Projecting Identities Through L2: Pronunciation and Attitudes Towards Varieties of English Among Thai Learners of English in a Public Speaking Classroom Context

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Abstract

This paper explores the pronunciation and attitudes of fifteen Thai learners of English towards American English, British English, and Thai-accented English in a public speaking classroom context by using auditory evaluations of students' actual production, a questionnaire, and group discussions. The study found that the majority of students (73.33%) aimed for American English, while a smaller number (26.67%) aimed for British English. Results from an auditory impression show that 46.67% of the participants were successful at producing the particular variety they were aiming for. Group discussions gave further insights about the complex and contesting attitudes Thai learners have regarding different English varieties. On the whole, Thai learners of English are positive towards Thai-accented English but also questioned its comprehensibility and wondered what kind of identity they may be projecting in the eyes of foreigners when using this variety.

Keywords: attitudes, varieties of English, identities, production, public speaking

1. Introduction

People's identities are multiple and not fixed (Butler, 1990; Eckert, 2000; Ochs, 1993; Reed, 2001). Who we are can be projected though linguistic as well as non-linguistic resources (Bucholtz, 1999; Holmes, Stubbe, & Vine, 1999). The way we dress, the way we hold ourselves, and the way we talk, especially our accents, can reveal a lot about who we are, as well as how we are perceived.

Studies have consistently shown that different language varieties can trigger different types of attitudes towards the speaker of that variety. As Cargile and Giles (1997, p.195) have noted, "Language is a powerful social force that does more than convey intended referential information…hearers may react to linguistic and paralinguistic variation in messages as though they indicate personal and social characteristics of the speaker". Speakers may be judged to be competent or ignorant, friendly or arrogant, reliable or untrustworthy, all due to the variety of language they were using (Cargile & Giles, 1997; Garrett, 2007; Giles & Powesland, 1997; Giles & Sassoon, 1983; Lippi-Green, 1997; Ryan & Giles, 1982; Sato, 1991). Generally, speakers of standard varieties of English are rated more positively in terms of social status and competence, and are

frequently viewed as more confident and intelligent, while speakers of non-standard varieties are rated lower on prestige and competence but more highly on pleasantness and friendliness by both "native" (people who speak English as their L1, especially those of Kachru's (1985) Inner Circle varieties) and "non-native" (people who speak English as their L2 or as a foreign language, or those of the Outer or Expanding circle) speakers of English (Ahn, 2015; Breshanan, Ohashi, Nebashi, Liu, & Shearman, 2002; Chen, 2011; Coupland, 2007; Garrett, Coupland, & William, 2003; Hiraka, 2005; Jenkins, 2007; Jindapitak, 2015; Ladegaard, 2000; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006).

        In sociolinguistics, identities and language have been viewed as reflexive of one another (Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1974) as well as constitutive or constructed through the use of language and other means as people are the product of their social history as well as an active agent in the construction of the self (Bell, 2001; Bucholtz, 1999; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Cutler, 1999; Eckert, 2000; Holmes, 1997; Johnstone, 1999). Although speakers can construct different identities in different contexts, public speaking is one context in which speakers may be especially aware of how they project themselves. Speakers may create or highlight certain persona in order to impress their audience. They may purposefully design their speech to go with how they would like to be perceived. Thus, in public speaking situations, speakers are likely to aim for a variety that they view more favorably or a variety that would work towards their benefit, for example a politician may use a standard variety for status effect but opt for the vernacular variety in their political speeches to be one with the people. While native speakers of English have their own variety at their disposal, non-native speakers of English, such as Thai learners of English, may need to decide which variety they would like to use, which variety sounds good to them, or would make them "sound good". It would be interesting to find out which variety learners aim for, the reasons for their preferences, as well as whether or not they can achieve their goal in the actual production in a public speaking context.

2. Learners' Attitudes Towards Different Varieties of English.

        Standard British English (also known as RP) and American English (also referred to as Gen Am) have undoubtedly been the dominant language learning models worldwide. However, their status is not equal in all dimensions (i.e., status and competence, social attractiveness, solidarity, linguistic quality). Taylor (2000) explored the attitudes of EFL learners from 21 different countries and found that British English received more positive evaluations than other varieties of English, including American English, in all dimensions. Although Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall, and Pittam (2001) have found that American English was replacing the dominance previously held by British English, other studies have proved otherwise. For example, Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) found that, despite the vitality of American English, especially in the world

media where American English is more dominant, and despite the fact that Danish learners actually like Americans and their culture, they do not want to sound American, but rather still considered RP the most prestigious language model in several important dimensions. Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) suggested that since Denmark is geographically located closer to Britain and shares the European culture, Danish speakers may see themselves as more of an in-group with the British than with Americans, so the reason for their language preference may be explained in terms of Tajfel & Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. The same may be said of other European countries as Norwegian learners of English also considered British English a prestigious model of pronunciation which the majority of learners aim for, while associating American English with informality (Rindal, 2010). It is interesting, however, that in the actual production, American English was the more dominant pronunciation for this group of speakers (Rindal, 2010). Spanish speakers also see British English as the prestigious model and view it "as the unmarked, high status variety" (Carrie & McKenzie, 2018, p. 324). Their verbal-guise experiment showed that British English speakers were most often correctly identified by Spanish learners of English, but when Americans were misidentified as British they were often credited with higher status and evaluated as correctly speaking English or using it well (Carrie & McKenzie, 2018).

Learners from different parts of the world may have different attitudes towards different varieties of English. In the case of Thai learners of English, previous studies have found that Thais prefer American and British English over other varieties, such as Australian English, Indian English, Singaporean English, Filipino English, as well as other ASEAN varieties (Jindapitak, 2010; Jindapitak, 2015; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Prakaianurat, 2016; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018). Jindapitak and Teo (2013) conducted a survey with 52 third year English majors to see students' preferences for different varieties of English. Using a questionnaire with multiple choice and open ended questions, they found that the preferred models of English to learn and use among this group of learners were American English (28.85%), British English (21.15%), and Thai English (9.62%), a variety which ranked far behind the other two native models. Other varieties of English such as Chinese English, Australian English, Canadian English, Russian English, Japanese English, and Korean English were ranked lower in terms of students' preferences. All in all, however, preferences for native models outranked non-native models. The reasons provided for the preference of native models were linguistic, aesthetic, prestige, and economic reasons, while reasons for preferring non-native models included identity reasons (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013).

It should be noted here that although it has been argued that Thai English is an emerging variety of English and evidence of nativization in syntax has been found (Trakulkasemsuk 2007), "Thai English" as a variety in the full-fledged

sense "has not been widely recognized" (Snodin & Young, 2015, p.250). Thai English, in this study, refers to Thai accented English where English is spoken with noticeable influence of Thai phonology at both the segmental (e.g. replacements of certain consonants and vowel sounds for others, deletion of initial and final clusters) and suprasegmental level (different stress placements and use of intonation from Inner Circle varieties).

Focusing on participants' attitudes towards native speaker varieties and perception of their own language production, Snodin and Young (2015), through open ended questionnaires, asked what varieties the learners thought they were using and which variety they used as their learning model. It was found that the majority (77.92%) said they were using American English with five respondents saying they use Thai English. American English was the most preferred variety, but in terms of the target model both American and British English were relatively equal. Since the data available was from the participants' perception only, we cannot be sure how accurate the learners were when it came to matching the variety they thought they were using with their actual production.

A large scale verbal guise study by McKenzie, Kitikanan, and Boriboon (2017) looked at Thai University students' attitudes towards various varieties of English as spoken by female speakers on the dimensions of competence (ability and efficacy) and warmth (friendliness and trustworthiness). It was found that Thai students rated British English and American English highly in terms of competence, but rated Scottish and Southern US English speakers highly in terms of warmth. Chinese, Indians, and Japanese were rated much lower on both the competence and warmth dimensions, while Thai English speakers were highly rated for both dimensions. This may be due to the fact that Thai-accented English is more familiar and comprehensible to Thai speakers and that they were rated highly due to solidarity reason as the participants may view the Thai speakers as their own people. Perhaps also that Thais are becoming more confident with their own variety of English, but whether they will prefer it as a model to aim for remains to be seen.

Prakaianurat and Kangkun (2018) extended the study of language attitudes in Thailand to Thai users (rather than learners) of English in the workforce and found that despite the call for the new teaching paradigm that treats English as an International Language (Jenkins, 2007), Thai users of English still prefer the native or Inner Circle varieties (American and British) over the Outer Circle (Filipino and Singaporean) and Expanding Circle variety (Thai) as their language model. American English and British English outranked Filipino English, Thai English, and Singaporean English in terms of status and competence, social attractiveness, as well as linguistic quality (Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018). Similar to the students in the study of Jindapitak and Teo (2013) who view American English more favorably, Thai users of English in the workforce also view American English more favorably than British English in

six dimensions (intelligence, leadership, social status, reliability, attractiveness, and intelligibility). However, it is quite interesting that they still see British English as a better model for language learning and job seeking (Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018).

Although previous studies have given us insights into Thai learners' attitudes towards different varieties of English, the picture can be made more complete by looking at attitudes in the context of talk and asking questions through the lens of the production side of language in use. In previous studies, the matched-guise and verbal-guise techniques looked at attitudes from the side of the listener who hears voices as language samples and evaluates those unknown voices in the form of predetermined choices in the questionnaire. Although they are useful indirect methods in the understanding attitudes, they are experimental in nature and are devoid of context. Similarly large scale questionnaires have also broadened our understanding of learners' attitudes towards different varieties of English, however, a gap still exists where attitudes are viewed in terms of production, focusing on the learners' variety of choice and their ability to project their L2 identities in the context of use, and on the impressions they make on the audience. Additional understanding about attitudes towards varieties of English can also be gained from group discussions where participants can exchange ideas, explore their own understanding of their attitudes, negotiate their different views, and voice their opinions about different varieties of English through talk-in-interaction.

3. Research Questions

The present study looks at attitudes towards varieties of English in a public speaking classroom context and seeks to answer the following questions:

3.1 What varieties of English do Thai students aim for?

3.2 How successful are they at producing those varieties of choice when delivering their speeches?

3.3 What are their attitudes towards different varieties of English namely, British English, American English, and Thai English?

4. Methodology
4.1 Participants

The participants of the study were fifteen third and fourth year Thai undergraduate students enrolled in an English Public Speaking class. One Laotian exchange student also enrolled and fully participated in the class, but was not included as part of the study. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 23 years old. Thirteen of them were English majors, one was an information studies major, and one a history major.

4.2 The Classroom Context

The public speaking class ran one semester long from January to April 2016. The class was held three hours a week for 16 weeks with the researcher as the class instructor. The students took the class as an elective course as part of their undergraduate degree at a university in Bangkok. The class focused on improving students' public speaking skills through the practice of delivering impromptu and prepared speeches and through discussion, peer feedback, and evaluation. Students were required to read the course packet which comprised of reading materials concerning the art of public speaking from several textbooks. They were also required to watch at least 12 additional speeches outside of class from TED talks where public speeches were available online. The students were very involved in the learning process throughout the semester and were quite active in giving peer feedback both orally in class discussions and through written forms. Although issues of pronunciation concerning segments and stress placements came up during class, no overt comments were made about varieties of English and identity on the teachers' part prior to the data collection session.

4.3 The Production Task

The data collected for the study's production task were persuasive speeches delivered by the participants during week 12 and 13 of the class. By that time, the students were quite familiar with different aspects of public speaking as they had already delivered two prepared speeches in front of the class (one self-introduction speech and one informative speech) and had had plenty of practice during impromptu speech sessions. Students chose their own topics and wrote their own persuasive speeches. The topics ranged from social issues, such as "Don't give money to beggars," and "Why we need to know about the US elections," and personal growth issues, such as "Starting your own business," and "Why we should focus on learning and not on grades". The speeches were approximately 10-12 minutes long and were audio recorded in full with the participants' consent.

4.4 The Questionnaire.

A short questionnaire was administered to the participants shortly after the production task to get to know the participants' English variety of choice, and to see the participants' view on their own variety of English as well as their view on their classmates' pronunciation. Since the participants had been interacting with each other for an extended period of time, they were quite familiar with each other's pronunciation and some impressions of accents of their peers had likely been formed through extended interactions.

4.5 The Auditory Impression

Three-minute speech samples from the beginning of each speech were played to three raters who were asked to specify whether the speakers sounded American, British, or Thai and to what extent (e.g. very American, American, somewhat American). As it is unlikely that the participants will sound entirely native, the gradient serves to help the raters be more confident and exact with their answers. The reason for listening to only a short part of the speech, besides practicality reasons, is because studies have shown that people can identify an accent correctly based on very small amount of speech, of less than a minute (Purnell, Idsardi, & Baugh, 2010). In fact, "people are able to successfully identify tokens among the dialects when only hearing the word hello," and they can do so in a very short amount of time as there are enough auditory cues to make low-level identification of dialects (Purnell, et. al., 2010, p. 146). Rather than using a checklist of target sounds to see whether the participants could produce their variety of choice, this study takes accents as something holistic that speakers project at the moment of talk, both segmentally and suprasegmentally, to see the impressions they make on the audience.

The raters included one American, one British, and one Thai. All three raters have extensive teaching experience in Thailand (of over 20 years) and are familiar with different varieties of English. The American rater is from Ohio and speaks (Mid-Western) American English, a variety that is unmarked and can easily be categorized as General American English. The British speaker is from South East England (London) and has a Standard British accent. The Thai rater is the researcher, who speaks English with an American accent.

4.6 The Group Discussion

Four groups of participant-led discussions were conducted to see participants' attitudes towards different varieties of English. Guiding questions were given to the participants but they were also free to introduce their own questions during the talk as is normal of what people usually do during discussions. The content from the discussions was used to gain further insight into how participants feel towards different varieties of English and especially towards the Thai variety of English.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study together with points of discussion.

5.1 Variety of Choice

When speaking English, eleven out of fifteen participants (73.33%) aimed for American English, while four participants (26.67%) aimed for British English. When asked a hypothetical question of what varieties of English they

would like their children to speak, the majority (10 participants) picked the same variety as they themselves aimed for. Four participants said any accent is fine as long as it is comprehensible, while one American aimer picked British English. None of the participants aimed for Thai English for either themselves or for their future children even though Thai English was offered overtly as one of the possible answers in the questionnaire. The details of each participants' target variety of choice can be seen in the following table and figure.

Table 1: English variety of choice based on person

Participants	Target variety of English	Chosen for future children
No. 1	American	American
No. 2	American	Any accent
No. 3	American	American
No. 4	American	British
No. 5	American	American
No. 6	American	Any accent
No. 7	British	British
No. 8	American	American
No. 9	British	Any accent
No. 10	American	American
No. 11	American	American
No. 12	British	British
No. 13	American	American
No. 14	American	American
No. 15	British	Any accent
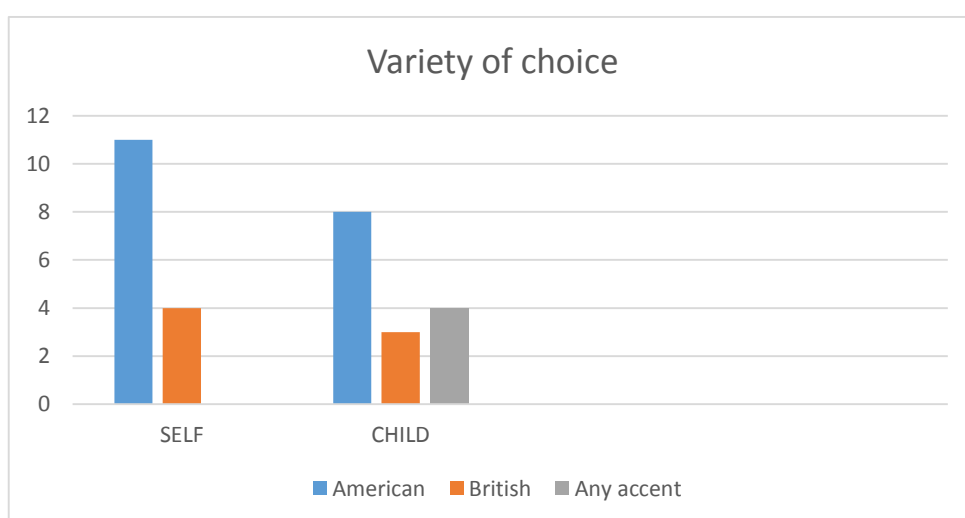
Figure 1: English variety of choice based on group

All in all, the majority of participants chose American English as their language of choice both for themselves (11 out of 15) and for their children (8 out of 15). In the open-ended question in the questionnaire of why they aimed for those particular varieties, American aimers said that American English was easy to understand (8 participants gave this as part of their answer), easier to pronounce (5), was familiar (4), was widely used (4), was good for international communication (3), gave them more opportunities and was more beneficial to their careers (3), was the language of a powerful country (3), sounded nice/not suffocating (2) and also that their favorite TV shows and movies were mostly in American English (1). British aimers stated that their reasons for choosing British English as their variety of choice was because it sounds beautiful (3), was more professional (1), more proper (1), and familiar (1). It seems then that British aimers tended to go for aesthetic reasons and the older norm of prestige with British being the "proper" and "correct" variety, whereas American aimers went for communication, familiarity, and advantages that come with America being a powerful country. Most of the participants were consistent and satisfied with their variety of choice as they chose the same variety for their children. The four participants who said any accent will do for their children all stressed that any accent is fine as long as the speaker is fluent and that the accent is comprehensible. They also felt that whatever accent one speaks is a personal choice and should not be forced and so they did not want to pick a variety for their children. The American aimer who chose British English for her child stated that British sounds more beautiful but since she had never had any British teachers, she herself could not speak it, but she hoped that it is a variety that her child could acquire.

5.2 Actual Production and Target Accuracy
This part answers the second research question of how successful the participants were at producing those varieties of choice to project their L2 identities when delivering their speeches.

Let us first look at the participants' self categorization and peer categorization from the questionnaire before moving on to look at the result from the auditory impression.

5.2.1 Self categorization and peer impressions
Beside asking the participants to categorize their own variety, the questionnaire also asked who the participants thought had the strongest British, American, and Thai accent and also who else they felt had those accents. The purpose of the questions was to see who makes the strongest impression on the classroom in terms of accents without forcing them to categorize peers whose accents may not stand out so much. In the table below, two points were given to those who were selected as having the strongest accent, and one point

was given to those who were mentioned as having a particular accent (participants could choose more than one person for this question). The highest score a person could get is 30 (15x2). The higher the score, the stronger the impression they made on their peers in terms of accent. Lower scores only mean that the participants did not make a strong as an impression on their peers in terms of a particular accent when compared to others.

Table 2: Self categorization and peer impression

Participants	Target	Self categorization	Peer impressions
No. 1	American	Thai	Thai 1
No. 2	American	American	American 6
No. 3	American	American	American 14
No. 4	American	American	American 11 (British 1)
No. 5	American	Thai	Thai 27
No. 6	American	Mixed American & Thai	American 1
No. 7	British	Mixed American & Thai	British 1 Thai 1
No. 8	American	American	American 10 (British 2)
No. 9	British	Thai	Thai 10
No. 10	American	Thai	Thai 1
No. 11	American	American	American 9 (British 3)
No. 12	British	British (with some American)	British 20 (American 2)
No. 13	American	Thai	Thai 9
No. 14	American	Thai	Thai 3 (British 1)
No. 15	British	British	British 14 (American 1)

*The shaded areas show cases where there is consistency between language aim, self categorization, and peer impressions.

        Seven out of fifteen participants (46.67%), five American aimers and two British aimers, indicated that they actually spoke the variety they aimed for, while eight out of fifteen participants (53.33%) indicated that their actual variety was different from what they aimed for. Six said their accent was Thai and two said that their accent was a mix between American and Thai. So according to the participants, almost half felt that they were successful at producing their target variety of choice, whereas a little over half of them were not.

        The participants' self categorization and peer evaluation matched in all cases, but one (No 7), where the speaker categorized her accent as mixed American and Thai but her peers said she spoke English with a British and Thai accent. However, the vote was so low (one for each accent) that this categorization can be disregarded. In cases where there was more than one

answer from the peer impression, the one with the much higher score still matched the participants own categorization (No. 4, 8, 11, 12, 15). Therefore, as far as the variety of English is concerned, the people in the class have similar impressions on who spoke what variety. The ones who were seen as having the strongest American accent were No.3 (14 points), No. 4 (11), and No. 8 (10); the ones with the strongest British accent were No. 12 (20), and No. 15 (14); and the ones with the strongest Thai accent were No. 5 (with an outstandingly high score of 27), No.9 (10) and No. 13 (9). We will later see if the peer evaluation is along the same lines as the raters' auditory impression.

5.2.2 The auditory impression
The results of the auditory impression is shown in Table 3 below. If at least two of the raters agreed on a particular variety, that variety was listed as the result.

Table 3: Raters' auditory impression on spoken variety of English

Participants	Target	Rater 1 American	Rater 2 British	Rater 3 Thai	Result
No. 1	American	Thai	(sw) British	Thai	Thai
No. 2	American	(sw) American	(sw) American	(sw) American	American
No. 3	American	(sw) American	Thai	(sw) American	American
No. 4	American	(sw) American	Thai	(sw) American	American
No. 5	American	Thai	Thai	Thai	Thai
No. 6	American	Thai	Thai	Thai	Thai
No. 7	British	Thai	Thai	Thai	Thai
No. 8	American	(sw) American	(sw) American	American	American
No. 9	British	Thai	Thai	Thai	Thai
No. 10	American	American	Thai	American	American
No. 11	American	American	(v) American	American	American
No. 12	British	American	(v) American	American	American
No. 13	American	Thai	Thai	Thai	Thai
No. 14	American	Thai	(sw) American	Thai	Thai
No. 15	British	(sw) American	(sw) British	(sw) British	British

*The shaded areas show cases where there is consistency between the varieties indicated.

According to the raters' auditory impression, seven out of fifteen participants (46.67%) were able to produce the variety they were aiming for, while eight of the participants (53.33%) could not. So for this group of students, almost half of them were successful at producing their variety of choice and projecting the L2 identity that they were aiming for.

Although this is the same ratio as the result of part 5.2.1 when we look at the participants' own self categorization and the target language,

there is one difference in the detail with participant number 12 and 10. While 10 considered herself a Thai English speaker and received one vote for sounding Thai, two out of three raters thought she sounded American. Another difference is in participant number 12. This is quite striking as participant number 12 considered himself successful at speaking British English. This was the same impression that his peers had of him as he received the highest votes for sounding British with a score of 20 points, leading the second most British sounding speaker by 5 points. What then happened to his speech production for the auditory impression, as two of the raters indicated that he sounded American, and even "very" American by the third rater? Looking at participant's self categorization, the participant stated that he speaks British English (with some American). In the group discussion he remarked that, "Actually, I have a problem, like mine is not to totally Thai, totally American, or totally British so it's quite mixed. So sometimes people think that, 'Oh, you're too pretentious' to like, speak British. I was just like no, it comes naturally." So it could be that he adopts a British accent most of the time but for this particular speech he "turned on" more of his American accent. On closer inspection, during the first three minutes of his speech about "Why we should encourage sex education in secondary schools in Thailand," he started out by giving a demonstration of how to properly put on a condom, using a banana as a prop, so he used an accent which was the opposite of what could be considered "pretentious" as he got his audience laughing and involved in his talk, at the same time he was able to get his point across which was that this is an important issue and that no one needs to be offended by this topic. His three-minute speech sample sounded very American as he adopts American vowel sounds for his keywords, such as 'c<u>o</u>ndom' and c<u>o</u>ntraceptive' using the long low back unrounded vowel [ɑː] of American English rather than the low back rounded vowel [ɒ] of British English. He also used the American flap [ɾ] rather than the British aspirated [tʰ] four times in saying 'exci<u>t</u>ed' 'i<u>t</u> is' 'universi<u>t</u>y' and 'sexuali<u>t</u>y'. More importantly, his accent was noticeably rhotic as he pronounced all the [ɹ]'s after the vowel sounds in a total of 15 words, for example, in 'wo<u>r</u>n' 'tea<u>r</u>' 'howeve<u>r</u>' 'acco<u>r</u>ding to' and only used the non-rhotic pronunciation twice, once for 'afte<u>r</u>noon' and once for 'matte<u>r</u>'. After the first three minutes, as his speech got more serious, he began to use more of the British accent. Although most of the rhotic [ɹ] remains in this particular speech, his vowels became more British and also more aspirated [tʰ]'s were produced than the American flaps, in words like 'society' 'ma<u>tt</u>er' and "transmi<u>tt</u>ed". In this sense, it seems that the change in his accent and the change in his L2 identity as a speaker has to do with how he interacts with the audience and on the seriousness of his talk, using American English when his talk was light and friendly in the introduction and changing to British English as the talk got more serious.

On the whole, we can see that the results from all three raters were quite consistent with one another. All three raters indicated the same variety in ten out of fifteen cases. The American and the Thai rater agreed on fourteen out of fifteen cases, while the British rated differently from the American in five cases, and differently from the Thai rater in four cases. Since the Thai rater also speaks English with an American accent, there may be no surprise that her evaluation matched with the American rater. We may start to wonder though if there is something in the British ear that makes him hear the accents differently. This is quite possible when the variety in question is not a native variety but an L2. The exact accent may be hard to place and different sounds may stand out differently to speakers of different varieties of English.

5.3 Language Attitudes

The attitudes towards varieties of English are in line with the answers in the questionnaire in section 5.1 in terms of the reasons for variety preferences, where the participants mentioned that they see American English as a variety for opportunities and benefits. It is a variety of familiarity and is easier to pronounce, "we don't have to change our mouth," according to participant No.2. Some, however, view British English as "more beautiful" and "elegant" as well as more "complicated" and "sophisticated". According to participant No.7, "the original" or British English "is the best".

Just as identities are complex and multiple, so are attitudes towards different varieties of English. The group discussion gives us a glimpse of these contesting ideas on varieties of English and what they may mean to speakers and hearers. In terms of variety preference during the discussion, all four groups of participants focused on the importance of communication rather than accent, saying that any variety is adequate as long as you can communicate and get your message across. This is reflected both by those who cannot achieve their target goal as well as for American and British aimers who are successful at producing their target language. Having said that any variety is fine, no one hesitated when it came to selecting the peers' accents that they liked most. Confidence, naturalness, and fluency seems to be the determining factors of why participants liked each other's accents. Being confident and fluent and being able to get your ideas across effectively are also the qualities and identities of a good public speaker.

Fakeness and the accusations of fake accents were also of concern to the participants. Speaking with certain L2 accents may make you sound "fake" or "pretentious" no matter whether it is British English, American English, or even for some Thai English speakers who sounded "too Thai". Thus speakers may have to manipulate the way they "sound" depending on the context of the talk. A personal anecdote that fits in nicely with this very idea is

from my son's experience early on in elementary school where he purposefully spoke English with a Thai accent, rather than using the American accent that he is familiar with, in order to fit in with his peers and teachers at school. As he grew older and as more of his peers started to speak English with various accents he then switched back to his somewhat American pronunciation.

For the learners in this study, Thai-accented English is viewed positively, on the whole, especially when referring to the accent of participant No.5 who had the strongest Thai accent in the class. It should be noted here that despite her strong Thai accent (especially in terms of suprasegmental structures of stress and intonation and the use of monophthongs in vowel sounds such as [e] rather than [eɪ], [o] rather than [oʊ]), she is an outstanding public speaker who was voted the best speaker for nearly all of the prepared speeches and impromptu speech sessions by her peers. Her grade for this course was also among the top three of her class. Although the participants in this study approved of Thai English in general, they also said that it had to be of certain standards. Participants voiced their concerns about how Thai English is looked down upon by Thai people themselves but that they also have doubts about using Thai accented English and wonder how they would be perceived in the eyes of foreigners. The next part presents the voice of the participants as heard in their group discussions.

The importance of communication over accent

No. 3 I think it's not important to sound like a native because the purpose is to communicate your thoughts. If you can express your thoughts and you can well express it to others to know what you're saying you achieve the purpose of the language. So you don't have to actually sound like them but you have to make sure they understand the true meaning.

No. 5 It doesn't matter what accent as long as you can communicate.

No. 6 If others can understand us, I think if the message can be delivered, if it's there it's okay.

No. 9 But some people think that some accent is better. Like Japanese people cannot say some words like computer they say computah, then some people who speak British or American English say it's not okay. But for me, it's okay as long as we can communicate.

No. 13 I agree that pronunciation is better than accent and as long as we can pronounce correctly, we can communicate in English effectively.

Naturalness and fluency

No. 4   I like No.11 best. Her accent is natural, beautiful
No. 6   Yes No. 11. Natural.

No. 8   I like No.3. Very fluent like her native language.

No. 5   No. 3 because she's natural.

No. 2   I like No. 5. He is clear as well.

No. 5.   But I hesitate between the two, but No.3 is more natural.

No. 11 Can I give two names? First, I like No.4, I think she's very confident when she speaks every time she gives her speech. It sounds so natural. The other one would be No. 5. I think other people would say she speaks with a Thai accent. I think she is really proud of her accent and she speaks so well.

No. 9   I like No.4 and No.12 because they can speak English fluently and naturally. Not like me. I have to think of what to say.

No. 7   I like No.15 because her accent is British but compared to other people that you have mentioned her accent is not pretend to be but it's natural. The other one I love is your accent, No. 11. Yes, which is American English. Also because your English is very fluent and you deliver it with confidence…The fluency, the grammar and many things that you use make your language fluent.

No. 12 Accent is not a particular matter but more on fluency and content.

On fakeness and being pretentious

No. 3 British, female? Oh. Emma Watson. It sounds more sophisticated and sounds more cool than American. But for me, the best is to communicate in American English. It's like straight to the point. It doesn't sound pretentious or anything.

No. 4 In Mathayom (High school) people ask me that to speak like this (with an American accent) you have to be pretentious right? I don't pretend anything.

No. 5 In my freshman year, I don't know who said I pretend to have Thai accent and that one claim that I went to AFS program but have Thai accent.

No. 2 Were you offended?

No. 5 I don't care (laugh) see? I still have Thai accent. Next class I will go even more Thai.

No. 15 But have you ever experience when we were in elementary school. Have you ever experience a friend with perfect English, perfect accent, we mock them? "Ee Kradae" (You fake).

No. 3 I know. When we were young, right?

Positivity towards Thai accented English

No.3 So just like No.5 you don't have to worry much. For me, I'm totally okay, like, totally totally okay with Thai accent because I think it's easy to understand for me and it sounds quite sincere as long as you know what to say …so for me Thai English is fine. Just like many various accents in the world.

No. 3 I think five or six years ago accent is very important to Thai people because it shows that you are well-educated. That you are better than the others. You can use your accent as a tool to intimidate people…but now we see how diverse the world is…so I think Thai is not so bad to have our original accent.

No. 5 I'm very comfortable with my accent. I don't see anything wrong with it.

No. 9 And I like No.5 too. She is proud of her accent. It's a good example for me to speak English. Not to be shy to speak but just speak to communicate what you think well.

No. 12 I voted for No. 5 as my favorite accent. I think it's unique.

No. 15. But I like the accent of No.5. I think when she talks she sounds so natural so in control because she doesn't have to I think because she doesn't have to worry about accents. She focuses more on the delivery and the content, the idea that she wants us to know. I think that's a good way to speak. You don't have to worry about how you pronounce it.

Doubts about Thai accented English

No. 6 Also in terms of mutual understanding, if we have too much of a Thai accent, people cannot understand us.

No. 7 My friends say to me why your accent is Thai? … I feel that sometimes, if I can speak like a native speaker, fluent and correct accent, I can be accepted in a group of native speakers.

No. 8 But yours is high level. Some Thai accent annoys me.

No.2 Like wrong stress. If it's comprehensible, it's fine, but I prefer the more correct way. Some people, British people might not understand you.

No. 9 I think Thai accent is okay but sometimes native speakers feel confused about what we are saying.

No. 10 I agree that Thai accent is easy to understand but is it hard to understand for foreigners?

No. 11 I don't know if native speakers will understand Thai accent but to me Thai accent is fine as long as we make sense, but I think that if Thai speakers can learn and adapt their accent to be similar to native speakers because absolutely native speakers can understand us more if we speak with their native accents.

No. 14 A lot of foreign teachers cannot understand us because we sound too Thai.

No. 15 And if I have a foreigner who try to speak Thai to me and their accent isn't Thai, I think it's okay. They try their best. But I hope foreigners will feel the same when I speak English with a Thai accent. Do you think we are okay? Will they think that our accent is as cute or acceptable when we try to speak with their native accent? Or they don't care?

No. 3 I think they don't care. For me, I think Thai accent is straight and direct like you can understand it clearly compare to other accents like Philippines or Indian…They understand what we mean.

No.15 Well, we are Thai so we understand our accent but I think foreigners they don't understand. Like for some of them they are really blunt and

they don't adapt their brain to our accent so they don't understand what we're saying.

No.10 But sometimes being able to speak with a native accent make it easier to communicate, for, I mean, for the native speaker to understand us.

No. 3 Yeah, it's more advantageous to speak with their accent.

No.15 And I think it's most of the time it's the Thai people who look down on people who speak with a Thai accent. That if you speak with perfect American or British accent like they have high education level. Like "if I sapeak (sic.) like dis" (with exaggerated Thai accent) some people may think that I have low education level which is not true.

The findings of this study indicate that Thai learners of English are very much aware of how language can reflect identities and that by speaking a particular variety of English a person is also projecting a certain persona to the people he or she is talking to. The participants in this group still see the native or Inner Circle varieties as the prestigious norm as they chose American English and British English as the pronunciation target for themselves and for their future children, although some are more open to the variety of choice for their children stressing instead the importance of comprehensibility and fluency. As far as the two native varieties are concerned, the result is similar to previous studies of language attitudes in Thailand as American English outranks British English in terms of preference (Jindapitak & Teo 2013; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018).

Participants' own categorization of variety that they speak matched their peers' impression in all but one case suggesting that Thai learners are quite accurate at identifying at least these three varieties of English as produced in the context of talk. In terms of perceiving L2 identity, the participants are not too far off from each other as a class. In terms of projecting their L2 identity through their variety of choice, however, less than half of them were successful, as only seven out of 15 participants were able to produce their variety of choice through their speech in a public speaking context.

Much like identities that are flexible and dynamic, so are learners' productions of and attitudes towards different varieties of English. Participants may shift towards certain varieties on different occasions and for different purposes similar to how participant No.12 can shift from sounding American to sounding more British even in the same speech. Within the same variety of English, even with Thai accented English, a speaker can choose to sound "more or less" Thai depending on the occasion. For example, speaker No.5, when accused of faking her Thai accent said that she could sound even more Thai just

to get back at the person who made the remark. And although sounding native can be beneficial according to the participants, the other side of the coin is that sounding like a native speaker may not always work towards your advantage, as it may be seen as taking on an identity that does not really belong to you as a Thai speaker. The group discussion points to the importance of communication over accent, highlighting naturalness and fluency. Thai accented English is viewed positively on the whole, but also with a bit of ambivalence. By looking at attitudes towards varieties of English through actual production and through the perception of peers as well as by using a holistic evaluation approach of language through auditory impressions, we can have a better understanding of language in use and the construction of identities in context.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This study has highlighted the importance of exploring the issue of language attitudes towards varieties of English through actual production in a public speaking classroom context. In this study the majority of participants aimed for American English due to ease of communication, familiarity, and opportunities and advantages, while the minority aimed for British English due to reasons of esthetics and the older norm of prestige. Almost half of the participants were successful at producing the variety they were aiming for according to both peer evaluation and raters' auditory impression. Participants were quite accurate when it came to identifying their own accents, and as a class they seem to have the same impression on who has the most outstanding accent of each particular variety. From the group discussion, it is clear that students are aware of and are concerned about the fact that different accents can project different sorts of identities and impressions on the audience. As Thai speakers of English, Thai accented English is viewed positively by the participants but there are also doubts of its acceptability and comprehensibility.

The findings of students' targets of choice as well as their somewhat reluctant attitudes towards Thai accented English suggests that perhaps it is high time teachers of English give time and space in the language classroom for the discussion of different varieties of English and introducing the concept of English as a Lingua Franca to students to equip them with the understanding and acceptance of the different varieties, and more importantly, for some students, to help them be more confident in their own Thai accented variety. As Galloway and Rose (2018) have shown, using presentation tasks in the classroom is an effective way of raising awareness about different varieties of English and this kind of task is even more effective than the listening and journal taking approach of their previous study as students are more engaged in the process (Galloway & Rose, 2014). "By listening to their peers impart this knowledge, they developed an awareness that English is used differently in various contexts around the world, and that these differences are not right or wrong," (Galloway & Rose,

2018, p.14). In this public speaking class in particular, the discussions about language varieties were conducted outside class time and were not part of the scope of the syllabus. However, students were very interested in the discussions and were eager to share their views and raise questions about different varieties of English. If the concept of varieties of English, English as a Lingua Franca, or English as an International Language were incorporated as part of the public speaking class and part of language teaching in general, students could greatly benefit from their peers' presentation and classroom discussions. These types of activities would also greatly benefit teachers as they would have a chance to think about this issue more critically and also address the issue of language variety overtly in the classroom. As Young and Walsh (2010) have shown in their study, teachers themselves are not sure which model they were taught as learners and "a large majority initially said they were unsure which variety they were currently teaching" only specifying later "when pressed" that they were teaching what they considered a standard native speaker based variety of American English (Young & Walsh 2010, p.135). Even though the idea of English as an International Language and English as a Lingua Franca sounded interesting to the teachers in the mentioned study, "the vast majority of participants in groups, and individually, expressed a belief that they would find the operationalisation of this concept in their own teaching to be problematic," (Young & Walsh 2010, p.134). Therefore, awareness raising of varieties of English would greatly benefit students as well as teachers.

Although this study has added to our understanding of attitudes towards different English varieties and the actual production of Thai learners of English, more empirical studies can be conducted in order for us to gain an even better understanding towards different varieties and what it means to the learners and users themselves. There are at least two possible routes for future research. The first one is more experimental and can ask questions about how speakers of different language varieties perceive Thai accented English and whether and to what extent Thai English is comprehensible to other speakers of English. The second, a less traveled path when it comes to attitude study, is to use the ethnographic approach to see the attitudes of Thai learners of English towards various varieties of English in actual social and cultural contexts and to see the projection of identities through L2 language use. Moreover, the ethnographic approach can be combined with the study of discourse to see the ever changing identities and the ever changing attitudes in talk-in-interaction as we start to see glimpses of these flexibility from the participants in this study.

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Appendixes

Appendix I: Questionnaire

1. In speaking English, which variety of English do you aim for and why? (American English, British English, Thai English, Others?)
2. Of all the students in our class, who has the strongest British accent?
3. Who else has a British accent?
4. Of all the students in our class, who has the strongest American accent?
5. Who else has an American accent?
6. Of all the students in our class, who has the strongest Thai accent?
7. Who else has a Thai accent?
8. What is YOUR accent? How do you feel about it?

Appendix II: Group Discussion Questions

1. Why is being able to use English important to you?
2. When speaking English, is it necessary to sound like a native speaker? Why or why not?
3. Which accent do you like best and why?
4. In our class, whose accent do you like best and why?
5. How do you feel about Thai-accented English?
6. Have you ever experienced anything negative due to your accent or the way you speak English?
7. If there is one thing you can improve about your English, what would it be?
8. Anything else you would like to add concerning this topic?