# Relationships Between Thai EFL Learners' Factors, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility Towards Varieties of English

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*Abstract*—This study aims to investigate intelligibility levels of Thai EFL learners, relationship between intelligibility and learners' variables, and relationship between intelligibility and comprehensibility scores toward varieties of English. Seventy-five students were recruited as a sample group through stratified random sampling technique. Seven research instruments were used in the study, including a quick placement test, a questionnaire, an intelligibility test, an accent familiarity judgment report, a comprehensibility test, an attitudinal test, and four speech samples produced by speakers of 4 different nationalities. Data were quantitatively analyzed by means of arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficients. The findings revealed that Thai EFL learners received high scores in their intelligibility tests for all speech samples. Thai speaker was rated as the most intelligible to the learners, while American speaker was rated as the least intelligible one. Correlations between intelligibility and other learners' variables were found only in accent familiarity, language proficiency, and attitude. A significant correlation was also found between intelligibility and comprehensibility scores towards varieties of English of Thai EFL learners.

*Index Terms*—intelligibility, comprehensibility, Thai EFL learners, varieties of English, learner's factor

## I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout its recent history, Thailand has welcomed millions of visitors from all corners of the globe, as its economy relies heavily on the tourism industry. Thus, Thais have a wide opportunity to interact with speakers from around the world. To achieve communicative goals, English is used as a lingua franca between Thais and visitors. However, a number of tourists coming to Thailand are not from territories where English is used as their native or official language. Instead, most tourists who speak languages other than English still use English to communicate with Thais. What contributes to the intelligibility and comprehensibility of the language used between the parties in communication is not limited to sounds, words, grammar, or pragmatic meaning. Suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation, and some others contribute to vernacular—also commonly called accent. Accent makes a significant contribution to the intelligibility and comprehensibility of the message sent from the speaker. For example, listeners are more likely to understand the message if they are familiar with the accent of the speaker. For students, if teachers want to prepare them to attain intelligibility and comprehensibility in the messages they sent, they need to familiarize themselves with such varieties of the language. The EFL classroom in Thailand has no exceptions. To prepare English language learners in Thailand for different varieties of English will arm learners to expect to use English in a wide scope of conditions, not only with native speakers. Some scholars in the field of EFL have also supported the importance of this notion. Previous studies, such as those of Bieswanger (2008) and Miura (2009) have thus emphasized promoting learners to prioritize intelligibility rather than stay with only native-like pronunciation.

In contrast to the demands of prioritizing intelligibility, published materials in the field of applied linguistics are influenced by the nativeness principle, which teachers and learners hold as models for language practice standards (Singhanuwananon, 2016). Forman (2005) stated that English instruction in Thailand is merely used to prepare Thai learners to communicate with native speakers. The learners are taught to identify and learn what American or British English sounds like. As a result, they have a little chance to be exposed to other varieties of English accents. Lack of accent familiarity and concern for intelligibility can cause difficulties in understanding non-native speakers in most authentic situations. The situation is similar in Germany. Bieswanger (2008) indicated that German learners experienced situations where they found interlocutors spoke English "differently" from what they have been taught in classes. The English message produced by non-native speakers of English was unintelligible and it was thus very difficult for them to comprehend. As a result, they could not deal with the situations and this always caused a communication breakdown. This can be evident that English teachers in Germany had failed to prepare learners to

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communicate with other non-native speakers in real-life interactions. Therefore, promoting mutual intelligibility and exploring other non-native varieties of a language is essential for teachers in the field, to prepare their students for a wider communicative setting.

Studies into the intelligibility and comprehensibility of Thai EFL learners towards varieties of English and their relationships with learners' individual variables have not been often undertaken. Therefore, this study attempts to show English teachers and Thai learners how varieties of English play a crucial role in this era of globalization. The research objectives of the study were as follows:

    (1) To investigate the levels of intelligibility of Thai undergraduate students.

    (2) To investigate how intelligibility score correlated with learners' individual variables: accent familiarity, language proficiency, attitude, overseas experience, and length of time learning English.

    (3) To examine the relationship between intelligibility and comprehensibility scores of Thai undergraduate students.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Definition of Intelligibility and Comprehensibility

Intelligibility is the ability to decode a speaker's utterances through a transcription task (Munro & Derwing, 1995; Smith, 1992). Another concept refers to understanding is comprehensibility, which is a higher level of understanding than intelligibility. Smith and Nelson (1985) defined comprehensibility as the understanding of the meaning of utterances. A word or an utterance is considered as comprehensible when the listener understands the meaning of the words. Meanwhile, Derwing and Munro (1997) explained comprehensibility as a listener's judgment of how easily utterances are understood.

### B. Correlations between Intelligibility and Learner's Individual Variables

*1. Accent Familiarity.* Several studies have shown in similar results that accent familiarity affects intelligibility. White, Treenate, Kiatgungwalgrai, Somnuk, and Chaloemchatvarakorn (2016); Winke and Gass (2013) examined the effect of raters' familiarity with test takers on their ratings and scores. Their findings revealed that accent familiarity affected listening comprehension. In addition, Natiladdanon and Thanavisuth (2014) found a similar result in Thai students that a Thai speaker was the most intelligible for Thai learners.

*2. Language Proficiency.* Several studies indicated a similar conclusion that language proficiency was a great predictor to intelligibility (Derwing & Munro, 1997; Matsuura, Chiba, & Fujieda, 1999; Nazari, 2012; Wilang & Teo, 2012). For example, Nazari (2012) found that language proficiency was correlated with intelligibility. Similar to a study of Matsuura (2007), which showed that language proficiency was found to have a positive correlation with dictation scores in American and Hong Kong English. However, the findings may be in contrast to that of Silveira and Silva (2018), who found no correlation between intelligibility and self-reports of proficiency.

*3. Attitude.* Jindapitak (2010) examined Thai students' attitudes towards six varieties of English accents. The findings showed that American received the highest rating on attitude while Indian received the lowest. Suntornsawet (2017) found that Thai accented English speakers were perceived as intelligible to native and non-native participants. The study also found a positive but weak correlation between intelligibility and attitudes. Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, and Wu (2006) examined learners' attitudes towards American, British, Chinese and Mexican English. Their findings revealed that learners revealed positive attitude towards native English accents (i.e., American and British).

*4. Overseas Experience* Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008) studied how learners' experiences influenced on their intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of L2 speech. Their results showed that length of exposure to L2 speech affected intelligibility and it was a factor to comprehensibility and accented ratings. Kim (2017) investigated the intelligibility of Thai and American English in L2 learners and the relationship between intelligibility and learners' length of residency in Thailand. The results indicated that participants understood American better than Thai English and Thai English intelligibility was correlated with length of residency in Thailand.

*5. Length of Time Learning English* Orikasa (2016) examined Japanese students' intelligibility towards varieties of English accents and the correlation between intelligibility and length of time learning English. The results showed that female speaker from China received the highest scores on intelligibility while an American female speaker was the least intelligible for Japanese students. The study also found that length of time learning English was correlated with intelligibility in male Chinese speakers.

### C. Correlations between Intelligibility and Comprehensibility

The correlation between intelligibility and comprehensibility was investigated in the study of Matsuura et al. (1999) and Derwing and Munro (1997). The results of both studies showed a partial agreement. Derwing and Munro (1997) indicated that intelligibility and comprehensibility were related but they were different. Similarly, Matsuura et al. (1999) found a correlation between intelligibility and comprehensibility only in some participants. Ludwig (2012) investigated the relationships between the accentedness, intelligibility and comprehensibility of English, Catalan, and German speakers rated by English, German, and Catalan speakers. Ludwig's study found a positive correlation between intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness.

Hardman (2010) investigated the intelligibility of graduate students towards Indian, Chinese, Korean and American peers and the effect of L1 background on intelligibility. The findings revealed that American talkers were the most intelligible for listeners while Korean listeners found Chinese talkers were difficult to understand. In addition, Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) examined the intelligibility of non-native listeners towards native and non-native English speakers from nine different countries. Their results demonstrated that a speaker from Sri Lanka was the most intelligible while Hong Kong Chinese was the least intelligible one.

Taking relevant frameworks and previous studies, along with the research gap for the current study, three research questions were addressed as follows:

    (1) What are the levels of intelligibility of Thai undergraduate students at Homeland University?

    (2) How does their intelligibility score correlate with learners' individual variables: accent familiarity, language proficiency, attitude, overseas experience, and length of time learning English?

    (3) How does intelligibility correlate with the comprehensibility scores of Thai undergraduate students at Homeland University?

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Population and Sample

The total population in this study was 220 English major students in their first to fourth-year of study at Homeland University, located in the greater Bangkok area. A stratified random sampling was used to recruit the participants. A total number of 75 students eventually participated in the study, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
STUDY SAMPLE

| Year of study | Gender | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | |
| 1st year | 9 | 17 | 26 |
| 2nd year | 2 | 16 | 18 |
| 3rd year | 2 | 15 | 17 |
| 4th year | 2 | 12 | 14 |
| **Total** | **15** | **60** | **75** |

### B. Instruments

The researchers employed 7 instruments in this study as follows:

#### 1. Quick Placement Test

The Quick Placement Test Version II (QPT; Oxford University Press, 2001) is a 60-item test. The test is divided into two parts: language proficiency assessment (40 items), and additional questions (20 items). The participants were asked to complete only the first part, which was considered adequate to measure their language proficiency. A criterion to classify groups of learners was adopted from the study of Suk-A-Nake (2003), which categorized the score of 1-17 as "low-level", 18-29 as "intermediate-level", and 30-39 as "high-level".

#### 2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created to obtain demographic information about age, gender, year of study, length of time learning English, duration of overseas experience, countries visited and purposes of visits.

#### 3. Intelligibility Test

The intelligibility test consisted of texts which were removed at regular intervals. It was used to measure the level of intelligibility towards four varieties of English speakers. Several blanks were provided for the participants to fill in while they were listening to the speech samples of each variety of English.

#### 4. Accent Familiarity Judgment Report

Accent familiarity judgment was designed to ask the participants to what extent they were familiar with the speakers' accents by using a five-point Likert scale.

#### 5. Comprehensibility Test

A standardized comprehensibility test consisted of a set of questions based on the speech samples. The results of the comprehensibility test were compared with intelligibility scores to establish the extent to which results were different across the two modes.

6. *Attitudinal Test*

An attitudinal test was employed as a subjective judgment designed for measuring learners' perceptions towards varieties of English using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was adapted from a study by Rungruangsuparat (2010).

7. *Speech Samples*

One male speaker from each variety, including American, British, Chinese, and Thai, was selected for speech samples. All speakers were required to have a high level of English proficiency. Each speaker was asked to read four different passages to be recorded by a digital voice recorder. Four short reading texts were adapted from two English learning websites: *www.headsupenglish.com,* and *www.ielts.mentor.com*. The four topics of reading passages were "Setting Goals", "First Impressions", "Anxiety", and "Slow Ageing". The four topics were considered as general with no specific terminology or difficult words. Finally, the quality of speakers' voices was controlled to ensure that it was loud and clear. Noises and any other disturbing sounds were removed.

*C. Instrumental Development*

To assess the validity of the instruments, three experts were asked to check whether the instruments were designed in accordance with the research questions and theoretical framework. This was also to assure the questionnaire's and tests' clarity and appropriateness. The experts' comments and suggestions were strictly followed in the revision process. To check the reliability of the tests, the questionnaire and the speech samples' representativeness, a pilot study was held with 30 English major students. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the question component were .742 for accent familiarity, .806 for self-reported comprehensibility, .801 for attitude, .883 for intelligibility, and .803 for standardized comprehensibility, respectively.

*D. Data Collection*

After getting IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval (2019/044.2602), a consent form was given to each participant before data collection procedure began. The participants were given a placement test and asked to complete demographic questions in the first part of the questionnaire. Then, they listened to four varieties of English accents and filled in missing words in the word recognition test for intelligibility. After completing the intelligibility test, the participants were asked to rate accent familiarity towards four speakers by using a five-point Likert scale and identify the speakers' origin. The recordings were played for the second time to answer a set of questions on a standardized comprehensibility test. The participants completed an attitudinal test in the final part based on their perceptions. The questionnaire and tests completion took approximately 40 minutes.

*E. Data Analysis*

In this study, the mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistics to show the levels of intelligibility of the participants towards four varieties of English in the intelligibility test. The numbers of correct and incorrect responses from the speaker's utterances were calculated to the percentage and frequency. Misspelling and homophones words were acceptable if they were recognizable. To identify correlations between intelligibility scores and learners' individual variables and correlations between intelligibility and comprehensibility scores, Pearson correlation coefficients were used in this study.

## IV. RESULTS

Overall, the participants reported that all records were highly intelligible. A group of fourth-year students gave the highest intelligibility scores to the Thai speaker, while second year students gave the lowest scores for intelligibility for the same speaker. For first-year students, the Thai speaker obtained the highest scores (84.62 %), followed by the American speaker (83.08 %), Chinese speaker (82.31 %), and British speaker (81.54 %). For intelligibility scores given by second-year students, the Chinese speaker received the highest scores (84.44 %), followed by the British speaker (81.11 %), American speaker (78.89 %), and Thai speaker (78.33 %). For third-year students, the Chinese speaker received (90.59 %), followed by the other three speakers: American, British, and Thai with the same scores (90.00 %). Moreover, for fourth-year students, the Thai speaker received (94.29 %), followed by the British speaker (88.57 %), American speaker (86.43 %), and Chinese speaker (85.00 %). Figure 1 shows the intelligibility scores the students gave for four individual speakers.
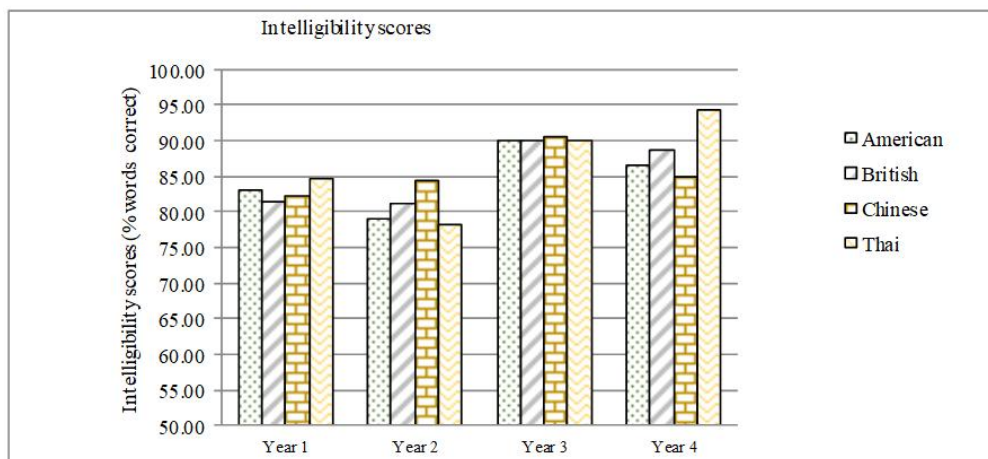
Figure 1. Intelligibility Scores

Table 2 presents the relationship between intelligibility scores and learners' variables. The findings indicated that intelligibility scores significantly correlate with learners' individual variables: accent familiarity, language proficiency, and attitude at the significant level of $ps < .01$ while the other two factors (overseas experience and length of time learning English) were not correlated with intelligibility. In addition, accent familiarity was found to have a significant correlation with attitude at the significance level of $p < .05$.

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INTELLIGIBILITY AND LEARNERS' INDIVIDUAL VARIABLES ($N = 75$)

|  | Accent familiarity | Language proficiency | Attitude | Overseas experience | Time learning English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intelligibility | .307** | .485** | .321** | .158 | .114 |
| Accent familiarity |  | .105 | .270* | -.033 | -.034 |
| Language proficiency |  |  | .201 | .021 | .076 |
| Attitude |  |  |  | -.118 | .059 |
| Overseas experience |  |  |  |  | -.065 |
| Time learning English |  |  |  |  |  |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 3
CORRELATION BETWEEN INTELLIGIBILITY AND COMPREHENSIBILITY SCORES ($N = 75$)

|  | Intelligibility | Comprehensibility |
|---|---|---|
| Intelligibility | - | .368** |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the correlation between the intelligibility and comprehensibility scores of the participants. The relationship among the two variables was represented as a Pearson $r$ value of .368. The results indicate that intelligibility scores significantly correlated with comprehensibility scores at a significant level of $p < .01$. The effect size was small (Cohen's $d = .13$).

## V. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that students in all years of study gave high intelligibility scores for the four speakers. Third-year students performed best on the intelligibility test, followed by fourth-, first- and second-year students. A possible explanation for this finding was that senior students tended to have extensive English knowledge as they mostly took major courses at the time of data collection. Moreover, the senior students had experienced travel abroad for leisure and work, as well as travel programs during semester breaks. Their English proficiency had been improved throughout overseas exposure and across the years of study. Junior students mostly studied general subjects in their freshmen year and started to take major courses in their following year. The transition from freshmen to the second year of study requires a lot of efforts and adjustments to the major-course learning system. Their English proficiency should improve

after some time. Therefore, first and second year students are likely to put more attention to improve their receptive skills for their production skills.

Among the speakers, the Thai speaker was the most intelligible, followed by the Chinese, British, and the American speakers, respectively. These results can be compared with that of White et al.'s (2016), who found that English major students were able to understand Thai accents better than others. These findings are also in line with Natiladdanon and Thanavisuth (2014), whose study showed that a Thai was the most intelligible speaker in their study. In addition, the higher levels of intelligibility towards a Thai accent in the current study might be because of a shared native language. A shared-L1 background between the speaker and the listeners is likely to affect the intelligibility for Thai EFL students' as the speaker and interlocutors possess shared linguistic knowledge (Jenkins, 2002; Smith & Bisazza, 1982) or *"interlanguage matched speech intelligibility benefit"* (Bent & Bradlow, 2003). Bent and Bradlow (2003) explained the term that the listeners are able to understand L2 speech better due to having a shared L1 background with the speaker. The foreign accent is affected by the assimilation of L1 phonological features which results in unique L2 speech articulation. The listener would have intimate familiarity with the phonological patterns of that same native language speaker. Moreover, studies by Bent and Bradlow (2003) and Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2002) supported the effect of shared L1 background, stating that non-native speakers were more understandable by their non-native counterparts who shared the same L1 than those who did not. It is considered that shared-L1 or familiarity with specific accents can be an aid for intelligibility.

The current study found a positive correlation between intelligibility and accent familiarity even though the relationship was rather weak. These findings are supported by Derwing and Munro (1997), Natiladdanon and Thanavisuth (2014); Winke and Gass (2013) and White et al. (2016), who found accent familiarity was positively correlated with intelligibility. On the other hand, Suntornsawet (2017) revealed a contrastive finding to the current study, in which no relationship was found between the two variables. Furthermore, in this study, American was unsurprisingly the most familiar accent, followed by Thai, British and Chinese, respectively. An explanation for rating American as the most familiar accent was that Thai learners are exposed to American TV series, films, and other channels. In addition to self-learning through media, the books and materials used in the classroom are dominated by standard American English as a model for language practice and use (Levis, 2005). This result was supported by Tan and Castelli (2013) who reported that East Asian participants exposed to American media. They, unsurprisingly, rated American as the most familiar and natural-sounding accent.

The current study also found that highly proficient students of English received the highest scores for intelligibility, followed by intermediate and low levels. This denoted that language proficiency was a great factor to increase intelligibility as they surpassed those of low levels in vocabulary size, phonological and grammatical information, and background knowledge (Bloomfield et al., 2010; Edwards, Zampini, & Cunningham, 2019). The findings of Wilang and Teo (2012) supported the idea that levels of English proficiency facilitate intelligibility, while Lim, Han, Choi, and Lee (2016) found that language proficiency was a significant factor for determining the speech intelligibility of Korean EFL learners. Similarly, Nazari (2012) found listeners with high language proficiency showed a positive performance in an intelligibility test and the study also revealed a positive correlation between language proficiency and intelligibility, which was in line the current study and a study by Orikasa (2016). Silveira and Silva (2018) also found a weak significant correlation between intelligibility and L2 proficiency.

Attitude was another factor for learners which was found to have a weak positive relationship with intelligibility. An explanation for the weak correlation could be that subjective rating scales of attitudes items can rate likeability based on participants' desires (Tan & Castelli, 2013). The results showed learners' preferences to speak American and British English ranked as the most popular. The native preference has been confirmed by studies by Jindapitak (2010), Gibb (1999), and Scales et al. (2006), who indicated that American or British English have gained the status of the most preferable models for learning and emulation. Jindapitak and Teo (2010) explained that American and British English were perceived positively due to social ideology and linguistics hegemony. Jenkins (2007) explained the stereotyped evaluation of native speakers as "standard native-speaker English language ideology in linguistics" can be considered as "historically deep-rooted". Moreover, Jindapitak (2010) indicated that Thai EFL learners were encouraged by language policy to attain native-like pronunciation for successful language learning. Therefore, there is no doubt why an American accent is the most preferable among Thai learners.

Overseas experience and length of time learning English were found to have no correlation with intelligibility in Thai EFL students. Silveira and Silva (2018) found no correlation between intelligibility and length of residence in Brazil. They also argued that being in a country for a limited time did not assure familiarity and intelligibility of the speakers of that country. The lack of correlation between the variables in the current study could be due to the numbers of learners had little or no experience of living abroad, visiting other countries, spending an extended duration visiting foreign countries, or limited exposure to varieties of English accents. Almost half of the participants had never been abroad. The country visited was likely to impact their relationship as well. Twenty-three participants had visited non-English speaking countries while only eighteen had visited English-speaking countries. In addition to visiting countries was the duration of the visit. The participants with overseas experience spent just a very short time in each country. They might have had limited opportunity to encounter with a variety of English speakers. These results were supported by those of previous studies; for example, Gass and Varonis (1984), Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008), and Kim (2017), who

reported that a limited amount of time in particular country did not facilitate listeners' understanding of English utterances. Because of these related factors, the participants might have little chance to expose to varieties of speakers. The current study was also in line with a study by Orikasa (2016), who indicated that participants' duration of overseas experience had no significant correlation with intelligibility.

Lastly, the length of time spent learning English may not be a powerful indicator to increase intelligibility. Rather, according to the results of this study, exposure to speakers of different accents mattered more. This finding was in line with the study of Orikasa (2016), who found no significant correlation between intelligibility and length of time learning English. These findings may reflect the language teaching and education policy in Thailand where grammar and native-like pronunciation are emphasized in language classrooms. That is, even though learners have been studying English for more than 10 years, this does not ensure that learners would be able to use English well and achieve mutual intelligibility with their interlocutors. It is not a matter of duration, but the quality of instruction that they received. Therefore, selecting authentic language materials and giving the students more opportunities to speak English in the classroom would help them to be an effective language user. Furthermore, it is not necessary to sound like a native speaker in order to be an effective language user.

Authentic language materials should serve learners' needs, learning objectives, meaningful communication (Rogers & Medley Jr, 1988), and should be related to learners' experiences. There are several sources for authentic materials such as TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, literature, and internet (Berardo, 2006). The teacher can search for articles, English podcasts (Akbari & Razavi, 2016), and many interesting TED talk videos from varieties of English speakers in various topics. From these sources, language learners should be able to well manage linguistic diversification (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013). Lopriore and Vettorel (2015) proposed that teachers should invite international students to the classroom and do activities together. Such activities would not only create opportunities for learners to improve communicative competence but also become familiar with those varieties of English used by the international students.

This section will discuss the relationship between the intelligibility and comprehensibility scores of Thai EFL students. The results of the current study showed a positive relationship between the two variables but at a weak significance level. This denotes that the two variables are likely to be linked to each other in speech production. That is, when communication takes place between a speaker and interlocutor, the interlocutor would use their ability to retrieve the acoustic-phonetic code by transcribing the utterances considered as intelligible (Fontan, Tardieu, Gaillard, Woisard, & Ruiz, 2015). The next would be the ability to integrate acoustic-phonetic information and all relevant signal-independent information such as linguistic knowledge or experiential knowledge (Hustad, Jones, & Dailey, 2003) to understand the speech. However, intelligibility and comprehensibility scores were anticipated to have a positive correlation, but the relationships between these two variables were controversial. As several studies found the variables were associated at a weak correlation while others were found to have a partial correlation. The results of the current study can be associated with the study of Ludwig (2012), who found a correlation between intelligibility and comprehensibility. The study also revealed that less intelligible utterances would affect less comprehensible utterances. This result was also parallel to a study by Derwing and Munro (1997) which found that perceived comprehensibility was linked with intelligibility scores. Fontan et al. (2015) also discovered a weak correlation between intelligibility scores and participants' comprehensibility scores.

## VI. Conclusion

Examining learners' individual variables influencing intelligibility benefits language teachers incorporating data into language classrooms to plan effective instruction. For example, presenting a variety of English accents in the classroom is good preparation for learners to become familiar with other non-native accents as much as they can. Apart from accent familiarity, language proficiency plays a crucial role in assisting learners in improving their intelligibility. English learners with a high proficiency showed a greater probability of understanding better as they surpassed those with lower levels of language knowledge. Attitude is also an important factor to influence intelligibility. If learners have a negative attitude towards non-native interlocutors because of accented English or any other factors, they may struggle to understand those speakers. On the other hand, if they feel good towards their interlocutors, they will overcome accented difficulties. Overseas experience can act as an opportunity to improve both input and output for language practice. Exposure to varieties of English speakers would be great opportunities for learners to practice their listening and communication skills. Duration of study is also a good indicator to measure whether it would help learners for successful communication in any actual circumstances.

Nonetheless, the current study was conducted to explore the intelligibility levels of Thai EFL students and correlations between intelligibility, learner's individual variables, and comprehensibility scores. The results showed that Thai EFL students had high intelligibility for four varieties of English: American, British, Chinese, and especially the Thai speaker who had shared their L1 with the participants, as proposed by Bent and Bradlow (2003). Therefore, Thai learners would be able to understand contents better if they are taught by Thai English teachers due to accent familiarity and shared native language background. Among learner's individual variables, accent familiarity, attitude, and English proficiency were found to have a significant correlation with intelligibility while overseas experience and length of time learning English showed no correlation. Moreover, this study can contribute to the call for a paradigm shift from the nativeness principle to the intelligibility principle for ELT in Thailand.

The study must acknowledge its limitations: the duration of tests and the questionnaire completion. The task completion took about 40 minutes; therefore, the participants may have felt tired and their tiredness may have affected their task completion and judgment. However, the recommendations of this study are also worth stating. That is, language teachers should include more varieties of English accents considering the areas where the most influential can be made, for example, business interactions or engagement with the tourism industry. To include participants from different educational backgrounds is recommended as there would benefit to comparing the degrees of intelligibility of the students, as well as their awareness of varieties of English accents.

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