# Towards Global English Horizons

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## Abstract

The exigencies of globalization and AEC integration provide an impetus for this paper. In this paper, two major questions are addressed. One, what will happen to the standard varieties of English as a vehicular language for international communication, when the spread of English continues towards global communication? Two, what will happen to a larger number of other local English varieties developed from standard varieties of English in response to the growth of globalization and AEC integration in the ASEAN region? The answers to these two questions culminate in the summary that English is not only the vehicular language for international communication but also a basis for constructing Thai cultural identities. This article, *Towards Global English Horizons*, represents a long and engaging journey that, in turn, empowers and invigorates ELT practitioners in improving English education of Thailand.

## 1. English and Global English

At the turn of the 21st century, Thailand was faced with a shift in language policies stemming from the pressure of globalization. According to Graddol (2001), some of the common questions pertinent to the scenario included the inquiry regarding the number of English native speakers around the globe and the chance for non-native speakers of English to interact with English native speakers. However, at present, these questions are no longer our interest.

In addition to globalization, another imminent pressure looms. In 2015, due to the exigency of AEC integration, English is becoming the working language of the ASEAN region, triggering academicians, especially those in ELT, to seriously consider the impact of AEC integration on ELT in Thailand. This impact will definitely be noticeable in the domain of English instruction at all levels of the educational system, ranging from elementary to tertiary education.

What does global English entail? A doyen of this topic, Crystal (2003), offers two definitions for global English. First, global English refers to the use of the English language as a common means of communication across cultures - a lingua franca. Second, global English refers to a form of English used in texts intended for an international audience. Based on these definitions, some intriguing questions to be scrutinized include: 1) What will happen to the standard varieties of English as a vehicular language for international communication, when the spread of English continues towards global communication? and 2) What will happen to a larger number of other local English varieties developed from standard varieties of English in response to the growth of globalization and AEC integration in the ASEAN region?

## 2. Standard varieties of English vs. other local English varieties

*Q1) What will happen to the standard varieties of English as a vehicular language for international communication, when the spread of English continues towards global communication?*

To answer this question, a number of academicians believe that standard varieties of English will be well maintained in Anglophone societies. However, in relevance to this question and in a Thai context, it is of interest to know, for instance, Thai university students' aspired model of English pronunciation. In other words, what English varieties should be prioritized for language teaching and learning purposes? To clarify this issue, Kanoksilapatham (2013) examined Thai university students' aspiration for an English pronunciation model ($N$ = 387). Although these university students seemed to be well aware of the notion of English as an international language (EIL) of which its ideologies are on intelligibility, they expressed favorable attitudes towards the pronunciation models of English native speakers. That is, if possible, they aspired to master standard varieties of English. Despite potential disagreement and ambivalence among intellectuals, this finding is illuminating, pinpointing what English varieties to prioritize, and encouraging ELT practitioners in Thailand to come up with teaching strategies that are in line with Thai learners' aspiration.

The finding also bears implications in pedagogy. That is, whereas Thai learners of English seem to exalt the merits of standard varieties of English, other local and regional English varieties should not be despised, looked down, or frowned upon. As a matter of fact, the use of local English varieties contributes to the development of local forms and hybrid varieties. The linguistic deviance or variation manifested in other local English varieties helps promote local cultures through the English language. As evidenced in the current use of the English language, a single homogenous variety or standard variety of English begins to disappear in various linguistic domains (be they grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation) to accommodate the need for intelligibility and the identity of the region. To delve into these issues, the following sections demonstrate examples of linguistic variation observed in certain English varieties.

## 3. Examples of linguistic variation

This section presents examples pertaining to linguistic variation that take place across English varieties in the domains of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.

Vocabulary variation seems to be the most distinct and prevalent of all. Imagine a British man walking into an eating place in Chicago. The man would describe the place as a *café*, whereas an American would call the place a *diner* (see Figure 1 of a diner and Figure 2 of a café).



Figure 1: A diner

Figure 2: A café

Suddenly, he saw customers waiting in *line* (*queue*) to be served. He heard a waitress asking one of the customers, "*How do you like your eggs?*" Immediately, the answer *sunny side up* was uttered (from the entire set of how eggs are cooked including *over easy, over hard, poached, scrambled, shirred, soft boiled*). In this specific scenario, not only the culinary tastes are revealed, but also localization features.

Let's go to South Africa, a sign on the road crossing says, "Robot ahead." (Figure 3). What is "robot"? It is traffic lights.


Figure 3: Robot ahead

Other examples include *driver's license* in American English (AE) and *driving licence* in British English (BE), *pants* in AE and *trousers* in BE. A number of examples in the domain of vocabulary involve terms related to specific culture such as local plants and animals, fruits and drinks, politics (*yellow/red shirts*), etc.

Pronunciation variation is quite apparent. For instance, in Northern English dialects in the UK, the vowel sound in the following words of *cup, some,* and *but* is the same as the vowel sound in the words *bush* and *could*. Similarly, in AAVE (African American Vernacular English), the initial sound of the words *they, then,* and *them* is identical to the initial sound in *day, den,* and *dug*.

Finally, grammatical variation can be a bit confusing for English learners. For instance, in BE, present perfect verb tense is used to express an action that has occurred in the recent past and has an effect on the present moment. However, past simple and present perfect can be used interchangeably in AE. For instance, *I've just had lunch* is common in BE; however, in AE, both *I've just had lunch* and *I just had lunch* are possible. For more examples of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar variation, see Kanoksilapatham (2012).

These examples demonstrate that variation prevails among English varieties, not to mention the variation discernible among local English varieties. With the exigency of AEC integration, local English varieties in ASEAN encountered by Thai people will become more prevalent.

## 4. Local English variety in a professional setting

*Q2) What will happen to a larger number of other local English varieties developed from standard varieties of English in response to the growth of globalization and AEC integration in the ASEAN region?*

Prior to addressing the second question, I would like to exemplify how a local variety of English can have an impact determining how successful the communication is, consider the following excerpt of a phone conversation between a hotel guest (HG) and room service (RS) at a hotel in Asia (cited in Kanoksilapatham, 2012: 297-298).

RS: *Morny, ruin sorbees.*
HG: *Sorry, I thought I dialed Room Service.*
RS: *Rye…Ruin sorbees…Morny! Dyuwish to ordor sunteen?*
HG: *Um…yes...I'd like some bacon and eggs.*
RS: *Ow july den? ...pry, boy, pooch?*
HG: *Oh, the eggs!...How do I like them? Sorry, scrambled please.*
RS: *Ow july dee baychem…crease?*
HG: *Crisp will be fine.*
RS: *Hokay. An some toes?*
HG: *I don't think so.*
RS: *No? Judo one toes?*
HG: *I feel really bad about this, but I don't know what "judo one toes" means.*

As a citizen of the ASEAN region, the excerpt depicts the attributes specific to a local culture that are manifested through the English language. As shown, localization drops in conversation. Was the language used by the Room Service understood? Yes, but with a certain amount of difficulty on the interlocutor's part.

## 5. Towards global English horizons: Pedagogy implications

Referring to the title of this article, a horizon is the line that separates the earth from the sky -- the line that divides all visible directions into two categories. Some of the connotations of the word include *far-reaching* but *inspiring; time consuming* but *successful*. The inclusion of this word in the title of this article is appropriate, implicating that being an English language teacher is a long and engaging journey. We, ELT practitioners, are going towards the horizon together, hand in hand.

Based on my research presented (Kanoksilapatham, 2013), Thai learners of English tend to aspire for standard English pronunciation as the norm. Pedagogically, teachers and students' linguistic aspiration should be in line with each other for the maximum benefit of instruction. In so doing, teachers are to provide students with a solid head-start of the basics of a standard variety of English to boost their motivation. However, local English varieties are prevalent, and thus learners of English should be trained to grapple with, be sensitive to, and be aware of, cultural assumptions embedded in the linguistic differences encountered.

At this juncture, to answer the second question, the emergence of global English and AEC integration is thrilling and indicative. In the Thai context, these pressures provide Thailand with an impetus for reconstructing Thai identities through English. For instance, if the use of *lah* at the end of an utterance to express strong assertion can be maintained in Singlish, within this regional context, the use of *kha* (ค่ะ) or *khrap* (ครับ) to

express politeness is highly possible and legitimate. By extension, certain expressions reflecting how Thai society is constructed but have no counterparts in English like *krengjai* (เกรงใจ), *sanuk* (สนุก), and *maipenrai* (ไม่เป็นไร) can help promote Thai culture internationally. The attempt to translate these notions into English can be quite a daunting task, not to mention the vulnerability of losing some color and flavor of these Thai expressions through the process of translation. If *tom yum* (ต้มยำ) and *som tam* (ส้มตำ) could make it internationally, so can these expressions. In so doing, our Thai national identities are not bulldozed, but are in turn transferred through the discourse of English. In short, towards global English horizons, language and culture are inseparable. To tie up loose ends at this point, if horizons are not reachable, we ELT practitioners must *set our goal high, and strive to achieve it* (ฝันให้ไกลไปให้ถึง).

## 6. Conclusion

We, academicians, want our students to be able to stand tall and to pedagogically perform and function effectively in English. As an attempt to accomplish this goal, this article highlights how Thailand can respond to the challenge of globalization and AEC integration by 1) embracing local English diversity around the region and the globe and 2) engaging in this transition creatively and preparing for global reality. First, to embrace English varieties, we need to change the mindset to appreciate other English language varieties, and not to despise them. Second, to engage in the transition creatively, it is time to forge the direction of language construction by integrating Thai identities into the English language. The inseparable nature of language and intercultural skills provides the driving force for this change of promoting Thai culture or Thainess internationally. Therefore, English teachers in the present era are required not only to be aware of standard varieties of English but also to develop appreciation for other local English varieties. This culminates in the summary that English is not only the vehicular language for international communication but also a basis for constructing Thai cultural identities. The far-reaching horizon represents the long and endless journey that, in turn, empowers and invigorates us, ELT practitioners.

## About the Author

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