

A Reflection of Thai English

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Abstract

This paper aims to give a linguistic account of Thai English as practised by high school and university graduates in Thailand with emphasis on the phonological, semantic and syntactic levels. In addition, current and future trends of the increasing demand for the use of English locally are given to show how Thai society is stepping towards the global community.

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้อธิบายปรากฏการณ์ทางภาษาศาสตร์ในระดับระบบเลียง ความหมายและโครงสร้างประโยคที่พบในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของคนไทย พร้อมทั้งแสดงแนวโน้มให้เห็นว่าภาษาอังกฤษมีบทบาทมากในสังคมไทยปัจจุบันในยุคที่พร้อมจะเข้าสู่ลั่นโลก

English is one of several foreign languages offered in the Thai education system, and it has an active role in the society since the mid 1800s. Thai English differs from English spoken elsewhere as linguistic restrictions in Thai give rise to mother tongue interference in Thai English which can be seen in Thai English Phonology, Vocabulary, Grammar and Semantics. However, English is considered indispensable for Thais in general, as academic and professional advancement depends on English fluency. Furthermore, in daily communication people freely use English loanwords or intermingle Thai and English words most of the time. The above-mentioned linguistic phenomena will be discussed in the following headings.

1. Linguistic contacts

During the Ayutthaya period Thai society appears to have come into contact with European travellers. The contacts started with the Portuguese in the reign of King Ramathibodi II (1491-1529), the Spanish during the reign of King Naresuan (1590-1605) and the Dutch in the reign of King Ekathotsarot (1605-10). The English first came to Ayutthaya for trade in 1612, during the reign of King Songtham, left the country, and then returned in the reign of King Narai (1656-88). English must have been spoken or taught privately then, but the king did not speak English and always used an interpreter (Gervaise, 1989:61).

It was not until the reign of King Mongkut of the Chakri dynasty that English became an important foreign language. The king himself studied the language and had his children, especially the Crown Prince Chulalongkorn, taught English by native speakers, either from England or the United States. King Chulalongkorn, after ascending the throne, visited Europe twice, in 1897 and 1907, and required that his children know English and either French or German (Sayamananda, 1971:132). During his reign, English had an active role in the Thai educational system, as it was included in the Thai curriculum from 1890 (Ministry of Education, 1996:1). The structure of the Thai educational system was, in fact, modelled on that of England. The primary and secondary levels of education were established in 1896, and, by royal command, an exemplary secondary school was set up based on the model of English colleges (Buls, 1994:70). Since that time English has been taught as a foreign language in schools of both levels and in universities.

Although English does not figure as a means of communication in daily life, some professional people, e.g. academics, businessmen, people in the media, or tourism, or computer technology, are regular users of English in their work. Lecturers in the international programmes of Thai universities, or in private international schools or colleges, use English as a medium of instruction. Lecturers in general programmes may give lectures in English to the English majors, or borrow some English terms in other classes. Businessmen who do not converse in English with their clients or associates may yet intermingle English and Thai words or phrases in their offices. A few programmes on radio and television are conducted in English, while some programmes conducted in Thai are interspersed with English words and expressions. There are also two English-language newspapers published daily in Bangkok. Tour guides for international groups have to speak English all the time, and computer technicians or trainers are obliged to use specific English expressions. Interestingly, commercial English brandnames and media programmes or series appear to be more attractive to Thais, and this provides an indirect means whereby ordinary Thais, children and grown-ups, pick up English words, albeit with Thai phonological influence.

2. Thai English Phonology

The phonological system that underlies the spoken English of Thais, as described below, is the result principally of three main factors: the method of teaching, the model of language use, and the process of mother tongue interference.

The first two of these factors relate to the language teaching situation in the Thai context. Before 1996, English was not required before Grade five of the elementary school. However, even before then private schools had for

a long time been keen to teach English to their pupils; some even going so far as to give English lessons in kindergarten. Not being equipped with well-qualified teachers, what these schools have done is let the pupils memorize word spelling with a single meaning, with the pupils reciting words aloud with mother tongue pronunciation. Very few schools expose pupils to native or native-like pronunciation. So the pronunciation model these young learners develop is an English spoken with a strong Thai accent, the phonological limitations of which leads to problems of communication.

These two factors in the teaching situation in Thailand give rise to mother tongue interference, as Thai phonology is so very different from that of English. The phonological contrasts between the two languages mean that the main problems for Thai learners of English lie in the fricatives, especially the voiced consonants, initial and final clusters, a tense-lax contrast of pure vowels and diphthongization, and also in some prosodic features such as stress, rhythm and intonation. A comparison of the Thai and British English consonant systems is given Table 1.

Table 1
Comparison of Thai and English Consonants
using IPA symbols

Consonants	Thai	English
Plosive	vl : [p p ^h t t ^h k k ^h ?] vd : [b d]	vl : [p t k] vd : [b d g]
Nasal	[m n ŋ]	[m n ŋ]
Affricate	vl : [tç tç ^h]	vl-vd : [tʃ - dʒ]
Fricative	vl : [f s h]	vl-vd : [f-v θ-ð s-z ʃ-ʒ h]
Flap/Trill (variant)	[r/ ɾ]	
Lateral	[l]	[l]
Approximant	[w j]	[w ɹ j]

All of the Thai consonants illustrated in Table 1 occur in the initial position, but only unreleased [p t k ?] and [m n ŋ] are allowed finally ([w] and [j] in the final position will be treated as diphthongization here). Thus, the difficulty for the Thai speakers of English is greater in the final position, especially the fricatives. With these restrictions, a replacement of sounds in the speakers' repertoire or final sound deletion is generally found, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Examples of Sound Replacement

Word	Transcription	Initial replacement	Final replacement	Final deletion	Ambiguous form
bag	[bæg]		[bæk]		back
chair	[tʃeə]	[tç ^h e:]			
each	[i:ç]		[i:t]		eat
jar	[dʒa:]	[tç:a:]			
wage	[weidʒ]		[weit]		weight
knife	[naif]			[nai]	
five	[faiv]			[fai]	
vague	[veig]	[weik]	[weik]		wake
thank	[θæŋk]	[t ^h ɛŋk]			tank
earth	[ə:θ]		[ə:t]		
the	[ðə]	[də]			
with	[wið]		[wit]		wit
face	[feis]		[fet]		fate
zoo	[zu:]	[su:]			sue
please	[pli:z]		[pli:t]		pleat
show	[ʃəu]	[tç ^h o:, ʃo:]			
fish	[fiʃ]		[fit, fiç]		fit
beige	[beiʒ]		[be:t, be:ç]		bait
raw	[rɔ:]	[rɔ:, rɔ:, lɔ:]			law
ball	[bɔ:l]		[bɔ:u]		
boil	[bɔ:il]			[bɔi]	boy

Interestingly enough, at present with the influence of some Amerasian and Eurasian singers and actors who usually speak Thai with the English accent and use [ʃ] for [tç^h] and [r] for [r, r̩] in the Thai words, most Thai youngsters appear to follow suit. So the standard [tç^h] is replaced by [ʃ], e.g. [tç^him] 'to taste' becomes [ʃim] and since most Thais have problems in articulating [l/r] contrast in the Thai language itself, the English [r] turn to be a rehabilitated form for the Thai [r̩] in order to keep the [l/r] distinction.

With reference to consonant clusters, the Thai phonological system is restricted to two-consonant clusters in the initial position and only 11 clusters are allowed. They are [pla:] 'fish', [preŋ] 'brush', [p^hleŋ] 'song', [p^hroŋ] 'cavity', [troŋ] 'straight', [kloŋ] 'drum', [kra:m] 'jaw', [k^hloŋ] 'canal', [k^hru:] 'teacher', [kwaŋ] 'deer', and [k^hwe:] 'tributary (of a river)'. The difficulty for the Thais arises when pronouncing the three-consonant clusters initially and four-consonant clusters finally in English. So what appears in most Thais' pronunciation of English is the omission of the sounds not existing in the mother tongue or not being possible for the replacement procedures mentioned earlier.

The pronunciation of the English vowels by Thai speakers tends to be a less difficult task than that of the consonants. Among the pure vowels, the Thai vowels are used to replace those with similar qualities. In spite of the existence of length contrast in Thai, the tense-lax distinction in English creates some problems. In this case only the tense pure vowels are heard for pairs of words like 'live-leave', 'full-fool' and for the pair with diphthongs such as 'cell-sail', 'bed-bade'. Mistakes in vowel pronunciation also come from interference from former knowledge of similar spelling of words already acquired from the target language system. Thus 'pear' is pronounced [piə], transferring from words like 'dear', 'near' and 'wool' pronounced [wu:l] from 'pool' respectively.

The interference of prosodic features lies mainly on stress, rhythm, and intonation. In Thai, polysyllabic words and longer utterances can be articulated in two ways, i.e. isolative and combinative. The pronunciation of words in isolative style, with accentuation on each syllable, is heard among children or beginners in Thai classes, while the combinative style is generally more common. Most Thai polysyllabic words are constrained by last-syllable accentuation, for example, [t^ha'le:] 'sea', [mala'kɔ:] 'papaya', [mi'k^hwa'mjin'di:] 'to be pleased to'. The habit of pronouncing words with ultimate accentuation has a strong influence on the production of English words because it is most likely that Thai learners of English will put a stress on the last syllable of a word. The misplacement of stress in some English words, even among simple ones like 'teacher', 'visit', 'banana', 'delicate', appears to deter understanding. In addition, homographed words, e.g. decrease (n)-decrease(v), which native speakers differentiate by stress, have only ultimate-stressed forms regardless of their grammatical functions.

The role of rhythm at the phonological level is equally important. The rhythm in Thai can be either syllable-timed or stress-timed. The syllable-timed is restricted to some poem and nursery rhyme recitations, emphatic expressions, or careful reading of beginners of Thai, but in general speech,

the stress-timed is more common. However, it is found that the habit of reciting one English word at a time, as taught in most Thai primary schools, continues even when phrases or sentences are assigned. So each word in a sentence is equally accented, regardless of whether they are content or function words. As the rhythm in English is stress-timing, the incorrect rhythm practised by Thai learners of English leads to unintelligibility.

As far as intonation is concerned, it appears that the pitch levels in the pronunciation of Thai speakers fluctuate among the five levels: mid, low, high, falling, rising, but the tonicity in each tone group is at random. Thus, the information point of the group may not be clearly conveyed. The phonological characteristics typifying Thai speakers of English will be illustrated in the one-sentenced phonetic transcription below. Not being imposed by vocabulary and grammatical burdens, three subjects, one English major and two non-English, were asked to read a standard passage consisting of problem sounds, prepared by the present writer.

Sample 1 (female)

Non English major

- represents accented syllable
- . represents unaccented syllable
- ↘ represents falling contour
- ↗ represents rising contour

mo:s	fru:s	in	tailæn	a:	sawit	æn	hæv	a	di:like:t	f'e:ə
-	-	.	-	-	-	↘	-	.	.	↘
fə	eksæmp'lə	mænggo:s		ba:na:na:s	ɔ:en:dze:s	ən	pa:melo:s			
.	.	.	↘	.	-	.	↘	.	-	↘

Sample 2 (female)

English major

mo:s	fru:s	in	tailæn	a:	swi:t	æn	hæv	a	di:like:t	fle:wə
-	-	.	-	-	-	.	-	.	.	↘
fə:	eksæmp'lə	mænggo:s		ba:na:na:s	ɔ:en:dze:s	æn	pamelos			
.	↘	.	↘	↗	.	↗	.	↗	.	↘

Sample 3 (male)
Non English major

mo:s	fut	in	tailæn	a:	sawit	æn	hæp	a	deliket	fe:p ^w ə
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
fɔ:	eksæmpə	mæŋko	banana:	ɔ:en	æn	pemelo:	-	-	-	-
.	.	↘	↘	.	↘	↘

The full text of the above samples is:

Most fruits in Thailand are sweet and have a delicate flavour, for example, mangoes, bananas, oranges and pomelos. Among them the bananas are extremely common throughout the country. There are seven or eight varieties and can be eaten all the year round. Non-tropical fruits are also found in the north of Thailand, especially those from the Royal Project, for instance apples, pears, strawberries, peaches, apricots and many others. They are available for consumers between November and February each year, and are regarded as fruits for special occasions.

3. Vocabulary

A large number of English loanwords both British and American forms have been incorporated in the Thai lexical corpus and used in daily communication and in various occupations. The English-loan strategies in the Thai context can be described as loan-proper, loan-translation, loan-shift, and loan-blend, which are discussed below with examples in Thai using IPA symbols in square brackets with the following tone marks: ` for low, ' high, ^ falling, ^ rising and the unmarked mid tone.

Among the English loanwords occurring in the Thai language, the loan-proper words are those most frequently used by people in all walks of life, starting from greeting and parting expressions like 'hello' and 'bye-bye'; the former is the expression for answering telephone calls as well as for greeting acquaintances, while the latter is taught to Thai toddlers together with a handwave. Other loan-proper words are found in all aspects of Thai daily-life and activities, e.g. food and drink, clothing, media, sports, communication, business, and education. The Thai spelling represents a direct transliteration from English, but the pronunciation is governed by phonological restrictions in Thai, for example, to mention only a few, 'gas' as [kéit], 'cake' as [k^héik], 'fax' as [fék], 'sweater' as [sawéty^h], 'bank' as [bék], 'football' as [fútbo:n], 'computer' as [k^hompíut^h]. However, educated Thais

tend to pronounce this group of loan-words with the original English pronunciation though with Thai intonation.

In addition, there are a great number of loan-translation words in Thai. This type of loanword, involving word for word translation but with Thai construction, is found in formal speech and in academic terms, e.g. [krɔ:p-we:la:] ‘frame-time’ for ‘time-frame’, [tçùt-jw:n] ‘point-stand’ for ‘stand-point’, [t^hana:-k^ha:n] ‘money-place’ for ‘bank’, and several other words with a ‘tele-’ prefix, such as [t^ho:ra-t^hát] ‘tele-vision’, [t^ho:ra-k^homma:n-k^hom] ‘tele-communication’, and those for ‘telescope’, ‘telephone’, ‘teletype’. They are so intensively used that some Thais may not realize that they are loanwords. Furthermore, academic terms translated from English are found in various disciplines especially those organized by The Royal Institute of Thailand, for example, linguistics terminology, printing terminology, medical terminology. Nevertheless, some translated words are not well-received and the original loan-proper forms are preferred instead, as seen in words like ‘software’ and ‘computer’.

The loan-shift strategy which implies phonological modifications of the original English forms, had been found in Thai as far back as the late 1800s, e.g., [pàtsatan] ‘pistol’, [talépkép] or [telik^hé:p] ‘telegraph’, but these forms are not in use any more as they are now replaced by new translated words, i.e. [pu:n-sân] ‘gun-short’ for ‘pistol’, [t^ho:ra-lé:k] ‘distance-writing’ for ‘telegraph’. Some other loanshift words appear as sound or syllable reduction from English, e.g. [ke:] for ‘gauge’, [?e:] for ‘air-conditioned’ or ‘air-conditioning’, [w^h:] for ‘over-doing’, i.e. only the last syllable of ‘over’ is pronounced in a Thai way. This word in particular has been introduced by teen-agers and is well-received among Thai people even those of older generations.

The loan-blend strategy seems to be an interesting way of coining new words. This group of words can be done by using a compound of Thai-English, e.g. [tau-kéit] ‘stove-gas’ for ‘gas stove’; of English-English but with Thai word order, i.e. headnoun-noun modifier, e.g. ‘taxi-meter’, as used by Bangkok taxis to mean a kind of taxi, is English words in Thai order, and finally a compound of a dialectal word and an English word, for example, [bò:] ‘not’ in northern Thai and ‘joy’ in English to be pronounced as [bò:tcɔ:i] ‘not happy’. This category of loanblend may not last long, but there is a growing tendency for a blend of Thai and English in Thai vocabulary. Some items appear unusual and attracting attention, e.g. [ra:k^hil^h:] ‘mould-killer’, [niu-lû:ktç^himpla:] ‘new-fishball’, being used as product brandnames, [krabu: è:n k^ho:] ‘buffalo and cow’ as a music agency. It is expected that

cross-cultural blends in the period of global communication and technology advancement will lead to some other strategies of merging loanwords into the Thai language.

4. Grammar

With reference to the units which carry grammatical patterns, Thai English varies among three varieties; namely, the 'telegraphic' consisting of mainly basic content words; the 'partially well-formed' with the application of some grammatical rules; and the 'near-native'. In this paper only the first two types are discussed. These two varieties of Thai English result from mother tongue interference and from the different characteristics of the two languages. Grammatical structures in Thai share a universal subject-predicate category with some other languages; otherwise, only a string of base forms are chained linearly without noun determiners, conjugations, inflections or derivations. Specific information can be added by using word indicators showing present-past time references, progressive-perfect aspects, adverbial, interrogative or negative forms. Moreover, the noun or pronoun subject bears the same form as the object. Thus, the Thai grammar appears structurally simple, but the proper placement of various indicators may need some attention. Examples of some basic structures of Thai are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Thai basic structures
with some modifying indicators

a)

Noun/Pronoun		Noun/Pronoun
Subject	Verb	Object
[tɕʰǎn/tɕʰán] 'I'	[sɯː] 'buy'	[krapău] 'bag'
[kʰun] 'you'	[tɕʰɔːp] 'like'	[tɕʰǎn/tɕʰán] 'I'
[kʰǎu/kʰáu] 'he,she'	[tɕʰɔːp] 'like'	[kʰun] 'you'
[mɛː] 'mother'	[sɔːŋ] 'post'	[tɕòtmǎːi] 'letter'
[kʰon] 'people'	[dɤːn] 'walk'	
[wírat] 'Wirat'	[wíŋ] 'run'	

b)

Subject	Verb	Object	Final indicators		
			Numeral + Classifier	Adverbial forms	Interrogative forms
[kʰǎu/kʰáu] 'she'	[suf:] 'buy'	[kra pǎu] 'bag'	[sǎ:m bai] 'three+Clf'	[pʰrǔŋ nǐ:] 'tomorrow'	
				[wan nǐ:] 'today'	
				[muə:wā:n nǐ:] 'yesterday'	
[kʰǎu] 'she'	[suf:] 'buy'	[kra pǎu] 'bag'		[lé:u] 'already'	
				[bòi bòi] 'often'	
[kʰǎu] 'she'	[suf:] 'buy'	[kra pǎu]			[ru:] (for 'yes/no' ques.) [tʰinai] 'where' [muə:rāi] 'when'

c)

Subject	Medial indicators			Verb	Object
	Negative	Negative + Past/Perfect asp.	Progressive		
[kʰǎu] 'she'	[māi] 'not'			[suf:] 'buy'	[kra pǎu] 'bag'
[kʰǎu] 'she'		[māi dái] 'didn't, haven't'		[suf:] 'buy'	[kra pǎu] 'bag'
[kʰǎu] 'she'			[kamlaj] '-ing'	[suf:] 'buy'	[kra pǎu] 'bag'

From the examples in Table 3, several fundamental differences between English grammar and that of Thai can be seen; they concern subject-verb agreements, definite-indefinite articles and inflectional-derivational morphemes. Thus, learning the English language is a difficult task for the Thais in general. With limited grammatical structures in mind, they have to build-in such abstraction into their interlanguage systems. Degrees of success in learning depend on the method of teaching, exposure to language use, and

the learners' motives. The outcomes of the teaching-learning process can be seen in the following samples. On being asked how busy they were in their offices, and why English was important or necessary for them, three female subjects answered impromptu with the same phonological restrictions, i.e. with the Thai pronunciation, but varying in grammatical structures which can be generalized as 'telegraphic' in Sample I, 'ill-formed' in Sample II, and 'partially well-formed' in Sample III.

Sample I

A high school graduate with no exposure to native speakers of English, working as a hotel telephone operator

'My wer [wə?] (work) at office -er- no busy (pause) for English (pause)

is important--important for ev-- everybody (pause) because if the guest (pause) contact--contact our (long pause) we--we use -er- English for (pause) for information with -er- the guest.'

Sample II

A high school graduate with some exposure to native speakers of English, working as a hotel telephone operator

Question:-----

'In my office is--is not so busy. I'm very enjoy -ah- my work and (pause) with my job. Have to -ah- I mean, have to asking the customer

like this, and (pause) we have very many customer coming to my hotel

like this and (chuckle) I'm so very enjoy it.'

Question:-----

'Very important for me and (pause) because if I know English, right? I have to asking -ah- another people, I mean, customer coming to Thailand like this.'

Sample III

A university graduate (non-English major) with little exposure to native speakers of English, working as an AV staff member

Question:-----

'Now, I am not busy and I -- and I think that English language is necessary for myself and my office because -er- my office at Thammasat University -er- I must contact with the foreign and I must speak English and I live in Bangkok. In Bangkok have many many

tourist. When -er- the tourist ask me about the way I must speak English with her.'

With these varieties of English, speakers can get the meaning across in some survival situations as context clues, gestures and facial expressions play an important role in spoken discourse. However, in academic circles and in some international related situations, grammatical patterns cannot be neglected and need special attention among Thais.

5. Semantics

As the phonological and grammatical limitations in Thai lead to difficulties in learning English, so the restrictions at the semantic level of the Thai language bring about limited semantic competence in the English of Thai learners. In Thai, one lexical item, i.e. the general meaning form, can be used colloquially to convey several specific meanings. However, in careful speech or in writing a modifier is added to the general head form to give a more precise meaning. In English, on the other hand, different lexical items are available. Take the word 'bag' [krapău] as illustrated in Table 3 as an example; [krapău] which is a general form can be used colloquially to signify 'a handbag', 'a wallet', 'a briefcase', or 'a suitcase'. However, in a more precise utterance, a number of modifiers are attached to this particular headnoun. This phenomenon appears as well with some other words but only a few are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Comparison of lexical items
in Thai and English

Thai	English	Thai	
General meaning		Specific meaning	
a) [krapău] 'bag'	handbag	[krapău tʰuŋ] 'bag for carrying'	
	purse	[krapău sataŋ] 'bag for money'	
	wallet		
	briefcase	[krapău ʔè:kasăŋ] 'bag for document'	
	suitcase	[krapău d̥r̥intʰaŋ] 'bag for travelling'	
b) [jím] 'smile'	beam	[jím nɔ:i jím jài] 'smile happily'	
	grin	[jím kwâ:ŋ] 'broad smile'	
	simper	[jím pʰajɔ:ŋ] 'self-conscious smile'	
	smirk	[jím sà?tçai] 'self-satisfied smile'	
c) [pu:ŋ] 'gun'	pistol	[pu:ŋ sâŋ] 'short gun'	
	revolver	[pu:ŋ lû:k mò:] 'gun with a container for bullets'	
	cannon	[pu:ŋ jài] 'big gun'	
	rifle	[pu:ŋ ja:u] 'long gun'	

In addition, the transfer of the habit of reciting word spelling with only single meaning practised as early as the primary school level worsens the selection of lexical items by the Thai speakers of English. This strategy reflects the misconception of a one-to-one correspondence between word and meaning in English. That is to say only items with general meaning exist in the speakers' repertoire. The Thai learners of English have only a limited range of words to signify meanings; in some cases the selection may be done inappropriately and may unintentionally result in misunderstandings as explained in the following examples of language use experienced by the writer herself.

Example I (key word: 'keep')

Situation: After a meal, a Thai wife asked her English husband to 'put the food away' by saying 'You keep it.' The husband complained irritably to the writer saying 'I don't understand why she wanted me to keep it.'

This is an example of the mother tongue interference. In Thai 'keep' has been translated in Thai dictionaries as '[kèp]' and has been recited in

school accordingly. However, the general meaning form [kèp] can signify the following items in English: 'to keep', 'to put away', 'to collect', 'to gather', 'to pluck'. In this case the Thai wife made a wrong choice of word.

Example II (key word: 'dear')

Situation: At a party, the English hostess showed a Thai guest a painting given to her by her boyfriend. The Thai guest looked at the painting and exclaimed 'Oh dear!' The hostess asked surprisingly 'Why? What's wrong?'

This is again another example of the learning of one-to-one meaning in English. For that person, 'dear' is translated as 'lovable' regardless of some other collocations of the word. In this situation the Thai guest really wanted to express appreciation, but her selection of word was put in a wrong expression.

Example III (key word: 'subject')

Situation: In a class, a student was summarizing a topic-content from an English passage. When she came to the sentence 'These features are **subject** to phonological rules.', she translated into Thai as 'These features are the **subject of** phonological rules.'

To this student, 'subject' has only one meaning, i.e. the subject of a sentence. No other related forms exist in her semantic repertoire of English.

Phrases and compounds are also a problem for Thai learners of English as they tend to look at one word at a time instead of the whole group of words. One of the examples which appeared in answer to the open question, 'The chief problem of education in Thailand is -----.' turned out to be 'Mr---(name of the Minister)' in the blank provided. This answer results solely from the misinterpretation of 'the chief problem' without any ill will. That is to say only 'chief' is concentrated on and 'chief' means 'head of that particular section' to this student. (The example came from a former lecturer at one of the Teachers Colleges in Bangkok).

Finally, there is a problem of stylistic meaning. It is difficult for the Thai speakers of English to understand where the boundaries lie in a scale of usage involving, 'formal', 'literary', 'colloquial', 'vulgar' or 'slang', as they have little or no exposure to language use. Once a university student described one of his friends as a 'shut up person' to mean a 'quiet person'. He said he had heard the term 'shut up' in some movies and thought it could be used elsewhere.

As linguistic components are related to one another, it is impossible to talk about the grammar of one particular language without reference to phonology or semantics. Ideally, what would be a great help to the Thai learners of English is a Thai-English or English-Thai dictionary with exhaustive accounts on the difficult points of all three levels mentioned earlier together with an appropriate method of teaching in order to reach the standard that may be expected.

6. Media Use of English

The use of English in the media in Thailand is not uncommon although Thai is mainly used in daily communication. The role of English can be seen in various forms of media available in the Thai society, e.g. newspapers, magazines, radio, television, academic journals, and advertisement.

There are two English-language newspapers in Thailand, *the Bangkok Post* and *the Nation*. Both of them offer local news and global information from international new agencies, analyse certain contemporary issues, acquaint readers with miscellaneous topics and put in the comics for amusement. Their target group of readers are some Thais, expatriates, and overseas subscribers. It could be said that they give unbiased facts and global perspective to the readers. In addition, they are sources of the English language for self-taught Thais who want to gain more fluency in English. For the younger target group, both newspapers offer subsidiary issues for children and students with an appropriate content-form.

As for magazines, local English ones are rare. There are only occasional issues of the English-language newspapers for special events, and some occasional consumer magazines covering a variety of specialized topics and interests. However, the international magazines *Asia* and *Time* and many others are available through subscription.

The other forms of media in Thailand, e.g. radio, television, journals and advertisement, carry their functions both in Thai and in English, but the Thai-based outnumber the English. Radio Thailand presents news in English while a few radio stations organized by native speakers of English give some news-talk and English music. Other Thai stations offer news-talk as well as album-oriented Thai and English music. A few stations, however, concentrate on the news-analysis talk conducted in Thai but give the names of the programmes in Thai and in English. The English-named programmes are coined along the lines of the loanword strategies mentioned before, e.g. 'News Update', 'Vision Two-thousand', 'Business To-day'. The focus points and the target groups of each radio station vary from one to another, but the radio is a form of media that reaches most of the population in all parts of Thailand.

English is also heard occasionally from the six unpaid channels of Thai television. The presenters of each programme, even among folk comedians, use some English words. Occasional talks or interviews on television, when participants are not Thais, are conducted in English, but a brief summary in Thai is also given by the Thai hosts. Conferences in Thai, which are of interest internationally and are televised, provide English interpreters and vice versa. Moreover, foreign news from international news agencies is broadcast in Thai, but occasional reporters' releases appear with the Thai subtitles on the screen, and several interesting Thai documentary series have English subtitles. In addition, various programmes on the television, e.g. games, variety, sports, concerts, bear the English names or have a blend of English and Thai, for example, 'Thank you game', 'Luk thung on air', ('Luk thung' is a Thai word meaning country music), 'Headline news', 'Motor waves', 'Super concert', and many others. Among a few pay cable television channels, English is more frequently heard on local news and international news from English and American broadcasting networks like BBC or CNN. In addition there is news from ABC Australia and Asia Business News on direct broadcasting satellites. On both cable television and satellites several other programmes produced in English speaking countries are also available.

English intermingling with Thai is also found in advertisement either on radio or television or from home-direct sales. Occasional English advertisements are received by bankcard members. Furthermore, English is also found in academic journals in Thailand, e.g. *The Thammasat Journal of Language and Linguistics* and *Journal of the Siam Society*. The former tends to include a few papers in English while the latter publishes mainly English papers.

There is a growing tendency of English in media use since media messages not only give information or entertainment but also reflect cultural, political and economic progress globally. In particular, the influence of western culture from the media has played an increasing role in the Thai society.

7. Language Policy

So far as foreign language policy is concerned, nowadays English language is required at the elementary school level. At the secondary school level, a number of foreign languages including English are specified in the curriculum, but only one foreign language is required for students in the first three years. It is apparent that most students choose English. During the following three years, one other foreign language can be selected. At the tertiary or university level, students are permitted to choose any foreign

languages specified in the curriculum, which may vary in different institutions. Taking the foreign language requirements at Thammasat University in Bangkok as an example (TU academic prospectus, 1997), first year students are required to take at least two fundamental courses from any one of the foreign languages offered in the curriculum; i.e. English, French, German, Russian, Japanese and Chinese. As might be expected, the students' demand for English is greater than that of the others. After the first year any foreign language courses can be chosen by students as their electives. As for the post-graduate level, only English is required. Students have to pass an English proficiency test; otherwise, two non-credit English courses have to be taken. Thus, English is still regarded as a principal subject for academic purposes in the Thai educational system.

8. Current trends

Nowadays English is widely recognized by Thai people as an important aid in gaining academic and professional advancement. As English is a required subject in the elementary schools, people in Thailand, even in the remote areas, know about the English language and its active role in society. In addition, the promotion of tourism in Thailand by private and government sectors increases the demand for the use of English for commercial purposes all over the country.

The local media which extensively reach the Thai community are important instigators of the necessity to learn English. A number of columnists in local Thai newspapers encourage readers to study English giving a reason that not only is English the most-used language in the world, it is also equally essential politically, socially, academically and economically for Thais and the global community. Moreover, there is a report in one of the English-language newspapers indicating that their Thai readership has increased considerably during the last two years, especially in the Bangkok area. This is due to the fact that analyses of local and international issues are generally available in the English-language newspapers and are regarded as food for thought. In addition, as English is the only means of accessibility to the internet, which is becoming the main source of information technology, English appears to be indispensable among educated and commercially-empowered groups of Thais.

Extra-curricular activities in English are usually considered beneficial. Students in Bangkok and in some big cities, with support and encouragement from their parents, are enthusiastic about taking extra English classes. English camps for students during the summer vacation are believed to be advantageous. Some well-to-do families manage to send their children to

summer schools in English-speaking countries with the hope of having them exposed to the language and the culture.

At present there are increasing number of private international schools and colleges as well as international programmes attached to private and governmental universities, where English is used as a medium of instruction. These places are becoming popular although the fees are high. Parents are willing to support their children to be educated in these institutions with one expectation, that is to equip them with a good knowledge of English.

9. The future

The increasing demand for the use of English locally, and society's readiness to step forward towards the global community, give the future prospect of Thai English a positive sign. English will be more frequently used all over Thailand and the number of people with English fluency will be greater. At present in universities with an international programme, some Thai students use English more freely both with their friends and lecturers. Some private international schools have non-Thai enrolments, so the Thai students in these schools are well-prepared and exposed to English use most of the time. Such developments will help particular groups of Thais improve the standard of Thai English phonologically, semantically and syntactically.

With the fruitful outcome of the learning and the use of English from the international institutions in Thailand, the Ministry of Education, which has full responsibility for the education of a large number of the population, could not ignore the teaching of English in educational institutions of its control. For the time being there is a movement among authorities in the Ministry to upgrade the policy and the method of teaching English in elementary schools.

In non-academic circles, the prevalence of English use will be seen in daily-life. The number of English loanwords is expected to increase and the intermingling of English and Thai in all forms of communication will become greater. This phenomenon is unalarming. The fact that it is necessary for Thais to keep their identity linguistically and culturally does not mean that they should neglect the essential means for their own good; i.e. English fluency. On the contrary, this means should be taken seriously and promptly encouraged for all Thai nationals.

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