Legitimizing Thai-accented English in TikTok comments: A Discourse-Pragmatic Study of Stance, Entitlement, and Audience Design

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Abstract
Thai-accented English is frequently evaluated in Thai TikTok comments. Using 3,039 public comments from 30 videos, this qualitative discourse-pragmatic study analyzes how evaluation and legitimacy are enacted through explicit Thai self-positioning and references to 'foreigners' as imagined audiences. Commenters legitimize Thai-accented English via normalization, encouragement, and 'good-enough' intelligibility, while foreigner-audience talk contests local accent policing. The study highlights pragmatic entitlement and audience design in context-collapsed sections.
Key words: TikTok, Tinglish, stance, entitlement, ideology

Introduction

At present, short-video platforms have become key venues for publicly displaying everyday language practices and subjecting them to lay evaluation. In comment sections, viewers can praise, tease, correct, or moralize speakers' accents and language choices, often using compact multimodal cues such as emoji. Because these evaluations appear in context-collapsed sections with potentially global audiences, they circulate as freely visible stances addressed simultaneously to multiple (often imagined) recipients (Aslan & Vasquez, 2018; Marwick & boyd, 2011).

On TikTok in particular, algorithmic recommendation and participatory remixing enable rapid circulation and mass visibility (Kaye et al., 2021; Zeng et al., 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). The present study examines these dynamics in Thai TikTok comment sections, where brief moments of Thai-accented English become relevant objects of talk. As videos travel across heterogeneous audiences, local ways of speaking may be judged through a form of "double exposure," in which evaluations orient to both locally salient norms and presumed expectations of international viewers. In the Thai TikTok comment data analyzed here, such moments can become flashpoints for negotiating not only what counts as acceptable English, but also who is entitled to evaluate it.

In parallel, research on intercultural communication (IC) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) has often examined language evaluation through intelligibility, communicative effectiveness, and attitudes toward language varieties (Seidlhofer, 2011; Jenkins, 2015). This work has strengthened the understanding of multilingual communication; however, it frequently relies on elicited data and tends to treat evaluation as a relatively stable disposition. Less attention, by comparison, has been given to how evaluative meanings are produced in attested online discourse, where affective resources and context collapse shape the pragmatic organization of evaluation (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Androutsopoulos, 2014). In comment sections, evaluation is therefore not merely a report of preferences. Rather, it can authorize, normalize, or contest particular ways of speaking. It is also commonly performed for an overhearing audience. In other words, commenters not only address the speaker in the video but also display stances to other commenters, thereby producing alignment, disagreement, and public negotiation of norms.

Here lies the central issue motivating this study: although accent evaluation is socially consequential in public digital sections, we still lack detailed accounts of how legitimacy is negotiated in naturally occurring comment sections, especially in

contexts like Thai TikTok where English, accent, and "Tinglish" become objects of public talk. Without analyzing how evaluations are packaged in real interactional environments (including affective cues and imagined audiences), it is difficult to explain why some comments function as encouragement and legitimacy while others function as policing or shaming, and how participants claim or contest rights to judge.

From a pragmatics perspective, evaluation can be understood as a discourse practice through which speakers position themselves and others in relation to norms and values (Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Du Bois, 2007). In online settings, affective resources such as emoji and laughter markers often accompany evaluative talk, helping to enact affiliation, mitigation, and moral stance (Zappavigna, 2012; Sampietro, 2019). In turn, these practices become especially noticeable in context-collapsed sections, where local linguistic behavior is assessed by audiences who may not share the same cultural or linguistic experiences. As a result, evaluation becomes closely tied to legitimacy, focusing on who is entitled to speak in a particular way and who is treated as entitled to judge that speaking. Accent-related evaluations, in particular, are rarely neutral as they can index broader ideologies about English, competence, and authenticity. At the same time, they operate as interpersonal moves that support, tease, correct, or shame.

Given these observations, this study examines how affective evaluations of English and accent are organized in Thai TikTok comment sections. Using a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach, it analyzes publicly available comments exported from videos that prompt discussion of Thai-accented English. To avoid inferring user identity from usernames or language choice, the analysis draws only on positioning that is explicitly evidenced in the comment text (e.g., self-identification). In addition, it treats explicit invocations of "foreigners" (ฝรั่ง/ต่างชาติ) as an audience category as a second analytic entry point for examining legitimacy, stance, and audience design. Details of the dataset, screening procedures, and the distribution of these resources are reported below in the Research Methodology and Analysis Procedure.

Conceptually, Thai self-positioning functions as pragmatic entitlement, warranting evaluation and legitimacy of Thai-accented English in terms of "our" norms and experiences. In contrast, foreigner-audience references frame evaluation around intercultural addressivity and imagined uptake; namely, how Thai-accented speech might be understood by foreigners, whether foreigners are presumed to care about accent difference, and how local expressions should be explained "for foreigners." Considered together, this dual orientation, insider entitlement and imagined outsider uptake, offers a useful window into how language legitimacy is negotiated in digital public discourse. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do TikTok commenters use affective language to evaluate English and accent in TikTok comment sections?
2. How does explicit Thai self-positioning function in legitimizing Thai-accented English?
3. How do comments that reference foreigners (ฝรั่ง/ต่างชาติ) as an audience category contribute to the evaluation of Thai-accented English?
4. When explicit non-Thai self-positioning occurs, what evaluative orientation does it display in this dataset?

To frame the analysis, the next section outlines the analytic concepts used to examine affective evaluation and positioning in TikTok comment sections.

Literature Review

Evaluation and stance

Evaluation can be treated as a central pragmatic activity through which participants assess people, actions, and linguistic forms and position themselves in relation to social norms (Hunston & Thompson, 2000). Stance accounts emphasize that evaluation is publicly displayed and implicates positioning and alignment (Du Bois, 2007). In this perspective, evaluative talk is not simply descriptive because it makes normative orientations visible and does interpersonal work by approving what counts as acceptable, desirable, or legitimize.

Stance is particularly relevant to the present study because evaluations of accent and English use often hinge on implicit criteria about what is "good enough," what is treated as "normal," and whose judgments count as authoritative. In this sense, stance-taking can be examined as a way commenters enact legitimacy, with Thai-accented English framed as acceptable variation, as a deficit, or as a socially valued marker of identity. Although digitally mediated stances are often compact, they can still index durable normative orientations through recurring lexical choices (e.g., "cute," "don't mind," "accepted," "bully"), repeated formulations (e.g., "as long as we understand"), and invocations of moral categories (e.g., bullying, superiority, legitimacy) (Zappavigna, 2012).

This perspective also helps explain why brief evaluations in comment sections can be socially consequential. For example, an utterance such as "Tinglish is cute" does more than describe; it aligns with the speaker, endorses a practice, and legitimizes it. Conversely, correction-focused comments can activate a standardizing orientation by construing pronunciation as a matter of correctness or effort, thereby positioning the speaker as accountable to particular norms. Stance analysis therefore allows evaluation to be treated as action: commenters advance claims about what counts as acceptable English and frame these claims in moral terms (e.g., policing as "bullying"), practical terms (e.g., sufficiency for communication), or aesthetic terms (e.g., "cute," "flirty," "funny") (Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Du Bois, 2007). Building on this view of evaluation as a stance, the following subsection focuses on affective resources relevant to digital discourse.

Affect and Emoji as Pragmatic Resources

In pragmatic terms, affect is observable through publicly displayed cues such as evaluative adjectives, intensifiers, laughter markers, and emoji. In digital discourse, emoji can increase affiliative alignment, signal playfulness, and mitigate interpersonal threat (Zappavigna, 2012; Sampietro, 2019). In this study, emoji are treated as affective resources that shape how evaluative stances are delivered and socially managed, rather than as a standalone object of analysis.

This focus matters because accent-related evaluation can be face-threatening, particularly when it takes the form of correction or critique. Emoji can reduce interpersonal risk while maintaining stance (e.g., criticism softened with laughter markers), or strengthen solidarity when legitimacy is being performed (e.g., hearts accompanying encouragement). Relatedly, emoji can shift the footing, or a comment that might otherwise be read as criticism may be reframed as teasing, while a statement of tolerance may be deepened into an endorsement. Emoji may also support "shareability" by packaging moral stances, such as condemning bullying, in humorous or affiliative formats that travel easily in fast-moving comment environments.

In the analysis that follows, emoji are interpreted functionally. They are examined as cues that display alignment, mitigate interpersonal threat, and index stance intensity. Where warranted by the data, they are also treated as resources that make evaluations socially acceptable and render legitimacy claims more palatable in public comment sections.

Language Ideology, Legitimacy, and English Evaluation

Language ideologies shape how linguistic forms are evaluated and how speakers are judged (Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy & Milroy, 2012). In English-related contexts, native-speaker norms often function as implicit benchmarks for correctness and authenticity. At the same time, everyday discourse can legitimize non-native English by foregrounding communicative sufficiency and local authenticity (Piller, 2016). For this study, the analytic interest is not whether Thai-accented English is intelligible, but how legitimacy is constructed or challenged through evaluative discourse in a context-collapsed environment.

When commenters frame Thai-accented English as "cute," "normal," or "good enough," these evaluations enact a stance that shifts the evaluative criterion from native-likeness to social acceptability and communicative adequacy. Conversely, when evaluations invoke "proper" speech, "real" English, or "natural" sound, they may reproduce normative ideologies even in informal comment sections. Importantly, ideological work is not limited to explicit correction. It can operate through everyday moral frames, such as "bullying," "superiority," and "not minding," which position evaluative practices themselves as legitimize or illegitimize.

The concept of legitimacy is useful here because many comments do not argue about phonetics; they argue about whether accent difference should be judged at all, and who is responsible for such judgment. In that sense, ideologies about English intersect with ideologies about interpersonal conduct (e.g., whether criticizing an accent is acceptable), making moral language central to evaluation.

Discursive Positioning and Audience Design in Context-Collapsed Comment Sections

In context-collapsed online environments, demographic identity is often ambiguous. Discursive positioning offers an empirically grounded alternative by examining how commenters position themselves and others through their writing (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Explicit self-positioning (e.g., “I am Thai,” “(im Thai),” เราคือคนไทย) provides strong evidential grounding without inferring identity from usernames.

In addition, references to "foreigners" (ฝรั่ง) as an audience category can reveal how evaluations are oriented to imagined recipients and how legitimacy is negotiated in relation to intercultural uptake. This aligns with audience design perspectives that treat discourse as shaped by who speakers orient to as their audience (Bell, 1984). In the present context, "foreigners" can be invoked as an imagined audience whose understanding and reactions shape how Thai-accented English is evaluated. Such references are analytically distinct from explicit non-Thai self-positioning: they foreground intercultural addressivity and uptake, even when outsiders do not explicitly self-identify in the comment stream.

A key implication of this distinction is that intercultural orientation in comment sections may be produced without a stable presence of explicitly self-identified outsiders. "Foreigners" can function as a normative reference point or a generalized figure whose presumed tolerance, comprehension, or judgment becomes relevant to how accent difference is evaluated. When commenters state that foreigners do not care about accents or ask how to explain a Thai expression to foreigners, they derive legitimacy from anticipated uptake rather than direct interaction. In these moments, evaluation becomes both interpersonal and pedagogical. Simply put, the comment not only assesses, but may also translate, explain, or package linguistic material for an imagined intercultural audience (Litt & Hargittai, 2016).

This perspective also helps explain why metapragmatic talk is common in such environments. When commenters ask what "ka" is or what "Tinglish" means, they treat local linguistic forms as objects of explanation and potential uptake. As a result,

evaluation becomes tied to learnability and usability, since a practice may be legitimized not only for being locally acceptable but also for being made intelligible and portable across audiences. In this way, positioning and audience design provide a framework for interpreting how Thai-accented English is not simply judged, but discursively managed as a socially meaningful practice under conditions of visibility and mixed audiences (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Litt & Hargittai, 2016)

Pragmatic Entitlement and Category-Based Warrants

In public comment sections, entitlement to evaluate is not automatic; rather, it is displayed and negotiated through discourse. Research on epistemics and social action shows that participants can claim, attribute, or contest differential rights to know, assess, and deliver judgments (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2012). In TikTok comment sections, such entitlement is often category-based. For example, a commenter may explicitly claim insider status by self-identifying as Thai to warrant evaluations of what counts as normal, acceptable, or "our" accent.

In this study, pragmatic entitlement refers to these discourse-visible claims to rights or authority to evaluate Thai-accented English in a context-collapsed setting. The term is used analytically to capture displayed category-based warranting and does not presuppose that such claims are accepted or sequentially approved by others in the thread. This is especially important here because reply-threading is not reliably preserved in the exported dataset. Entitlement is therefore treated not as a stable trait of a commenter, but as an interactionally achieved resource that can be mobilized for supportive legitimacy, teasing, correction, or moral critique.

Research Methodology

Data and Sampling

This study sampled 30 public TikTok videos because they prompted discussion of English use, accent, Thai-accented speech, or "Tinglish." Sampling was purposive: the aim was to compile a corpus of comment sections in which English and accent became explicit objects of evaluation, rather than to estimate population-level frequencies of attitudes on the platform.

Videos were identified via TikTok's in-app search using English and Thai queries related to English, accent, and Thai–English mixing (e.g., "Thai accent," "Thai-accented English," "Tinglish," ภาษาอังกฤษ, สำเนียง, สำเนียงอังกฤษ, คนไทยพูดอังกฤษ, ติดสำเนียง). Candidate videos were included if they (1) featured English use or Thai-accented English as a salient element and/or elicited comment-level talk about English or accent, (2) had a publicly visible comment section at the time of collection, and (3) showed multilingual participation in the exported comment set. Multilingual participation was operationalized as the presence of Thai and English (and/or Thai–English mixed) comments within the exported comment set for a given video. The final set of 30 videos was selected to maximize topical relevance while avoiding inferences about creators' demographic identities.

Although videos are anonymized, the sample included several prompt formats that tended to elicit explicit English/accent talk in the comments. Many clips featured short, performative or humorous demonstrations of Thai-accented English/"Tinglish," often prompting quick evaluations of "accuracy," "cuteness," and normativity. Other clips were explanation-oriented (e.g., demonstrating Thai particles or phrases in English), eliciting questions about meaning and how to explain forms "for foreigners." A third set involved everyday interactional or narrative contexts in which Thai speakers used English with mixed audiences, prompting evaluations focused on intelligibility, effort, and communicative sufficiency. This typology is offered as a descriptive orientation rather than a systematic content analysis, and it does not rely on inferring creators' demographic identities.

Comment Export and Preprocessing

Comments were exported in October 2025 using a third-party tool (ExportComments.com), producing one spreadsheet per video. Export was successful for all 30 videos. Across spreadsheets, 3,051 comment rows were retrieved; after removing rows with empty comment text (n = 12), the analytic dataset comprised 3,039 non-empty comments posted between 20 August 2020 and 20 October 2025 (UTC). Duplicate detection relied on exporter-generated comment identifiers, dates, and comment text; no duplicates were identified. Exported comment volume per video ranged from 7 to 149 (median = 120.5). The dataset includes English, Thai, and Thai–English mixed comments.

Export files also contained metadata fields such as commenter display name, profile ID, and a like count for each comment. These fields were treated as ancillary: they were used only for internal quality checks (e.g., identifying blank rows and potential duplicates) and were not interpreted as interactional uptake measures. Like counts can reflect platform-specific visibility and are not directly comparable across videos given unknown selection and ranking mechanisms.

Completeness Checks

Export completeness is a further consideration. Twenty-one of the 30 spreadsheets included a tool-generated banner indicating that TikTok displayed higher total comment counts than the number of rows available in the export (e.g., "export all N comments"), suggesting that some exports represent subsets of full comment populations. In these cases, tool-reported total comment counts ranged from 122 to 36,471 (median = 515). The proportion of exported comments relative to the tool-reported totals ranged from 0.4% to 82.2% (median = 26.9%). In addition, nine spreadsheets included a notice that some comments may not appear in the export due to privacy settings. The dataset is therefore treated as a purposively assembled corpus of exported comments suitable for qualitative discourse-pragmatic analysis, rather than as a census of all comments on each video.

Across spreadsheets, comments were ordered chronologically (oldest to newest) and exported counts per video clustered near an upper bound of approximately 150 (range 7–149), suggesting a tool-level cap on retrievable comments at the time of export. Because the exporter does not specify whether retrieved comments correspond to the most recent, most liked, or another algorithmic selection, the dataset is treated as an exported slice of each comment space.

Given this apparent upper bound on exported comments per video, the present study samples 30 videos to balance breadth (cross-video recurrence of evaluative logics) with manageability for close qualitative analysis. Table 1 summarizes the dataset.

Table 1. Overview of the dataset

Component	Description
Platform	TikTok
Videos sampled (final)	30
Videos included (export successful)	30
Raw exported comment rows	3,051
Blank comment-text rows removed	12
Comments analyzed (non-empty)	3,039
Comment date range (UTC)	20 Aug 2020–20 Oct 2025
Comments per video (exported)	7–149 (median = 120.5)
Languages observed	English; Thai; Thai–English (mixed)

English/accent keyword hits (screening subset)	365 (12.01% of corpus)
Explicit Thai self-positioning	8 (0.26% of corpus)
Foreigner-audience references	64 (2.11% of corpus)
Explicit non-Thai self-positioning	2 (0.07% of corpus)
Export completeness indicators	"Export-all" banner in 21/30 files; privacy notice in 9/30 files

Analysis Procedure

Because the export format does not reliably preserve reply threading across files, the analysis does not assume turn-by-turn adjacency or a sequential reply structure. Accordingly, the unit of analysis is the individual comment, treated as an evaluative act within a shared comment space. Extracts are presented as short clusters of co-present comments drawn from the same video's comment section. This presentation preserves local context (e.g., the co-presence of legitimacy, humor, and audience-oriented talk) while avoiding claims about sequential organization.

To locate high-evidence entry points for examining accent-related evaluation, the dataset was screened for three explicitly indexed positioning resources. In addition, a keyword-based subset was compiled to contextualize evaluative patterns beyond these anchor cases.

First, explicit Thai self-positioning was identified through first-person identity claims such as "I am Thai," "I'm Thai," "(im Thai)," and "as Thai people," as well as Thai equivalents such as เราคือคนไทย ("we are Thai") and ฉันเป็นคนไทย ("I am Thai"). Eight comments met this criterion (n = 8; 0.26% of 3,039). Because the category claim is explicit, these cases are treated as high evidence anchors for analyzing insider warranting and entitlement.

Second, explicit non-Thai self-positioning was identified through self-references such as "I'm not a Thai person …" and "as a foreigner in Thailand …". Two comments met this criterion (n = 2; 0.07%). Given their rarity, they are treated as limited observations rather than a basis for strong comparative claims.

Third, foreigner-audience references were identified through lexical references to foreigners invoked as an audience category, including "foreigner(s)," "for foreigners," ฝรั่ง, ต่างชาติ, คนต่างชาติ, ชาวต่างชาติ, and farang. Sixty-four comments met this criterion (n = 64; 2.11%), excluding explicit non-Thai self-positioning cases. For transparency, an inclusive lexical count of foreigner-related forms (n = 66) was also recorded; this broader count includes rare non-audience uses of the same terms and is therefore slightly larger than the manually verified subset used for close analysis (n = 64).

These resources are not mutually exclusive: a single comment may self-position, invoke foreigners, and perform metapragmatic evaluation simultaneously. Identification therefore proceeded in two steps; keyword search followed by manual verification, to ensure that each case met the explicitness criteria (e.g., Thai identity treated as self-claimed rather than attributed or generalized in the third person).

To contextualize evaluations of English and accent beyond explicitly indexed cases, a keyword screen identified 365 comments containing lexical references to English or accent-related talk (n = 365; 12.01% of the corpus). The screening used the following set: "English," "accent," สำเนียง, ภาษาอังกฤษ, and "Tinglish." English terms were searched case-insensitively, and accent was counted as a whole word; Thai forms were searched as written. These 365 comments occur across 28 of the 30 sampled videos, supporting cross-video contextualization of recurring evaluative orientations.

Building on these identification steps, extracts were selected based on (1) clarity of positioning, (2) relevance to English/accent evaluation, and (3) recurrence across multiple videos. Selection prioritized clusters that (1) contain explicit positioning or

foreigner-audience references, (2) articulate a clear evaluative criterion (e.g., normalization, sufficiency, "not minding," "bullying," accepted variation), and (3) show how affective resources (emoji/laughter) shape the pragmatic delivery of evaluation.

Analytic weight is distributed as follows: the explicitly indexed subsets (Thai self-positioning; foreigner-audience references) serve as high-evidence entry points for examining pragmatic entitlement and audience design, while broader claims about evaluative logics (e.g., pragmatic sufficiency, moral framing, normalization) are grounded in cross-video recurrence within the keyword-screened subset (n = 365) and supported by additional examples from the wider corpus where relevant. Frequency statements are restricted to the exported corpus and should be interpreted cautiously due to export incompleteness.

Thai Data Conventions

Extracts are reproduced verbatim, preserving original orthography (including non-standard spellings), punctuation, capitalization, and emoji. Thai excerpts are accompanied by an English translation and a word-by-word rendering. Glossing is intended to convey the core lexical meaning of clauses most relevant to the analytic point, rather than to provide a full morpheme-by-morpheme analysis. Abbreviations used in glossing include NEG (negation), PRT (particle), POL (politeness marker), COP (copula), and INTENS (intensifier).

Ethical Considerations

All comments analyzed were publicly available at the time of collection. Nevertheless, following internet research ethics guidance (Association of Internet Researchers, 2020), the study treats TikTok comments as human-subject data despite their public availability. Accordingly, usernames, profile IDs, and video URLs are not reported; videos are referenced only via internal codes, and comments are presented as anonymized excerpts (C1, C2, etc.). No attempt was made to infer demographic identity from usernames, profile images, or language choice. To reduce traceability, excerpts are kept short and do not include timestamps or links, and translations are provided by the author. Positioning is discussed only when it is explicitly indexed in the comment text. The full raw dataset is not publicly shared; instead, the manuscript reports the search terms, screening keyword set, and extract-selection principles to support transparency while protecting user privacy.

Results

This section reports how Thai-accented English is evaluated and legitimized in the exported TikTok comment corpus. The analysis is organized around two high-evidence entry points; explicit Thai self-positioning and foreigner-audience references, triangulated with recurrent patterns in the broader keyword-screened subset of English/accent talk. Across extracts, emoji and laughter markers are treated as affective resources that can intensify affiliation, stance strength, or interpersonal tone; however, emoji are not analyzed as a standalone semiotic system. For transparency, all extracts are labeled with anonymized video codes (V01–V30).

Thai Self-Positioning and Legitimacy Via Normalization

In the explicitly Thai self-positioned subset (n=8; 0.26% of the corpus), commenters legitimize Thai-accented English by normalizing accent difference and foregrounding communicative sufficiency. Affiliative emojis often strengthen a supportive stance.

Extract 1 (V12)

C1 (TH): มีความน่ารักในตัวเราเองดีค่ะ เพราะเราคือคนไทยค่ะ🥹🥹

(ENG): We have our own cuteness because we are Thai. 🥹🥹
(GLOSS): have cuteness in self good POL because we COP Thai POL

C2 (TH): จริงคะ...ทุกชาติมีสำเนียงของชาตินั้นๆ
(ENG): True… every nation has its own accent.
(GLOSS): true POL every nation have accent of that-PRT

C3 (EN): i went an interview. the interviewer was complaining about my accent as well. Then, i just said I am Thai which is can't b changed. 🥹🥹🥹

C1 links Thai self-positioning to a positive appraisal ("cuteness"), reframing accent difference as socially valued rather than deficient. C2 generalizes accent difference as universal, placing Thai-accented English within a broader frame of legitimize variation. C3 treats accent as non-changeable and anchors legitimacy in identity rather than correction. The co-occurrence of emoji intensifies affiliation and reduces interpersonal risk, shaping the evaluation as supportive rather than corrective.
A further point concerns how "Thai" functions as a stance warrant. The explicit invocation of Thai identity does not merely provide background information; it functions as an entitlement to speak about accent as "ours" and as something that does not require apology.

Thai Self-Positioning and Pragmatic Criteria of Sufficiency
A second recurring orientation treats English as a practical resource: legitimacy is grounded in being understood rather than in native-like accuracy.

Extract 2 (V12)
C4 (TH): ใช่ ฉันสามารถพูดภาษาไทยได้แบบนั้น เพราะใครจะรู้ว่าฉันเป็นคนไทย
(ENG): Yes, I can speak Thai like that, because who would know that I am Thai.
(GLOSS): yes I can speak Thai like that because who FUT know that I COP Thai

C5 (TH): ใช่...เวลาฝรั่งพูดไทยไม่ชัด คนไทยก็ไม่ถือสาแถมบอกน่ารักดี
(ENG): Yes… when foreigners speak Thai unclearly, Thai people don’t mind and even say it’s cute.
(GLOSS): yes … when foreigner speak Thai NEG clear Thai people also NEG mind plus say cute good

C6 (EN): omg this is so funny 😭🤣 (im Thai)

C4 frames Thai identity as a warrant for how speech may be interpreted and evaluated. C5 formulates a tolerance norm by describing acceptance of unclear speech and revaluing it as "cute," substituting legitimacy for correction. This matters because it shows how evaluation becomes moralized through everyday frames: "not minding" is a moral stance toward accent difference. C6 continues the affective framing through amusement rather than policing.
Across the dataset, pragmatic sufficiency often appears in compact formulations ("as long as we understand," "communicate and that's enough"), which enact a criterion shift from native-likeness to communicative purpose.

Foreigner-Audience References and Intercultural Addressivity

Beyond explicit self-positioning, comments often orient to foreigners as an audience category and treat foreign understanding as a relevant evaluative benchmark. These comments are not equivalent to non-Thai self-positioning; instead, they reveal how evaluation is organized around imagined intercultural uptake.

Extract 3 (V28)

C7 (TH):	เป๊ะสุดดด
(ENG):	Super accurate.
(GLOSS):	accurate INTENS
C8 (TH):	เหมือนสุด 😆
(ENG):	So similar 😆
(GLOSS):	similar INTENS
C9 (EN):	this is so funny to watch as Thai people ka! 😂😂 … how do you explain "Jung Loey or loey"… for foreigners to use?
C10 (EN):	Is jung loey like leng lui in Cantonese? It sounds similar

C7 and C8 evaluate the performance as "accurate/similar," positioning recognition of local linguistic detail. C9 frames stance from an insider collective perspective ("as Thai people") while addressing foreigners as the target audience, inviting practical intercultural explanations. The question does not merely seek a translation; it positions Thai discourse markers as reusable material and foreigners as potential adopters. This is a distinct evaluative logic: the object is not only whether something is "correct," but whether it can be made intelligible and usable across audiences.

C10 further extends this orientation through cross-linguistic comparison (Cantonese). The move from Thai-specific evaluation to comparison with another language suggests that comment sections can shift from local assessment to intercultural mapping. Here, "foreigners" are not simply outsiders; they are a horizon of uptake, and evaluation is oriented toward how local forms might travel across linguistic repertoires. Laughter emoji in C9 reinforce the playful tone, but they do not trivialize the pragmatic work: humor coexists with an orientation to explanation and audience design.

Across the dataset, foreigner-audience references recur in three forms: (1) requests for explanation ("how do you explain X for foreigners"), (2) claims about foreigner tolerance ("foreigners don't care about accent"), and (3) assumptions about foreigner comprehension ("foreigners can understand / will understand"). These references organize evaluation around intercultural addressivity even when outsiders are not explicitly self-identified in the thread. In this sense, foreigner-audience references offer clearer textual evidence of intercultural orientation than the rare instances of explicit outsider self-positioning.

Foreigners as "Evidence" Within Thai Legitimacy Narratives

A recurring pattern in foreigner-audience references is the use of "foreigners" as evidence that Thai-accented English is acceptable, thereby positioning legitimacy in relation to outsider tolerance rather than insider insecurity. In this orientation, the moral target of critique is often not the accent itself but local self-policing.

Extract 4 (V08)

C11 (TH): ฝรั่งจริงๆไม่มีใครบลูลี่เรื่องสำเนียงจ้าามีแต่คนไทยด้วยกันเองนี่แหละ🤣🤣🤣

(ENG): Foreigners don't really bully accents; it's Thai people who do it to each other. 🤣🤣🤣

(GLOSS): foreigner really NEG have who bully about accent PRT have.only Thai with each.other EMPH

C12 (TH): ฝรั่งเค้าไม่สนสำเนียงนะเอาจริงๆ แค่สื่อสารรู้เรื่องคือจบ

(ENG): Foreigners don't care about accent, honestly; if you can communicate and be understood, that's it.

(GLOSS): foreigner they NEG care accent PRT truly only communicate know.matter COP end

C13 (TH): ไม่แปลก ฝรั่งเขาก็พูดภาษาไทยไม่ชัดเหมือนกัน 🤣

(ENG): No surprise—foreigners also speak Thai unclearly. 🤣

(GLOSS): NEG strange foreigner they also speak Thai NEG clear same.also

C14 (TH): เมื่อก่อนพยายามฝึกสำเนียงหนักมาก ตอนนี้ไม่ละ ฝรั่งบอกน่ารักเฉย 😆

(ENG): I used to work hard on my accent; now I don't—foreigners just say it's cute. 😆

(GLOSS): before try practice accent very hard now NEG already foreigner say cute only

This cluster shows how "foreigners" can be mobilized as an external benchmark that reverses deficit framing. C11 frames accent critique as a moral problem located within the Thai community ("Thai people … to each other"), which shifts accountability away from outsiders and toward local evaluative conduct. C12 explicitly formulates pragmatic sufficiency ("communicate and be understood"), aligning legitimacy with communicative purpose. C13 strengthens the argument by introducing symmetry: if foreigners speak Thai unclearly, then Thai-accented English is ordinary variation rather than a deficiency. C14 adds an autobiographical stance shift from accent anxiety to acceptance, justified through outsider appraisal ("foreigners just say it's cute").

Importantly, moral language is central here. "Bullying" is not a neutral description; it positions certain evaluations as socially illegitimize. The target of evaluation shifts from language to evaluative practice itself: accent policing is deemed morally inappropriate, and tolerance is presented as the preferable stance. Emoji and laughter markers intensify this moral critique by making it shareable and affiliative, rather than confrontational. In short, legitimacy is enacted through a combination of pragmatic sufficiency, symmetry arguments, and moral framing of evaluation-as-conduct.

Accent Diversity Discourse and Legitimacy Via Comparison

Another orientation legitimizes Thai-accented English by invoking accent diversity more broadly (e.g., differences between English varieties) and by explicitly rejecting accent perfection as an evaluative criterion.

Extract 5 (V12)

C15 (TH): US กับ Uk สำเนียงยังต่างกันเลย ไม่แปลกเลยที่เราคนไทยจะมีเป็นสำเนียงของตัวเอง

(ENG): US and UK accents are different; it's not surprising that Thai people have our own accent.

(GLOSS): US with UK accent still different NEG strange that we Thai have accent of self

C16 (TH): เพราะทุกชาติมีสำเนียงเป็นของตัวเอง แค่สื่อสารเข้าใจรู้เรื่องก้พอละครับ

(ENG): Because every nation has its own accent; as long as we understand each other, that's enough.

(GLOSS): because every nation have accent of self only communicate understand know.matter also enough already POL

C17(EN): Don't worry with your accent … we speak English with different accents and it is accepted.

C18 (EN): It doesn't matter if you speak in your own accent. We use English so that we can communicate and not to please anyone.

C15 and C16 mobilize inter-varietal comparison (US vs UK) as an argument for legitimacy. Rather than presenting Thai-accented English as deviation from a single standard, the comment reframes English as inherently plural and accent-diverse. C16 then makes the evaluative criterion explicit: mutual understanding is sufficient. This is a clear ideological move: it replaces a native-likeness benchmark with a communicative benchmark and frames the latter as socially legitimize.

C17 and C18 reinforce this orientation by restating the legitimacy claim in global terms ("accepted," "doesn't matter," "communicate"). Notably, these English comments explicitly separate communicative purpose from social approval ("not to please anyone"), which frames accent policing as unnecessary and potentially socially harmful. Together, the Thai and English comments co-construct a legitimacy frame that is both locally grounded (Thai identity and local experience) and globally legible (accent diversity and communicative purpose). This is one of the clearest examples of legitimacy achieved through explicit argumentation rather than simple endorsement.

Metapragmatic Labeling of "Tinglish" as a Legitimizing Resource

In several comment sections, the label "Tinglish" itself functions as a resource for framing Thai-accented English as a recognizable and shareable practice. The label organizes evaluation around style, identity, and affiliative participation rather than deficiency.

Extract 6 (V28)

C19 (EN): Tinglish is cute

C20 (EN): i understand tinglish 😆

C21 (EN): i adoreeee tinglish 😂

C22 (EN): i'm not a thai person, but i mostly use tinglish when i speak english hahha 😭

C23 (EN): whats tinglish and whats ka?

The repeated use of the label "Tinglish" frames Thai-accented English as a named, socially circulating practice. This naming matters pragmatically because it allows commenters to treat the practice as a recognizable category, something that can be liked, learned, and used. Evaluation is overwhelmingly positive ("cute," "adore"), and emoji intensify enjoyment and affiliation, positioning "Tinglish" as socially desirable rather than deficient.

C22 is particularly informative because it includes explicit non-Thai self-positioning while claiming participation ("I mostly use tinglish"). Here, legitimacy is constructed not through entitlement to judge but through affiliative uptake: the commenter aligns with the practice and frames it as usable in their own English. In contrast to outsider policing, outsider participation becomes a resource for legitimacy. C23 shows that labeling can also trigger requests for explanation. Asking "what's ka?" frames Thai particles as part of what needs to be made intelligible to outsiders, connecting metapragmatic labeling to audience design. The cluster, therefore, illustrates a dynamic in which evaluation and learnability are intertwined: the label both legitimizes and invites explanation.

Norm-Oriented Correction and the Limits of Legitimacy

Although legitimacy is prominent, comment sections also include norm-oriented evaluations that invoke correctness in pronunciation. These moments show how policing can appear even within broadly supportive sections, and how supportive stances often coexist with correction.

Extract 7 (V12)

C24 (EN): it's not about the accent... it's about making effort to pronounce
correctly... for example, the end words- boX, not boK, EngliSH,
not EngliD.

C25 (EN): yes girl! having an accent doesn't mean anything 😇 you dont need perfect english. and your english is better than many people! 💔

C26 (EN): Its okay bcs many people in this world have many different accents

C24 reframes evaluation away from "accent" toward "effort" and "correct pronunciation," introducing a standardizing logic while attempting to avoid appearing discriminatory ("it's not about the accent"). The micro-corrections specify a normative standard and position the speaker as an authority who can diagnose and instruct. This is a common pragmatic strategy: correction is packaged as benevolent advice rather than judgment, but it still invokes correctness as an obligation.

C25 and C26, which are co-present in the same comment cluster, reassert an accent-tolerant orientation. C25 explicitly separates accent from deficiency ("having an accent doesn't mean anything"), endorses the speaker, and uses emoji to intensify supportive alignment. C26 generalizes accent diversity as a global fact, echoing the "accent diversity" argument seen elsewhere. The co-presence of these comments indicates that legitimacy is not uniform; rather, it is articulated alongside competing evaluative criteria within the same shared comment space. Affective resources (especially emoji) help maintain an affiliative stance even when correction is voiced.

Boundary-Case Observation: Rare Explicit Non-Thai Self-Positioning

Explicit non-Thai self-positioning occurs only twice in the dataset (n=2; 0.07%). Because of this very small number, the examples below are treated as boundary cases: they illustrate how a non-Thai footing can be made relevant in comment sections, but they are not used to advance strong comparative claims about "Thai" versus "foreigner" evaluations.

Extract 8 (V21)

C27 (EN):	what about lotus, yooo the struggle is real as a foreigner in Thailand
C28 (EN):	I know all these cause my cousins 555

Summary of findings

Across the explicitly Thai self-positioned comments (n=8; 0.26% of the corpus), Thai identity is mobilized to legitimize Thai-accented English through normalization, encouragement, and pragmatic sufficiency. Foreigner-audience references (n=64; 2.11%) occur more often than explicit non-Thai self-positioning (n=2; 0.07%) and show how evaluations are oriented to intercultural addressivity and imagined uptake. The label "Tinglish" functions as a metapragmatic resource that supports affiliative legitimacy while also inviting explanation. Norm-oriented correction appears occasionally and coexists with supportive stances, indicating competing evaluative criteria within the same comment space. Given the rarity of explicit non-Thai self-positioning, the analysis does not build a symmetrical insider–outsider comparison. Instead, it foregrounds Thai self-positioning and foreigner-audience references as the most well-attested explicitly indexed positioning resources in the exported dataset, contextualized through the wider keyword-screened set of English/accent talk.

Discussion

Evaluations of English and accent in these TikTok comment sections are organized around affective stance-taking and legitimacy negotiation (Du Bois, 2007; Hunston & Thompson, 2000). Rather than treating Thai-accented English primarily as a linguistic object to be measured against a single standard, many commenters orient to questions of acceptability, entitlement, and moral conduct: whether accent difference should be criticized, who is authorized to evaluate it, and what counts as a reasonable evaluative criterion in public interaction. The findings show that legitimacy-oriented evaluation is produced through recurring pathways, including explicit Thai self-positioning, pragmatic sufficiency formulations, and references to the foreign audience. These resources allow commenters to shift attention from native-likeness toward socially acceptable variation and communicative purpose.

A first pathway concerns explicit Thai self-positioning as an entitlement to ratify Thai-accented English as legitimize. In Extract 1, the self-positioning of Thai identity co-occurs with a positive aesthetic evaluation ("cuteness") and with a general claim that "every nation has its own accent." These moves do not merely express personal preference; they build a legitimacy frame in which accent difference is expected and socially valuable. The stance work is achieved through a combination of identity positioning ("we are Thai"), normalization ("every nation has its own accent"), and affective reinforcement through emoji. In stance-theoretic terms, evaluation and positioning are tightly linked here: being Thai is mobilized as a warrant for speaking about Thai-accented English as "ours," and the evaluative stance ("cute," "normal") aligns participants around acceptance rather than remediation.

A second pathway concerns pragmatic sufficiency formulations that explicitly redefine the evaluative criterion. In Extract 2, the orientation "not minding" and the revaluation of unclear speech as "cute" establish a normative contrast between

correction and tolerance. The argument is not that speech is error-free, but that communicative purpose and mutual understanding are sufficient grounds for legitimacy. This logic resonates with ELF work emphasizing intelligibility and communicative effectiveness (Seidlhofer, 2011), but the present data highlight an additional point: the criterion is framed not only as functional ("we understand") but also as moral ("don't mind," "it's cute"), thereby constructing tolerance as the socially preferred stance. In other words, pragmatic sufficiency becomes a legitimacy claim, and that claim is supported by an affective stance that encourages rather than corrects.

A third pathway involves references to a foreign audience, which organize evaluation around intercultural addressivity and imagined uptake. In Extract 3, the question "how do you explain … for foreigners to use?" positions "foreigners" as an imagined audience and frames local discourse markers as objects of explanation and potential adoption. This is a distinct evaluative logic: the focus shifts from whether a performance is "correct" to whether a form is portable, explainable, and usable across audiences. Audience design perspectives suggest that speakers shape discourse by orienting to an audience; here, an imagined foreign audience becomes the horizon against which evaluation is framed (Bell, 1984). The comment does not simply evaluate; it also performs pedagogical work by requesting explanation, thereby linking evaluation to learnability. This is important for the present study because it shows how interculturality can be produced discursively, even when explicit outsider self-positioning is rare: "foreigners" repeatedly appear as a category that organizes how language is discussed and evaluated.

Foreigner-audience references also function as "evidence" in legitimacy narratives, particularly when commenters claim that foreigners do not care about accent. Extract 4 illustrates how outsiders are invoked as a tolerance benchmark: "foreigners don't bully accents" and "foreigners don't care about accent" are used to reframe legitimacy in relation to outsider acceptance. This does not mean that outsiders are actually present in the thread as evaluators; rather, "foreigners" are mobilized as an authoritative reference point, supporting the claim that local policing is unnecessary. In ideological terms, this is a powerful move because it repositions the source of pressure: the problem is not that Thai-accented English is deficient, but that some evaluative practices, especially accent policing, are morally inappropriate. The term "bullying" functions as a moral category that evaluates evaluators, creating a second-order evaluative layer in which the act of judging becomes the object of judgment. This is consistent with language ideology research, which shows that evaluations of language are often simultaneously evaluations of people and conduct (Lippi-Green, 2012; Piller, 2016). Here, the moral target is not accent difference but interpersonal behavior, who criticizes whom, and whether such criticism is socially acceptable.

The accent-diversity argument in Extract 5 provides an additional mechanism for legitimacy, linking local evaluation to widely recognizable global comparisons. By invoking US and UK accents as different, commenters treat accent variation as intrinsic to English rather than as a deviation from a single model. This move supports a variationist ideology of English and provides a publicly shareable justification for Thai-accented English as expected variation. The evaluative criterion is again framed pragmatically ("as long as we understand"), reinforcing the sufficiency orientation. Notably, the co-present English comments ("accepted," "doesn't matter," "communicate") restate the legitimacy claim in global terms, making it legible across audiences. In this sense, legitimacy is co-constructed through multilingual resources: Thai comments provide local logic and identity anchoring, while English comments frame the stance as generalizable across English users. This interplay supports a legitimacy frame that is simultaneously locally grounded and globally intelligible.

The metapragmatic label "Tinglish" further clarifies how legitimacy can be achieved through naming. In Extract 6, repeated uses of "Tinglish" frame Thai-accented English as a recognizable category that can be liked, understood, and used. Naming

matters pragmatically because it provides a stable label around which affiliation can form ("cute," "adore"), and it facilitates participation by making the practice discussable. The cluster also shows how evaluation and learnability are intertwined: while many comments endorse "Tinglish," others ask "what's ka?" and "what's tinglish," which positions local features as objects of explanation. This aligns with the audience design orientation: discourse is shaped not only by evaluation but also by anticipated comprehension and uptake. The presence of explicit non-Thai self-positioning in Extract 6 ("I'm not a Thai person, but…") is especially informative because it frames outsider participation as affiliative rather than policing. Legitimacy here is constructed through uptake and alignment rather than through entitlement to judge. This suggests that outsider positioning is not always associated with normative policing; when outsiders align with the practice, they can become resources for legitimacy.

At the same time, the presence of correction-oriented discourse demonstrates that legitimacy is negotiated amid competing evaluative criteria. Extract 7 shows a standardizing orientation that reframes evaluation as "effort to pronounce correctly," providing micro-corrections while attempting to avoid discrimination ("it's not about the accent"). This is a common pragmatic strategy: correction is packaged as benevolent guidance, which mitigates face threat while preserving the authority to define correctness. In the same cluster, supportive comments such as "having an accent doesn't mean anything" and "many different accents" reassert legitimacy and shift the evaluative focus away from correction toward endorsement. Emoji intensify the supportive stance and help maintain an affiliative affective tone. Overall, the cluster illustrates how comment sections can juxtapose standardizing and variationist ideologies within a shared comment environment.

Methodologically, these findings also justify treating foreigner-audience references as a central analytic object. Even when explicit outsider self-positioning is rare (n=2; 0.07%), the comment sections can remain intercultural in orientation because "foreigners" are invoked as audiences, benchmarks, and imagined recipients (n=64; 2.11%). This supports an approach to intercultural digital discourse that does not require stable participant identities; instead, it examines how interculturality is produced through discourse practices such as audience invocation, explanation requests, and symmetry arguments. The distinction between explicit outsider self-positioning and foreigner-audience references is therefore crucial: the latter occur more often than the former in this dataset and shape how evaluation is framed, even though they still represent a small proportion of the full corpus.

Several contextual factors may shape evaluative orientations in comment sections. Evaluations may vary with video topic, creator audience, and the linguistic content of particular clips, and the absence of reliable reply threading constrains sequential analysis. In addition, third-party export tools may return subsets of full comment populations, and some comments may be missing due to privacy settings. The corpus should therefore be treated as an exported sample rather than a complete census of each thread. Sampling across multiple videos reduces reliance on single-thread effects, but it does not eliminate topic effects or platform-specific practices. The analysis therefore, treats these patterns as situated observations grounded in exported comment sets rather than as claims about TikTok discourse in general. Nonetheless, the recurrence of normalization, sufficiency, foreigner-audience invocation, and moral framing across multiple extracts indicates that these are not isolated rhetorical moves but stable resources for negotiating legitimacy in public comment environments.

Finally, the analysis complements ELF scholarship by showing that evaluations in everyday digital discourse can be organized around legitimacy and affective alignment in addition to intelligibility concerns (Seidlhofer, 2011; Jenkins, 2015). Attested comment data make visible how moralized judgments ("bullying"), audience

design (“for foreigners”), and affective resources (emoji) contribute to the pragmatic organization of evaluation. This extends an intelligibility-centered account by showing how speakers also negotiate the social conditions under which evaluation is acceptable and the interpersonal stance through which legitimacy is made visible.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the dataset is based on third-party exports and therefore represents a tool-mediated slice of each comment space rather than a complete record of all comments on a video. Export completeness varies across videos, and the export tool appears to impose an upper bound on retrievable comments per video. Moreover, the exporter does not specify whether retrieved comments are selected by recency, popularity, or other platform criteria. For these reasons, the analysis is not intended to estimate the prevalence or representativeness of attitudes on TikTok, and frequency statements are restricted to the exported corpus.

Second, the export format does not reliably preserve reply-threading across files. Consequently, the analysis treats comments as co-present evaluative acts rather than as turn-by-turn sequences. This limits claims about sequential ratification, escalation, or repair (e.g., whether a correction is contested, ignored, or endorsed in subsequent replies).

Third, explicitly indexed positioning is relatively rare. Explicit non-Thai self-positioning occurs only twice (n = 2), which constrains any systematic comparison of insider and outsider evaluation. Likewise, explicit Thai self-positioning (n = 8) provides high evidence anchor cases but remains a small subset of the larger corpus.

Finally, positioning is operationalized through explicitly evidenced cues in the text. While this approach increases analytic reliability and avoids identity inference, it may undercount implicit or indexical forms of positioning that do not take the form of overt self-identification. In addition, although the dataset spans multiple years and videos, the analysis does not model temporal change or variation by content type; instead, it prioritizes recurring evaluative logics across comment sections.

Implications and Recommendations

Despite these constraints, the study offers several implications for research on digital discourse, language ideology, and English evaluation. First, it shows that evaluations of accent in comment sections are organized not only around intelligibility but also around affect and moral stance. Legitimacy is frequently accomplished through normalization, encouragement, and “good-enough” communicative criteria, often intensified by affiliative emoji and other stance resources. This suggests that affective alignment is not peripheral to language evaluation online but can be central to how legitimacy is enacted and circulated.

Second, the findings highlight the analytic value of distinguishing explicit self-positioning from audience-category invocation. Foreigner-audience references function as a salient discursive resource for organizing intercultural addressivity even in the absence of self-identified outsiders. In this sense, “foreigners” function as an imagined horizon of uptake and an evidential benchmark within legitimacy narratives, enabling commenters to challenge local accent policing and reframe evaluative authority.

Third, the study contributes a principled methodological approach to positioning in context-collapsed settings: by relying on explicit self-positioning and explicit audience-category references, it provides a replicable way to examine legitimacy without inferring demographic identity from usernames, language choice, or other unreliable cues. This approach is applicable to other platforms and linguistic contexts where identity is ambiguous and evaluations are addressed to multiple audiences simultaneously.

Future work can extend these findings in several ways. One priority is to increase corpus coverage under tool-limited export conditions by sampling a larger number of videos and/or using alternative collection methods. Relatedly, data collection procedures that preserve reply-threading (where ethically and technically feasible) would enable closer analysis of sequential negotiation, including how correction, teasing, or legitimacy moves are ratified, resisted, or transformed across interactional turns.

A second direction is to examine variation across content types and participation formats. For instance, comparing comment sections triggered by humorous performance, explanation-oriented clips, and everyday interaction could clarify how evaluative criteria (e.g., "cute" vs. "correct") are patterned by prompt design and audience composition. A third direction is to explore temporal and event-based shifts, such as whether evaluative lexemes and moral framings change across time periods or around salient platform trends. Finally, comparative work across national contexts or across different "accented English" categories could test the portability of the analytic framework and identify which evaluative logics are locally specific versus broadly recurrent in platformed comment sections.

Conclusion

This study examined affective evaluations of English and accent in TikTok comment sections using a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach. Analysis of 3,039 comments from 30 exported videos shows that, within the explicitly Thai self-positioned subset (n = 8; 0.26% of the corpus), commenters legitimize Thai-accented English through normalization, encouragement, and pragmatic criteria of communicative sufficiency, often reinforced through affiliative affect. In addition, foreigner-audience references (n = 64; 2.11%) highlight intercultural addressivity, including orientations to how Thai-accented speech is understood, used, or evaluated by foreigners.

Importantly, the study contributes to linguistic research by (1) demonstrating how stance, entitlement, and legitimacy are enacted in context-collapsed comment sections rather than inferred from elicited attitudes, (2) showing that moral framing (e.g., bullying vs. tolerance) and affective resources (emoji/laughter) are central to how accent evaluation is organized online, and (3) offering a replicable approach to positioning analysis that relies on explicitly indexed self-identification and audience-category invocation rather than inferred user identity. These contributions extend work on language ideology and Global Englishes by making visible the pragmatic mechanisms through which 'accent legitimacy' is publicly negotiated in platformed discourse.

Because exported comments constitute a tool-mediated slice of each comment space, the analysis is not intended as a prevalence estimate of attitudes on TikTok but as an account of recurring pragmatic resources for evaluation and legitimacy. Explicit non-Thai self-positioning is rare in this dataset (n = 2; 0.07%) and is therefore treated as a limited observation rather than a foundation for strong comparative claims. By grounding positioning analysis in explicit self-positioning and foreigner-audience references rather than inferred identity, the study offers a principled approach to examining legitimacy and evaluation in context-collapsed online discourse. Future work could expand the number of sampled videos to increase coverage under export constraints and could incorporate data sources or collection methods that preserve reply threading, enabling closer analysis of sequential negotiation.

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Declaration on AI Use
The author prepared the manuscript in full. An AI-assisted writing tool (QuillBot) was used only to improve clarity and readability in selected passages (language editing). The author remains fully responsible for the content, interpretations, and the scientific integrity of the work.

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