

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale and Background

English is a communicative language in an era of the availability of immense information and advanced technology. English is called a global language (Crytal, 1997). It is indisputable that Thai learners should learn English as a compulsory subject. Nevertheless, Thai learners' TOEFL scores are significantly lower than the scores of learners from other Asian countries (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Osathanukor (2005) adds that while Thai learners work very hard to learn English inside and outside of the classroom, too many learners still cannot speak well. He also emphasizes that Thai learners are very intelligent. They understand all the English rules of grammar, but they do not have a chance to use all the rules in real situations. Moreover, they rarely have a chance to communicate with native speakers, so they lack self-confidence when they finally do have to speak with foreigners. To reduce miscommunication, clear pronunciation is undeniable for language learners.

To promote effective communication, developing pronunciation is a necessary aspect in the communicative approach (Wong, 1987; Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996; Lambercher, 1996; Otlowski, 1998). There are two main areas of pronunciation teaching and learning: segmentals and suprasegmentals. Segmental refers to the individual sounds and suprasegmental refers to rhythm, stress, prominence and intonation. Many writers of teaching material, teachers and researchers have stated that the suprasegmental aspect should be the first aspect for language learners to learn (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin 1996; Gilbert, J. 2003). This is because learning about suprasegmentals can help language learners increase their self-confidence in speaking.

Acquiring an understanding of suprasegmentals is a problem for Thai learners because of the differences between the Thai and English sound systems (Kruatrachue, 1960; Rudaravanija, 1965; Sankhavadhana, 1989). Kruatrachue (1960) conducted a comparative study between Thai and English phonology and found that English

prosodics, or suprasegmentals, were complex facets for Thai learners to acquire. Similarly, Lekawatana, et. al. (1969) pointed out that suprasegmentals such as word stress and intonation are the main problems for Thai learners. Moreover, they have difficulty pronouncing the primary stresses in English words (Jaruson 1997, Wei & Zhou (2002). Furthermore, Sankhavadhana (1989) stated that for intonation patterns, some features in the English language do not appear in the Thai sound system. These are some of the difficulties found by Thai learners in their English language acquisition. Sankhavadhana (1989) suggested that teachers have to design suitable lessons in order to help learners to become familiar with the stresses and intonations of English words. To reduce the errors in communication for Thai learners who learn English as a foreign language, learning word stress and intonation is absolutely essential.

According to the Suggestopedia approach, music plays an important role in helping learners to relax and feel comfortable when learning new things. When learners feel relaxed, their state of mind is more conducive to learning. Music and songs can be used to motivate language learners to communicate (Orlava, 1997, Schoepp, 2001). Music and songs can help learners expand their foreign language ability by deepening their understanding of grammatical structure, vocabulary and pronunciation. Furthermore, many different musical genres can be used for teaching rhythm, word stress and intonation, such as folk (Spicher & Sweeney, 2007), rap (Fischler, 2005), and jazz chant (Soudon, 2002; Graham, 2006). In addition, Iwata (2005) found that learning a foreign language by using song lyrics can help learners acquire language better than learners who learn by memorizing sentences. Music is also helpful for learning word stress and intonation.

Advancements in information technology have helped people to connect more easily with each other. Moreover, anybody with access to the Internet can search for information from anywhere in the world. So, technology and computers are very important in everyday life. For language learning in particular, the computer is a useful tool for teachers and language learners alike. Computer-assisted language learning can provide multimedia lessons which learners can use virtually anytime and anywhere (Splittgerber, 1979; Thabsri, 1992). In fact, computer-assisted language learning has been used for teaching both aspects of pronunciation, that is to say, both

segmentals and suprasegmentals (Hardison, 2004; Kedrowicz & Watanabe, 2006; Gruba, 2006; AbuSeileek, 2007). In Thailand, Chompuboot's (2005) studies about using computer-assisted language learning to teach word stress, sentence stress and intonation at the university level found that most learners acquired knowledge with a more positive attitude.

As mentioned earlier, English is known as the international language that many people all over the world use for daily communication. Business English students at Khon Kaen University learn English in order to communicate with foreigners. They are required to enroll in English speaking and English listening courses. In a business context, the result of miscommunication is not only misunderstanding but also potentially lost income. In order to help Business English students reduce miscommunications and help them master English sounds, this research will study methods to help them learn about learning English word stress, sentence stress and intonation.

In Thailand, there are only a few programs and textbooks for teaching English word stress, sentence stress and intonation at the Thai university level. Commercial programs and textbooks, such as Real-time Pitch (RTP), include texts with audio tracks of native speakers. Real-time Pitch is a program that was created by Boersma and Weenink. This program provided a pitch contour in real time and allowed the comparison of the learners' speech with native speakers' speech (Boersma, 2001). In addition, the study of Chompuboot (2005) also provided audio sounds of the native speaker and used computer program for teaching word stress and intonation. The research, music, and songs were used as a means for teaching English suprasegmentals. There were many studies that used music and song styles for teaching English suprasegmentals, such as jazz chant (Soudorn, 2002; Graham, 2006), rap (Fischler, 2005), and folk songs (Spicher & Seeney, 2007). In this research, various kinds of music styles were used in composing the songs. This research focused on the lessons regarding English word stress, sentence stress and intonation for second-year English students at Khon Kaen University studying one of these so-called suitable programs. Sokatiyanurak (2006) said that music and language cannot be separated because both of them require one's ears to perceive the sound. As a result, in this study music notation will be used to point out the pitch change in

the words and sentences in order to teach English word stress, sentence stress and intonation. In addition, computer-assisted pronunciation can be used in the language classroom to promote an enjoyment of life-long learning. Learners can learn by themselves any time and any place where there is a computer. The potential benefits of this type of courseware has led to its inclusion in this research, as it covers the development of computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware for teaching English suprasegmentals to Business English learners at Khon Kaen University.

2. Purposes of the Study

2.1 To develop computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware for teaching English word stress, sentence stress and intonation.

2.2 To enhance learners' abilities in proper English word stress, sentence stress and intonation patterns by using computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware.

2.3 To investigate learners' attitudes toward computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware.

3. Research Questions

3.1 What are the efficiency and the effectiveness index of the computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware?

3.2 To what extent can computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware help learners improve their knowledge of English word stress, sentence stress and intonation through music?

3.3 What are learners' attitudes toward the computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware?

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 **Computer-Assisted Musical Pronunciation Courseware** is a computer assisted learning program which consists of songs in English and musical melodies. Both the songs' melodies and lyrics in this research will be written based on the content compiled by the researcher. The songs will be written based on the correct English word stress, sentence stress and intonation.

4.2 English Suprasegmentals are called prosody or prosody phonology. Kreidler (1989) stated that prosody consists of the utterance divided into chunks or tone units. The tone unit describes the accent or tonicity, as well as intonation or “language melody” (Halliday, 1967). Ladefoged (2006) described suprasegmental’s features as rhythm, pitch, duration, stress, intonation.

In this research, **English suprasegmentals** focus on word stress, sentence stress and intonation.

5. Scope of Study

This study focused on developing the computer-assisted musical pronunciation courseware of suprasegmentals for Business English learners at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Khon Kaen University. This research covered suprasegmentals at the word level and sentence level, as well as intonation. Although there are many acceptable accents in English (British English, American English, Australian English, etc.), this research will only use American English

6. Significance of Study

English Suprasegmentals is the problematic area for non native English language learners. Many attempts have been made to solve this problem. Jaruson (1997) studied and found that the learners who were exposed to English environment had higher ability about word stress. Yasuyo (1988) used the musical notes as the visual aid for helping learners to improve rhythm of second language. Sidalad (2005) used Thai alphabets for helping learners learn English pronunciation. Furthermore, there were many studies that used music and songs for teaching language. For example, Le (1999) used songs to communicate. Cardoso and Vieira (2006) used music and songs for teaching the interpretation of metaphorical expression. Soudorn (2002) constructed jazz chant for teaching stress. Fischler (2005) used rap music for teaching stress. In addition, technology was used for teaching English suprasegmentals such as Hincks (2002) used commercial programs for synthesizing learners’ speech. Kongkeo (2002) used ball queuing and color-bar queuing technique shown stress placement of the words on the screen. Chompuboot (2005) constructed computer-assisted language learning for teaching English stress and intonation.

Although, there were many studies that used computer-assisted language learning for teaching English suprasegmentals but very few studies were found to use the music with computer-assisted language learning for teaching English suprasegmentals. Therefore it is the purpose of the present study to develop a Computer-Assisted Musical Pronunciation Courseware for English Suprasegmentals so language learners who are non-native English speakers can have an awareness of the significance of word stress, sentence stress and intonation. Music and songs in this study were composed in order to promote an enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere in the foreign language classroom. Music can be a useful tool for teaching word stress, sentence stress and intonation. The advantages of using music in the language class room are that learners can acquire a second language in generally conducive atmosphere. In addition, music and songs can be used to increase learners' motivation and reduce learners' anxiety. Furthermore, music and songs can be used in the language classroom to promote communication skills and increase understanding of pronunciation. Moreover, computer-assisted language learning is a useful supplement to a language class and teachers can encourage their students to learn in a suitable time and place, thus not restricting learning to the classroom.