What's in a Name?: An Analysis of English Nicknames of Thai People[*]

อะไรอยู่ในชื่อ?: การวิเคราะห์ชื่อเล่นภาษาอังกฤษของคนไทย

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Abstract

This research aims at studying the meaning of English nicknames used by Thais so as to see how it reflects Thais' thoughts and ways of life in contemporary Thai society. 665 nicknames were collected from various sources, namely two websites and a book providing lists of nicknames for the public to choose, a collection of posts about nicknames from an internet forum, and a nickname survey conducted by the researcher. The collected nicknames were analyzed based on the concept of global cultural flows proposed by such globalization theorists as Appadurai (1990; 1996), Hannerz (1991; 1992), Robertson (as cited in Scott, 1997 and Inglis and Thorpe, 2012), Tomlinson (1999) and Crane (2008). The findings of the research reveal that there is a relationship between the meaning of English nicknames and the construction and manifestation of Thai identities in the contemporary Thai context. More specifically, what Thais seek from English

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nicknames is not only "labels", but also images of people in modern society. In other words, Thais expect from the nicknames a sense of seizing the opportunity to identify themselves with a modern global society. However, in the naming process, there is hybridization and transformation of English nicknames as a way to negotiate and assert Thai identities in global cultural spaces. Hence, Thais are not mere receivers, but also act as active agents in the process of global cultural flows.

Keywords: nicknames; globalization; global cultural flows; Thai identities

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความหมายของชื่อเล่นภาษาอังกฤษ ของคนไทยเพื่อวิเคราะห์ว่าชื่อเล่นนั้นสะท้อนความคิดความเชื่อและวิถีชีวิตของคน ไทยในสังคมยุคปัจจุบันอย่างไร ชื่อเล่นจำนวน 665 ชื่อถูกรวบรวมจากแหล่งข้อมูล ต่างๆ ได้แก่ เว็บไซต์ หนังสือรวบรวมชื่อเล่น กระทู้เกี่ยวกับชื่อเล่นจากกระดาน สนทนาทางอินเตอร์เน็ต และการสำรวจชื่อเล่นโดยผู้วิจัย ชื่อเล่นเหล่านี้ถูก วิเคราะห์โดยใช้กรอบแนวคิดของนักทฤษฎีทางโลกาภิวัตน์ศึกษา ได้แก่ Appadurai (1990; 1996), Hannerz (1991; 1992), Robertson (อ้างใน Scott, 1997 และ Inglis and Thorpe, 2012), Tomlinson (1999) และ Crane (2008) ซึ่งมี แนวคิดเกี่ยวกับการเคลื่อนตัวทางวัฒนธรรมระดับโลก ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความหมายของชื่อเล่นภาษาอังกฤษมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับการสร้างและแสดง อัตลักษณ์ของคนไทยในปริบทของสังคมไทยยุคปัจจุบัน กล่าวคือ สิ่งที่คนไทย ต้องการจากชื่อเล่นภาษาอังกฤษไม่ใช่แค่ "ป้ายชื่อ" แต่เป็นภาพลักษณ์ของตัวเอง ในสังคมสมัยใหม่ หรือในอีกนัยหนึ่ง คนไทยคาดหวังว่าชื่อเล่นภาษาอังกฤษจะเปิด โอกาสให้ตัวเองเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของสังคมโลกอันทันสมัยได้ อย่างไรก็ตาม ใน กระบวนการตั้งชื่อนั้น คนไทยมีการผสมผสานและปรับเปลี่ยนชื่อเล่นภาษาอังกฤษ เพื่อต่อรองและแสดงอัตลักษณ์ของคนไทยในพื้นที่เชิงวัฒนธรรมระดับโลก ดังนั้น

คนไทยจึงไม่ใช่เป็นแค่ผู้รับ แต่เป็นผู้เล่นที่มีบทบาทอยู่ในกระบวนการเคลื่อนตัว
ทางวัฒนธรรมระดับโลกนั้น

คำสำคัญ: ชื่อเล่น; โลกาภิวัตน์; การเคลื่อนตัวทางวัฒนธรรมระดับโลก;
อัตลักษณ์ไทย

Introduction

Pizza, Airbus, Man-U, Title, Bomb, King, Garfield, Arm, Focus, Atom, Shampoo… these are all nicknames of real Thai people. They may sound puzzling, hilarious or even ridiculous to some, but for others such nicknames are cool, hip and in trend. As an anonymous online blogger (2012) puts it,

> I must say I don't see many Thai people, kids or adults, making much of these nicknames, I think are weird. Maybe I'm the weird one in Thai society. (That thought has crossed my mind quite a lot lately.)…But I have not lost hope (that I'm not the only weird one). I believe there are some Thai youths out there who think like me. For all we know there could be some ill-adjusted Thai teenagers called Xerox or Fax, Modem or Netscape, brooding in their rooms right now, wishing their parents had been less techno-savvy and more sensible about nicknames. Please have mercy on your beloved children before you give them a "trendy" nickname, Thai parents!

The fact that Thais address each other by their nicknames is a common practice in Thailand. This is especially true in an informal situation where the relationship between the speaker and the listener is

intimate. Ronnakiat (as cited in Thammachoto, 1997: 6-7) states that, for Thais, given names are emblems of formality and distance, while nicknames connote intimacy. As such, except in formal situations, Thais usually replace the first person pronoun with nicknames (Ronnakiat, as cited in Thammachoto, 1997: 6-7). Typically, nicknames begin at birth, being bestowed by parents or relatives along with given names. However, some people have more than one nickname: the first one being bestowed by their parents or relatives and the additional one(s) by their friends. Most nicknames are short, and can be of any language.

Thais' nicknames have changed over time. In the past, parents preferred nicknames in Thai, which were short and simple. Children were usually named after animals, fruits, colors and nature such as "Moo (pig)", "Kob (frog)", "Mod (ant)", "Nok (bird)", "Pla (fish)", "Poo (crab)", "Kluay (banana)", "Som (orange)", "Daeng (red)", "Khiew (green)", "Khao (white)", "Nam (water)" and "Fon (rain)" (Rompohthanthong, 2007: 2). Some people even gave their children ugly names such as "Ma (dog)", "Tia (shorty)" and "Men (smelly)", which were believed to protect them from the devil (Kiengsiri, 1994). Nowadays, nicknames are becoming more complex. For instance, the increase of syllables and the addition of foreign flavor in nicknames seem to be more common. A survey by the Ministry of Culture (Government Public Relations Department, 2012) reveals that, out of 1,014 students in a northern province in Thailand, 417 students have Thai nicknames, while 597 students have foreign nicknames. Among these foreign nicknames, the most popular ones are in English. They are "Fluke", "Boss", "Ice", "Dream", "Cake", "Knot", "Nut", "Beam" and "Film". Another survey conducted by the Ministry of Culture (Thai Nicknames, 2012) reports the same trend. The survey claims that

out of 5,125 children born during 2006-2008, the top ten lists of boys' names are "Win", "Ice, "Mickey", "Khao (rice)", "Nai (boss, a male title)", "Arm", "Boss", "Sun", "Beam" and "Best". The most popular girls' names are "Fah (sky)", "Mind", "Neuy (butter)", "Prae (a kind of fabric)", "Amy", "Fern", "Cream", "Focus", "Ploy (gemstone)" and "Mint". Despite being questionable in terms of reliability, these surveys are clear examples of the increasing popularity of English nicknames in Thailand. A question then arises: What makes Thais turn to English nicknames?

Apart from the general knowledge about nicknames mentioned above, little has been researched about Thais' nicknames. Such few academic studies have been grounded on the linguistics perspective. For instance, a study by Ronnakiat (1988) discusses the origin of nicknames collected from a group of Thai university students. The study reveals that Thai nicknames can be classified into eleven groups based on their origin: 1) the events when babies were born or birth year/birthplace; 2) the events when mothers were pregnant; 3) the physical features of children; 4) the qualities parents want their children to possess; 5) the rank of children in the family; 6) food or objects that parents like; 7) parents' belief in luck and prosperity; 8) foreign words; 9) pronunciation; 10) gender; and 11) diminutives of given names or last names. Another study on nicknames is that of Thammachoto (1997). She studied Thai nicknames in a southern province of Thailand in terms of language characteristics including sound, language source and meaning. It was found that parents' and children's nicknames had little relationship in terms of language characteristics. However, siblings' nicknames tended to be linked through sound and language source. Both Ronnakiat's and Thammachoto's studies are useful in that they show the importance of nicknames in the eyes of Thais (e.g.

being carefully chosen). As a source for the present study, however, the data collected is unfortunately now rather old. Moreover, both overlook the increasing significance of foreign nicknames, including English, despite their popularity. As a result, this paper is an attempt to offer another perspective on nicknames in the Thai context. It will deal specifically with nicknames in English that are increasingly popular among Thais.

Purpose

This research aims at studying English nicknames in terms of meaning. These nicknames are analyzed so as to see how they reflect Thais' thoughts and ways of life. In particular, this paper will look closely at how nicknames play a role in the constitution, manifestation or contestation of Thai identities in the contemporary Thai context.

History of given names and nicknames in Thailand

Thais' naming changes according to the development of Thai society (Siriwatananawin, 2001). Siriwatananawin (2001) states that when the society was still primitive, names contained monosyllabic Thai words. But when the society was transformed into a more complex one, names became longer, having more loanwords. Na Bangchang (1984) provides an in-depth analysis on language of Thai names in different periods. According to Na Bangchang (1984), in the Sukhothai period, given names of both royal families and commoners were very simple. Virtually all of the names were mono-syllabic Thai words. Generally, they were names about kinship and the endeavor to build stability and prosperity of the society. Na Bangchang argues that these ideas were based on the governing system of paternalism that was characteristic of the period.

In the late Sukhothai and Ayudhya periods, the royal families adopted the Hindu conception of "thevaraja", resulting in the transformation of the ruling system into an absolute monarchy. Hence, according to Na Bangchang (1984), the royal families' and the commoners' names were no longer the same. Upholding that they were deities reincarnated to protect commoners' lives, the royal families started to use Pali and Sanskrit in their given names to show their supremacy and holiness. They started to consult "Namtaksapakorn", a Hindu naming scripture, in choosing suitable names. It is found that their names had many syllables; the meaning of the names generally related to power and dignity, and the names of deities were commonly used. Kooprasertwong (as cited in Rompohthanthong, 2007: 19) claims that the first nicknames might have appeared in the early Ayudhya period among the circle of the royal families. Prince Damrong was mentioned as the one who recorded that Prince Naresuan (later King Naresuan) was known as "the Black Prince" and his younger brother Ekathotsaros "the White Prince" (Kooprasertwong, as cited in Rompohthanthong, 2007: 19). Unlike the royal families, Na Bangchang's (1984) analysis reveals that the Thai commoners still used simple Thai names. Their given names were mostly related to things in daily life (e.g. animals, flowers/plants, ores, colors) and actions. Names that reflected abstract concepts were rare, except those about "boon" or merit in Buddhist ideology.

In the early Bangkok period, especially during the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V, the royal families used more Pali and Sanskrit and increased the number of syllables in their given names (Na Bangchang, 1984). They opted for names referring to power, dignity and honor (Na Bangchang, 1984). It is thus possible that nicknames were

increasingly used in the court around this time. Since their given names were long, they created nicknames that helped them address each other more easily. For instance, King Rama IV called one of his brothers' daughter and son by the names "Nu Tui" and "Praong Wan", respectively (Kooprasertwong, as cited in Rompohthanthong, 2007: 19). Similarly, King Rama V addressed his wife "Mae Lek" and his son "Look To" (Kooprasertwong, as cited in Rompohthanthong, 2007: 19). "Tui"[1], "Wan"[2], "Lek (little)" and "To (big, the eldest)" were nicknames which were preceded by "Nu" (a term of address for girls), "Pra-ong" (a term of address for royal family members), "Mae" (a term of address for women or mothers) and "Look" (a term of address for children), respectively.

Before the 1932 Revolution, the commoners continued to use given names similar to those of the Ayudhya period (Na Bangchang, 1984). After the revolution, however, they began to adopt the court tradition of choosing names due to the increasingly spreading idea of equality as a consequence of social change (Nacaskul, as cited in Rompohthanthong, 2007: 20). Thus, the commoners began to lengthen their names and use more Pali and Sanskrit (Na Bangchang, 1984). Following the "Namtaksapakorn" scripture, they tended to choose names relating to power, dignity and honor for boys, and names relating to charm and beauty for girls (Na Bangchang, 1984). Given this practice, it is possible that the idea of having nicknames was already transmitted to the public. However Nacaskul (as cited in Rompohthanthong, 2007: 20) notes that the commoners' nicknames were merely shortened from their

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[1] The meaning cannot be identified.

[2] The meaning cannot be identified.

given names. For example, the nickname "Boon (merit)" may possibly be shortened from these five given names: "Kittiboon", "Thanaboon", "Theeraboon", "Patcharaboon" and "Somboon". Nacaskul maintains that the attempt to invent a nickname, separate completely from a given name, as practiced today, might arise after the commoners realized that shortened nicknames caused confusion in certain situations.

History of English nicknames in Thailand

The entry of English into Thai nicknames is unknown. However, looking at the history of English in the country may help us guess roughly as to when Thais first started using English nicknames. Foley (2005) and Methitham and Chamcharatsri (2011) maintain that English was first introduced to Thailand in the 19th century during the colonization of Southeast Asia. King Rama III was the first who recognized that knowledge of English was essential for higher court officials and administrators. He thus hired missionaries and tutors to teach English to his children. King Rama IV continued this practice. He also put forward the idea of educational modernization as he realized that "education provided by the temple and the court was not adequate for future court officials and administrators" (Ministry of Education, 2012). From these historical events, we know that by the time of King Rama IV, a limited number of royal family members must have been familiar with English.

Following the previous kings, King Rama V pursued the policy of educational modernization with great effort. According to the Ministry of Education Website (2012), he established a school in the palace for the education of young princes and court children in 1871. Soon afterwards, he founded an English school in the palace to prepare them for

communication with foreigners and further studies abroad. In 1884, he opened a school outside the palace to educate commoners' children. A few years later, he established the Department of Education (later the Ministry of Education) to administer education and religious affairs nationwide. In 1901, the first government school for girls was established. We can see from these events that in the reign of King Rama V, education in the modern sense was disseminated to a wider circle of people. It is thus possible that English, as part of modern education, was first introduced to a number of commoners.

During the reign of King Rama VI, higher education emerged as Chulalongkorn University was founded in 1916 (Ministry of Education, 2012). Soon afterwards King Rama VI proclaimed the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1921, requiring a compulsory 4 years of schooling. Thus, schools nationwide came to use the same textbooks and curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education. According to Durongphan et al. (as cited in Methitham and Chamcharatsri, 2011: 61), soon after the proclamation of the Act, "English became mandatory for students beyond grade 4 in the national curriculum". One main purpose of teaching English was "to produce modern thinkers for the country" (Aksornkul, as cited in Foley, 2005: 224). This very fact is significant because it illustrates that in the 1920s, English had already become part of the school curriculum. Consequently, the number of the commoners who had gained basic knowledge in English must have been greatly increased.

After the 1932 Revolution, as discussed above, the Thai public began to choose more complex given names, which was the starting

point of nicknames. Together with the emergence of people acquiring a basic level of English proficiency as a result of educational development in the country, it is thus possible that basic English words were first used as nicknames during this period. Born in the 1970s, I have classmates whose names are "A", "B", "(Ap)ple", "Cherry", "Joy", "May", "Bow", "Gift", "Golf", "Nick", "Ann", "Jane", "Jack", "Lisa", and "Laura". My classmates' parents were born in the 1930s-1950s. Obviously, they were the product of the modernized educational curriculum in which English was included. Knowing English to a certain extent, some of them chose to bestow their children with nicknames in English.

The use of English among Thais seems to have become more and more widespread from the 1960s during which English for international communication was greatly emphasized in the English curriculum, partly because of "the ever-increasing involvement of the United States in the war in Indochina" (Foley, 2005: 224). Driven by such communication motive, the number of people aspiring to master English might have increased. Another factor that helped bring Thais into more contact with foreign languages, including English, might be their exposure to the outside world due to the invasion of mass media into the country (especially through radio broadcasting, TV broadcasting and the Internet starting from 1928, 1955 and 1996, respectively). In addition, the on-going development of the country's educational system led to an increasing number of students learning English in school. In particular, in the 1980s, college students were required to study foreign languages, including English, for 6 credits as part of a general education program (Methitham and Chamcharatsri (2011). In 1996, English became mandatory for all primary students from grade 1 (Foley, 2005). For these

reasons, it is not surprising why English nicknames are becoming popular. It seems to me that English nicknames emerge with Thailand's accelerating pace of modernization in the increasingly globalizing world.

Principles in choosing names

There are many principles in naming, the most popular one being the principle of "Namtaksapakorn". "Namtaksapakorn" is written in "Mahataksa", which is a Hindu scripture used as a guideline for choosing auspicious names. Some texts claim that ancient astrologers wrote the scripture, and others believe that it was written by a Hindu priest who acquired an advanced level of meditation.

Yaiyatham (1994) and Kunadilok 2000) state that, according to the scripture the earth is influenced by 8 planets: the sun, the moon, Venus, Mars, Mercury, Saturn, Jupiter, and Rahoo (a celestial monster which causes eclipses). These planets exert their influence on human lives. Each planet represents each birth day of the week. Each birth day of the week is associated with a part of the alphabet. Each part of the alphabet contains meanings associated with 8 categories: boriwan (relatives, friends, attendants), ayu (longevity, health, standard of living), det (honor, dignity, charisma, respect), sri (charm, loveliness, beauty), mula (property), utsaha (perseverance), montri (supporters) and kallakini (evils, disasters, bad luck, ill fate).

It is determined that certain parts of the alphabet are good or bad for each birth day of the week. For example, it is believed that all vowels are "kallakini" to those born on Monday. In contrast, consonants beginning with /b/, /p/, /ph/, /m/ bring financial stability to them while

those beginning with /y/, /r/, /l/, /w/ make them to be persevering. As for those born on Tuesday, vowels bring them supporters. Consonants with /b/, /p/, /ph/, /m/ make them become charming or beautiful, and consonants with /y/, /r/, /l/, /w/ make them have financial prosperity.

While some people choose their children's names by themselves, others ask for the advice of monks or astrologers. Kiengsiri (1994) reports that, to choose a name appropriate for a child, monks or astrologers will ask the child's birth year, month, date, day of the week and time. Then, based on the naming principles, they will suggest names they consider good for the child or let parents choose first what they desire most for their children (e.g. power, fame, wealth) before suggesting an appropriate name. Usually, consulting monks is free (though a donation is the custom), but for astrologers it is a business. Nowadays there are many websites operated by astrologers to provide the naming service online. What parents need to do is merely: 1) give information about their children's birth, 2) pay, and 3) wait for the names.

In fact, choosing names is not a personal matter, but involves the state to a large extent. According to the Person Name Act of 1962, Thai people must have a given name and a surname. Under the Act, a given name must not 1) duplicate the king's and the queen's names, 2) duplicate the noble titles conferred by the kings, and 3) be rude (Kunadilok, 2000). Moreover, though not stated in the Act, these following rules apply when registering a name. That is, 1) the name must have meaning in Thai, 2) the name must have less than 5 syllables, and 3) the name should indicate whether it is feminine or masculine (Kunadilok, 2000). When babies are born, parents must register their names at the local district

within 6 months. During the registration, their babies' names will be checked for approval. Names that are disapproved by the registration officers will not be registered.

It seems that choosing names is not an easy one. It requires a lot of effort on the part of the name givers. However, this does not apply much to nicknames. Unlike given names, choosing nicknames does not have to follow the "Namtaksapakorn" principle (though it is a trend now). Nicknames can even be bestowed by friends. This shows that choosing nicknames does not have to be "that serious" as they are just "fun names". However, it may be that what is contained in the nicknames may reveal certain aspects of Thai society that are of importance.

Methodology

Data collection

I collected English nicknames from four sources. The first source was these two websites: "www.siambestname.com" and "www.thainickname.com". The first website provides both given names and nicknames to the general public. The second website caters to pregnant women; it provides only lists of nicknames for a mother to choose for her baby. These websites were chosen because their lists of nicknames are more complete than those of other websites found on the internet.

The second source was a collection of posts on a leading internet website "www.pantip.com". This website was selected because it provides the biggest online discussion forums where people can hold conversations and exchange opinions in the form of posted messages on

various topics such as politics, business, education, religion, entertainment, health, mother and child, food, travel and cars. I searched for nicknames by typing the keyword "cheulen (nickname)" in the website's "smart search" system under the forum on the topic of mother and child. Once posts that contained such a keyword appeared, I browsed through them to see whether they contained any messages about naming. After that, I looked specifically for English nicknames. There were 25 posts altogether, all of which were posted during September-October 2012.

The third source was a book titled "Cheulendee mii tae ruay (Good Nicknames Bring Wealth)" written by Kunadilok (2004). The author of this book claims that he supplied the first list of nicknames based on the Hindu naming principle of "Namtaksapakorn", which is popular among Thais. Whether the author's claim is true or not, this book is the only published material on nicknames I could find.

The fourth source of nicknames was from my own survey. That is, I conducted a basic survey with a randomly selected sample of 326 students who are studying at Kasetsart University, Thailand. They are first-year students, both male and female. The survey was conducted on 13-14 September 2012. These students were asked to write down their own nicknames and the nicknames of their siblings on the provided paper. Despite its small-scale nature, the survey supplemented the information from other sources and provided opportunities to check its accuracy.

Nicknames listed in the mentioned sources were in Thai, English and other foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean. To

meet the purpose of this research, only English nicknames were collected. In total, there were 665 nicknames. These nicknames were classified into groups based on their meanings before the analysis proceeded.

Scope and limitations

In this research, I analyzed only English nicknames. No attempt was made to compare English nicknames with Thai ones. In addition, I intentionally presented the data qualitatively rather than quantitatively because by so doing the outstanding features of the collected nicknames could be seen more vividly.

One of the limitations of this paper might be that one set of data collection was based on printed and online materials that provided only lists of nicknames with meaning. Another set of data collection was based on a very simple survey. In the survey, no personal data of the subjects was collected (except the information on their gender). Given this limitation, it was beyond the scope of this research to examine the ways in which nicknames were originated (e.g. who created the nicknames and why) and how the nicknames linked to age, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic backgrounds of the name givers and their owners.

Data analysis and theoretical framework

The data analysis is based on the conceptual framework of global cultural flows proposed by such globalization theorists as Appadurai (1990; 1996), Hannerz (1991; 1992), Robertson (as cited in Scott, 1997 and Inglis and Thorpe, 2012), Tomlinson (1999) and Crane (2008). These theorists assert that there is now a globalization of culture, but it is not homogenization but rather a diversification of discourses.

Globalization of culture is "a complex process of standardization, differentiation and specification by which the same commodities, information and symbols are connected to diverse and heterogeneous connotations; they are alienated from a definable cultural context, spread globally and are, in this process, linked to new, even contradictory meanings" (Korff & Berner, 1997: 6). This is a consequence of the diminution and dissolution of the social, economic and geographic boundedness of cultures, propelled by global cultural economy, which has an effect on established core/periphery relations (Appadurai, 1990). As Appadurai (1990: 296) remarks, "The global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those which might account for multiple centers and peripheries)". He proposes a framework of five dimensions or "scapes" of global cultural flows to substitute the binary structure of center/periphery; they comprise the flows of ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes which involve the dynamic movements and interactions of people, mass media, technology, finance and investment, and ideologies.

In the process of global cultural flows, the theorists agree that hybridization and indigenization of cultures are commonplace. As Robertson (as cited in Scott, 1997: 7) puts it, there is *"a massive twofold process involving the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism"*, meaning that globalization of culture itself is as much integration as fragmentation. Foreign products, for example, are often domesticated by local consumers in terms of their meanings as well as their forms and content. Here, Tomlinson (1999: 84)

elaborates, *"Movement between cultural/geographical areas always involves interpretation, translation, mutation, adaptation, and indigenization as the receiving culture brings its own cultural resources to bear, in dialectical fashion, upon cultural imports"*. In a similar vein, Crane (2008: 364) maintains that *"global cultures must be adjusted to local conditions because external cultural influences are meaningful only if they can be integrated with local experience and cultural understandings"*. Hannerz (1991; 1992) nevertheless warns that the cultural distribution within universals and particularities may occur in a structure of asymmetrical relationships. For instance, countries at the receiving end *"[are] more the taker than the giver of meaning and meaningful form"* (Hannerz, 1991: 107). Despite Hannerz's warning, what these theorists are certain of is that the process of hybridization and indigenization will lead to increasingly diversity of all forms of culture rather than a homogenous global culture (Crane, 2008: 367).

The concept of hybridization and indigenization has proved useful in highlighting the emergence of new forms of identity (Barker, 2002). As Robertson (as cited in Inglis and Thorpe, 2012: 276) points out, *"globality is a situation whereby specific groups retain distinct – though complicated, overlapping and glocal – viewpoints and identities"*. Similarly, Bhabha (as cited in Crane, 2008: 367) maintains that *"the phenomenon of hybridization produces inconsistent, ambiguous or conflicting meanings that create opportunities for culturally oppressed groups to resist the dominant culture"*. There is research supporting these claims. For instance, Craig and King (2002) state that the subaltern groups in many parts of Asia (or Asian diaspora) cannot be silenced when brought into contact with the contemporary western popular culture. In their view, local

audiences can transform, negotiate, manipulate, mediate and co-opt the Western cultural hegemony in their own ways, which results in the creation of hybrid forms of popular culture with layers of meaning and message to the audiences. Bennett (2001), dealing with young Asian diasporas in Britain, examines the development of Banghra music from a traditional Punjabi folk style to a fusion style combining elements of western pop music. According to Bennett, young Asians in Britain have produced this hybrid form of music as a way to challenge white western authority and to negotiate their spaces in youth cultural life there. Walraven (2002) discusses South Korea's countercurrents to globalization through the food culture of dog meat. Despite the fact that dog meat is not very important in the Korean diet (and many Koreans resist eating it), local customs manage to maintain, or even promote, dog meat eating in order to resist global pressures such as campaigns of the western animal rights activists seen as attempting to destroy Korean cultural identity. Here, dog meat eating has been employed to symbolize the defense of Korean cultural identity. These examples illustrate that in consumptions of global cultural commodities lies the creative possibility for subversion and resistance to dominant and even global ideologies, rather than one of a simple cultural imperialism. Hence, they provide a useful background for examining Thais' appropriation of English nicknames.

Findings and discussion

One thing that is discernible from the collected nicknames is that English nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs can become nicknames for Thais (see Table 1) Even expressions (e.g. greetings) and exclamations

can also be used as nicknames. Another discernible thing is the diverse meaning of nicknames. That is, nicknames can be anything, ranging from animated beings, objects, places, abstract ideas emotions to actions (see Table 2) Looking closely into the meanings, it seems to me that some nicknames do contain rather "strange" meanings. (Can anyone imagine a child named "Nuclear" or "Hacker"?) It is beyond the scope of this paper to see why such nicknames are chosen. However, what we can draw from the data is that meaning is not the most important factor in choosing nicknames. Cute or beautiful sounds also count as reasons.

Table 1: example of nicknames classified by English parts of speech

noun	Sun, Rose, Ham, Trip, Music, Pipe, Bow, Man, Boy, Duke
noun/verb	Smile, Hug, Touch, Giggle, Focus, Hop, Jump, Stop
adjective	Great, Good, Best, Grand, Big, Fresh, Safe, Strong, New
adjective/adverb	Many, Any, Little, Only, Fair
expression	Hi, My Dear, Thanks, Thank You
exclamation	Bam

Table 2: the classification of nicknames based on meaning

English alphabet (e.g. A, B, F, X)	food/drinks (e.g. Oat, Donut, Cake, Milk, Beer)	travel (e.g. Camp, Tent, Trip)	emotion (e.g. Love, Proud, Feel)

number (e.g. One, Two, Nine, First)	vegetables/fruits (e.g. Cherry, Carrot, Plum, Peach)	sports (e.g. Golf, Bowling, Pingpong, Champ)	actions/gestures (e.g. Hug, Smile, Jump, Share, Wake)
color (e.g. Blue, Green, White, Pink)	nature (e.g. Sun, Snow, Dew, Ocean, Earth, Ice)	game (e.g. Game, Pinball, Jigsaw)	features of people/things (e.g. Strong, Smart, Big, Fresh, Grace)
people (e.g. Man, Boy, Kid, Friend, Buddy)	household items (e.g. Shampoo, TV, Fuse, Pipe, Bell)	celebration (e.g. New Year, Birthday)	abstract qualities (e.g. Hope, Brave, Peace)
people's title (e.g. Prince, Duke, King)	cities & countries (e.g. Japan, Venice, Troy)	month (e.g. April, May, June)	quantity/degree (e.g. Only, Many, Little)
job (e.g. Guide, Captain, Tutor)	jewelry (e.g. Pearl, Crystal)	transport (e.g. Bus, Jet, Yacht, Airbus)	brands (e.g. Benz, Porsche, Sony, Nokia)
body parts (e.g. Heart, Arm)	clothes (e.g. Jeans, Tie, Chiffon)	science (e.g. Proton, Atom, Nuclear, Solar)	religion (e.g. Holy, Bible)

animals (e.g. Cat, Deer, Mink, Dragon)	accessories (e.g. Bow)	IT (e.g. Password, Data, Java, Web)	cartoon characters (e.g. Micky, Minnie, Garfield, Popeye)
places (e.g. Home, Bank, Theater)	math (e.g. Math, Graph)	reading (e.g. Narnia, Elf, Tale)	position (e.g. Front)
music (e.g. Note, Music, Piano, Guitar, Jazz)	art (e.g. Art, Paint)	plants/flowers (e.g. Rose, Poppy, Palm, Oak, Bamboo)	money (e.g. Cash, Dollar, Pound, Bonus)

The diverse range of meanings and parts of speech of English nicknames may suggest the desire to create unique nicknames on the part of name givers (i.e. parents). With such desire, name givers need to look for nicknames from a wide range of lexicon so as not to duplicate other people's nicknames. That possibly leads to negligence in searching for meaning because uniqueness is more important.

Creating nicknames that appear unique illustrates that Thai people are probably becoming more individualistic. They may want to assert their unique identity through nicknames such as by choosing recognizable or unforgettable nicknames. This quest for uniqueness is not restricted to nicknames. According to Na Bangchang (1984), starting from the 1932 Revolution, Thais are likely to choose increasingly unique given names. In contrast, before the revolution, names that duplicate

others' were common. She argues that this illustrates the change in Thai thinking from being harmonious with others to being self-centered.

Looking more closely at the collected nicknames, it is found that there are a lot of nicknames that have meanings relevant to the concept of modern living. This may be a consequence of modernization and globalization that necessitates and accelerates the use of English in Thailand as discussed in the previous section. Modernization and globalization bring new ways of life to Thais. For instance, nicknames in Table 3 show that the western diet has become part of the Thais' eating culture, whereas those in Table 4 suggest that Thais may have become attracted by western styles of clothes. Table 5 is an example of new daily consumption products and household equipment that make Thai life more comfortable.

Table 3: example of nicknames relating to diet

diet	Pancake, Oat, Pudding, Ham, Jam, Pie, Pasta, Puff, Cream, Pizza, Muffin, Molt, Yoghurt, Jelly, Waffle, Cookie, Cake, Donut, Cocktail, Champagne, Soda, Punch, Beer, Milk Grape, (Ap)ple, Cherry, Blueberry, Kiwi, Carrot, Plum, Peach, Pear

Table 4: example of nicknames relating to attire

attire	Jeans, Tie, Chiffon, Zip

Table 5: example of nicknames relating to household items

household items	Shampoo, Gel, Torch, Remote (Control), Note, Fuse, Knot, Bell

Furthermore, new leisure activities have emerged (see Table 6). Thais have come to consume entertainment media imported from the West, such as computer games, music, TV programs, and novels. Also they have become familiar with sports that were never played in the old days such as golf and bowling. In addition, they have developed new kinds of hobbies, such as taking photos or camping, which are part of modern lifestyles.

Table 6: example of nicknames relating to leisure activities

game	Game, Pinball, Jigsaw, Yoyo
music	Piano, Guitar, Bass, Sax(ophone), Rocker, Reggae, Jazz, Tap, Rap
TV	TV, Program, Cartoon, Micky, Minny, Snoopy, Piglet, Barbie, Popeye, Garfield, Pooh
sport	Golf, Putter, Par, Bowling, Ball
travel	Film, Photo, Frame, Camp, Map, Trip, Tent
reading	Tale, Narnia, Elf

Moreover, modernization and globalization lead to the movements of people across boundaries. Given the increasing presence of foreigners in Thailand, interactions between Thais and foreigners have risen. Likewise, Thais themselves are part of these transnational movements. For instance, visiting foreign countries for work, travel or study is now common. Tables 7-8 show real names of westerners and names of foreign places that Thais adopt as nicknames as a consequence of such growing interactions and movements.

Table 7: example of English given names

English given names	Jane, Ann, Betty, Paul, Pete, Jay, James, Nick, Michael, Alice, Mark, Jason, Jack, Sean, Laura, Vicky, Guy, John, Tom, Pam, Nate, Eve, Helen, Bella, Simon, Chris, Joyce, Ron, Sunny, Hugo, Sammy, Mick, Molly, Louis, Emma

Table 8: example of nicknames relating to foreign countries and cities

country and city	Japan, Athens, Venice, Rome, Milan, Tokyo, Cuba

At the national level, it is obvious that Thai society has developed itself to be a science- and information-based one. The foundation for this development is modern education as well as the expansion of information technology driven by rising global interconnection. Nicknames in Table 9 demonstrate that knowledge in the fields of science, mathematics and English, which are part of modern education, are prevalent. They also suggest the influence of information technology on people's lives.

Table 9: example of nicknames relating to modern knowledge

science	Proton, Atom, Ohm, Ion, Amp(ere), Alpha, Solar, Sonar, Radar, Rocket, Robot, Nuclear, Neon, Ozone, Nano, NASA
mathematics	Math, Graph
English	A, B, C, D, F, K, M, O, P, R, S, T, U, V, X
IT	Java, Click, Connect, Password, Data, Disk, Digital, Web, Chat, Comp(uter)

Due to the new educational system, more diversified and specialized occupations have emerged, as illustrated in Table 10. In

terms of concrete things, we have witnessed the development of infrastructure in the country. In particular, a new transport system has been expanded, as shown in Table 11.

Table 10: example of nicknames relating to job

job	Model, Spy, Guide, Captain, Tutor, Hacker

Table 11: example of nicknames relating to transport

transport	Bus, Van, Yacht, Jet, Copter, Airbus, Bo-ing, Auto

Meanwhile, changes in the society lead Thais to adopt new social values. For instance, they seem to give more importance to worldly or international celebrations (see Table 12).

Table 12: example of nicknames relating to celebration

celebration	Birthday, New Year

Thais also seem to strive for individual prosperity, success, power, and fame more than ever before. One indicator for this is the amount of money they have; another indicator is the leading position they hold in society. Nicknames in Table 13 indicate such mentality.

Table 13: example of nicknames relating to money and power

money	Richie, Cash, Money, Bonus, Dollar, Pound
power	King, Queen, Duke, Prince, Boss, Champ, Champion, Hero, Win, Famous, Great, Grand, Best, Peak, Top, Boom

In addition, Thais seem to live their lives in more materialistic ways. As Table 14 demonstrates, brands are common to be used as nicknames. These brands are of luxurious items that are internationally recognized and consumed. Yet, not all brands are chosen as nicknames.

Only those perceived to be trendy or classy in Thai eyes are chosen. Thai recognition and consumption of these brands also symbolizes the power of global marketing and media.

Table 14: example of nicknames relating to brands

brands	Sony, Nokia, Benz, Ford, Fiat, Audy, Porsche, Harley, Vespa, Cooper, Pepsi, Cola, Fanta, FIFA, Man-U

Another interesting point seen from the data is that many English nicknames are adapted in terms of form and sound. For example, some nicknames are taken from English words. Yet, once a sound is added at the end, they no longer remain English words. Table 15 shows newly created nicknames formed by adding the /y/ or /ty/ sounds after the English term. The /y/ and /ty/ sounds are probably added to make the term more "cute".

Table 15: example of adapted English nicknames

adapted nicknames	Freshy (Fresh + /y/), Newty (New + /ty/), Fitty (Fit + /ty/)

Some nicknames are taken from English words, but they are shortened. Sometimes, the first syllable is omitted, and sometimes the second syllable. One reason why this happens is that the shortened nicknames are easier to be used. These types of nicknames are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: example of shortened nicknames

shortened nicknames	Ble (from Double), Bo (from Jumbo), Amp (from Ampere), Jan (from January), Cop (from Copter), Ple (from Apple), Toon (from Cartoon), Top (from Stop), Pink or Ky (from Pinky)

Some English words are pronounced differently from the original pronunciation. That is partly due to the different sound systems between English and Thai. The ignorance of how to pronounce the English words correctly is also another factor. Yet, sometimes the mispronunciation is done intentionally by those who have high ability in English. That is probably because the so-called "Thai-Thai" pronunciation makes the interlocutors more connected with each other.

Table 17: example of mispronounced nicknames

mispronounced nicknames	Jam (pronounced as /Yam/), Jelly (pronounced as /Yelly/)
	Shutter, Poppy, Hero, Cherry, Solar, Super, Title, Penguin
	(stressed on the second syllable, instead of the first)

Not only are English words being adapted, but also there are Thai words being adapted into English. For example, nicknames in Table 18 are Thai, but the sound /y/ is added at the end to make them sound English-like to Thai people.

Table 18: example of Thai nicknames adapted to be English-like

English-like nicknames	Pooky (Pook + /y/), Nonny (Non + /y/)

In addition, it must be noted that some nicknames are neither Thai nor English, but they are invented in such a way that makes them sound English-like to Thai people. These nicknames are presented in Table 19.

Table 19: example of nicknames that cannot be identified in
terms of origin

Unidentified nicknames	Vevie, Didi, Toto, Nene, Bobo, Coony, Mumu, Pikpo, Ottin

Nicknames in Tables 15-19 are good examples of globalization theorists' concepts of hybridization and indigenization. In the process of global cultural flows, new meanings are being constantly (re)produced with much active involvement from the locals. As Crane (2008: 366) puts it, *"those who study cultural flows or cultural networks conceptualize the transmission process as a set of influences that are not necessarily originating in the same place or flowing in the same direction. Receivers may also be originators"*. Apparently, Thais produce their own hybrid forms of nicknames. Hence, they are not mere receivers, but also act as active agents who manipulate English nicknames and absorb them into their own lifestyles.

The last point worth mentioning here is that the meaning of some English nicknames duplicates that of Thai nicknames. In other words, Thai nicknames are transformed into an English version. For example, "Fah" becomes "Sky". "Yim" becomes "Smile". "Khao" becomes "White". "Suay" becomes "Beauty". "Mai" becomes "New". "Maew" becomes "Cat". "Rak" becomes "Love". "Chai" becomes "Man". This suggests that nicknames in Thai may fail to keep up with Thais' developing taste for modernity and contemporary relevance. In part, such a taste might be shaped by changes in their lifestyle (e.g. more exposure to the outside world) thanks to better access to higher education and new

economic opportunities or the spread of the country's modernization project.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have found that the meaning of English nicknames of Thai people is very diverse. English nicknames are selected from a wide variety of lexicon ranging from the names of colors, food, animals, numbers, plants and flowers, household items, body parts, places, transport, sports, actions, features of people to those of abstract qualities. A lot of nicknames appear to be unique in terms of meaning to express the individuality of the name givers/users. Furthermore, I have found that many English nicknames have meanings related to the concept of modern living – a consequence of modernization and globalization. Nicknames relating to diet, leisure activities, celebration, job, brands, money, transport or IT are among those illustrating how Thai lifestyle has been transformed to be more westernized, materialistic and individualistic. Yet, what is discernible is that many English nicknames are adapted in terms of form and sound. For instance, some of them are shortened while others are pronounced differently from the original. On the contrary, there are nicknames that are taken from Thai words but adapted to be English-like. In addition, the meaning of some English nicknames duplicates that of Thai nicknames, which suggests that Thais see English nicknames to be more relevant in their modern living.

The findings have led me to conclude that, for Thais, English nicknames offer images, styles and symbols for consumption. What Thais seek from English nicknames is not only "labels", but also "emblems" for identifying and being identified with a particular group. In particular, they

expect from the nicknames a sense of being identified with a circle of modern people, or of seizing the opportunity to identify themselves with a modern global society. However, in the naming process, the creativity to adapt English nicknames through the means of hybridization and indigenization is commonplace. At the same time, it is a common practice to make Thai nicknames English-like. Hence, it can be argued that instead of a one-way, top-down process from the global to the local, global cultural flows involve two-way interactions. There is transformation, manipulation and naturalization of inputs from global culture (in this case English nicknames) to negotiate cultural spaces of the local. While aspiring to be part of a global community, Thais do constitute and assert their own cultural identities based on their own locality. Thus when asked "What's in a name?", my answer is: a Thai agent who is "modern" yet "very Thai"[3].

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[3] "Very Thai" is coined by Cornwel-Smith (2004).

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