a direct interview (Garrett et al, 2003). It is hoped that these holistic approaches could help us to explore the participants' overt and covert attitudes, providing a more thorough understanding of their perceptions of different English varieties and potential indexical meanings of different phonological variables.

Results

To shed light on the underlying reasons behind people's linguistic choices or stylistic practices, the study first presents the results of participants' perception of different English varieties, followed by the production results. This sequential approach aims to facilitate readers' understanding of the factors influencing individuals' linguistic behavior and to uncover potential

correlations, discrepancies, or patterns between participants' attitudes and their actual language usage.

Perception

Attitudes from VGT

Table 1

Mean scores of participants' attitudes toward British, American, and Thai English in 8 dimensions.

DIMENSION	BE	AE	TE
Education	4.2	4.0	3.1
Intelligence	4.1	3.9	3.1
Friendliness	3.7	4.7	3.8
Formality	3.9	3.4	3.3
Casualness	3.8	4.5	3.3
Intelligibility	4.4	4.2	3.2
Good for Job Seeking	4.5	3.7	2.3
Good for Academic Purpose	4.4	3.8	2.3
Mean	**4.1**	**4.0**	**3.1**
SD	**0.92**	**0.95**	**1.01**

The findings from the VGT explicitly showed that the 15 EP students rated native-based English varieties as superior to TE across all dimensions, indicating that native English accents are still a more preferred English accent. Both BE and AE received similar overall ratings, with BE slightly surpassing AE with an average score of 4.1 (SD 0.92) compared to 4.0 (SD 0.95). However, TE was not rated extremely negative but rather moderately positive, as reflected by an overall mean score of 3.1. The slightly higher standard deviation for TE of 1.01 suggests that the participants had more diverse attitudes toward TE compared to the other two native-based accents.

A closer examination of the data from Table 1 revealed that between the two native English varieties in the study, BE was perceived considerably more favorably in professional and educational context, with the scores of 4.5 and 4.4 for "good for job seeking" and "good for academic purpose" respectively, underscoring the perception that BE is a superior pronunciation model in formal situations among EP students. By contrast, AE was rated more prestigiously in terms of friendliness (4.7) and casualness (4.5) than BE and TE. Of all the linguistic dimensions for TE, the best rating was for friendliness (3.8), while the lowest, and relatively negative, ratings went to being a good model of English in professional and educational settings, with

scores of 2.3 for both these linguistic dimensions. Thus, these results suggested that it is possible for people to feel moderate toward certain English varieties but perceive certain English accents as an unacceptable model for their pronunciation in particular situations, specifically in formal settings. Given this, it was apparent that the linguistic dimensions of "good for job seeking" and "good for academic purpose" emerged as notable distinguishing features, setting non-native English varieties, such as TE, apart from both BE and AE among the participants. However, notably, this study, given its exploratory and qualitative nature, relies on simple descriptive statistics for data evaluation.

Attitudes from Semi-structured Interview and Their Accent Aim

As part of the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked about their target English variety and the rationale behind their choice. The findings revealed that out of the 15 participants, 7 participants said they aimed for AE due to its attributes, such as easier to understand, clarity, and universality, while only 2 expressed a desire to speak with BE since BE is perceived to be unique:

> Well, American accent is one of the most popular accents of all as it's used worldwide. It's universal and better for communication.
> (Participant 7, AE aimer)

> Because American accent is the accent that's pronounced clearly, and I like the flow of American accent. I think British is a little bit hard to understand sometimes because it's not pronounced fully like the word water [wɔːɾɚ]. They pronounce it like water [wɔːʔə]. (Participant 5, AE aimer)

> I aim for British English because I watch a movie and British English seems very cool to speak. American English sounds too normal. I want to be unique. (Participant 13, BE aimer)

While 9 participants said they aimed specifically for either AE or BE as their accent goal, the remaining participants (6) reported no preference for such a particular aim. Rather, they mentioned the use of mixed accents based their prior experiences of exposures to diverse English accents, while highlighting the significance of pronunciation when speaking to achieve communicative goals:

> I don't really have an aim. I mean my accent changes all the time. I used to have Australian accent because I used to live in Australia. Then I came back I kind of have American and British accent. And now, I kind of have mixed American, British, and Australian accent, but it's understandable …. Sometimes I say water [wɔːtʰə] sometimes I just say [wɔːɾɚ] or [wɔːʔə]. It's like it's always a mix. It just comes out of my mouth without even realizing it. (Participant 6, Global aimer)

> I would say I'm not aiming for any because when I was in primary school, I was taught with British English, but later I was taught American English when in high school. So, it's mixed, and I don't think aim for any. (Participant 10, Global aimer)

Despite not aiming for a specific accent, these 6 participants still exhibited attitudes toward specific English varieties and appeared to favor native-English varieties over non-native ones, such as TE. This group of participants will be referred to as "Global aimers" as they indicated a desire to sound like native speakers without specifically aiming for either AE or BE, but not TE. In further inquiries about whether they would speak with TE, especially when TE could also lead to mutual understandings in interactions, Participant 3, Participant 2, and Participant 7 said they still wanted to sound like a native speaker because native-based English accents could probably provide them with better professional and educational opportunities in the future. Similarly, those aiming for a particular native accent also viewed native English varieties as superior to TE in professional and educational contexts. In other words, speaking with a native accent made them feel more professionally competent.

> When you speak English with Thai accent, you kinda lack professionalism. (Participant 7, Global aimer)

> I actually want to sound like a native speaker because it would be beneficial when I have to communicate with foreigners, when I have to work in the future, or when I study in university where I have to meet more diverse people. It shows professionalism. (Participant 3, Global aimer)

> If I speak Thai-accented English to foreigners, I think they can still understand. But, you know, in job application or interview in the future, if you speak with Thai accent, you'll look a little bit unprofessional, and it might impact the way people look at you. (Participant 5, AE aimer)

All the extracts above suggest that the participants perceived English not only as a means of communication but also as a means of projecting professional competence, which might yield favorable results for their future career pathways.

Even in Asian ELF encounters where English is used a default language among those who do not share the first language, 14 participants stated that they will generally speak with native-based English accents rather than the local Thai English accent, especially when they know their interlocutors well or in formal contexts. TE, by contrast, was reported to be used mostly only with Thai close friends or grandparents, and deliberately used in a joking manner.

> For those who I don't know well, I will talk with my normal, more international accent like when I talk with my foreign teachers. (Participant 10, Global aimer)

> I'd talk with other Asian people the same way, with my international accent, but with Thai friends I might talk with Thai accent because it's fun, not with others because it might be offensive to them (Participant 9, Global aimer)

> I'd only use Thai English accent in a joking way with friends because I usually want to be seen as a professional, fluent speaker of English. Like when we're talking some stuff and a certain word that Thai people pronounce that native speakers find funny like "over" [oˈvɚ] (Participant 15, AE aimer)

Like Participant 15 who provided an example of using TE as a funny exchange, Participant 3 (a Global aimer) also described a situation in which he intentionally used TE to create a "cozier" and humorous conversation.

> Interviewer: So, basically, you talk with native English accent like this, right? And, do you sometimes want to sound more Thai or talk with Thai accent when speaking with other Asian people?
>
> Participant 3: I think it depends on how close the relationship is. For example, some teachers in my school are Asian, and when we're talking out of class, sometimes I might speak with Thai English to make it more cozy. But, when it's official, I try to maintain my normal accent.
>
> Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?

> Participant 3: Like when I speak with my teacher, and I'd like to joke with him. For example, I talked with him like teacher teacher I failed math again ar teacher.

The extract above revealed that Participant 3 considered native-based accents to be more appropriate for formal classroom discourse and official situations, and therefore avoided speaking with TE in such contexts. During his last turn-taking, he shifted his speech style to provide an example, incorporating a range of Thai-accented phonological features. These included a monotonous tone, a rising intonation at the end of the word "teacher" instead of a falling tone, the repetition of the word "teacher", the use of a monophthongal [e] instead of a diphthong [eɪ] in the word "again", and the inclusion of the Thai particle "ar" The example of this possible style-shifting strategy he employed while interacting with his teacher demonstrates Participant 3's awareness of Thai-accented English resources and ability to freely select from from a range of available linguistic resources to project different facets of his persona.

Only one participant, Participant 14 (AE aimer), reported he would sometimes speak with a Thai local accent in EFL encounters, giving his personal anecdote of when a tourist asked for directions as an example:

> When I speak with Asian people, yeah if I'm crossing the road and they want a direction, I will speak with a Thai accent. The example is yesterday when a tourist asked which bus station they should get on, I don't want to speak in that American accent because honestly, I'm not in a good mood. I don't want to put that much effort, and I don't think basic words will confuse them that much. (Participant 14, AE aimer)

This excerpt highlights Participant 14's choice to speak with a Thai local accent in an EFL encounter, which was influenced by his mood. Notably, despite being capable of speaking with a native-like American accent, Participant 14 found it easier and required less effort to communicate using TE. This underscored the need for him to exert additional effort when incorporating native-based phonological resources into his speech styles, indicating that it is not an effortless task.

Ultimately, the results revealed that the participants appear to recognize the importance of accents as a way of projecting multifaceted personas. In addition, the findings suggested that the participants, through metalanguage discussions, were aware of the distinguishing characteristics of different English varieties, which give us a glimpse of their perceptions toward different English accents and where in such speech situations

individuals may use certain English varieties to discursively construct their identities. Since it is important to see how they make use of linguistic repertoires in different speech contexts in real production, the following section will provide the distribution of phonological features used to give insight into the extent to which their speech styles aligned with their preferred pronunciation.

Production

This section used an auditory impression technique to analyze the actual production in three speech contexts, namely a reading of a wordlist, a classroom presentation, and an ELF interaction. In line with Rindal (2010), the terms AE and BE in this study entail not only standard L1 accents but also acquired native-based linguistic repertories. Their pronunciation of AE and BE, while not entirely native-like, can still be categorized as AE, BE, or TE based on their phonological distinctiveness (See appendix). These categories were also used to examine whether their pronunciation aligned more with global or local communities in different contexts. Tokens that were not realized as AE, BE, or TE were excluded from the analysis.

Table 2 presents the percentages of phonological variants used by all 15 participants (6 AE aimers, 2 BE aimers, and 7 Global aimers). The results showed that EP students pronounced 71% of the analyzed tokens with an American-like pronunciation, as determined by the three sociolinguistic variables (ɹ), (t), and GOAT. Furthermore, based on (t), (ɵ), (ð), FACE, GOAT, and consonant clusters, 83% of the analyzed tokens were found to relate to global communities rather than local communities.

Table 2

Mean percentages of American English, British English, and Thai-accented English variants for 7 phonological variables.

Variable	AE variants	BE variants	TE variants	N
(ɹ)	76%	24%	Ø	1,903
(t)	35%	53%	7%	297
GOAT	73%	12%	15%	1,009
All Variables	**71%**	**23%**	**6%**	**3,209**
(ɵ)	87%		13%	647
(ð)	75%		15%	1,494
FACE	78%		22%	917
Consonant Cluster	90%		10%	1,430
All Variables	**83%**		**17%**	**5,794**

Even though the majority of the analyzed tokens aligned with American features, speakers' linguistic choices were in line with the accents they aimed for based on the production results for each individual. According to Ladegaard (2000), if speakers used over two-thirds of variants related to their target accent, they were considered users of that accent, indicating successful attainment. The production results by Global aimers were excluded from this part since the objective of this analysis was to test the correlation between target accent and their actual production. As can be seen from Table 3, all 6 participants who aimed for AE achieved their desired accent, as they consistently pronounced more than two-thirds of their words using American-like variants. Specifically, they produced a higher frequency of AE distinctive features, such as rhotic [ɹ], [ɾ], and [oʊ], compared to non-rhotic [r], [tʰ], and [əʊ]. Even though the use of flapping [ɾ] by Participants 12 and 14 was lower than that of [tʰ], the overall results still indicated the clear influence of their accent aim on their actual production. In contrast, both BE aimers did not attain their accent goals, with the overall mean percentages of BE phonological variants being less than 66.66%. While they used more non-rhotic [r] and did not flap their /t/ sounds, they rarely pronounced words with a British [əʊ], but, instead, used noticeably more monophthongal [o] in their GOAT vowels. Despite these discrepancies, a clear correlation between their L2 pronunciations and their intended accent preferences was apparent.

Table 3

Percentages of variables and degrees of accent attainment among AE and BE aimers.

	(r)		(t)			GOAT			Accent Attainment Degree
	rhotic [ɹ]	N	[ɾ]	[tʰ]	N	[oʊ]	[əʊ]	N	
Participant 4 (AE)	92%	108	55%	44%	22	85%	15%	54	85%
Participant 5 (AE)	97%	115	56%	33%	18	83%	1%	69	89%
Participant 11 (AE)	96%	134	67%	17%	18	85%	15%	48	91%
Participant 12 (AE)	80%	103	38%	50%	16	80%	7%	71	76%
Participant 14 (AE)	94%	155	31%	48%	29	73%	0%	83	81%
Participant 15 (AE)	91%	127	81%	19%	16	90%	0%	123	90%
Participant 8 (BE)	38%	139	0%	79%	24	35%	0%	51	49%

Participant 13 (BE)	16%	182	0%	70%	20	36%	1%	70	62%

In terms of global or local affiliations, Table 4 reveals that most of the participants (13 out of 15) predominantly employed native-based phonological features in their L2 pronunciation, with the total percentages of global identity affiliations being over 80%. Only two participants, both BE aimers, failed to foreground global affiliations as desired, with the total percentages of 46% and 24%, respectively, of native-based variables being used. Specifically, while the use of global variants varied considerably across different linguistic variables among AE and BE aimers, those not aiming for either AE or BE (Global aimers) consistently used more than 80% of global variants in their speech.

Table 4

Degrees of global identity affiliations through six phonological variables.

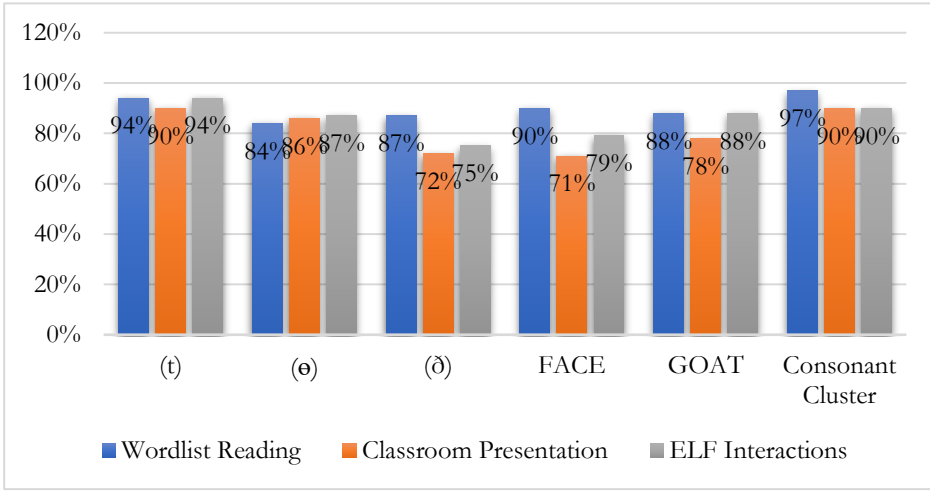
	Global Identity Affiliation							
	(t)	**GOAT**	**FACE**	**(ɵ)**	**(ð)**	**Consonant Cluster**	**N**	**Total**
Participant 4 (AE)	100%	85%	76%	92%	87%	97%	294	91%
Participant 5 (AE)	94%	84%`	97%	98%	89%	90%	311	90 %
Participant 11 (AE)	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	371	100%
Participant 12 (AE)	87%	87%	67%	79%	79%	88%	401	82%
Participant 14 (AE)	83%	73%	82%	89%	79%	93%	479	83%
Participant 15 (AE)	94%	90%	92%	100%	77%	96%	501	90%
Participant 8 (BE)	79%	35%	29%	74%	32%	72%	390	46%
Participant 13 (BE)	75%	37%	17%	12%	12%	50%	481	24%
Participant 1 (Global)	95%	94%	84%	81%	82%	99%	436	89%
Participant 2 (Global)	95%	98%	81%	94%	82%	96%	322	89%
Participant 3 (Global)	94%	94%	100%	100%	76%	98%	376	93%
Participant 6 (Global)	100%	100%	91%	100%	98%	92%	358	96%

Participant 7 (Global)	100%	97%	97%	86%	70%	95%	379	88%
Participant 9 (Global)	100%	98%	96%	100%	94%	99%	302	96%
Participant 10 (Global)	100%	89%	82%	89%	81%	93%	497	87%

Despite the prevalent use of native phonological features, it is noteworthy that EP speakers showed some variability in their utilization of these variants across different contexts, with varying degrees of usage for each variant. Chart 1 shows that while the frequencies of usage for variables (t), (ɵ), (ð), and consonant clusters remained relatively consistent across contexts, the use of native-based variants for the FACE and GOAT vowels was noticeably lower in a classroom presentation context. This suggests that participants tended to shift their speech styles by incorporating more local phonological variants such as monophthongal [o] and [e] when giving a presentation in a classroom context. This shift can be seen as a way for these EP students to align themselves with the EP classroom community, indexing an in-group membership and establishing a rapport through the specific linguistic practices shared within the EP classroom context.

Chart 1

Degrees of global identity affiliations in three speech contexts



While the quantitative distribution of phonological variables in different contexts offers some understanding of style shifting in the use of FACE and GOAT vowels, analyzing how and when participants' speech

styles become more localized during ongoing moments of interactions can provide a more holistic and comprehensive understandings of this style shifting rather than merely relying exclusively on quantitative data. Notably, while the local variant [e] was more commonly used overall than [o], a clear divergence emerged specifically within the classroom context, as four participants showed a pronounced preference for [o] over [e]. In the following section, we present discourse analysis extracts to explore how EP students used localized phonological variables, examining the nuanced dynamics of stylistic practices among participants. The selected extracts highlight distinct occurrences of global/local variant usage that contrast with other styles in different contexts, as well as specific stances taken by speakers in interactional moments. Collectively, these elements contribute to the creation of socially meaningful stylistic meanings (Podesva, 2008).

Extract 1: Bigger Banana

Context: a classroom presentation.

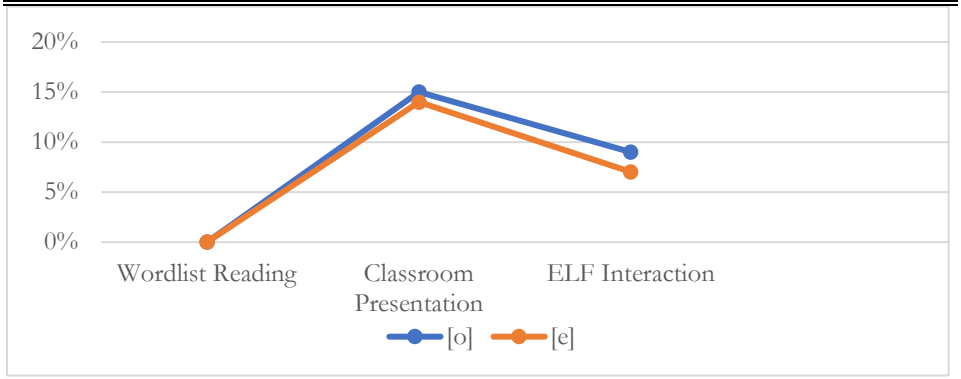
Participant 15 (AE aimer) discussed the benefits of GMO products.

(Key: ***local variants***)

[noʊ] [pleɪses]
1 […] If you want an eggplant or a banana to be big, you know, like to fit some places
[soʊ] [ɑːlsoʊ]
2 <laugh> so if you want a banana to be big you can also do that too. You can make a
[noʊ]
3 banana bigger for your purposes whatever you wanted for. I don't know where you're
4 going to put it but if you want a banana to be big you can basically genetically
[so] [proʊ] [dʒiɛmoʊ] [so]
5 engineer it. ***So***, that's pros and cons of GMO […] ***so*** if something is essentially
[neɪtʃɚ] [dʒiɛmo]
6 impossible in nature, people will use ***GMO*** and genetically engineer it to get that
[so] [sʌmdeɪ]
7 ***So*** you want a dog with like three eyes yeah they might be able to do that someday.

Chart 2

Percentages of local variants [o] and [e] used by Participant 15 in three contexts.



In this extract, Participant 15 explained the potential benefits of GMO products, starting with genetically engineered food that offers improved taste and animal breeds that have enhanced physical robustness. However, he further provided some unconventional examples to support his claims, mentioning the possibility of three-eyed dogs or bigger bananas where he humorously suggested it could serve purposes beyond consumption, with a playful tone and even a laughter (line 2). Additionally, during this particular moment of the presentation, Participant 15 shifted his speech style by incorporating the local variant of the monophthongal [o] in words like "***so***" [so] and "***GMO***" [dʒiɛmo], adding a distinctive style to his presentation delivery. Prior to this introduction of examples, Participant 15 had primarily utilized a more standard American speech style, such as "know" [noʊ] "so" [soʊ] or "also" [ɑ:lsoʊ], and the use of AE variants was also prevalent in the other speech contexts, as shown in Chart 2. However, in this specific example, his linguistic choices and the shift in his stance indicated a deliberate transition from a serious and informative presenter to a more entertaining and lighthearted approach. This shift in stances, both in terms of speech style and delivery, subtly marked and contrasted his speech styles, thus indexing a stance of in-group membership within this EP academic discourse and revealing different facets of his identity as a professional yet approachable and playful speaker.

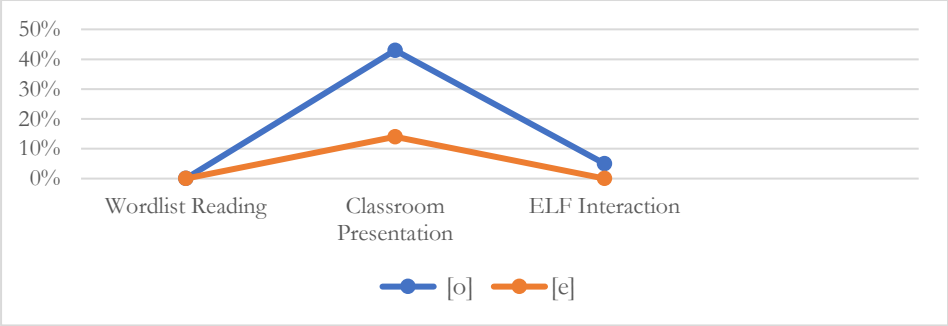
Extract 2: Everything has two sides – So as GMO. [sic]
Context: a classroom presentation.
Participant 5 (AE aimer) discussed the advantages of GMO products.
(Key: ***local variants***)

[dʒiɛmoʊ] [dʒiɛmo]
1 And some of the advantages of GMOs are that ***GMO*** plants are designed to be
[so][moʊst]
2 healthier and cheaper to produce ***so.*** Most of the citizens can have access to it in a
[loʊ] [dʒiɛmoʊ]

3 low price. And, another advantage of GMO food includes the IT has more. It has
[tɛɪst]
4 healthier nutrition, fewer pesticides. And sometimes even better taste. But, right,
[so] [dʒiɛmo]
5 everything has two sides. ***So*** as ***GMO***.

Chart 3

Percentages of local variants [o] and [e] used by Participant 5 in three contexts.



Similar to Participant 15, Participant 5 demonstrated a noticeable shift in speech style during his presentation on GMO benefits in the EP classroom. As shown in Chart 3, Participant 5 predominantly used monophthongal [o] for about half of the GOAT vowels in the presentation delivery, a usage noticeably more prevalent than in his ELF interactions. Specifically, words like "GMO" and "so" were pronounced as [dʒiɛmo] and [so] respectively in the classroom presentation, instead of [dʒiɛmou] and [soʊ]. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Participant 5 employed the monophthongal [e] to a slightly greater extent during the classroom presentation, while it was entirely absent in his ELF interactions.

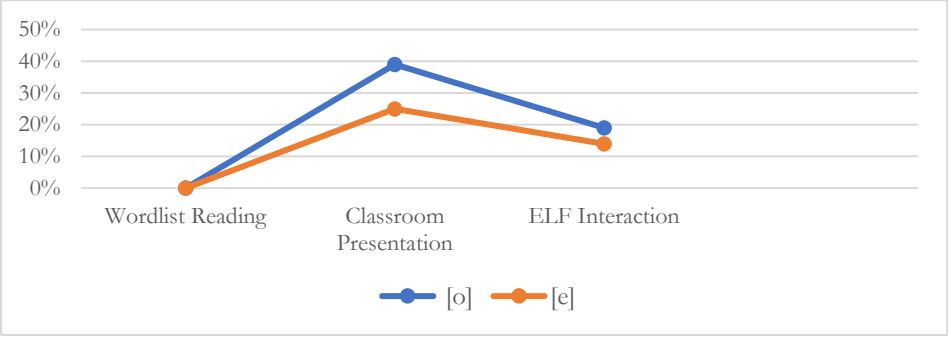
However, unlike Participant 15, Participant 5 adopted a broader range of local speech styles, occasionally speaking with a monotonous tone or ending sentences without a falling tone. This distinct contrast in speech styles between the classroom and ELF contexts, observed at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels, indicated Participant 5's deliberate use of stylistic practices to align himself with the in-group identity within the EP community, in contrast to his ELF interactions where he projected a competent, global persona through native-based linguistic resources.

Extract 3: Place?
Context: ELF interaction.
Participant 14 (AE aimer) talking to the Chinese research assistant – RA.
(Key: ***local variants***)

1 RA: So, what do you like to do in your free time?
[plɛ] [plɛ]
2 Participant 14: Probably ***play***. Like ***play*** with my brother or something. I don't have like
[plɛ] [geɪm] [so] [pleɪ]
3 a computer to ***play*** games with my friends, ***so*** I usually play football and
4 basketball.
5 RA: Yeah. Sports guy. So, what is your favorite place of all time?
[pleɪs] [pleɪs]
6 Participant 14: [Uh] Place? Place?
7 RA: I mean, like, for travelling. Do you have a favorite place to go?
[pleɪs]
8 Participant 14: Place. Probably Japan. The food there is very delicious.

Chart 4

The percentages of local variants [o] and [e] used by Participant 14 in three contexts.



Among the 15 participants, only Participant 14 expressed a preference for speaking with local TE in ELF settings. Like Participant 5 and 15, Participant 14 exhibited distinct variations in speech style, incorporating the local TE linguistic features [o] and [e] in classroom contexts, as can be seen in Chart 4.

Extract 3 provides a glimpse into Participant 14's conversation with a Chinese research assistant during an ELF interaction, where he initially adhered to the TE speech style, as he had expressed his intention to do so. In lines 2 and 3, when asked about recreational activities, Participant 14 mentioned playing with his brother, using monophthongal [e] in the word "play" three times and [so] instead of [soʊ] in line 3.

However, an interesting shift in styles occurred when Participant 14 encountered difficulty understanding the question posed by the ELF

interlocutor in line 5. In response to this comprehension challenge, Participant 14 repeated the question using native-based phonological features [pleɪs] twice and subsequently embraced a more native-sounding accent throughout the rest of the ELF interaction. By adopting a native-based accent, Participant 14 aimed to ensure mutual understanding with his Chinese interlocutor during the ELF interaction. This highlights Participant 14's deliberate choice to embrace TE features initially to foreground local affiliations in the ELF setting. However, due to comprehension challenges, the practice of using TE features was ultimately overridden by the need for effective communication, leading to the adoption of a more native-like accent. Based on these observations, it can be inferred that Participant 14 recognized native accents as a more effective means of conveying his message in this specific situation and the choice to speak with a more native-sounding accent was viewed as a strategic response to the communicative demands and challenges faced during ELF interactions.

Indeed, these three extracts showed a consistent pattern of greater usage for [o] than [e] in classroom and ELF settings. This discrepancy can possibly be attributed to the saliency of [o] in the articulatory process, specifically due to the lip rounding involved. The distinct articulatory feature of a rounded GOAT vowel may make it more perceptually prominent and draw the attention of the EP students to the distinction of [o] and [oʊ] over [e] and [eɪ], resulting in a more frequent use of the local monophthongal [o] in classroom discourse to align themselves within the local EP community and a greater use of global diphthongal [oʊ] in ELF encounters when they wish to project professionally competent identities.

Discussions and Pedagogical Implications

This study explored EP students' attitudes toward English varieties such as AE, BE, and TE, their preferred identities in academic and ELF settings, and how their L2 pronunciation contributed to their identity construction. The results showed a clear preference for native-based English varieties among EP students, particularly AE, with the greater usage of AE features in speech production and higher ratings given to AE across dimensions. These findings are in line with most reported studies in that AE is the more preferred and more prestigious variety of English among non-native English speakers in different countries (Edwards, 2016; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Rindal, 2010; Snodin & Young, 2015; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018). The present study also revealed that American-like phonological features were more commonly used by EP students, even among participants who were Global aimers.

Another striking result in the study is that EP students prefer to sound like native speakers in their daily life, even in ELF contexts, with almost all of them (13 out of 15) successfully achieving the accent they were aiming for. This preference for native-like accents among Thai EP students differs from the study by Sung (2014) on L2 learners of English in Hong Kong, where some learners expressed a preference for their local identity in ELF contexts, arguing for the importance of expressing local identity in ELF encounters through L2 pronunciation. However, in the present study, almost all the Thai EP students (14 out of 15) reported a preference for speaking with native-based accents in ELF interactions, associating native-based English varieties with positive attributes that could project a positive self-image as proficient, fluent English speakers. Although one participant (Participant 14) mentioned occasionally using a local Thai accent in ELF encounters, further analysis (Extract 3) revealed that he shifted his speech style from using local TE variants to adopting a more native-like accent after facing difficulties understanding his Chinese interlocutor in the ELF context. This suggests that the participants recognized the communicative advantages of adopting a native-like accent in ELF interactions. The results from the VGT and semi-structured interviews showed that EP students attributed positive characteristics to different varieties of English. AE was perceived as "understandable", "universal", and "clear", while BE was described as "cool" and "unique". Additionally, 6 out of the 15 participants highlighted the prestige of native-based English in terms of professional and education opportunities, indicating the benefits of speaking with native accents for their future careers and education pathways. However, TE was perceived somewhat negatively in terms of appropriateness for academic and professional contexts. In other words, the use of native-based linguistic repertoires allows EP students to project professional identities in relevant contexts or in their imagined communities. The quantitative findings uncovered that the participants used a greater number of native-based variants in an ELF setting compared to a classroom context, and such a choice was probably attributable to the fact that native-based or global variants offer "a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture" (Arnett, 2002, p. 777) and the "inability to use it would be detrimental to one's image as a competent professional" (Zhang, 2005, p. 455). Consequently, EP students deemed it socially advantageous and more effective for communication to adopt a native-like accent when interacting with unfamiliar individuals (just as Participant 10 remarked), rather than foregrounding local affiliations through TE local variants in ELF discourse.

In contrast to native English varieties that were associated with professionalism, this study revealed that TE is associated with a sense of humor and ease of communication, rather than ease of understanding. Just as

Participant 14 mentioned, speaking with an American accent required extra effort on his part, even though he was capable of doing so. In addition, four EP students also reported using TE in informal settings or with close friends to create humorous exchanges, projecting a "cozy" and "humorous" persona through their L2 pronunciation. Interestingly, despite TE being rated as inferior in academic contexts, the production results showed that they incorporated TE local variants more frequently into their speech during classroom presentations. One potential explanation for this usage of TE variants in classroom settings is their ability to index a stance of in-group membership within the specific local EP community, creating a more relaxed and informal atmosphere. This helps establish rapport, solidarity, and shared experiences among the students. Similar to Rampton's (2016) study on the use of the local variant glottal-T approximations by an L2 adult learner when talking with his Punjabi friends to evoke the intimacy or informality, it seems likely that these EP students also create linguistic patterns of using local variants monophthongal [o] and [e], along with non-local features, in their speech style when delivering presentations in the classroom with their classmates as the audience to project their desired personas.

In addition to the style-shifting observed between the two speech situations, the asymmetrical preference for local variants [o] over [e] within classroom discourse among certain groups of participants, as presented in Extracts 1—3, further highlights how EP students exploited linguistic resources to project distinct personas of social identities. Through the analysis of participants' discursive practices from classroom observations, interview sessions, and self-representation narratives in ELF talks, two distinct social groups emerged among the student population: the "Popular" group and the "Bookishness" group. The Bookishness group is identified by their choices of casual and comfortable attire, typically in bright primary colors, with a strong passion for intellectual pursuits and a particular fondness for complex subjects such as physics, mathematics, or coding (Participant 7, Participant 9, and Participant 11). On the other hand, the Popular boys expressed disinterest in any particular subject (Participant 5) or favored physical education due to its "lack of homework" (Participant 14), as remarked during the ELF talks. The Popular group is recognized by their preference for stylish dark-tone oversized T-shirts, a nonconformist attitude toward institutional norms, and involvement in "cool" social activities, such as music, parties, sports, or hangouts with their gangs, just as Participant 14 stated during the ELF interactions that playing basketball was "pretty fun" and allowed him to enjoy the company of friends without feeling "too stressed". It is crucial to recognize that these descriptions of the "Popular" and "Bookishness" groups are generalizations, and individual practices among students may differ greatly. Despite this diversity, there was a noticeable tendency for EP students

to associate themselves with either the "Popular" or "Bookishness" group regarding their social identities. This observation of participants falling into distinct social identities was also consistent with the feedback from Mr. Bio (the biology teacher and academic advisor of these EP students). This alignment of students with particular social groups reinforces the idea that these social identities do have an impact on students' preferred identities in different social contexts, their language ideologies, and their linguistic behaviors, at least to some extent.

Notably, the "Bookishness" group consistently maintained the use of global standard variants and avoided incorporating a local monophthongal [o] or [e] in their speech styles. This creates a distinction between themselves and their EP peers who embraced local variants, positioning them as individuals prioritizing academic excellence and conformity to established linguistic norms. By adhering to global standard variants, they projected a professional identity associated with intellectualism and dedication to standardized language use. In contrast, members of the "Popular" group showed a greater tendency to shift their speech styles and exploited monophthongal [o] more frequently than [e] in the classroom context. While other EP students used [e] to index friendliness and belonging, the Populars specifically made greater use of [o] in their linguistic repertories to project a sense of coolness, popularity, and rebellion, setting themselves apart from the other EP peers. Despite their ability to consistently speak with a native-based variety as in ELF talks, adhering strictly to standard norms in the EP classroom might be perceived as too studious or nerdy by the Popular group. As a result, they opted for using the local variant [o] to maintain a cool persona and avoid being seen as overly academic, as it could potentially jeopardize their popular image. Sounding too smart, in other words, could risk being deemed unhip or socially boring by their peers. Ultimately, despite all participants being Thai middle-class boys enrolled in a Thai public school's English program and potentially categorized as members of the same speech community, their individual stylistic practices set them apart socially from one another.

With language and identity being inherently intertwined (Joseph, 2004), it prompts us to critically consider the pedagogical implications of these findings, particularly in our contemporary globalized world where English is increasingly being used as the lingua franca. The study's findings of EP students' desire to use native-based English varieties in ELF encounters stress the importance of providing room for native-based English norms as part of the learning goals in English language teaching classrooms, while stressing the legitimacy of other varieties. Since positive attitudes toward target language learning can significantly impact learners (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006), language learners aspiring to appear professionally competent

in multilingual interactional contexts, such as ELF encounters, should be provided with the necessary recourses and language goals that match their expected learning outcomes to foster positive attitudes toward language learning. Furthermore, it is crucial to develop pedagogical approaches that not only address learners' needs and facilitate effective communication but also foster a more socially sensitive pedagogy. In this regard, English classrooms should serve as spaces where students not only acquire language skills for communicative purposes but also help develop a sense of their own identities through their L2 pronunciation, embracing the linguistic diversity that encompasses the plurality of English varieties.

Conclusion

Through mixed-method approaches, the study brings to light several important findings regarding the accent preferences among a sample group of EP students in Thailand, as well as the ways in which these students negotiated social meanings and deliberately created linguistic patterns to construct their identity in academic discourse and in ELF interactions. The results revealed that the 15 EP students expressed a strong desire to sound like native speakers in their daily lives, and in ELF contexts. Although BE was rated slightly higher than AE for educational and professional purposes, the use of AE linguistic resources was more prevalent in the speech of the participants. This suggests the prevailing dominance of AE cultures, supporting the argument for AE rather than BE to serve as the global language (Crystal, 2003).

With regard to the relationship between accent preferences and their pronunciation, the results revealed that 13 of the 15 participants managed to achieve the accent they aimed for, and they exploited stylistic practices to index social meanings through their L2 pronunciation to project their preferred personas. That is, these EP students chose to adopt the speech styles of native speakers in ELF interactions to project a "proficient English speaker" persona and to index the stance of an in-group membership in global culture as a global citizen (Arnett, 2002). Conversely, within the EP classroom discourse, these students shifted their speech styles, using TE local variants — monophthongal [o] and [e] — to project a "cozy" and "humorous" persona, establishing a sense of friendliness, intimacy, and solidarity in this specific community. Additionally, the findings also highlight the asymmetrical patterns of local variant usage among these EP students belonging to two distinct social groups: the Bookishness and the Popular. While the former consistently maintained the formal and prestigious linguistic registers of native speakers across contexts to index a sense of academic excellence, professionalism, and accuracy, the latter deliberately avoided

adhering strictly to such linguistic norms. Instead, to project a hip and non-nerdy image, they chose to incorporate local variants in their speech styles, with [o] being more frequently used than [e], possibly due to the salience of [o] in the articulatory manner. Even though the Popular boys could also consistently speak with a native-based accent, as observed in ELF settings, these individuals made deliberate linguistic choices to present themselves as cool adolescent boys who prioritize social acceptance and distance themselves from being perceived as overly studious or as uncool nerds within the EP community of practice. Thus, the analysis of these deliberate shifts in style, along with discursive practices, provides us with empirical evidence supporting the role of human agency, demonstrating that individuals purposefully create linguistic patterns and index social meanings through their L2 pronunciation to project certain personas in varying interactional contexts (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985).

Even though this study has shed light on the intricate dynamics of identity construction through L2 pronunciation, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. While the participants demonstrated the capability of using the seven native-based phonological features, caution is needed in making definitive assumptions about the participants' native-like speech styles since the study did not investigate other crucial connected speech features. In addition, the study had the small sample size and exclusively focused on male participants within the EP community. It is important to emphasize that the findings should not be generalized to represent the entire Thai population or all learners outside of EP programs whose motivations, linguistic backgrounds, and language learning experiences can vary considerably. Nevertheless, the study's insights remain relevant to both EP and non-EP students in Thailand since they often share common objectives of learning English: to pursue professional goals or to further their education. Such common goals highlight the broader implications of identity construction and that the motivations behind L2 pronunciation are multifaceted and extend beyond ethnic identity construction, which can be applied regardless of their specific language learning context.

Looking ahead, there is a pressing need for broader investigations into the impacts of globalization, global media, and educational policies on language ideologies and linguistic behaviors. Future research could explore the sociolinguistic realities individuals encounter in their professional lives, particularly within business and tourism industry situations. Special attention could be paid to key professionals such as tour guides, hotel staff, and flight attendants who aim to showcase Thailand's cultural heritage and embody "Thainess" in their professional roles. Ethnographic techniques could be used to examine their language attitudes and stylistic practices, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interplay among language attitudes,

identity construction, and linguistic practices in these contexts. This would inform language education policies to equip L2 English users with effective communication skills in today's globalized society where English is increasingly used as the lingua franca.

Ethical Concerns

This study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for person, beneficence/non-maleficence, and justice. The participants included had received complete information outlining the study's broad objectives, procedures, benefits, and risks and could decide whether or not to participate, with confidentiality maintained. In addition, the researchers ensured that the participants received all conceivable benefits and prevented any possible adverse consequences of participating in the study The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and had no stated medical issues that precluded them from doing so. Exclusion criteria included incomplete tasks, loss of interest, or unavailability during data collection. The research would be terminated or suspended if it posed unexpected serious harm to participants or as decided by the principal investigator and/or sponsor. Given the equitable selection, the participants included in this study were selected in accordance with the criteria clearly relevant to the research questions to be answered in the study.

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Appendix

Summary of phonological variables in AE, BE, and TE

Table 5

Summary of phonological variables in AE, BE, and TE.

Variable	Example	AE variants	BE variants	TE variants
(r)	'wate**r**' 'mo**r**e'	rhotic [ɹ]	non-rhotic [ɾ]	Ø
(t)	'li**t**tle' 'be**t**ter'	[ɾ]	[tʰ]	unaspirated [t]
(ɵ)	'**th**ing' '**th**ree'	[ɵ]	[ɵ]	[t]
(ð)	'**th**at' '**th**ose'	[ð]	[ð]	[d]
FACE	'd**a**y' 's**a**y'	diphthong [eɪ]	diphthong [eɪ]	monophthong [e].
GOAT	'b**oa**t' 's**oa**p'	diphthong [oʊ]	diphthong [əʊ]	monophthong [o]
Consonant Cluster	'**fl**oor' 'a**ct**'	Full [flɔːr] [ækt͡]	Full [flɔː] [ækt͡]	Reduced [fɔː] [æk]

(adapted from Prakaianurat, 2016)

- Variable (r) is pronounced with non-rhotic [ɾ] in postvocalic contexts in BE, while variable (r) is always rhotic [ɹ] in AE. In TE, however, no salient phonological variants have been reported.
- Variable (t) refers to intervocalic [t] between two vowels, with the second vowel unstressed. This variable is pronounced as a voiceless aspirated alveolar [tʰ] in BE, whereas in AE, it is usually pronounced as an alveolar tap [ɾ] in the same environment. On the other hand, this consonant is often pronounced as an unaspirated [t] in TE.
- Variable (ɵ) refers to a voiceless interdental fricative [ɵ] that is normally used in both BE and AE. However, for TE, this variable is usually replaced by unaspirated [t] or [tʰ].
- Variable (ð) refers to a voiced interdental fricative [ð] used in both BE and AE; however, the variable is commonly substituted by [d] in TE.
- A lexical set of GOAT is pronounced with a diphthong [əʊ] in BE, whereas in AE the sound is pronounced as the diphthong [oʊ]. This variant in TE, by contrast, is pronounced as a less rounded monophthongal [o].
- A lexical set of FACE in BE and AE has a shared phonological feature of a closing or half-closing diphthong [eɪ], whereas in TE the sound is likely to be replaced by a long monophthong [e].

- Consonant clusters in AE and BE are always fully pronounced in a careful speech situation like reading a wordlist but is perhaps reduced in natural speech, especially in the final position, when the environment is met. In TE, by contrast, they are usually reduced or broken into two-syllable sounds, such as [sətæm] rather than [stæmp].