

Attitudes of Native Speakers of Thai Toward Speakers of Thai as a Second Language

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Abstract—Languages and accents build understanding and relationships with other people. Therefore, understanding individual attitudes could contribute to more effective second language communication and learning motivation. This study investigated the attitudes of native speakers of Thai (NST) toward speakers of Thai as a second language: Chinese speakers of Thai as a second language (CST) and American speakers of Thai as a second language (AST). The matched-guise technique (Lambert et al., 1960) was used to assess data collected from 145 Thai NST evaluators through an online questionnaire. The analysis of the NST's attitudes found ten characteristics from both the CST and AST were statistically significantly different at a 0.05 level, such as friendliness, diligence, generosity, self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, economic status, attractive accent, and language use appropriateness. The NSTs were found to have more positive attitudes toward the CSTs than the ASTs in many aspects, which may have been because of native language sound and social context factors.

Index Terms—language attitudes, accents, Thai as a second language speaker, matched-guise technique, sociolinguistics

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, foreigners have been moving to Thailand to travel, work, marry, and study, all of whom need to communicate with Thai people or friends, especially in workplaces and other communicative situations. Using Thai could result in greater understanding and trust than using other languages. However, language is not only for “communication” as it also can convey culture, race, social group, gender, age, and “attitudes”.

Sociolinguistics theory includes the study of attitudes because these can determine and affect social behavior. Positive attitudes can contribute to helpful and constructive behavior and bad attitudes can affect social development. Attitudes also influence daily decisions, such as choosing friends, career choices, and the selection of education. As attitudes often lead people to act on what they believe is suitable, they can therefore affect communication and understanding with other people, and can also cause misunderstandings and conflicts. Especially if the interlocutor has some stereotypical biases.

Attitudes transmitted through language, therefore, have been widely studied by Thai and foreign researchers, with most studies examining the individual attitudes related to language communication tendencies, the problems caused by social factors, the use of language for learning, and understanding the different cultures and behaviors of mother tongue people (Lambert et al., 1960; Palikupt, 1983; Srinarawat, 1986; Gaies & Beebe, 1991; Saravanan et al., 2006; Lakshmi & Caleon, 2007; Charunrochana & Yang, 2013; Paksasuk, 2018; Liu, 2019; Nejjari et al., 2019; Aykut-Kolay, 2022; Komar, 2022; Ianos et al., 2023; Kang et al., 2023). To understand the attitudes toward languages and cultures, most studies have analyzed data collected from interviews or questionnaires, from which it was confirmed that languages and cultures affect communication and understanding in academic societies and in everyday life.

Attitude has usually been evaluated using the matched-guise technique, which is a social science technique that studies listeners and/or responders in several dimensions, such as credibility, perfection, and social behavior. Lambert et al. (1960) were the first to use this technique to examine individual attitudes, from which a set of social and cultural examples were developed that illustrated the impact on individual assessments, especially in perfection and social behavior and the community context variances. Since that time, the matched-guise technique has been employed to evaluate individual attitudes in various research areas, such as the social sciences, culture, linguistics, and communication. However, even though Thai has become a reasonably popular language choice for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and American learners, to date, there have been no studies exploring the language attitudes of Thai people toward American speakers of Thai as a second language and comparison of Chinese speakers of Thai as a second language and American speakers of Thai as a second language by native speakers.

Therefore, this study investigated the attitudes of native speakers of Thai (NST) toward two different Thai second language speakers: Chinese speakers of Thai as a second language (CST) and American speakers of Thai as a second language (AST). Studying the language attitudes of speakers with different mother tongues is important to assess the influences that accents can have on understanding and relationships, the results from which can improve relationships between NSTs and non-native speakers of Thai (NNST), decrease possible stereotypical biases, increase NNST

motivation, lead to a better understanding of diverse language behaviors, facilitate more fruitful communication and cultural understanding, and strengthen Thai language teaching and learning.

II. ATTITUDE, ACCENT, AND THE MATCHED-GUISE TECHNIQUE

As the language spoken in a particular situation can result in a listener forming certain attitudes toward the speaker/s, the factors related to the formation of these attitudes could be seen to be important social language use variables. Although attitude is an unpredictable variable, it is the key factor leading to language change (Thomason, 2001, p. 141).

Social science defines attitude as a feeling or emotion a person has toward organizations, products, services, or other people, which can be transmitted through many mediums, such as advertisements, social media, and face-to-face interactions. A person's opinions, perceptions, and behavior are based on their personal experiences and the opinions and beliefs they have developed from other sources, such as social media, that is, their self-concept (LeVine & Campbell, 1972).

Accent, which is defined as "a variety of speech differing phonetically from other varieties" (Matthews, 1997, p. 4), is also closely related to attitude, especially in communicative situations. Accents vary depending on a person's place of residence or culture, identify where a speaker is from and can affect a listener's ability to understand what a speaker is saying.

The language attitudes of people living in the same or different societies can be determined using various methods, such as interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The matched-guise technique has also been applied to analyze attitudes and behavior toward languages and cultures and explore how communication in different languages and cultures can affect perceptions. Lambert et al. (1960) and Anisfeld and Lambert (1964, 1972) were social psychologists who developed the matched-guise technique to study individual attitudes. In their early studies, study samples were asked to listen to recordings of unknown speakers who could speak two languages, after which they were asked to determine the speakers' possible characteristics. This matched-guise technique has since been widely used because of its ability to effectively evaluate attitudes.

Although sociolinguistics researchers use semantic differential scales, the matched-guise technique, and attitude questionnaires to evaluate opinions toward languages or cultures, the matched-guise technique has been the most popular, primarily because it emphasizes social and cultural differences based on community contexts. However, studies have also highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of the matched-guise technique research method (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles et al., 1991).

The advantages include:

1. The matched-guise technique allows a researcher to systematically compare the changes in listeners' attitudes and perceptions toward the sound heard without the interference of the social differences that could affect the interpretation of the findings.
2. The matched-guise technique allows researchers to control variables that could affect the research results, such as voice and speech.
3. The matched-guise technique provides independent and unbiased results, that is, the respondents are independent and anonymous, which allows for unbiased results that can be used for further analysis.
4. The matched-guise technique is inexpensive and requires uncomplicated technology.

However, some disadvantages have also been identified:

1. The data preparation process for the comparative testing and evaluation is complex and time-consuming.
2. To obtain accurate research results, it is necessary to control for other variables such as gender, age, and environment.

Therefore, because of the advantages and the wide previous use of the matched-guise technique, it was used in this study to investigate the attitudes of NSTs toward NNSTs. However, to effectively apply this method, it was necessary to control for the speakers' attributes, and to obtain the best attitude assessments of the NNST accents, a pilot and a comparative evaluation were required before the main data collection.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Method

1) First, speakers were selected for the audio recordings, after which they were divided into two groups: NST and NNSTs.

1.1 Two voice distractors were recorded by an NST; one in standard Thai and one in a Southern Thai dialect; which were used as barriers between the NNSTs to prevent the evaluators from recalling either of the speakers as the evaluators could have identified the NST from the NNSTs. As these NST recordings were designed to only distract the evaluators, they were not analyzed in the study results.

1.2 The selected NNSTs must have studied Thai for at least two years in an educational institution in Thailand and had to be capable enough to regularly converse in Thai with their Thai friends.

It was found that Chinese speakers of Thai as a second language (CST) and American speakers of Thai as a second language (AST) were the most suitable groups for the study as they represented NNSTs from Asia and the West. These

two student groups mostly attended Thai universities in the 2020–2021 academic year (Ministry of Higher Education Science Research and Innovation, 2022: online). Then one CST and one AST were selected to meet the study requirements; a female aged between 20 and 21 years old currently studying for a bachelor's degree in a Thai Language Department in Thailand.

2) Using accidental sampling, one hundred and forty-five NSTs were selected as evaluators to complete the questionnaire.

3) The tools used to gather the data were sound recording equipment, a Thai text for the NST and NNSTs, and a questionnaire that was developed using Google Forms. All tools were piloted, and any problems found during the pilot process were revised before the actual data collection.

4) The sample NST evaluators listened to the NST (distractor) and the NNST recordings and then completed the questionnaire. The obtained questionnaire data were then quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed.

B. Research Tools

There were three research tools used in this study.

1) The matched-guise technique was used to indirectly identify the individual attitudes. As discussed, the matched-guise technique can be used to thoroughly evaluate attitudes toward another person. As asking something directly to another person can result in untrue answers, the matched-guise technique allowed the sample NST evaluators to listen to the same text from several unknown speakers without knowing the speakers' cultural backgrounds, which allowed them to assess the speakers' attitudes more objectively.

2) Audio recordings

A Thai text was sent to the one NST and two NNST speakers before the recording to allow them to practice. After becoming familiar with the text, they recorded the text once. The four recorded texts were then checked before being sent to the sample NST evaluators.

All speakers recorded the following Thai script.

Thai is one of the tools of the Thai nation. All languages are the tools of humans in expressing his or her opinions in a beautiful way such as in literature. Therefore, people should carefully maintain these languages. In Thailand, we have our own language, and it should be cherished. We have been fortunate to have our own language since ancient times. Therefore, it is very necessary to maintain it. (Thai language club, Faculty of Arts Chulalongkorn University, 1999, p. 5)

3) Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to assess the attitudes of the sample NST evaluators. The questionnaires were adapted from Lambert et al. (1960) and Palikupt (1983) to make them more appropriate for the sample NST evaluators, who were required to assess fifteen characteristics for each speaker: appearance, friendliness, perseverance, generosity, honesty, intelligence, self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, educational status, economic status, social status, attractive accent, understanding, and language use appropriateness. After listening to each recording, the sample NST evaluators score each characteristic on a five-level score frame that ranged from highest to lowest.

C. Data Collection

A Google Forms questionnaire was distributed to collect the data from the sample NST evaluators, to which the four text recordings were attached. After listening to each speaker, the evaluators scored the speakers' characteristics, as explained in the previous section.

D. Data Analysis

1) The sample NST evaluation score data for each text recording was collected; however, as stated, only the NNST text recordings were analyzed.

2) To assess if there were any significant differences in the sample NST evaluator's attitudes toward the CST and AST recordings, the data were analyzed using a t-test, with the statistical significance set at 0.05.

3) Correlation analyses were then employed to examine the NST evaluators' attitudinal differences toward the CST and AST speakers.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analyses of the average NST evaluator's CST and AST attitude scores identified ten characteristics that were statistically significantly different at the 0.05 level; friendliness, perseverance, generosity, self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, economic status, accent, understanding, and language use appropriateness; and five characteristics that were not significant; appearance, honesty, intelligence, educational status, and social status. The average scores for the sample NST evaluator's attitudes toward the 15 characteristics of the CST and AST are shown in Figure 1.

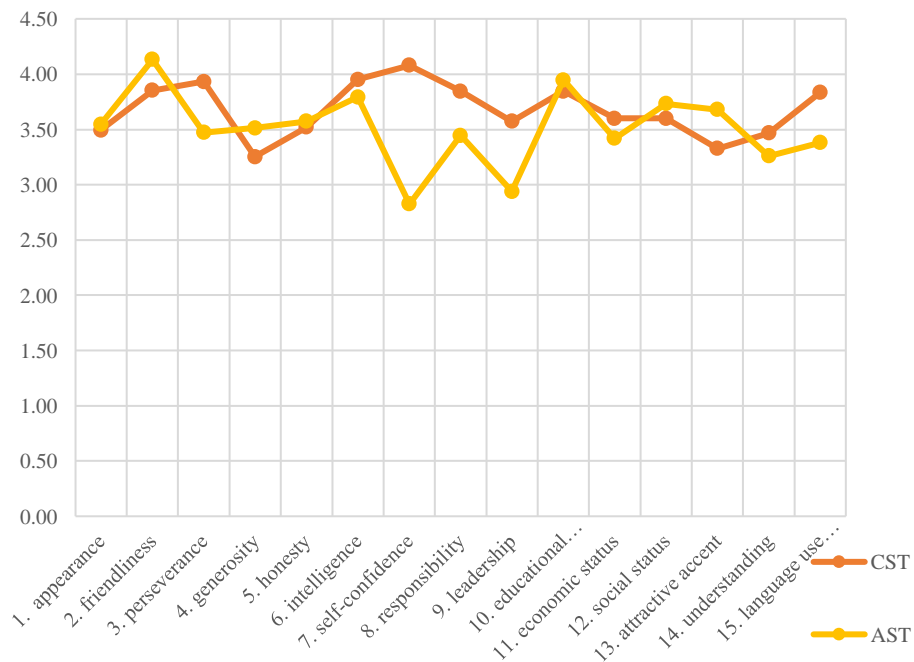


Figure 1. Average Scores for the Sample NST Evaluator's Attitudes Toward the 15 CST and AST Characteristics

The sample NST evaluators assessed the CST recordings as having seven better characteristics than the AST recordings; perseverance, self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, economic status, understanding, and language use appropriateness, and assessed the AST recordings as having three better characteristics than the CST recordings; friendliness, generosity, and attractive accent.

The fifteen characteristics were categorized into three groups: *personal traits*, *social status and abilities*, and *language qualities*. The personal traits comprised appearance, friendliness, perseverance, generosity, and honesty characteristics, the social status and abilities group comprised intelligence, self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, educational status, economic status, and social status characteristics, and the language qualities group comprised the attractive accent, understanding, and language use appropriateness characteristics. The sample NST evaluators' attitude classifications for the CST and AST recordings are shown in Figure 2.

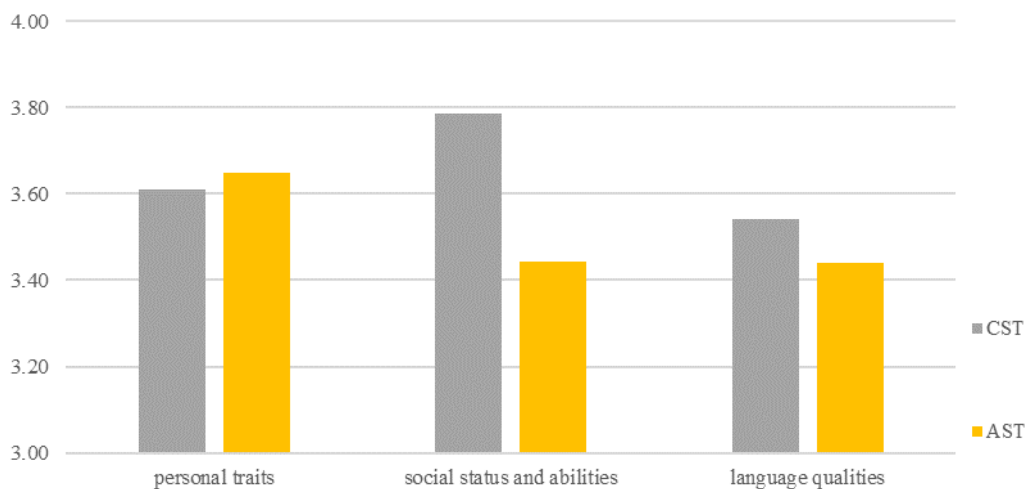


Figure 2. Average Sample NST Evaluators' Attitude Classifications for the CST and AST Recordings

Figure 2 indicates that the sample NST evaluators felt that the CST recordings showed better social status and abilities and better language qualities than the AST recordings and the AST recordings showed better personality traits than the CST recordings. It was speculated that this may have been because of the tone of the mother tongue and the social contexts, as detailed in the following.

1. *Personality traits* are the personal characteristics that could be observed from the appearance, behavior, and ideas in everyday life. The statistical differences indicated that the sample NST evaluators found the AST recordings to have

more friendly and kind characteristics than the CST recordings and the CST recordings to indicate greater diligence than the AST recordings.

The reasons for the higher ratings for AST's friendliness and generosity characteristics may have been because of political and economic dimensions. It has been found that Thailand has had a more positive attitude toward its relationship with the United States of America (USA) for decades because of its long history of diplomatic relations. This finding was in line with the conclusions of Malasri (2020), which studied the foreign policies of the USA toward Southeast Asian countries. During the Barack Obama and Donald Trump presidencies, the USA strengthened its alliances with the Philippines and Thailand and expanded its connections to other countries around Asia.

As the strengthening of the USA/Thai relationship was built on their long history of diplomatic relations and because Thailand is one of the original allies of the USA and plays an important role in Southeast Asia, Thai people may have more positive attitudes toward the friendliness of the USA, especially as the USA has assisted Southeast Asian countries and Thailand in particular since World War 2. Further, the friendly attitude of the sample NST evaluators toward the USA may also have been because of the reliance of Thailand's domestic economy on US political policies.

The USA's assistance may also have been linked with generosity in the sample NST evaluations as generosity is aligned with "kindness" by the Thai people (Wanthana, 1992, pp. 306–311). Therefore, the contributions of the USA may have been reflected in the sample NST evaluators' attitudes.

The sample NST evaluators' assessments of the greater diligence of the CST may have been because most Thai people believe the Chinese to be more diligent because of the long Thai and Chinese trade and investment relationship. This was reflected in a story, Thailand, wake up (1938), written by King Rama VI under the pseudonym Asavabhahu. King Rama VI wrote this story for the Thai people, who at that time, were indulging in the happiness and comfort brought by the diligent Chinese living and working in Thailand who were willing to do all kinds of work, including jobs that the indigenous Thai people should be doing. King Rama VI believed that this would result in negative consequences for Thailand. Chinese diligence was often also highlighted in the media until it became a stereotype, with many Thai people thinking that the Chinese built their fortunes from having only one mat and one pillow to becoming a group that was economically stable and secure.

2. *Social status and abilities* are gained from the respect of others and might be the result of social position, status, knowledge, and ability. The analysis of the NST evaluators' attitudes toward the CST recordings found that there was a statistically significant difference from the AST recordings for self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, and economic status.

From the investigation, the positive attitudes of NST toward the social status and abilities of CST may have been the result of changes in political policies. China currently has a proactive policy to build confidence in its abilities to be the economic leader in Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Over the past two decades, China's importance in the ASEAN region has increased significantly through diplomacy and economic growth, as evidenced by the establishment of a free trade area with ASEAN in 2001 and its strategic partnership declaration with ASEAN. These have therefore made China the primary strategic partnership country for ASEAN and the ASEAN + three cooperation framework; China, Japan, and South Korea, which has a long-term goal to become an East Asian community (Charassangsomboon, 2019; Thongtakorn & Niyomthai, 2018; Thepchatree, 2016).

Because of China's close relationship with ASEAN, as the roles of the USA in the ASEAN economy and Thailand have decreased, China has begun to play a key role. These factors may have influenced the NSTs' leadership evaluations and their assessment that the Chinese people have higher social status.

The mother tongue factors that interfered with the second language speaking might persuade Thai people to view CSTs as confident speakers. This is because the Chinese word sounds are short, and when the Chinese speak Thai as their second language, they often do not pronounce final consonants. In the Chinese sound system, most Chinese consonants are affricate or fricative sounds produced by the palate and the lips. These sounds are usually emitted and then immediately stopped at the end of the vocal line. The vocal cords also have highly complex sound frequencies, which allow for firm and articulated voices. This mother tongue interference may have influenced the sample NST evaluators' attitudes toward the confidence and leadership characteristics of the CSTs.

3. *Language quality* is characteristic of Thai communication. While the sample NST evaluators found the AST recordings to have more attractive Thai accents, they felt that the CST Thai recordings were more understandable and more appropriate.

The sample NST evaluators had more positive attitudes toward the attractive AST accent because they were influenced by the "English accent." English is considered a language of dignity. English has been part of most Thai people's lives since primary school, so many people are familiar with its sounds. In the open-ended questionnaires, the sample NST evaluators noted that the AST's Thai language "*tries to make long and beautiful sounds, but makes her seem to lack confidence,*" and the speaker "*pronounces words like English vowels and uses a lot of long sounds. The shortness and length of the sound should be distinguished*". This pronunciation of long vowels rather than short vowels made the NSTs think of sweetness, which influenced their assessment of the beauty of the Thai language usage.

On the contrary, the NST viewed the understanding and appropriateness of language use of the CST positively because there are tone marks in Chinese like Thai. This made Chinese accent similar to Thai pronunciation. Consequently, the NST thought that the CST can appropriately use Thai language. Moreover, if looking at the sound

level of Chinese, it would be found that there are three tones which are high-pitched to low-pitched tones, high-pitched to rising tones and low-pitched to rising tones. These tones are similar to the tones of Thai language, so they made Thai people feel familiar with.

It is also possible that the NSTs found that the appropriateness of the CSTs' language was better because Chinese like Thai is a tonal language, which means that the CSTs' pronunciation was more similar to Thai pronunciation. Consequently, the NSTs thought that the CSTs could more appropriately use Thai language. Moreover, considering the sound level of Chinese, there are three tones which are high-pitched to low-pitched tones, high-pitched to rising tones and low-pitched to rising tones. These tones are similar to the tones of Thai language, so they made Thai people feel familiar with.

This is similar to comments of NST on the CST's sound. The NSTs noted that the CST "could control the pitch of her voice, highness, or lowness of a tone, very well. She might be used to using tone marks, yet she still pronounced some words differently," and the speaker "has a clear tonal pronunciation without any monotone. However, if the speaker moved the shape of the mouth correctly, he might pronounce some words more clearly".

The NST attitudes toward the fifteen characteristics of the CST and the AST were both significantly statistically different and indifferent because of the political and economic policy dimensions and the mother tongue dimension.

The characteristics that were not found to be statistically different were possibly related to the Chinese and American accents. Many people from these two countries work and study in Thailand, and both China and the USA are powerful countries. Therefore, their appearance, intellect, educational background, and social position characteristics were found to be acceptable even when a long tone was used to express sweetness, or a short sound was used to indicate energy. As the tones expressed sincerity, they were seen as expressing honesty.

Overall, the study found that the sample NST evaluators' attitudes toward the CST speakers were more positive than toward the AST speakers. The westernization of the Thai people led to predictions that Thai sounds would be unduly influenced by English and that it was necessary to maintain the Thai language sound (Onpau, 2016). Therefore, these results may reflect the changing values and worldviews of people in Thai society.

The sample NST evaluators gave the highest CST scores for confidence and leadership, which was because Thais recognize the diligence and humility of the Chinese. From 1997, the One China policy of President Xi Jinping has strengthened China's military and economy. China has invested heavily in spacecraft construction and has become a leader in space technology. Because Thai industry has become more dependent on China than the USA since 2000 (Pongnairat, 2017), the Thai people have great confidence in the Chinese leadership. Charunrochana and Yang (2013) found that American speakers of Thai as a second language had less leadership and confidence than Chinese speakers of Thai as a second language, which was in line with the results of this study.

The average scores for the sample NST evaluators' attitudes toward the distractor recordings were also interesting. Very high scores were given by all NSTs for all characteristics and were significantly higher than the CST or AST speakers and statistically significant, indicating that standard Thai was seen to have social dignity, popularity, and acceptance. Nevertheless, speakers from different backgrounds usually have second language accents influenced by their mother tongue and their origins, which can result in communication obstacles and result in incorrect judgments by native speakers. Therefore, native speakers need to understand the difficulties in learning to accurately speak a second language to motivate second language learners to interact with native speakers.

This study has indicated that native speaker attitudes toward second language learners could be a factor in successful language learning as positive relationships with native speakers could increase social interactions, better develop second language abilities, and improve the motivation to study the language. Therefore, second language teachers and native speakers should take care not to stereotype second language speakers as this could affect their language learning and discourage native speaker interactions.

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