

Vietnamese learners' attitudes towards world Englishes

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ABSTRACT

English has become the lingua franca facilitating communication among countries around the globe. Globally, a huge range of industries including mass media, medicine, travel, business, biology and so forth have all been relying on the English language for international cooperation and business. Therefore, many studies have stated that non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers of English. Because most global communication happens among non-native speakers of English, there is a crucial need to acknowledge varieties of English around the world, or World Englishes instead of English only. However, despite numerous studies which call for the recognition of World Englishes, the roles of World Englishes are still underestimated. In Asia, especially in Vietnam, the ideology of 'native accent' is dominant, so the importance of World Englishes is totally ignored. In order to raise a concern of this issue for teachers, educators and educational policy officers as well as to prepare students for successful learning English in the future, this paper is going to report a case study that explores the status of World Englishes in Ho Chi Minh City, particularly among TESOL adult students. The findings reveal participants' attitudes towards native and non-native accents of English, their rationales of the attitudes as well as their frequency of English speakers. This paper suggests an innovative solution for English language planning, teaching, and learning when using English as an international language in this modern world.

Keywords: World Englishes, lingua franca, international language, global language

1. INTRODUCTION

Because English is currently a global language, it has become a medium of communication across Asian region with various features and settings [1]. However, the users of English have been rigidly categorized into two groups [2, 3]: native speakers of English (NSE) (the Inner Circle) and non-native speakers of English (NNSE) (the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle) [4]. Although NNSE outnumber NSE [5, 6], and researchers all over the world have been calling for a thoughtful consideration of the varieties of Englishes [7 - 9], English in the Inner Circle has long been considered the standard for English speakers around the world to follow [10]. "Proper English" is believed to be the prerogative of the UK and the US [11], and thus

those speakers 'are automatically in a position of power as compared with those who have to learn it as a second language or foreign language' [12]. The consequence of that is there is a tendency of discrimination between NSE and NNSE [13 - 15].

The discrimination towards NNSE and NSE has had a strong impact on learners of English in Asian countries [16]. British English (BE) and American English (AE) were the preferred varieties of English for Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, and Italian students [3, 17] as the standard to aim for. The impact of this situation can be seen in the emphasis given to pronunciation classes in Asian contexts as well

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as the use of Western teaching materials [18]. In addition, with non-native teachers of English, there has been an assumption that the competence of native speakers is the goal to achieve [19] while the non-native accent and the acquisition of World Englishes has been debated for the selection of appropriate pedagogic model [20] and successful global communication [21]. Finally, there is a myth that when learners of English achieve a native like accent, they would be successful in the society [22].

In this globalised world, English learners' needs have been changed and increased, so the role of World Englishes becomes critical [21]. Therefore, because English around the world now have different varieties, this paper is going to report a study that explored an aspect of World Englishes, accent, among Vietnamese adult students in four important pillars: their attitudes towards native and non-native accents, their rationales, and their regular communicators in daily lives within Asian context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions of World Englishes

The global spread of English has prompted many scholars to acknowledge World Englishes [23]. Brunner and et al., reported that World Englishes is an umbrella term which covers all of the varieties of English worldwide [24]. McKay [25] notes that an international language "no longer linked to a single culture or nation but serves both global and local needs as a language of wider communication". Pennycook [26] explains the term 'worldliness of English' is the idea that English can never be removed from the social, cultural, economic or political contexts in which it is used. According to Sharifian [22], English as an international language is the language that used in many parts of the world as a language for inter-

national and intercultural communication rather than being owned by communities that claim it as their mother tongue. McKay [25] claims that English as an international language can be viewed as a kind of English and how English is used.

2.2. Ideology of native accents in Asian contexts

Native accents have been found to be the favourite accent of the English learners in many studies. In 1987, Reid surveyed 1,388 students and found that students in this study preferred native speakers of English. That result was latter reconfirmed by several studies [27 - 29]. Similarly, students in Thailand [30, 31], Vietnam [32], China [33, 34], Malaysia [35], Korea [36, 37] and Iran [38 - 40] also revealed that they adored British and American English.

Not only at universities are native accents preferred, but they are also favoured in job markets. Mahboob and Golden [8] analysed 77 job advertisements in TESOL in East Asia and Middle East and reported that there was a strong discrimination between native and non-native TESOL candidates in the job market. In fact, native teachers are always hunted for in Asia [41- 44].

2.3. Attitudes of teachers and students towards non-native accents

Several studies have drawn on teachers' and students' attitudes towards non-native accents of English. The results of those studies can be divided into two groups: accepting non-native accents and accepting only native accent. Timmis [45] had a survey which contained 600 participants including teachers and students from 45 countries. The findings showed that while teachers wanted to be native-speaker-like, not all of students would like to do so. Similarly, Kalra and Thanavisuth

[46] explored 80 international students in Thailand towards Asian English accents. They found that the participants preferred Indian accent of English to that of the Burmese, Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese. In addition, in another study of 40 TEFL students, most students were reported to support World Englishes [39]. Magne [47] also highlighted the importance to have the exposure of various English input of accents for students. Sharing this perspective, 465 participants stated in a study that they did not think their teachers were necessary native English speakers [48]. Ambele and Boonsuk [49] studied 25 university students and found that they agreed that it was important to teach students different accents of English for global communication and not to force students to imitate native accents.

However, although World Englishes were found to be supported in former research, they were rejected strongly in other studies. Lim [50] reported that teachers in Cambodia had very negative attitudes towards non-native accents of English and other varieties of English. In fact, those Cambodian teachers considered non-nativeness as a deficit. Furthermore, a study reported that European participants said they would not use European English in their teaching [51]. In addition, Uchida and Sugimoto [52] surveyed 100 high school students in Tokyo and found that they just liked native accent. Huang and Hashim [53] studied 574 university students and found that they had very strong bias against Chinese and other non-native accents of English.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This case study addressed two research questions:

1. *How are TESOL adult students' attitudes towards native and non-native accents of English?*

2. *Who are these students frequently speaking English to?*

This study was conducted at a TESOL organization that trains teachers of English in Ho Chi Minh City. Data were collected in June, July and August 2020. The study had 56 participants who enrolled in the TESOL diploma program to become teachers of English. The participants were from 22 years old to 32 years old who were doing various full time professional jobs including officers at the Consulates, teaching assistants, project managers, models, actors, engineers, and recruiters, but they desired to do teaching English as their part time job.

The questionnaire has 19 items with two options Yes/No. It was delivered in class and follow-up interviews were conducted among 14 randomly selected students. Participants took less than seven minutes to complete the questionnaire. The interviews were done in 2 groups. Each group interview happened about 35 minutes.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Attitudes towards native accents (British and American accents)

The first part of the survey explored the attitudes towards native accents (British and American accents). The findings show that participants have very strong preference of native accents. The majority of students (81%) in this study think that to imitate native accents is extremely important in learning English. Most learners also agree that only British or American accent is standard (77%) while a lower number of 72% believe that both British and American accents are standard. However, most learners (79%) choose to practise American accent because they think American accent is more popular and easier to understand.

Table 1. Students' attitudes towards native accents (British and American accents)

No.	Item content	Yes	No
1	To imitate native accents is extremely important in learning English.	81%	19%
2	Only British accent is standard.	77%	23%
3	Only American accent is standard.	76%	24%
4	British and American accents are standard.	72%	28%
5	I am practising the accent of	American 79%	British 21%

In the group interviews, attitudes towards native accents tend to be stronger than those of the non-native accents. These are the significant ideas from the groups:

Student 1 (S1): *"I think practising English following native accents is extremely important because when I was a student at an international university, my teacher who was a native said that following native accents was compulsory. If we did not do it, when we talked to native speakers, they would laugh at us."*

Student 2 (S2): *"We like British accent very much, and according to us, British accent is the most standard. British accent has been considered as classy for ages, so following British accent will make learners of English cooler although it is sometimes very hard to comprehend to most learners of English."*

Student 3 (S3): *"If you want to get high score for IELTS, you must follow native accents because the examiners are all native speakers."*

Student 4 (S4): *"I think it is not important at all to follow native accents because I like to speak English with my own accent. I feel more confident because that is me."*

Student 5 (S5): *"Following native accent is a must because English textbooks in Vietnam now are all from giant publishers from the United Kingdom and the United States."*

The findings from this study align with many other former studies [27, 28, 30, 33, 38], but they discover factors affect learners' attitudes

towards native accents. Firstly, data from S1 reveal the impact from the teachers, especially when the teachers are native speakers. They have the tendency to exaggerate the importance of native accents in the Vietnamese classrooms: While they are boosting the position of native teachers with Vietnamese students and the Vietnamese labour market, they are threatening Vietnamese students and recruiters at the same time. Due to this motivation, there have been a large number of clips which mock Vietnamese learners of English. This is a threat for Vietnamese learners as they are in their teenage and want to prove their selves. As a result, this kind of negative effect leads to misleading learning objectives. As Rose [13] said: "By not exposing learners to the diversity of English, teachers are doing their learners a disservice by ill-equipping them to use English in the future with a wide variety of speakers who will not comfort to the unrepresentative standards promoted in traditional English as a foreign language classroom".

Secondly, from S2's perspective, students still believe in the myth of the ownership of English language, resulting in a strong belief that English language must follow British or American English. However, students may not know clearly what a standard American/ British accent is when there are various accents within American or British themselves. On the other hand, S3 and S5 are affected by the testing

system and the available learning materials [32]. This reflects the current national language policy in Vietnam. Finally, there is only one student in the group who shows his interest in being himself, having his own accent, not following any models. The findings in this study once gain confirmed the ideology of native accents in Asia, especially in Vietnam [22, 25, 41].

4.2. Reasons of preferences of native accents

The next part of the questionnaire investigated

the reasons of preferences of native accents. The majority of participants (83%) revealed that they liked to imitate native accent because it helped them impressed the listeners. In addition, they (80%) think that to imitate native accent made them more confident when speaking English and helps them sound professional and cool in front of the crowd (77%). The lowest percent (73%) think that to imitate native accent is the target of learning English.

Table 2. Reasons of preferences of native accents

No.	Item content	Yes	No
6	To imitate native accent is the target of learning English.	73%	27%
7	To imitate native accent makes me feel more confident when speaking English.	80%	20%
8	To imitate native accent helps me impress the listeners.	83%	17%
9	To imitate native accent helps me sound professional and cool in front of the crowd.	77%	23%

More data were collected from the group interviews as following:

Student 6 (S6): *I am responsible for recruiting teachers of English for a centre of English. Being able to recruit native teachers is our boss's priority because it is the most appealing factor that attracts learners for the centre and convinces students' parents to pay higher tuition. In addition, it is also a competitive factor among foreign language centres in Ho Chi Minh City.*

Student 7 (S7): *I am a teaching assistant for young learners and teenagers when they have classes with native teachers. Although these students are quite young, they show strong preference to study with native teachers. However, I have to say that because many native teachers here are not really from educational background, they could not teach many parts of the lessons, and we, the teaching assistants must cover those parts for them.*

Student 8 (S8): *I also recruit native teachers for a language centre. The salary which we offer for*

native teachers is always more than that of Vietnamese teachers although we have many stronger candidates for the teaching positions. For example, a Philippine teacher who got the degree in English Language was paid less than an American teacher who got the degree in Business Management. An American teacher who has Chinese descent was refused by Vietnamese students and parents because of his Vietnamese like appearance. However, students and their parents still accept non-native teachers whose have Western appearance.

The results from this research are very different from previous studies. While other countries in Asian region prefer native accent because they think it is standard [46, 50, 52], this factor in this study has the least percentage. On the other hands, three factors that have the highest scores are: being able to impress others, being more confident and being cool in front of the public. This finding shows the psychology of teenagers and the traditional impact of 'losing face' of Vietnamese people.

From data among students 6 and 8 above, there is a close mutual connection among families, schools/centres/and society. Students' parents affect their children, their children affect their schools/centres, and the schools/centres affect the labour market. That is the reason why native teachers of English have been over nurtured in Vietnam. In addition, due to the effect of Western trend, Vietnamese learners not only favour native accent but also Western appearance. Therefore, Matsuda [25] states that incorporating World Englishes into teacher preparation is important to de-/re-construct the notion of native speakers because given the varieties of Englishes and the numbers of speakers of Englishes, the concept of native

speaker becomes problematic [54].

4.3. Attitudes towards non-native accents of English

The next part of the questionnaire explored attitudes towards non-native accents of English. The majority of participants (77%) revealed that they felt unconfident and hurt if others said they were speaking English with Vietnamese accent. Similarly (76%), they felt funny when watching some clips mocking English from Thailand, Vietnam and India. Finally, they (73%) feel uncomfortable if others say they were speaking English with Vietnamese accent. However, they (100%) are well-aware of English nowadays is an international language which has various types of English accents.

Table 3. Students' attitudes towards non-native accents of English

No.	Item content	Yes	No
10	I feel uncomfortable if others say I am speaking English with Vietnamese accent.	73%	27%
11	I feel unconfident and hurt if others say I am speaking English with Vietnamese accent.	77%	23%
12	I feel funny when watching some clips mocking English from Thailand, Vietnam, and India.	76%	24%
19	I am aware that there are many different types of English language around the world.	100%	

In the group interviews, students revealed more information about their attitudes towards non-native accents of English:

Student 9 (S9): *Because Vietnam has been considering native accent as standard, other accents are considered not standard. You can speak English well or correctly, but not standard. That opinion scares me the most when I go to work. When my colleagues and students criticise me that my English is not standard, how can I feel confident to work?*

Student 10 (S10): *I do not have any issues with non-native accents because I have been studying with international students. Each of them has various accent, as long as we can understand each other.*

Student 11 (S11): *My cousin and I were the victim of the idolization of native accent. Before we studied abroad, we had been practising hard following native accent, so we faced lots of difficulties to understand our international classmates' talks.*

The findings of this study do not align with the results of studies about Korean, Japanese, Malaysian and other students in Asian region because students in those countries accepted all varieties of Englishes although they preferred native accent [47 - 49]. However, the majority of Vietnamese students could not accept it. This attitude was similar to that of Chinese students in several studies [33, 53] and Cambodian students [50]. From the findings of

this study, some perspectives become 'habit', resulting in problem for teachers in later generation to do some renovation in changing the mindsets. Even when students come to study in English speaking countries, the chance to be able to speak to native speakers is still low because big universities usually locate in cities where there is a condensed level of migrants who are doing various jobs. In addition, at universities, lecturers are also come from different nations. Therefore, being aware of and accepting a wide variety of Englishes in the world is necessary and urgent [17, 25, 55, 56].

4.4. The purposes of learning a foreign language

The fourth aspect of this questionnaire is to explore the purposes of learning a foreign language. The participants highly (91%) agreed that when speaking a foreign language, to pronounce words clearly, naturally and accurately to convey the message is the most important. Most of them (81%) also agreed that the success of learning a foreign language to use that language fluently study, work, and travel. Finally, they (79%) think that the purpose of learning a foreign language is to understand the language of a country and its culture.

Table 4. The purposes of learning a foreign language

No.	Item content	Yes	No
13	The purpose of learning a foreign language is to understand the language of a country and its culture.	79%	21%
14	The success of learning a foreign language is to use that language fluently to study, work, and travel.	81%	19%
15	When speaking a foreign language, to pronounce words clearly, naturally and accurately to convey the message is the most important.	91%	9%

The results of the survey show that Vietnamese students have been struggling among learning objectives, learning motivations, and learning methods. They highly agree that learning a foreign language needs pronouncing clearly and naturally, using it to communicate, study, work and travel is successful, but they still force themselves following native accents. Therefore, students are needed to be raised the awareness of World Englishes [54, 57] because the needs of English language learners have changed [58].

4.5. Who the Vietnamese are speaking English to

The last aspect of the questionnaire is exploring

whether participants know who are their main of communicators when using English in Vietnam now. The finding shows that most of them (84%) think the Vietnamese use English to mainly communicate to speakers of English from different areas of Asian regions. Therefore, only 16% believed that the Vietnamese use English to mainly communicate to native speakers of English such as British, American, Australian and New Zealander. However, at the end of the survey, the participants still confirm that they (74%) will guide their students to practise the accent of native speakers.

Table 5. Who the Vietnamese are speaking English to

No.	Item content	Yes	No
16	The Vietnamese use English to mainly communicate to native speakers of English (British, American, Australian, and New Zealander)	16%	74%
17	The Vietnamese use English to communicate mainly to speakers of English from different areas of Asian regions.	84%	16%
18	When I begin teaching, I will guide my students to practise the accent of native speakers.	74%	26%

In the group interviews, students said:

Student 12 (S12): “Our clients are mainly from Singapore, Korea and Japan.”

Student 13 (S13): “Our CEO is American, but he resides in the USA. He comes to Vietnam once every six months, so we only contact him through email.”

Student 14 (S14): “Our group travel very frequently around South East Asia especially Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. I sometimes go for business trip in the USA and New Zealand.”

According to the theory of users of English language, Vietnam is in the Expanding circle with more than one billion people. However, the Vietnamese until now still have not realized and accepted accents of those one billion people, nor accepted accents of more than 300 people of the neighbouring circle (outer circle). They just aim to the accent of the Inner Circle while in reality the needs for communicating, doing business, cooperating and travelling which provides Vietnamese to use English belong to the Expanding Circle. Therefore, teachers should raise the students' awareness of World Englishes [55, 56] because students need to be exposed in varieties of Englishes for international communication [1, 17, 25].

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has just reported a case study which explored an aspect of World Englishes, accent, among TESOL adult learners in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Findings shows that Vietnamese students nowadays are still affected by the ideology of native accents although they are well aware of the varieties of Englishes which they have been experiences from their clients. However, they have negative perspectives for non-native accents. While Ho Chi Minh City is considered a centre of trade and economics of Vietnam, the attitudes of students towards World Englishes may be a barrier for potential copérations and economic development. In addition, since the participants in this study are teachers of English, their perspectives should be changed and more open. This study is a current reflection of the paradoxes of teaching and learning English in Vietnam today. It is also an alert for the language policy makers and teachers of English to reconsider their current strategies for their future plans. The limitation of this study is the small number of participants. Further studies with larger cohorts of participants are highly recommended.

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Thái độ của học viên người Việt đối với các biến thể tiếng Anh trên thế giới

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TÓM TẮT

Tiếng Anh đã trở thành ngôn ngữ giao tiếp quốc tế. Trên toàn cầu, một loạt các ngành công nghiệp bao gồm truyền thông, y học, du lịch, kinh doanh, sinh học, v.v. đều dựa vào tiếng Anh để hợp tác quốc tế và kinh doanh. Do đó, nhiều nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra rằng người nói tiếng Anh không phải là người bản ngữ hiện nay nhiều hơn người bản ngữ nói tiếng Anh. Do đó, cần phải công nhận nhiều biến thể tiếng Anh đang được sử dụng khắp thế giới hiện nay (World Englishes) thay vì chỉ tiếng Anh của người bản xứ. Tuy nhiên, bất chấp nhiều nghiên cứu kêu gọi sự công nhận của các biến thể tiếng Anh trên thế giới, vai trò của World Englishes vẫn bị đánh giá thấp và chưa được thừa nhận. Ở châu Á, đặc biệt là ở Việt Nam, thời gian qua, tư tưởng học theo 'giọng bản xứ' đang chiếm ưu thế, vì vậy tầm quan trọng của việc hiểu biết và công nhận World Englishes dường như bị bỏ qua. Để nâng cao mối quan tâm về vấn đề này cho giáo viên, nhà giáo dục và cán bộ làm chính sách giáo dục cũng như chuẩn bị cho học sinh, sinh viên học tiếng Anh thành công trong tương lai, bài báo này sẽ báo cáo một nghiên cứu tìm hiểu tình trạng của World Englishes tại TPHCM, đặc biệt là trong số các học viên đang theo học chứng chỉ TESOL. Kết quả về thái độ của học viên đối với giọng bản ngữ và không phải

bản ngữ, lý do của họ về thái độ cũng như tần suất nói tiếng Anh của họ sẽ được đề cập. Bài báo cũng đề xuất giải pháp cho việc lập kế hoạch, dạy và học tiếng Anh khi sử dụng tiếng Anh như một ngôn ngữ quốc tế trong bối cảnh hiện nay.

Từ khóa: *các biến thể tiếng Anh trên thế giới, ngôn ngữ giao tiếp, ngôn ngữ quốc tế, ngôn ngữ toàn cầu*

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