

Accent Priority in a Thai University Context: A Common Sense Revisited

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Abstract

In Thailand, there has been much debate regarding what accents should be prioritized and adopted as models for learning and use in the context of English language education. However, it is not a debate in which the voices of English learners have sufficiently been heard. Several world Englishes scholars have maintained that being a denationalized language, English should be viewed through the lens of linguistic hybridization. In this paper, we investigated Thai university English learners' preferences for varieties of English and their attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English in order to generate a better understanding as to what extent native and non-native varieties gain acceptance as English models. We also explored whether learners' attitudes were consistent with the ideology of English as an international language which sees English in its pluralistic sense. The findings of this study suggest that even though the majority of learners preferred native-speaker accents as models for learning and use, they considered non-native Englishes worth understanding and learning. The findings challenge the old paradigm of English language teaching that is based on the concept of linguistic Americanization or Britishization, prioritizing the native-speaker school of thought. In closing, we proposed some pedagogical suggestions that, we believe, are consistent with how English functions in the world as an international lingua franca.

Keywords: English as an international language, English as a lingua franca, world Englishes, English accent, native vs non-native speaker

1. Introduction and Contextualization

What varieties of English accent do Thai English learners in general identify as their preferred models for learning and use? Do other forms of English, e.g., Indian English, Singaporean English or Chinese English, have a place in language classroom? These questions are considered commonsensical because everyone seems to be in agreement that Thai people are gravitated to native-speaker (inner-circle) models especially the Anglo-American variety (Gibb, 1999; Jenkins, 2005) when it comes to the learning and teaching of English. Thailand, according to Kachru (1992), is classified in the expanding circle where English has no role in almost every sphere of life. Hence, it follows logically that we are a norm-dependent country in which language learners and all parties involved in English language teaching (ELT) have to follow the models originated by native-speaking (norm providers) in the West.

When we talk about what can be comprehended and interpreted by using common sense, it is often referred to as something that needs no clarification or further investigation because it is considered common and normal. As defined in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, common sense is "a prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts." For example, we have never wanted to find out whether Thais prefer eating rice or bread as a daily meal, playing football or ice hockey as a favorite sport and watching Japanese or American manga as a favorite animated cartoon. Without reliance on abstruse knowledge or empirical study or research, people in common can apparently tell that Thais prefer rice to bread, football to ice hockey and Japanese to American manga. When it comes to language learning, the situation is no different from the aforementioned cases: We seemingly do not have an attempt to discover what models of English accent Thai learners prefer to learn and use. This is because it is a common sense that Thai English learners surpassingly nominate native-speaker or inner-circle models for learning and use. The common sense also tells us that

native-speaker models are ‘good’, ‘correct’, ‘standard’, ‘beautiful’, ‘natural’ and ‘authentic’, while non-native models are the reverse (Jindapitak & Teo, 2012). This social-driven linguistic judgment, that lies under the ideological assumption that the English language solely belongs to native speakers of inner-circle countries (Widdowson, 1994), is believed help stabilize the spread and the authority of native-speaker varieties and advance native speakers professionally (Canagarajah, 1999a, 1999b; Modiano, 2001). Thus, it is not surprising that linguistic innovations deviant from native-speaker models are often judged as deficit, interlanguage or, in an extreme case, linguistic decay. This trend of belief is empirically demonstrated by some Thai researchers. Jindapitak and Teo (2012) conducted a study on Thai English learners’ reactions to varieties of English or world Englishes and found that the learners judged the speakers with native-like accents as having higher status and more prestige than those with non-native accents. Similarly, Buripakdi’s (2008) study on how Thai professional writers perceived the notion of Thai English also showed that English is closely tied to the elite-class social groups and the glorious English culture, civilization, etc. In detail, mainstream Englishes were often associated with positive traits such as ‘beautiful’, ‘expressive’, ‘international’, ‘appropriate’, ‘perfect’, and ‘professional’, while non-mainstream ones were associated with unfavorable traits such as ‘broken’, ‘stigmatized’, ‘non-standard’, and ‘incorrect’.

These findings lead to a conclusion that the ideological construct of idealized native speakers assuming how ELT should be engineered in countries where English is learned and used as a second or foreign language is prevalent. It is reported by some that the mastery of American-like or British-like English proficiency has captivated hearts of many English users, regardless of their educational and proficiency levels (see e.g., Jindapitak & Teo, 2011, 2012; Methitham, 2009, 2011). Take the quote below retrieved from an online blog as an example:

There are only two accents that can be used as the appropriate English models in the world arena: standard American and British English. Why? Accents like Indian, Filipino and Thai would only cause students to speak poor English. As for Australian one, it is regarded as a rural English accent and it is not intelligible at all. So please do not rob the bright future of our students. (Limsuwanrote, 2010, para 2)

This anachronistic conceptualization of language use is primarily a result of the critical lack of the knowledge of linguistic diversification or the natural spread of English. Given this lack, people might end up developing the idea (like the above author) that using non-native Englishes would lead to a future with hopeless career prospect. This results in people going in an extreme length to mimic as closely as possible the way native speakers use the language. Most of the time, the language of native speakers is often used as the benchmark of final achievement in second and foreign language education (Cook, 1999). More specifically, ELT methodologies based on the native-speaker school of thought “usually define language learners in terms of what they are *not*, or at least *not yet*” (Kramsch, 1998, p. 28) though much research in second language acquisition has revealed that relatively few individuals can fully attain monolingual native-speaker likeness (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Jenkins, 2000). Logically speaking, someone who did not learn a target language in childhood cannot be a native speaker of that language. By definition, later-acquired languages can never be native languages (Cook, 1999). Ironically, claiming that language learners usually fail to master native-like competence or become native speakers “is like saying that ducks fail to become swans: Adults could never become native speakers without being reborn” (Cook, 1999, p. 187).

It should be argued that the native-speaker pedagogical orientation is not only unattainable and impractical as learning goal (Kirkpatrick, 2007) but is also totally at variance with how the language authentically functions in social contexts. The notion of English as an international language (EIL) suggests that a truly global language (English in this case) must be hybridized or dehegemonized not Americanized or Britishized (Kachru & Nelson, 2000; Jenkins, 2005). This means that English must be dissociated with the colonial past (Kachru, 1992). The ownership of English should be awarded to whoever uses it to suit his/her own purposes (Widdowson, 1994, 1997). Viewing the language through the perspective of EIL, learners can opt for their own tongues or use their local varieties to project or express their own identity through English without having to worry that their localized second language (L2) production will be judged vis-à-vis the native-speaker benchmark or fall short of native-speaker expertise criteria (Jenkins, 2002; Lowenberg, 2002). In this connection, Rampton (1990) notes that “if native-speaker competence is used to set targets and define proficiency, the learner is left to play a game in which the goal-posts are being perpetually moved by people they cannot often challenge” (p. 99). It is understood that expertise in the paradigm of EIL should be treated by what people know rather than where they come from (Rampton, 1995). Hence, non-native accents should democratically be treated as legitimate varieties of English not fossilized or deficient ones (Jenkins, 2005).

Despite a growing body of literature supporting EIL-based pedagogical assumptions, however, it is hard to deny that the native-speaker construct has still been established firmly and gained sumptuous supports as theoretical

assumptions guiding ELT practices in Thailand. This is because nobody questions the role it plays in most educational contexts and criticizes its relevance to how English is really used out there in lingua franca situations. That is to say, if we let this unrealistic idea of native-speaker mimicry stay firm in our mind and run deep in the educational system (Buripakdi, 2008; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013), we automatically accept native speakers as ideal linguistic knowers or sole judges of what type of English is right or wrong in every domain of language use. As a result, the notion of EIL which is considered as a new, realistic and democratic approach to English teaching and learning (McKay, 2002), can never go any further than it is now in its infancy stage (Buripakdi, 2008; Jindapitak & Teo, 2011, 2012).

In the globalized era, the changing sociolinguistic and socio-political profiles of English have led to changes in language learners' learning needs and goals. Learners who need a kind of language that is appropriate for lingua franca communication should be treated with an instruction that takes into account the importance of linguistic diversity as Matsuda (2003) claims: "The international scope of learners' English learning agenda should logically be matched by pedagogical approaches that teach English as an international language... in part through inclusion of varieties of world Englishes" (p. 719). As English continues to be used as a lingua franca, Erling and Barlett (2006) call for the need for the new paradigm of ELT that can realistically prepare learners for communicative situations where interlocutors use Englishes rather than English.

2. Objective and Research Questions

Our focus in this paper is to cast light on the notion of teaching EIL which is "linked to the stories of its worldwide spread; its changes in forms, functions and users; and the politics of the language" (Matsuda, 2003, p. 722). This paper reports the findings of a survey of Thai English learners concerning accent priority. It investigates their preferences for varieties of English as models for learning and use and attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English in classroom. Knowing the learners' accent preferences and how they justify their responses may lead to a clearer understanding as to what extent non-native varieties of English are valued as appropriate English models. Furthermore, knowing their attitudes towards the importance of understanding world Englishes allow us to observe whether ELT in Thailand can go beyond the native-speaker paradigm which considers English and English education in terms of its attachment to the native-speaking ownership (Cook, 1999). To achieve these goals, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What varieties of English accent do the English learners want to learn and use? What rationales do they employ to support their preferences?
- (2) Do they consider learning varieties of English important? What rationales do they employ to support their answers?

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The informants consisted of 52 third-year English majors (49 females and 3 males) from Thaksin University located in the South of Thailand. The reason for choosing this group of informants was that they were considered future users of English who would be confronted with many Englishes in their professional lives. Hence, their attitudes were considered important and might provide some empirical insights into the knowledge of EIL or world Englishes. These informants had been studying English for between 12-17 years. While the majority of the informants reported not having lived, studied or traveled abroad, only four claimed to have traveled abroad (mostly in Malaysia) for a short time.

3.2 Instrument

In an attempt to discover the informants' preferences for varieties of English and their attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English, a questionnaire was used as an instrument in this study. There were two items in the questionnaire. Regarding item one, the informants were asked to indicate their preferred English accent on the designed multiple-choice options of English varieties. They were also asked to provide reasons for their preferences in the given open-ended question. In item two, the informants were asked to indicate their attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English on a 4-point Likert scale statement. Besides, they were also asked to provide their justification for their responses. The questionnaire was in English; however, the informants were allowed to provide written answer in either Thai or English. Data obtained from the informants were calculated using descriptive statistics: percentages and frequencies.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings of Research Question One

4.1.1 Varieties of English Accent the Learners Want to Learn and Use

To indicate how many varieties of English were chosen by the informants, frequencies and percentages of the informants' preferred English varieties are hierarchically shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Informants' preferences for varieties of English: Individual varieties

Informants' preferred spoken accents	Frequency (Percentage) N=52
American English	15 (28.85%)
British English	11 (21.15%)
Thai English	5 (9.62%)
Chinese English	4 (7.69%)
Australian English	4 (7.69%)
Canadian English	3 (5.77%)
Russian English	2 (3.85%)
Japanese English	2 (3.85%)
Singaporean English	2 (3.85%)
Malaysian English	2 (3.85%)
Korean English	1 (1.92%)
No preference	1 (1.92%)
Total	52 (100%)

The majority of informants identified the two mainstream accents as the most preferred models to learn and use (28.85% for American English and 21.15% for British English). The third most preferred variety was Thai English (9.62%). It should be noted that the discrepancy in percentages between the third preferred accent (Thai English) and the first two accents (American and British English) was considerably high. This suggests that these two inner-circle accents were the unrivaled models for learning and use. The next most chosen accents were Chinese and Australian accents with equal percentages of 7.69, followed by Canadian English (5.77%). The Russian, Japanese, Singaporean and Malaysian varieties of English were equally nominated by 3.85% of the informants. Among the varieties in the list that were chosen by the informants, Korean English was the least preferred accent model with 1.92% opting for it. Similarly, the same percentage (1.92%) selected 'any variety'. This means that this informant had no preference for any variety of English to learn and use.

Table 2. Informants' preferences for varieties of English: native/non-native contrast

Native/Non-native priority	Frequency (Percentage) N=52
Native models	33 (63.46%)
Non-native models	18 (34.62%)
No preference	1 (1.92%)
Total	52 (100%)

When the data were presented in the native/non-native contrast in order to indicate priority, the finding becomes clear that the native-speaker models (63.46%) were prioritized more than the non-native-speaker models (34.62%). To put it in a simpler way, around two-thirds of the informants nominated native-like accents as the models for learning and use, while about one-third of them opted for the non-native-speaker models.

4.1.2 Rationales for the Accent Preferences

This section of data analysis seeks to answer what rationales the informants employed to support their preferred native- and non-native-speaker models. The informants' reasons provided for their accent preferences (as obtained from the open-ended question) were categorized into five main themes: linguistic reason, aesthetic reason, prestige/status reason, economic reason and identity reason (excluding vague comment and unanswered category).

Table 3. Rationales for the preferred native- and non-native-speaker models

Rationales	Native-speaker models	Non-native-speaker models	No preference	Total
1.Linguistic reason	9 (17.31%)	4 (7.69%)	-	13 (25.00%)
2.Aesthetic reason	4 (7.69%)	3 (5.77%)	-	6 (11.54%)
3.Prestige/status reason	11 (21.15%)	-	-	11 (21.15%)
4.Economic reason	2 (3.85%)	2 (3.85%)	-	3 (5.77%)
5.Identity reason	-	4 (7.69%)	-	4 (7.69%)
Vague comment	4 (7.69%)	4 (7.69%)	-	8 (15.38%)
Unanswered	3 (5.77%)	1 (1.92%)	1 (1.92%)	5 (9.61%)
Total	33 (63.46%)	18 (34.62%)	1 (1.92%)	52 (100%)

4.1.2.1 Native-Speaker Models

From the table presented above, the informants who identified native-like accents as their preferred models for learning and use provided justifications mostly on the basis of prestige/status (21.51%) and linguistic (17.31%) reason. To a lesser extent, the informants by 7.69% made their preferences for these models based on aesthetic reason; and 3.85% economic reason. Below are the informants' reasons representing each justification theme (the preferred English variety and informant code are provided in parenthesis). Vague comments were not included in the discussion.

Prestige/status reason

The most common rationales that the majority of informants (21.15%) employed to support their preferred native-like accents were the prestige or high status that certain native-speaker accents hold. To them, these varieties were associated with such attributes as 'smart', 'educated', 'prestigious', 'high-class' and 'powerful'. As two of them claimed:

"I want to be able to speak like the (former) Prime Minister Abhisit because he speaks smart English (Oxford English)." (British English, informant 2)

"The American accent is the most educated English accent that people should adopt as a model." (American English, informant 34)

Linguistic reason

The informants by 17.31% provided reasons with regard to linguistic attractiveness for their preferred native-like accents. These informants' reasons seem to resonate with the universal assumption in English language learning across the globe that the most intelligible or correct form of English is the one uttered by a native speaker (see, e.g. Jindapitak, 2013; Jenkins, 2000). As two of them reacted:

"I want to have an American accent because it is considered a correct English accent." (American English, informant 33)

"According to my experience with native speakers, this accent is the most intelligible accent." (Australian English, informant 27)

Aesthetic reason

For some informants (7.69%), native-like accents were seen as possessing aesthetic quality (Bezooijen, 2002). Aesthetic qualities such as ‘impressive’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘pleasant’ were mentioned by these informants. Because of these aesthetic values, these informants identified native-speaker varieties as models (Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill & Lewis, 1974). As two of them stated:

“The British English accent sounds more impressive than the American one.” (British English, informant 20)

“The Canadian teacher at our department speaks beautiful English. I want to have this accent when speaking in English.” (Canadian English, informant 49)

Economic reason

Two informants (3.85%) regarded a native-like accent as an advantageous tool for reaching their career goals. A primary concern of these informants was to master native-speaker likeness in order to secure a better professional position and be able to work in an international organization (Graddol, 1997, 2006). As they articulated:

“I want to learn and use good English accent because I want to work at an international company where most of the employees are foreigners.” (American English, informant 5)

“To get a better job/position means I have to be able to speak like a native speaker. I think an ability to speak English well is one of the important measurements for job promotion.” (American English, informant 50)

4.1.2.2 Non-Native-Speaker Models

The frequencies of the informants’ rationales employed to support the preferred non-native-speaker models appeared to be more heterogeneous than the native-speaker counterparts. The informants, by 7.69%, provided comments for their chosen non-native-speaker models by means of linguistic reason and identity reason. To a lesser extent, while 5.77% of the informants justified their preferences for these models on the basis of aesthetic reason, 3.85% of them based their preferences on economic reason. Their reasons employed to support their preferences are detailed below.

Linguistic reason

Just as those who preferred learning and using native-like accents because of their linguistic attractiveness, so were these informants (7.69%) who chose non-native accents to learn and use. The rationales provided for their preferences implied that certain non-native accents (e.g., Japanese, Thai and Chinese English) were intelligible forms of English. As two of them stated:

“From my experience, I think Japanese accent is easier to understand than a native speaker’s accent.” (Japanese English, informant 46)

“Thai accent is OK: it is very easy to understand.” (Thai English, informant 10)

Identity reason

The informants (7.69%) who identified Thai English as their preferred accent tended to believe that the use of English is a reflection of uniqueness of socio-cultural aspects of the nation (Buripakdi, 2008, 2012). That is to say, they seemed to label their English ‘my English’. It was interesting to find out that these informants did not find their Thai-influenced English pronunciation problematic; rather, they tended to perceive their own ways of speaking as part of identity. As two of them stated:

“I am Thai, and I want to speak English with Thai accent; there is nothing wrong with it.” (Thai English, informant 4)

“I want to learn and use Thai English accent because I don’t want to speak like a foreigner. It is not my English.” (Thai English, informant 43)

Aesthetic reason

Here, 5.77% of the informants associated certain non-native accents (e.g., Korean and Japanese English) with some aesthetic values such as ‘lovely’ and ‘pleasant’. To illustrate, positive attitudes towards people who speak certain (non-native) varieties can play a significant role in making people view the varieties as aesthetically attractive. As two of the informants responded:

“Korean trend is now rampant. I often watch my idols on YouTube, and when they speak English, I think it is very lovely.” (Korean English, informant 7)

“Japanese accent is very pleasant to listen to. I know one of the Japanese movie stars who speaks very good English.” (Japanese English, informant 40)

Economic reason

It was interesting to find out that certain non-native accents were attractive to learn (as identified by 3.85% of the informants) because they carry some economic values (Graddol, 1997, 2000, 2006). While one tended to be gravitated to a certain variety (e.g., Russian or Chinese English) where its political or economic motion is gaining recognition in the world arena, another provided the reason which reflects the sociolinguistic needs outside of classroom (Matsuda, 2003).

“I actually want to learn both Russian and Chinese accents because they are going to be the next world’s economic powers, and we will need to communicate with people from these countries a lot in the future.” (Russian English, informant 47)

“I want to learn Malaysian English because there are many Malaysian tourists in Hat Yai (a town near Thailand-Malaysia border).” (Malaysian English, informant 19)

4.2 Findings of Research Question Two

4.2.1 Learners’ Opinions about Importance of Studying Varieties of English

Table 4. Importance of understanding varieties of English

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
“It is important to understand varieties of English, e.g., Indian English, Singaporean English, Chinese English, etc.”	5 (9.62%)	14 (26.92%)	23 (44.23%)	10 (19.23%)

From the above table, the number informants who were positive towards the statement was apparently higher than those who had negative opinion. It can be seen that more than half of the informants thought it was important to understand varieties of English: 44.23% agreed, while 19.23% strongly agreed. Regarding negative evaluation on this statement, 26.92% disagreed, while 9.62% strongly disagreed. In order to know their reasons for considering and not considering varieties of English important to understand, the informants were asked to briefly provide reason for their response. The results are discussed below.

4.2.2 Rationales the Informants Employed to Support Their Consideration

4.2.2.1 Reasons for Considering Varieties of English Important to Understand

The majority of the informants who thought varieties of English were important to understand showed their consciousness about the global role of English. This can be linked to the idea of English being spoken by the majority of non-native speakers. With such a global view, there are more opportunities to be confronted with different types of English users in daily-life interactions. The informants seemed to realize that international speakers use different forms of English:

“It is very important to understand varieties of English because in fact people who come from different parts of the world have different accents. I do not mean that we have to study them like what we’re studying American or British English, but the point is to just understand them for the sake of international communication.” (Informant 6)

“We have to use English to communicate with people around the world, so it is important to understand different accents of English.” (Informant 47)

“There are so many non-native speakers now because everyone has English knowledge. It’s the fact that we talk to non-native speakers more than native speakers of English. This is why we need to understand varieties of English.” (Informant 11)

The need to understand different forms of English in order to ensure communicative effectiveness in cross-cultural or intercultural interactions was also mentioned:

“When we have to cross-culturally communicate with speakers from other countries, we need to understand the accents they speak. An attempt to understand each other is of paramount importance in cross-cultural communication. This is what successful communication is meant to be.” (Informant 1)

“Understanding of varieties of English helps prevent intercultural communication breakdown especially in situations when you communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.” (Informant 15)

Similar to the above findings, these informants seemed to have positive attitudes towards varieties of English as they showed their interests in learning various forms of English. They mentioned that phonological differences of world English speakers could be an interesting/fun topic in English pronunciation learning:

“It will be very interesting if we have an opportunity to learn different forms of English pronunciation.” (Informant 4)

“Even though we don’t use these varieties of English in school or in daily-life contexts, I think learning them can be fun!” (Informant 20)

Even though some informants noted that they had difficulty recognizing non-native speakers’ accents they seemed to believe that familiarity with varieties of English accent was a good way to help them recognize and understand these speakers more easily:

“I used to talk to people from China and Taiwan, and I found their English very difficult to understand. So, it is important to be familiar with these varieties.” (Informant 22)

“We don’t know where people especially non-native speakers come from, and we don’t seem to understand what they speak because we are not familiar with their accents. Most of the time, this will lead to major communication failure. For me, understanding as many English varieties as possible is an advantage.” (Informant 16)

The most interesting case, perhaps, goes to the below informant whose comment resonates with the concept of *addition* in accommodation skills in EIL phonology as addressed by Jenkins (2000). This informant believed that the understanding of varieties of English could provide speakers with the phonological accommodation skill to suit listeners’ receptive needs (Jenkins, 2000):

“If I understand varieties of English, I can adjust the way I speak to accommodate my listeners. I think people will understand me better if I know how to adjust my speech. So, I strongly agree that learning varieties of English is beneficial.” (Informant 43)

In summary, the learners who considered varieties of English important for understanding seemed to have a sense of linguistic tolerance. This is reflected in their reasons employed to support their agreement. They did not see varieties of English as something that need to be prevented; rather, they saw them as a natural linguistic phenomenon in which they had to be confronted with when communicating with international interlocutors. Moreover, various forms of English (phonological differences) were also considered interesting to learn.

4.2.2.2 Reasons for Not Considering Varieties of English Important to Understand

When English language learning is involved, the only correct and standard linguistic models, to the majority of informants, should be the ones that are informed by native speakers of English:

“I don’t think we need to understand these non-standard varieties because they are not native varieties of English. I think it’s necessary for language learners like us to rely on native speakers of English when we need reference for correct language usage.” (Informant 31)

“Not necessary to understand! British English is the original version of English. We need to master it not Indian or Chinese English.” (Informant 50)

“We cannot even master American English, let alone learning other varieties of English.” (Informant 20)

Many informants commented upon the unintelligibility of many Asian Englishes. As they referred to their experiences with other Asian speakers who spoke unintelligible forms of English, they seemed to finalize that non-native varieties were difficult to understand:

“I used to talk to some Indian people; their language is different from native speakers and is, of course, very unintelligible.” (Informant 22)

“Speaking from my experience, I found the speech of people from China and India very difficult to understand and very hard to follow. As for Singapore, some speak good English but not good Enough since they use a lot of Chinese words in English.” (Informant 14)

Some informants did not believe that varieties of English exist, and this is the reason why they disfavored understanding varieties of English. They articulated that they had no idea of what the term ‘varieties of English’

mean:

“What do you mean by varieties of English?” (Informant 36)

“I don't know how Indian English or Chinese English sounds like. I'm not sure how distinct its form is linguistically. I mean it's not what we often find in most dictionaries. Linguistically, I often hear reference to only British and American English not varieties of English.” (Informant 37)

In a nutshell, the informants who considered varieties of English unimportant to understand seemed to believe that different forms of English deviant from native-speaker origin were non-standard and unintelligible. Some even articulated that there were no such things as non-native varieties of English. This finding resonates with one of the six fallacious assumptions about uses and users of English as described by Kachru (1988). He puts it: “The diversity and variation in English are indicators of linguistic decay” (Kachru, 1988, p. 3). Kachru continues to argue that this fallacy has resulted in position in which difference at any level from the codified native norm is erroneous.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Suggestions

It is not a surprising finding that native-speaker varieties of English were chosen as appropriate models for learning and use by the majority of informants. In addition, the mainstream varieties: American and British English have emerged as the two unrivaled models since the discrepancy in percentages between the informants choosing these varieties and other varieties were considerably high. Given the inner-circle varieties being described as linguistically, prestigiously, aesthetically and economically attractive, it may be assumed that inner-circle Englishes have been firmly established and deeply held as the unquestionable linguistic and/or pronunciation standards in language classroom (Jindapitak, 2013).

Concerning realistic approach to ELT in the 21st century that concentrates on learner centeredness, Kirkpatrick (2007) notes that classroom model should be informed by learners. Pedagogically speaking, the majority of learners, in the present study, whose goals were to approximate native speakers, should be awarded the freedom of choice to learn native-speaker models. However, this does not mean that teachers blindly adopt a native-speaker model as the sole authoritative figure in language curriculum and ignore other models. We should not forget that there are also a fair number of learners (as reflected in this study by about one-third of the informants, 34.62%) who did not want to learn and use inner-circle Englishes. Their voices must also be heard. Thus, classroom pedagogy which is based on the mainstream one-size-fits-all approach that adheres to the pursuit of native-speaker scholarly knowledge or wisdom (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) does not seem relevant for these learners. More interestingly, this study also suggests that even though the majority of learners preferred native-speaker models, it did not necessarily mean that they did not see the importance of understanding world Englishes. It was found that about two-third of the informants either agreed or strongly agreed in the statement asking about the importance of understanding varieties of English.

This finding is thought to carry weight in shaping ELT in Thailand in the future and challenging the native-speaker guided practices that have been deeply rooted in Thailand for decades. We maintain that it is much needed for global ELT to challenge Quirk's (1990) standpoint in which non-native speakers are encouraged to uphold a single monochrome standard form of English authorized by native speakers of a particular nation. The traditional ELT, which assumes that English learners (who most of their lives learn and use English in Thailand) have to master native-speaker likeness or a native-like accent in order to use English effectively in both intra- and international contexts, has to be seriously put into question. It can be drawn upon the study that there is a group of learners (though small in number) who want to learn and use other types of English that allow them to glorify their identity, follow the global trends, adapt to suit their local needs and express national identity. In these cases, English learners have no desire to assimilate the way native speakers use the language or have no feeling of becoming native speakers. Thus, ELT in the globalized world should be realistic in a way that is pedagogically sensitive to “... a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 544). Providing similar ground to Kumaravadivelu, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) acknowledge that even though we use the same language for international communication, it is certainly not the same language use. They continue to argue that: “Authentic discourse in London or New York might be quite inappropriate for speakers of English in other parts of the world; what is authentic in one context might need to be made appropriate to another” (P. 199).

We maintain that it is needed for English learners to be exposed to varieties of English aside from the inner-circle ones. Without EIL knowledge, learners may develop the idea that varieties of English including their own, which phonologically or structurally differ from the inner-circle varieties, are linguistically-ill versions of

English and are unacceptable when international communication is involved (Matsuda, 2003). By exposing learners to word Englishes and having them interact with EIL users, it is believed that they may be able to re-conceptualize the notion of proficient English speakers; as in EIL terms, being an effective user of English does not require being a native speaker (Matsuda, 2003). Learning EIL is also believed to help learners develop the sense of tolerance of linguistic diversity as well as enrich their linguistic repertoires when international or intercultural communication is concerned. It is essential that learners should be made aware of the diversified contexts of English where people use varieties of English to serve a wide range of communicative purposes (Buripakdi, 2012; Cheng, 2013; Chinh, 2013; Cook, 2002; Jaber & Hussein, 2011; Jindapitak, 2013; Jindapitak & Teo, 2011, 2012, 2013; Jenkins, 2000, 2006; Matsuda, 2003; Sung, 2013). Adding to this, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) claim that ELT should enable learners to do business with both native and non-native or local and international speakers in the global world market.

Last but not least, given the crucial need to learn EIL, however, we do not conclude that the native-speaker ELT orientations should be completely marginalized in English classroom. In fact, these models can still be used as linguistic and pedagogic points of reference (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994) or as guidance for those who wish to learn English in order to identify themselves with native speakers in an inner-circle environment. In this case, learners can celebrate the choice of model they have chosen and aim for such specific goal.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

This survey study is limited in the small number of informants. Hence, this study ought to be interpreted or generalized with caution. It is suggested that future study recruit more informants in order to make the study more generalizable. Moreover, since this study employs only single method to investigate the learners' attitudes, it is recommended for future study to utilize various approaches (e.g., interview, verbal-guise test and perceptual dialectology) to eliciting and triangulating attitudinal data.

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