

THE TENDENCY OF SOUND CHANGE AMONG THAI STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Good pronunciation leads to the clarity of understanding and delivering a word in daily communication and context. Since pronunciation is considered one of the problems for Thai students, this research investigated some sound change of English words made by Thai students. Ten sophomore students of English for Liberal Art in Xavier Learning Community Thailand were the participants in this research. One research question to be answered in this research is “what are common factors affecting Thai students’ English sound change?” Mixed-method was implemented to answer the research question and discover Thai students’ English mispronunciation. The focus of this study is to seek the common factors influencing Thai students’ English mispronunciation. The instruments to gather the data in this research are questionnaires and interviews. The result showed that five major problems are affecting Thai students’ English mispronunciation namely mother tongue, motivation, age, and intonation. Language change also becomes one of the factors affecting sound change among Thai students. This research concluded that to master the English language, L2 students should be more attentive in learning English. L2 students must also realize the importance of learning English pronunciation. This research has implications for the students, thesis advisors, and future researchers.

Keywords: English, sound change, Thai students

INTRODUCTION

Language is used to communicate with each other in a daily context. Without language, we cannot communicate and share our ideas. This idea is supported by Jamcharoensup (2014) who stated that we use language as a media to understand each other. Nowadays, the demand for learning a foreign language is increasing. One of the foreign languages that are demanded to be learned is English. English is considered an international language that should be learned by many students around the world in daily also global contexts. The demand for learning English is always increasing every year. Moreover, it is supported by Rusik (2015) who stated that the demand for learning to communicate in a second language always be a crucial notice to the sound structure of the language.

English is considered a lingua franca. Jenkins (2008) mentioned that 80% English speakers are non-native speakers. Lingua franca is a language that is used and adopted as a common language in a country whose native language is different. English is described as an international language that is used as a way to share knowledge, information, and many more in all parts of the world (Plailek & Essien, 2021). English has known as the most used language in the world and holds an important “second language” role in multilingual countries (Lauder, 2008). Students from some multilingual countries use English as a second language just as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and so on. Students from multilingual countries use English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) in a daily context (Sanjaya & Bram, 2021). Moreover, Khamkhien (2010) added that English has become a language to communicate around the world and has been

used for global contexts. Plailek & Essien (2021) claimed that nowadays all students in the world especially the students who learn EFL or ESL are required to learn English. Anjayani & Suprpto (2016) stated that to be capable of understanding and using English flawlessly, students must be able to cover various skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. When it comes time to learn English, speaking is one of the critical skills that should be mastered. On the other hand, speaking skills might cause various problems for EFL or ESL students (Plailek & Essien, 2021).

EFL or ESL students' mother tongues affect their English pronunciations, and eventually, it makes several kinds of special versions of pronunciation for instance Chinese-English, Thai-English, Singaporean-English, and many more (Zhou & Wei, 2002). Pronunciation is an important factor in the English language. Ellis (1997) stated that good pronunciation is required if a student wants to be successful in speaking (cited in Sahatsathatsana, 2017). As mentioned by Zhang & Yin (2009), the skill in speaking English represents an accuracy of pronunciation and intonation and it also influences the proper communication in an everyday conversation. Students have to pronounce words accurately and good pronunciation should be their ultimate goal in learning English, especially in mastering speaking skills (Sahatsathatsana, 2017). The main reason students must learn pronunciation deeply is to pronounce words accurately so others will understand what they said. However, Thai students often pronounce the words differently, and sometimes it makes people confused about what they said. As stated by Rusik (2015), the unclear and inaccurate pronunciation may interrupt the communication.

Thailand uses English as a foreign language to communicate in a purposive situation, moreover, it is obligatory for Thai students to learn English. English is included as a crucial subject in their curriculum, which starts from kindergarten level up to the highest educational levels (Sahatsathatsana, 2017; Plailek & Essien, 2021). Sahatsathatsana (2017) claimed that although Thai students have learned English for more than ten years in school, most of them still cannot practice and apply English to communicate and transfer their ideas in a daily context. Zhou & Wei (2002) stated that Thai people sometimes borrow English words in a daily conversation, yet pronounce the words in Thai ways; such as “supermarket (without /t/) and Topland (without /d/)”. Essien (2015) gave a further explanation to that problem, she explained that Thai students do not have proper time to practice their English pronunciation. they should need more time to practice their English pronunciation skills and apply them in real situations; inside and outside the school. It is also supported by Zhou & Wei (2002) who mentioned that pronunciation teaching might be the most abandoned factor in teaching English. however, the teacher's style in teaching pronunciation and instructions can be the main factor that leads students to be fluent in pronouncing English words. Based on the research that already had done by Hinofotis and Baily (1980), it is shown that the fault in learning English which should be enhanced seriously by EFL or ESL students is pronunciation, instead of vocabulary or grammar (cited in Tam, 2005).

Sound change might lead to misunderstanding to the listener (Rosari & Ena, 2019; Kosasih, 2017). Thai students tend to create pronunciation problems in speaking because they often pronounce English words in Thai ways. In line with that, Setter (2008) stated that students have to learn how to pronounce accurately to be well-understood by others. Sound change is proof that Thai students find difficulties in speaking English. It is supported by Hadi, Izzah, & Masae (2020) that

communication in English is a big problem for graduate degree students in Thailand. It can be concluded that learning how to pronounce the words accurately is needed by EFL or ESL students especially Thai students to make others understand the ideas they shared clearly.

Thus, the researcher attempt to answer one research question “what are common factors affecting Thai students’ English sound change?” by investigating students’ pronunciation of English words. The main reason is students are expected to be able to speak flawlessly and pronounce the words accurately. This research has implications for students, thesis advisors, and future researchers.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are several studies about Thai students’ pronunciation problems. The study entitled Thai Learners’ English Pronunciation Competence: Lesson Learned from Word Stress Assignment by Khamkhien (2010). The finding and discussion from Khamkhien’s study is the pronunciation of most participants was limited. Khamkhien (2010) also assessed Thai students’ English pronunciation by giving them a test. Khamkhien (2010) mentioned that Thai students must learn how to sharpen their knowledge about English, be more attentive, and be more aware of the importance of pronunciation features.

Another case study that was done by Sahatsathatsana (2017) is also related to this research. Sahatsathatsana (2017) conducted a case study entitled Pronunciation Problems of Thai Students Learning English Phonetics: A Case Study at Kalasin University. Sahatsathatsana (2017) stated two purposes of the study. The first purpose is to investigate the students’ opinions in phonetic learning and the second purpose is to seek factors causing phonetic learning problems. There are several factors causing pronunciation problems for instance students’ native language, phonetic ability, prior English pronunciation learning, instruction, and motivation.

The last similar study to this research is Pronunciation Problems and Factors Affecting English Pronunciation of EFL Students by Plailek & Essien (2021). They mentioned the purpose of their study is to discover EFL students’ English pronunciation problems and to seek the factors affecting students’ English pronunciation. According to their study, the major factor affecting students’ pronunciation problems was their basic knowledge of English pronunciation. Moreover, English phonemes at the initial syllable, teachers’ instruction, and the frequency of English pronunciation were also affecting students’ English pronunciation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Affecting Sound Change among Thai Students

Sound change refers to a component in the language system which happens in a certain state (Saussure, 1992). Sound change is a change in the sound structure of a language. In order to pronounce the words accurately, it is important to understand the factors affecting students’ pronunciation and learn how to improve the pronunciation. In the word of Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (2000), Zhou & Wei (2002), Zhang & Yin (2009), Sahatsathatsana (2017) several factors are affecting Thai students’ English mispronunciation including students’ mother tongues, motivation, age, and the absence of phonetic features. Below is the explanation of those factors affecting Thai students’ English mispronunciation.

Mother tongue

Mother tongue refers to the language that students learned first at home since they are little. It is also stated by Avery & Ehrlich (1987) that students who have different mother tongues usually speak a target language differently. Along with that, Sahatsathatsana (2017) declared that the way the students speak the target language is occasionally dissimilar from their mother tongue. Kenworthy (1987) mentioned that the mother tongue becomes the most dominant aspect in deeming students' pronunciation of the target language. Students' mother tongues usually affect the way they speak the target language because they have learned and spoken with it during their childhood. Thai mother tongue has a unique intonation which sometimes affects students in pronouncing English words. It can lead to confusion for others in understanding them. Moreover, one of the aspects which make students difficult to pronounce an English word is the different accent in each dialect (Jamcharoensup, 2014)

Motivation

Motivation is believed as a medium to boost students' will to study a foreign language. Motivation is required for students to learn a foreign language (Tanaka, 2017). Khamkhien (2010) explained that students' motivation is the powerful aspect for leading the students into success or failure in learning a foreign language. Motivation can also help the students in developing native-like pronunciation (Sahatsathatsana, 2017). The positive experience of learning a foreign language is an important aspect in expanding native-like pronunciation (Moyer, 2007). Sahatsathatsana (2017) also added that teachers must motivate students to be brave to speak English inside and outside the classroom. Motivation is the main reason for students to learn a foreign language because it can lead to success or failure. This statement is supported by Lee & Bong (2019) who stated that motivation in L2 learning encourages L2 students to master a second language by constructing a positive attitude about the second language itself and attaining effort when learning the second language. Moreover, teachers have an important role in building students' motivation in learning a foreign language, especially learning pronunciation.

Age

In improving students' pronunciation skills, age holds a major role. Zhang & Yin (2009) indicated that pronunciation is difficult to master for adults. The main reason is young learners tend to learn the sound system more successfully, on the other hand, the adult usually might slow down their learning process due to their age (Zhang & Yin, 2009). Khamkhien (2010) described students who are able to pronounce flawlessly might probably start to learn a foreign language when they are little. Collier (2003) mentioned that older and younger students were reported to be more rapid in language learning rather than adults. Students who learn a foreign language during their childhood tend to be more accurate in pronouncing the words because they have already familiar with the words. However, adults seem to have problems mastering pronunciation because they are not familiar with the words of the target language.

Intonation

Phonetic features refer to the features to make and distinguish phones for instance pitch, intonation, and rate. Intonation is the ups and downs in a tone that makes the melody of a speaking. Wenda (1983) stated that intonation is a major aspect of English pronunciation. In addition, Zhou & Wei (2002) described intonation as the pitch of the voice. Intonation is described as a navigation for the listener to help the listener understand and follow what the speaker tries to say (Gilbert, 1994). Intonation in differentiating questions and statements is rarely used in the Thai language (Zhou & Wei, 2002). Zhang and Yin (2009) claimed that intonation in English shows the degree of certainty of an utterance. They also added that rising intonation is usually used for questions. In short, it is beneficial for students to learn.

Language Change

All languages are changing continuously. Language always change continuously based on their regions, cultures, generations, and so on. Language is used by humans to communicate with each other. Language change is the method to modify the phonetic, morphological, semantic, syntactic, and other language features (Rusik, 2015). As mentioned by Fasold & Linton (2006), language change can happen because of the relationship between other languages and the cultures which show the social, political, and military history and there are four kinds of language change such as morphological change, syntactic change, semantic change, and phonological change.

Morphological change, the changes in the morphophonemic system of a language. Syntactic change, the change in the grammatical structure of a language. Semantic change, the change in the meaning of words. Phonological change, the change in the sound structure, and it has an impact on a single word being pronounced.

The Types of English Sound Changes

The types of English sound changes are sorted by Crowley (1992) into seven types namely lenition and fortition, sound addition, fusion, unpacking, vowel breaking, assimilation, and abnormal sound changes.

Lenition and Fortition

Lenition refers to the change of sound from strong sound to the weak sound. It also includes group reduction which means to deletion of some consonants. However, fortition shows the opposite of lenition which the changes from the weak to the strong sound.

Sound Addition

It includes excrescence, epenthesis, and prosthesis. Excrescence means the process of adding a consonant between two consonants in a word. Epenthesis and prosthesis mean the addition of vowel between the word to split two consonants and adding the sound at the beginning of a word.

Fusion

Fusion means the combination of two different sounds to become one sound. Rusik (2015) gave an example of the word *bɔ̃n*. It is a French word and the meaning of *bɔ̃n* is *good* which is

pronounced as [bõ]. The explanation of this phenomenon is in French sound structure, if a vowel is placed before a nasal consonant so it will be pronounced as a nasalized vowel.

Unpacking

Unpacking means the separation of one original sound into two different sounds. Rusik (2015) gave an example of unpacking for instance the word *truck*. *Truck* is *camio* in French which is pronounced as [kamiõ]. While in Bismala, a French nasal vowel is pronounced by adding a nasal consonant [kamioŋ].

Vowel Breaking

It means the changes from one vowel into a diphthong while the original vowel remains the same. Rusik (2015) mentioned the example of vowel breaking such as the English word *bad* [bæd] is pronounced as [bæəd] by some Americans. The vowel [æ] is still the same however, there is an addition of a neutral schwa vowel [ə].

Assimilation

It means the change of sound because the influence of a sound onto the other sound which resulted two sounds might be similar to one another. It happens when a vowel is nasalized because of the presence of adjacent nasal consonant.

Abnormal Sound Changes

It is the changes of sound which appeared at the first glimpse and it is not fit into the eight types that have stated above. Rusik (2015) gave an example of this phenomenon for instance the word *English* should be pronounced as [ˈɪŋɡlɪʃ], however it changes into [ˈɪŋɡlɪs] by Indonesian learners.

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study is to discover the common factors affecting Thai students' English mispronunciation. English pronunciation ability means the ability to dispatch good pronunciation. This study provides one main objective which is to discover the factors affecting Thai students' English mispronunciation. This research employ document analysis because the researcher reviewed and assessed documents (Bowen, 2008). The qualitative method is also employed in this research by conducting interviews with three participants. Thus, this research used mixed-method to gather and examine the data. A mixed-method blends both quantitative and qualitative data in research; a mixed method is used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to integrate the data and use a specific design to examine the data (Creswell, 2018).

The participants were the sophomore of English for Liberal Art in Xavier Learning Community which is located in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Around 10 students had participated in this research. The methodology employed in this research is a document analysis to gather and examine the data. The researcher also used an instrument in this research which is English paragraph text to be read by the sophomore students of English for Liberal Art in Xavier Learning Community as the object of the research. The data for this research was gathered and collected by applying the instrument. The students were asked to pronounce the given English words individually. The researcher

recorded the students and made transcripts of their recordings. The researcher calculated the data from the results of the recorded transcripts and the phonetic transcription, and the results were displayed in a table and the researcher explained and added the data from the interview. The researcher adopted an assessment form from Rusik (2015) to assess the participants' pronunciation which is The Phonetic Transcription of Participants' Pronunciation and an assessment form from Crowley (1992) which is The Kinds of English Sound Changes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher attempted to answer the research question in this section by gathering and analyzing the data.

Factors Affecting Sound Change among Thai Students

Table 1. Data of the participants

| Participants | Age | Years of learning English |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| P1 – Beer | 22 years old | 14 years (since 8 years old) |
| P2 – Phan | 22 years old | 8 years (since 10 years old) |
| P3 – Nannas | 22 years old | 6 years (since 16 years old) |

The personal data of the three participants are described in Table 1 above. The years of learning English have an important impact on the participants in pronouncing the words flawlessly. The result shows that the participants who have learned English for more than 10 years reveal that they have better pronunciation. P3 stated that “At first I did not like English but I have to study it because English and Chinese programs should be taken together.” In addition, P2 mentioned that “I have learned the English language since I was in grade 4 but until now I cannot speak English fluently because I never use the language in daily conversation.”

P1 mentioned that “my motivation to learn the English language was when I had some foreign teachers from the USA, Australia, Phillipine, and Indonesia who spoke English fluently and from that experience, I wanted to learn English deeper so I can speak with foreigners who speak and understand English fluently.” P2 stated that “my motivation to learn English is to be able to talk with foreigners and watch English movies without subtitles because I am always tired when I watch English movies and read the subtitle.” While P3 claimed that “I had a friend from Germany when I was in high school. At that time, I could not understand what she said but I wanted to talk with my German friend without getting confused about the language. So, I decided to study English deeper to sharpen my English skills especially in speaking.” P1 also added that “The biggest motivation in myself to learn English is because I want to get a good job abroad. So to get a good job, I have to study English well and go abroad.”

When the researcher asked the participants about who motivates the participants to learn English better, P3 stated that “the English teacher motivates me to learn English.” P2 claimed that “the motivation to learn English is my self.” While P1 mentioned that “Everyone motivates me to learn English, especially my English teacher. He always supports me to learn and tells me to never give up.” The participants have various answers about how the participants learn the English language. P2 answered that “In Thailand, we mostly learn about grammar and we do not speak the language

in daily conversation. We only learn the English language at schools with our teacher and friends.” P2 stated that “I like listening to English songs because I believe that by listening my favorite English songs, I can hear the accent of the singer and catch some new vocabularies so I can learn from it.” P1 stated that some strategies are needed to learn English such as speaking with some foreigners to gain confidence and improve the speaking skill, listening to English songs helps to gain some new vocabularies which can be used in daily conversation, following some English influencers in *Facebook* to add more knowledge about the English language for instance the difference between American and British accents and later the participant can compare both American and British accents from the different influencers that the participant follows. This can help the participant in deciding which accent that will be implemented when the participant speaks in English.

The researcher asked the participants’ difficulties in English pronunciation and the participants showed various answers. P1 mentioned that the Thai people usually find difficulties in pronouncing English words especially in letter [r]. P1 claimed that Thai accent influences the way they pronounce letter [r]. When they have letter [r] in the English word, they cannot pronounce the letter fluently. P1 added that pronouncing [th] is difficult for Thai people. P1 gave an example the English word *thank* [θæŋk] is pronounced as [tæŋk] by some Thai people. P1 also explained that Thailand is known as the country which has more or less 30 ethnic groups that influence the Thai people to pronounce the English words depending on the accents of their ethnics. P2 and P3 shared the same problem which is the English long words are difficult to pronounce. All the three participants mentioned some words that are not commonly used during their conversation, for instance the word *chaos* is pronounced as [caʊs] instead of [keʊs] and the word *aisle* is pronounced [aɪsəl] instead of [aɪl].

The Types of English Sound Changes

Table 2. The kinds of English sound changes (Crowley, 1992)

The researcher presented the gathered data in the Table 2 based on the kinds of English sound changes by Crowley (1992). There are nine kinds of English sound changes namely lenition and fortition, sound addition, metathesis, fusion, unpacking, vowel breaking, assimilation, dissimilation, and abnormal sound changes.

| Kinds of sound changes | Words | Participants’ pronunciation | Longman Dictionary (2008) | Oxford Dictionary (1995) |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lenition | Health | [helt] | [helθ] | [helθ] |
| | Governor | [ˈgʌfərnər] | [ˈgʌvərnər] | [ˈgʌvərnər] |
| | Vaccine | [ˈfæksi:n] | [ˈvæksi:n] | [ˈvæksi:n] |
| | Expect | [ɪkˈspek] | [ɪkˈspekt] | [ɪkˈspekt] |
| Fortition | Recipient | [reˈsɪpiənt] | [rɪˈsɪpiənt] | [rɪˈsɪpiənt] |
| | Procure | [prəˈkjʊr] | [prəˈkjʊə] | [prəˈkjʊr] |
| | The | [də] | [ðə] | [ðə] |
| | Third | [tɜ:rd] | [θɜ:rd] | [θɜ:rd] |
| Sound Addition | Immunization | [,ɪmʉniˈsteɪʃn] | [,ɪmjʉnaɪˈzeɪʃn] | [,ɪmjʉnaɪˈzeɪʃn] |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Fusion | Inactive | [in'ektɪv] | [ɪn'æktɪv] | [ɪn'æktɪv] |
| | Expand | [ɪk'spænd] | [ɪk'spænd] | [ɪk'spænd] |
| | Proactive | [prə'æktɪv] | [prɒ'æktɪv] | [prɒ'æktɪv] |
| Unpacking | Meanwhile | ['mɪnwaɪl] | ['mi:nwaɪl] | ['mi:nwaɪl] |
| | Network | ['netwɜ:k] | ['netwɜ:k] | ['netwɜ:k] |
| Vowel Breaking | Country | ['kʌntri] | ['kʌntri] | ['kʌntri] |
| Assimilation | Second | ['sekənt] | ['sekənd] | ['sekənd] |
| Abnormal Sound Changes | Likely | ['laɪli] | ['laɪkli] | ['laɪkli] |

Students' pronunciation problems are affected by several factors. The Thai language is a tonal language which is focusing on the tone. The Thai language does not distinguish the words based on stress so stress is considered as the major problem for Thai students. Thai students often put stress on the last syllable of the words. When Thai students speak in English, they usually pronounce the words in Thai ways. Moreover, the alphabet of the Thai language also affects English pronunciation. This phenomenon is considered a normal thing in Thailand. Zhou & Wei (2002) explained that Thai students often read 'th' into 't' as in the word *they* which should be pronounced as [ðeɪ] however, the participants tend to pronounce this word as [teɪ], 'ph' into 'p', 'p' into 'b', and so on.

The intonation that is used in the Thai language also affects English pronunciation. Thai students often apply the intonation into English pronunciation which is sometimes confusing. Thai students think of this phenomenon as normal, however, without they realize, it affects their English pronunciation which sometimes leads to misunderstanding. In addition, the teacher should also pay more attention and spend more time teaching pronunciation also affects students' pronunciation.

CONCLUSION

To sum up this study, the researcher discovered some common mispronunciations made by Thai students and factors affecting their pronunciation problems. To master the English language, L2 students should be more attentive in learning English. L2 students must also realize the importance of learning English pronunciation. Common factors affecting Thai students' English mispronunciation are students' mother tongues, motivation, age, and intonation. Pronunciation is not as difficult as they think depending on their acknowledgment of those factors and they must practice more often in order to boost their pronunciation.

Some suggestions come up along with the problems. Provide some articulatory descriptions of the mother tongue and English language for students, it will help them to realize what and how they are doing. Teachers should improve the way they teach their students in pronouncing English words. Students should have strong motivation from inside them to learn English pronunciation, moreover, teachers should motivate their students to not be shy and try to speak in English inside and outside the school. If it is possible, try to learn English during childhood, it is shown that early age is the golden age to learn a foreign language, especially English. Teachers also have to spend

more time teaching pronunciation to their students. Teachers must also be more aware of students' difficulty in pronouncing English words.

This research has limitations that should be broadened by future researchers who have an interest in investigating this topic. First, this research uses a limited number of participants. Second, the participants' competence in pronouncing words might be influenced by other factors such as phonetic ability, etc. Therefore, further researchers should investigate this topic deeper.

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