Thai English, Acceptable or Just Likable?
A Study of Foreign Tourists' Perception of Thai English

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Abstract

Although Standard English is generally adopted as the ultimate goal in Thai EFL classrooms, it is undeniable that Thai English, a non-standard form of English in Thailand, is still commonly used in many contexts in the country, including tourism. Accordingly, Thai English has been questioned about how it reflects the speakers' hierarchy status and individual personal attributes. Therefore, this present study aimed to investigate foreign tourists' perceptions towards Thai English in the two aspects of an individual speaker's social status personality traits. Mixed-method research was employed to survey and interview one hundred international tourists in Bangkok from four regions: East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. The results showed that the overall personality traits received more positive feedback than social status. Interestingly, the frequency of linguistic variation occurrence in speech samples played a tremendous role in the participants' perception towards the social status of the speaker including education, proficiency, and acceptability as it aroused their negative feedback. In conclusion, this study provides the missing puzzle pieces in the form of the viewpoints of non-Thais to Thai English raising the awareness of the Thai English features that Thais should be concerned with when using English to communicate internationally for their specific needs and purposes.

Keywords: Thai English, perception, foreign tourists, social status, personality traits

Introduction

As the world becomes more and more internationally connected, undoubtedly Thailand has the opportunity to welcome millions of foreign visitors from different regions across the world. Therefore, the language that is most employed in interactions between Thais and non-Thais is English which serves as a lingua franca in many contexts in Thailand, including tourism.

Although English has been a compulsory subject in Thailand, Thai is the national language. That is why the influence of Thai as a mother tongue inevitably makes Thai people use English in different ways (Buripakdi, 2012). The concept of these linguistic variations in the way Thais use their English has been defined as an emerging characteristic of one of the English varieties or so called "Thai English".

Several studies exploring Thais' attitudes towards English varieties in pedagogical contexts (e.g., Buripakdi, 2012; Chamcharatsri, 2013; Choedchoo, 2015; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Ying Ying & Castelli, 2013) showed a feeling of inferiority about those non-native varieties of English including Thai English itself. However, not enough studies attempted to explore how non-Thais perceive Thai English and what self-image it reflects to the Thai English users from foreigners' point of view. On top of that, a great number of studies seem to direct attentions to Thai English in educational contexts. The use of Thai English in professional contexts such as media or tourism appears to be underexplored despite the fact that these contexts are the future career paths of many Thai students and contribute numerous benefits to Thai citizens.

Moreover, as foreign tourists are one of Thais' main target interlocutors to communicate in English, their opinions are valuable for EFL contexts like the tourism industry which is also the main source of incomes and job opportunities of the country. This present study, therefore, aimed to explore foreign tourists' perceptions of

Thai English, in two aspects of an individual speaker's social status and personality traits. With the insights from the foreigners' viewpoint, Thais would be able to grasp a better understanding and a clearer picture of how their own English variety is perceived internationally.

Literature Review

The Spread of English

English was initially introduced to indigenous people and local communities around the world by British settlers, colonizers, armies, missionaries, ambassadors, and merchants. Crystal (2003) asserts that the spread of English is not only because of colonization but also a result of its power which relates to the power of people who speak it. "Power", in this connection, has a variety of applications in political, technological, economic and cultural contexts. This phenomenon also applies to the contexts of the countries which have never been politically colonized such as China, Korea, Thailand, and so on. In these countries, English is considered a foreign language, and it is adopted as a lingua franca to serve various purposes within the country as described by Sowden (2012): "English serves for business, studying, trading, socializing, or tourism, English is nowadays a truly international language". Hence, there is no hiding the fact that English is no longer the sole possession of the British or the other countries in the inner circle where English is used as a first language (Kachru 1985), but it is truly an international language with an increase in the number of users who adopt it for some purposes without denying the value of their own languages. Consequently, new varieties of English have gradually emerged and so has the term World Englishes.

The Role of the English Language in Thailand

Thailand is one of those countries in the expanding circle where English is also used primarily as a language of wider communication across national and cultural boundaries. Although Thailand has never been politically colonized, English has gained prestige in Thai society in the area of education, medicine, business, personal communication

and especially tourism. Thailand has been designated the most popular tourist destination for many years in a row based on several surveys (e.g., CNN travel, MasterCard's poll, and Wow Thailand). In 2018, Thailand attracted over 38 million international tourist arrivals from all over the world and tourism contributed over 1.8 billion Thai baht to the country. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports' (2018) demographic survey, Thailand welcomed tourists from East Asia the most with approximately 16 million, including Chinese tourists who dominate the chart with the highest number of tourists at almost 10 million. Tourists from ASEAN came in the second place in the chart with 9.5 million visitors followed by Europe with 6 million, and the North Americas with 1.6 million. The Thai capital city, Bangkok, ranked first-place surpassing London and New York in the Euromonitor International's list of "Top City Destinations" with 21 million visitors and earned over 9-billion-baht revenue for the country. The tourism industry is, accordingly, not only the top source of income in Thailand from the point of view of revenue, but also provides abundant tourism-related job opportunities for Thai citizens. Therefore, English plays a significant role for those Thais working both directly and indirectly in the tourism industry. These people need to carry out meaningful conversations with their patrons from around the world on a daily basis. That being so, communication ability is even more crucial for the Thai workforce in tourism.

The Emergence of Thai English

However, the English spoken by Thais remains questionable in terms of its effectiveness and comprehensibility as it is full of unique features. Although Standard English is generally adopted as the ultimate goal in Thai EFL classrooms, it is undeniable that non-standard English, often perceived as "Broken English", is still commonly used throughout the country. The term "Thai English" represents a variety of English spoken by Thais (Bennui, 2017). According to Roger (2013), Thai English contains the linguistic features of sounds, words, grammar and discourse styles influenced by the Thai language.

Several studies exploring Thais' perception and beliefs in English varieties (e.g., Buripakdi, 2012; Chamcharatsri, 2013; Choedchoo, 2015; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Ying Ying & Castelli, 2013) show negative views and an inferiority complex towards those non-native varieties of English including Thai English. Nevertheless, only few have attempted to investigate how non-Thais perceive Thai English in working contexts such as tourism.

Linguistic Features of Thai English

Like other varieties of English, Thai English consists of four linguistic levels of variation including phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse which are related to Jenkins's (2003) notion, namely phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse.

First, phonologically, Rogers (2013) emphasizes the English with Thai phonological elements at two levels – segmental and suprasegmental. The segmental level relates to the uses of consonant and vowel sounds in a way different from that of the native speaker models. For example, most Thais simplify the sound /θr/ of the word "three" in a Thai way, namely the sound /tr/ because of difficulty in uttering the sound /θ/, which does not exist in Thai. Similar to the production of consonant sounds, Thais tend to simplify their articulation of monophthongs, diphthongs, and triphthongs for vowels. For instance, the triphthong /aɪə/ for the word "fire" is frequently articulated as the diphthong /aɪ/, or the monophthong /ɪ/ for the words "average" is often simplified as the diphthong /eɪ/. With respect to the suprasegmental level, this feature is particularly related to stress, tone, and intonation in Thai ways such as equally stressing all syllables in a word, and emphasizing the final syllable in words.

In terms of morphological variation, Baker (2008) indicated that Thai is not only pragmatics-based, but Thai words are also not inflected to indicate any grammatical relations within the sentences. This makes Thai and English different, because English words are inflected, i.e. -s, -es for number, person, gender, and case as well as -s, -es for tense, aspect, and mood (Baker, 2008). Moreover, Bennui (2017) demonstrates that the morphological features of Thai English

involve a formation of new words. To illustrate, Thais use Thai words such as "*Tuk Tuk*", and "*Som Tam*" in English conversations, and sometimes they even mix Thai and English words to create a new word combination like "*Soi Two*". Moreover, Jaroensak and Saraceni (2019) demonstrate that Thais even combine English words to coin a new meaning. For example, "*hi-so*", a coined word which refers to a wealthy person is commonly used in Thailand. This word is a mixture of "high" and "society".

Concerning Thai English syntax, these linguistic features influenced by the users' dialects include grammatical elements of English utterances grounded by first language grammatical rules, such as subject-verb agreement and tenses, which are considered to be "new ways of saying it". Thai is a language in which each word determines grammatical relations and interpretation. For example, Thais always add the word "*laew*" as a time marker in their speeches to project a past action. By adding this kind of words, Thai people are able to determine grammatical relations without changing forms of any component in the speech (Rogers, 2013).

Lastly, regarding discourse style, Chamcharatsri (2013) maintains that there are three salient features of discourse styles of Thai English including code-mixing, discourse particles, and reduplication. Code-mixing involves the mixing of Thai and English. Discourse particles concern the embedment of linguistic units - affixes, words such as "*ka*" or *"na"* - to demonstrate Thai cultural aspect such as politeness into English sentences. Reduplication (Watkhaolarm, 2005) refers to the Thai syntactic repetition from the Thai pragmatic discourse. In other words, it is the way words, phrases, clauses, and sentences are repeated by the speakers for certain effects on the listeners such as "*I bought this <u>very, very</u> expensive shirt*."

Perception

Perception is the cognitive process in which organisms interpret and organize sensation to produce a relevant experience of the world (Lindsay & Norman, 1977). In other words, when a person encounters a stimulus or situation, that person interprets it as something

meaningful to him/her based on his/her prior experiences. However, what an individual interprets or perceives may be different from reality. The perception process is affected greatly by a person's awareness and acceptance of the stimuli. Moreover, the outcome is highly selective and may be limited by a person's existing beliefs, attitude, motivation, and personality (Assael, 1995). According to Pickens (2019), the perception process follows four stages: stimulation, registration, organization, and interpretation. In the very first stage called stimulation, a person receives stimuli through five basic senses, namely touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. In the next stage, registration, he/she selects the stimuli that stand out the most to mainly focus on. The third stage in the process is organization where the person arranges the information concerning those stimuli in a meaningful way. In the last stage referred to as interpretation, the person makes sense of the information based on his/her prior experiences and interprets it as either positive or negative. It should be noted that each person can organize and interpret the same stimulus differently depending on his/her previous experience with it.

This study selected perception as the main focus because the participants expressed their feedback on Thai English as a stimulus in the stimulation stage. In the interpretation process, this study provided traits associated with the social status dimension and personality traits (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009) for the participants to analyse based on their prior experience and beliefs. The social status dimension included the features concerning hierarchy statuses perceived in a society, namely education, proficiency, and acceptability. On the other hand, the personality traits focused on the features associated with feelings, emotions, and related opinions which are reflected in how an individual uses language, namely confidence, sincerity, and friendliness.

Most people generally judge language varieties based on their perception. When hearing a variety, they shape opinions towards the variety or even the speaker. These perceptions often stem from social factors, and some varieties may become stereotyped in a particular

society. However, the views of non-specialists are inconsistent and there is often disagreement about which languages are more "likable", "pleasant" or "friendly". Linguists assert that it is not usually the accent itself that is judged, but rather the supposed characteristics of people who speak it and the speakers themselves are the window that reflects that particular language they speak. It is important to study language attitudes. We can therefore distinguish between linguistic and non-linguistic viewpoints. To do this, linguists often use guise techniques including a matched guise test and a verbal guise test.

A matched guise test records just one speaker. They read a passage multiple times, using a different accent each time and then listeners evaluate each accent without knowing that the speaker is the same. To tackle the problems of matched guise tests, verbal guise tests engage informants in listening to a series of speakers reading the same passage. The participants then assess each speaker on factors like education, sincerity, confidence, and friendliness. Therefore, verbal guise tests gain an interest from many researchers conducting studies on reactions to varieties of English (e.g., Jindapitak & Teo, 2012, Prakaiborisuth & Trakulkasemsuk, 2015.) and a verbal guise test was also employed as an instrument in this present study.

Relevant Studies

In recent years, a great number of studies have been conducted to explore the nature of Thais' attitudes towards World Englishes, especially in the pedagogical context. With respect to varieties of English, plenty of studies have investigated how Thais view varieties of English such as Singapore English, Chinese English, Malaysian English, and so on (see e.g. Chamcharatsri, 2013; Choedchoo, 2015; Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Ying Ying & Castelli, 2013; Wilang & Teo, 2012). However, a limited number of studies have investigated Thais' attitudes towards their own English. For instance, Choedchoo's (2015) finding revealed that the Thai accent was the lowest rated in terms of correctness but it was rated top for pleasantness by 98 Thai tertiary students.

Saengboon (2015) explored 198 Thai undergraduate students' perceptions towards World Englishes. The findings revealed that the inner circle of America and Britain were the most preferred accents. On the contrary, the Thai English accent was marked by most participants as undesirable. Relatively similar to Seangboon's findings, Jindapitak and Teo's (2012) study revealed that English major students in Thailand had more favourable attitudes towards inner-circle Englishes than the other accents. Although Thai English was considered the third most preferred accent, the difference in the percentages between the third preferred accent (Thai English) and the first two accents (American and British English) was considerably high. Most importantly, the results also showed prejudice as non-native speakers were stereotyped based upon their accents.

Out of the educational context, Chamcharatsri (2013) carried out an online survey with 137 respondents to explore their awareness of Thai English and its characteristics. The findings surprisingly revealed that 51% of the respondents had never heard of the term 'Thai English'. The findings of both Chamcharatsi's (2013) and Jindapitak and Teo's (2012) studies seem to agree on the fact that Thai people still lack an awareness of World Englishes and the varieties of English including their own. Therefore, this points to the need for more studies on Thai English focusing on other unexplored areas and in wider contexts.

Apart from studies in the Thai context, there are only few studies investigating how Thai English is perceived by other non-Thais. Weerachairattana et al. (2019) conducted a study with 130 Chinese university students in China. The finding showed that 33% of the respondents were prone to have a negative opinion towards the varieties of English from the expanding circle countries including Thailand.

To conclude, despite the fact that plenty of studies have already investigated the attitudes of Thais towards Thai English, there are still a few gaps that have not yet been paid enough attention. First, one of the less explored areas is how Thai English is internationally

perceived by groups of people who come from different parts across the world, and have different backgrounds. Second, previous studies did not direct enough attention to the use of Thai English outside the educational context in which communication in English with non-Thais who are the main target interlocutors of Thai people is even more crucial. Third, most of the participants in the previous research tended to be students and teachers who contributed feedback only in the educational aspects. Other groups of participants with different backgrounds such as tourists who are able to provide feedback in professional aspects to Thai English seem to be insufficiently explored. Therefore, the present research aims to bridge these gaps by exploring how Thai English used in professional communication contexts is viewed by non-Thai tourists from different regions including North America, Europe, East Asia and Southeast Asia. In this paper, the main focus was directed to the perception towards the Thai English variety. Hence, the objective of this study was accomplished by seeking the answer to "What is foreign tourists' perception towards Thai English?"

Methodology

Participants and Context

The participants of the study were 100 foreign tourists in Bangkok. The areas in Bangkok covered in the study included three famous tourist attractions (namely the Grand Palace, Silom Road, and Khao San Road). These spots were chosen to yield responses of tourists across a wide range of nationalities and backgrounds because they were considered must-visit places in Bangkok for foreign tourists according to *CNN Travel's article, "World's Greatest City: 50 reasons why Bangkok is No. 1."* (Jorgensen, 2017).

The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 49 years with 46% identified as female, 54% as male. Most of the participants (73%) were first-time visitors, 55% reported not being familiar with Thai English at all, while the second highest reported being somewhat familiar at 23%. The rest were mixed between not very and very

familiar with Thai English, 19% and 3% respectively. The participants were grouped into four categories according to the regions they came from. This study focused on only the tourists from the top four regions with the highest numbers of visitors to Thailand, i.e., East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America according to the demographic information from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2018).

Stratified purposeful sampling was used to sort the participants into four sub-categories, and quota sampling was used to reach the required number of the participants from each region in the questionnaire administration stage. The quota of the participants from each region was proportionally allocated based on the Ministry of Tourism and Sports' demographic information. As a result, the participants in this study consisted of 40 tourists from East Asia, 30 from Southeast Asia, 20 from Europe, and 10 from North America. For the next stage, convenient sampling was employed to choose 20 per cent of the participants from each category as cases to partake in the semi-structured interview.

Research Instruments

Test Stimuli. Speech samples were used as test stimuli in this study. The audio file consisted of four speech samples containing Thai English linguistic features in line with Jenkins's (2003) notion of four levels of variation in the varieties of English. To ensure authenticity, naturalism, and spontaneity, this study employed the verbal guise test model where the speech samples were selected from various sources and different speakers. The speakers in each sample also used English to perform his or her routine work (for example, a tour guide, a tourism officer, a tour agency staff member, and a cooking instructor), based on the following criteria: (1) the speaker must be a Thai worker in tourism using English for communication in their job; (2) each speech sample contains at least one typical linguistic feature of Thai English; and (3) each speech sample is no longer than 2 minutes. Thai English linguistic features in the speech samples of this study were briefly detailed as the following:

a) Segmental Level: The uses of English consonants and sounds in Thai ways

b) Suprasegmental Level: The stress, tone, and intonation of English in Thai ways

c) Loanwords: The borrowing of Thai lexemes into English

d) Loan Translation: The translation of Thai lexemes into English

e) Literal Translation: The ungrammatically direct translation from Thai into English sentences

f) Overgeneralization: The misuse and overuse of English grammatical elements

g) Omission: The lack of grammatical elements in sentences

h) Restructuring: The simplifying process in which complicated English grammar points are arranged in Thai ways

i) Reduplication: Thai linguistic repetition in English sentences from the Thai pragmatic discourse

j) Thai Particles: The use of Thai particles in English spoken texts

Questionnaire. The questionnaire of this study consisted of three parts. The first part employed a gap-filling format to elicit the participants' personal information including their gender, region, frequency of visit to Thailand and exposure to Thai English varieties. The second part employed 5-Likert scale format to elicit their level of agreement on their impression of the Thai English speakers. This present study adopted *Social Status Dimension and Personality Traits* (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009), associated with the speakers, to elicit the participants' perceptions of Thai English.

The social status dimension is associated with traits concerning hierarchy status perceived in a society, namely education, proficiency, and acceptability. To obtain the responses to the social status dimension, the participants were asked questions about the stimulus speaker concerning the following:

a) Educational attainment: Participants were asked if the speaker is well-educated.

b) Proficiency: Participants were asked if the speaker is a proficient user of English.

c) Acceptability: Participants were asked if the speaker's English is acceptable.

On the other hand, the personality traits focused on features associated with feelings, emotions, and related opinions which are reflected in how the speaker uses English, namely confidence, sincerity, and friendliness. To obtain the responses to the social status dimension, the participants were asked questions about the stimulus speaker concerning the following:

a) Confidence: Participants were asked if the speaker sounds confident.

b) Sincerity: Participants were asked if the speaker sounds sincere.

c) Friendliness: Participants were be asked if the speaker is friendly.

Before being launched in the real context, the questionnaire was checked for reliability in a pilot study which was conducted with 30 international tourists in Bangkok, Thailand. It took place at the same location as in the actual study, but at a different time to ensure that the participants are similar to those of the main study in terms of diverse nationalities and regional backgrounds. Data of the pilot study was computed using Cronbach's alpha to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. The result of the pilot shows that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was .766 which is considered acceptable.

Semi-structured Interviews. Each interview was open-ended, and lasted about 5 to10 minutes depending on how much clarification and illustration was needed.

The semi-structured interview questions were of two types: structured questions and unstructured questions. Concerning the structured questions, they were a particular set of questions prepared in advance by the researcher such as "*To what extent do you think Thai English is easy to understand?*" or "*What makes Thai English*

difficult to understand?''. On the other hand, unstructured questions referred to the impromptu questions to follow up or probe the individual's responses to the questionnaire such as "*What made you rate Thai English very low on acceptability?*" or "*What made you strongly agree with the friendliness of Thai English*?". During the interview, the responses of the participants were recorded with their consent.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Procedure. The quantitative and qualitative data collection of this study was carried out in October 2019. Since the participants of this study, foreign tourists in Bangkok, were not an existing group, the questionnaires were given to the participants through personal approach, followed by the semi-structured interview which was carried out immediately after the participants had completed the questionnaire. Therefore, asking the participants for their consent to partake in this study was the very first important step before proceeding any further. This stage included introducing the researchers, explaining the study aims, and giving information on the entire process that they needed to go through to ensure the participants' willingness to be a part of this study. In light of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), the interview was conducted and recorded in English upon their permission.

Analysis of Data from the Questionnaire. The data collected from the questionnaire were quantitatively analysed by the use of descriptive statistics to find out the mean score, and standard deviation of every item in the social status dimension and personality trait of Thai English speakers. The analysis was carried out by using SPSS, a statistical program. The final quantitative data were presented as a mean score which indicated the foreign tourists' perception of Thai English in each attribute and category. The ranges of the mean scores were interpreted according to the following criteria.

Range	Agreement	Clarification
4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	Positive
3.41 – 4.20	Agree	
2.61 – 3.40	Neutral	Neutral
1.81 – 2.60	Disagree	Negative
1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree	

Analysis of Data from the Semi-structured Interviews. After the interview was transcribed, the data were summarized to find the key points by the use of a content analysis approach. The process of qualitative data analysis was separated mainly into 2 sections, analysis of responses to structured questions, and analysis of responses to unstructured questions. Concerning the participants' responses to structured questions, the interview data were transcribed with the use of two themes, positive and negative, in the first stage. Then, Thai English linguistic features were set as the framework to investigate what made the participants perceive Thai English differently in both themes. On the other hand, those responses to unstructured questions were initially meant to probe deeper about Thai English speakers in two areas including *Social Status Dimension*, and *Personality Traits*. Therefore, the six attributes mentioned in these two areas were the framework to elicit the in-depth information not only to support the rationale of the quantitative data, but also to explain the phenomena of the present study.

Results and Discussion
Overall Perception of Thai English

Table 1
Overall Mean Values and Standard Deviations of the 6 Attributes of Thai English

Attributes of Thai English speakers		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social status dimension	1. Well-educated	100	1.00	4.50	3.49(+)	.48320
	2. Proficient	100	1.00	4.00	3.37(=)	.38706
	3. Acceptable	100	1.00	4.50	3.68(+)	.39218
Personality traits	4. Confident	100	3.00	5.00	4.36(+)	.36072
	5. Sincere	100	3.50	5.00	4.45(+)	.28225
	6. Friendly	100	4.00	5.00	4.57(+)	.18285
Overall		100	2.25	4.58	3.99(+)	.24427

Note. (+) represents positive evaluation.
(=) represents neutral evaluation.

The overall results shown in Table 1 demonstrate that Thai English speakers received neutral and positive feedback from the foreign tourists. As can be observed, friendliness received the most positive evaluation ($\bar{x}$ = 4.57), followed by sincerity ($\bar{x}$ = 4.45), and confidence ($\bar{x}$ = 4.36) respectively. On the other hand, Thai English yielded the lowest mean score for English proficiency ($\bar{x}$ = 3.37), followed by good education ($\bar{x}$ =3.49), and acceptability ($\bar{x}$ = 3.68), all of which appeared to be in the quite similar range of the mean scores ($\bar{x}$ = 3.37-3.68). Even though considered the top three lowest rated attributes, the mean scores of the mentioned attributes exceeded the negative evaluation, and two of them including education and acceptability posited around the positive area. Only proficiency of the Thai English speakers was evaluated in the neutral criteria by the participants.

In general, it can be clearly noticed that the foreign tourists in this study welcomed Thai English used in this study which may

reflect the sense of hospitality of the speakers to the listeners in the tourism context where service mind, cordialness, or genuineness are relatively appreciated. This could also be one of the factors that have promoted Thai tourism, and made Thailand a famous destination for international tourists for years. However, Thai English may not yield the same success when it comes to other contexts where correctness or accuracy is required such as in business or media contexts.

As proficiency of Thai English in this study received neutral feedback which did not shed much light into the results, investigating into the participants' perception towards each particular speaker in the study was essential to elicit certain specific insights into the results of the study. Accordingly, the next section illustrates how each individual speaker was evaluated and what could be the factors that made their English perceived differently.

Perceptions of Individual Thai English Speakers

Table 2
Evaluation of the Individual Thai English Speakers

Attributes of Thai English		Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4	Total
Social status dimension	1. Well-educated	3.91(+)	4.55(+)	2.45(-)	3.07(=)	3.49(+)
	2. Proficient	3.73(+)	4.38(+)	2.37(-)	2.99(=)	3.37(+)
	3. Acceptable	4.11(+)	4.46(+)	2.98(=)	3.19(=)	3.68(=)
Personality traits	4. Confident	4.80(+)	4.65(+)	3.81(+)	4.18(+)	4.36(+)
	5. Sincere	4.82(+)	4.96(+)	3.32(=)	4.72(+)	4.45(+)
	6. Friendly	4.79(+)	4.80(+)	3.70(+)	4.99(+)	4.57(+)
	Total	4.36(+)	4.63(+)	3.10(=)	3.85(+)	3.99(+)

Note. (+) represents positive evaluation.
(=) represents neutral evaluation.
(-) represents negative evaluation.

Once the in-depth data of individual Thai English speakers were presented, it can be observed that Speaker 3 was clearly rated the lowest in all attributes. While the other speakers were evaluated with the mean scores in the positive range, there were two attributes of Speaker 3 (namely, *Well-Educated*, and *Proficiency*) that yielded a negative evaluation by the participants at the mean scores of 2.45 and 2.37 respectively, that is to say, his Thai English was considered a downfall of the overall perception of Thai English.

Although rated with neutral evaluation, Speaker 4 was considered the second lowest in proficiency and good education with a little higher score than those of Speaker 3. On the contrary, Speaker 2 was perceived positively with the highest mean scores of almost all attributes except *Confident*. Based on the data, an assumption could be made that there must be certain factors in the speech samples that affected the tourists' perception of the Thai English speakers, and thus Thai English. To further explain the results, the speech samples were analysed in order to determine factors that could influence the participants' perception of the individual speakers. The two variables were found and demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Variables in the Speech Samples

Speaker	Number of different linguistic features	Frequency of Thai English feature occurrence in the speech		
		1-5 times	6-10 times	11-15 times
Speaker 1	4	✓		
Speaker 2	3	✓		
Speaker 3	6			✓
Speaker 4	6		✓	

As shown in Table 3, there were two empirical variables in the speech samples of the Thai English speakers. First, the speech of each speaker varied in the number of Thai English linguistic features it contained. Speaker 3 and Speaker 4 employed six different linguistic

features in their speeches considered to be the highest number of all speakers, while Speaker 2 used only half the number of Thai English linguistic features compared to the two former speakers. Since Speaker 3 was rated the lowest, and Speaker 2 was evaluated the highest, the number of the different linguistic features in the speech sample was probably a factor that affected the participants' perceptions of the Thai English speakers.

Second, with the same length at no longer than two minutes, the speech samples had different frequencies of Thai English feature occurrence. The most frequent occurrence of Thai English features at 11-15 times was in Speaker 3's speech, followed by Speakers 4, 1, and 2 respectively. Interestingly, it was found that the order of the frequency of occurrence of Thai English features in the speech of the individual speakers corresponded with that of the perception results in which Speaker 3 was evaluated the lowest followed by Speakers 4, 1, and 2 as the highest rated speaker.

For these reasons, the number of different linguistic features, and the frequency of Thai English idiosyncrasy occurrence in the speech samples could be the main factor that impacted on the perception outcomes as they aroused the participants' negative feedback. In fact, several participants even mentioned this point in their interview. Excerpt 1 from the Malaysian participant exemplified the reason why she rated the last two speakers lower.

Excerpt 1

> *"The bike tour and reservation ladies (*Speakers 1 and 2) *speak English pretty good; I think. They speak fluently. Clear enough to understand. When the last two speak ok but the grammar is not correctly used. So, the first and second speakers are better."*
> *---- P1, Southeast Asia*

To probe deeper into the participants' perception of Thai English, the attributes of Thai English were divided into two aspects: status dimension and personality traits. Moreover, it was necessary to separately demonstrate the perception data provided by each group

of the participants. In this regard, the data were presented in more detail as the following to grasp a clearer understanding of how each group of participants viewed each attribute of Thai English speakers.

Social Status Dimension

Table 4

Evaluation of Thai English Speakers by Tourists from Different Regions: Social Status Dimension

Attributes in social status dimension of Thai English	Groups of the participants				Total
	America $n = 10$	Europe $n = 20$	Southeast Asia $n = 30$	East Asia $n = 40$	
Well-Educated	3.50(+)	3.42(+)	3.52(+)	3.55(+)	3.49(+)
Proficient	3.50(+)	3.20(=)	3.36(=)	3.41(=)	3.37(=)
Acceptable	3.30(=)	3.53(+)	3.75(+)	3.95(+)	3.68(+)
Overall	3.43(=)	3.38(+)	3.54(+)	3.63(+)	3.51(+)

Note. (+) represents positive evaluation.
(=) represents neutral evaluation.

Table 4 detailed the mean scores of the attributes regarding social status dimension including *Well-educated, Proficient*, and *Acceptable.* The mean scores of the two attributes, *Well-educated,* and *Acceptable,* were in the same range of positive evaluation, while *Proficient* was the only attribute with the neutral evaluation. Although considered to be in the positive trend, *Well-educated* exceeded the neutral evaluation by only 0.09 which was very close to the neutral criteria. Looking into the feedback based on the origins of the participants, it was found that the participants from all regions appeared to share the relatively similar patterns interpreted as neutral feedback. Concerning overall attributes in the social status dimension, although the participants were prone to respond positively to these attributes of Thai English speakers ($\bar{x} = 3.51$), the evaluation exceeded neutral judgment by only 0.11.

First, beginning with the attribute *Well-educated*, the results indicated that the tourists from all regions appeared to have a positive feedback towards this attribute ($\bar{x}$ = 3.49). The group of participants that provided the highest evaluation was East Asian ($\bar{x}$ = 3.55), and the lowest was European ($\bar{x}$ = 3.42). Apparently, the feedback tendencies across these four groups were somewhat alike. Although posited in the positive area, the responses from European and North American participants only slightly exceeded the neutral trends. Moreover, some responses in the qualitative data from the interview showed some particular ideas of how the participants perceived Thai English concerning well-educated attribute as shown in Excerpt 2 and Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 2

"I think the way they put their sentences and construction was not great, so if they were well-educated, these sentences and constructions would be better." ---- *P2, Europe*

Excerpt 3

"Where's the grammar? Accent is clear enough but without any kind of grammar, the speakers sound uneducated, even if they are not." ---- *P3, North America*

The responses above obtained from participants from the United Kingdom and the United States attributed the low rating on well-educated qualification of Thai English speakers to ungrammaticality. The justifications implied that the ungrammatical structures and the speech samples played a part in perceiving whether the speakers were well-educated. These responses can represent the viewpoints of some native English speakers, since both of them came from the countries where English serves as a first language. Moreover, the north American participants who were considered native English speakers understood Thai English the most, but the results of the perception of Thai English manifested a contrast with that of the comprehensibility. Despite scarce effect on the comprehensibility,

Thai English syntax somehow had an impact on the participants' perceptions.

Second, as for the attribute *Proficient* the participants tended to respond to Thai English speakers neutrally ($\bar{x}$ = 3.37). Like *Well-educated*, European tourists contributed the lowest evaluation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.20) which exceeded the range of negative feedback by 0.60. Although the North American was the group with the highest rating ($\bar{x}$ =3.50), there was only a small rating range across the four groups. The results seemed to be congruent with the results of the study by Phuengpitipornchai and Teo (2020), which showed that of all groups of participants, the American participants understood Thai English the most, and the European did the least.

Excerpt 4

> *"But I'm not really saying that she's not schooled. I'm saying that she's not educated in the sense of having a lot of proficiency and interaction with English speaking people." ---- P4, North American*

The informant from the United States elucidated in Excerpt 4 that education and proficiency are related. This clarification seems to explain why he rated both attributes relatively low compared to the other attributes.

Excerpt 5

> *"I mean they obviously sound like less proficient than the first two ladies. Like for the guy,* (Speaker 3)*, he pronounces some words quite weirdly and he put sentences randomly. And for the lady selling chilies, she kind of like mixed Thai words" ----P1, Southeast Asia*

In Excerpt 5, one Malaysian interviewee explained that many linguistic features (e.g., mispronunciation, wrong grammar and the mix of Thai words) affected her perception regarding English proficiency. According to the response, it can be noted that phonological and

discourse features not only affected comprehensibility but they also altered the participants' perception of English proficiency of Thai English speakers.

Lastly, on the attribute *Acceptable* like the former two, the participants' perception stays in the positive range ($\bar{x}$ = 3.68). However, the ranking order is slightly different from the previous ones. As can be seen in Table 4, the highest rating was by the East Asian participants ($\bar{x}$ = 3.95). In terms of the lowest rating, the raters also shifted from the European to North Americans ($\bar{x}$ = 3.30), which appeared to be in the neutral feedback range. The justifications for the acceptability of Thai English were exemplified in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 6

> *"Yes, because I think I can understand what they say. So, it is acceptable for me."---- P5, East Asia*

Excerpt 7

> *"I mean it is acceptable for local services."---- P6, Southeast Asia*

The response in Excerpt 6 seemed to support the quantitative data. As one informant from China expressed that in order for a variety of English to be acceptable, it must be able to convey messages understandably. If he was able to understand what the speakers tried to communicate, their Thai English was acceptable in his opinion. The claim explicitly showed an empathy with non-native English speakers. Also, the response in Excerpt 7 obtained from a Singaporean informant corresponded with the mean value of the Southeast Asian participants ($\bar{x}$ = 3.75) which perhaps implied an uncertainty of the participants since the informant claimed that the speech samples could be acceptable in the particular context like local tourism but they might not be perceived the same in other contexts. However, a strong opinion on acceptability of Thai English was addressed in Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8

> *"Look, I want to say that it is ok for the person who speaks English as a second language. Because it's my first language so I can speak it fluently. But at the same time, it is not acceptable and I don't accept it."*---- P2, Europe

The above excerpt demonstrated a strong opinion on the acceptability of Thai English in the view of a native English speaker from the United Kingdom. The response shows a negative feedback on the statement "The speakers' English is acceptable". The interviewee claimed that the authority of being an owner of the language made it hard to accept Thai English variety which contains a number of distinctive linguistic features different from his own variety. This result was similar to most existing research, especially that carried out in the United States (see e.g., Derwing et al., 2002; Lindemann 2005). The results of the previous research seemed to subscribe to the "standard language ideology" (Milroy, & Milroy, 1991). This standard can be defined as "Standard American English" which indicated the quality of educated speakers in formal contexts such as pedagogical contexts despite the fact that there are a number of regional diversities within the US (Laurence, 2013). In Lindemann's (2005) study, these "non-native" speakers were perceived to communicate with "broken English", and further exemplify how negative attributes were assigned to these speakers. According to the results, it can be observed that the native English speakers felt entitled to make a judgment on other English variety speakers that they defined as non-native ones, and the concept of anchoring oneself to the standard English preference also extended to this study. In a similar vein, standard language ideology was applicable to Thai English, one of the English varieties outside the inner circle, as it was also perceived negatively from the native speakers in this study.

Personality Traits

Table 5

Evaluations of Thai English Speakers from Different Regions of Tourists: Personality Traits

Attributes in personality traits of Thai English	Groups of the participants				Total
	America $n = 10$	Europe $n = 20$	Southeast Asia $n = 30$	East Asia $n = 40$	
Confident	4.45(+)	4.32(+)	4.30(+)	4.40(+)	4.36(+)
Sincere	4.48(+)	4.35(+)	4.50(+)	4.51(+)	4.45(+)
Friendly	4.55(+)	4.55(+)	4.60(+)	4.58(+)	4.57(+)
Overall	4.49(+)	4.40(+)	4.46(+)	4.50(+)	4.46(+)

Note. (+) represents positive evaluation.
(=) represents neutral evaluation.

Table 5 shows the results of the foreign tourists' perceptions of the attributes concerning personality traits of the Thai English speakers including confidence, sincerity, and friendliness. Like the results of the social status dimension, there was no difference among the foreign tourists' evaluation of the three attributes across all four regions, since the participants seemed to have a unanimous feedback. One difference was that none of the mean scores of all personality traits was below 4.00, which indicates that the participants strongly agreed with these traits of the Thai English speakers. The results show that Thai English yielded very positive feedback on the individual personalities in the tourism context. The results support previous study by Choedchoo (2005), showing that Thai English was rated top for pleasantness by 98 Thai tertiary students. However, the results of the previous research by Weerachairattana et al. (2019) revealed that 130 university students in China tended to have a negative opinion on the varieties of English from the expanding

circle countries including Thailand. Based on the results of this study and those of previous studies, it could be assumed that Thai English was perceived differently by non-Thais depending on each particular context. While in the tourism context, non-Thai tourists seemed to respond positively, the educational context yielded the opposite outcome. To provide certain insights on the evaluation of each personality trait, the results will be elaborated individually as the following:

First, concerning the attribute *Confident*, the participants' evaluation seemed to be even across the four groups ($\bar{x}$ = 4.32 - 4.45). Overall foreign tourists considered that the speakers sounded very confident ($\bar{x}$ = 4.36).

Excerpt 9

> *"They didn't seem to care much about grammar, making them seem not very worried while speaking." ---- P7, Southeast Asia*

Excerpt 10

> *"But as for the guy on the boat and the two girls, they are really like out there, not feel shy to speak." ---- P4, North America*

In Excerpts 9 and 10, the interviewees elucidated that some speakers sounded confident because of their outgoing speaking. Without hesitating, the speakers seemed not to be concerned with grammatical correctness or any linguistic accuracies. This result can imply the factor of not holding back to communicate boosted up the confidence of the speakers and it can be perceived by the listeners.

Second, on the attribute *Sincere*, the participants' perception appeared consistent among the four groups with the total mean score of 4.45. The results indicated that the tourists found the Thai English speakers sincere. Excerpt 11 is a case in point.

Excerpt 11

> *"They own their speech. So, their confidence makes me believe in what they say and also feel sincere."* ---- P1, Southeast Asia

According to Excerpt 11, a Malaysian interviewee addressed an interesting point that personality traits related to one another as she responded to the question *"You also rated their confidence and sincerity at 5 to almost all speakers. What made you think of them that way?"* The results show a relationship among different personality traits. Moreover, it reveals that not only linguistic features that affected the participants' perception, but certain personality traits of the speakers also had an influence on other traits that were perceived by the listeners.

Lastly, regarding the last attribute, *Friendly*, the participants' evaluation was particularly high with the total mean score of 4.57 which was considered the highest evaluation of all attributes including those in the social status dimension. It can also be observed that the participants from the four regional groups had a similar tendency of their rating of the speakers' friendliness, with the range of the mean score between 4.55-4.60. The result corresponded with the attitude of Thais towards Thai English in this regard. Previous research (see Jindapitak & Teo, 2012) has shown a positive evaluation on Thai English in terms of friendliness rated by Thai undergraduate students. According to these results, it can be inferred that in either an educational or professional context, Thai English speakers are perceived to be friendly for both Thais and non-Thais. Excerpt 12 further points out the factor contributing to the friendliness of Thai English.

Excerpt 12

> *"Like the way they speak, the sound and tone. Like they have a service mind, and made me feel welcomed and not intimidated you know."* ----P8, East Asia

The responses from a Taiwanese interviewee in Excerpt 12 justified that the intonation of Thai English was the factor of friendliness impression. It also added the detail on how it was suitable in the tourism context because Thai English provided a sense of welcoming and not intimidating to him as a tourist.

Conclusion

The foreign tourists in this study in general provided positive feedback to Thai English in the tourism context. Personality traits (friendliness, confidence, and sincerity) in particular, yielded very high scores from the tourists. Apparently, Thai English evoked positive feelings of the tourists from all regions to most attributes in this present study. With regard to the social status dimension (good education, proficiency and acceptability), the tourists provided neutral feedback to the Thai English speakers' proficiency. Slightly exceeding the neutral range, education of the Thai English speakers was rated with the positive feedback. The lowest scores were obtained mostly from the tourists in the Inner Circle countries. As another study by Phuengpitipornchai and Teo (2020) addressing the same group of the participants found that Thai English was comprehensible to most of the tourists from all four regions, the results of the present study demonstrated a mismatch between comprehensibility and perception towards Thai English. Although understanding Thai English the best, the North American tourists accepted Thai English the least. The reason Thai English was not acceptable enough was primarily due to the ungrammaticality that differed from that of the native speakers' English model. In contrast, East Asian tourists including those in the Expanding Circle countries, even with the moderate understanding results, perceived Thai English with much empathy. The results show paradoxical perspectives between native and non-native English speakers. While the former made a judgment on Thai English with the privilege of being a language owner, the latter judged Thai English with empathy with a person who acquires English as a second language.

In the light of English as a lingua franca, as English serves for business, studying, trading, socializing, or tourism, it is nowadays a truly international language. Hence, the use of Thai English prevails in various areas, and there are still several contexts besides tourism and education that Thai English has not yet been explored. Since English is used for wider communicative purposes with diverse groups of people, it is hoped that this present study will raise English users' and learners' awareness of what they should be concerned with to attain specific communicative purposes. Some require English just to carry a meaningful conversation, while others probably want their English to reflect a good self-image in society. Some always interact with non-native English speakers, but others perhaps communicate with native English speakers in their work routine. With different communicative purposes, the English used may not need to be exactly the same. An individual's English is practical enough as long as it achieves the person's purposes. At the end of the day, if people view English as a language for communication rather than a label to measure an individual's hierarchy status, then any variety of English that can be understood among the interlocutors can be a viable tool for people from different regions and backgrounds to convey messages, express identities, develop career growth, and spread great ideas to each other.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study relied on natural occurring speech samples as the test stimuli with no control over linguistic feature distribution as well as selected tourists with different backgrounds as the participants to trigger the natural results. Thus, future researchers who prefer to elicit empirical results might take a different approach which involves the control of the speakers' and the participants' English proficiency profiles as well as the equal distribution of the target linguistic features. Apart from equal linguistic features in the test stimuli, an equal number of participants is also an interesting choice, since this study proportionally allocated the participants based on the demographically

recorded number of the visitors in 2018. Due to the limited number of speech sample resources, it is also recommended that future study consider including more target linguistic features, and speech samples to represent the Thai English variety more comprehensively. Moreover, cooperating with other coders during the data analysis process is a good idea to ensure trustworthiness for future researchers. Lastly, as Thai English prevails in various contexts of Thailand apart from tourism and education, it is recommended that future research explore Thai English in a wider range of contexts such as media, business, and entertainment, all of which have a potential to be major sources of income of the country, and provide many job opportunities to Thai citizens.

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