

English as a Lingua Franca: Learners' Views on Pronunciation

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Abstract

This paper aimed to investigate whether pronunciation norms based on native speakers of English still dominate English language teaching in Thailand in an era when English has acquired the status of a global lingua franca. The study examined non-native English majors' attitudes toward various pronunciation issues that relate to the notion of English as a lingua franca by means of indirect (verbal guise test) and direct (questionnaire and semi-structured interview) attitudinal elicitation methods. Findings showed that the construct of the idealised native speaker is still anchored to the field of ELT and pronunciation teaching as it was nominated by the majority of participants as the end goal in pronunciation learning. However, to a certain extent, the participants' perceptions were consistent with the notion of English as a lingua franca as they seemed to see non-native varieties as intelligible Englishes and consider them as important when classroom learning is involved. The paper ends by proposing pedagogical implications for pronunciation learning and teaching that are believed to be realistic, applicable and attainable for the English language classroom in Thailand and non-native contexts.

1 Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed several changes in sociolinguistic profiles of English brought by globalisation. Perhaps, the most noticeable change is that English has been used as a means of communication mostly between non-native speakers (NNSs). In addition, the number of NNSs has significantly surpassed that of native speakers (NSs), meaning that more and more NNSs use English as a lingua franca (ELF) to communicate among themselves and to suit their own linguistic purposes (Crystal, 2004). The second area of change concerns the ownership of English. Widdowson (1994) points out that English no longer only belongs to NSs, but to everyone who uses it. Similarly, Kachru (1992) argues that English should be treated as a denationalised language in the sense that it belongs internationally. These changes have made ELF scholars begin to think about how ELF could shape the way English is taught in the classroom and negotiate the appropriate linguistic models for English language teaching (ELT) of the globalised world. Particularly, issues concerning phonological variation across Englishes have received considerable attention from ELF and world Englishes scholars (e.g., Cook, 1999; Derwing & Munro, 1997; Jenkins, 2000, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Matsumoto, 2011; Sifakis & Sougari, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004), especially when it comes to the question of what pronunciation models and norms should inform classroom teaching. Levis (2005) points out two contradictory principles in pronunciation teaching: the nativeness principle, whereby learners seek to approximate a standard pronunciation model (e.g., American and British English), and the intelligibility principle, whereby learners opt for an ability to make themselves easily understood despite first language (L1) interference in English pronunciation. The former is believed to be the traditional goal of pronunciation learning and

teaching which could stretch back to the late 15th century (Jenkins, 2000). Until fairly recently, as Jenkins (2000) argues, such learning and teaching goal is still prevalent in contemporary ELT: learners mainly need the language in order to communicate effectively with NSs, who are regarded as the sole owners of English, keepers of standard English and authorisers of pedagogic norms. On the contrary, the intelligibility principle has been vastly embraced by ELF advocates for its sensitivity to local context (Levis, 2005) and relevance to the changing architecture of English in the world, which can be conceptualised through “worldwide transitions in the function, contexts of use, and ownership of English” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 5).

In response to the increased use of English in ELF contexts, Litzenberg (2014) calls for “a reconceptualisation of many traditional linguistic concepts, such as what constitutes an ‘error’ and perceptions of successful communication” (p. 2). Given a growing literature on ELF and increasing efforts to reconceptualise language variation, an interesting question is: What do NNS learners, who mainly use the language with other ELF speakers, think about these issues?

In Thailand, despite a growing increase in awareness of ELF, we do not have much empirical data regarding the question of how ELF ideas in pronunciation learning and teaching are shared by learners in the classroom. To add to the literature of ELF pronunciation learning and teaching, which is largely under-researched in Thailand, it is important to explore Thai tertiary English learners' attitudes toward different sociolinguistic and social-psychological pronunciation issues with regard to ELF, and the ways in which concerns can be addressed in the pedagogy of ELF pronunciation.

This study attempts to provide a discussion for the question as to whether the learning and teaching of English pronunciation in Thailand can go beyond the dominance of idealised NS norms and ideology. To achieve this aim, this study is structured to follow two paths. On the one hand, it builds on previous literature concerning attitudes toward pronunciation norms. The aim is to add to the emerging literature on ELF pronunciation learning and teaching from the perspective of English language learners in a NNS country (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). On the other hand, the study elaborates on the attitudinal findings in an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the socio-political dimension of English and to form a practical principle for viewing and approaching pronunciation pedagogy apart from NS standards (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005).

2 ELF and debates on pronunciation norms

As far as the notion of world Englishes is concerned, the intelligibility principle is emphasised over the nativeness principle. In fact, the traditional ELT assumption which prioritises NS approximation has been put into question due to its irrelevance and inappropriateness for NNSs who mainly communicate with other NNSs (Cook, 1999). This view has been supported by a number of scholars. For example, McKay (2002) claims that not all NNS learners and users of English need or want to acquire native-like competence in pronunciation. In fact, when it comes to ELF communication, people may not only want to communicate their messages, but also need to convey their identity through the language or language varieties they speak (Widdowson, 1994). Given emerging varieties of English in the world, Derwing and Munro (1997) state that foreign-accented English should be tolerated and should not be judged against how close they are to a certain NS standard. Moreover, considering native-like competence in pronunciation in the light of second language (L2) acquisition, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p. 158), citing the functions of language learning circuitry in the human brain, even argue that “a native-like accent is impossible unless first exposure is quite early, probably around the age of six”. Lastly, the most recent movement in pronunciation teaching and learning is perhaps Jenkins' (2000) proposal on international pronunciation syllabus. In her book entitled *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, she introduces Lingua Franca Core (LFC) pronunciation syllabus, which encompasses phonological features necessary for mutual intelligibility, for pronunciation teaching and assessment. In addition to the LFC, Jenkins excludes a number of phonological features that do not jeopardise mutual intelligibility in NNS interactions such as vowel quality, weak forms, pitch movement, assimilation and stress timing. Jenkins' contention for the LFC proposal is that “there is

nothing intrinsically wrong with L2 pronunciation that does not conform to a NS accent but varies in the direction of the speaker's own L1" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 79). Following Jenkins' categorisation, it should be highlighted that *pronunciation* and *accent* are two different terms. With the adoption of ELF-based pronunciation syllabus, NNS learners can feel free to produce non-core pronunciation features with their mother-tongue influence or first language accent. In other words, good pronunciation does not necessarily mean having a NS-like accent. Jenkins also calls for a redefinition of phonological and phonetic error for ELF: "one which incorporates the sociolinguistic facts of regional variation instead of regarding any deviation from NS pronunciation as a potentially harmful error (the EFL perspective)" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 97). In other words, L2 productions should not be equated with deficiency or incorrectness if they are structured systematically in L2 norms.

While Jenkins' work has sparked considerable criticisms over its unnaturalness (Sobkoviak, 2005), limited practicality (Doel, 2010), and heavy bias toward L1 users' phonetic and preference (Scheuer, 2005), it has been favoured by many scholars and proven useful in various ELT contexts in terms of its learnability (Graddol, 2006), manageability (Seidlhofer, 2004), attainability (Matsumoto, 2011), relevance for learners in authentic settings (Coskun, 2011) and NNS identity promotion (Dauer 2005).

Due to a growing recognition of ELF in applied linguistics, recently, many ELT educators have begun to conduct research into L2 learners' perceptions of pronunciation norms and models in various parts of the world, such as China (He & Zhang, 2010), Hong Kong (Li, 2009; Sung, 2013), Croatia (Stanojevic, Borenic, & Smojver, 2012) and Turkey (Coskun 2011). Some studies were interested in comparing attitudes of participants from different L1 backgrounds (e.g. Nowacka, 2012; Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006). One of the shared findings in these studies is that while NS varieties of English were preferred as the most effective instructional models in pronunciation, NNS varieties were often associated with low prestige. Also related is the shared belief system, which revealed that the ability to mimic NS-based accents was always considered as a source of pride. Besides, these studies also made a number of different interesting findings. For instance, Sung (2013) found that, according to the Hong Kong participants, NS accents could sometimes hinder mutual intelligibility if the pronunciation in question was strongly accented or too regionally native-like. This led Sung to conclude that "'accentedness' is not only associated with a 'foreign', or 'non-native', accent, but also with native-speaker accents as well" (p. 20). However, this finding runs counter to another study in Hong Kong, Li's (2009). Li's participants did not believe NS Englishes can cause communication breakdown. In contrast, only NNS Englishes were seen by many as a major cause of miscommunication. Li also pointed out the emerging tension between intelligibility and identity voiced by a small number of participants who preferred localised accents as a means for conveying their identity when speaking English. In another study, Scales et al. (2006) investigated ESL learners' perceptions of accent. The results showed that although the majority of participants rated NS Englishes as the easiest to understand and indicated their goal to be native-like in their accent, only a small number of them were able to correctly identify the American accent. In China, He and Zhang (2010) explored the question of whether NS norms should inform ELT in China. They argued that although NS-based linguistic standards were indicated by the Chinese as the most desirable norms in the classroom, China English would be more welcomed if it was linguistically codified. In Croatia, a study by Stanojevic et al. (2012) revealed that while the Croatians disfavoured bad pronunciation (strongly accented English), they appeared to be tolerant to a mild accent. This finding, according to the authors, suggested "a clear case of linguistic schizophrenia" (Stanojevic et al. 2012, p. 38): it is of utmost importance to learn how to speak proper English, but L1-influenced traces in L2 English are unavoidable and always noticeable.

In Thailand, a growing number of studies have been conducted to investigate different issues in pronunciation learning and teaching. Being aware of the global role of English in the world, some studies have also tried to make a number of implications for the pronunciation classroom. For instance, referring to the important role of English in ASEAN, Kanoksilapatham (2014) firmly states that several problematic areas in pronunciation (e.g. interference from learners' mother tongue) are responsible for dissatisfaction in Thai learners' pronunciation performance. This is at variance

with the ELF idea which, for example, sees L1 trace in L2 as a part of the speaker's identity. In another case, Isarankura (2009) argues that in order to develop a more informed and effective method for teaching pronunciation in Thailand, it is important for Thai learners to have the ability "to clearly interpret native speakers' intended messages" (p. 71). Concerning teacher beliefs, Suwanarak (2010) found that Thai tertiary English teachers were reluctant to teach aural and oral skills. NS teachers were believed to be better at teaching these skills than themselves. Similarly, in a study conducted by Methitham (2009) to investigate the ideology of NS and NNS dichotomy in ELT in Thailand, it was revealed that, in the light of pronunciation teaching, local English teachers seemed to encourage their learners to achieve a NS accent.

In the above literature review, there appears to be a gap in pronunciation research. Though most studies tended to suggest that NNS English learners (and teachers) gravitated towards NS norms, it is still unclear when it comes to the question of whether these learners are aware of the changing profiles of English in the world. A mere reliance on the finding of learners' preference for pronunciation models and norms alone may not sufficiently help to yield relevant implications for the ELF pronunciation classroom. Emerging sociolinguistic issues surrounding English pronunciation should also be brought into consideration to inform how effective pronunciation teaching should be directed. In other words, what the literature in pronunciation research did not clearly reveal is to what extent English language learners' views "are related to their awareness of the sociolinguistic issues involved in the debate about NS norms and international English" (Timmis, 2002, p. 248). To observe any possible difference in language attitudes as a result of sociolinguistic changes in the society, more research in this field is needed.

3 Objectives and research questions

The central objective of this study was to investigate Thai tertiary English language learners' perceptions of different ELF-based pronunciation issues. It is important to know whether the lingua franca role of English was part of the English language learners' belief system. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the Thai tertiary English learners' views on pronunciation?
2. Do their beliefs reflect their recognition of the notion of English as a lingua franca?

These central questions lend themselves to several empirical points to be investigated in this study. Particularly, the issues explored concern how English language learners stereotypically reacted to different accents of English, how they saw the connection between pronunciation practices and native-like competence, whether they considered understanding varieties of English to be important, how they perceived their own English accent and how they thought about mastering native-like competence in pronunciation.

Following the objective of this study, it is felt that the lack of understanding of learners' views on pronunciation norms and sociolinguistic issues surrounding English pronunciation in the context where ELF informs most of communicative needs is problematic. This is because the changes in pronunciation instruction encouraged by ELF scholars cannot be effectively implemented without knowing learners' voices. Matsuda (2009) states that teaching ELF is involved in a change in mind-set that differs from the traditional approach based on the NS linguistic standard. Additionally, Kirkpatrick (2007b) asserts that choices of models should be informed by learner needs. Therefore, without or with limited knowledge of how English language learners think about pronunciation norms and ELF, we clearly do not have sufficient ideas about how to meaningfully approach curricular innovation (Matsuda, 2009) for a pronunciation teaching approach that is suitable for contemporary English education in Thailand. Therefore, I deem it necessary to investigate how English language learners perceive pronunciation norms and different sociolinguistic aspects which relate to ELF.

4 Methodology

4.1 Participants

All English major students (N=116) who were in the Bachelor of Arts program in English from a university in southern Thailand participated in this project. The reason for choosing this group of participants was that English majors are considered future users of English who will have to be confronted with varieties of English or speakers of world Englishes in their future professional lives. Therefore, their opinions about pronunciation learning and teaching are important as they are believed to reflect the extent to which ELF pronunciation orientation gains acceptance and indicate whether awareness of ELF is developed (in an Expanding-Circle country that has been perceived largely as norm-dependent country). Of the 116 participants, 25 (21.55%) were males and 91 (78.45%) were females. They had learned English from 12 to 18 years old, and most of them reported having had overseas experiences, mostly a short visit to neighbouring countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

4.2 Methods

According to Denzin (1997), “interpretations which are built upon triangulation are certain to be stronger than those which rest on the more constricted framework of a single method” (p. 319). Therefore, to optimise validity and reliability in data collection, this study employed both direct and indirect elicitation methods to measure the participants’ views toward pronunciation with regard to the notion of ELF. Specifically, attitudinal data obtained from the indirect approach or the experiment using the verbal guise test (VGT) were triangulated with the data obtained from the direct approaches (questionnaire and interview).

4.2.1 Verbal guise test

VGT was used in this study to elicit the participants’ privately held stereotypical reactions to different accents. The VGT is believed to be the most influential method in measuring participants’ hidden perceptions, which are often masked behind a social façade (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenbock, & Smit, 1995; Giles & Billing, 2004). The use of VGT involves playing recorded speech samples of different accents to the participants and having them rate their impression of the speakers on a pre-determined list of stereotypical attributes. In this study, eight varieties of English accent (American English (AmE), British English (BrE), Australian English (AuE), Indian English (InE), Filipino English (FiE), Singaporean English (SgE), Malaysian English (MyE) and Thai English (ThE)), all of which are believed to be prevalent or frequently heard in Thailand, were selected as speech samples and used to evaluate the participants’ language attitudes. All the accents, except the ThE and SgE ones, were downloaded from The University of Kansas’s International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA) website: <http://www.dialectsarchive.com/>. The ThE and SgE samples on the abovementioned website, however, were not of a good quality, so they were recorded by the research assistant in a soundproof room. The speakers read the same neutral passage, containing 110 words in total. Using J. C. Wells’ standard lexical set words, the text is considered neutral in the sense that it does not contain culturally biased and culturally specific information as judged by three appointed applied linguists.

Since there is actually a vast array of accents even within one variety of English, the selection process of the speakers and their biographical information (see Table 1) need to be highlighted. It is necessary to ensure first that each sample was representative of the speaker’s country of origin. At first I had collected a total of 24 speech samples (three samples for each of the eight varieties) from both IDEA and my own recordings before assigning two native speakers of each variety to identify a collection of 24 samples. Therefore, this process involved 16 raters belonging to the eight varieties. The samples that were correctly recognised by their two native speakers were considered regionally representative of the varieties in question. In this process, 22 out of 24 samples

were successfully recognised by their two native speakers. After careful consideration, the best sample of each variety (in terms of sound quality) was selected for the VGT task in this study (a total of eight varieties as mentioned earlier). Adobe Audition Software (2.0 version) was used in the final stage to control sound qualities such as noises, other disturbing sounds and volume level.

Table 1. Speakers' biographical information

Speaker	Place of birth	Ethnicity	First language	Occupation
AmE*	Oklahoma, USA	Caucasian	English (General American accent)	Mayor
BrE*	Hertfordshire, England	Caucasian	English (Estuary accent)	Writer
AuE*	Perth, Australia	Caucasian	English (Standard Australian accent)	Undergraduate student
FiE*	Northern Manila, The Philippines	Filipino	Tagalog	Journalist
MyE*	Malacca, Malaysia	Chinese	Chinese	Doctoral student
InE*	Madurai, India	Hindi	Hindi	Doctoral student
ThE	Bangkok, Thailand	Thai	Thai	Graduate student
SgE	Singapore	Chinese	Chinese	Business owner

(* Information based on <http://www.dialectsarchive.com/>)

In this study, the VGT experiment involved the use of semantic differential scale for measuring the participants' stereotypical reactions to the eight accents. The scale was created using bipolar adjectival attributes at each end. Particularly, consisting of six pairs of adjectival attributes, the scale was designed such that the left side is generally positive, and the reverse is true for the right side. In the use of a 5-point form of the scale, the value 3 is regarded as neutral. Values of 1 and 5 are regarded as extremes (i.e., Uneducated 1 2 3 4 5 Educated). The bipolar adjectives employed in this study were derived from the pilot study, where English majors (from another university) were asked to describe each of the eight speakers based on a pre-determined list of 32 adjectives commonly utilised in previous attitudinal studies. It was decided that the six most frequently chosen adjectives (educated, confident, friendly, sociable, kind and intelligent) along with their semantic opposites were included in the current study.

4.2.2 Questionnaire

Consisting of six items, the questionnaire was constructed in the form of a 4-point Likert scale (where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 4, strongly agree): Item 1 relates to the question of whether sufficient practice can lead to native-like mastery; Item 2 concerns the importance of understanding varieties of English; Item 3 is to find out whether NNS accent is considered a major cause of communication breakdown; Item 4 elicits how the participants perceive their own accent; Item 5 explores whether acquiring native-like competence is important; and Item 6 elicits whether the participants tolerate varieties of English.

4.2.3 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview was also used in the interest of prompting the participants to expand their ideas and opinions (Phothongsunan & Suwanarak, 2008). In this study, about one third of the participants (N = 36) were contacted for interviews. Each interview was conducted in Thai. Interview data were first transcribed verbatim into Thai before being translated into English. Both the transcriptions and translations were proofread and checked by the researcher and the research assistant. In this process, following He and Miller's (2011) approach to qualitative data interpretation, stylistic inconsistencies were kept to a minimum, discussed and solved by agreement. The

qualitative data were read several times in order to discover supportive evidence for the quantitative data obtained from the VGT and questionnaire (He & Miller, 2011).

5 Findings

5.1 VGT

Table 2 shows how the eight speakers were evaluated against the six attributes. It presents the rank ordering of the participants' accent evaluation means (and standard deviations).

Table 2. Accent evaluation means (and standard deviations) by rank ordering: Individual attributes.

Educated		Kind		Confident		Friendly		Sociable		Intelligent	
AmE	4.12 (0.92)	AmE	3.92 (0.92)	BrE	4.03 (0.89)	AmE	3.92 (0.83)	AmE	3.97 (0.86)	AmE	4.27 (0.76)
BrE	4.04 (0.86)	BrE	3.75 (0.98)	AmE	4.01 (0.81)	AuE	3.83 (0.93)	BrE	3.93 (0.88)	BrE	3.95 (0.77)
AuE	3.92 (0.90)	AuE	3.74 (0.92)	AuE	3.94 (0.93)	BrE	3.72 (0.99)	AuE	3.84 (0.86)	AuE	3.77 (0.86)
SgE	3.50 (0.87)	ThE	3.45 (0.98)	MyE	3.57 (0.88)	ThE	3.69 (0.93)	ThE	3.49 (0.99)	SgE	3.41 (0.91)
MyE	3.28 (0.98)	SgE	3.44 (0.93)	SgE	3.53 (0.91)	SgE	3.57 (0.87)	SgE	3.47 (0.92)	MyE	3.37 (0.97)
ThE	3.25 (0.95)	MyE	3.33 (0.94)	ThE	3.44 (0.94)	MyE	3.41 (0.99)	MyE	3.36 (0.98)	ThE	3.30 (0.90)
FiE	3.02 (0.90)	FiE	3.21 (0.96)	InE	3.14 (0.86)	InE	3.28 (0.82)	FiE	3.11 (1.00)	FiE	3.09 (0.85)
InE	2.92 (0.86)	InE	3.03 (0.93)	FiE	3.00 (0.88)	FiE	3.23 (0.88)	InE	2.94 (0.87)	InE	2.98 (0.87)

(Note: The most positive mean value of the rating scale is 5.0.)

The results in Table 2 reveal some interesting patterns in the participants' judgments of the different accents. First, it can be seen that NS accents (AmE, BrE and AuE) were rated more favourably than the NNS counterparts (SgE, ThE, MyE, FiE and InE) on all attributes. Specifically, in terms of accent hierarchy, the table also shows the consistent appearance of the three NS accents in the first three places on most attributes, with the AmE, BrE and AuE occupying the first, second and third places, respectively. These three NS accents received relatively high mean scores. Second, after the first three accents, the SgE, ThE and MyE were rated more positively than the remaining two accents (FiE and InE) on most attributes. Third, another interesting finding is that although the InE and FiE received lower ratings relative to the other speakers, their mean scores (on the whole) are not indicative of negative attitudes; instead, they suggest neutral views.

In terms of overall evaluations of the eight accents (see Table 3), the participants' strong preference for NS accents was revealed. On the whole, the participants rated NS accents higher than the other five NNS accents. In terms of the hierarchical ranking of the eight speakers' overall mean scores, the AmE accent received the most positive evaluation with the mean value being 4.03, followed closely by the BrE being 3.91, and the AuE being 3.83. More interestingly, though the NNS counterparts were evaluated less favourably than the three NS accents, their overall evaluation means remained positive (3.48 for SgE, 3.44 for ThE, 3.39 for MyE, 3.11 for FiE and 3.05 for InE).

Table 3. Overall evaluations of the accents (all attributes)

Speaker	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
AmE	4.03	0.50	116
BrE	3.91	0.56	116
AuE	3.83	0.54	116
SgE	3.48	0.62	116
ThE	3.44	0.61	116
MyE	3.39	0.59	116
FiE	3.11	0.56	116
InE	3.05	0.51	116

(Note: The most positive mean evaluation is 5.0.)

To find out if there was a significant effect in the participants' overall judgment of the eight accents, a one-way repeated measure ANOVA was computed. Mauchly's test revealed that assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^2(27) = 46.76$, $p < .05$; therefore, the Greenhouse-Geisser estimate of sphericity was used to correct the degrees of freedom ($\epsilon = .899$). The results showed that there was a large significant effect in the participants' evaluations of the eight accents, $F(6.28, 721.72) = 52.23$, $p = .00$. In order to indicate where the significant differences in the comparison of each pair of speakers were located, a post hoc test was run. It was shown in Table 4 that the participants rated the three NS accents significantly more positively than those of NNSs. However, the mean differences among the three NS accents were not statistically significant. It can also be seen that without differentiating among the SgE, ThE and MyE, the participants rated these three accents significantly more favourably than the FiE and InE. Lastly, no statistical difference was found in the pair of FiE and InE.

Table 4. Mean difference of each pair of speakers

	AmE	BrE	AuE	SgE	ThE	MyE	FiE	InE
AmE		-.129	-.195	-.550(*)	-.598(*)	-.647(*)	-.924(*)	-.986(*)
BrE	.129		-.066	-.421(*)	-.468(*)	-.517(*)	-.795(*)	-.856(*)
AuE	.195	.066		-.355(*)	-.402(*)	-.451(*)	-.728(*)	-.790(*)
SgE	.550(*)	.421(*)	.355(*)		-.047	-.096	-.374(*)	-.435(*)
ThE	.598(*)	.468(*)	.402(*)	.047		-.049	-.326(*)	-.388(*)
MyE	.647(*)	.517(*)	.451(*)	.096	.049		-.277(*)	-.339(*)
FiE	.924(*)	.795(*)	.728(*)	.374(*)	.326(*)	.277(*)		-.062
InE	.986(*)	.856(*)	.355(*)	.435(*)	.388(*)	.339(*)	.062	

(*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.)

5.2 Questionnaire

Data obtained from Items 1, 4 and 5 (see Table 5) reveal that the participants tended to favour or rely on NS norms in pronunciation. The majority of participants (78.45%) perceived that NS pronunciation could be achieved by sufficient practices. In addition, viewing their own accent negatively (56.89%), they tended to believe that it was important to acquire native-like competence in pronunciation (63.79%). On the contrary, Items 2, 3 and 6 seemed to suggest that the participants' views were consistent with the notion of ELF. The majority of them (72.42%) thought it was important to understand varieties of English. In the same vein, they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assumption of NNS accent being a major cause of communication breakdown (62.06%). Lastly, when it came to the question of whether they should be intolerant of NNS accents, the majority of them (79.33%) thought the opposite.

Table 5. Results from the questionnaire survey

Item	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	"If I sufficiently practice English pronunciation, I will be able to master a native-like accent."	6 (5.17%)	19 (16.38%)	59 (50.86%)	32 (27.59%)
2	"It is important to understand varieties of English, e.g., Indian English, Singaporean English, Chinese English, etc."	12 (10.34%)	20 (17.24%)	57 (49.14%)	27 (23.28%)
3	"The feature that causes miscommunication in English the most is a non-native accent."	31 (26.72%)	41 (35.34%)	36 (31.03%)	8 (6.90%)
4	"I am proud of my own English accent."	21 (18.10%)	45 (38.79%)	31 (26.72%)	19 (16.38%)
5	"It is important to acquire native-like competence in pronunciation."	11 (9.48%)	31 (26.72%)	45 (38.79%)	29 (25.00%)
6	"We should not tolerate varieties of English that differ from native speakers'."	31 (26.74%)	61 (52.59%)	14 (12.07%)	10 (8.62%)

5.3 *Semi-structured interview*

This section displays an in-depth description of the participants' responses to several pronunciation issues. The data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with 36 participants and were found to overlap with those of VGT and questionnaire. The interview results seemed to reveal contradictory patterns; that is, whereas NS-based norms were seen as important, practical and should be approximated, some ELF-oriented issues and practices were valued and regarded as relevant especially when it comes to classroom learning.

In the interviews, the participants were asked whether sufficient practice in pronunciation can lead to the mastery of native-like competence. Many of them seemed to agree with the statement, and the main influences are the teacher's encouragement and commercial textbooks or pocket books claiming that native-like competence is achievable. Two stated:

I'm always told by my teacher to practice correct English pronunciation and learn different phonetic systems of British and American English.

I've bought many pronunciation pocket books. They claim that achieving native-like competence is easy, ... but it requires multiple practices.

When asked if acquiring native-like competence in pronunciation is important, many participants agreed. Their justifications are typically based on their perceived prestige of NS varieties or NSs in terms of their representations of linguistic authority/standardisation in ELT and the perceived link between language origin and language learning, the need to follow strictly the original source of the language. Two claimed:

It's important because I want to communicate with NSs well. ... From my experience as a student in an English program school, I had to speak all English with my classmates and teachers. ... It was the program's policy that students had to speak standard English.

English was originally created in England and later brought to America. So, the best practice ... in learning pronunciation is you can speak original English like NSs of either America or Britain.

With regard to the question about whether they were proud of their own accent, they seemed to have different feelings. Some expressed their frustration resulting from their inability to speak

English like a NS. Feeling awkward about their English proficiency and accent, they seemed to perceive themselves as incompetent speakers. Two remarked:

Last year when I went to Malaysia to attend a cultural exchange program for ASEAN students..., I extremely felt suffocated due to my inability to speak English smoothly like other students. They were way better than me. ... I was so foolish and ashamed.

My accent is bad. ... I can't improve my accent to sound more native-like no matter how hard I try.

In contrast, others were proud of their own accent. They tended to base their justifications on the notion of intelligibility and identity construction in L2 English. They stated that the main purpose of communication is not to emulate a NS accent but to get interlocutors' messages across. One stated:

When I speak English, others can understand me well and I can understand others well too. I'm proud of my own English. I think it's ridiculous pretending to talk ... like a NS.

However, a few participants seemed to be in a dilemma as they wanted to be identified as Thai but did not want to be unintelligible or incomprehensible to the ears of NSs. One said that:

I think my accent is OK and want to be recognised as Thai, but I can't help thinking that ... other NSs will not understand my accent.

Interestingly, when the participants were asked whether it is important to understand varieties of English, they responded positively. Their typical justifications are twofold: awareness of the global role of English especially in relation to how English functions as a lingua franca in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and recognition of English being spoken with a wide range of accents. Two remarked:

AEC will bring more people to our country. ... It's very important to understand varieties of English spoken in ASEAN countries.

There're so many NNSs ... because everyone is now capable of speaking English. This is why we need to understand different varieties of English.

Their positive reactions to the notion of ELF can also be drawn from the question as to whether NNS accent is regarded as a major cause of communication failure. The primary reasons for not considering NNS accent as a major cause of communication failure include their realisation of the importance of accent familiarity and their emphasis on clarity of pronunciation rather than accent variation in communication. Two reacted:

At first, I found Malaysian and Singaporean accents very difficult to understand, but ... frequent contacts with tourists from these countries allowed me to ... understand them more easily.

I don't think NNS accent is a major cause of the breakdown in ... communication. If so, NSs will never understand us or other NNSs. I think clear articulation of words is more important.

The last item investigated the participants' tolerance of NNS accents. The great majority of them showed positive views. Their justifications can be grouped into three major categories: (1) accent does guarantee successful communication; (2) discrimination made against language is unmerciful; and (3) acceptance is conditioned to correctness and intelligibility. The following quotations illustrate these points:

I only focus on the message, not accent.

I think it's unmerciful to look down on people with accents.

NNS accents should be accepted but the condition is they should be intelligible and correct.

6 Discussion

It is safe to conclude that NSs are still held as the favourable norms in the field of English pronunciation teaching in Thailand. However, to a certain extent, some pronunciation aspects informed by the notion of ELF were positively viewed by the participants. In the following, we present emerging themes that enable us to understand the different patterns of findings obtained from the three elicitation methods.

6.1 *The construct of NS superiority and NNS inferiority in English pronunciation*

In the VGT task, the participants held stereotyped reactions toward varieties of English, with the NS stimuli being rated more favourably than the NNS counterparts. Similarly, it was noticed from the interviews that, on the whole, NS Englishes seemed to receive positive remarks from the participants especially with regard to classroom teaching. This indicates the powerful status of NS Englishes as models of learning and teaching in Thailand. These stereotyped reactions could possibly be explained by the “standard native-speaker English language ideology in linguistics” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 32). To illustrate, Tsuda (1997) maintains that NS norms continue to colonise the minds of NNSs, resulting in the ideological construct of NS linguistic superiority and NNS linguistic inferiority (Jenkins, 2007) as was evident in the VGT results. Pedagogically speaking, Jenkins (2007) believes that this ideological construct prevails gatekeeping practices in ELT (including the field of pronunciation teaching) in various parts of the world. The findings were found to correlate with similar studies in various NNS countries such as Hong Kong (Li, 2009), Japan (Matsuda, 2009), and Turkey (Coskun, 2011), which argue that language learners are somehow “conditioned mentally and behaviourally by practices of schooling to serve the dominant social institutions and groups” (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 22). Canagarajah further explains that “the dominant social arrangement passes on its values to the school; the school (through its curriculum and pedagogy) passes on those values to students; the students uphold the status quo” (p. 23) of NS. That is, the schooling system can influence or frame students to act in accordance with dominant social discourses. As revealed in the study, phrases like “I’m always told by my teacher to practice correct English pronunciation...”, “they claim that achieving native-like competence is easy” and “It was the program’s policy ... to speak standard English” allow us to assume that school policy, the teacher’s instruction and commercial textbooks have influenced the way the participants viewed the language in general and pronunciation learning in particular (Adreou & Galantomos, 2009; Jenkins, 2007). In addition, these influences probably explain why many participants believed that native-like competence is an important and a relevant goal in pronunciation learning. Having continually been influenced by such a dominant schooling system, consequently, the participants were believed to exhibit the feeling of “linguistic insecurity” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 247) or what Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 548) refers to as “linguistic self-marginalisation.” It can be seen from the study that many participants expressed dissatisfaction with their own English accent. Some even felt unsafe when having a conversation with NSs. The issue of linguistic insecurity of English language learners in this study was found to be congruent with Methitham’s (2009) finding that Thai teachers were influenced by the NS fallacy and exhibited a feeling of professional insecurity simply because they are not NSs.

6.2 *NNS varieties as intelligible and different Englishes*

While the above findings revealed the participants’ gravitation toward NS-based norms in pronunciation learning, the following discussion to which we now turn to allows us to see several positive signs that reflect awareness of the lingua franca role of English in the participants’ belief system. Although findings from the VGT task revealed that the participants tended to evaluate people with accented English in a hierarchical manner, their attitudes toward NNSs, on the whole,

were not negative since the evaluation means of these speakers were above the neutral point. The VGT findings were then cross-validated with those obtained from the questionnaire and interview investigating whether the participants tolerated NNS Englishes. The findings were found to be positive and consistent with the VGT's. Many of them mentioned the necessity to accept linguistic differences as their justification. In the same vein, the study also revealed that the majority of the participants did not believe that NNS accent is a major cause of communication failure. They justified in the interviews, for example, that NNS phonological traces in a particular variety had nothing to do with mutual unintelligibility. One possible explanation for the participants' positive view toward NNS accents in terms of their understandability may be due the fact that many participants, to a certain degree, were familiar with speakers from neighbouring countries (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia). In fact, the town where this study was undertaken is relatively near the Malaysian border and is close to the famous tourist city in the South for visitors from neighbouring countries; therefore, the locals' frequent contacts with speakers from neighbouring countries are usual. Such contacts with local NNS Englishes (e.g., MyE and SgE) may allow some participants to consider varieties in question to be intelligible. These views support Kirkpatrick (2005) that variation in world Englishes does not necessarily lead to mutual unintelligibility. He further notes that one of the primary factors on which intelligibility depends is concerned with "the relative familiarity that listener has with the speaker's variety" (p. 34). Moreover, familiarity of world Englishes may improve the comprehension of accented speech (Gass & Varonis, 1984) and attitudes (Munro, Derwing, & Sato, 2006).

6.3 The place of world Englishes in the language classroom

The findings obtained from the questionnaire and interview with regard to whether the understanding varieties of English is important confirm ELF scholars' view (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2004; Matsuda, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2004) that awareness raising of the existence of varieties of English is one of the most significant strategies to promote communication effectiveness between NNSs. Although other scholars (e.g. Li, 2009; Prodromou, 2006) seem to be concerned that such an attempt may run the risk of marginalising successful English users, such a concern did not seem to be raised by the participants in this study. About 70% of the participants considered understanding varieties of English to be important. Many of them reported in the interviews that they were interested in learning different varieties of English. Interestingly, to many, their desire to learn and understand world Englishes clearly resulted from their awareness of the changing profile of English in the ASEAN region. In fact, sentiments surrounding the advent of AEC may play a crucial role in the participants' perceptions of English. In fact, due to Thailand's commitment to join the AEC in the near future, students of all education levels have been made conscious about the increasing role of English in the region (Kanoksilapatham, 2014). In this study, recognising that English is used as a lingua franca in the AEC context, many participants believed that knowing different forms of English produced by speakers from ASEAN countries is necessary since it helps promote mutual intelligibility among ASEAN speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2005). More interestingly, it can also be seen that the participants' desire to acquire native-like competence does not necessarily mean that the use of NNS Englishes in ELT materials is being marginalised in the language classroom. This finding has an important implication for the pronunciation classroom especially in relation to the question of whose English accents should be used as listening materials in the classroom. It also challenges Thai English teachers' deeply entrenched assumption that learners need to be exclusively exposed to only NS Englishes, and that instructional models should only be informed by NSs (see e.g. Methitham, 2009; Suwanarak, 2010).

What has been discussed so far is concerned with the participants' perceived importance of understanding varieties of English and their perceived intelligibility of some NNS (mainly ASEAN) Englishes, which is considered the receptive skill. The participants, however, did not mention the need to use such NNS pronunciations or to adjust their pronunciation to increase intelligibility when communicating with other ASEAN interlocutors. This finding, therefore, did not corroborate with convergence strategies in speech accommodation theory according to which speakers are

likely to converge their speech styles to those of their interlocutors in order to seek approval in a social situation and to promote communication efficiency between themselves and their interlocutors (Giles & Coupland, 1991). It might be explained that the participants were still undergraduate students and did not have much experience conversing with interlocutors of different L1 backgrounds, so they might not have the motivation to minimise the differences in terms of accent, dialect or other paralinguistic features between themselves and their NNS interlocutors.

7 Conclusion and implications

In view of the findings in this paper, it should be maintained that a shift in ELT from the NS-based paradigm to a more realistic paradigm of ELF, which is based on the current role of English as an international lingua franca, is needed. Kirkpatrick (2007a) illustrates that if English in NNS settings is used primarily for meaningful communication between NNSs, then how English is really used by these people becomes more important than how it is used by NSs. Based on this study, several sociolinguistic aspects which relate to pronunciation learning and teaching need to be revisited. Implications that follow are believed to be imperative for both pronunciation teachers and learners.

First, this study maintains that the exposure to world Englishes in the pronunciation classroom is necessary. Based on the results of this study, the participants, to a certain extent, showed some prejudiced reactions to NNS Englishes although they were generally positive when asked if understanding varieties of English is important. Teachers could then begin to include NNS stimuli as listening materials to improve learners' understanding and awareness of world Englishes. Derwing, Rossiter and Munro (2002) argue that a general lack of familiarity with NNS Englishes "creates a sense of trepidation that causes some NSs... to freeze. Still other factors that may play a role are bias attributable to ethnicity or a genuine lack of ability to understand accented speech" (p. 248). Although their claim is based on the need for NSs to understand varieties of English, it is thought to be imperative for NNSs too. That is, as far as world Englishes is concerned, the English language classroom should serve as a starting point to help learners gain an international understanding of the world and to develop a sense of tolerance of English varieties. Matsuda (2002) maintains that if the English in a L2 classroom is limited to only how NSs use the language, learners' worldviews may also become limited too. They may not find other parts of the world that they are not familiar with to be interesting enough to explore or worth learning. An ELF-based curriculum, according to Matsuda (2002), should be "capable of providing opportunities for the exposure to various parts of the world, and it would be unfortunate if the exposure were limited to the Inner Circle, taking away available learning opportunity" (p. 438).

Second, this study may also be used to reconceptualise appropriate pronunciation learning and teaching. Although the approximation of native-like pronunciation is motivating for most learners, such a goal can be unnecessary given the use of ELF in NNS settings where NNSs are the norm (Jenkins, 2000). In this study, it is interesting to find that some participants were aware of the changing sociolinguistic profiles of English as reflected in their consciousness of the increasing role of English driven by the commencement of the AEC in 2015. Following such findings, the ELF pronunciation classroom should serve as a springboard to help English language learners foresee what the future uses and users of English will be like (Matsuda, 2003, 2009; Song & Drummond, 2009). On practical grounds, teachers can inform learners that there is no need for them to direct all of their energy to mastering native-like competence in pronunciation because the term *native-like* is rather ambiguous linguistically. Teachers can also encourage learners to use English confidently without worrying that their productions will fall short of the NS pronunciation criteria. This kind of anxiety was held by many participants in this study: they felt insecure when asked if they were proud of their own English accent. The learners should be educated that NNS linguistic variation is not necessarily indicative of linguistic incorrectness, but that it is a matter of linguistic diversity. Moreover, teachers need to be conscious about the role of ELF in the world. Since language changes with time, it seems unrealistic if pedagogical implementation is still geared toward the standard of the ambiguous "West" (Shin, 2004) as the sole pedagogical priority

in NNS contexts where people use ELF to suit different communicative purposes. However, it should be noted that the use of ELF-based pronunciation orientation does not necessarily mean that NS-based pronunciation models should completely be marginalised in the NNS pronunciation classroom. English language learners still need them as point of reference whenever possible (Jenkins, 1998). These models are useful for learners or people who have the goal to identify themselves with NSs or function in NS communities. Hence, teachers need to be careful to select appropriate pronunciation models that suit different learner needs.

Regarding limitations and recommendations, it is important to note first that the findings of this study should not be generalised to all English majors in Thailand. This study is solely based on the perceptions of English majors in only one university. Future studies may recruit larger populations in order to make data more generalisable. More interestingly, future studies can recruit populations from different geographical areas or of different linguistic experiences and backgrounds in order to achieve broader conclusions and to allow more attitudinal differences to be observed. Second, other groups of population are also worth investigating since it might allow researchers to draw different conclusions regarding pronunciation learning and teaching. For example, future studies can compare learners' perceptions with those of the teachers in order to find possible agreements or solutions for pedagogical development. As this study suggests, there were some aspects of pronunciation teaching as perceived by the learners that did not match the teachers' pedagogical assumptions in some studies in the literature. Thus, without listening to both learners and teachers, pedagogical development might become directionless.

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