



Thai Tourism Students' Attitudes toward English Accent Varieties: Intelligibility, Linguistic Identity, and Communication Confidence

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Abstract

This study investigates Thai undergraduate tourism students' attitudes toward English accent variety and examines their relationships with linguistic identity and communication confidence. Guided by Global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca perspective, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed. Data were collected from 50 students through a questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews with 15 participants. Quantitative results indicated relatively high exposure to diverse English accents ($M = 3.77$), with Thai English ($M = 4.53$) and American/British accents ($M = 4.33$) most frequently encountered. Intelligibility was prioritized, with exposure facilitating comprehension ($M = 4.02$), while native-speaker accents remained associated with professionalism ($M = 4.10$), despite the general acceptability of Thai English ($M = 3.85$). Interview findings further revealed that students evaluated accents based on communicative effectiveness rather than native-like pronunciation, and that real-world experience enhanced their confidence in interacting with diverse speakers, although native accents continued to be linked to prestige. Overall, the findings highlight a tension between communicative effectiveness and native-speaker ideology in tourism contexts.

Keywords: communication confidence, English accent variety, intelligibility, linguistic identity

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Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected and globalized world, English has undergone a significant transformation. No longer confined to native-speaking countries, English has evolved into a global lingua franca, serving as a common means of communication among speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2007; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Ambele, 2025). This global spread has resulted in the emergence of multiple English varieties and accents, reflecting how English is localized and adapted in different sociocultural contexts (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). Consequently, the traditional notion of a single standardized English has been increasingly challenged, with intelligibility and mutual understanding often taking precedence over conformity to native-speaker norms (Ambele, 2023).

Within this global context, accent variety has become central to discussions of language learning, identity, and communication. For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), exposure to diverse English accents is now common, shaped by formal instruction as well as media, tourism, international travel, and digital communication (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2004; Galloway & Rose, 2015). Thailand, categorized within Kachru's Expanding Circle, represents a context where English functions primarily as a foreign language used for international communication rather than as a native or institutionalized second language. As such, Thai learners are increasingly exposed to a wide range of English accents in both academic and professional settings.

Traditionally, English language education in Thailand has emphasized native-speaker pronunciation models, particularly British and American varieties, which are often associated with prestige and correctness (Tananuraksakul, 2016; Huttayavilaiphan, 2021; Huang & Ambele, 2025). However, the realities of global communication—especially in multilingual professional domains—require learners to interact with speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In such contexts, communicative effectiveness depends less on native-like pronunciation and more on intelligibility and adaptability (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). As Thai students encounter various English accents, including non-native varieties and Thai-accented English, their attitudes toward these accents become increasingly significant. However, this transition remains complex; recent studies indicate that learners continue to navigate an ideological tension where traditional notions of 'prestige' persist alongside a growing awareness of linguistic diversity (Huang & Ambele, 2025). Furthermore, scholars increasingly emphasize that accent-based perceptions in professional settings are not merely academic concerns but are deeply linked to the potential for accent-based discrimination (Uzun, 2023). These emerging debates suggest that the challenges facing EFL learners extend beyond simple pronunciation accuracy, involving the development of a professional identity that balances communicative legitimacy with the socio-symbolic authority often still granted to native-speaker norms.

Research indicates that learners' attitudes toward English accents influence their communicative confidence, language performance, and sense of linguistic identity (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021;

Fang, 2023; Munro & Derwing, 2016). When non-native accents, including their own, are perceived as inferior, learners may experience anxiety and reduced confidence. Conversely, when intelligibility and effective communication are prioritized over native-like pronunciation, learners are more likely to develop positive self-perceptions and confidence as English users. The English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective supports this view by emphasizing mutual intelligibility and communicative effectiveness rather than adherence to native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant in contexts where English functions as a tool for intercultural communication.

In Thailand, English proficiency is closely linked to national development, particularly in sectors such as education, business, and international tourism (Kirkpatrick, Subhan, & Walkinshaw, 2016; Ambele, 2023). Within the tourism and hospitality industries, English serves as a primary means of interaction with international clients. University students enrolled in tourism-related programs are therefore expected to communicate effectively with speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Their perceptions of different English accents, especially in terms of intelligibility and acceptability, may significantly influence their communication confidence, professional identity, and readiness for future workplace communication.

Despite the growing body of research on Global Englishes and ELF, limited empirical attention has been paid to how Thai university students in tourism-related programs engage with accent diversity in relation to both intelligibility and acceptability, and how these dimensions jointly shape their linguistic identity and communication confidence in professional contexts. Previous studies have tended to examine general attitudes toward English varieties or pedagogical practices, with less focus on the interplay between these specific dimensions and students' communicative readiness in real-world tourism settings.

To address this gap, the present study investigates Thai undergraduate tourism students' attitudes toward Thai-accented English and other English accents, with particular attention to intelligibility and acceptability as key dimensions of accent perception. It further examines how these perceptions influence students' linguistic identity and communication confidence in tourism-related contexts. By explicitly linking accent attitudes with communicative outcomes, the study aims to contribute to Global Englishes and ELF research while also providing practical insights for developing more inclusive and context-sensitive English language education in Thailand.

Literature Review

The global spread of English has led to a shift away from traditional native-speaker models toward more pluralistic perspectives. Global Englishes (GE) conceptualizes English as a dynamic, pluricentric language shaped by diverse sociolinguistic contexts (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Rose & Galloway, 2019). Drawing on related frameworks such as World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and English as an International Language, GE challenges the

notion of English as a fixed system owned by native speakers and instead emphasizes intelligibility and communicative effectiveness (Ambele, 2025).

Kachru's (1985) Three Circles Model situates Thailand within the Expanding Circle, where English is primarily used for international communication in domains such as tourism and education. Within this context, ELF highlights English as a shared resource among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, where successful communication relies on accommodation, flexibility, and negotiation of meaning rather than native-like accuracy (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2011).

Accent plays a crucial role in shaping both how English speakers are perceived and how they perceive themselves. Beyond phonological features, it functions as a social marker associated with identity, legitimacy, and belonging (Lippi-Green, 2012; Moyer, 2013). Accent identity theory further highlights how pronunciation is intertwined with broader social categories such as nationality and status, influencing learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate (Beinhoff, 2013; Uzun, 2023).

Research consistently shows that native-speaker accents, particularly British and American English, are often privileged as more prestigious and legitimate, while non-native accents are frequently marginalized (Holliday, 2006; McKenzie, 2010). This ideology of native-speakerism reinforces linguistic hierarchies and shapes learners' aspirations and self-evaluations.

As a result, learners frequently experience tension between striving for native-like pronunciation and maintaining their own linguistic identity. While native-like accents may be associated with professional advantage, retaining a non-native accent can represent authenticity and cultural affiliation (Masztalerz, 2021).

Studies in ELF and Global Englishes contexts reveal a persistent paradox: although learners increasingly acknowledge the global and plural nature of English, they continue to evaluate competence through native-speaker norms (Fang, 2023; Ambele, 2023). This contradiction underscores the enduring influence of nativeness ideology, even within frameworks that promote linguistic variety.

In Thailand, English language education has traditionally emphasized native-speaker models, particularly British and American accents, which are associated with prestige and employability (Tananuraksakul, 2016; Fang, 2023). Institutional structures further reinforce this orientation. For instance, the Teachers Council of Thailand recognizes only citizens from Inner Circle countries as native English speakers, contributing to the privileging of specific accents in educational and employment contexts. Research also suggests that hiring practices may favor native-like pronunciation, often reflecting broader ideological assumptions (Todd, 2006).

Empirical studies indicate that Thai learners generally express favorable attitudes toward native English accents. Jindapitak (2014) found that Thai university students viewed native English-speaking teachers as more appropriate models for pronunciation instruction, while Buripakdi (2008) reported that Thai professionals perceived mainstream English as prestigious and Thai-accented English as non-standard. Although students recognize the practical role of diverse accents in international communication, native-speaker varieties often remain aspirational benchmarks (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Akkakoson, 2019).

These findings suggest that accent attitudes in Thailand are shaped by both global ideologies and local institutional practices, with important implications for learners' linguistic identity and communication confidence. Research highlights the interrelationship between intelligibility, acceptability, identity, and communication confidence. Intelligibility refers to the extent to which speech is understood, while acceptability concerns its perceived appropriateness in specific contexts (Jenkins, 2000; Beinhoff, 2013).

When learners perceive their accent as both intelligible and acceptable, they are more likely to develop positive linguistic identities and confidence. However, if their accent is understood but socially devalued, they may still experience insecurity (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). From a GE and ELF perspective, legitimacy is grounded in successful communication, yet learners' beliefs about prestige continue to influence their self-perception. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that perceptions of intelligibility and acceptability shape identity construction, which in turn influences communication confidence. This framework underpins the present study.

Overall, the literature demonstrates substantial scholarly attention to Global Englishes, ELF, accent attitudes, and linguistic identity, including studies situated in the Thai context. However, despite extensive research on accent attitudes, little is known about how these perceptions operate in professional tourism education contexts and shape students' emerging professional identities. Existing studies have tended to examine general preferences for English varieties or pedagogical orientations, with limited focus on how specific dimensions of accent perception—particularly intelligibility and acceptability—interact with identity formation and communication confidence in industry-oriented programs.

Given the intercultural and multilingual nature of the tourism sector, understanding how tourism students evaluate different accents and position themselves as future professionals is particularly important. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates Thai undergraduate tourism students' perceptions of English accents and examines how intelligibility and acceptability shape their linguistic identity and communication confidence in professional contexts.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine how Thai undergraduate tourism students perceive different English accents in relation to intelligibility and acceptability, and to explore how these perceptions

influence their linguistic identity and communication confidence in tourism-related contexts. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To investigate Thai undergraduate tourism students' attitudes toward Thai-accented English and other English varieties in terms of intelligibility and acceptability
2. To examine how students perceive the influence of accent variation on their linguistic identity and communication confidence in professional tourism settings

Methodology

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to investigate Thai undergraduate tourism students' attitudes toward English accent varieties and their relationship to linguistic identity and communication confidence. Quantitative data were collected first to identify general patterns, followed by qualitative interviews to provide deeper interpretive insight. The methodological procedures are outlined in the following sections.

1. Participants

The participants were 50 fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in tourism-related programs at a public university in Northeast Thailand. The sample included students from Tourism and Hospitality Management (50%, $n = 25$), Hotel and Hospitality Management (44%, $n = 22$), and International Tourism and Hospitality Management (English Program) (6%, $n = 3$), ensuring a relatively homogeneous academic level.

Most participants were female (84%, $n = 42$), followed by male (12%, $n = 6$) and other genders (4%, $n = 2$). The majority were aged 18–22 (88%, $n = 44$), with a smaller proportion aged 23–27 (12%, $n = 6$). Based on self-assessment, 54% ($n = 27$) reported fair English proficiency, 22% ($n = 11$) good, and 24% ($n = 12$) poor, indicating generally basic to intermediate levels typical of tourism-related English users.

All participants had completed at least one internship in tourism-related settings (100%, $n = 50$), and 62% ($n = 31$) had additional work experience in the sector, while 30% ($n = 15$) reported experience abroad. These experiences suggest substantial exposure to real-world English communication, including interaction with diverse accents. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their enrollment in tourism-related programs and relevant professional experience, making them appropriate for examining perceptions of English accent variety, linguistic identity, and communication confidence. A subset of these participants was later selected for the qualitative phase of the study.

2. Data Collection

Data collection followed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms.

The survey link was shared through students' social media platforms, including LINE and Facebook, to facilitate participation. The questionnaire elicited students' perceptions of English accent intelligibility, acceptability, linguistic identity, and communication confidence.

The questionnaire items were developed based on relevant literature in Global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca and were adapted to the tourism context of the study. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in applied linguistics and English language teaching, and revisions were made based on their feedback. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of students with similar characteristics to the target population to ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items. Minor adjustments were made based on the pilot results. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the use of descriptive statistics, reliability was addressed through careful item design and pilot testing rather than statistical measures.

Following preliminary analysis of the survey data, a subset of 15 participants was purposively selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews to ensure variation in responses. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability. This qualitative phase aimed to provide deeper insights into the meanings underlying the quantitative findings.

Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.

3. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures were employed. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, to summarize students' attitudes toward English accent intelligibility, acceptability, linguistic identity, and communication confidence. Inferential statistics were not employed due to the relatively small sample size and the exploratory nature of the study, which aimed to identify patterns rather than establish statistical generalizability.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English where necessary. The researcher conducted repeated readings of the transcripts and systematically coded meaningful segments of the data using a combination of deductive codes derived from the research objectives and inductive codes emerging from participants' responses. Codes were then grouped into broader categories and themes related to intelligibility, acceptability, identity, and communication confidence.

As the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, inter-coder reliability was not applicable. To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were employed, including maintaining analytic memos, engaging in peer debriefing with an academic colleague, and triangulating qualitative findings with quantitative results. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during the interpretation phase to strengthen the overall credibility and transparency of the analysis.

Results

This section reports the findings of the study following the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitative results from the questionnaire are presented first to identify overall patterns in students' exposure to and perceptions of English accent varieties. These statistical trends are then complemented by qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews, which provide deeper explanations of the meanings, beliefs, and experiences underlying the numerical patterns.

1. Exposure to English Accent Varieties

The findings indicate that participants were exposed to a wide range of English accents across academic, social, and tourism-related contexts. Overall exposure was relatively high ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.03$), suggesting that Thai tourism students regularly encounter diverse English varieties.

As shown in Table 1, exposure was highest for Thai-accented English ($M = 4.50$ – 4.56), reflecting its dominant role in classroom interaction and daily communication. Similarly, American and British accents were also highly prevalent ($M = 4.28$ – 4.38), particularly through instructional materials and digital media. In contrast, exposure to other Asian English varieties remained moderate, while exposure to unfamiliar accents was comparatively lower.

Table 1

Participants' Exposure to English Accent Varieties (Grouped Data)

Accent Type	Mean	SD
Thai English	4.53	0.66
American/British English	4.33	0.83
Australian English	3.55	1.19
Asian Englishes (Singaporean, Malaysian, Chinese)	3.20	1.21
Unfamiliar accents	3.00	1.21

These quantitative findings were supported by interview data, which showed that students encountered accent variety not only in classrooms but also through internships and workplace interaction. As one participant explained: *"I often hear Thai, American, and British accents... but sometimes I also hear accents that are unfamiliar... English in tourism is very diverse."* (Participant 1) Similarly, another participant noted: *"I often hear different English accents in my*

classes, on social media, and during my internship... sometimes I also hear Indian or other Asian accents.” (Participant 3)

This suggests that exposure to English in tourism contexts reflects authentic multilingual communication rather than classroom-based norms alone. This finding supports Objective 1 by demonstrating that students’ attitudes toward English accent varieties are shaped by frequent exposure to diverse accents in both academic and real-world tourism contexts.

2. Accent Intelligibility as a Functional Criterion

Participants reported moderate to high levels of intelligibility across English accents, indicating that they were generally able to understand diverse spoken English varieties. As presented in Table 2, the highest mean score was associated with the role of prior exposure in facilitating comprehension ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.69$). Participants also reported relatively high levels of understanding of Asian English accents and the ability to follow conversations with unfamiliar accents. However, variation in pronunciation and rhythm remained a challenge for some respondents.

Table 2

Participants’ Perceptions of Accent Intelligibility

Item	Mean	SD
Understanding Asian accents	3.92	0.71
Familiar accents are easier to understand	3.85	0.76
Pronunciation differences cause difficulty	3.40	0.88
Understanding unfamiliar accents	3.78	0.73
Exposure improves understanding	4.02	0.69

Interview findings further revealed that intelligibility was evaluated primarily as a functional communication criterion rather than as a measure of native-like pronunciation:

“For me, understanding is more important than whether the accent sounds native or not.” (Participant 6) Similarly, another participant explained how unfamiliar accents required additional effort but were still manageable: *“Some accents are difficult at first, especially when people speak fast, but I try to listen carefully or ask them to repeat.”* (Participant 6)

Participants also described using adaptive strategies such as repetition requests and careful listening when encountering unfamiliar accents. These findings indicate that intelligibility is experience-based and aligned with a pragmatic communication orientation, where comprehension is achieved through interactional effort rather than accent conformity. This finding directly addresses Objective 1 by demonstrating that students prioritize intelligibility and communicative effectiveness over native-like pronunciation when evaluating English accent varieties.

3. Acceptability and Accent Hierarchies

Participants demonstrated generally positive attitudes toward the acceptability of English accents, although a clear hierarchy was evident. As shown in Table 3, native English accents were perceived as highly appropriate for academic and professional communication ($M = 4.10$), while American and British accents were considered suitable for tourism-related work ($M = 4.05$). Thai-accented English was also viewed as acceptable in real-world communication ($M = 3.85$), though slightly lower than native varieties.

Table 3

Participants' Attitudes toward Accent Acceptability

Item	Mean	SD
Native accents appropriate for professional contexts	4.10	0.62
American/British suitable for tourism	4.05	0.68
Thai English acceptable in real communication	3.85	0.74
Teaching should focus on native accents	3.20	0.88
Teaching should include diverse accents	4.25	0.55

A clear contrast emerged between pedagogical preferences: while participants showed only moderate agreement with native-only instruction, they strongly supported the inclusion of diverse English accents. Interview data revealed that native accents were associated with prestige: *“American and British accents... sound more professional and reliable.”* (Participant 2)

In contrast, Thai English was associated with communicative ease but lower perceived status: *“Thai English is natural for me... but native accents look more professional.”* (Participant 10) Likewise, another participant reflected this dual perception: *“Thai English is natural and comfortable for me... but native accents are still seen as more professional.”* (Participant 8)

These findings highlight a tension between pragmatic acceptance and prestige-oriented norms, where students simultaneously recognize the communicative value of diverse accents while maintaining a preference for native-speaker models in formal and professional contexts. This finding supports Objective 1 by illustrating how students evaluate accent acceptability through both functional effectiveness and socially constructed perceptions of prestige.

4. Communication Confidence and Linguistic Identity

Participants demonstrated generally positive attitudes toward their own English accents, while also showing relatively high levels of communication confidence. As summarized in Table 4, participants expressed satisfaction with their accent identity and reported increased awareness of accent variety ($M = 3.80$ – 3.90). At the same time, communication confidence was relatively high, particularly when mutual understanding was achieved.

Table 4

Accent Identity and Communication Confidence

Construct	Mean	SD
Satisfaction with own accent	3.85	0.69
Pride in Thai identity	3.80	0.73
Sensitivity to accent variety	3.90	0.71
Confidence when understood	4.15	0.58
Exposure increases confidence	4.25	0.55
Confidence decreases when not understood	3.70	0.76

Interview findings revealed that Thai-accented English was often associated with authenticity and identity: “*Thai English represents who I am... I don’t think it is wrong.*” (Participant 7)

This sense of identity was also linked to communicative comfort, as another participant explained: “*When I speak English with my Thai accent, I feel more relaxed and confident.*” (Participant 4)

At the same time, participants’ confidence remained sensitive to listener response: “*I feel confident when others understand my English.*” Some participants also reported attempting to approximate native accents for professional purposes: “*I accept Thai English... but sometimes I try to sound more like a native speaker.*” (Participant 5)

These findings suggest that identity and confidence are interconnected and shaped by both internal attitudes and external expectations, particularly perceptions of intelligibility and listener evaluation. Across all findings, participants’ attitudes toward English accents were not fixed but dynamically negotiated, reflecting a balance between communicative effectiveness and perceived professional norms.

While intelligibility and communication effectiveness were prioritized, native-speaker accents continued to be associated with prestige and professionalism. At the same time, Thai-accented English was increasingly recognized as a legitimate and functional variety, particularly in tourism contexts. Participants demonstrated the ability to navigate these perspectives, reflecting an evolving orientation toward Global Englishes.

Rather than forming distinct categories, attitudes toward English accents are better understood as existing along a continuum shaped by exposure, experience, and sociocultural expectations. Taken together, these findings address Objective 2 by demonstrating how perceptions of English accent varieties shape students’ linguistic identity and influence their communication confidence in tourism-related contexts.

Discussion

Rather than reiterating descriptive findings, this discussion interprets how the results extend and complicate existing perspectives in Global Englishes (GE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Overall, the findings reveal a dual orientation: students demonstrated a functional commitment to intelligibility, as reflected in relatively high mean scores for understanding diverse accents ($M = 3.85\text{--}3.92$) and strong agreement that exposure enhances comprehension ($M = 4.02$), while simultaneously maintaining the symbolic prestige of native-speaker accents ($M = 4.05\text{--}4.10$). This tension provides important insight into how GE principles are interpreted and negotiated within tourism education contexts.

1. Intelligibility and the Functional Logic of ELF

The prioritization of intelligibility over native-like pronunciation strongly supports ELF perspectives that conceptualize successful communication as negotiated and interactional (Jenkins, 2000, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). In this study, participants reported moderate to high levels of intelligibility across diverse accents ($M = 3.40\text{--}4.02$) and indicated that exposure plays a crucial role in enhancing comprehension ($M = 4.02$). These findings suggest that clarity and mutual understanding are prioritized over strict adherence to native norms, particularly in tourism contexts where English functions as a contact language.

However, the findings also nuance ELF claims. Intelligibility was closely linked to familiarity and exposure rather than treated as an abstract communicative principle. Participants reported greater ease in understanding familiar accents, while unfamiliar accents required additional processing effort. This suggests that ELF-oriented attitudes may develop gradually through repeated communicative experience rather than through ideological alignment alone.

This finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Jenkins, 2007), particularly in emphasizing that interaction plays a central role in shaping communicative competence in ELF contexts, where meaning is negotiated rather than determined by native-like accuracy. In the present study, this is reflected in participants' reliance on exposure and real-world interaction, which enhanced their ability to understand diverse accents ($M = 4.02$). However, the findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that experiential exposure in tourism-specific contexts—such as internships and workplace communication—plays a crucial role in developing intelligibility. Thus, while the study supports ELF's functional account of communication, it also highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that provide sustained and context-specific exposure to accent variety.

2. Accent Prestige and the Limits of Global Englishes

Although participants demonstrated openness toward multiple English varieties, native-speaker accents retained strong symbolic authority. This is reflected in the high mean scores for the appropriateness of native accents in academic and professional contexts ($M = 4.10$) and for

American and British accents in tourism settings ($M = 4.05$). These findings align with Global Englishes scholarship, which argues that Inner-Circle varieties continue to hold institutional and ideological capital (Kachru, 1992; McKenzie, 2010).

At the same time, the findings complicate a simplistic narrative of native-speaker dominance. Participants expressed only moderate agreement with native-only teaching models ($M = 3.20$) and strongly supported the inclusion of both native and non-native accents in instruction ($M = 4.25$). This suggests the emergence of a more pluralistic orientation toward English use.

This pattern is consistent with previous empirical studies (e.g., McKenzie, 2010), which found that learners often simultaneously accept accent variety while maintaining preferences for native-speaker norms. However, the present study extends this perspective by situating such attitudes within tourism contexts, where perceptions of professionalism and customer expectations may reinforce prestige hierarchies.

Thus, the findings suggest that GE-informed pedagogies must address not only awareness of linguistic variety but also deeply embedded beliefs about professional legitimacy in specific disciplinary contexts.

3. Linguistic Identity: Ownership with Ambivalence

The positioning of Thai-accented English within students' linguistic identity further illustrates this negotiation. Quantitative findings indicate moderate to high levels of accent satisfaction and identity acceptance ($M = 3.80$ – 3.85), suggesting that students generally view their accent as a legitimate part of their identity. This supports Global Englishes perspectives that conceptualize English as a shared global resource (Galloway & Rose, 2015).

However, this acceptance was accompanied by ambivalence. Participants also reported that their confidence could be affected when they were not understood ($M = 3.60$), and some expressed a desire to approximate native-speaker pronunciation for professional purposes. This reflects the continued influence of native-speaker ideology, as described by Holliday (2006).

These findings complicate celebratory accounts of English ownership in GE literature. While students acknowledge the legitimacy of Thai English, this recognition does not fully eliminate perceived hierarchies of prestige. Instead, linguistic identity appears to be relational and context-dependent, shaped by anticipated evaluation in tourism-related communication. This suggests that ownership of English does not automatically translate into confidence or equality, particularly in contexts where professional norms continue to privilege certain accent types.

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that ownership of English does not automatically translate into confidence or equality, particularly in contexts where professional norms continue to privilege certain accent types.

The findings of this study resonate with recent academic debates regarding the persistence of linguistic hierarchies in the face of Global Englishes. As observed by Huang and Ambele (2025), learners often find themselves in an ideological 'tug-of-war' between the pragmatic need for linguistic variety and the internalized pressure to conform to traditional prestige norms. Furthermore, the anxiety regarding intelligibility and the fear of negative evaluation described by participants highlight that accent-based perceptions are deeply tied to the risk of social or professional discrimination. This reinforces the argument made by Uzun (2023) that accent-based bias is a critical dimension of professional identity formation, suggesting that pedagogical interventions must move beyond mere awareness-raising to critically address the systemic nature of accent-ism in tourism-related industries.

4. Communication, Confidence, and Ideological Mediation

Communication confidence was influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by intelligibility and listener response. Participants reported high levels of confidence when they were understood ($M = 4.15$) and indicated that exposure to diverse accents significantly enhances confidence ($M = 4.25$). These findings support previous research on interactional confidence (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), which emphasizes the co-constructed nature of communicative success.

Importantly, increased exposure, particularly through internships and real-world interaction, was associated with greater adaptability and reduced anxiety. This supports ELF and GE perspectives that emphasize the transformative potential of authentic communicative experience (Jenkins, 2007).

However, the continued symbolic prestige of native-speaker accents suggests that confidence remains ideologically mediated. Even when students accept accent variety in principle, perceptions of professionalism continue to shape self-evaluation. This finding indicates that exposure alone may not be sufficient to fully transform accent attitudes, as broader institutional and social discourses continue to influence learners' perceptions.

Thus, the study highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that not only increase exposure to diverse accents but also critically engage with underlying ideologies of language and professionalism.

Conclusion

This study examined Thai tourism students' attitudes toward English accent varieties and how these attitudes relate to linguistic identity and communication confidence. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study integrated quantitative patterns with qualitative

insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of accent perceptions in a tourism education context.

The findings show that intelligibility functions as the primary evaluative criterion, with students prioritizing understanding and communicative effectiveness over native-like pronunciation. At the same time, native-speaker accents, particularly American and British English, retain symbolic prestige in academic and professional domains, while Thai-accented English is accepted as a functional but less prestigious variety.

Communication confidence was shaped more by exposure, interactional experience, and perceived intelligibility than by accent type alone. Overall, the findings reflect a dual orientation in which students balance pragmatic communication needs with enduring prestige hierarchies, highlighting the importance of pedagogical approaches that integrate exposure to accent variety with critical awareness of language ideologies.

Recommendations

1. Pedagogical Implications

Tourism English curricula should systematically incorporate exposure to diverse English accent varieties, including both native and non-native Englishes. Structured listening activities and interaction-based tasks can enhance students' intelligibility skills and reduce overreliance on native-speaker norms.

Assessment practices should prioritize communicative effectiveness, clarity, and interactional competence rather than accent conformity, thereby better reflecting real-world tourism communication and supporting students' confidence. Experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and simulated intercultural communication tasks, should be strengthened to provide sustained engagement with multilingual interaction. Such experiences are essential in developing adaptability and reducing anxiety toward accent variety. Furthermore, pedagogical interventions must move beyond mere awareness-raising to critically engage with the systemic nature of accent-ism, empowering students to challenge entrenched linguistic hierarchies as they navigate their professional identities.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how accent attitudes evolve as students transition into professional contexts. Experimental studies incorporating controlled intelligibility tasks may provide further evidence on comprehension across accent types. Additionally, investigating tourism employers' perspectives would help clarify how educational beliefs about accent legitimacy align with industry expectations.

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