

# **English Language Policy in Thailand**

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## **Introduction**

Thailand along with many other countries in Asia and especially ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) has in recent years given increasing prominence to the role of English in language policy. As such it provides a window into current language ideologies and the relationship between language policy and practices. In particular, following elements of Spolsky's (2009) language policy theories this article will focus on education policy since this is the most obvious manifestation of official overt language policy (Shohamy, 2006; Darasawang & Watson Todd 2012). The paper will begin by setting English within the wider linguistic landscape of Thailand in relation to Thai and other languages as well as an exploration of the monolingual and monocultural ideologies that underpin much policy in this area. However, there will also be a suggestion that recent policy reflects an increasing awareness of multilingualism. This will be followed by a brief overview of the historical development of English as the principle foreign language in Thailand before turning to the current role of English in Thai society. The remainder of the article will explore recent policy in relation to English in education beginning with the 1999 reforms continuing to the most recent 2016 policy from the Commission of Higher Education. While all levels of education will be discussed, examples from higher education will be most prominent and this is the area of expertise of the authors and the area of language policy of which we have first-hand experience.

We argue that there has been a consistent increase in the emphasis on English language education in policy based on an underlying ideology that views English as the language of development and globalisation. At the same time though, there has also been persistent dissatisfaction with the perceived results of education practices as regards the English proficiency level of the Thai populace. However, in this article we propose that much of this supposedly low level of proficiency is due to inappropriate native speaker and Anglo-centric models of English which do not reflect the growing use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) globally and as the official lingua franca of ASEAN. We also note the concerns that have been raised regarding the detrimental effects on other areas of education resulting from an over-emphasis on English and the inequalities that this may further entrench.

## **Language policy and language education policy**

While the focus of this article is not a theoretical discussion of language and education policy, it may help to briefly outline the framework that informs our argument here. In discussing language and education policy we will be using Spolsky's tripartite model (2004; 2009) which distinguishes between language practices, language beliefs or ideology and language management. Language practices are "the observable behaviors and choices – what

people actually do” (Spolsky 2009: 4) and they are the strongest element of the framework since without these there can be no language model for beliefs or management. Language beliefs in relation to policy refer to “the values or statuses assigned to named languages, varieties, and features.” (Spolsky 2009: 4) Beliefs are important, for example, in understanding which named varieties of languages are given prestigious or prominent status in policy and which are stigmatised or even ignored. Finally, language management is “the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs.” (Spolsky 2009: 4) This may include, for instance, government policy on which languages will be taught in schools and so will have an influence on language choices and may lead to modification of beliefs and practices. However, Spolsky (2009) cautions that management will not automatically be successful, particularly when it comes into conflict with beliefs or practices. In this discussion we will be concentrating on the language management aspects of Spolsky’s model with an emphasis on education policy. This is, we believe, a productive level to focus on, as Shohamy (2006) argues, it is through the overt mechanisms of education policy that we can observe explicit attempts to turn language ideologies into language practices. We will thus be examining Thai government language policy documents and curricula as well as formal language assessment. However, before turning specifically to language education policy it may be helpful to outline the linguistic context in which these policies take place.

## **The linguistic landscape of Thailand**

Thailand is generally viewed as an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous country, with the assumption that all Thai citizens speak Thai (National Identity Board 2000; Keyuravong 2010). However, it is, in fact, ethnically and linguistically diverse; alongside the majority of Thais, there are Chinese, Malays, Cambodians, Vietnamese and indigenous tribes such as the Karen, Lahus, and Lissus. In addition, there are estimated to be over 70 minority languages and related varieties including, Chinese, Lao, Malay, Khmer and Mon (Foley 2005; Rappa & Wee, 2006; Simpson and Thammasathien 2007; Darasawang and Watson Todd 2012; Premsrirat 2014). Standard Thai is the national language used in administration, education, and media and is one of the important symbols of Thai national identity and unity. To maintain its dominance and superiority, other regional varieties such as ‘Northern’ Thai (e.g. Kham Muang) and ‘Southern’ Thai (e.g. Pak Tai) are treated as variants of the Thai language regardless of their linguistic properties. However, there is debate as to whether all the varieties or dialects of Thai are actually dialects as opposed to separate languages (Darasawang and Watson Todd 2012). At present, though, there seems to be little ideological or political motivation to question this categorisation.

Many ethnic minorities, e.g. Laotian, Cambodian, and Burmese, have a long history of slowly being absorbed into Thai society and culture, with their language varieties being treated as dialects of Thai. Other languages are treated as being clearly foreign, for example, Malay, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Regarding the Chinese and Malay minorities, two of the largest foreign language groups, the Chinese seem to have assimilated most smoothly into Thai society in recent times allowing the Thai language to displace Chinese. However, the situation of the Thai Malay community, particularly in the south of Thailand where the majority are Muslims, in contrast to majority Buddhists in the rest of the country, is different. The Malay (Patani Malay) language is closely tied with the Islamic religion, and it is viewed as the language that expresses faith in the religion and a key representation of identity. Thus, the assimilation into Thai society by displacing Malay with standard Thai presents difficulties

and is often viewed as a threat to religious and cultural identity. The situation is further complicated by a separatist movement in a number of Malay speaking southern provinces and the ongoing violent conflicts that this has led to.

Thus, for a sizeable minority in Thailand, between 1 in 10 to 1 in 15, (Warotamasikkhadit and Person 2011) 'standard' Thai functions as an L2. The recent 2010 draft National Language Policy of Thailand offers greater recognition for minority languages stating that "It is the policy of the government to promote bilingual or multilingual education for the youth of ethnic groups whose mother tongue is different from the national language [Thai], as well as those from other countries who enter Thailand seeking employment." (cited in Fry 2013). This is beginning to affect language practices such as 'mother tongue' education in languages other than Thai. For example, a successful Patani Malay - Thai bilingual education programme has been running in a number of schools in the South of Thailand since 2008 (<http://www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=9&programme=147>). Nonetheless, at the time of writing this, the new National Language Policy still remained at draft stage.

Against this backdrop of assumed monolingualism and a nascent, but very recent, recognition of multilingualism, English, in contrast, is the foreign language that has been granted a special status for some time. While English has never challenged the status of standard Thai, in part due to Thailand never being colonized by a Western country, it has been seen as a key part of Thailand's development. English has for many decades been widely perceived as the prime international language to communicate with the outside world for economic, political, academic and cultural contact (Rappa & Wee, 2006; Baker 2012). However, it is important to stress that English has typically been positioned as the language of the 'other' or 'outsider' and, just as with the other languages present in Thailand, there has been strong resistance to giving English an official status in language policy within the country or allowing it to challenge the hegemony of Thai (Draper 2012).

## **Brief historical background of English language policy and education**

The English language and its teaching has been present in Thailand for more than a century. According to historical recounts (Baker and Phongpaichit 2005; Darasawang, 2007; Sukamolson 1998), English language teaching (ELT) started in the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851). This was due to the importance of English as a tool to establish diplomatic relationships with many Western countries during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851) and to safeguard the country from the threat of colonization by these Western countries and this continued into the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868). The Kings hired American missionaries and other British tutors to teach English to the royal members and the kings' officers so that they could use the language to communicate with the western world and to access the advanced knowledge brought by the missionaries as well as to aid in the development and prosperity to the country.

King Rama V (1868-1910) and King Rama VI (1910-1925) further promoted the importance of English for modernizing the country, dealing with foreigner traders and diplomats and learning advanced knowledge. King Rama V established the Ministry of Education to educate English and other subjects to Thai citizens. The "King's Scholarships" were awarded to those who were proficient in English to study abroad to bring the knowledge of modern

advancements to develop the country. King Rama VI (1910-1925) set up Western-style education and founded the country's first university. A Compulsory Education Act issued by the King required all children aged between four and eight to attend school. English was a compulsory subject to study after grade 4. More officials and students were also sent to study abroad.

After the change of political system from absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy during the reign of King Rama VII in 1932, the government's national plan was to offer equal education to all Thais. English was still important. In 1948, the education plan was extended to the tertiary level which was divided into 2 programmes: Art Program and Science Program. Only students in the Art Program were required to study English and another foreign language, i.e. French, Chinese, or Pali. Later in 1955, all university students were required to study English as a compulsory subject. Other foreign languages, e.g. French, German, Chinese, or Pali, were optional subjects. Sukamolson (1998) further described that English subjects was still compulsory at the tertiary level in 1960s and the first half of 1970s. The 1978 national education curriculum saw a temporary shift in direction and downgraded English language to an elective subject among other foreign languages in all levels of education, including at the tertiary level. The revisions to the 1978 curriculum in 1990 and 1996, kept English as an elective subject at university and school. However, in practice nearly all students all over the country took English subjects. For example, first-year university students took general English courses and English for academic purposes courses were provided to the second- and third-year students. So in education policy over the previous century English has typically been granted, either officially or 'de-facto', prime status as a foreign language but has not been the only foreign language.

## **The current status of English**

Although an attempt to make English an official second language in Thailand by the education minister in 2010 was unsuccessful and very unpopular (Darasawang, & Watson Todd 2012), English remains the 'de-facto' primary foreign language of Thailand. This status appears likely to be continued into the new National Language Policy which views English as the 'principle language of commerce' although it also notes a lesser but growing role for Chinese, Japanese and Korean (2011: 36). The increasing importance of ASEAN in Thailand has further reinforced this 'principle' place of English due to its status as the official working language of the organization (as well as ASEAN + 3 which includes China, Japan and S.Korea). The significance of English to Thailand's participation in ASEAN has been a frequent subject of public debate and has resulted in a number of government initiatives, such as declaring 2012 'English speaking year', to increase both the use of English and the proficiency levels of Thais.

Due to its status as a foreign rather than official Thai language there has been little desire to develop a standardized local version of 'Thai English' and instead English is typically "characterised as a lingua franca used to connect economically, culturally and politically with the rest of the region and world" (Baker 2015: 207). Indeed, English is most commonly used with other non-native users, most obviously with ASEAN neighbours (Kirkpatrick 2010) but also in tourism where the majority of visitors are from East Asia (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2013). However, the 'foreign' status of English is complicated by its increasing prominence in many urban settings where it functions as a language of both *inter* and *intra*

cultural communication, particularly among the middle classes. This includes the rapid growth in bilingual Thai-English and English medium instruction programmes at school and university, the use of English in electronic communication, the media and urban linguistic landscapes through signs and advertisement (Huebner 2006; Glass 2009; Keyuravong 2010; Seargeant, Tagg, & Ngampramuan 2012). Despite this prominent place accorded to English and its long established role in Thailand, there is still a perception that English proficiency in Thailand is poor and that education policy is, in part, responsible for this. Thus, education policy is the subject to which we now turn.

## **English in education policy**

### **The educational reform of 1999 and beyond**

The discussion now turns specifically to education policy as the most explicit manifestation of language management and policy in Thailand. A growing demand for the overhaul of Thai education at all levels was caused by the economic, political, cultural and social crisis during the 1990s. This resulted in a re-evaluation of Thailand's engagement with globalisation and a return to more 'traditional' Thai values and behavior (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005). However, at the same time it was expected that the urgent reform would enable Thai citizens to compete with other countries in the globalization era. By co-operating with scholars, academics and stakeholders in education since 1997, the National Education Act was eventually enacted in 1999. It can be argued that this has been the most significant educational reform in recent times and has had a major impact on English language policy. The major areas of reform included: 1) basic educational rights for all 2) education systems 3) learning processes 4) administrative and management systems 5) educational standards and quality assurance systems 6) development systems for teaching professions 7) mobilization of resources and investment for education 8) technologies for education (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999).

According to the National Education Act of 1999, the goal of curricula at all levels "shall aim at human development with desirable balance regarding knowledge, critical thinking, capability, virtue and social responsibility." In the higher education, the curricula "shall emphasize academic development, with priority given to higher professions and research for development of the bodies of knowledge and society." The learning process is primarily based on student's centeredness with emphasis on learners' interests, aptitudes, individual differences and training of thinking process (Section 28, National Education Act, 1999). There was an emphasis on the value of local knowledge and wisdom and a desire to incorporate this into education (Section 7 & 23, National Education Act, 1999).

This reconsideration of Thailand's engagement with globalization and the emphasis of local knowledge might have been expected to curtail the role of English. And indeed the English language is never actually mentioned in the National Education Act of 1999. However, in practice English retained its status as the de facto primary foreign language for Thai students and its role was actually expanded as a result of the Act and the following 2002 curriculum (Wongsathorn et al 2003). The Act has subsequently had a substantial impact on English language policy and teaching in Thailand (Darasawang, 2007; Foley, 2005). For instance, English remained the most commonly taught foreign language in schools and in higher education, and became a compulsory subject required for a degree completion.

One significant change in English language education was the transformation, in policy at least, of the passive classrooms into learner-centered classes. Individual differences of students and development of thinking processes were also taken into account in English teaching. This change has resulted in the search and implementation of teaching practices which adhere to learner-centeredness principles, develop learners' ability to communicate in intercultural communication contexts and promote lifelong learning (Darasawang, 2007). Linked to this, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) gained more prominent status in ELT and teachers widely implement this approach in teaching as they thought its principles corresponded to the notion of learner-centredness and could encourage learner autonomous and independent learning (see e.g. Darasawang, 2007; Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2002). In teaching practices, students were encouraged to use the language meaningfully in various social situations through a variety of classroom activities enabling students to use the language for meaningful communication. In higher education some teachers shifted their teaching attention to adopt task-based syllabi which emphasize learner-centeredness and enable students learning progress through completing a series of tasks throughout the courses (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Todd, 2006). It was hoped that involvement in performing the tasks would encourage students to become independent learners and to achieve real-world needs.

However, as might be expected, such ambitious reforms to education policy have not necessarily been smooth. In particular, the ability of often inadequately trained teachers to deliver such a potentially demanding approach as CLT has been questioned and more significantly the appropriateness and relevance of CLT itself in Thai settings has been raised (Adamson, 2003; Baker, 2012; Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011). Other issues include centralized-top down planning, inadequate funding and resources, a divide between urban and rural provision, over-burdened teachers, large class sizes and, linked to the critique of CLT, an over-reliance on outside approaches and especially Anglophone models of English and education (Kosonen 2008; Hayes, 2010; Darasawang, & Watson Todd 2012; Draper 2012; Baker 2012). Many of these are issues that continue until the present time.

### **Current English language policy in education**

Mr. Surin Pitsuwan, former ASEAN secretary-general, claimed in a critique that, despite the Education Reform since 1999, the quality of education at tertiary level and English language proficiency of Thai students were far from satisfactory in comparison with those of other ASEAN countries. Citing the WEF's global Competitiveness Report for 2012-2013, the quality of Thai education has been the worst among the eight ASEAN countries surveyed. He criticized that "efforts to bring about reforms since 1999 have not borne fruit due to political interference and bureaucratic resistance." He reiterated the importance of English as a working language of ASEAN and a tool for communication in business but pointed out that that "Thai youths are lagging behind in this increasingly important tool of communication in ASEAN" (Bangkok Post, 2013).

Mr. Surin's remark correspond with a 2015 report by the Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index indicating that Thailand ranked 62 out of 70 with a ranking of "very low proficiency" (EF EPI, 2015) and a report of Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL iBT Test revealing that the mean scores of Thai students were lower than most of those from other ASEAN countries (TOEFL, 2015). There are many reasons to be suspicious of such test

scores as a measure of English proficiency, for example: they are typically based on a narrow monolingual native speaker model of English rather than a multilingual users (Baker 2012; Jenkins and Leung 2014; McNamara 2014); they might offer a glimpse of English proficiency levels of those involved in the tests but may not portray an accurate indication of English language of Thai citizens overall; and they do not account for the role of individuals taking the test multiple times as is often the case in Thailand. Nonetheless, these test scores have a significant impact on public perceptions of English language proficiency in Thailand and so cannot be dismissed.

With its recognition of the importance of foreign languages, especially English, as stated in the new national language policy in 2010, the Ministry of Education have been determined to improve the English language skills of students at all level of education. As previously discussed, this is underpinned by an ideology that higher proficiency in English will enable Thais to gain access to advanced knowledge and become more competitive for career opportunities. This is also seen as a preparation for Thais to engage in the ASEAN community where English is a working language among its member states.

In relation to primary school level education the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (OBEC 2008) follows many of the strands of the 1999 Act but a major change was stating an official role for English as the 'prescribed' foreign language for grades 1-6 with other foreign languages as optional (OBEC 2008: 266). The four major strands: Language for Communication; Language and Culture; Language and Relationship with other Learning Areas; and Language and Relationship with Community and the World emphasise the role of foreign languages in students connecting with the rest of the world and the processes of globalization while at the same time developing a sense of their unique 'Thainess'. However, there is an emphasis on 'native speaker culture' in relation to languages which represents a mis-match as regards the role of English as a lingua franca for ASEAN (Nomniam 2014) and, furthermore, reinforces monolingual and monocultural views of Thai society.

Focusing on higher education the Commission of Higher Education announced a policy to upgrade English language standards in higher education in April 2016. This policy demands each university to improve English language proficiency levels of students by focusing on three main areas: university's policy on English language, ELT practices, and assessment of students' English language proficiency as described below.

1. Each university decides on its own policy to raise the English language standards of students and sets its benchmark of English language proficiency that students are expected to achieve. The university graduates should be well equipped with academic and professional knowledge and a 'working knowledge' of English language for communication in context.
2. Each institution may need to revise its English language teaching practices in order to improve the English language proficiency levels; Extra-curricular activities, language learning resources, language learning environment should be offered by the university in order to facilitate students' autonomous learning of English language.
3. Each student is required to take English language examinations in order to assess levels of English language proficiency. Each university may select one of the international standardized tests available or may develop its testing systems corresponding to the

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) or other standards in order to determine the levels of proficiency of each student. The test result may be informed to the students by issuing a certificate or recording it in the university transcript.

(Commission of Higher Education 2016<sup>1</sup>)

This policy is likely to be an explicit indication for a new direction in English language education in Thai higher education placing yet more emphasis on the importance of English. Of most potential significance is recognition in the rationale by the Ministry of Education stating that ‘the graduates’ knowledge and proficiency in English is a significant tool to gain access to the advancement of knowledge and globalisation, to engage in ASEAN community, and to enhance the national competitiveness.’ Accordingly, the approaches to English language education need to be adjusted in terms of language ideology, teaching practices, and assessments. The status of English as a working language in ASEAN should remind educators that English is mainly used as a means for communication among multilingual non-native English speakers in ASEAN countries. The traditional ideology of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) seems to be irrelevant as the goal of language learners is not necessarily to achieve native-like competence. Thus, this would entail that the focus of teaching should be effective communication of English among speakers of English from various cultural background in ASEAN contexts, rather than solely focusing on communication with native-English speakers, as is the case with the Basic Education Core Curriculum.

However, the last of the three recommendations, assessment, could potentially represent a barrier to achieving this change in direction. As students are required to take English tests before graduation, the selecting or developing of the English language testing systems that truly reflect the students’ proficiency level in English is a crucial task. The university authorities need to ensure that any international standardized testing systems selected is appropriate to local contexts of students, e.g. academic disciplines, potential interlocutors and the objectives of taking the test, i.e. for academic reasons or professional purposes. They should also be aware that the results from standardized tests, for example, TOEFL, may provide inaccurate views of English language proficiency in particular contexts as measurement often does not take into consideration authentic local situations in which English is used for communication (i.e. multilingual ASEAN settings). As Kaur et al. (2016) observed, despite poor results in English tests, e.g. TOEFL, in Thailand, travelers were pleasantly surprised with the English proficiency levels of Thai workers involved in the tourism industry. Since the measurement of proficiency levels of standardized tests are based on native-speaker norms, it is also doubtful if assessment of English proficiency against native-speaker norms could accurately indicate the proficiency levels of multilingual speakers in contexts in which English is used as a lingua franca. Such English native speaker bias in tests has attracted criticism both in general (Jenkins and Leung 2014; McNamara 2014) and in specific reference to Thailand (Methitham 2009; Baker 2012).

The alternative of developing local tests, as suggested in the new policy from the Commission of Higher Education, offers the potential to avoid the ‘standardized’ Anglophone bias of so-called international tests. However, the reference to the Common

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission of Higher Education policy of 2016 is in Thai. All translations into English are the author’s.



European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in language assessments is problematic. On the one hand test developers following this framework are encouraged to produce tailored-made examinations that assess students' English language proficiency levels by "using situations and tasks which are likely to be familiar and relevant to the intended test taker at the given level" (ALTE, 2011, p.12). However, on the other hand much of the CEFR framework is still based around the assessment of language proficiency based on how well the test takers interact with native speakers (Pitzl 2015). In many cases this will be irrelevant to Thai students in which engagement in communication with native speakers is not the primary concern. Furthermore, the CEFR was developed in reference to European settings and the modern foreign languages learning tradition within this, in which languages are clearly associated with particular national and cultural groupings. Thus, any application of the CEFR model in designing tests in Thailand will need adjustments that recognize the multilingual and multicultural nature of English uses as a lingua franca in ASEAN in which it is not the first language of any particular group. Baker and Hüttner's (2016) recent study in a Thai HE setting underscores some of these tensions, demonstrating multilingual teaching practices but Anglophone native speaker orientations in testing and assessment. At present much work still needs to be done in developing relevant tests for the Thai setting that would both meet the needs of Thai English users and carry international recognition.

In sum, approaches to English have been clearly manifested in recent language education policy. English is the only compulsory foreign language at school and it is also a compulsory language in higher education with graduation dependent on passing English exams. The rationale for the prominent status of English has typically matched the ideology of English as a language of development and globalization. However, while English may be advantageous according to such ideologies, there are a number of issues in giving English such importance. At primary level for the many whose L1 is not standard Thai, English adds an additional language, and potential learning barrier, to the mix and this has become especially acute given the increasing popularity of bilingual English-Thai programmes (Darasawang, and Watson Todd 2012; Kaur et al. 2016). It is also of concern that the concentration on English education is likely to be at the expense of other subjects. This is particularly problematic for students and settings where English has little use or relevance (Draper 2012). Similarly, in higher education we may also question the relevance of English to all university students especially given that it is compulsory to pass English courses before graduation. The use of English examinations as a gatekeeper to university entrance is likely to act as a barrier to many who may have little need of English. Furthermore, at both school and tertiary level the emphasis on English as a gatekeeper is likely to exacerbate differences between well-funded urban schools and often comparatively poorly funded rural schools, as well as between those that can afford extra private English tuition, and those that cannot (Hayes 2010; Baker 2012).

## **Conclusion**

To summarise the current position of English, as outlined in this article, similar to many countries in ASEAN (Kirkpatrick 2010), and Asia more generally (Bolton 2008), English has taken on an increasingly important role in language policy and practice in Thailand. While English has been the 'principle' foreign language for over a century, this prominence has increased in recent times with its role as the official working language of ASEAN and the

explicit mention of English in the draft National Language Policy. There is an underlying ideology of English as a language of modernization and means of connecting Thailand to the rest of the world and engaging in the processes of globalization. However, English has remained as a ‘foreign’ language, and there has been strong resistance to making it an official language for use within Thailand that might challenge any part of the role of the Thai language in national identification. At the same time though there is a nascent recognition of multilingualism with a move away from a simplistic Thai L1, English as a foreign language model and a greater awareness of the diverse range of L1s in the country as well as the importance of other ‘foreign’ languages.

Nonetheless, it seems that for the foreseeable future language policy is moving in a direction that increases rather than diminishes the role of English in education. Perhaps then the biggest challenge for language education policy is recognition of the use of English as a global language and hence a lingua franca and the move away from Anglo-centric native English speaker models and approaches. As the earlier discussion made clear, we believe Anglophone models of English are still deeply embedded in the Basic Education Curriculum and while HE policy has demonstrated greater awareness of role of ELF in ASEAN, it still provides contradictory advice as regards the key role of assessment practices. This is a concern as Thais are most likely to be using English with other non-native speakers, so adherence to standard English in terms of Anglophone models are not of relevance. A growing number of scholars have advocated alternative multilingual and multicultural approaches to ELT and assessment which are more relevant to uses of English in Thailand (e.g. Kirkpatrick 2010; Nomnian 2014; Baker 2015). It also needs to be acknowledged that despite the significant investment and policy initiatives, there is still a general perception that English proficiency is low. However, in this article we have argued that this is a result of relying on standardized international tests and Anglophone models of English which are not suitable given the multilingual use of ELF in Thailand. Thus, we believe that shifting to an alternative multilingual and lingua franca approach and ideology to English in policy and practice would have the added benefit of improving perceptions of English use and proficiency in Thailand as well as enabling the development of more locally relevant policies and educational approaches.

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