

Language Attitudes Toward English Accents among Thai Youth

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Abstract

This study investigates language attitudes toward English accents among Thai youth, examining preferences, perceived prestige, familiarity, and the influence of demographic factors and media exposure. A total of 200 participants aged 15–24, from secondary schools and universities in Thailand, completed a self-administered questionnaire measuring attitudes toward American, British, Thai English, and other non-native accents using a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and correlation analyses were employed to analyze the data. The results indicate that American and British accents are the most preferred and perceived as highly prestigious, while Thai English and other non-native accents received moderate positive evaluations. Age, educational level, urban exposure, and media consumption significantly influenced accent attitudes, with greater exposure correlating with stronger preference for Inner Circle accents. These findings highlight the impact of sociocultural factors, media influence, and native-speaker ideology on language perceptions. Implications for EFL teaching in Thailand include incorporating diverse English accents in instructional materials to foster acceptance of global English varieties and enhance learners' listening comprehension, speaking confidence, and communicative competence.

Keywords: English accents, Language attitudes, Thai youth, EFL, Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

1.1 Principles and Rationale

English has become a global lingua franca, serving as a key medium for international communication, education, business, and digital interaction (Crystal, 2003). In multilingual contexts such as Thailand, English plays a crucial role not only as a foreign language but also as a symbol of social status, educational achievement, and global connectivity (Kirkpatrick, 2010). However, despite widespread exposure to English, learners' attitudes toward different English accents—such as British, American, and other varieties—can significantly influence their comprehension, motivation, and communicative confidence (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Language attitudes refer to the positive or negative perceptions, evaluations, and feelings that speakers hold toward a particular language or language variety (Baker, 1992). These attitudes shape learners' linguistic choices, willingness to communicate, and even their identity as global English speakers (Lippi-Green, 2012). Research indicates that learners' preferences for certain accents may reflect sociocultural factors, such as exposure to media, perceived prestige, and cultural identification with native speakers of English (Timmis, 2002; Munro & Derwing, 1995).

Prior studies have highlighted that accent familiarity and perceived prestige often lead learners to prefer specific English varieties over others. For instance, Thai university students have been shown to favor American English due to its prevalence in movies, music, and online content, while British English is often associated with formal education and higher status (Pimsuriyawong, 2019; Suriyan, 2021). These attitudes can have pedagogical implications, as learners may experience greater motivation or anxiety depending on the accent presented in classroom materials, influencing both listening comprehension and speaking proficiency.

Despite the growing interest in English language education in Thailand, research on accent attitudes among Thai youth remains limited, particularly studies comparing attitudes toward multiple accents and linking them to sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, region, and media exposure. Investigating these attitudes can provide valuable insights for EFL teachers, curriculum developers, and policy makers, enabling them to design instructional materials that are culturally relevant, motivational, and aligned with learners' preferences.

Therefore, this study aims to explore language attitudes toward different English accents among Thai youth, examining how these attitudes vary across social and demographic factors and discussing their potential implications for English language teaching in Thailand.

1.2 Research Objective

The primary aim of this study is to investigate language attitudes toward different English accents among Thai youth. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine Thai youths' attitudes toward various English accents (e.g., American, British, and other varieties) in terms of preference, perceived prestige, and familiarity.
2. To explore the relationship between demographic factors (such as age, gender, region, and educational background) and attitudes toward English accents among Thai youth.
3. To investigate the influence of media exposure and social interaction on the development of Thai youths' language attitudes toward different English accents.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Language Attitudes and Accent Ideology

Language attitudes refer to the evaluative judgments, feelings, and beliefs that speakers hold toward particular language varieties or accents (Baker, 1992). These attitudes are shaped by sociolinguistic factors such as ideology, identity, prestige, and exposure (Lippi-Green, 2012). In the context of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), accent ideology often privileges "Inner Circle" varieties (e.g., American, British) as standard or prestigious, while non-native or localized varieties may be stigmatized. Such ideologies influence how learners perceive intelligibility, status, and "correctness" in English (Charatwattananich & Proce, 2024).

2.2 Accent Attitudes among Thai Learners: Global, Local, and ELF Perspectives

Empirical research in Thailand indicates that many learners hold strong preferences for native-like accents. In a mixed-methods study, Ambele and Boonsuk (2021) reported that Thai university students have ambivalent attitudes toward their own Thai-English accent: although many say they accept it if understandable, some still aspire to sound more like native speakers of American or British English. Similarly, Sahrai and Tantiniranat (2024) investigated secondary-school students' attitudes and found that American English is overwhelmingly

avored as the standard of pronunciation. Their study also revealed a negative self-perception among some Thai learners regarding their own Thai English accent.

2.3 Attitudes toward Accent Diversity in Thai Educational Contexts

Several studies in Thai educational contexts highlight how students evaluate different varieties of English. Frank & Chayanuvat (2023) conducted a study at a private Thai university, surveying undergraduates' attitudes toward seven English accents (e.g., U.S., U.K., Australia, India, Philippines, Thailand, China). Their findings show that the top preferences in terms of "likeness, intelligibility, acceptability, preference, and prestige" were British, American, and Thai English accents. In addition, Ambele (2023) qualitatively analyzed the attitudes of Thai undergraduates toward non-Inner Circle English accents. Many students expressed appreciation for accent diversity and recognized the identity and charm of different English varieties. Still, some maintained a preference for Inner Circle accents as more "ideal."

2.4 Sociolinguistic Implications, Identity, and Native-Speakerism

Accent attitudes in Thailand reflect broader sociolinguistic dynamics, including identity construction and ideology. The preference for native-like American or British accents can be linked to standard language ideology, where these accents are viewed as "correct" or "prestigious" (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). This ideology can undermine the status of local English varieties, such as Thai English, despite their communicative effectiveness (Charatwattananich & Proce, 2024). Moreover, the recognition of non-native accents among Thai learner points to increasing awareness of English as a global, pluricentric phenomenon. Studies suggest that Thai learners are gradually valuing intelligibility and communication over "native-likeness," particularly in ELF contexts (Ambele, 2023; Frank & Chayanuvat, 2023).

In conclusion, there is limited research focusing specifically on Thai youth, as most studies examine university or adult learners. Few studies explore how media exposure and global digital environments shape young people's accent attitudes. The links between accent attitudes and actual EFL outcomes—such as confidence, comprehension, and willingness to communicate—remain largely unexamined. Research rarely investigates teachers' roles, classroom practices, or curriculum design in shaping or responding to accent preferences. Overall, more youth-centered, pedagogically oriented, and media-informed studies are needed to address these gaps.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design using survey methodology to examine the attitudes of Thai youth toward different English accents. Descriptive research is appropriate for capturing participants' perceptions, preferences, and evaluative judgments and for identifying patterns in language attitudes across demographic variables.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population for this study comprises Thai youth aged 15–24, including both secondary school and university students from Bangkok and various regional provinces. A total sample of 200 participants will be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation across gender, age group, region, and educational level. Eligible participants must have studied English for at least three years and have basic listening and speaking skills in English.

3.2 Research Instruments

The main instrument is a self-administered questionnaire developed to assess participants' attitudes toward different English accents. The questionnaire consists of:

Demographic Information: Age, gender, education level, region, years of English learning, and exposure to English media.

Attitude Assessment: Items rated on a 5-point Likert scale covering: Preference for specific English accents (American, British, Thai English, etc.), Perceived prestige of each accent, Familiarity and comprehensibility of the accents, and Impact on motivation and confidence in learning English.

Open-ended Questions: Optional qualitative responses about participants' reasons for their preferences and perceptions.

The questionnaire is adapted from prior research on accent attitudes and validated through expert review by three EFL specialists in Thailand. Content validity was confirmed by three experts in sociolinguistics and EFL teaching, who evaluated whether the questionnaire items adequately represented the key dimensions of accent attitudes. The instrument was piloted with 30 Thai youth to assess clarity and comprehension, and its reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency and stable measurement of accent attitudes.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure began with obtaining ethical approval from school and university administrators, followed by securing informed consent from all participants. Questionnaires were administered both in classroom settings and through online platforms such as Google Forms to accommodate respondents from remote regions.

3.4 Data Analysis

The statistical methods used for data analysis consisted of the following:

Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were used to summarize participants' attitudes toward each English accent.

Comparative Analysis: Independent-sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were employed to examine differences in attitudes according to gender, age, educational level, and region.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between media exposure, familiarity, and attitude scores.

Qualitative Analysis: Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns and reasons for accent preferences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4. Results

A total of 200 Thai youth participated in the study, representing a balanced and diverse sample across key demographic categories. Of the participants, 98 were male and 102 were female. In terms of age, 90 respondents were between 15–18 years old, while 110 were aged 19–24. The educational background of the sample consisted of 90 secondary school students and 110 university students. Regarding geographical distribution, 120 participants were from Bangkok and 80 were from other provinces, ensuring regional representation within the dataset.

4.1 Overall Attitudes Toward English Accents

Participants were asked to rate their attitudes toward five English accents: American, British, Thai English, and other non-native accents. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Table 1 summarizes the demographic information.

Table 1 Overall Attitudes Toward English Accents

English Accent	Mean	SD	Interpretation
American	4.35	0.62	Highly Positive
British	4.18	0.68	Positive
Thai English	3.60	0.72	Moderate
Others Non-Native	3.40	0.75	Slightly Positive

The results revealed Thai youth show the strongest preference for American English, followed by British English. Thai English and other non-native accents are perceived positively but less preferred. These results indicate that while Thai youth recognize the legitimacy of local and diverse English varieties, native-like accents continue to dominate perceptions of correctness and prestige.

4.2 Perceived Prestige of English Accents

Participants rated the perceived prestige of each accent on a scale of 1–5. Table 2 summarizes the perceived prestige of English accents.

Table 2 Perceived Prestige of English Accents

English Accent	Mean	SD	Interpretation
American	4.35	0.62	Highly Positive
British	4.18	0.68	Positive
Thai English	3.60	0.72	Moderate
Others Non-Native	3.40	0.75	Slightly Positive

The results indicate that American and British accents are associated with higher social status, cultural influence, and “standard” English. Thai English, while familiar and intelligible, is perceived as less prestigious.

4.3 Familiarity and Comprehensibility

Participants’ self-reported familiarity and comprehensibility of the accents presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Familiarity and Comprehensibility

English Accent	Mean	SD	Interpretation
American	4.30	0.65	High Familiarity
British	4.00	0.70	Moderate to High Familiarity
Thai English	3.90	0.68	Moderate to High Familiarity
Others Non-Native	3.50	0.72	Moderate Familiarity

The results indicate that participants are most familiar with American and British accents due to media exposure and educational materials. Thai English is familiar but considered less “ideal” in prestige.

4.4 Differences in Attitudes by Demographic Factors

Differences in accent attitudes among Thai youth were examined using independent-sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA across key demographic factors. No significant gender differences were observed in overall accent preference ($t = 1.12, p > 0.05$). However, age was a significant factor, with older participants (19–24 years) showing a higher preference for American English compared to younger participants (15–18 years) ($F = 5.23, p < 0.05$). Educational level also influenced attitudes, as university students rated British English higher in prestige than secondary school students ($t = 2.45, p < 0.05$). Regional differences were evident, with participants from Bangkok assigning greater prestige to American English than those from other provinces ($t = 2.12, p < 0.05$), suggesting that age, education, and urban exposure shape accent preferences.

4.5 Relationship Between Media Exposure and Accent Attitudes

Pearson correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between media exposure and attitudes toward Inner-Circle accents. Frequent engagement with English-language media was significantly correlated with preference for American English ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$) and British English ($r = 0.35, p < 0.01$), whereas media exposure showed no significant correlation with attitudes toward Thai English or other non-native accents ($r < 0.15, p > 0.05$). These findings suggest that media consumption reinforces exposure-driven preferences for widely used native-like accents while having minimal impact on local or non-native varieties.

5. Conclusion

This study examined language attitudes toward English accents among Thai youth, focusing on preference, perceived prestige, familiarity, and the influence of demographic factors and media exposure. The findings indicate that American and British accents are the most preferred and perceived as highly prestigious among Thai youth, while Thai English and other non-native accents receive moderate positive evaluations. These preferences align with prior research highlighting the influence of native-speaker ideologies and exposure to international media in shaping learners' perceptions of English accents (Baker, 1992; Lippi-Green, 2012; Pimsuriyawong, 2019).

The study further found that demographic factors, including age, educational level, and urban exposure, significantly affect accent attitudes. Older participants and those with university-level education showed a stronger preference for Inner Circle accents, indicating that greater exposure to English through education and media reinforces prestige-oriented perceptions (Frank & Chayanuvat, 2023). Additionally, increased media exposure was positively correlated with preference for American and British accents, highlighting the influence of popular culture, social media, and entertainment on language attitudes (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Regarding language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies—used for planning, organizing, focusing, and monitoring learning—were the most frequently employed, followed by cognitive strategies aimed at comprehension and language production.

The analysis revealed that the three most frequently used metacognitive strategies were: (1) striving to be a better language learner, (2) paying close attention to the speaker, and (3) learning from mistakes. These findings carry significant implications for EFL pedagogy in Thailand. Educators and curriculum designers should incorporate diverse English accents into listening and speaking activities to raise learners' awareness of global English variation and

challenge native-speaker norms. Encouraging acceptance of Thai English and other non-native varieties can strengthen learners' confidence, motivation, and communicative competence in English as a Lingua Franca (Ambele, 2023; Charatwattananich & Proce, 2024; Yordchim et al., 2025).

In conclusion, understanding Thai youth's attitudes toward English accents not only informs effective teaching strategies but also contributes to culturally responsive and inclusive English education. Future research should expand to include younger adolescents, longitudinal studies on accent attitudes over time, and qualitative exploration of the social and psychological factors underlying these perceptions.

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