Exploring Students' Attitudes Toward Various English Accents at a Thai Private University: Preferences and Influences of Accents on English Language Learning

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Abstract

This study investigated students' attitudes towards various English accents at a Thai private university by studying their preferences and how these accents affect their English language learning. Seven accents in the study consisted of those from the inner, the outer, and the expanding circles, representing the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Philippines, India, Thailand and China respectively. A mixed-methods research design with a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were the instruments used in this study. With the random sampling method, ninety-nine undergraduates of the Department of English for International Business English Communication [IBEC] at a Thai private University were questionnaire respondents on five attitudinal perspectives: likeness, intelligibility, acceptability, preference and prestige. Twelve participants, through convenience sampling, participated in the semi-structured interviews conducted with seven prompt questions. Quantitative data were statistically analyzed in frequency and percentage, while the qualitative data underwent content analysis according to Lichtman's three Cs of data analysis technique. The findings for Research Question 1 of the study showed that the students' three topmost preferred accents were British, American and Thai English, respectively based on likeness, intelligibility, acceptability, preference and prestige. In addition, students could accept accents other than the standard native speaker English. They would accept different varieties of English accents as long as they could communicate easily with them. The study also reported students' willingness to learn many accents to ease global communication, education success and career standing. The various English accents did not negatively affect the students. For Research Question 2 on the effects of these accents on their English language learning, it was found that their motivation could be enhanced by the British and American accents. For conversation and interaction, they felt more comfortable with the British and American accents. For willingness for improvement, they chose American and Thai accents, while for familiarity, students ranked American and Thai accents higher than others. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers of English be aware of why students prefer certain accents more than others although they have positive attitudes towards all accents and do not look at native speaker of English as superior to other varieties.

Keywords :Students, Attitudes, Native Speaker English, Various English accents, Thai Private University

1. Introduction

English has increasingly become a lingua franca of the world over decades (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Crystal, 2012; Paradowski, 2013; Jenkins & Leung, 2014). The feasibility of global communication constitutes one of the major agents of the internalization of English (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022). English is widely used in international business, education, science, the Internet, tourism, and aviation, among others and its significance has given the language way into the curriculum of study so much that it is variously seen as one of the compulsory subjects taught from early childhood and/or integrated as a foreign language in various countries of the world.

Language essentially exists as a vehicle for communication within human society to serve its interdependent needs. Therefore, the revision of common English codes for the service of individual societal needs results in new versions of English that are peculiar to the sociolinguistic contexts. Such possess a certain level of functionality and acculturation profile (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022). Global English has a plethora of accents and sociolinguistic profiles. It is most often categorized into two groups of native and non-native speakers of English. However, Kachru (1996) gave a more comprehensive categorization of the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. The inner circle comprises the native speakers of English, the outer circle consists of countries where English is used as a second language, and the expanding circle involves those that use English as a foreign language. These circles, especially the expanding circle, keep growing with concomitant growth in the significance of the English language. In other words, Kachru (1997) believes that people living in various parts of the world use the English language differently; thus, it is better to move towards English as a global language or English as an international language based on the notion of 'World Englishes''. In this way, native speaker English has reduced its significance and demand that it is the only variety to be taught and learned.

Teachers of English also emerge from these backgrounds. The models of English language teaching incorporate not only native English speakers but welcome non-native speakers. Following Kachru (1997) and Canagarajah (1999) numerous English teachers around the world are non-native English speakers. This scenario raises questions and attitudes toward a supposed ideal English teacher. According to the prestigious views, native English speakers are held to be the most qualified English language teachers. They are upheld to have the prowess of firsthand knowledge of their cultural background with English as a native language acquired by birth. They are characterized by a clear and accurate accent of the language. Non-native English speakers by this ranking receive inferior treatment (Chun, 2014; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

However, there are counterreactions to the prestigious and innate proficiency of native English speakers as best English teachers. Having a firsthand experience with the language from birth does not qualify one as the best teacher of the language. According to Cook (1999), the essential pathways to be qualified as a teacher demands an intensive pedagogical familiarity with the principles of education. Devoid of these metalinguistic skills, one may lack the core justifiable judgment in explaining how the language is given in the instructional process and context. There are many native and non-native English speakers with innate giftedness in English proficiency but down the lane are unable to play a professional profile in the teaching, learning, and assessment of the language (Cook,

1999). These are empirically verifiable and evident. Albeit the latter view appears more educationally plausible, the bias created by the dichotomy between native and non-native English teachers persists. Such could be seen in English teaching job advertisements, employment policies of language institutes and schools, and parents' demands. These employment streams only welcome non-native English speakers due to a shortage of native speakers.

The globalization and emergence of world Englishes have created a dynamic and diverse working environment, particularly for English language teachers. Today, many students studying English, especially in higher institutions are exposed to numerous accents due to the diverse backgrounds of English teachers. While some of these students may have accent preferences, others just want to be able to communicate and integrate into the global sphere using English. A study by Koad (2014) revealed that students who wanted to speak like native English speakers were considerably discouraged along the learning process, while the group who did not pay much attention to accent perfection were happy and excelling. With the models of various English accents, it follows that students have to constantly switch between lessons and these accents which are products of entirely different sociolinguistic backgrounds. The scenario gives room for attitudes and influence on the part of the students toward these accents. It, therefore, becomes pertinent to investigate what those attitudes are, and how these accents influence students learning, hence the crux of this study.

In brief, this study was conducted at a Thai private university. Although there may have been some studies on English accents and preferences, there were no studies in Thailand investigating undergraduate students who were considered English language learners in a business major, who need to communicate with their business counterparts later in their business careers It would be interesting to find out their thoughts about varieties of English. Especially, they might have to work with international partners in the future. It was worth investigating whether the students in the study continue with the traditional notion of native speaker English as the only perfect model of accents or with any English varieties for their own personal purposes.

2. Research Objectives

1. To explore students' attitudes towards various English accents at a Thai private university
2. To investigate whether these various English accents affect Thai undergraduate students' English language learning achievement

3. Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of Thai undergraduate students towards various English accents?
2. Do these various accents affect Thai undergraduate students' English language learning?

4. Literature Review

This section discusses different views of relevant authors on attitudes and various English accents focusing on concepts of Components of Attitude, World Englishes, Accent Prestige Theory, and English as a Global Language.

4.1 Components of Attitude

One of the fundamental themes in the enterprise of social psychology is attitudes. Lexically, attitude may be defined as a formed opinion or feeling about something or someone, and or a mode of behaving that is caused by this opinion or feeling. For Allport (1954), an attitude is a condition of preparedness that dynamically affects how someone responds. It entails mental coordination in which a person is somewhat prepared for a reaction. People will also react positively or negatively depending on how they feel about an object or something else. Attitude comprises behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements. According to Oskamp (1977), attitude is among the most influential elements in determining behaviors. A single attitude can affect a wide range of behaviors. Additionally, attitudes reveal how people show themselves to the public.

According to the ABC model of attitudes proposed by Oskamp and Schultz (2005), attitudes are determined by three factors: affective, behavioral, and cognitive.
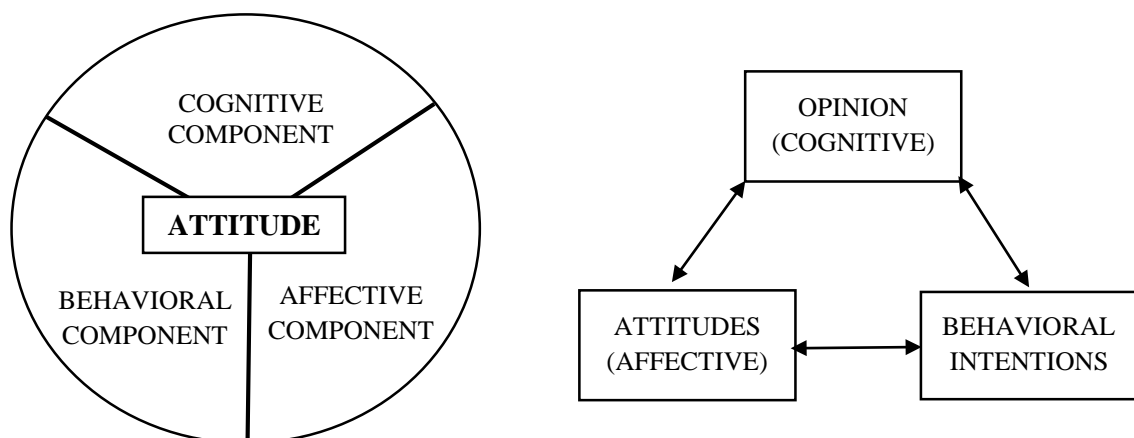
Figure 1. Double viewpoints on the components of attitude
        Source: Oskamp and Schultz, 2005

These are some examples of people's attitudes toward flying an airplane.
   A: **An affective component**: This represents the sentiments and yearnings that a person has for a thing. Such as "Flying an airplane is fun" and "Flying an airplane is exciting".

   B: **Behavioral components:** This points to one's action or tendency to act in a certain way towards an object. For example, "I fly a plane whenever the need arises", and "I would want to afford an aeroplane if I had the means".

C: The thoughts and assumptions: These are referred to as a cognitive component. For instance, "Jets are speedy", and "Time is saved by taking a plane rather than a drive a long distance".

For an attitude to be produced, each attitude-producing component must be relevant. The model serves as a foundation for organizational change that the system goes through. The person who wishes to display the attitude can do so by thinking, acting, or feeling in certain ways. The attitude that is created by the cognitive component may also show up in a person's behavior or mood.

4.2 World Englishes

Understanding that language exists primarily as a tool for communication within human society is important because it reflects both the social nature of people and the interconnected requirements of society. This is eminent because human requirements are distinctive to particular cultural and geographic situations, where there are numerous English versions used in various settings.

Kachru (1986) coined the phrase "World Englishes" to describe the emerging different contexts of usage around the world that result in distinctive variances in the English language. Despite just minor connotational differences, the phrase has been used interchangeably with alternative concepts such as global English, international English, new English, and English dialects (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022; Bolton, 2005; Schneider, 2003). Kachru divides English into three categories after recognizing variations in the structure and pattern of world Englishes. According to Kachru (1984), there are three concentric circles in English and each of the categories depicts where one belongs. This is represented in Figure 2 below.
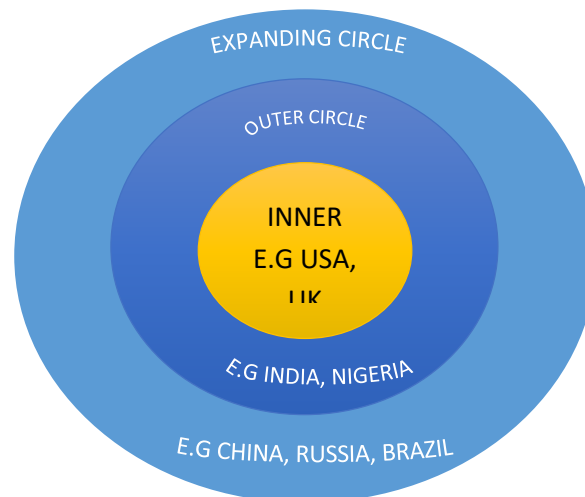
Figure 2. Kachru's Concentric Circles of Englishes
Source: Kachru, 1985

4.2.1 Concentric Circles of Englishes

According to Kachru (1986), nearly three-quarters of all ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educators worldwide

dominantly are non-native English speakers. Kachru (1986) proposed a concept that grouped English usage throughout the globe into three separate rings based on the types of dispersion, the role of English observed in each area, and the patterns of acquisition. The vast majority of individuals in the Inner Circle, which is made up of countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, speak English as their first language. The educators who originated from the central circle area, according to Kachru, are native English users.

Nations in the Outer Circle such as South America, Nigeria, Ghana, India, Singapore, and the Philippines, etc., were colonies of the Inner Circle nations, thus English has a significant impact on these countries. Most people in these countries adopt English as a second language. In contrast, comparing the Inner Circle nations where English is used almost exclusively for communication, English in Outer Circle countries has official standing and is utilized for significant functions. Devout from the occasional usage of English, they possess their unique varieties of native languages of which the English language coexists with another primary language in countries outside the inner ring. Singaporeans, for instance, converse in Chinese and English. Hindi and English are widely used in India for communication. The instructors from the nations of the Outer Circle are according to these grouping NNS English speakers and are equally categorized also as ESL (English Second Language) instructors.

English Language Speaking in the Expanding Circle was not as great as in the Inner and Outer Circle regions. According to Kachru (1986), the countries in the Expanding Circle include several countries such as Brazil, China, Japan, Thailand, etc. However, English is now the most widely taught foreign language and is frequently used in advertisements, stores, brand names, and tourist sites. It has also received vast acceptability from the ASEAN community.

4.2.2 Characteristics of World Englishes

The notion of "World Englishes" contains a pluralist framework to account for variations in the lexicon, phonetics, practical usage, and vocabulary of English speakers throughout the world (Melchers & Shaw, 2003). It implies universal English based on the dialects, traditions, and histories of a single user. Despite originally belonging to a certain group of people, English has been greatly broadened and is now utilized by native dialects. Kachru (1988) lists ownership of the English language by all users, pragmatic-based ownership of English variants, and a variety of cultural backgrounds as the key components of the new paradigm. These offer English in both Western and regional identities when used globally.

The idea of "World Englishes" highlights the importance of a diverse and inclusive approach to English use around the globe (Bolton, 2005). They present an unconstrained use of English that is free of boundaries and compliance with relevant that are considered to adhere to native speakers. World Englishes brings forward a system of thought that opposes the idea that any form of English is superior to all others, draws attention to understanding and cooperation, particularly from supporters of the dominant English, urges educators to make a distinction between linguistic ingenuity and mistakes, and supports non-native speakers' creative use of the language.

To explain the vast international resonance particular to the English language as shown in learners' attitudes, this study adopts the concept of world Englishes.

4.3 Accent Prestige Theory

Humankind has an inherent instinct to categorize and divide itself into factions, sometimes on the premise of flimsy reasons. This is often referred to as stereotyping. Simply said, it is simpler for the human brain to rely on a caricature that is supported by scant aural or visual cues than to completely understand what kind of person each individual is after a laborious process of evidence gathering.

The accent prestige theory states that people form assumptions about a speaker's personality based on their accent (Giles, 1970; Fuertes, Potere, & Ramirez, 2002). The appraisals are split into two categories: the status dimension, which takes into account traits like knowledge, literacy, social status, and success; and the solidarity dimension, which takes into account traits like joviality, pleasantness, and honesty (Fuertes, Potere, & Ramirez, 2002). When it comes to the solidarity dimension, persons possessing pro accents will score speakers with standard accents more than those with pro accents, and conversely (Fuertes, Potere, & Ramirez, 2002). Judgments regarding the socioeconomic class and ethnicity that the accent represents are mediated by bias based on accents that involve both desirable and undesirable preconceptions. This is done through the status and solidarity components (Foon, 2001).

One may assess a person's personality, and most crucially, their IQ, based on the audible sound of their English pronunciation. According to the notion of accent prestige, some Thai University students may prefer the accents of native English teachers in terms of status and social-class influence. They may also prefer non-native English teachers' accents in terms of solidarity.

The accent prestige theory is relevant in this study to examine the root cause of certain students' attitudes towards various English accents.

4.4 English as an International Language

According to a qualitative and quantitative study conducted by Khatib and Monfared (2017), in this contemporary era, there has been an emergence of numerous varieties of English as a result of globalization. To examine the teachers' attitudes toward the various accents within the framework of English as a global language as well as how they perceive their obligations relative to various variations of English, the authors carried out the research with 121 Native Americans and British, 120 Indians, and 121 Iranian teachers. As obtained from the study, the result noted that there is no doubt that issues of globalization have had weighty impacts on the profusion of English around the globe for the past twenty years. The study argued that inspiring and valuing the diverse varieties of English is vital in acknowledging and promoting ways to increase mindfulness among teachers and students toward the international spread of English.

Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) observed that the growth of English as a universal language and its impacts on teaching have engrossed a lot of scholarly devotion in the past few decades. The main aim of the authors was to build upon the prevailing literature on

English as an international language to offer recommendations on instructive decisions and practices for modern classrooms. Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) contend that rather than describing English as a specific linguistic variant that is only utilized in global relations, the term "international language" refers to a role that the language performs in multinational circumstances.

Similarly, Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) also noted that numerous accents are presented since every speaker is from a distinct place. To ensure that speakers with numerous accents communicate effectively, various strategies are employed to negotiate linguistic variations and other variances to make the speakers mutually intelligible (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). According to the authors, although one variety of English can be chosen as the overriding instructional model, learners must understand that the variety used is one of the numerous varieties. This eliminates the notion that the instructional variety is the only correct variety for the learners.

Gunantar (2016) explored the influence of English as an international language on English language teaching in Indonesia. According to the study, the contemporary demand for English learning has increased the proliferation of the language globally. Today, according to the study, the practice of English is not only limited to international communication but also local communication. Gunantar (2016) emphasized that English is one of the most spoken languages in the world and also one of the most studied languages. This however suggests that English teachers must focus on improving the ability of the learners to communicate in English rather than acquiring the native accent.

4.5 Varieties of English in Relation to English Language Teaching

In this study, English as an International Language offers insight into accessing English from the global perspective instead of nativelikeness. This is relevant in exploring students' attitudes towards the diverse English teachers' accents on global awareness. Native speaker English has been recognized and accepted as the model for all. However, many people failed in their endeavor to adopt it in exactly the same way due to interference of the mother tongue in many ways. In addition, Kashru's three circles of language users have ironically indicated that there are fewer native speakers than others who need to use English to communicate with one another. This fact itself should be enough for all scholars to decide how English should be taught and learned. Indeed, the development of the field have shown that varieties of English have finally been accepted by more people with the new terms coined in the field such as English as an International Language (EIL). English as a Global Language (EGL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and others. The learners have some freedom to choose the models they wish to follow. Based on research, motivation is easily affected if students cannot communicate with others. There are also other factors. Therefore, areas of effects of accents that are investigated in this study consisted of motivation, conversation, pronunciation, familiarity and willingness for improvement. The findings on the effects of accents would be useful to all educational institutes when they recruit teachers of English.

In conclusion, the reviewed related studies showed scholastic approaches by various researchers exploring basic themes of students' attitudes focusing essentially on factors influencing learners and their approaches to learning the English language.

5. Research Methodology

This section presents research design, population and sample, research instruments, data collection and data analysis.

5.1 Research Design

A convergent parallel mixed techniques design is used in this work. The convergent parallel design consists of analyzing qualitative and quantitative data collection and relating the results of each data upon interpretation. The data collection periods for both types of data took place at the same time. In the following stage, the quantitative and qualitative data were combined in a mixed methods design to provide a deeper and more thorough examination of the study problem. This design was most suitable in this study because a reexamination of the research findings, both quantitative and qualitative, to find whether the findings were similar or different would provide a clear answer to the investigation. The illustration of the research design is given below in Figure 3.
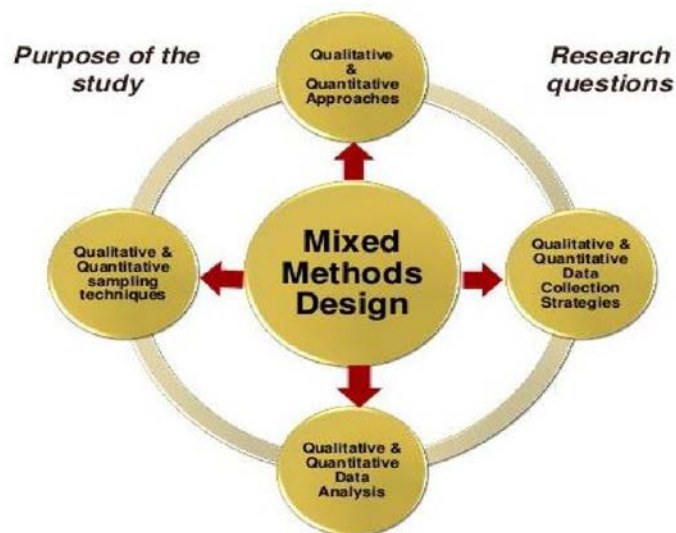
Figure 3. Mixed Method Design
Source: Creswell, 2014

The following table shows the research process with the steps in order, with the person participating/responsible at each step.

Table 1. The Research Process

No.	Research Steps	Participating/ Responsible Persons
1	Questionnaire design	--The Researcher --3 Experts for IOC
2	Pilot-test	--30 students from the Department of Business Communication
3	Questionnaire improvement	--The researcher

No.	Research Steps	Participating/ Responsible Persons
4	Questionnaire distribution to the target sample	--99 English for Business Communication International Department students at a Thai private university in Bangkok
5	Semi-structured interviews	--12 volunteered students from the Department of Business Communication
6	Data analysis	--Researcher

5.2 Research Site

The site where the study was conducted is a large well-known private university in Bangkok. This university welcomes students from various parts of the world and adopts both English and Thai as the mediums of instruction where appropriate. The university offers 127 programs in the bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. The students in the study were from the Department of English for International Business English Communication (IBEC) in the Faculty of Arts. As for the faculty, all qualified lecturers were welcome no matter what nationalities they were. This program prioritizes language communication skills with leading business principals to foster international commerce and entrepreneurial skill acquisition. The university is determined to produce competent business communicators in global business involvement. Therefore, the research site was suitable for this study.

5.3 Population and Sample

This section reveals how the sample group for the questionnaire and how the volunteers were obtained for the study

5.3.1 Population

The population of the study consisted of 132 undergraduates from the Department of English for International Business English Communication [IBEC] at a Thai Private University. The population comprised students from the first to fourth year.

5.3.2 Sample for the Quantitative data Collection

The sample size for this research was 99 undergraduates from the Department of English for International Business English Communication (IBEC) at a Thai Private University. The sample size was calculated by Yamane's formula with a 95% confidence. The sample of 99 out of the population of 132 was justified as an acceptable representative of the population via random sampling techniques. Details of the questionnaire sample group are shown below.

Table 2. The Basic information of the Questionnaire Respondents

Basic Demographics of the Sample Group	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate level		
☐ Freshmen	21	21.2%
☐ Sophomores	12	12.1%
☐ Juniors	31	31.3%
☐ Seniors	34	34.3%
Years of studying English		
☐ 1 – 3 years	6	6.1%
☐ 4 – 6 years	9	9.1%
☐ 7 – 9 years	37	37.4%
☐ 10 – 12 years	34	34.3%
☐ More than 12 years	12	12.1%
Study abroad experience		
☐ Yes	78	78.8%
☐ No	21	21.2%

Based on Table 2, it is found that most of the respondents were seniors and juniors with 34 and 31 people constituting 34.3 and 31.3 percent respectively. This was followed by 21 freshmen making up 21.2 percent. 37 and 34 students had 4-6 and 7-9 years of studying the English language which constitutes 37.4 and 34.3 percent. 78 of the respondents had a study abroad experience while 21 had none.

5.3.3 Research Participants in the Semi-Structured Interview

Twelve students voluntarily participated in the semi-structured interview. They expressed their intention to join the interview activity directly to the researcher after the announcement for interviewees among the student population. Convenience sampling technique was applied. The only criterion for inclusion of the interviewees was the number for each level, that is, three students from each study level from Year 1 to Year 4.

5.4 Research Instruments

This study used the questionnaires for quantitative data collection and semi-structured interviews for qualitative data collection.

The 70 questionnaire items were constructed based on the reviewed literature, divided into two sections of each investigated accents. The first part was "Attitudes towards the Various English Accents' and the second part was "Influences on My Study". As a result, for each accent, there were ten 10 items for each nationality teacher. Each questionnaire respondent was required to do all the 70 items.

The semi-structured interview had seven question They were as follows:
1) Can you briefly introduce yourself?
2) What do you think is the significance of accents in English language learning?
3) Which accent(s) do you prefer and why?
4) Do you mind if your English language teachers are non-native speakers of English?

5) Which accents are easier for you?
6) Do you think adopting a chosen accent as a model is easy?
7) What are the strategies you normally use to improve your chosen accent?

Both the 70-item questionnaire and the seven interview prompt questions were subjected to content validity check by three experts obtaining the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index score of 0.98 for the questionnaire and 1 for the interview questions. After that the pilot test was conducted with 30 participants of similar backgrounds and obtained the Cronbach alpha score of 0.898. The table below illustrates the interpretation of Cronbach's alpha score range.

Table 3. Interpretation of the Cronbach's Alpha score range

Alpha Coefficient Range	Interpretation
≥ 0.9	Excellent
≥ 0.8	Good
≥ 0.7	Acceptable
≥ 0.6	Questionable
≥ 0.5	Poor
≤ 0.5	Unacceptable

Source: George & Mallery, 2003

5.5 Data Collection

Recruitment of research participants and seeking informed consent were conducted online via Google Forms questionnaire and Line applications. The participants were reached, consented and participated in the study through these channels. Conducting interviews and, questionnaire distribution and collection were done online. The questionnaire was made using Google form, shared and completed online by respondents via the adopted media channels.

5.6 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed and assessed. The analysis established the study results, conclusion, and recommendations respectively. Evaluations were freed from partial methodologies and influences. Quantitative data surveying students' attitudes towards various English accents and the influence of these accents on Thai undergraduates at a Thai private University were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 and analyzed by means of frequency and percentage.

To derive the findings from the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interview, this study employed the content analysis technique which involves in-depth analysis by looking at the idea reported, categorizing themes, and grouping similar themes. It anchored the transition from raw data to categories and knowledgeable concepts. The collected qualitative data from the interviewees were analyzed using Lichtman's (2013) three Cs of data analysis: coding, categorizing, and concepts. The data analysis process can schematically be represented as follows:
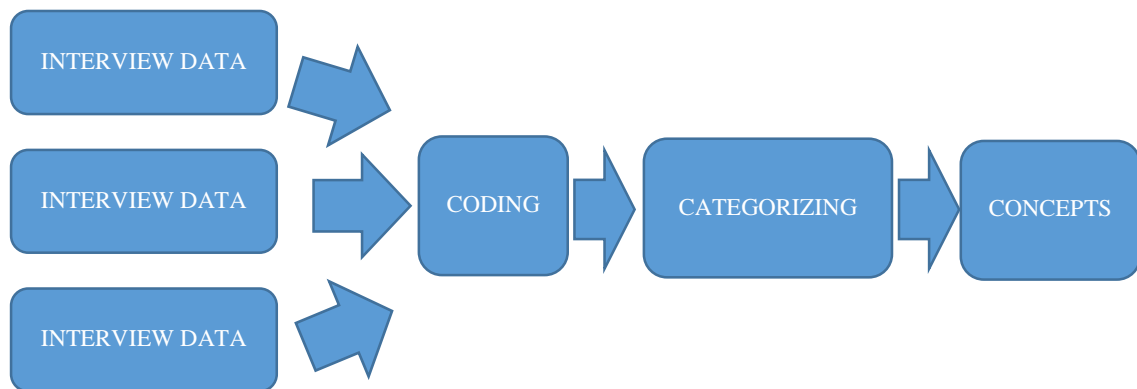
Figure 4. Three Cs of Data Analysis: Coding, Categorizing, and Concepts
        Source: Lichtman, 2012

The following figure illustrates an example of the three Cs analytical steps:
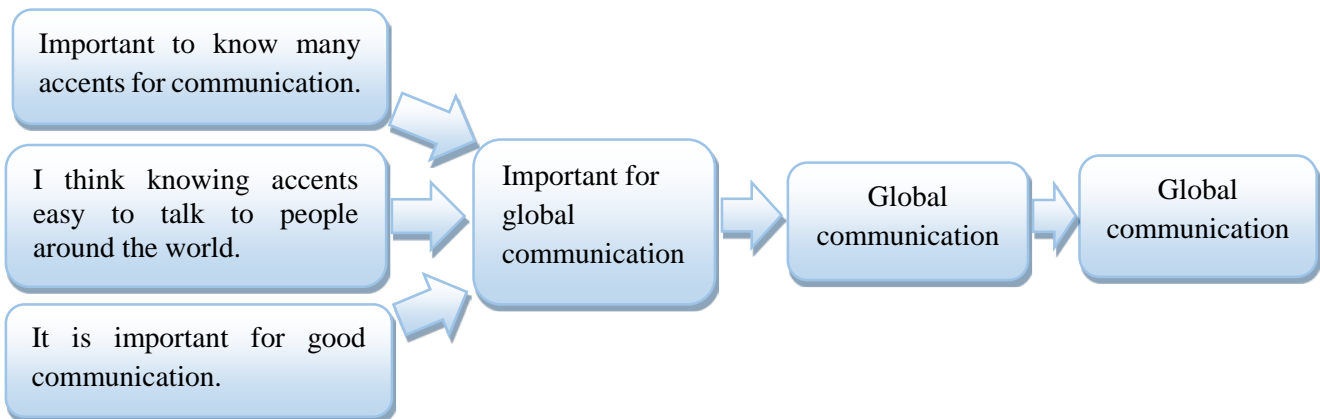
Figure 5. Example of 3Cs Step Analysis Technique

5.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher carefully observed all actions in dealing with the questionnaire respondents and semi-structured interviewees as well as kept all the documents related to the participants in a safe place. Most importantly, the researcher submitted the research proposal to the Rangsit University Ethics Review Board for approval and permission to carry out the study before collecting the data. The number of the Certificate Approval of this study is COA. No. RSUERB2023-075 issued on 23 May 2023.

6. Results and Discussion

This study had two research questions. Therefore, the findings are shown in response to each question in the following sections.

6.1 Students' Attitudes toward Various English Accents

The second part of the questionnaire investigated Thai undergraduates' attitudes toward various teachers' English accents. The research was conducted from five attitudinal perspectives: likeness, intelligibility, acceptability, preference, and prestige vis-à-vis the English accents of the program's teachers. The results were as follows.
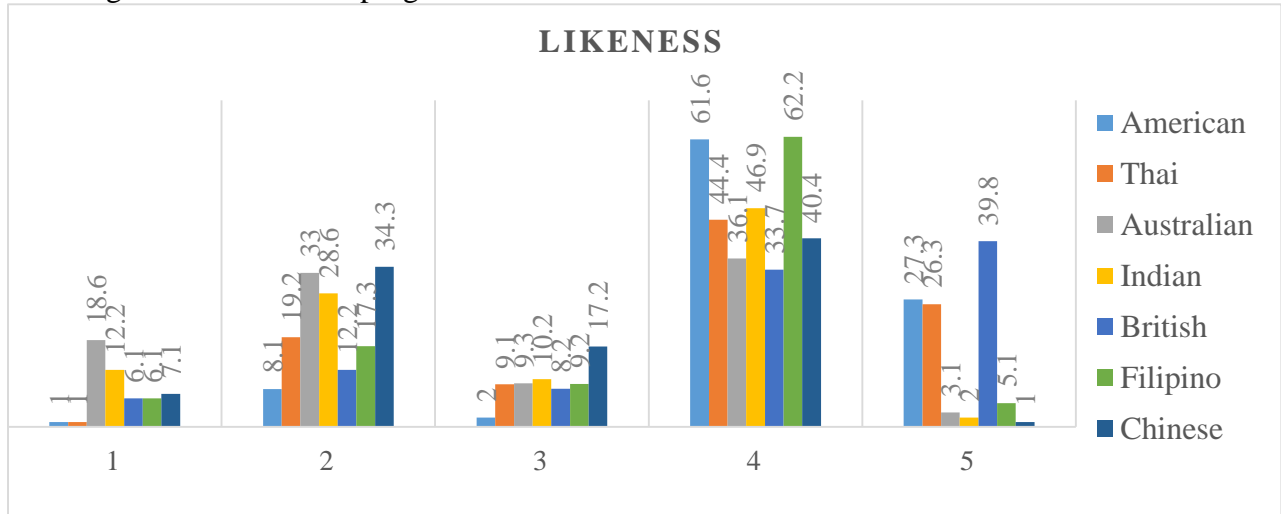

Figure 6. Admiration of English Accents

The first item considered students' admiration of the English accent because it is clear, and its sounds could be heard correctly. From Figure 6, the score of 5 (strongly agree) occurred most in the British accent while the mode of other accents was 4 (agree). In the mode 4 category, the American accent topped the chart with 27.3 and 61.6 percent of 5 and 4 scores respectively, followed by the Thai accent with 26.3 and 44.4 percent of 5 and 4 scores, then the Filipino accent with 5.1 and 62.2 percent. It could therefore be said that Thai undergraduates mostly like British accent, then American, Thai, and Filipino accents.
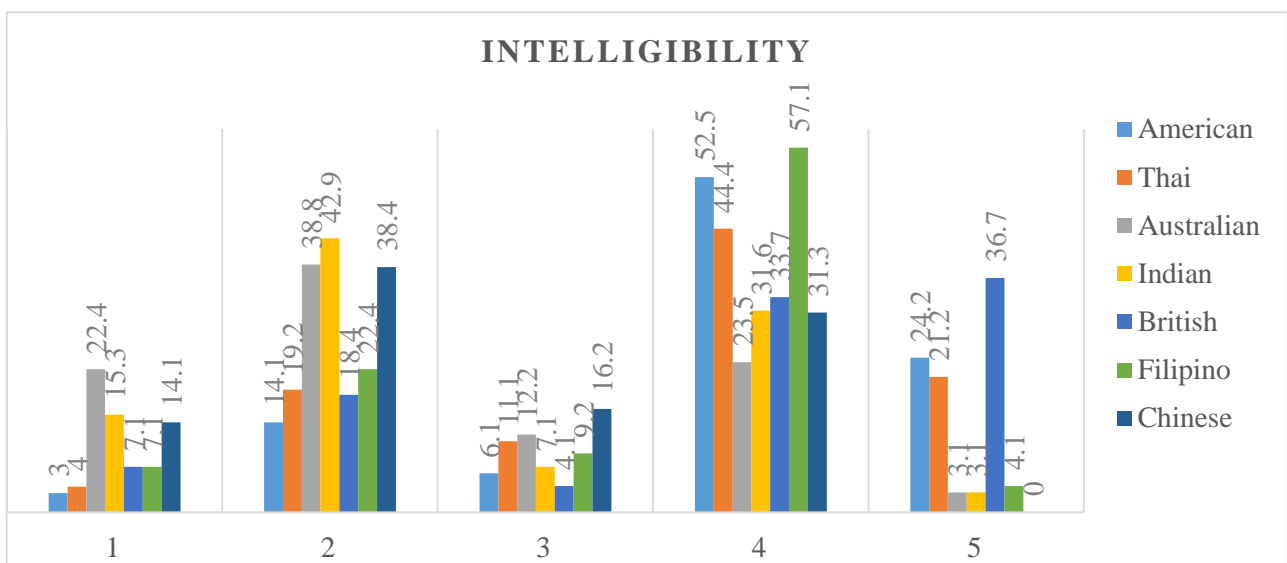

Figure 7. Intelligibility of English Accents

Accent intelligibility was rated based on students' ability to understand what was being said with ease. Again, the British accent emerged with a 5 mode while 4 appeared most in the American, Thai, and Filipino accents. While the British accent was unraveled as the most intelligible with 36.7 and 33.7 percent of 5 and 4 scores respectively, American accents came second with 24.2 and 52.5 percent, Thai accent was third with 21.2 and 44.4 percent, and Filipino occupied fourth position with 4.1 and 57.1 percent.
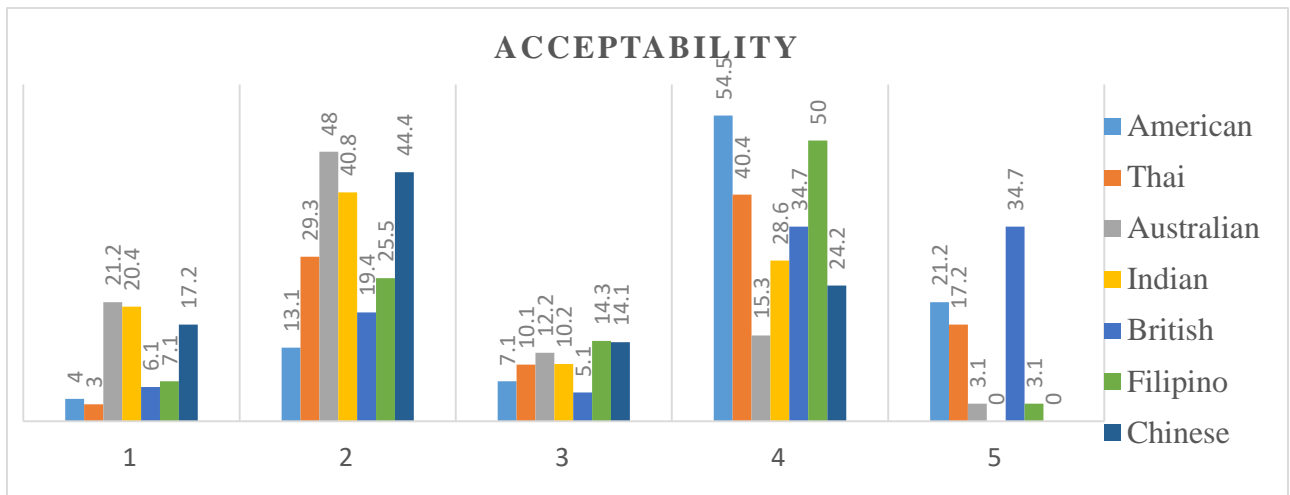

Figure 8. English Accents Acceptability

Accent acceptability was measured based on perceived suitability for communication in any English-speaking environment. The mode of overall acceptable level was 4 in British, American, Thai, and Filipino accents. The British accent was the most acceptable with 34.7 and 34.7 percent of 5 and 4 scores respectively. Next was the American accent with 21.2 and 54.5 percent of 5 and 4 scores, then the Thai accent with 17.2 and 40.4 percent of 5 and 4 scores, and the Filipino accent with 3.1 and 50 percent. In descending order, Thai undergraduates accept British, American, Thai, and Filipino accents.
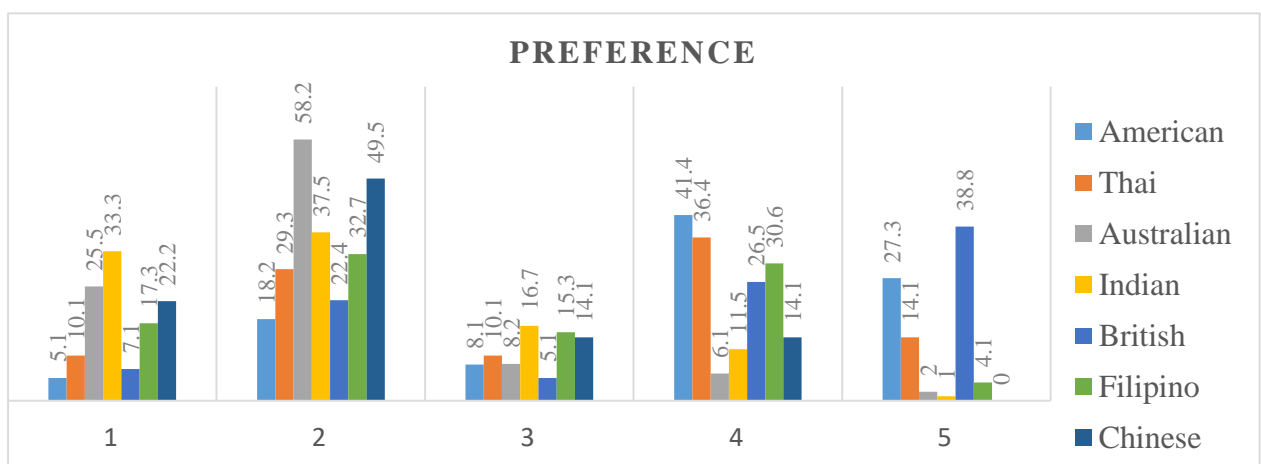
Figure 9. English Accents Preference

According to the data on English accent preference, 5 was most frequent in the British accent preference, 4 occurred most in American and Thai accents and 2 in the other accents. It was found that the British accent is the Thai undergraduates' most preferred English accent with 38.8 and 26.5 percent of 5 and 4 scores respectively, followed by the American accent with 27.3 and 41.4 percent, then the Thai accent with 14.1 and 36.4 percent, and the Filipino accent with 4.1 and 30.6 percent.
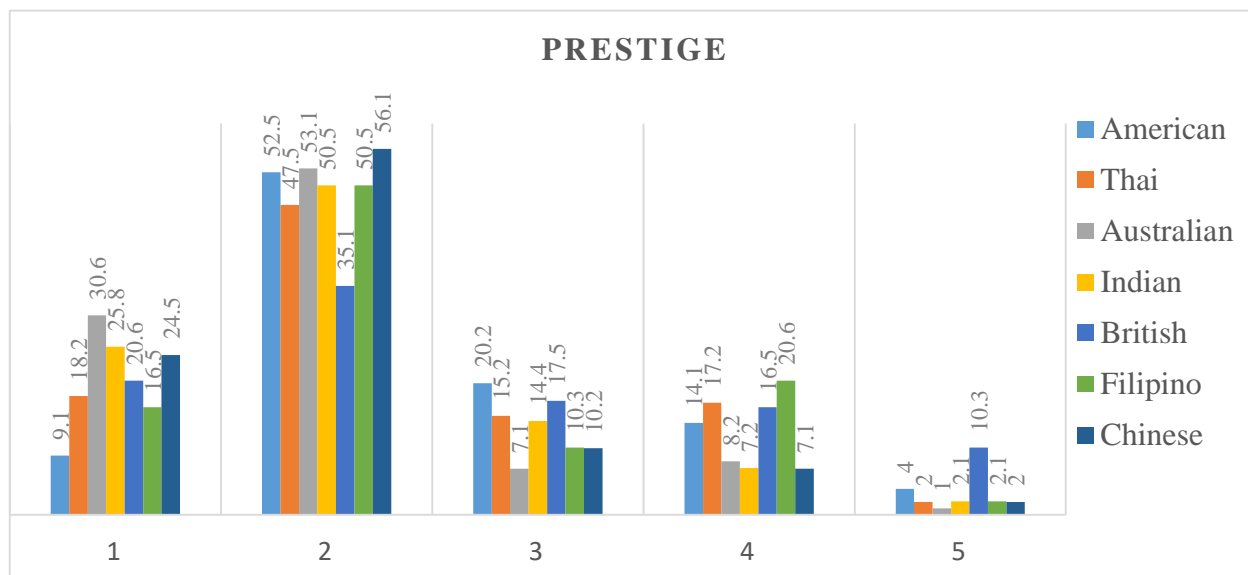
Figure 10. English Accents Prestige

According to prestige theory, accents serve as cues to judge the characteristics and education of the accented speaker. The respondents seem to disagree that accent shows the educational level of the speaker or accord prestige. As evident in the data, the most frequent number across the accents is 2 which denotes disagreement. Only 10.3 and 16.5 percent of 5 and 4 scores assert that the British accent conveys prestige, 4 and 14.1 percent align with the American accent, 2.1 and 20.6 percent identify with Filipino, and 2.1 and 7.2 percent say Indian accent.

In a nutshell, the overall respondents' attitudes in terms of likeness, intelligibility, acceptability, and preference for English accents were positive. This positive attitudinal orientation in the aspects of likeness, intelligibility, acceptability, and preference across the considered accents was found most in the British accent, then the American accent, followed by the Thai accent, and the Filipino accent. On the contrary, the aspect of prestige had a negative attitudinal orientation among respondents. This means that students did not consider native speaker English more prestigious than other varieties. Thus, based on the data in this item, this group of students were more inclined towards the notion of 'World Englishes'.

6.2 Influence of Various English Accents on Thai Undergraduate Students

The third part of the questionnaire explored the various accents' influence on respondents' communication competence. Five impacts were tested––motivation,

conversation, pronunciation, familiarity, and listening skills. The results presented in mode and frequency are as follows.
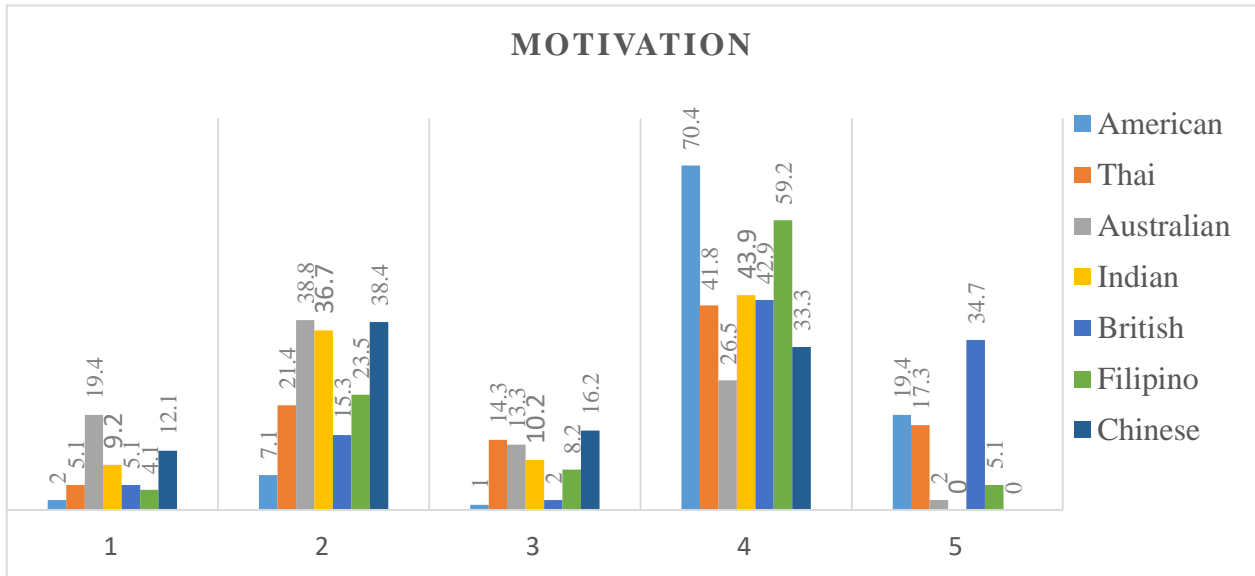

Figure 11. Motivation to Learn

According to Figure 11, motivation to learn the English language was most frequent in 4 across British, American, Thai, and Filipino accents. The respondents' interest in learning was mostly influenced by the British accent with 34.7 and 42.9 percent of score 5 and 4 respectively. It was followed by the American accent with 19.4 and 70.4 percent, then the Thai accent with 17.3 and 41.8 percent, and the Filipino accent with 5.1 and 59.2 percent of scores 5 and 4.
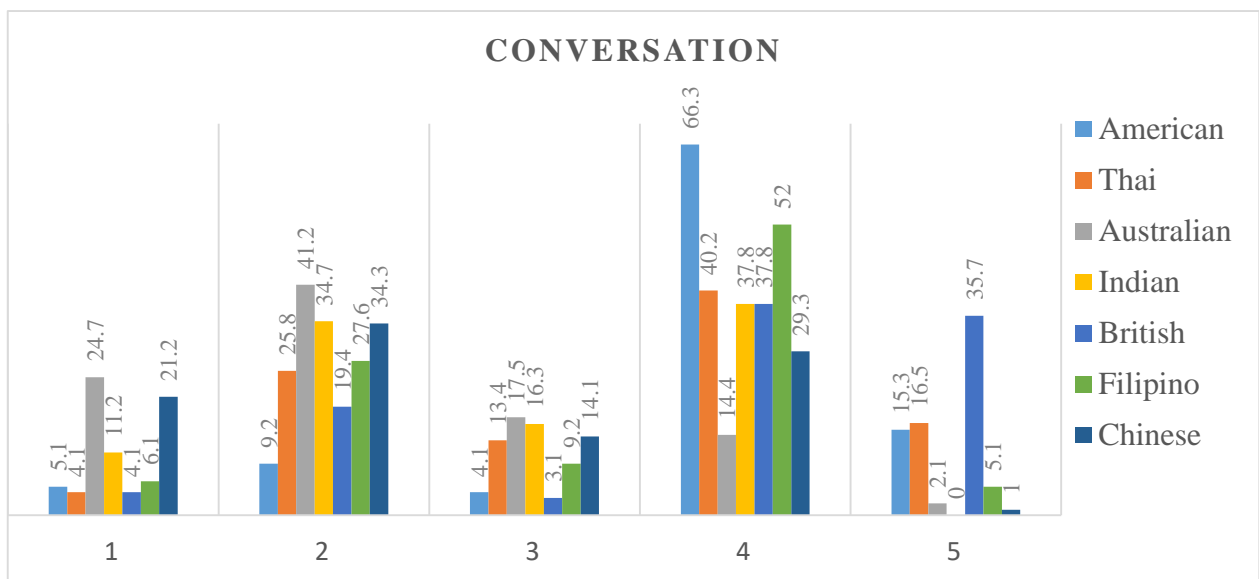

Figure 12. Ease of Conversation

As evident above, the degree of agreement to ease of interacting in the English language occurred mostly in 4 across the British, American, Thai, Filipino, and Indian accents. It follows that Thai undergraduates found it easy to interact in the English language using the British accent (35.7 and 37.8% of scores 5 and 4), then the American accent (15.3 and 66.3% of scores 5 and 4), Thai accent (16.5 and 40.2% of scores 5 and 4), and Filipino accent (5.1 and 52% of scores 5 and 4).
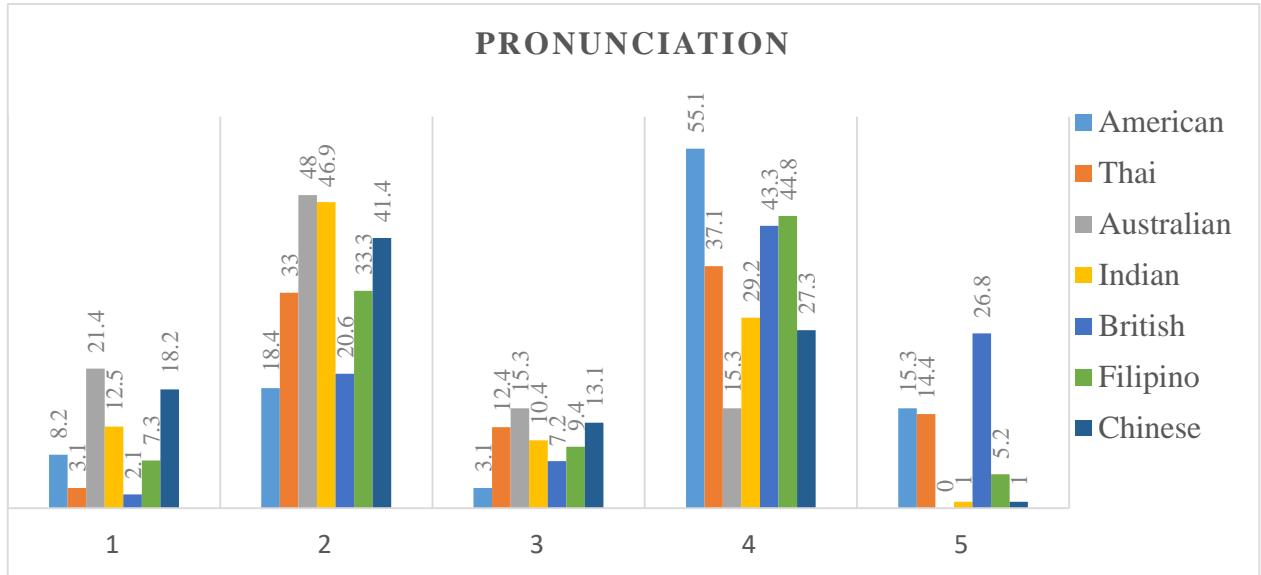
Figure 13. Correct Pronunciation

Using the teachers' accents as models, respondents rated the degree of their correct pronunciation of words and 4 had the highest frequencies in the British, American, Thai, and Filipino accents. Inferentially, Thai undergraduates can pronounce words more correctly using the British accent (26.8 and 44.3% of scores 5 and 4), followed by the American accent (15.3 and 55.1% of scores 5 and 4), Thai accent (14.4 and 37.1% of scores 5 and 4), and Filipino (5.2 and 44.8% of scores 5 and 4).
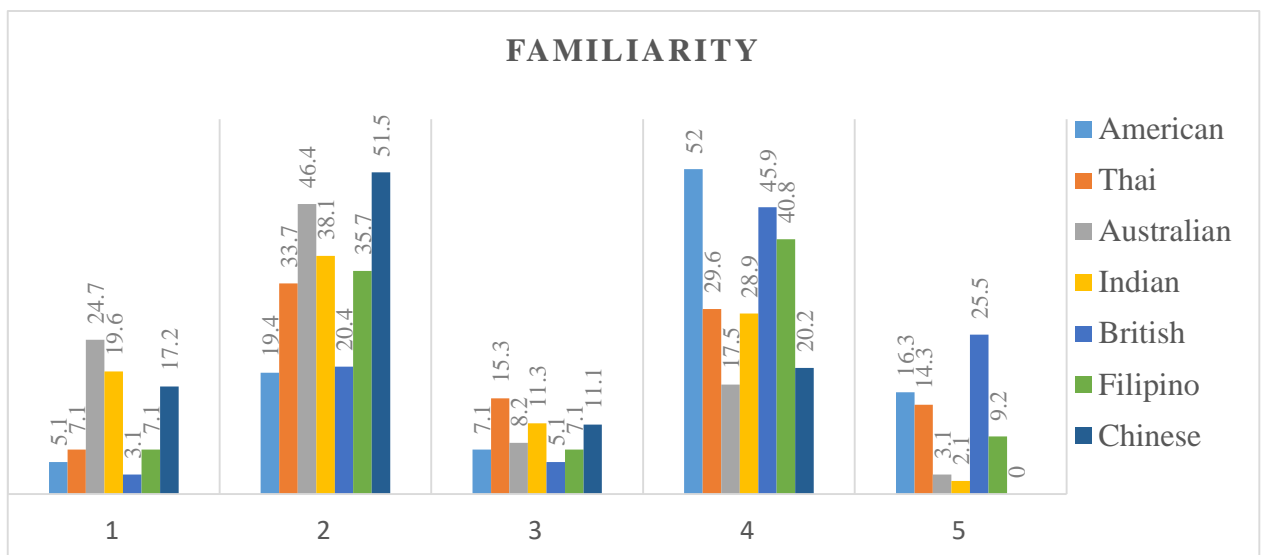

Figure 14 Familiarity with Accents

This item investigated the concept that familiarity with an accent improves English listening ability. On which accent whose familiarity has more impact on students' English listening ability, as seen in Figure 14, the most frequent points were 4 for the British, American, and Filipino accents and 2 for Chinese, Australian, Indian, and Thai. British accent topped the chart with 25.5 and 45.9 percent of scores 5 and 4 respectively, then the American accent with 16.3 and 52 percent, followed by Filipino with 9.2 and 40.8, and the Thai accent with 14.3 and 29.6. Invariably Thai undergraduates prefer familiarizing British, American, Filipino, and Thai accents.
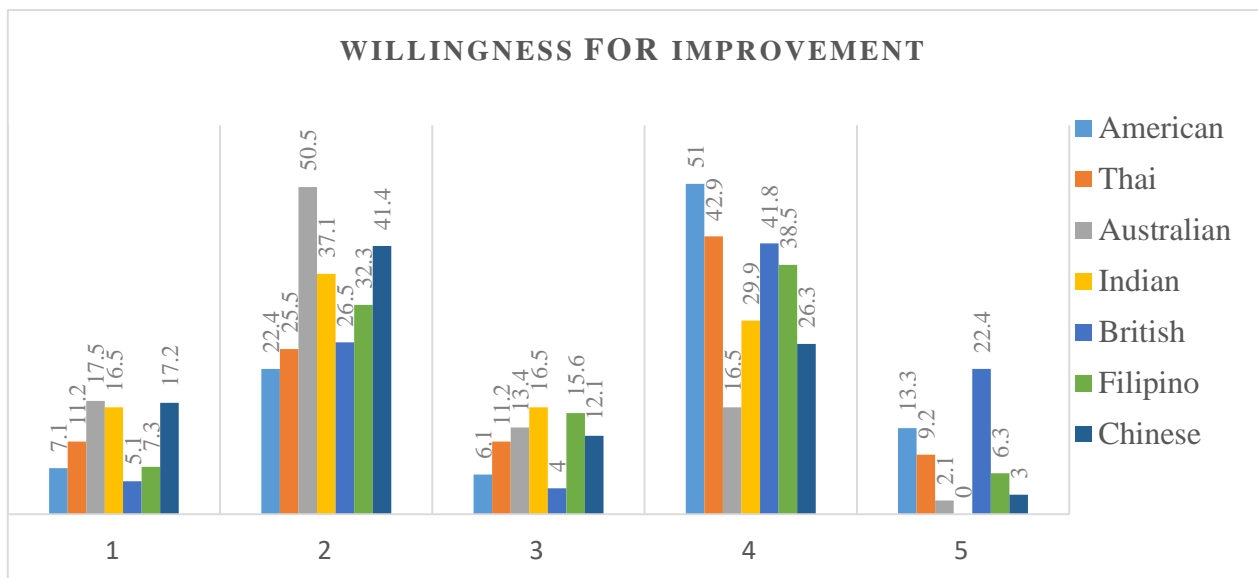
Figure 15. Willingness for Improvement

According to Figure 15, it was found that the willingness to improve English communication skills was impacted most by speaking and listening to teachers with British, American, Thai, and Filipino accents. According to Figure 15, it was found that the willingness to improve English communication skills was impacted more by speaking and listening to teachers with British, American, Thai, and Filipino accents. The willingness for improvement is enhanced most by speaking and listening to a teacher with a British accent (22.4 and 41.8% of scores 5 and 4), then the American accent (13.3 and 51% of scores 5 and 4), Thai accent (9.2 and 42.9% of scores 5 and 4), and Filipino accent (6.3 and 38.5% of scores 5 and 4).

6.4 Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

This section shows the coded data arrangement of the semi-structured interview. The concepts realised include global communication, accent preference, teachers' accent, easy accent, models, and interaction. Considering these with reference to the research questions, the attitudes of students were reflected in accent preference, teachers' accents, and easy accents. It was found that the majority of students in the interviews shared similar ideas that also matched with the views of the questionnaire respondents. On the other hand,

the impact of these accents was seen from the perspectives of global communication, models, and interaction. The following section presents the interviewees' actual words in different categories.

1) Global Communication
The interviewees' responses revealed their understanding of the usefulness of various English accents.

"I think knowing various accents makes it easy to talk to people around the world." (Interviewee 3, June 5th, 2023)

"It is important for good communication." (Interviewee 4, June 5th, 2023)

"Exposure to a variety of English accents is good for making friends work, and travel around the world." (Interviewee 11, June 6th, 2023)

2) Accent Preference
The interviewees' responses showed that they had specific reasons for each accent.

"I like a British accent. It's a sexy accent." (Interviewee1, June 5th, 2023).

"I prefer an American accent. It's better for me and I feel special." (Interviewee 4, June 6th, 2023)

"I like my Thai accent. It is easy to know where I come from." (Interviewee 7, June 6th, 2023)

3) Teacher's Preference
The interviewees' responses indicated that they did not place more significance or higher prestige for native speaker English. They cared about whether their teachers could teach well.

"I don't mind if my teachers are native or non-native, I go for learning English." (Interviewee 1, June 5th, 2023)

"I don't mind where my teachers come from. I just want to learn English." (Interviewee 3, June 5th, 2023)

"I don't care where my teacher comes from. I think teachers are good to teach students English." (Interviewee 5, June 6th, 2023)

"I like to study with American teachers John and Jane, good." (Interviewee 6, June 6th, 2023)

"I prefer British teachers. They are good teachers they are so good in teaching." (Interviewee 2, June 5th, 2023)

4) Easy Accent

The responses of the interviewees show that they prioritized easy-to-understand accents.

"I have listened to every accent but the American accent is easy for me." (Interviewee 4, June 5th, 2023)

"I like to speak with the British accent." (Interviewee 6, June 6th, 2023)

"I like my Thai English. I make fun with foreigners and they are happy to listen to me." (Interviewee 7, June 6th, 2023)

5) Model
Responses on accent modelling show that the English teacher must be a model.

"I take my teacher as a model and I always want to speak like my model." (Interviewee 1, June 6th, 2023)

"I don't have a model. I like listening to everyone talk and I try to learn." (Interviewee 2, June 5th, 2023)

"English model is good for me. I prefer to speak like my model." (Interviewee 4, June 5th, 2023)

6) Interaction
Responses on the interviewees' language learning strategies pointed out how they picked up their accents.

"I work on my accent by watching movies and listening to music." (Interviewee 3, June 5th, 2023)

"I repeat English sounds I hear and that's how I learn my preferred accent." (Interviewee 4, June 5th, 2023)

"I repeat words from movie dialogue and see how best to speak fluently after listening." (Interviewee 5 June 5th, 2023)

In summary, the qualitative findings reported students' willingness to learn many accents to ease global communication, education success and carrier standing. The various English accents did not negatively affect the students but positively influenced their needs and learning objectives. The topmost preferred accents were British, American and Thai English, respectively. Students indicated a significant efficiency of social media access to develop their preferred accents.

In comparing and contrasting the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data, it is apparent they are similar in that the students in the study primarily considered their own benefits in choosing their preferred accents to support their English language learning and development. They did not prefer an accent because it was associated with prestige. In other words, any accent that supported ease and fluency as well as effectiveness in communication would be targeted.

7. Conclusion

The study findings can be concluded with a reference to emerging issues as follows.

7.1 Attitudes towards Various English Accents

The investigation of this study was on seven accents--British, American, Australian, Indian, Thai, Filipino, and Chinese accents which are aligned with and reflect Kachru's concentric circles of English language users around the world. British, American, and Australian accents belong to the inner circle (the Native Speakers of English); Indian and Filipino accents are of the outer circle (English as a Second language users), while Thai and Chinese accents are of the expanding circle (the English as a Foreign Language users). The results of the study show that students' likenesses, opinions and preferences did not address the order of significance of the English language users of these circles from the most perfect to the least due to the idea of which group they belong to. but they particularly considered typical individual accents. This was a move away from the predominant nativism standard. For instance, though the Australian accent is of the inner circle it never appeared in the top four at any instance. As in earlier research by Alzahrani et al (2022) in the Saudi context, the results of the present study suggest that having an accent as an EFL teacher might not be perceived negatively as long as the teacher has the ability to deliver lessons effectively. It equally aligns with the findings of Kalra and Thanavisuth (2018) that familiarity with a particular accent reinforces learners' certainty and feeling of language character which may ensue in preferences.

Acknowledging the existence and being equipped with knowledge of varieties of English accents will eradicate learners' monolithic conceptions of the World Englishes and rescue their status in the learning scale. (Matsuda, 2003a, p. 722) it will also create awareness of other varieties of English internationally. These thoughts stationed the penultimate emphasis in this present study. The learners' exposure to various English teachers from seven nationalities offered detailed data on accent recognition. The measured items in the study unfold the learners' attitudes to a given accented nationality giving positive and non-judgemental attitudes upon the speakers' interlocution. This points to some accents as intelligible, familiar, motivated, etc. The results of these held statuses by learners demonstrate exposure or selective accent standard in the socio-linguistic landscape. To maintain these positive remarks and excuse English learners from judgemental standpoints towards other varieties of English accents and accented speakers, a recap of reinforcement and assisted learning pedagogy is pertinent to their learning curriculum. According to Munro, Derwing and Sato (2006), these approaches will help strengthen English learners' awareness in the process towards the emancipation of stereotype attitudes and expose the channels through which it is instilled and reinforced. Along the same line, Khatib and Monfared (2017), there has been an emergence of numerous varieties of English as a result of globalization. Therefore, varieties of English should play a significant part in English language teaching and learning to avoid the pain of the need to adopt only the standard accents. As Koad (2014) pointed out, "students trying to pursue the model of native English speakers were considerably discouraged along the learning process, while the group who did not pay much attention to accent perfection were happy and excelling."

In addition, the research results support Matsuda and Friedrich's (2011) position that although one variety of English can be chosen as the overriding instructional model, learners must understand that the variety used is one of the numerous varieties thereby eliminating the possible misconception that the instructional variety is the only correct variety for the learners. Such eliminates negative attitudes toward other varieties of English and boosts students' confidence as they converge in any accent of their choice. The participants' non-stereotypical and positive attitudes toward their teachers' many accents were also reflected in their non-insistence and not demanding of teachers of certain linguistic backgrounds but welcoming all as far as lessons are well taught. It was equally confirmed in their negative attitudinal orientation toward the prestige theory. These are a step toward Kachru's call for reconsidering the goal of studying English essentially for communication rather than imitating nativelike accents. Kachru's (1985, 1986) "World Englishes" opposes the idea that any form of English is superior to all others.

7.2 Influence of Varieties of English Accents on Students' English Language learning

Recognising the English language transition and changes over decades offers divergent views on its adoption, usage and integration into learning subjects. Owning to this, it is practically incorrect to bestow Western ownership and ambiguous pedagogical practices as a standard form of English (Shin, 2004) in the expanding circle context, especially in Thailand where students use English solely as a foreign language. This posits a task for reconsideration of the English language teaching and learning contents in Thailand to be wholistically revisited. Some research findings prove evidence that acknowledge the existence of prototypical practices of English as a foreign language which influence and suggests learners to act in consonant with native speakerism (Bolton, 2005; Buripakdi, 2008; Forman, 2005, Metcalfe, 2013, Nattheeraphong, 2004, Patil, 2008). In addition, Kachru (1986) calls for reconsidering the goal of studying English essentially for communication rather than imitating nativelike accents. Further findings reveal the belief by Thais that acquaintances with inner-circle English models guarantee life success in the global space (Modiano, 2005). Unfortunately, such belief does not meet the prevalent provision of the English language in recent times as language transition and proliferation birthed diversification of adoption and usage as a world lingua franca. To thrive learners with educational practices in realness and standard to international imitations as a lingua franca calls for learners' engagement beyond the concept of native mindset into the spheres of exposure to varieties of English accents (Cook, 1998; Modiano, 2005). This is similar to Todd's (2006) views that realistic practices for English language acquisition in Thailand should gear towards awareness of the English language as an international language.

Emphatically, English language learners should be availed of the principles of the sociolinguistic landscape of English adoption e.g the transitory approach of English from sectional ownership to global ownership, the political and sociolinguistic trace of the English language, the concept and usage of English as monolingual, adverse to multilingual adoption (Kachru, 1992). The rewarding pathways of English accents exposure are stated to enhance communication competence when learners come in contact with other varieties of English-accented persons (Matsuura, 2007, Seidlhofer, 2004). In this study, the respondents acknowledged the significance of understanding varieties of accents. On a positive note, participants in the study observed that accent familiarity would aid a friendly approach and enable international work and travel. This also posited that accent familiarity

serves in the understanding of other persons, especially in conversation. It can be inferred therefore from Modiano (2005) that accents exposure can influence learners' motivation in conversation and listening skills acquisition.

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