

THAI STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS' MANDARIN ACCENTS: A CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate and compare Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions using a mixed-methods research approach. A questionnaire, acceptably reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78, was used as the main research instrument; structured interviews were secondarily used to supplement the quantitative results. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage, means, and standard deviations. The overall findings collected from 317 students at a private school in Bangkok through stratified random sampling revealed that the students had very positive attitudes toward Mandarin accents of their native and Thai Chinese language teachers at the highest level; however, the primary school students were most familiar with their native and Thai Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents, which allowed comprehensibility, intelligibility, perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher to exist, and motivated them to pay more attention to the class than the middle and high school students. Speaking like their native Chinese language teachers' standard Mandarin accent more appealed to both primary and high school students. The primary school students were more cheerful to embrace the foreign Mandarin accent spoken by their Thai Chinese language teachers than the middle and high school students. There were two implications as follows:

1) accent familiarity played a vital role in shaping the students' positive attitudes, which concurrently influenced their motivation to learn Chinese. 2) younger learners could accept speaking Mandarin with a foreign accent more as long as it was intelligible, which was similar to English language learning ideology in Thailand.

Keywords: Attitude, Mandarin accent, Chinese language teachers, Thai students

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Introduction

In Thailand, Chinese has been a popular foreign language to learn at school with the full support of the Chinese and Thai governments. In the Chinese classroom, Thai students learn the Chinese characters and culture, and the Chinese language they learn often refers to Mandarin (Fang. 2015). Despite the rise in popularity, research studies (e.g., Wang. 2017; Han. 2018; Yang. 2021) similarly reported that Thai students studying in middle and high schools could not communicate well in Mandarin due to the differences between Chinese and Thai languages and cultures, lack of opportunities to practice, and the models of Chinese proficiency tests. The insufficient opportunities for Chinese oral practices in the Thai social context, where Thai is the main language spoken at home and in the society, appear to be the great cause. Without motivation, they may unlikely seek opportunities to practice the language in their leisure time and pay attention to the Thai and Chinese cultural differences in communication, and vice versa. In some cases, Han (2018) particularly pointed out that Thai students' pronunciation may be interfered by their own English way of speaking, which may produce a certain level of strong Chinese accent, uneasy to be understood by others, and eventually they may lack confidence and motivation in learning.

Motivation is one of affective factors crucial for foreign and second language learning. Sufficient motivation allows language learners to maximize their learning potential and reach their goals. Like motivation, language attitude plays a vital role in learning achievement. Learners who have positive attitudes toward language learning are more likely to learn the target language and progress faster; conversely, learners with negative attitudes progress more slowly (Li. 2009). In the last decade, past studies into Thai students' Chinese learning have been more focused on their motivation (e.g., Wang. 2017; Yang. 2021) and attitudes towards learning Chinese (e.g., Han. 2018; Sasanabundith. 2021). Although language learners' positive attitudes toward English accents can stimulate their positive learning behaviors which can help them succeed in learning (Wei. 2019), no one has attempted to study Thai students' attitudes toward Mandarin accents in a Thai context. There are more studies into Thai students' attitudes toward English accents (e.g., Kalra, & Thanavisuth. 2019; Choomthong, & Manowong. 2020; Ambele, & Boonsuk. 2021; Thienthong, & Uthaikorn. 2023), and they tend to investigate one aspect only that is the effect or feelings about the target language, either like or prefer or dislike it. Examining three aspects can provide a more comprehensive understanding of attitudes than focusing on a single dimension, as it captures individuals' affective reactions, cognitive beliefs, and behavioral tendencies toward an object or situation (Rosenberg, & Hovland. 1960).

Based on Ambele and Boonsuk's (2021) research into Thai University students' attitudes towards their Thai English accent, there are contradictory beliefs in learning and using English in Thailand. Traditionally, British and American English varieties are more superior to other varieties because they are seen as standard English that may give Thais a privilege to get a good job, and some Thais may prefer to speak English like a native. However, with globalization, today it becomes more common to learn to speak English with their own accents and with intelligibility. With the global status, English has been most studied as a foreign language or as a second language, which is attached with a sense of power, prestige and privilege in Thai society as the majority of Thais are monolingual. The study of Chinese as a foreign language or as a third language in this country has also been on the rise over the last decade, yet it is unknown whether it is perceived as similar ideology to the English language or not. As a native Chinese language teacher at a Thai private school in Bangkok, the researcher was interested in investigating Thai students' attitudes towards their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions. In

this school, two teachers, a native and a Thai, are always scheduled to co-teach in the Chinese classroom. All the native Chinese teachers pass a 2A Mandarin level considered having a standard accent in Mandarin as they speak Chinese with correct pronunciation at a moderate speed which can be easily heard and understood. They are assigned to teach listening, speaking, reading and writing classes. All Thai Chinese language teachers have a foreign accent in Mandarin and are responsible for teaching grammar classes.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions.
2. To compare Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, this study asks two specific research questions.

1. What are the Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions?
2. What are the similarities and differences of Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions?

Literature Review

Attitude has always been a significant focus of language research, which is known as language attitude. It is the term defined in different ways, but one essential aspect of its definitions is to link attitudes directly to the prediction of behavior so that we can have a general grasp of behavior prediction, both in terms of its practical and theoretical significance. Psychologically speaking, Rosenberg, & Hovland (1960) introduce attitudes from three dimensions: affective, cognitive and behavioral. The first one refers to a subjective feeling individuals have about things they touch and it is used to describe a person's positive and negative feelings towards an attitude object. The second is an individual's belief in something based on his own knowledge, ideas, thoughts and learning. The last means an action that individuals take according to their own beliefs or feelings, which has been used to describe overt actions and responses to the attitude object.

Wei (2019) explains in her research that attitude will stimulate specific brain regions (motor cortex) to produce specific behaviors. For example, when one sees a cup of chocolate ice cream that looks delicious, his brain will prepare his body for soothing or consuming actions, so attitude is associated with specific purposes and behaviors. In the same way as language learners, having positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language can enhance their learning motivation and achievement because they are affective factors that influence one another. There is a significant positive relationship between attitudes and motivation, positive attitudes influence and determine motivation, and attitudes condition the foreign language learning process mainly through motivation (Gardner, & Lambert. 1959; He, & Mei. 1999). Negative attitudes, on the other hand, can demotivate their language learning and lead to unsuccessful learning. Hearing a beautiful sound of voice accent from the target language speaker may also stimulate language learners' positive learning behaviors in a manner that attracts or motivates them to learn (Wei. 2019).

Based on Ballard, & Winkes' (2017) study into the interplay of accent familiarity, comprehensibility (the degree of difficulty in understanding an utterance), intelligibility (the degree of understanding a speaker's utterance), perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher, familiarity positively influences the listener's understanding. For example, when the listener is familiar with the speaker's accent, he shows better understanding ability. It can imply that language learners will have a positive attitude towards the target language accent if they are familiar with the accent (accent familiarity), understand the speech (intelligibility), and have no difficulty to understand the speech (comprehensibility), have the ability to differentiate English accents (perceived native speaker status) and accepted the ESL teachers' accents (acceptability as a teacher). This implication represents the affective dimension of attitude.

When language learners have a positive attitude towards English accents, they will have a positive learning behavior (Wei. 2019), that is enthusiasm to pay more attention to the class, take notes actively, always do homework, and review their lesson independently (Li. 2009), seek opportunities to practice Mandarin listening and speaking skills, and be mindful about the cultural differences in communication (Wu. 2018). It can be implied that language learners' positive attitudes toward the target language accent can motivate them to learn the target language, and have enthusiasm to pay more attention to the class, take notes actively, always do homework, review their lesson independently, seek opportunities to practice Mandarin listening and speaking skills, and be mindful about the cultural differences in communication. This implication represents the behavioral dimension of attitude.

When language learners are influenced by the current social language ideology, they will associate accents with economic level, power and prestige (Fishman. 1971). For example, they perceive someone as educated and elegant based on his/her accent (Stewart et al., 1985). Having a standard accent can have some privileges in finding a job in the future (Li, & Zhu. 2010). It can be implied that language learners are influenced by the current social language ideology, that they will associate accents with power and prestige, that a standard accent will make them feel smart or educated, and that it gives them a privilege to get a good job in the future. This implication represents the cognitive dimension of attitude.

In order to illuminate the above-mentioned argument, the definition of attitudes towards Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents is adapted from Zhang, & Tananuraksakul's (2023) study. It means Thai primary, middle and high school students' opinions about the way their Chinese language teachers sound when teaching in Mandarin, which consists of affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions. The teachers' sound or their accent differs from how they pronounce words, which focus on their articulation. Affectively, it is their positive or negative feeling about the way Chinese language teachers sound when teaching in Mandarin, considered a core dimension of attitude. This affective dimension is based on Ballard, & Winkes' (2017) framework of interplay accent familiarity, comprehensibility, intelligibility, perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher. The first concept is connected with the rest. Behaviorally, it refers to the tendency they act toward the way Chinese language teachers sound when teaching in Mandarin. This behavioral dimension is based on the argument about the role of attitude on motivation that results in positive language learning behaviors (Li. 2009; Wu. 2018; Wei. 2019). Cognitively, it regards their belief, knowledge and thoughts about the way Chinese language teachers sound when teaching in Mandarin. This cognitive dimension is based on foreign language ideology in Thailand, which may or may not influence Thai students' ways of thinking about speaking in Mandarin (Ambele, & Boonsuk. 2021; Thienthong, & Uthaikorn. 2023). Language learners' feelings, behaviors and beliefs influence one another through the learning process and subsequently form their attitudes.

Research framework

The conceptual framework of this study as shown in Figure 1.

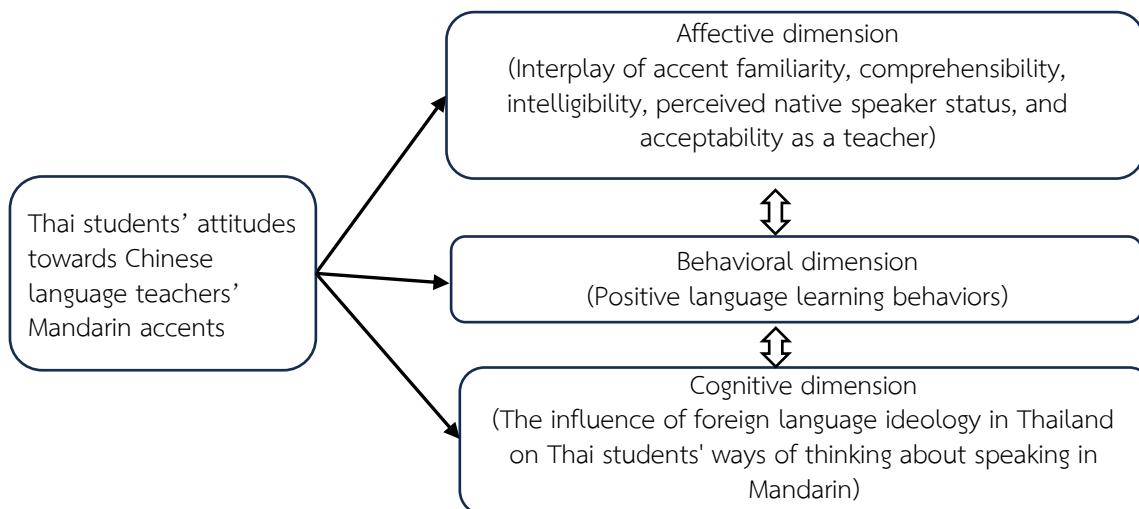


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods research approach. Quantitative research was primarily used for general comparisons of large amounts of data, while qualitative research was used to specifically understand and supplement the research problem (Schoonenboom. 2023). Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to design a study can significantly improve the quality of research findings (Galbraith, et al., 2017). In this study, a questionnaire was used to fulfill the two research objectives, and to supplement the questionnaire's limitations, additional information was collected through structured interviews.

Population and Sample

A total of 843 (N=843) target students enrolled in the 2023 academic year were the population, consisting of 407 primary school students (Grades 4-6), 364 middle school students (Grades 7-9) and 72 high school students (Grades 10-12) at the Thai private school where the researcher has taught Chinese to Grade 1 and 4 for six years. Those students had studied Chinese for more than one year, had already been exposed to their teachers' Mandarin accent and were able to recognize it, and faced oral Chinese challenges similar to those reported in previous studies, which made them an appropriate target group. While all the target students learn English as a compulsory subject, primary and middle school students learn Chinese as an elective course, so they study two Chinese lessons per week and each lesson lasts 50 minutes, 80 hours in one semester. High school students choose Chinese as their major subject, so they study Chinese for 6 hours a week, 2 hours per lesson and 120 hours per semester. Students of Grades 1, 2, and 3 were excluded in this study because they may be too young to recognize their teachers' Mandarin accent when teaching, which may affect the results of study. Based on Yamanes' (1973) formula calculation, the appropriate sample size for the quantitative data collection was 272. Each grade of students was selected through stratified random sampling technique. Through convenience sampling technique, sample for the structured interviews depended on the participants who responded to the questionnaire and were willing to join the interview.

Research Instruments, validity and reliability

This study used two research instruments: a questionnaire and questions for structured interviews. The questionnaire as the primary research tool aimed to collect quantitative data and was divided into two parts. The first part asked about the participants' level of study, age, the length of learning Mandarin, the length of study at the target school, recognition of the accents of their Chinese language teachers, learning Mandarin, frequent use of Mandarin, frequent exposure to Mandarin, and their plan to study abroad in any Mandarin-speaking country. The second part used the 5-Likert scale to measure the participants' attitudes towards Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents, which consisted of 30 items. Items 1-10 (affective), 11-22 (behavioral) and 23-30 (cognitive) were constructed based on the conceptual framework.

The questions for structured interviews were constructed based on the quantitative data analysis, which needed additional information about the cognitive dimension. The questions were made in a form as follows:

1. Is it important for you to sound like a native Chinese speaker? Why? Why not?
2. Do you normally understand your Chinese teachers teaching in Mandarin in the classroom? Why? Why not?
3. What do you think about the way your Chinese language teachers sound when teaching in Mandarin?
4. Why do you think about them/him/ her that way?
5. Other opinions related to the above questions.

The questionnaire and structured interview questions were firstly validated by three experts using the item-objective congruence (IOC) method. The index of IOC evaluation results from -1 to +1, The overall score of IOC was 0.65, which was acceptable for data collection (Jusoh et al., 2018). The unacceptable items were deleted and the others were revised according to the experts' suggestions.

Then 30 students of similar characteristics to the target students at a different private school were invited to participate in a pilot study to calculate the questionnaire items' reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The value of the Cronbach's alpha was 0.78, higher than 0.70, which was acceptable (Arafat et al., 2016).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was firstly done by distributing 350 copies of the questionnaire to the target group and 317 (n=317) returned the questionnaire after a few days. They were 132 (n=132) primary school students, 113 (n=113) middle school students and 72 (n=72) high school students. Secondly, the students who completed the survey were invited to join the structured interview. 19 students consisting of 3 fourth graders and 2 students per level, from fifth to twelfth grade, volunteered to participate in the structured interview. Since the researcher is not competent in Thai, all the student volunteers were asked to write down their responses in Thai on the form to avoid any inaccuracies due to translation problems. They return their responses to the questions in the following day.

Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software was used to analyze the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics included frequency, percentage, the mean and standard deviation. Frequency and percentage were used to analyze the participants' personal information data analysis, while the mean and standard deviation for their attitudes towards Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents were interpreted based on 5-rating scales shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Interval scale of the Descriptive Ratings

5 rating scale	Descriptive Rating
4.21 - 5.00	Strongly agree/Very positive attitude/Very important
3.41 - 4.20	Agree/positive attitude/Important
2.61 - 3.40	Not sure/Moderate positive attitude/Moderate important
1.81 - 2.61	Disagree/Negative attitude/Unimportant
1.00 - 1.80	Strongly disagree/Very negative attitude/Very unimportant

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Firstly, the 19 participants' written responses, originally in Thai, were translated into English with the assistance of two Thai English language teachers. The translations were then reviewed and verified by the researcher's thesis advisor to ensure accuracy. Then, the researcher organized and familiarized with the translated data so that they were easily coded and sorted into the three dimensions.

Research Results

The students' attitudes towards Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from three dimensions

From Table 2, the overall mean of the primary school students' affective dimension was at the highest level ($\bar{x}=4.40$) and all the items were at the highest levels, meaning they strongly agreed that they liked the way their native and Thai Chinese language teachers sounded when teaching in Mandarin because they were familiar with the way their native and Thai Chinese language teachers talked, could understand their teaching, had no difficulty to understand their teaching, recognize their teachers' Mandarin accents and their teachers' accents were acceptable.

The overall mean of the middle school students' affective dimension was also at the highest level ($\bar{x}=4.32$), which meant they strongly agreed that they liked the way their native and Thai Chinese language teachers sounded when teaching in Mandarin. Items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were the highest mean scores, and Items 1, 4 and 10 were high mean scores.

The overall mean of the high school students' affective dimension was also at the highest level ($\bar{x}=4.33$), meaning they strongly agreed that they liked the way their native and Thai Chinese language teachers sounded when teaching in Mandarin. Items 2-9 were the highest mean scores while Items 1 and 10 were high mean scores.

Table 2 Students' Affective Dimension of Attitude

Items	Primary school			Middle school			High school		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation
I like the way my native Chinese language teacher sound when teaching in Mandarin because ...									
1. I am familiar with the way he/she talks	4.33	1.01	Highest	4.18	1.12	High	4.08	1.06	High
2. I can understand his/her teaching	4.44	0.92	Highest	4.29	1.02	Highest	4.39	0.97	Highest

Table 2 Students' Affective Dimension of Attitude

Items	Primary school			Middle school			High school		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation
3. I have no difficulty to understand his/ her teaching	4.40	0.98	Highest	4.25	1.09	Highest	4.35	1.04	Highest
4. I can recognize his/her Mandarin accent	4.34	0.96	Highest	4.19	1.07	High	4.29	1.02	Highest
5. it is acceptable	4.44	0.93	Highest	4.29	1.03	Highest	4.39	0.98	Highest
I like the way my Thai Chinese language teacher sound when teaching in Mandarin because ...									
6. I am familiar with the way he/she talks	4.49	0.93	Highest	4.33	1.03	Highest	4.43	0.98	Highest
7. I can understand his/her teaching	4.46	0.91	Highest	4.31	1.01	Highest	4.41	0.96	Highest
8. I have no difficulty to understand his/her teaching	4.44	0.97	Highest	4.29	1.08	Highest	4.39	1.03	Highest
9. I can recognize his/her Mandarin accent	4.41	0.93	Highest	4.26	1.03	Highest	4.36	0.98	Highest
10. it is acceptable	4.22	0.99	Highest	4.07	1.10	High	4.17	1.05	High
Overall	4.40	0.95	Highest	4.32	1.00	Highest	4.33	1.01	Highest

From Table 3, the overall mean of the primary school students' behavioral dimension was at a high level ($\bar{x}=4.13$). Item 11 was the highest mean score while Items 12-22 were high mean scores, meaning they agreed that they liked the way their native and Thai Chinese language teachers sounded when teaching in Mandarin, so they were very enthusiastic to pay more attention to the class, take notes actively, always do homework independently, review their lesson independently, seek opportunities to practice their Mandarin listening and speaking skills, and be mindful about learning cultural differences in communication between Thai and Chinese.

The overall mean of the middle and high school students' behavioral dimension was also at a high level ($\bar{x}=3.68$, $\bar{x}=4.06$). All the Items were at high levels, meaning both middle and high school students agreed that they liked the way their native and Thai Chinese language teachers sounded when teaching in Mandarin, so they were enthusiastic to pay more attention to the class, take notes actively, always do homework independently, review their lesson independently, seek opportunities to practice their Mandarin listening and speaking skills, and be mindful about learning cultural differences in communication between Thai and Chinese. Surprisingly, Item 22 was the lowest mean score meaning their enthusiasm to be mindful about learning the cultural differences in communication between Thai and Chinese was not as high as the others.

Table 3 Students' Behavioral Dimension of Attitude

Items	Primary school			Middle school			High school		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation
I like the way my native Chinese language teacher sound when teaching in Mandarin, so I am enthusiastic to ...									
11. pay more attention to the class	4.29	0.92	Highest	4.14	0.92	High	4.04	0.87	High

Table 3 Students' Behavioral Dimension of Attitude

Items	Primary school			Middle school			High school		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tation
12. take notes actively	4.19	0.98	High	4.04	0.99	High	4.13	0.94	High
13. always do homework independently	4.14	0.93	High	4.00	0.93	High	4.09	0.88	High
14. review my lesson independently	4.19	0.91	High	4.04	0.91	High	4.13	0.86	High
15. seek opportunities to practice my Mandarin listening and speaking skills	4.12	0.94	High	3.98	0.95	High	4.07	0.90	High
I like the way my Thai Chinese language teacher sound when teaching in Mandarin, so I am enthusiastic to ...									
17. pay more attention to the class	4.19	0.96	High	4.04	0.97	High	4.13	0.92	High
18. take notes actively	4.19	0.93	High	4.04	0.93	High	4.13	0.88	High
19. always do homework independently	4.21	0.91	High	4.06	0.91	High	4.16	0.86	High
20. review my lesson independently	4.23	0.93	High	4.08	0.93	High	4.18	0.88	High
21. seek opportunities to practice my Mandarin listening and speaking skills	4.00	1.00	High	3.86	1.01	High	3.95	0.96	High
22. be mindful about learning cultural differences in communication between Thai and Chinese	3.69	1.09	High	3.56	1.11	High	3.64	1.05	High
Overall	4.13	0.95	High	3.68	0.96	High	4.06	0.91	High

From Table 4, the overall mean of the primary school students' cognitive dimension was at the highest level ($\bar{x}=4.22$). Items 23-26 were the highest mean scores, meaning they strongly agreed that it was very important for them to sound like their native Chinese language teachers because they wanted others to understand them when speaking in Mandarin, and it made them look smart or educated, gave them a privilege to look for a job in the future and a sense of power and prestige. The qualitative findings from a fourth, a fifth and a sixth grade students further supplemented these quantitative results that sounding like a native Chinese speaker was a "unique identity" and showed "ability", and others could understand them better. Also, Items 27 were the highest mean scores which meant they strongly agreed that it was very important for them to sound like their Thai Chinese language teachers because they particularly wanted others to understand them when speaking in Mandarin. The qualitative findings from a fourth grade and two sixth grade students wrote that "understanding each other was enough."

The overall mean of the middle school students' cognitive dimension was at a high level ($\bar{x}=3.99$), meaning they agreed it was important for them to sound like their native and Thai Chinese language teachers. Item 25 was the highest mean score while the rest were high mean scores. The qualitative findings from an eighth grader and two ninth graders shared that sounding like the native Chinese speaker was "professional" and allowed them to "communicate with others better." However, Item 29 and 30 were the lowest mean scores, meaning sounding like their Thai Chinese language teachers could give them a

privilege when looking for a job in the future and a sense of power and prestige were not as high as the others.

The overall mean of the high school students' cognitive dimension was at a high level ($\bar{x}=4.00$). Items 23-26 were the highest mean scores, meaning they agreed it was very important for them to sound like their native Chinese language teachers because they wanted others to understand them when speaking in Mandarin, it made them look smart or educated, gave them a privilege to look for a job in the future and a sense of power and prestige. However, Items 29 and 30 were the lowest mean scores, meaning sounding like their Thai Chinese language teachers could give them a privilege when looking for a job in the future and a sense of power and prestige were not as high as the others.

Table 4 Students' Cognitive Dimension of Attitude

Items	Primary school			Middle school			High school		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tion	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tion	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpre- tion
I think it is important for me to sound like my native Chinese language teacher because ...									
23. I want others to understand me when speaking in Mandarin	4.31	0.99	Highest	4.16	0.90	High	4.26	0.88	Highest
24. it makes me look smart or educated	4.29	0.95	Highest	4.14	0.86	High	4.24	0.84	Highest
25. it gives me a privilege to get a good job in the future	4.41	0.96	Highest	4.26	0.87	Highest	4.36	0.85	Highest
26. it gives me a sense of power and prestige	4.35	0.97	Highest	4.20	0.88	High	4.30	0.86	Highest
I think it is important for me to sound like my Thai Chinese language teacher, because ...									
27. I want others to understand me when speaking in Mandarin	4.24	0.93	Highest	4.09	0.83	High	4.01	0.81	High
28. it makes me look smart or educated	4.04	0.94	High	3.90	0.85	High	3.82	0.83	High
29. it gives me a privilege to get a good job in the future	4.07	1.10	High	3.65	0.88	High	3.58	0.86	High
30. it gives me a sense of power and prestige	4.04	0.94	High	3.50	0.96	High	3.43	0.94	High
Overall	4.22	0.97	Highest	3.99	0.88	High	4.00	0.86	High

Discussion

1. Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents.

The primary school students had very positive attitudes towards their native and Thai Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents due to the interplay of accent familiarity with recognition of their teachers' standard (92.42%) and foreign (98.48%) accents in Mandarin, comprehensibility, intelligibility, perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher (Ballard, & Winkes. 2017). Their positive attitudes toward their teachers' accents in Mandarin, in turn, highly motivated them to have positive behaviors in learning Chinese. They specifically paid more attention to the class and sought opportunities

to study Chinese after school (28.79%), use Mandarin often (15.91%) and join some activities outside the class that required them to use Mandarin (21.21%). Sounding like their native Chinese language teachers significantly remarked their linguistic identity, considered "unique" to them because it made them look smart or educated with a sense of privilege, power and prestige, similar to these two studies about the use of English in the United States (Gluszek, & Dovidio. 2010) and Japan (Tokumoto, & Shibata. 2011). While sounding like their Thai Chinese language teachers strongly highlighted their linguistic identity as "understanding each other was enough", implying that speaking Mandarin with their own accents and with intelligibility was acceptable for them, consistent with the research results among nonnative English speakers in the United States (Derwing, & Munro. 2009) and Thailand (Ambele, & Boonsuk. 2021; Thienthong, & Uthaikorn. 2023).

The middle school students had very positive attitudes towards their native Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents. Despite their less familiarity with their native Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents, they still had comprehensibility and intelligibility, and they accepted their native Chinese teachers' Mandarin accents. They also had very positive attitudes towards their Thai Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents due to the effect of accent familiarity on their comprehensibility, intelligibility, and perceived native speaker status (Ballard, & Winkes. 2017). Their positive attitudes toward their teachers' accents in Mandarin in turn highly motivated them to have positive behaviors in learning Chinese as 25.66% of them pointed out they joined some activities outside the class that required them to use Mandarin, studied Chinese after school (20.35%) and used Mandarin often (18.58%). Nonetheless, they were less aware of learning cultural differences because they and their Thai Chinese language teachers had the same cultural practices, traditions, and values that shaped their communication styles. This common understanding can lead to "invisibility" (Song. 2021). Sounding like their native Chinese language teachers gave them more privilege to get a good job in the future than sounding like their Thai Chinese language teachers, and were considered "professional". These findings implied that they preferred to speak Mandarin like a native, similar to Winke, & Gass's (2013) study in the United States with Spanish and Chinese learners.

The high school students had very positive attitudes towards their native Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents because 97.22% of the students recognized their teachers' standard accents in Mandarin, which positively influenced their comprehensibility, intelligibility, perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher. They also had very positive attitudes towards their Thai Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents due to the mutual influence of the Thai Mandarin accent familiarity (94.44%), comprehensibility, intelligibility, and perceived native speaker status (Ballard, & Winkes. 2017). Their positive attitudes toward their teachers' accents in Mandarin in turn highly motivated them to have positive behaviors in learning Chinese as 56.94% of them noted that they used Mandarin every day, studied Chinese after school (30.56%) and joined some activities outside the class that required them to use Mandarin (29.17%). However, their recognition of cultural differences was limited, as they and their Thai Chinese language teachers adhered to similar cultural practices, traditions, and values, which shaped their communication styles. This shared cultural framework made them less aware of cultural differences in learning (Song. 2021). Sounding like their native Chinese language teachers significantly remarked their linguistic identity because it made them look smarter or more educated with a sense of power, prestige and privilege than sounding like their Thai Chinese language teachers. These findings implied that they regarded the Mandarin accent of their native Chinese-speaking teachers as an ideal model, were more eager

to speak Mandarin like a native and believed that it would help them gain social recognition, consistent with the study of nonnative English speakers in the United States (Gluszek, & Dovidio. 2010).

2. The comparison of Thai primary, middle and high school students' attitudes toward their Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents from three dimensions.

The primary, middle and high school students had very positive attitudes toward Mandarin accents of their native and Thai Chinese language teachers. Only the primary school students were the most familiar with their native and Thai Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents, which allowed comprehensibility, intelligibility, perceived native speaker status, and acceptability as a teacher (Ballard, & Winkes. 2017) to exist, and motivated them to pay more attention to the class than the middle and high school students. Their motivation could be their parents, who culturally influenced their ways of thinking and behaving as part of collective culture (Bai, & Young. 2024). Speaking like their native Chinese language teacher's Mandarin accent more appealed to both primary and high school students because the former may want to be praised and recognized by their parents (Li. 2006), and the latter may be intrinsically motivated since 83.33% of them chose to study Chinese as a major subject by themselves. The primary school students were more cheerful to embrace the foreign accent spoken by their Thai Chinese language teachers than the middle and high school students, similar to Su's investigation (2019) among younger and older Chinese learners of English; younger learners were less disturbed by their native language and were more curious as well as attuned to non-native accents. These above analytical findings could imply that accent familiarity was important to shape those Thai students' positive attitudes toward their native and Thai Chinese language teachers' Mandarin accents, which concurrently influenced their motivation to learn Chinese. Younger learners were more accepted speaking Mandarin with a foreign accent as long as it was intelligible, which was similar to English language learning ideology in Thailand. This implication supports the argument that intelligibility and comprehensibility should be central in evaluating teacher effectiveness (Ballard, & Winkes. 2017).

Although this study was limited by the use of single-school sample, structured interviews and the research's incompetence in Thai, the findings have practical implications: teachers should consider students' accent familiarity, incorporate listening and speaking activities with both standard and non-native accents, and Thai Chinese language teachers could benefit from professional development in accent standardization and cross-cultural strategies. School administrators may support extracurricular Chinese activities, and at the policy level, Thai Chinese language education policies could emphasize teacher training and classroom strategies that promote intelligibility and accent awareness to enhance language learning outcomes.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for implementing the findings of the study

1.1 Native Chinese language teachers, who are primarily responsible for lesson preparation and instruction, should incorporate cross-cultural experiences into their teaching to enhance students' awareness of cultural differences.

1.2 Thai Chinese language teachers assisting in Chinese language classes should be offered professional development programs or training workshops aimed at improving Mandarin proficiency, teaching strategies, and intercultural understanding, thereby enabling them to better support native teachers and enhance their students' learning experiences.

1.3 Schools are encouraged to allocate additional financial resources to support Chinese extracurricular activities and the establishment of Chinese language clubs, providing students with more opportunities to practice and use the language outside the classroom. School administrators should consider regular evaluation of instructional practices to ensure high-quality teaching.

1.4 At the policy level, educational authorities could develop initiatives that promote cross-cultural language learning, provide funding for Chinese language programs, and establish guidelines for teacher training to improve overall standards of Mandarin instruction.

2. Suggestions for further research

2.1 The sample for this study was drawn from only one private school in Bangkok, so subsequent studies that include participants from different types of schools, different educational backgrounds or cultural settings are recommended.

2.2 Since the structured interview limited the additional information in this study, it is recommended that unstructured or semi-structured interviews be used to obtain more insightful data.

2.3 Future studies could also explore the perceptions of various stakeholders, including school administrators and policymakers, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Thai students' attitudes toward their teachers' Mandarin accents.

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