WHAT DO THEY THINK OF ME?
A SEMI-ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENT STEREOTYPES AND BIASES TOWARDS TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study investigates the stereotypes and biases held by students at an international university in Thailand towards teachers in terms of race, accent and native speakerness within the context of the internationalization of higher education. It takes a semi-ethnographic approach, interviewing and staying in contact with the participants over a period of about three months. The data were transcribed, coded and organized into themes as they emerged. The findings showed that native and non-native English speaking teachers were stereotyped differently. That certain accents were highly stigmatized and that this stigmatization resulted in the perception of the accents being harder to understand, and furthermore that the blame for misunderstanding was put onto the speaker of the stigmatized accent; whereas with an accent perceived to be native speaker the participant (as listener) would put the blame on themselves. Race was found to be an issue only in the implication that a White identity was associated with native speakerness, and that a non-native accent was sometimes not stigmatized if it came from a White teacher. Another finding was the perceived marginalization of international students. The findings are integrated into existing theories of social connotations (Trudgill & Giles, 1978) and communicative burden (Lippi-Green, 2012), and through these it is discussed how the stigmatization of an accent might affect intelligibility. Finally, implications are looked at and recommendations made in consideration of the findings.

Keywords: internationalization, native speaker, non-native speaker, accent, race, social connotations, communicative burden, attitude, bias, stereotype.

Introduction

>*It is not important whether or not the interpretation is correct…if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.*
>
>(Thomas & Thomas, 1928)

Humans are 'above all, social animals' (Dunbar, 1993). And as social animals, humans live in a social world where personal and societal beliefs and attitudes can modify behavior. What has become known as the Thomas Theorem describes how a person's 'immediate behavior is closely related to his (or her) definition of the situation, which may be in terms of objective reality or in terms of a subjective appreciation – 'as if' it were so' (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). This means that the way people behave and especially the way they behave towards others may hinge not necessarily on objective reality but on beliefs, biases, stereotypes, ideologies and prejudices that may be (but not necessarily) entirely subjective; in other words the way they personally view any given situation, which itself will be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by society's view. In referring to a study on undergraduate students' perceptions of graduate student teachers in the U.S. (Rubin, 1992) where many of the graduate student teachers were from outside the U.S. Lippi-Green states that 'Undergraduates have stereotypes and biases which, if not put aside, interfere with a potentially positive and valuable learning opportunity' (Lippi-Green, 2012).These stereotypes and biases were reflected in the students 'hearing' an accent that wasn't there and getting lower comprehension scores, even though objectively there were no differences that could justify such perceptions. Or put another way 'the scant research on university students' acceptance of non-native English speaking academics similarly indicates that instructors' ethnicity, manifested by a foreign accent as well as by non-linguistic factors such as Asian features can negatively affect teacher ratings and listening comprehension' (Eisenchlas & Tsurutani, 2011).

It is my belief that the statement given by Lippi-Green above can equally apply to an international university in Thailand where the main language of instruction is English and where, according to the promotional material, teachers represent 36 nationalities and students over 80 nationalities. A university which is 'one of the senior private universities, long been known as a pioneering university which offered all programmes in English' (Lavankura, 2013). And currently 'the university is attracting the highest number of international students (in Thailand)' (Office of the Higher Education Commission 2011 cited in Lavankura, 2013). A university furthermore which is part of the situation in Thailand where 'Many Thai students come to the international programs with the *expectation* that they

would better their English proficiency.' And may be motivated by a '…desire to enhance their social status' (Lavankura, 2013). This creates a situation where teachers of different race, accent and English native-speakerness come into contact with students who may have certain stereotypes and biases in regards to these teacher identity factors that could potentially interfere with learning (and affect how teachers construct their identity and view themselves) by modifying the students' behavior towards and expectations of those teachers. That is, if students believe something to be real about their teachers it can be real in its consequences. One example of this might be students asking to switch classes or switching off because they claim to not be able to understand their 'non-white' English teacher.

If students have stereotypes and biases that have the potential to interfere with and have a negative impact on learning, and communication between student and teacher, then knowing what these are and trying to understand them is the first step in dealing with them. Without awareness there can be no action taken. 'A first step in critical work may therefore be to develop an awareness of the issues; nothing will change unless people know things need to' (Pennycook, 1999).

A number of studies on accent attitude have been undertaken, for example: (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Eisenchlas & Tsurutani, 2011; Friedrich, 2000; Jenkins, 2007; Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2002; Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Timmis, 2002), but they have often focused on the teachers' voice, which only tells half the story, and few have been done in Asia (Asia here meaning East Asia or what might be called the Orient). Furthermore the majority of these studies took a quantitative approach using questionnaires whereas (in regards to these studies) 'a more qualitative analysis of the respondents discourse…may reveal deeper insights' (Jenkins, 2007). And even though all the non-native English teachers whose attitudes have been investigated (see above) must have once been learners of English, no studies have asked the question whether or not students who are successful learners (but not teachers of English) still maintain the stereotypes and biases towards accents that the literature tells us they do.

Furthermore in regards to teacher identity most research has focused solely on accent and/or native speakerness, whereas it is my view that these factors cannot be separated from what might be conceptualized as 'race'. Racialized diversity that is very much present at the international university in Thailand in which this study takes place. It is these three identity factors that I believe will have the greatest impact on how teachers are perceived by

students, which will influence how they (the teachers) communicate, their teaching confidence, and in turn will influence the students and how they communicate with the teacher. So a cycle is created that if beginning with negative stereotypes and biases will continue to have negative consequences on the students' learning and the learning environment as a whole.

Background

The Internationalization of Higher Education

The context of this study is the internationalization of higher education, which has been described as 'a process in rapid evolution-both as actor and reactor to the new realities of globalization and to the rather turbulent times facing higher education' (Knight, 2008). From this description internationalization can be seen as something different to globalization, although the distinction is often confused: 'Internationalization and globalization are not only most interchangeably used in academic circles, but are also often confused in the practical world' (Yang, 2002). Knight (2008) defines globalization as '…the process that is increasing the flow of people, culture, ideas, values, knowledge, technology, and economy across borders, resulting in a more interconnected and interdependent world.' Internationalization and globalization are both processes but globalization is the context in which internationalization is happening. Globalization and internationalization are related but not the same thing (Altbach & Knight, 2007). According to them, whereas globalization is unalterable, internationalization (of higher education) involves choices, choices revolving around motivations including commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisition and enhancing the curriculum with international content.

According to the literature the internationalization of higher education in Asia has seemed to mean copying the West, with educational reforms in Asia strongly influenced by Western doctrines, ideologies and practices. Examples of Asian countries following these Anglo-Saxon paradigms include: Using English as the medium of instruction, adoption of curricula from Australia, UK and the USA, and the quest for 'world class' university status as it is defined by the Anglo-Saxon world (Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008). And also, as expressed by Conlon, what is missed in such discussions is that the term "university" is itself a Western one and that in reality the Western university is doing the talking and guiding while the Asian university is meant to change or develop itself so as to fit the vision (Conlon, 2009).

As mentioned, in Thailand many Thai students come to the international programs with the expectation that they would better their English proficiency, which would give them access to more and better job opportunities' (Lavankura, 2013). Another motivating factor she points out is a desire on the part of the students to enhance their social status and associate themselves with international concepts. Although with regard to the view that there is a need for graduates competent in English it should be pointed out that (available to the public and in English) there is a near-absence of research reports on actual language needs in Thailand's employment sectors' (Takahashi, 2012), but it is a belief that has certainly seemed to increase in Thailand as it looks ahead to integration in the ASEAN community. But even in the university with the highest number of international students (and the university in which this study took place), Thai students still make up roughly 85% of the total. As Lavankura (2013) explains, Thai higher education is not as of now marketable abroad (in contrast to countries such as the U.K. and U.S.) so the concept of internationalization is aimed at Thai students who can afford it, whilst still being cheaper than actually studying abroad, and this creates an inequality of access to internationalized higher education in Thailand.

Attitude towards Accent and Varieties of English

Accents are among the strongest non-content verbal cues' and 'a non-mainstream accent is likely to arouse in the hearer a perception of the generalised or stereotypical characteristics that the hearer associates with that group (Eisenchlas & Tsurutani, 2011). This summarizes what may be an important concept when investigating attitudes towards accents; namely the Social connotations hypothesis (Trudgill & Giles, 1978). It need not be a non-mainstream accent, but *any* accent. This hypothesis explains how people judge accents based on the social connotations or associations they make with that accent, and can, perhaps, explain the stigmatizations that certain accents elicited in the participants. The idea is that reactions to an accent are not really about the accent itself, that it is not a reaction to anything linguistic, even when people try to justify it as such, rather it is a reaction to all the social, cultural, political etc associations, prejudices and stereotypes the accent invokes, even to the extent that the person involved could be said to have been 'brain-washed' (Trudgill & Giles, 1978).

A review of the literature on attitudes towards accent and varieties of English shows that there is still a strong preference for native speaker norms, and that UK and US varieties of English are deemed the most valuable and rated the highest, and even that comprehension scores were better when a

native speaker accent was used (Major et al., 2002). Although as Kachi (2004) cited in Llurda (2006) notes listeners seem to be able to understand nonnative speech better than they say they can, while nonnative listeners tend to claim that they understand native English better than they actually do. This contradicts the findings of Major et al. (2006), although if the listeners of this study were aware beforehand of the accent (variety) they were about to listen to the results could still be explained by attitude. As with Scales et al. (2006) and another study (Yook & Lindemann, 2013) which investigated the attitudes of Korean university students' attitudes towards varieties of English and found that most students believed US English was what should be taught and learnt in Korea, but that often this preference only surfaced when *informed* (italics added) of the speakers nationality, indicating that learners seem not to be very good at identifying varieties or accents. The fact that it is only when informed of the accent/variety that preferences and issues of perceived comprehension appear, highlights the role that attitude plays. From this it may be suggested that it was the attitude not the accent that was causing preferences. Since attitude seems to play such a significant role, and since none of the studies reviewed so far have taken a qualitative/ethnographic approach to really understand what the learners' attitudes towards different accents and varieties of English are, it may be a timely to do so.

Native and Non-native Speaker

The native-nonnative speaker dichotomy is far from a clear one, with little agreement on what it is or what it even means to be a 'native speaker'. It is also complicated by the promotion of the native speaker model within and by the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry. One reason for which is that the native speaker concept has political and economic benefits for the countries from which particular languages originated (Phillipson, .1992) And a reasons for choosing the exonormative native speaker model (Kirkpatrick, 2007), include that it has prestige and legitimacy, has been codified with grammars and dictionaries which are available for teachers and learners alike, and because it has been codified learners can be tested against these norms.

But what is a native speaker? Davies (2003) discusses some of the possible definitions from a social and linguistic perspective based around concepts such as mother tongue, first language, dominant language and home language, all of which are flawed in one way or another. He also states that, The position taken up in his book is that it is possible but difficult for an adult second language learner to become a native speaker of the target

language (Davies, 2003), which would mean that the definition must be directly based on proficiency and also implies that a monolingual speaker may not even be a native speaker of the only language they know! Contrary to this Cook (1999) states that the indisputable element in the definition of native speaker is that a person is a native speaker of the language learnt first. And that Later-learnt languages can never be native languages, by definition. This means that becoming a native speaker would not be possible but difficult (Davies, 2003) but rather an impossibility. He further argues that an L2 learner cannot be turned into a native speaker, that they cannot meet the biodevelopmental definition (Cook, 1999), with the implication being that it is wrong to try and wrong to expect such a change. But how do learners view it?

The concept is widely used but eludes definition, so it may be taken that the only meaning the term has is in the intended meaning of the user. It follows therefore that in a classroom setting perhaps the most important 'meaning' is what it means to the student and it is their definition that will go some way to defining their relationship with the teacher, in particular in an English language class. If, as pointed out above by Lavankura (2013), students in Thailand arrive at international programmes in university with the expectation of improving their English, does this mean they expect a native speaker teacher? And if so what does native speaker mean to them? And how do they feel if they are not getting what they expect? Furthermore how does their perception on this issue influence their learning? Studies on student attitudes (Ling & Braine, 2007; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014) and on English language teacher attitudes (Tang, 1997), towards native and non-native English language teachers have shown that when the non-native speaker teacher shared the student's L1 there were perceived advantages involving code-switching and understanding of cultural and educational background. But how often will this be the case as the internationalization of higher education continues?

In a small scale pilot study on how students at an international university in Thailand made judgements on who and who was not a native speaker of English (Wilkinson, 2014), it was found that students tended to be of one of two types. They either judged native speakerness on country of origin and were more inclined to visualize native speakers of English as 'White' and very reluctant to regard an Asian identity as a native speaker. Or they judged on proficiency and seemed more ready to accept for example Filipinos (who are common as English language teachers in Thailand) as native speakers. But overall it was indicated that native speakerness was very much associated with 'whiteness' with a degree of acceptance of African-

American or Black British for example as native speakers, but a strong reluctance to view anyone with an Asian identity as a native speaker of English, even if they were from an English speaking country.

Race in TESOL/ELT

The silence in our field on topics about racialization and racism is peculiar given increased attention to them in other academic fields as well as the tremendous amount of racialized diversity manifested in TESOL (Kubota & Lin, 2006). I would also add the argument that *talking* about race is not promoting racism or divisions but that ignoring the issue or pretending that it does not exist is unhelpful and likely harmful.

To be clear about what is meant and what is not meant with the use of the term 'race' in this research. The Human Genome Project completed in 2003 revealed that of the 3 billion base pairs of genetic letters in humans 99.9% are identical in every person (National Human Genome Research Institute, 2006). And furthermore, when looking at people according to geographical location of the three continents (Africa, Asia and Europe) that correspond to the common view of 'major races', of the 0.1% variation between individuals, 85-90% of that variation is found *within* those continental groups, and only 10-15% between (Jorde & Wooding, 2004). This means that what people consider 'race' in humans makes up only a small proportion (10-15%) of possible genetic variability between individuals. I would argue therefore that biologically and genetically the term 'race' has no meaning, but when used in discussion of student attitudes it will be taken to mean the socially constructed definitions that students have about people of different nationalities and colour. That is, it will only mean what the participants intend it to mean.

Despite this, race in an inescapable issue since as Kubota and Lin (2006) argue the privileged status given to 'native speakers' when hiring English language teachers is increased by them having white skin, is a form of institutionalized racism. A privilege which 'has been codified into law by visa requirements established by certain countries which actively recruit English teachers' and subsequently has been used to exclude NNES teachers (and even non-White NES) regardless of their English teaching ability (Ruecker, 2011).

A look at the literature on race in TESOL/TEFL shows that it is limited, but research that has been done in the U.S. (Motha, 2006; Shuck, 2006) shows that non-native speakers of English are often marked as non-White, and other research (Amin, 1997; Sung, 2011) shows that race is a

factor in devaluing certain varieties of English .

Methodology

The research questions were:

(1) What attitudes do students at an international university in Thailand have towards English language teachers in terms of accent, race and native speakerness and what biases might be generated by these attitudes?

(2) What are the beliefs that students at an international university in Thailand have about English language teachers in terms of accent, race and native speakerness and how do these beliefs contribute to stereotypes held by the students?

(3) Do students that are successful learners/users of English still have the stereotypes and biases that the literature tells us they and other stakeholders have? That is belief in British or American English (including accent) as target and norm with higher perceived comprehension of those two varieties, some perceived advantages of having a non-native speaker teacher (who shares the student's LI), and the association of native-speakerness with Whiteness.)

Three methods of collecting data were used: Interviews, communication via Line and small focus group meetings. This afforded three lines of site (triangulation) where data was gathered on what they said to me face to face, what they said to me from a distance and with time to consider their answers (i.e. a distance in space, a distance in time depended on when they responded to any questions I asked) and finally what they said to each other. Potential participants were approached individually and the idea and purpose of the study explained and any questions they had were answered.

I chose to do semi-structured interviews where the topics and issues are raised by the interviewer rather than predetermined questions asked, so there was never a list of questions to go through, rather there were issues that I brought up as the conversations went on. The advantages of semi-structured interviews are, firstly that it gives the *interviewee* some control over the direction and flow of the interview, secondly it gives the interviewer flexibility, and thirdly it gives 'privileged access' the other people's lives (Nunan, 1992). I would also add that it is no good asking a direct question in search of implied meaning as an answer to that question, and that genuine

thoughts and feelings are only going to come out when the participant feels they can express themselves freely. In total the data collected consisted of transcribed interviews and small focus groups (about 30,000 words), and answers to questions given on Line as part of a continuous staying in touch.

The Participants were:

Name	Sex	Age	Nationality
Ronaldo	M	23	Brazilian
Nat	F	21	Thai
Susan	F	20	Taiwanese
Fon	F	20	Thai
Ploy	F	19	Thai
Bow	F	19	Thai
Samba	M	30	Senegalese

Findings

Having analyzed and coded the data several themes emerged with the final framework for analysis as follows:

Framework for Thematic Analysis:

1. Stereotype of the NNST

2. Stereotype of the NST

3. Stereotypes and Biases of Accent

   -Stigmatization and low comprehension of NNS accents

   -Desire, accent and ELTs

   -Belief in a standard as target

   -Accent proximity bias*

4. Bias of Blame*

5. Race: Explicit Rejection, Implicit Bias, Practical Concerns

6. Marginalization of International Students*

* Themes that emerged from the data and were not part of the original research questions.

A summary of the findings show non-native speaker teacher was stereotyped as more traditional in approach, stricter, not 'open' in teaching style, not being open to discussion, questions or classroom participation from students. Also there was the stereotype of non-native teachers lacking English proficiency and of the Thai teachers in particular speaking too fast making it hard for them to be understood.

Native speaker teachers on the other hand were stereotyped as more relaxed, flexible, fun, less traditional and open to questions and student participation. The term 'joyful' was used by two participants to describe the classroom atmosphere with a native speaker teacher in contrast to that on a non-native speaker teacher.

Importantly these stereotypes of native and non-native teachers were mixed up with the ideas of Asian vs. Western or 'foreign' teachers, making it hard to differentiate, for example, the concept of non-native speaker from that of 'Asian'.

Biases towards accents meant the stigmatization of various non-native speaker accents, with the effect of them being perceived to be hard to understand. The most commonly stigmatized accents were Thai, Filipino and Indian, with Chinese and Italian also stigmatized by individual participants. Other stigmatized accents, but not in regards to teachers at the university, were Brazilian and Nigerian, again by individual participants. Attitudes towards these accents meant they tended to be described as 'not good' or somehow harder to understand than native speaker accents. These biases were also manifested in the participants expressing a desire to attain native speaker accent (commonly American but also British). The belief that accent was acquired from ones teacher also meant the participants all expressed a desire for native speaker teachers, something that seemed to be a broad and consistent attitude. Related to this was the belief in a native speaker norm that was the target of learning which compounded the desire for acquiring a native speaker accent and having native speaker teachers, and meant that non-native speaker teachers tended to be judged on this basis with their accents described and good or likable if they were perceived to be the same as a native speaker.

A further significant finding was what I have referred to as the 'Bias of Blame' whereby a participant would *blame themselves* for a misunderstanding with a native speaker teacher (communicating in English), but they would *blame the teacher* if that teacher was a non-native speaker. This attitude was most strongly expressed by the Asian (Thai and Taiwanese) participants.

When it came to the issue of race participants tended to explicitly reject the notion that it was an issue for them, but often what they said implied biases in favour of teachers that were White so that, for example, a teacher who was non-native speaker but happened to be European (White) tended not to be stigmatized with the 'I can't understand his/her accent' bias. Some participants did however admit that other students might more openly discriminate or hold negative attitudes towards non-White or Black teachers. Whether or not this represented what the participant really felt but did not want to admit to is hard to say. From my own judgement of the participants who talked about this issue, I believe that for two or three it may have been a reflection of their own attitude, but for one at least it most definitely did not.

The third research question was to ask if students who had already successfully learnt English (at least to a level where they were comfortable using it to communicate and express themselves) still had the stereotypes and biases that the literature told us that learners of English have. The finding of this study is that for the most part, yes they do:

The desire to acquire a native speaker accents, American or British, was expressed by all of the participants and was particularly strong in Nat who happened to be the most proficient in English of all the Asian students. The idea that it might be impossible to attain was never mentioned by any participants. A belief in some kind of Standard English which was the target of learning was also a view expressed by all of the participants, often expressed as the idea that an accent is 'good' if it is close to that of a native speaker. Furthermore there was explicit preference on the part of all the participants for native speaker English teachers particularly for English language classes. The only issue in which the participants diverged from the literature was in perceived advantages of non-native speaker teachers. As discussed in chapter 2 I believe this is because most of the advantages perceived by learners related to the teacher sharing an L1 and cultural background. Whereas the situation in this study, and a situation likely to become more and more common as the internationalization of higher education continues, involved teachers and students from various backgrounds and various L1s, so that being a non-native speaking teacher did not guarantee the sharing of an L1 or cultural knowledge with the students.

None of the participants expressed any awareness of the concept of World Englishes, let alone the idea of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), where they might have some pride in their own identity reflected in the variety of English they used. None of them indicated the idea that they

might be more likely to use English with other non-native speakers than with native speakers.

Discussion

Social Connotations

Participant reactions to accents may be explained by the Social Connotation Hypotheses (Trudgill & Giles, 1978). When a participant in this study expresses a negative reaction to, for example, a Filipino accent what are they really reacting against? One clue can be seen in the answers given by one participant (Susan) when asked which accents she thought were important for her to understand. She chose American and British first, as might be expected, but after that her choices were Japanese, Chinese and German. Her reason being that she considered these to be countries important to industry, and so her choices were clearly political and economic rather than linguistic. What comes into the mind of a Taiwanese university student studying in Thailand when the idea of German or Germany comes up? Probably there are associations with expensive high status cars, quality engineering and technology. Similarly with Japan, along with other cultural aspects such as fashion, and with China it's probably the idea of a rising power, important now, and to the future of global economics. All these are guesses on my part, but whatever associations she had they must have been at least largely positive and related to high status aspects of those countries. So why does a Filipino accent, amongst others, have negative associations/social connotations for most of the participants? Could it simply be because of the relatively low economical and political status of the country itself? Or is it something more directly experienced? To say it is because of the status of the country alone seems unlikely. This would only work as an explanation if the person had no experience with or knowledge of people from that country, where there was no social aspect to the associations. Filipino English teachers are very common in Thailand, and all of the Thai participants had had Filipino teachers in the past, whether in the Thai system, English Programme or at an International School. Throughout they would have witnessed the secondary status of Filipino teachers compared to those hired as native speakers (see Introduction). This must have had an effect and is probably, in part, the explanation for why the Thai students stigmatized the Filipino accent so much. That is to say, the way the Filipino teachers were treated by the institutions that employed them has affected the social connotations students have of them, and therefore their accent.

Why did the Thai participants so readily complain about Thai accents in some teachers? Ronaldo's perspective was that his English was of a high enough level that he was in a position to judge the level of English in his non-native speaker teachers. And even if he felt that the English of his teacher wasn't very good he could compensate for this by understanding all the technical language. But in his view it was the *Thai* students who suffered and had problems understanding Thai teachers, who were 'not the best English speakers.' This was an observation also made by Fon that the Thai students were the ones most affected by Thai teacher's English that was 'not clear.' Taking this into account, along with what else was also said by the Thai participants, the stigmatization seems to be based on a real perception that a Thai accent makes English harder to understand. My guess would be that this is caused, in terms of social connotations, by the larger global hierarchy of Englishes, and the heavy promotion of native speaker English, particularly American and British, by the ELT industry. Where, in this hierarchy Thai English or a Thai accent happen to be lowly rated. This hierarchy is reflected in the work by Buripakdi (2012), where the Thai participants positioned an imaginary Oxford English or King's English as high class and a sign of intelligence, and devalued their own English despite being professional writers in English.

Communicative Burden

If the Social Connotations Hypothesis explains why some accents were stigmatized then the concept of a Communicative Burden, a burden that people can choose (consciously or not) to share or reject with any interlocutor, explains I believe, why the participants so frequently claimed difficulty in understanding stigmatized accents, and why they tended to blame the teacher for a miscommunication/misunderstanding *if* they perceived that teacher to be a non-native speaker, and why they tended to blame *themselves* when they perceived the teacher to be a native speaker.

The idea of the communicative burden is that all communication requires effort for meaning to be created and understanding to occur. The sharing of this effort (or burden) will be split between all parties but not always on an equal basis. As Lippi-Green (2012) explains, 'Breakdown of communication is due not so much to accent as it is to negative social evaluation of the accent in question, and a rejection of the communicative burden.' When a student rejects the communicative burden with a nonnative speaking teacher there will likely follow a breakdown of communication, hence the tendency of the Bias of Blame, and the claimed difficulty in

understanding nonnative speaker accents.

An important question would be, does this unwillingness to share the communicative burden, which is a matter of attitude, affect comprehension in the classroom and in tests, or only *perceived* comprehension? That is, does it have real life consequences for the students? Logic would say that familiarity with an accent would make it easier to understand. And if that were the case then Thai students should find teachers with Thai accented English easy to understand, yet this study suggests that Thai students perceive the opposite. So is it only perceived comprehension or actual intelligibility? Because if perceived comprehension does affect actual intelligibility then the attitude that informs the perceived comprehension is a very real issue, one that would interfere with learning.
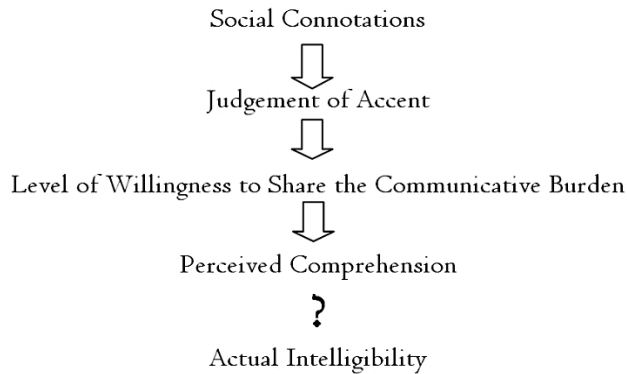
Perceived Comprehension vs. Actual Intelligibility

This is the difference between what people actually understand (actual intelligibility) and what they believe they can understand (perceived comprehension). And may explain why participants sometimes, directly after claiming an accent was hard to understand or not clear, would remark something like this 'Yes I understand but…'

In Major et al (2002) study they mentioned attitude as a possible explanation for the difference in test scores, but their main suggestion was that 'the speech of NNSs of English may have phonological characteristics that advantage or disadvantage listeners.' (Major et al., 2002)and that for example, the reason scores for the Chinese and Japanese listeners were higher when listening to a Spanish accent than when listening to their own, was due to the rhythm and other prosodic characteristics. I would argue against this conclusion because it does not explain the why scores were higher for the native speaker English that (as they explain) has a different rhythm, and why the scores were lower for Chinese and Japanese accents that (according to them) shared a similar rhythm to Spanish. What would explain all of this, I suggest, is attitude, attitude that primed the subjects as to what degree to share or reject the communicative burden, and therefore affected perceived comprehension, which in turn influenced actual intelligibility. As they pointed out, the Japanese and Chinese listeners were probably not familiar with Spanish accents, so when they heard it it would not have triggered any negative social connotations, and perhaps even, given how students can be bad at placing unfamiliar accents (Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Scales et al., 2006; Yook & Lindemann, 2013), have thought that it was a native

speaker accent. The point of bringing up this study (Major et al., 2002) is to show that the attitudes, the biases that students have may actually affect their understanding of what a teacher says, making understanding what these biases are all the more important.

I would argue that no accent can be *inherently* harder or easier to understand. But even so, would the judgement of an accent, the perception of it being hard to understand translate into a difficulty of actual intelligibility as my interpretation of the results of the Major et al., (2002) study suggest, with attitude being the main cause?

A theoretical model of how social connotations and the communicative burden may affect actual intelligibility:

Social Connotations

⇩

Judgement of Accent

⇩

Level of Willingness to Share the Communicative Burden

⇩

Perceived Comprehension

?

Actual Intelligibility

This model tries to explain the process by which perceived comprehension and possibly actual intelligibility can be affected by the social connotations of an accent and the willingness or lack of to share the communicative burden. The social connotations associated with an accent will influence the judgement of that accent, which will in turn influence the level of willingness to share the communicative burden. The amount of willingness to share the communicative burden will then affect perceived comprehension which then may possibly affect actual intelligibility, although I am not aware of any process to explain how perceived comprehension might affect actual intelligibility.

Internationalization: Who is it for?

Considering the perception of both the international participants in this study, and some of the Thai participants on the perceived marginalization of international students, along with how the university

promotes itself highlighting its international nature, it may be concluded that the entire concept of internationalization is set up solely as a promotional strategy to attract local students and that the international students themselves are peripheral, both in the view of the institution and in the mind of some of the teachers.

How does this fit with the argument that internationalization essentially means westernization of higher education? I think the question should be; is it a genuine effort to be international, or is it just a façade used to attract local students? And if, as I suspect, it is just a façade then how can it be that internationalization really means westernization? Does it only mean having the appearance of being western? And how does it fit with the statement from Deem et al (2008) that 'the national role of universities may be ignored in favour of the international role.'

Implications and Recommendations

The main implication of the findings of this study is that if students, when confronted by particular stigmatized non-native speaker accents, believe that accent to be unclear or hard to understand it may follow that they will essentially give up trying to understand, perhaps hoping for a different teacher next time who has a 'clear' native speaker accent. Needless to say this has the potential to be disruptive to the learning experience. It also relates to the Bias of Blame which may create a breakdown in communication between teacher and student and a different classroom dynamic with students failing to take up any share of the communicative burden.

There will also be an added burden on non-native speaker teachers to 'prove' themselves to students as proficient and capable of teaching English or content in English, and to gain legitimacy that is given automatically to native speaker teachers, this legitimacy also being aided by Whiteness and hindered by having an Asian identity. The implication of this is that 'race' does matter.

The primary recommendation would be generating awareness in the students/learners of several key concepts: First that of World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca so that non-native to non-native communication in English can be seen for what it is; more common than non-native to native communication and increasingly so. Second, that expecting to somehow become a native speaker is impossible and that it should not be the target. Third, that there is no such thing as a 'standard' English so therefore no accent can be *inherently* 'good' or 'bad' or harder to understand than any other. This does not mean that any old pronunciation will do, where an individual speaker may have such an accent that *nobody* can understand

them, but that an accent does not have to be native speaker-like to be understandable, and that it is more usually another non-native speaker that will need to understand and be understood, not a native speaker. If students are aware that there is no such thing as a 'standard' English floating around somewhere perfectly formed, and that they do not need a native speaker accent that they believe to be a reflection of this standard, then it may lessen or even remove the desire for a native speaker teacher for English classes or any other course taught in English. Day to day in a classroom this would mean that an English teacher should not necessarily try to teach a native speaker accent (whatever they may consider that to be), and that the emphasis should be on communicating and understand the message. Students should be able to take pride in their identity reflected in their use of English, and should be told so.

A further recommendation is that the native speaker and non-native speaker distinction be dropped as a form of judgement when it comes to the hiring of teachers, whether English language teachers or those teaching content in English. If institutions stop this policy then maybe students/learners may in time also no longer make such a distinction of their teachers.

A final recommendation, reflecting on the idea of the marginalization of international students, is that teachers, whenever in the context of the internationalization of higher education with its multilingual and multicultural classrooms, should not use a language at anytime that is not shared by all of the students. The marginalization of international students revealed in this study is an issue of emotion and not only an issue of understanding. All the required content may be given in a common language, but switching to a language not understood by some members of the class, to tell jokes for example, will likely create the impression on those learners who do not understand that language of being left out and not cared for to the same degree. It will create inequality in the classroom.

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