# Thai Language Learners' Sense of English Ownership

## Songyut Akkakoson

Faculty of Applied Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok
1518 Pracharat 1 Road, Wongsawang, Bangsue, Bangkok 10800 Thailand
Email: songyutbee@gmail.com

## Abstract

As a result of the important role English has played as a lingua franca in various world regions, a question has been asked whether this Anglo-American property has already been shared by speakers in non-native countries. This concern voices calls for increased attention to ESL/EFL learners' sense of self and their positioning with respect to English. This study explored Thai postgraduates' feelings about their taking ownership of English as an International Lingua Franca in ASEAN and how they view themselves in relation to the language. A qualitative approach was applied, using open-ended interview questions asking 44 postgraduates who enrolled on existing courses of the two English-related programmes. No shared sense of ownership is found, but the idea that English is used as a language for communication is highlighted. Since their relation to English is mainly found to be socio-economic and English is widely recognised for the sake of their educational, economic and social growth and prospects, the assumption that 'the West is the world' is still prevalent. Although getting involved in various English-related activities, these students' identity through their national language remains firm, and English is not considered the main determinant of their identity. The study provides suggestions aiming for valuing gains in

English proficiency, together with instilling a respect for ASEAN local languages and cultures.

**Keywords:** English as an international lingua franca, appropriation of English, ownership of English, present-day English

## Introduction

With economic globalisation, English has transfigured a colonial construct into 'Englishes' and plays the role of a global 'Big Brother' (Durairaj, 2015, p. 2) in the lingua franca situation serving both intra- and international communication (Kachru, 1992). That is to say, it is spoken not only amongst local users within one country, but also by a larger number of speakers who have different mother tongues as an international lingua franca (McKay, 2002) to provide meaningful interactions for international business, economy, politics, diplomacy, computers and the Internet. The reason for this rise, as speculated by Crystal (2005, p. 10), can be attributed to 'the power of the people who speak it' which influences others in terms of political, technological, cultural and economic reasons. The position as such appears to represent power and success which many countries throughout the world admire and would like their citizens to possess (Durairaj, 2015). This is because they consider being proficient in English as one of the major 'mediational tools' (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007, p. 1) through which their nations can strive to be successful in the international economy. As a result, the language has strengthened and been processed by all the market players to serve the market needs (e.g., 'English for Engineers, Business English, Communication Skills, or Soft Skills with English at the core' [Durairaj, 2015, p. 3]) of a huge number of clients, including international organisations and global users around the globe, especially in non-native settings which include multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual components as a result of demographic movement. Since these peoples are required to utilise English more frequently within wider regions, the language

becomes variant. In views of Yano (2009), its variations become institutionalised and can be grouped into regional standard Englishes, namely Euro English, Asian English, Latin English, Arab English and African English (other than Anglo-American English) the users of which share interregional intelligibility and preserve local lingua-cultural characteristics and identities. As a result of global mobility and the inauguration of different regional communities for economic purposes, English is, then, chosen a medium of communication for individuals from different native language backgrounds. This characterises a function of English as an International Lingua Franca (EILF) in different world regions. Sociolinguistically, both aforementioned regional standard Englishes and EILF have emerged under the umbrella of World Englishes (WEs) (Kachru, 1985, 1992) which underpins the shifted paradigm of English as an International Language (EIL), as known in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Sharifian, 2009).

As a consequence of these changes, a lot of concerns about the present status of English have been voiced amongst scholars in the language-related fields. Amongst others, a question as to whether English is still the sole property of people in native settings (or Kachru's [1992] inner-circle countries), or has this property already been shared by a vast majority of speakers in particular Kachru's (1992) outer- and expanding-circle countries has also been asked by a number of researchers (e.g., Anwaruddin, 2012; Canagarajah, 1999; Phan Le Ha, 2008; Lee, Lee, Wong & Ya'acob, 2010; Sultana, 2012). A study conducted by Phan Le Ha (2009) who explored the ideas of English ownership and how the language relates to its international users has sparked the present researcher's interest. This study has found the shared sense of English appropriation amongst Asian international student users who report using English as an international language for their own benefit. Even though Thailand, a monolingual country in the ASEAN region, does not own English in the sense of a colonial language, this language is considered a high-status foreign language in this country due to its multi-roles in the present globalised world. In fact, 'English in

Thailand has evolved to what it is today through other means of direct and indirect contact with Anglophones' (Bennui & Hashim, 2014, p. 2) and of lingua franca functions in ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2012). How about Thai students who have studied this language for years? Do they share the same sense of English ownership and use the language for their own advantage or not? If more answers support the fact that this Anglo-American property has been shared, the assumptions that 'the West is the world' and 'English belongs to native English-speaking countries' (Phan Le Ha, 2009, p. 202) and that native-speaker teachers represent a western culture from which springs the ideals both of the English language and English language teaching methodology (Holliday, 2005) become questionable. Widdowson (1994, p. 384) posits that one should not bow to the control of the form originated by the inner-circle countries, but one should be 'proficient in a language to the extent that you possess it, make it your own, bend it to your will, assert yourself through it'. Moreover, the pedagogical model of English that foreign language learners should follow needs to be revised, based on the sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of the language (Cook, 2001; Holliday, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2001; Tupas, 2006).

This article, therefore, describes a study which seeks to add to the present knowledge on the aspect of English appropriation. It intends to investigate Thai postgraduates' shared sense of taking ownership of English as an International Lingua Franca (EILF) in ASEAN and examine how these students see themselves in relation to this global language.

**Taking the ownership of English**

The issue of taking the ownership of English by users of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds which is a focal point of the present study has been raised due to the fact that the status of English becomes international or global. Since varieties of English are presently institutionalised by millions of contemporary users in different regions, can these users claim their rights to be counted an owner of this language? Based on

essentialist concepts, things are believed to have a set of characteristics which makes them what they are. Thus, language ownership has to be defined according to the 'birth-right paradigm' (Parmegiani, 2010). That is, only can one's parents' ethnicity and birthplace determine one's linguistic ownership. In linguists' views, this assumption seems problematic. In fact, they postulate that those who have learnt an additional language can truly claim its ownership. Moreover, '[t]hose who feel a sense of ownership towards the language do not require authorisation from professional linguists [to grant them the ownership of English], whose seals of approval are of little consequence' (Saraceni, 2010, p. 15).

Where the English ownership notion is concerned, several linguists have long talked about it. Dating back to 1960s, Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens (1964, p. 293) made the argument that 'English is no longer the possession of the British, or even the British and the Americans, but an international language which increasingly large numbers of people adopt for at least some of their purposes'. Later, Nelson (1992) urged particular users of English to take control of this additional language and adapt it appropriately to their cultural contexts. Widdowson (1994, 1997) remarked to native speakers of English that with the status of their language as an international means of communication, they must accept the fact that an international language has to be an independent language. This is because English has changed from being a language that was conventionally used in certain native-speaking countries to functioning as a medium for wider communication for numerous bodies and users around the globe. Given that English has come to be utilised by billions of international users mostly in non-native settings, it has ceased being the exclusive stuff of individuals with particular ethnic backgrounds or with specific inner-circle communities. As a result, English is no longer their property, but other users actually possess it too. Since English serves the communicative and mutual necessities of various societies, the language inevitably adapts and diversifies into a

standard form to the extent required to meet the needs of the communities concerned. For example, scientists or business people, whose first languages are different, could maintain a common standard of English in order to keep up standards of communicative effectiveness. In views of Brumfit (2001), taking the ownership or appropriation of any language lies with the people who use it. No matter who they are: monolinguals or plurilinguals, they have the power to adapt and change the language they use. Sociolinguistically, languages are shaped by their use. For English, 'it is the non-native speakers of English who will be the main agents in the ways English is used, is maintained, and changes, and who will shape the ideologies and beliefs associated with it' (Seidlhofer, 2003, p. 7). Canagarajah (1999) exemplifies the appropriation of English in the context of Sri Lanka where there are local cultural and political issues. Sri Lankan people are able to take control of English and use it for their own sake. Due to this, Canagarajah proposes a teaching approach that is resistant to linguistic imperialism. In accord with this, Kramsch (2001) focuses on how those who are diverse users of English can own the language through their English teachers, asserting that appropriation can claim itself by continuously forming 'third cultures' or 'third spaces' (Kramsch, 1993). Agreeing with Canagarajah's and Kramsch's ideas, Pennycook (2001) offers possibilities of forming the so-called third spaces or third cultures for using this language. As noted by Phan Le Ha (2007, 2008, 2009), the opinions on the appropriation of English, in fact, go against linguistic imperialism and the postcolonial dichotomy of Self and Other. This notion does not indicate refusing English at all. Rather, it first promotes one's use of English for one's own benefit and equality. Second, it encourages users of English to join together to get rid of the discoursal forms of colonialism/ imperialism (genres, styles, rhetorical conventions of the English speaking world). This is to create 'a new and more sophisticated view of "appropriation," which consists of resistance and reconstitution' (Phan Le Ha, 2009, p. 205). Hashimoto (2000, p. 39) illustrates a case of how Japan withstands the effect of

Western globalisation and English dominance, reasoning that 'the commitment of the Japanese government to internationalisation in education actually means "Japanisation" of Japanese learners of English'.

In short, the notion of English appropriation is to highlight the role of non-native users in spreading and transforming English into a global language. It covers not only the ideas of opening up to changes and spaces for non-native speakers of English to develop positively and equally in comparison to native English speakers, but also the ideas of how non-native speakers actively and comfortably use English as their language (Phan Le Ha, 2009). By means of this, English ownership or English appropriation in this study may be defined as an attitude of accepting  responsibility for  English  and taking control of  how it uses and develops by users of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**Voices concerning the notion of English ownership**

Empirically speaking, research has been conducted to hear a variety of participants' voices concerning this issue. Some researchers appraised the participants' capability to own English, whereas others sought their sense of English ownership through interviews. Nikula (2007) has examined how English is used by 15 Finnish primary school students in their biology and physics Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classrooms, using a discourse-pragmatic perspective approach to monitor social and interpersonal aspects of language use in authentic settings. The findings indicate that these CLIL students' ownership of English is claimed through their confidence in the use of English as a resource for the construction of classroom activities. An identity as users of English is also shown through their code-switching practices between their L1 and the L2. Phan Le Ha (2009) has interviewed eight Asian international postgraduate students in Thailand to investigate their shared sense of EIL ownership and their relationship with the language. Her findings reveal that these students take the ownership of EIL

for their own sake, namely making English serve one's multi-relationships with the language, feeling included and positive as international students and foreigners in the foreign land and being a teacher of EIL. Moreover, their multiple identities of Asian international students are constructed around English and their being Asian. Seilhamer (2015) has studied six young Taiwanese women' relationships with English, employing multiple in-depth interviews conducted in English and participant observation. The results show that four out of six participants are considered proficient in English and able to be effective members of the imagined global community of English users. That is, they have a degree of English ownership. All of them have highly prevalent English usage, strong affective belonging with English and a high degree of expertise in the language and English teaching experiences both of which position them as legitimate experts.

Although there is some evidence that the ownership has been shared, the following studies, on the other hand, reveal something opposite. The results of Matsuda's (2003) qualitative case study of Japanese secondary school students show that these students do not believe that English is owned by international users although they are aware that it is as an international language and is used internationally. Even in a former British colony like Malaysia where there is the desire to use their own indigenised variety of English to construct a sense of belonging and identity, people feel that their Malaysian English is considered inaccurate or invalid (Pillai, 2008), which at worst spoils the so-called standard English (Saraceni, 2010). In a similar vein, Ke (2010) has explored 19 Taiwanese university students' worldviews and conceptions of English through in-depth interviews on their past experience of learning and using English, including their personal reflections on the experience. The findings point to the perceptions that native speakers and their accents seem to be something of great value. These students are unlikely to own English even though the language becomes part of their national literacy.

The above discussion has emphasised some important voices concerning the issue of the appropriation of English amongst a vast majority of non-native speakers. To add more knowledge about this issue in the literature, the present study has sought an answer whether a shared sense of ownership of English is represented in the perceptions of Thai postgraduate students of English-related programmes who are ones of the present-day English users in ASEAN and who are desirous of communicating internationally with the community and the world through the language.

**The study**

This qualitative research was conducted in a sci-tech university located in Bangkok, Thailand. Since the study focuses on opinions specifically drawn from master's students of English-related programmes, purposive sampling was employed. Therefore, 44 postgraduate students who were taking the existing courses of the two English-related programmes (i.e., English for Business and Industry Communication and Translation for Education and Business) were taken as a sample group. Eight of them were males and 36 females with an age range of 22 to 43, which is presumably mature enough both academically and mentally to share perceptions of English ownership. These students had more than 13 years spent studying English and were considered present and future users of English because some of them were having English-related jobs whilst others would probably be having such jobs after completing their study. Therefore, insights into their ideas about English appropriation were considered significant. All participants were coded PS1-PS44 for data analysis.

A written-interview form was employed to gather participants' opinions on how each individual has taken ownership of English to his/her advantage. Each participant was requested to respond by writing a detailed explanation of their opinions. Inspired by Phan Le Ha's (2009) study of English appropriation of Asian international students, the present researcher created the interview topics based on its results (Phan

Le Ha, personal communication, April 5, 2013). These topics were transformed into ten open-ended questions, which were further translated into Thai by the researcher and double-checked by three experts who have a PhD in Applied Linguistics. The interview form with a consent form was distributed to the student respondents through their course instructors and completed in their own time. Either Thai or English in answering the questions was allowed. The responses written in Thai were translated into English by the researcher himself whilst the English answers were kept intact. Finally, the obtained data were analysed by collating according to similarities and differences. The collated data were then put in percentage terms.

The following sections discuss the results according to the research purposes, followed by an account of conclusions, implications and recommendations of the study.

**Participants' perceptions of taking ownership of English**

The obtained data show that a majority of the participants did not think they own English and English owns them (77.27%), whereas a minority of them did (22.73%). Some views of the participants are exemplified below (original data in English kept intact):

> Personally, I don't think I own English because I can't use it as well as the native speaker. But I view that English controls me as it is necessary for various aspects of life such as studying, working, or doing business. (S40)

> Exactly, it is [I do] since I try harder to practice my English skills and its knowledge for not only my higher effective and efficient communication but also teaching other people how to speak English as much as they expect. (S20)

Although not perceiving as an owner of English, around half of the participants had a positive experience of using the language as an English-related student (52.27%). One participant said:

> I don't think I own English. I'm just a shared user of this
> language. I'm positive towards English and I have positive
> experience in using it because I am a student of an
> English-related postgraduate programme  in  Thailand.  I
> think I may feel like the one who owns English when I go to
> study or stay in a native English speaking country for at
> least 1 or 2 years. (S15)

Almost half of them said that they take ownership of English by
feeling included and positive, or having a positive experience of
being a student of an English-related postgraduate programme in
Thailand (40.90%) whilst only a few of them partly felt included
and positive (4.54%). However, a few turned out to have a negative
feeling on English ownership (2.29%). Some positive opinions
include:

> Yes, I feel included, positive, and have a positive experience
> of being a student of an English-related postgraduate
> programme in Thailand. Once I was a young student, I got
> a lot of good experiences about learning English which
> make me love English. That's why I feel really good towards
> English nowadays. (S3)

> I have a positive attitude of English. Every time I use it, I
> feel proud that I can communicate using it although
> sometimes it takes quite some time. But once foreigners
> understand me and get what they want, I think that I am
> successful in using the language and I feel like I am a co-
> owner of this shared language. (S8)

Benefits that these students mentioned they gain from the
appropriation of English mostly lie in the affective aspects of their
use of the language: increasing one's confidence (25.31%);
improving one's motivation (21.51%); creating one's inspiration
(13.92%); reducing one's speaking anxiety (3.79%) and increasing
one's desire to contact foreigners (1.26%), to live overseas (1.26%)
and to master a native-like level of English (1.26%). Other
advantages they stated include the practical aspects of English
usage: being able to use English at work (7.59%), facilitating

communication (3.79%), broadening one's perspectives (3.79%), increasing one's knowledge of English (2.53%), providing more job opportunities (2.53%), helping towards one's education (1.26%) and promoting one's self-improvement (1.26%). The following statements illustrate some affective aspects the participants viewed:

> I think my appropriation of English benefits will help to increase confidence in using the language. If inner of yours are the ownership, the outer will appear such as pronunciation, tone, stress, etc. (S1)

> Using English the language is to increase motivation to study the language more than in the past. Because English is important for education around the world. There are many countries using English in teaching in international programme. For example, In Thailand, there are many universities using English in teaching such as Chulalongkorn university and Thammasat university. So if we can read or write in English, we can read about English documents clearly and understandably and most textbooks are published in English. (S32)

> It inspires me to teach people in the next generation and also to improve myself to get better in English language. (S19)

However, a few of the participants commented that they gain benefit from the language itself, not from its appropriation (8.94%). Some participants said:

> No benefits as we are not the owner of English. (S4)

> I feel English is like a friend who has been growing up with me. This is because we learn English since a nursery school. (S25)

The above accounts illustrate that the Thai postgraduates in this study do not feel agreement with the concern that the present-day English becomes the shared property of non-native

people who are a vast number of speakers in particular Kachru's (1992) outer- and expanding-circle countries. That is, they do not see this international or global language as everyone's language. In fact, they do not want to integrate themselves into the inner-circle community. This finding is surely in contrast to the earlier reviewed studies in which the shared ownership has been identified (i.e., Nikula, 2007; Phan Le Ha, 2009; Seihamer, 2015). Finnish primary school students in Nikula's study are found to possess English competence as they prove to be able to use English assertively when doing classroom activities. Since these students are also able to code-switch from English to their L1, Finnish for affective purposes, Nikula has pointed that they are considered users rather than learners of English. Asian postgraduates in Phan Le Ha's study feel they take control of English and they see English as everyone's language and seem to enjoy positive international experiences by taking ownership of this language. These students are international students who come from various Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines to do their master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) at an international university in Thailand. They have some English teaching experience either in their home country or in the research setting or both. Consequently, Phan Le Ha has asserted that they possess English at such a high level that they can reflect a sense of sharing the ownership of English. Similarly, Taiwanese female participants who used to be Seihamer's former university students are considered having a degree of English ownership because they prove themselves to be full competent users who have highly prevalent English usage in communities, having strong affective belonging with the language and having legitimate expertise as English teachers.

Although another voice from the students in this study does not match the researcher's prior assumption, their unfound sense of English ownership seems hardly surprising. These students are similar to those of Matsuda (2003) and Ke (2010) in that they seem to share the same characteristic as the majority of English

learners and users around the world who, as suggested by Saraceni (2010), are not aware of or concerned with the concept of language ownership which, if they are, is believed to consist of the unattainable native-speaker norms and birth-right paradigm. In other words, they consider their English proficiency inferior and perceive that they are definitely not native speakers of English. They just think they are in the process of improving their English ability. They report that their English is not good, saying they are able to use only easy English to communicate. They do not think they can speak English well, nor do they have confidence in their own abilities to use it. They state that they cannot use English as fluently as a native speaker though they have spent years studying it. They also say they are still trying to practise their English skills more and more because they want to use English more efficiently. Thus, these students are obviously less confident of their English use than those of Nikula's (2007), Phan Le Ha's (2009) and Seihamer's (2015) studies.

This can be said that these non-native English learners are reluctant to claim ownership. The problem may be ascribed to the fact that 'standard English' which was firmly codified or supported by established grammars and dictionaries is still the norm in most educational institutions, as pointed out by Canagarajah (2005). Non-native learners of Jindapitak's (2013) study in Thailand and those of Alhassan (2017) in Sudan are of the same opinion that the standard English to be taught, learnt and identified in the classroom still needs to be attached to the ideology and construct of native speakers. Greek teachers of English in a study of Sifakis and Sougari (2005), Cameroon teachers of English in a study of Belibi (2013) and Thai teachers of English in Boriboon's (2013) study still value native speaker ideology in relation to accent and pronunciation, believing that native speakers are the most desirable accent models learners should aspire to. Why so? Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the dichotomy and implication of the Self (native speakers) and Other (non-native speakers) are still prevalent in TESOL (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi, in press). The former implies first-class users of English who are superior,

whereas the latter second-class ones who are always inferior, resulting in valuing the native speakers' norms of English by most teachers and learners in ELT contexts. Another reason is probably owing to being a monolingual speaker who has never experienced subsuming a colonial language. Language learners who have no direct exposure to the English language and English-speaking culture through the colonial traditions and customs like those in Thailand still subscribe to the norm of native varieties of English and hardly dare to develop or recognise their own 'truly Thai variety of English' (Bennui & Hashim, 2014, p. 18).

**Participants' views on their relationships with English**

The participants in this study thought English is related to them in respect of occupational purposes (41.42%), educational purposes (22.85%), daily life activities (19.99%) and communicative purposes (15.74%). One participant said:

> Since I work in a company of which the headquarters are located overseas, I have to use English for business communication. Moreover, I have to travel aboard to work and I use English to communicate with foreigners. (S12)

Some of them expected to be a future user who would use English for either business transactions or academic purposes (35.08%) and several of them stated that they are a present user of English (26.31%). A minority of them said that they are a pre-experienced business communicator through English (7.01%). A few participants affirmed that they are already an experienced business communicator (5.26%). One participant mentioned their use of English:

> Yes, I do. Because I study about business in English so I want to use any skill that I have learned in the future for sure. Also I think that a knowledge skill of business will useful for me in many ways for example, in case of I have to contact or communicate with customers, I will know how to contact with them appropriately. (S25)

Asked about the native-speaker norms, many of the participants responded that they do not attach importance to British or American accent English (68.18%) whilst a few are all in favour of one particular accent only, namely American English (18.18%) and British English (13.64%). One participant who expressed no care for the native norms stated:

> In the past I learnt English but I never care either convention and use both interchangeably. I study in the course I know that in Thailand uses both American-orientated and British-orientated. Mostly Thais uses American-orientated in writing work. There are several areas in which American English has adapted the spelling to reflect the way that the words actually sound. Finally, if I am writing for British readers, I will use British spelling. (S44)

A few numbers of participants did not think that English grants them an empowering and superior status compared to other ASEAN people's speaking English (36.36%), but a minority of them did (34.09%) whilst a few of them were not sure of such an idea (29.55%). An example from those who thought they are not superior is shown below:

> No, it does not. If you can use English as well you can communicate or travel around the world. You can use the language for helping people but it is not mean you are more powerful to other ASEAN people's speaking English. They are trying to develop using the language. (S10)

Many of the participants were confident that they can be a communicator of cultures through 'international English' (79.54%) and can make other people recognise their identity as a Thai through English (88.63%). A few of them were not certain that they can be such a communicator (13.63%) whilst very few of them were sure they certainly cannot (6.83%). The following exemplifies what one confident student revealed:

> Yes, I'm. Nowadays Thailand is famous for outstanding places and sightseeing and culture in Thailand. There are a lot of foreigners coming to visit Thailand more than before. So when some foreigners come to visit some places where they don't know about deep information. We can offer ourselves to help them explain clearly and precisely. Each country is different from another country so some visitors come to Thailand, we have to tell them about our culture and belief. (S9)

Another student talked about her Thai identity:

> I think I can. Since I am a Thai who was born and grew up in Thailand. I have been raised up and educated in Thailand within the Thai social cultural background. My communication with foreigners inevitably more or less reflects my personality, feelings and beliefs general Thai people have. I am very proud to be a Thai who is one of the citizens of ASEAN. Being Thai represents a nice and valuable identity. (S2)

For communication in ASEAN, a majority of the participants did not think that English alone is enough (79.54%), but a few of them did (18.18%) whilst very few thought that communicating through English alone in ASEAN is probably working (2.28%). Two participants stated:

> If we have a chance to learn the third language, that will help increase opportunities in various aspects such as jobs, trading, hotel business, tourism or higher education. Although English is a language for communication in ASEAN, there are other languages which are national languages like Malay which is used as an official language in many countries like Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, part of Singapore. Even Chinese is also important because a lot of tourists visit Had Yai or other places in Songkha. If we want to practise language skills other than English, it will increase opportunities in your jobs or contacting with local government agencies. (S36)

> I think although English is necessary for communication
> in ASEAN, there are also other factors, for example
> understanding of basic cultures of each country,
> nationalities and religions. (S5)

The above-mentioned descriptions indicate that although not self-identifying themselves with English, the students participating in this study serve their multi-relationships with the language. This probably contributes towards their different identities believed and felt about English as they use it for communication. First, they relate themselves to English based on the globalised community's economic ideology. This identity is apparent from the economic value that the language may have for them in their present or future careers. The participants believe that English proficiency will provide them much opportunity for high-paying jobs and career advancement. As a result, they make an effort to expose themselves to English through education, daily life activities and communication. Unsurprisingly, these instrumental, economic orientations to learning English are also a stimulus for various groups of students in Asia, for example in Thailand (Hayes, 2014), in Indonesia (Bradford, 2007), in Macao (Carissa Young, 2006), in Taiwan (Warden & Lin, 2000). This fact seems to emphasise the assumptions that the West is the world and that English belongs to native English-speaking countries the community of which is well-trained and well-educated in the fields of education, technology, economy and politics. People living in developing countries, by contrast, believe that their educational, economic and social growth and prospects totally depend upon developing English language proficiency.

Another facet of identity is shown through the participants' expressed confidence in being able to communicate their Thai cultures through English as a good host welcoming foreign tourists. English has typically become Thailand's common currency for cross-cultural conversation as the country receives a number of visitors from around the world. Tourism is also one of the most important sectors driving the Thai economy. However,

they think English alone, although important, is not enough for communication in ASEAN. Knowledge of different cultures and languages in ASEAN is also viewed as a necessity.

The participants' identity of being Thai is also expressed. A sure sign of Thai esteem is shown through their confirmed confidence to make other people recognise their identity as a Thai through English. Apart from that, they affirmed that they are a user of English, but English does not grant them an empowering and superior status over other ASEAN citizens. This illustrates their 'smooth interpersonal relationship orientation' which is categorised by 'the preference for a non-assertive, polite and humble type of personality' (Komin, 1990, p. 4) trait which is possessed by Thai people in general.

Lastly, the fact that the participants paid no attention to whether it be British or American accent may signify a new ideology that is perhaps prevailing amongst Thailand's new generations. That is, generations Y and Z tend to adopt new technologies that come with English in forms of numerous applications in their smartphones, and more and more parents send their children to International Schools, or study bilingual programs at kindergarten and international programs at the university level. As a result, there is a likelihood that these young generations' identity may be in progress of transforming to be the global one or glocal one.

**Conclusions, implications and recommendations**

Positioned in the context of English as an international lingua franca (EILF), this study tries to add another answer to the concern about taking ownership of English by translating the voices heard from a group of postgraduate students of English-related programmes studying in Thailand, one of the expanding-circle countries where English is used as a foreign language. Such questions as to who they are, who they want to be and who they could become in relation to their feelings, ideas and thoughts of how their English is used have been investigated. The findings have demonstrated that the shared sense of English ownership is

unfound amongst these language users, but their positive feelings towards the language are prevalent. Their manifold identities in connection with English are revealed. Still, their trait of being Thai is firm.

The study has implications for curriculum developers in Thailand. The curriculum objectives for teaching-learning English at all levels need to be reconsidered. First, Thai language learners need to be recognised in connection with who they are, who they want to be and who they could become. In fact, the goal of how to use English in the lingua franca context of ASEAN, or even in the globalised context can be regarded, according to House (2003, p. 556), as 'languages for communication' not 'languages for [cultural/social] identification'. This means English should be a useful instrument for making oneself understood in international encounters and for enabling communication with others who do not speak ones' own L1. The goal is not for learners to attain native speaker proficiency and to sound like native speakers but to facilitate the use of English successfully in lingua franca contexts in which they will naturally sound like multilinguals. Thus, the present researcher agrees with Phan Le Ha (2009) about encouraging and valuing users' appropriation of English. Ways that English language learners in Thailand take ownership of English should be promoted. All learners, whatever levels they are working at, should be encouraged to acknowledge and value this notion.

Second, since the mission to approximate the native-speaker norm and use it as a model for the official curriculum seems to be impossible, alternatives should be taken into consideration. Oanh (2012) has proposed the notion of in-country glocal English to be used in Asia. For this notion, English users are able to use a variety of English which is 'influenced by local languages and cultures to better meet local communicative needs while maintaining basic intrinsic English comprehensibility' (Oanh, 2012, p. 108). This variety is seen as 'situated Englishes' (Oanh, 2012, p. 107), which is understandable to the international community with indigenous linguistic and ethnic features, neither

for language learning assessment, nor for trans-national communication. Kirkpatrick (2012) has also proposed a lingua franca approach to the teaching of English in ASEAN where English is granted sole official status amongst a group of 10 countries and where first language speakers of English are very small in number. For this approach, gaining English proficiency comes alongside learning of local languages and cultures.

Third, supported by the absence of awareness about British and American English orientations in this study, the study puts forward that the native-speakers as the providers of worldwide norms for the language which exist everywhere should be diminished. It seems that in most education systems, the native-speaker norms with the skill-based perspective of English language education seem to be honoured as the model for the national curriculum at all levels (Hayes, 2014). Teachers of English as a foreign language even value the native-like English identity for what is required to take the role as an effective teacher of English (Belibi, 2013; Boriboon, 2013; Jenkins, 2007; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). Moreover, the native-speaker ideology is still anchored by learners as the notion of standard English (Alhassan, 2017; Bennui & Hashim, 2014; Jindapitak, 2013). However, the student participants in the present study confirm that they do not express interest in the native conventions, but they confirm using both British and American styles interchangeably. In fact, these native-speaker norms are unachievable by the vast majority of EFL students compared to their actual usage. In addition, it is apparent that native-speaker linguistic standards become irrelevant in the contexts where English is mainly used as a lingua franca to serve such wider communicative purposes like the one in the ASEAN region (House, 2003). Therefore, in English language classrooms, indiginised or localised Englishes should be made aware of amongst EFL learners. For oral production, they need to understand the fact that successful second/foreign language users who speak the target language differently from native tongue users should not be considered lower, deficient or non-standard (Erling & Barlett, 2006). If possible, language learners should be

provided chances of conversing in English with proficient international users (Matsuda, 2003), but if not, video clips depicting how these people produce English utterances can also be shown in class. This can pedagogically help to highlight the fact that there are a lot of non-native English speakers who make 'full use of their multilingual resources to create their own preferred forms' (Jenkins, 2011, p. 928). To become efficient English language users does not necessitate native-likeness (Matsuda, 2003). This can also help to prevent learners' misconceived notions of resistance and refusal of other Englishes that are different from the English of the native speakers (Jaber & Hussein, 2011). Thus, EFL learners should be encouraged to feel free to orally produce their indiginised or localised versions of English as long as their utterances are logical and understandable. Their accents and pronunciation of English should not be compared to the close proximity to the native speaker standards, but the focus should be on the learners' communicative practicality (Matsuda, 2003), international intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000) and being mutual intelligible when communicating with ASEAN speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2012). As a result, the pursuit of native-likeness becomes inessential for ASEAN multilinguals (Walker, 2010) when it comes to English as an international lingua franca in ASEAN. In fact, a native-like version as such, which is generally believed to be better than others in ELT (Jenkins, 2007) is influenced by 'the political construct of the language rather than linguistic reality' (Jindapitak, 2013, p. 125).

Finally, attempts in terms of motivation may facilitate an improvement in EFL learning situations. Not only is motivation a force that inspires someone to greater efforts and structures behaviour towards a goal, but it is also a powerful factor that has an impact on the total learning goal (Eggen & Kauchak, 1994). As we have learnt that EFL learners in this study are aware of the importance of English but mainly driven to learn it by external, instrumental reasons, to promote students' motivation in learning English as a foreign language in Thailand, the potential economic value that English will bring them should be included as a major

motivational strategy for teachers of English. This impetus may increase the interest that students have in the English subject which may, in turn, form perceptions of the immediate and/or long-term advantage they may gain from learning this language. For example, the following points could be emphasised and repeated in class. English can be an important instrument for receiving interesting well-paid jobs. Higher salaries can be earned by employees whose English are better. Within the company, there is also plenty of room for personal advancement through competence of this language.

The present study also provides two research agendas for future studies. First, acquiring written responses to open-ended questions may have been a limitation of this study. Future studies designed to access more thorough and in-depth data through face-to-face interviews, or focus group discussions are highly recommended. Second, this study deals a bit fairly with Thai language learners' identities which at present may be changing due to a strong social influence of the globalised world's ideology. Further investigations are necessary to validate this issue.

## The Author

Songyut Akkakoson is presently an assistant professor in the Department of Languages at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (KMUTNB).  His papers have appeared in 3L, Journal of Research in Reading, GEMA Online®, MJLI. His research interests include learning styles and strategies, EFL reading, English for business communication, English speaking anxiety, genre analysis and World Englishes.

## References

Alhassan, A. (2017). Teaching English as an international/lingua franca or mainstream standard language? Unheard voices from the classroom. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ), 8*(3), 448-458. doi: 10.24093/awej/vol8no3.29

Anwaruddin, S. M. (2012). Learner identity in second language acquisition. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 18*(2), 13-23. Retrieved from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11494248.pdf

Belibi, P. R. (2013). Teaching a standard variety of English or a local standard: The case of Cameroon. *International Journal of English Language Education, 1*(3), 172-185. doi:10.5296/ijele.v1i3.3956

Bennui, P., & Hashim, A. (2014). English in Thailand: Development of English in a non-postcolonial context. *Asian Englishes, 16*(3), 209-228. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13488678. 2014.939810

Boriboon, P. (2013). A paradox of acquired identities and aspired identities: Local English teachers' ideological positionings as English users and agents of accent/pronunciation practice. *The 2013 International Conference on English Language Education in a Global Context.*

Bradford, A. (2007). Motivational orientation in under-researched FLL contexts: Findings from Indonesia. *RELC, 38*(3), 302-322. doi: 10.1177/0033688207085849

Brumfit, C. (2001). *Individual freedom in language teaching: Helping learners to develop a dialect of their own.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Canagarajah, A. S. (Ed.). (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Carissa Young, M. Y. (2006). Macao students' attitudes toward English: A post-1999 survey. *World Englishes, 25*(3-4), 479-490. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2006.00468.x

Cook, V. (2001). *Second language learning and language teaching* (3rd ed.). London: Arnold.

Crystal, D. (2005). *The language revolution.* New Delhi: Foundation Books.

Durairaj, V. (2015). English: Aladdin's magic lamp. In M. A. Vyas & Y. L. Patel (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second language: A new pedagogy for a new century* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1-4). Delhi: PHI Learning Private.

Erling, E. J., & Barlett, T. (2006). Making English their own: The use of ELF among students of English at the Free University of Berlin. *Nordic Journal of English Studies, 5*(2), 9-40. Retrieved from http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/njes/article/view/69/73

Eggen, P., & Kauchak, D. (1994). *Educational psychology classroom connection* (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan College Publishing.

Halliday, M. A. K., McIntosh, A., & Strevens, P. (1964). *The linguistic sciences and language teaching.* London: Longmans.

Hashimoto, K. (2000). 'Internationalisation' is 'Japanisation': Japan's foreign language education and national identity. Journal of Intercultural Studies, 21(1), 39-51. doi: 10.1080/ 072568600 50000786

Hayes, D. (2014). The value of learning English in Thailand and its impact on Thai: perspectives from university students. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education.* doi: 0.1080/02188791.2014. 924390

Holliday, A. (2005). *The struggle to teach English as an international language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holliday, A. (2008). Standards of English and politics of inclusion. *Language Teaching, 41*(1), 119-130. doi: 10.1017/S0261444807004776

House, J. (2003). English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism? *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 7*(4), 556-578. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9841.2003.00242.x

Jaber, M., & Hussein, R. (2011). Native speakers' perception of non-native English speech. *English Language Teaching, 4*(4), 77-87. doi: 10.5539 /elt.v4n4p77

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitudes and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2011). Accommodating (to) ELF in international university. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43*(4), 926-936. doi: 10.1016/j.pragma.2010.05.011

Jindapitak, N. (2013). The politics of standard English: An exploration of Thai tertiary English learners' perceptions of the notion of standard English. *Asian Social Science, 9*(5), 118-127. doi:10.5539/ass.v9n5p118

Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the Outer Circle. In R. Quirk & H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world, teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kachru, B. B. (1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Ke, I. (2010). Global English and world culture: A study of Taiwanese university students' worldviews and conceptions of English. *English as an International Language Journal, 5,* 81–100.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2012). Teaching English as a lingua franca in ASEAN: Maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity. *The 2012 ILAC International Conference.*

Komin, S. (1990). National character in the Thai nine values orientations. *United States Educational Foundation.* Retrieved from http://www.thaisunset.com/downloads/ Suntaree%20Komin%20Thai%20National%20Character.pdf

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (2001). Language, culture, and voice in the teaching of English as a foreign language. *NovELTy: A Journal of*

*English Language Teaching and Cultural Studies in Hungary, 8*(1), 4-21. Retrieved from http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/15690/1/Language%20and%20 culture%20in%20ELT.pdf

Lee, S. K., Lee, K. S., Wong, F. F., & Ya'acob, A. (2010). The English language and its impact on identities of multilingual Malaysian undergraduates. *GEMA Online™ Journal of Language Studies,10*(1), 87-101. Retrieved from http://ejournal.ukm.my/gema /issue/view/34

Lin, A., Wang, W., Akamatsu, N., & Riazi, M. (in press). Absent voices: Appropriated language, expanded identities, and re-imagined storylines. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education.*

Matsuda, A. (2003). The ownership of English in Japanese secondary schools. *World Englishes, 22*(4), 483–496. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2003.00314.x

McKay, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nelson, C. L. (1992). My language, your culture: Whose communicative competence? In B. B. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures*, (2nd ed.) (pp. 327-39). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Nikula, T. (2007). Speaking English in Finnish content-based classrooms. *World Englishes, 26*(2), 206–223. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2007.00502.x

Oanh, D. T. H. (2012). Global vs. Glocal English: Attitudes and conceptions amongst educators, administrators and teachers in eight Asian countries. In A. Kirkpatrick & R. Sussex (Eds.), *English as an international language in Asia: Implications for language education* (pp. 107-135). New York: Springer.

Parmegiani, A. (2010). Reconceptualizing language ownership. A case study of language practices and attitudes among students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. *Language Learning Journal, 38*(3), 359-378. doi: 10.1080/09571736.2010.511771

Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction*. New Jersey:  Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Phan Le Ha (2007). Toward a critical notion of appropriation of English as an international language. *Journal of English as an International Language, 1*, 48-60. Retrieved from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/sept_05_plh.pdf

Phan Le Ha. (2008). *Teaching English as an international language: Identity, resistance and negotiation*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Phan Le Ha. (2009). English as an international language: International student and identity formation. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 9*(3), 201-214. doi: 10.1080/1470847 0902748855

Pillai, S. (2008). Speaking English the Malaysian way – correct or not? *English Today, 24*(4), 42–45. doi: 10.1017/S0266078408000382

Saraceni, M. (2010). *The relocation of English: Shifting paradigms in a global era*. (Language and Globalization). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sharifian, F. (Ed.). (2009). *English as an international language: Perspectives and pedagogical issues*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 11*(2), 133-158. doi: 10.1111/1473-419 2.00011

Seidlhofer, B. (2003). A concept of international English and related issues: From 'real English' to 'realistic English'? Retrieved March 14, 2013 from http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/linguistic /Source/ SeidlhoferEN.pdf

Seilhamer, M. (2015). The ownership of English in Taiwan. *World Englishes, 34*(3), 370-388. doi: 10.1111/weng.12147

Sifakis, N. C., & Sougari, A. (2005). Pronunciation issues and EIL pedagogy in the periphery: A survey of Greek state school

teachers' beliefs. *TESOL Quarterly, 39*(3). 467–488. doi: 10.230 7/3588490

Sultana, S. (2012). Problematising the popular discourses about language and identity of young adults in Bangladesh. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 18*(4), 49-63. Retrieved March 29, 2013 from http://ejournals.ukm. my/3l/issue/ view/381

Tsui, A. B. M., & Tollefson, J. W. (2007). Language policy and the construction of national cultural identity. In A. B. M. Tsui & J. W. Tollefson (Eds.), *Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian contexts* (pp. 1-21). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tupas, T. R. F. (2006). Standard Englishes, pedagogical paradigms and their conditions of (im)possibility. In R. Rubdy & M. Saraceni (Eds.), *English in the world: Global rules, global roles* (pp. 169-185). London: Continuum Press.

Walker, R. (2010). *Teaching the pronunciation of English as a lingua franca.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Warden, C.A., & Lin, H. J. (2000). Existence of integrative motivation in an Asian EFL setting. *Foreign Language Annals, 33*(5), 535-545.  doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2000. tb01997.x

Warschauer, M. (2000). The changing global economy and the future of English teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(3), 226-233. doi: 10.2307/3587741

Widdowson, H. G. (1994). The ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*(2), 377-389. doi: 10.2307/3587438

Widdowson, H. G. (1997). EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests. *World Englishes, 16*(1), 135-146. doi: 10.1111/1467-971X.00054

Yano, Y. (2009). English as an international lingua franca: From societal to global. *World Englishes, 28*(2), 246-255. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01587.x