"I'm Happy to Speak with My Accent": Does Language Attitude Influence Willingness to Communicate?

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Abstract

Scholarship on students' language attitudes toward their non-native English accent with respect to their willingness to communicate (WTC) has remained relatively underexplored, especially in the Thai context. Recognizing this gap, this paper examined Thai university students' language attitudes toward their Thai English accent and their WTC. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study adopted a language attitudes questionnaire and interview questions as research instruments. A total of 30 first-year education students, majoring in English at a Thai autonomous public university, were selected to participate in the study. The quantitative data was collected from the pre-, mid-, and post-surveys, and it was analyzed using one-way ANOVA. Interview responses were examined through content analysis. The findings showed no significant differences across variables. However, the relationship between the two variables analyzed using bivariate correlations showed significant differences in the pre- and post-surveys. Interestingly, the qualitative data revealed positive perceptions toward the language attitude and WTC. It indicated that participants are willing to speak with their Thai English accent in various situations. The outcomes of this study have pedagogical implications and outline further avenues of research.

Keywords: English accent, language attitude, Thai English accent, university student, willingness to communicate

1. Introduction

The role of the English language in both academic and sociolinguistic contexts has evolved over the years. Its development has been widely documented in the World Englishes (WE) research (Kachru, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2007), and its significance has earned itself the status of a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2013). With such a status, a flurry of research activities has been observed, especially in non-Anglophone contexts such as Thailand. In Thailand, English is considered a foreign language, and most Thais use the language as a lingua franca (Trakulkasemsuk, 2018). This perspective produced studies concerning Thai English writing in professional contexts (Buripakdi, 2012a, 2012b), English in Thai media (Snodin, 2014), Thai students' classification of the geographical origin of speakers of English (McKenzie et al., 2019), Thai students' perceptions toward WE (Kalra & Thanavisuth, 2018; Rajprasit & Marlina, 2019; Snodin & Young, 2015), and Thai teachers' perceptions toward Thai English (Tarrayo et al., 2021). These pointed to the direction of Thais' appreciation toward the native English speakers' (NES) varieties and reliance on native-speaker norms (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Draper, 2019). This means that the language standards implemented in both the teaching and the learning materials are anchored on NES varieties. Garrett (2010) observes this practice and asserts that the standards of English disseminated in educational institutions are many through dictionaries and grammar books.

Although the Thai Ministry of Education has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve English standards, teachers' lack of proficiency remains a problem (Franz & Teo, 2018). This has become prominent as higher education institutions implemented English Medium Instruction (EMI) as a key aspect of their internationalization efforts. However, the success of EMI varies and is often hindered by overly ambitious expectations and insufficient acknowledgment of the multilingual environment (Ra & Baker, 2021; Ulla et al., 2022). Therefore, the country is unable to cultivate its own academically accepted variety and thus subscribes to a more native-oriented one. Due to its native-norm-inclined practice, language attitudes have become an important discussion.

Language attitude plays an essential role in education. Garrett et al. (2003) illustrate that language attitudes are about how people feel about their or others' language, especially their production of the language. These feelings are driven by various factors. In the classroom context, Bailey (2005), for instance, sees class size as a roadblock in students' attitudes toward speaking English, leaving them hesitant and anxious. Khan (2015) highlights that when students were hesitant and anxious, it frightened them to speak and negatively impacted their confidence, leading to the avoidance of speaking. It can be seen that class environment, whether in terms of size or atmosphere, contributes to language attitudes, plus another significant factor, which is the willingness to communicate (WTC). In the Thai context, Chotipaktanasook (2014) indicates that Thai students were not willing to communicate, and the causes affected WTC. This leads to

limited space allotted to investigating Thai students' perceptions of their Thai accent when speaking English.

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to assess Thai university students' perception of their Thai English accent and their level of willingness to communicate. Hence, the study seeks to resolve the following research questions:

1) What are the students' attitudes toward their Thai English accent at different times?

2) What is the level of students' willingness to communicate at different times?

3) What is the correlation between their attitudes toward the Thai English accent and their willingness to communicate?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Attitude and Accent

Language attitude remains a significant line of inquiry concerning accents. It is primarily because language attitude is a part of our lives (Garrett, 2010). For instance, one can perceive others' language negatively when they articulate words nonconventionally while those who speak the language in a generally accepted way are viewed positively. Such varied attitudinal responses are because the use of language carries social meanings that could be advantageous or disadvantageous. In this view, standardization of languages plays an important role in language attitudes. It is disseminated through educational systems as codified in dictionaries and grammar books. In other words, the correctness of the standardization of languages is significantly emphasized by the authority (e.g., Ministry of Education). Thus, the promotion of standard language use may influence positive and negative language attitudes (Garrett, 2010). There are three aspects of attitudes: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. In terms of the affective aspect, positive emotions play a crucial role in motivating and enhancing success in language learning, while negative emotions can hinder progress (Casil-Batang & Malenab-Temporal, 2018). Low behavioral scores suggest a disconnect between favorable attitudes and active participation in language learning tasks (Said et al., 2018). In contrast, the cognitive aspect is closely related to motivation and how useful learners perceive the language to be (Al Hloul et al., 2024).

Interestingly, language attitudes can reflect how people feel about the speakers of a particular language. It can reveal how people feel about their language or others' language (Garrett et al., 2003). A rich body of literature has demonstrated varied language attitudes (He, 2015; Karahan, 2007; Somblingo & Alieto, 2020), including learners' satisfaction with language attitudes, especially their and others' accents, and their reactions in various contexts. For one, studies have indicated that negative attitudes toward non-standard or regional accents can reflect discrimination and prejudice (Tan et al., 2021), resulting in social and professional impact (Russo et al., 2017), stigmatization and communication problems (Birney et al., 2020; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), and perception of distortion of truthfulness, effort and intelligibility (Hanzlková & Skarnitzl, 2017; Rovetti et al., 2023). Moreover, a spate of research activities has indicated that positive attitudes toward non-standard accents are based on acceptance in multicultural contexts (Eisenchlas & Tsurutani, 2011), educational interventions (Tananuraksakul, 2017), social lenience (Fairchild et al., 2020; Ip & Papafragou, 2023), and efforts to reduce negative bias (Ip & Papafragou, 2023). Thus, language attitudes can reflect how social groups categorize and stereotype others based on their attitudes (Dragojevic et al., 2018).

Besides its positive and negative perceptions, language attitude has been connected to language ideologies, particularly in the discussion of accents. Language attitudes investigate competing understandings and people's preferences toward a certain language or linguistic features. Garrett (2010) indicates that research on language attitudes provides a context for explaining linguistic variation and change. Such has become more prominent in the exploration of accents. Accents are broadly defined as the way to articulate individual sounds or segments as well as suprasegmental features (Moyer, 2013). The term 'accent' is still conspicuous in sociolinguistics as it has no technical or specific meaning (Barrett et al., 2022). One challenge is that having a certain accent is influenced by people's first language or other languages they learn, thus making it difficult to offer a succinct and solidified definition of accent. However, accents are salient aspects of foreign language use and language attitudes (Jenkins, 2007). Attitudes toward accents have been one of the essential areas of English teaching and learning (Lippi-Green, 2012; Moyer, 2013). In the context of Thailand, where English is used as a foreign language (EFL), Thai people still positively perceive a dominant standard-language ideology (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). In other words, Thai students and teachers have positive attitudes toward native English. There are some previous studies on attitudes toward the Thai English accent (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022; Thienthong & Uthaikorn, 2023). Thienthong and Uthaikorn (2023) investigated the attitudes of 90 Thai learners toward English accents in relation to differing fields and stages of study. The results showed that most respondents hold significantly more favorable attitudes toward the English as a native language (ENL) variety than the non-ENL varieties regarding status, solidarity, and speech. Similarly, Boonsuk and Fang (2022) conducted a study with nine international students studying in Thailand to investigate their attitudes toward their own and native English accents and the influence of English accents in English language teaching (ELT). The findings revealed that most students perceived their accents as being deficient, and they believed that native speakers' English accents were the norm of English use and the ultimate learning goal. However, a few studies have been conducted on accent attitude from the EFL perspective, especially in the Thai context and Asian countries. Therefore, this present study aims to examine students' attitudes toward their English accent.

2.2 Willingness to Communicate

As previously discussed, it is unsurprising that English language teaching relies on native-oriented teaching and learning pedagogy. It is

speculated that learners' language attitude impacts their willingness to communicate in English. In their study, MacIntyre et al. (1998) examine what shapes a person's willingness to speak in a second language (L2). They note that some individuals with strong language skills still hesitate to use their L2, while others with less proficiency are eager to engage in conversations. This difference implies that more than just language ability plays a role in L2 communication. To account for this, the authors present a detailed model that aims to understand, explain, and forecast L2 communication behavior. Their model brings together elements of language knowledge, communication skills, and social-psychological factors, highlighting how both short-term situations and long-term traits influence a person's willingness to communicate. Willingness to communicate (WTC) refers to a learner's desire or urge to communicate in a second language or foreign language conversation when they are given the opportunity. It is also stated that developing WTC should be a key objective in language teaching, rather than focusing solely on improving language accuracy or fluency (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Additionally, Alemi and Pahmforoosh (2012) highlight that WTC is a fundamental concept for language interaction and production, emphasizing that teachers should prioritize improving students' English skills to boost their WTC because linguistic factors are more predictive of WTC than psychological factors.

WTC in the EFL classroom is viewed in two aspects: a trait level and a situational level. In situations when communication is expected, the trait level creates an inclination or tendency for individuals to initiate conversation. On the contrary, the situational level influences the decision to initiate communication in a given circumstance (MacIntyre et al., 1999). Several factors that affect WTC. Researchers in the field of applied linguistics and English language teaching have studied the factors that may impact WTC, including 'international posture' or internationally open-minded behavior (Yashima et al., 2004), and other affective variables such as motivation (Fallah, 2014; Lin, 2019; Shirvan et al., 2019), anxiety in L2 (Shirvan et al., 2019), self-confidence (Fallah, 2014; Peng, 2013), and attitudes toward L2 (Dewaele, 2019; Yashima et al., 2004). It is essential to note that these factors interact and can vary across individuals and language-learning environments. Understanding these factors can assist educators and researchers in developing strategies to promote and enhance learners' WTC.

3. Method

The study employed a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The quantitative data included language attitude and willingness to communicate questionnaire, and the qualitative data covered the semi-structured interview.

3.1 Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the Department of Education at a public university in southern Thailand. Using a convenience sampling technique, 30 first-year students, consisting of 17 female and 13 male students who majored in English, were involved in the study. They were between 18 and 19 years old and had an English proficiency ranging from A2 to B1 based on results from the department's English proficiency test. This range reflected their diverse linguistic development, where A2 represented basic communication skills, while B1 indicated emerging intermediate proficiency. Such diversity in proficiency allowed for the examination of how different levels of language competence interacted with the varied instructional materials and activities implemented in the Listening and Speaking Skills course, one of the compulsory courses for first-year students in the education program. The course ran for three hours a week. In this course, a number of materials taken from various types of media, such as videos, extracts from podcasts, news, and talks, were implemented. The media contained content demonstrating different varieties of English. The media were selected based on the three concentric circles model (Kachru, 1992)—inner, outer, and expanding circles—which represented different varieties of English. The inner circle included native varieties (e.g., British or American English), the outer circle (e.g., Indian or Singaporean English) reflected varieties influenced by local cultural and linguistic contexts in regions where English has official status, and the expanding circle (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Thai English) featured emergent varieties from contexts where English is learned as a foreign language. These varieties were chosen to expose participants to a broad spectrum of authentic language use and to reflect the global nature of English communication. The activities in the class included daily conversations and speaking in academic settings.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Thai English Accent Attitude Questionnaire

This study modified Fang's (2017) language attitude survey to investigate students' attitudes toward their Thai English accent. Our questionnaire consisted of nine items and was designed on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 4 to 1 (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) to avoid bias. The questionnaire items were submitted to three experts in English language teaching and applied linguistics for validation. After receiving the recommendations, the instrument was adjusted and was pilot tested with ten students with the same English proficiency level. The responses underwent a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha, which resulted in .62, indicating an acceptable result (George & Mallery, 2003). Then, the instrument was distributed to students who accomplished it for approximately 20 minutes. It was administered in three different stages, namely, the pre-survey (week 1), mid-survey (week 4), and post-survey (week 8). Some survey questions included: 1) I feel satisfied with my own English accent and would like to keep it; 2) I feel happy if someone mistakenly regards that I have a native speaker accent of English; and 3) When I speak English, I am happy to be identified as a Thai speaker.

3.2.2 Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire

This questionnaire was adapted from Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2016) and was modified to investigate students' willingness to

communicate. With 20 items using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 4 to 1 (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree), ten students' pilot-tested the questionnaire, which took them approximately 30–40 minutes to complete. The results were submitted to the same group of experts for validation. The questionnaire was then adjusted based on the comments received. The result of the reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was .94, which means acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003). Some survey questions included: 1) I am willing to express my ideas, feelings, and ideas to the rest of my class; 2) I am willing to give a presentation in front of the class; and 3) I am willing to speak with foreigners on various topics and situations.

3.2.3 Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview questions were designed to gain insights into the students' attitudes toward the Thai English accent and willingness to communicate. Using their final scores, the participants were divided into three groups: high, mid, and low performers. The interview process lasted 20 minutes per group. It was conducted both in Thai and English to address language barriers. The core themes of the interview questions included their attitudes toward standard English, Thai English accent, and willingness to communicate inside and outside the classroom.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection process took eight weeks. Questionnaires on language attitudes toward the Thai English accent and willingness to communicate were administered in Week 1 as a pre-survey. From Weeks 2 to 7, the participants studied with different instructional materials to be exposed to different varieties of English. In Week 4, we administered the questionnaires. Finally, we divided the focus groups based on their performance: low-performer, mid-performer, and high-performer. They were interviewed to gain insights into their language attitudes and willingness to communicate. The summary of the data collection is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Collection Process

Week	Activity
Week 1	• Course introduction • Pre-survey on attitudes toward Thai English accent • Pre-survey on willingness to communicate
Week 2	• American and British accents materials
Week 3	• Australian accent material
Week 4	• Singaporean and Malaysian accent materials • Mid-survey on attitudes toward Thai English accent • Mid-survey on willingness to communicate
Week 5	• Singaporean, Malaysian, and Indian accent materials
Week 6	• Chinese and Japanese accent materials
Week 7	• Thai accent material
Week 8	• Post-survey on attitudes toward Thai English accent • Post-survey on willingness to communicate • Interview

3.4 Data Analysis

The mixed-methods design generated both quantitative and qualitative data. For quantitative data, students' attitudes toward the Thai English accent and their willingness to communicate were obtained from the pre-survey, mid-survey, and post-survey. These survey findings were investigated using one-way ANOVA to compare the mean and standard deviation and using correlation to investigate the relationship between the language attitudes toward the Thai English accent and willingness to communicate. The qualitative data was collected from a semi-structured interview. The findings from those instruments were examined using content analysis. The scope of the qualitative data was students' attitudes toward standard English and Thai English accents, confidence and willingness to communicate, and their pride in the authority of the Thai English accent.

4. Results

The present study explored Thai university students' perception of their Thai English and their level of willingness to communicate. The quantitative data from the Thai English Accent Attitude Questionnaire was analyzed using one-way ANOVA and shown in Table 2. The one-way ANOVA results showed no significant differences ($F = 1.024$, $p = .364$). This outcome suggests that the students' attitudes toward their Thai English accent did not show differences at different times (Table 2).

Table 2. One-way ANOVA Results for English Language Attitude

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	.277	2	.138	1.024	.364
Within Groups	11.764	87	.135		
Total	12.041	89			

In addition, Tukey HSD post-hoc test results revealed no significant differences among the different times (pre-survey, mid-survey, and post-survey) of the students' attitudes toward their Thai English language accent, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Tukey HSD post-hoc Test Results for Students' Thai English Accent Attitude at Different Times

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pre-survey	Mid-survey	.06167	.11300	.849	-.2078	.3311
	Post-survey	-.07333	.11300	.793	-.3428	.1961
Mid-survey	Pre-survey	-.06167	.11300	.849	-.3311	.2078
	Post-survey	-.13500	.11300	.459	-.4044	.1344
Post-survey	Pre-survey	.07333	.11300	.793	-.1961	.3428
	Mid-survey	.13500	.11300	.459	-.1344	.4044

The data revealed that the students' attitudes toward their Thai English accent remained stable throughout the study period. In addition, the lack of significant differences suggests that the instructional materials or classroom experiences after exposure to the varieties of Englishes did not lead to a change in their attitudes in the study.

Students' attitude toward standard English

While the quantitative results showed no significant differences, the focus-group interviews revealed interesting qualitative data with respect to attitudes to accents. The participants mentioned that they tended to have positive attitudes toward standard English (see responses from S1, S6, and S4). Besides the positive attitudes, students appeared to have a desire to acquire such accents, particularly stated in S6. In addition, the students equated having a native accent with being excellent, as seen in S4. The responses echoed a desire and admiration towards two standard English varieties, i.e., American English and British English. Such a view was primarily linked to high competence in the English language. These outlooks could potentially be due to the media the students were exposed to, whereby mainstream media featured actors speaking with a standard English accent. And thus, this led students to hold a strong preference toward the native accent as they perceived it as "nice."

> "At first, I feel like having the American accent would be nice. As I can see, people who have that accent are very good at English." (S*1)*

> "I love watching American series so much. I wish I could speak with an American accent like my favorite character." (S6)

> "You know why I want to have a British accent so much. I think it is so nice. I think if you speak with a British accent, people will think that I am very good at English." (S4)

With the observed positive perception towards native English varieties, the study exposed the students to a broader variety of Englishes, where exemplars from non-native Englishes were provided. During the class, students made some comparisons of the different accents they heard. It was observed that students showed more understanding and appreciation of their accents. In the section that follows, we report the students' speaking reflections and responses from the interview. Particularly, we discussed their attitudes toward the Thai English accent.

Students' attitude toward the Thai English accent

Although native accents held positive attitudes, it was interesting to note that the students had a similar view of their Thai English accent. They stated that their Thai accent of English was unique and should be counted as one of the English varieties. This was despite the fact that the Thai English accent was not one of the famous varieties.

> "Speaking English with a Thai accent can be charming and unique. If someone hears what you're saying, foreigners will know that you are Thai, or you are from Thailand." (S3)

> "In my opinion, the Thai accent is good and easy for Thai people because we are familiar with our accent used to talk to each other. I think the Thai accent is like other accents like American, and British accents. But the Thai accent is not famous enough to use in the international community." (S1)

> "I was born and raised in Thailand. I learn English and always speak with a Thai accent. I am proud of having it. It would be great if people around the world know about the Thai accent." (S4)

As can be noted, the students appeared to have an endearing view of their Thai English accent. It was evident in their positive remarks such as *charming* and *unique* (see S3). Another salient point was the view of the Thai accent as a national identity marker, as seen in S4. Within identity, the Thai accent was also seen as a racial identity, i.e., the identification of being Thai (appeared in S3). The discussion of identity was a significant aspect of accent and language attitude. Perhaps the crucial point raised was the intelligibility between interlocutors of the same nationality, as stated by S1 above. Essentially, the students provided a rich perspective toward their Thai accent of English as unique and equally important as the other accents.

In addition, the participants expressed their openness when speaking their Thai English accent. Such openness stemmed from their

positive evaluation, confidence, and pride in their accent. These were observed in the participant's responses (as seen in S5), particularly in their pride in their Thai accent (as illustrated in S3, S5). Below are the excerpts from the participants' interviews:

"I think the Thai accent is not bad. We can say or talk with the Thai accent. It's not wrong, and it's not a big deal to have a Thai accent, but we must be confident when speaking with a Thai accent." (S5)

"I never feel ashamed when speaking English with a Thai accent. I think the meaning is more important because if people understand you even if you have a Thai accent, it is not a problem to have it. I'm happy to speak with my accent." (S6)

"I am so satisfied, actually proud of my Thai accent. I feel more confident when speaking using an accent. I feel like I am not trying hard when speaking something. Plus, I never experience any miscommunication between me and my foreign friends when using a Thai accent in conversations." (S3)

Interestingly, participants did not see their Thai accent as an issue. They stated that confidence was necessary when speaking it (see S5). S3 even positioned their statement that miscommunication was never an issue. These indicate that the participants' view of their accent was positive with no reservations. Their acceptance of their Thai accent was rather a point of pride and identity. In the following section, we investigated the level of students' willingness to communicate.

The student's level of willingness to communicate was likewise examined. In doing so, we used one-way ANOVA. The results showed no significant differences ($F =.715$, $p =.492$) in students' willingness to communicate at different times, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA Results for Willingness to Communicate

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	.274	2	.137	.715	.492
Within Groups	16.662	87	.192		
Total	16.937	89			

Furthermore, the Tukey HSD post-hoc test results revealed no significant differences among the different times (pre-survey, mid-survey, and post-survey) of the willingness to communicate, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The Tukey HSD Test Results for Willingness to Communicate at Different Times

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pre-survey	Mid-survey	.06167	.11300	.849	-.2078	.3311
	Post-survey	-.07333	.11300	.793	-.3428	.1961
Mid-survey	Pre-survey	-.06167	.11300	.849	-.3311	.2078
	Post-survey	-.13500	.11300	.459	-.4044	.1344
Post-survey	Pre-survey	.07333	.11300	.793	-.1961	.3428
	Mid-survey	.13500	.11300	.459	-.1344	.4044

The students' WTC remained the same over the three different time periods because it did not reveal a significant difference. This suggests that the instructional materials and classroom experience did not remarkably impact their WTC.

Students' confidence and willingness to communicate

In contrast to the lack of statistical differences in the quantitative data from the three surveys, the qualitative data revealed positive attitudes about participants' willingness to communicate both in-class and out-of-class conversations with their experiences through the focus-group interviews. Such findings were consistent with the participants' perceptions. Below were excerpts from the participants' interviews.

"I am always willing to explain everything that my friends or foreigners cannot understand me or anything about what we are talking about. Once they understand what I try to explain, I feel really happy." (S1)

"I always offer help to any foreigners using my English with a Thai accent. One night, I went to the convenience store near my dorm. While I was considering buying some snacks. Then, a foreigner asked me to help her choose a canned coffee because she could not read Thai. I did not expect this situation would happen, but I was willing to help her." (S4)

"I am [sic] the person who always felt not confident [sic] to speak English because I was afraid of making mistakes. But after learning with peers and teachers, it is all right to make some mistakes as long as you understand each other. So, it makes me feel more confident and willing to speak." (S6)

As can be noted, the participants were more than willing to communicate in any context. This willingness appeared to stem from helpfulness and gradual learning. S1 and S2 shared a similar experience where their willingness to be of assistance pushed them to communicate in English regardless of with whom they were communicating. They both mentioned that their effort in communicating in English to foreigners was due to helping them meet their needs or to reach an understanding. This circumstantial event enabled them to communicate and be satisfied with their abilities to speak in their Thai English accents. S6's willingness to communicate came from gradual learning, where confidence was built on learning from committing mistakes. Such a safe learning zone allowed him/her to be willing and confident to speak English. These experiences indicated that circumstances and safe learning zones could promote willingness to communicate.

Language attitude toward Thai English accent and willingness to communicate

Using the data from the pre-survey, we examined the relationship between language attitude toward the Thai English accent and willingness to communicate. We found that there was a positive correlation between the two variables (Table 6, $r = .381$, $p = 0.038$). This suggests that students with a more positive attitude toward their Thai English accent were more willing to communicate in the pre-survey. Moving to the findings from the post-survey, we found that those variables were also strongly positively correlated ($r = .851$, $p = 0.000$). This strong, significant, and positive correlation suggested that students with a more positive attitude toward their Thai English accent were much more willing to communicate by the end of the study. Furthermore, the findings indicated nonsignificant correlations between other groups.

Table 6. Correlation of Students' Language Attitude (LA) toward Thai English Accent and Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

		WTC (Pre-survey)	LA (Mid-survey)	WTC (Mid-survey)	LA (Post-survey)	WTC (Post-survey)
LA (Pre-survey)	r	.381	0.148	-0.055	0.113	0.230
	p	0.038[*]	0.436	0.772	0.551	0.221
WTC (Pre-survey)	r		-0.108	0.087	-0.124	0.039
	p		0.570	0.648	0.513	0.837
LA (Mid-survey)	r			0.336	0.108	0.302
	p			0.070	0.571	0.105
WTC (Mid-survey)	r				-0.335	-0.222
	p				0.070	0.237
LA (Post-survey)	r					.851
	p					0.000[*]

*The significant level is $p<.05$.

Note: LA refers to Language Attitude, and WTC refers to Willing to Communicate

This correlation demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between students' attitudes toward their Thai English accent and their WTC at the pre- and post-surveys, which suggests that when students perceived their Thai English accent positively, they were more likely to participate in the communication practice.

Students' pride and claim of the authority of their accent

Students demonstrated both their acceptance and pride in speaking their Thai English accents. The findings from the focus-group interviews aligned with the quantitative data. The participants favorably reported their willingness to communicate with their peers and teachers using their Thai English accent because it reflected their identity. S2 and S6 clearly stated their active participation and contribution to their class discussion with their Thai accents. They claimed that their peers and teachers did not complain about it and that there was nothing wrong with it. Some participants were more concerned about grammar and vocabulary than about using English with a Thai accent in class.

> "When I participate in any activities in class, I speak English with my Thai accent all the time. I always try to speak English in class even though I know that my accent is so Thai." (S2)

> "I think I do not have to try so hard when speaking English with a Thai accent. My friends and my teacher do not complain about it. So, I am willing to contribute and participate in class using my Thai English accent because there is nothing wrong with it." (S6)

> "I never think about my Thai accent at all. I only think about grammar and vocabulary to use to communicate in my class. When the teacher asks me something, I am willing to answer with this Thai accent anyway because it is my accent. I do not struggle with the accent, but grammar and vocabulary." (S1)

Students' willingness to communicate was not limited only to classroom discussions, as they continuously did so outside. This was initially observed in an earlier section, and it could be solidified that they were not afraid, nor did they feel ashamed of their Thai accents. Excerpts below indicated students' willingness to communicate with foreigners. For them, as long as they could help and express what

they needed to, it was fine (see S3). In a similar vein, S5 viewed English as a mere communication tool and thought that the meaning was more important. S2, interestingly, shared the universality of having an accent by stating that when speaking to other speakers of English, their accents also showed, which did not interfere with communication at all. This positioned that the student's willingness to communicate was grounded on the understanding of the nature of English and its usage.

> "I once encountered an American asking me for directions. I helped them even though my English accent is so Thai. I just think that as long as I can help them get where they want to go. That is clear." (S3)

> "For me, English is just a means for communication. I think having a Thai accent does not matter as long as the meanings are delivered to foreigners." (S5)

> "Personally, I think English is an international language. I am not afraid and ashamed to speak English with a Thai accent. Because I used to talk to German people at Samui Island, they also speak with a German accent. Therefore, I think if we understand each other, the communication is success." (S2)

In essence, it was clear that students did not see their Thai accents as minuses or a form of embarrassment; instead, they viewed them as part of their identity and as common among non-native speakers. It was also noted that the willingness to communicate arose from the need to help others, which, in a certain way, was an act of circumstantial need rather than an initiation of conversation. Nonetheless, the students' ability to respond and feel comfortable with their accents demonstrated their willingness to communicate with their Thai accent.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated Thai learners' language attitudes and willingness to communicate. With the Thai English accent being neither an English native accent nor a major variety of English, people could infer that having this accent was perceived as inferior, which could hinder the willingness to communicate. Such a case has been observed in a Thai classroom where Thai students learning English as a foreign language kept silent in an English-medium instruction class. This was due to their lack of confidence and psychological attributes, including the issues of shyness and concern for peer criticism, the excitement of oral presentation, and a fear of losing face for giving wrong answers and utilizing incorrect grammar (Chaiyasat & Intakaew, 2023). We believe the (un)willingness to communicate bears a causal relationship with the issue of silent students in the classroom (Giles et al., 1992), in which a negative attitude toward one's accent was an underlying cause.

An overwhelming admiration toward native accent varieties has been recorded in the literature. In Kuwait, for instance, Kuwaiti learners' preference was directed toward the NES accents more than their own (Almubayei & Taqi, 2022). This was similar in the context of our study, particularly in the pre-survey stage, where students showed their admiration toward the two major native English accents, namely American and British English, probably as a result of their exposure to popular media and perceptions of native speakers. With such inclinations toward native accents, some of the students revealed their uncertainty about expressing themselves in English. The preference for native accents is conspicuous in some previous studies as well (Panthong & Rattanawaropas, 2023).

It is interesting to note that while the previous literature exhibited a more positive attitude toward the NES accent variety, we found that it is possible to create a positive attitude toward one's variety of accents, specifically those that are less popular or non-mainstream accents. This indicates that admiration toward NES accents and the acceptance of one's accent (e.g., Thai English) are not mutually exclusive. The present study demonstrates Thai students' fondness for British and American English and their appreciation of their own English, even embracing it as part of their identity. This is also echoed by previous studies (e.g., Somblingo & Alieto, 2020), where learners show satisfaction with their accents and other varieties. What perhaps influences such attitudes are the construction of diverse course plans, the creation of a safe learning environment, and the appreciation of one's identity, insights yielded in our study.

Our diverse structured course planning yielded illuminating insights that provided a more positive attitude. The students surveyed were exposed to different materials showcasing the rich varieties of Englishes. With such a design, they developed a more positive attitude toward their Thai English accent. This result of the affirmative perspective is consistent with recent studies of Thai students' attitudes toward their Thai English accents upon the condition that it is intelligible to others (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Panthong & Rattanawaropas, 2023). Then, in this study, it is somewhat safe to claim that Thai students are in favor of their Thai English accent as long as it can be understood by others. Moafa (2024) echoed our observation that one's ability to communicate is far more important and can lead to success regardless of accent.

Creating a safe environment can foster a positive language attitude and can reinforce willingness to communicate. This safe environment is created through the normalization of accents by using media content showcasing diverse accents, as evident in the students' speaking reflections and interview responses. This is consistent with Chen's (2022) study, in which she found that students' confidence improved after being exposed to non-native varieties. Another important factor is the effort to promote English as an international language, articulating it as a communicative tool sans advocating NES accents (Moafa, 2024). The creation of small groups to provide a much safer environment and a more conducive learning space can also increase willingness to communicate likely to increase (Musa, 2023). We observe this to have gradually developed. We also noticed from the semi-structured interviews that students expressed more thoughts, freedom, and confidence in their Thai English accent as time passed. For the students who showed their willingness to communicate,

some of them stated that they were aware of their Thai English accent while they were speaking, but the others did not focus on it as they might think of other things, such as grammar or vocabulary, more than accents. For those who were aware of their accent, it could affect their willingness to communicate due to the shyness of their accent. This aligns with Fallah (2014) revealing that shyness indirectly affects willingness to communicate. From the qualitative data with these students, whether they were conscious of their Thai English while speaking, they were likely to communicate. Thus, being aware of one's accent does not correlate with the willingness to communicate; attitude is more critical. In this case, students with a positive attitude reflected their growing confidence and freedom to communicate in English even more.

Appreciation of one's accents is integral to the ownership of one's identity. This is potentially an interesting observation from our study, as students exhibited their pride and authority in their accents. Until this point, we have not explored whether there is such a thing as Thai English. We assume and acknowledge its existence and leave the question for other studies (for more information, see Tarrayo, Ulla & Lekwilai, 2021). Since Thai English is a non-mainstream accent, it is possible for it to be neglected or not recognized by the global English community or Thai people themselves. However, the participants in this study suggested otherwise. From an elevated level of confidence, many students asserted their pride and made their claim of the authority of the Thai English accent. Admirable qualities, such as "good, easy, charming, unique, satisfied, proud," and many more, were used to describe the accent. Surveying 44 Thai postgraduate students, Akkakoson (2019) found that most participants did not believe they owned English, but English owned them in terms of studying, working, or doing business. However, from the findings of this study and as Boonsuk and Ambele (2020) mentioned, "every English user has the right to claim ownership of English and to utilize it in their preferred way without emphasizing the native speaker norms" (p. 297), the trajectory of English ownership is changing. With a positive attitude and this sense of confidence, pride, and ownership, non-native speakers of English can be more likely to communicate.

6. Conclusion

This study explored students' attitudes toward their English accent and their willingness to communicate. Specifically, it investigated the correlation between these two aspects as they can both influence students' competence and performance regarding speaking skills. Our quantitative data showed no significant changes in the students' perception of their Thai English accents; however, qualitatively, despite expressing a preference for NES accents, participants strongly emphasized their positive attitudes towards their Thai English accents. While we detected no significant changes in our quantitative data concerning willingness to communicate during the study period, we found a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between language attitude and willingness to communicate. These results affirm that if students have a positive attitude toward their accents, they are more likely to be willing to communicate.

Implications of the Study

In this study, we have shown the correlation between students' attitudes toward their Thai English accent and their willingness to communicate. The findings indicated that a positive attitude is associated with willingness to communicate. Pedagogically, the findings of the study offer implications in the following areas:

1.) *Use of diverse varieties of English in teaching and learning materials*: Students should be exposed to different ~~relevant~~ varieties of English, especially in speaking and listening skills. As English is now used more as a lingua franca by non-native speakers, who outnumber the natives (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011), students in Thailand are likely to use English to communicate with people from the ASEAN countries, such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Therefore, there should be more materials in these varieties of English for Thai students to prepare them for real-world interaction situations. Likewise, Thai English materials would be an alternative to other ASEAN countries.

2.) *Recognition of the Thai English accent in assessment*: Speaking activities and assessment methods should consider Thai English accent as an acceptable variety. Teachers should let students speak freely without having to emphasize a native-like pronunciation but an intelligible one. If students realize that their teachers do not always find fault in their accents, they can adopt a positive attitude and demonstrate a willingness to communicate both inside and outside class.

3.) *Cultivating progressive attitudes toward accent diversity*: Because nowadays there is still discrimination against non-native accents, we would like to encourage and expand the community of World Englishes by boosting more progressive attitudes of diverse accents, confidence, and willingness to communicate in the younger generations. With proper education and a correct understanding of intelligibility, the issue of accents will not interfere with communication. Also, language learners can foster critical metacultural and multi-varietal communication skills (Tarrayo et al., 2021) so that we have empathy and mutual respect with one another because knowledge is not all about accents.

Limitation and Recommendation

Despite employing a mixed-methods design, the study has some limitations. First, the small sample size yielded insignificant results and was ungeneralizable. Second, the interview data captured only a portion of students' perceptions and were not sufficient to attain a much more robust insight. Lastly, the length of the data collected was limited to eight weeks only. With these limitations, it is recommended that future studies explore students with various backgrounds and fields of study as the participants of this study were limited to students majoring in English education. Additionally, a longitudinal approach is likewise recommended as it might offer more insightful results.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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