

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature from a number of studies specifically related to three main areas along with a summary: (1) The Theory of Second Language Learning, (2) The Concept of Teaching Pronunciation, (3) Relevant Research, and summary.

2.1 PRONUNCIATION AS AN ASPECT OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORY

According to *How Languages are Learned*, Lightbown & Spada (1999) mentioned significant second language learning theories as an aspect of pronunciation as follows:

Patkowski's concept of Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) about the relationship between age of acquisition and second language development focused on learners' phonological achievement (pronunciation). The older learners have a noticeable foreign accent. Second language learning will be more difficult and incomplete after puberty. Therefore, teaching and learning pronunciation of target language like a native speaker should be at the earlier stage.

"Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis" (CAH) predicts that where there are similarities between the first and second languages, the learner will acquire second language structures with ease; where there are differences, the learner will have difficulty. Therefore, contrastive analysis made 'transfer' or 'interference' the explanation for the first language influencing learners' interlanguage. Swan and Smith (1987) presented the idea that the significant differences of the phonological systems of Thai and English are one of the causes in pronunciation problems of Thai learners. There are 21 consonant phonemes and 21 vowel phonemes in Thai. In the Thai consonant system, the aspirated voiceless stops /p^h/, /t^h/ and /k^h/ are distinction phonemes and not simply allophones of /p/, /t/ and /k/ as in English. English has more fricatives than Thai: /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. Therefore, Thai speakers are likely to make the substitutions. For initial consonants, they pronounce /w/ instead of /v/, /t/, /s/ instead of /θ/, /d/, /t/, /s/ instead of /ð/, /tʃ/ instead of /ʃ/, /s/ instead of /z/. For final

consonants, they pronounce /t/ instead of /d/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /p/ instead of /v/, /f/, /n/ instead of /l/. Moreover, /g/ and /dʒ/ at the beginning of a word are often pronounced as unvoiced consonants. For consonant clusters, English has a larger number of consonant clusters than Thai, and there are no final consonants at the final position of words in Thai at all. The initial two-segment clusters: /dr/, /fr/, /fl/, /fj/, /tw/, /sl/, /sw/, /sm/, /sp/, /sk/, /st/ are not found in Thai. Thai speakers insert a short vowel sometimes creating a fully stressed syllable. They pronounce ‘sa-moke’ instead of ‘smoke’, ‘fa-rown’ instead of ‘frown’. The initial three-segment clusters of English are also pronounced ‘sa-cre’ instead of ‘screw’, ‘sa-trike’ instead of ‘strike’. For final consonant clusters, Thai speakers retain the first segment of cluster and drop the last. They pronounce ‘pum’ instead of ‘pump’, ‘perfec’ instead of ‘perfect’, and ‘lun’ instead of ‘lunch’. In the Thai vowel system, vowel length is significant with a difference made between long and short vowels because Thai is a tonal language. There are no diphthongs in Thai. Thai people pronounce diphthongs /ei/, /əʊ/ and /eə/ as long pure vowels /e:/, /o:/ and /æ:/ respectively. For stress, Thai speakers tend to emphasize with equal weight to each syllable in English. Those sounds are prominent pronunciation problems of Thai speakers if they are not taught to distinguish the right phonological system of English.

Schachter’s outlined a concept of “Avoidance” that it is a part of the learners’ systematic second language performance. The learners avoided using the target language where they perceived that a language feature in the target language was too difficult for them. Additionally, avoidance did not occur on the phonological level but on the syntactic level or lexical level, e.g. /-θ/ in words like “this, that” (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996, p.21). Thai students usually use the concept of “Avoidance” when speaking English. There are some consonants, consonant clusters, and diphthong vowel sounds that are too difficult to produce or that have L1 interferences as mentioned earlier. When Thai students speak English, those sounds are voiceless.

Additionally, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (1996) pointed out about “Exposure to the target language” the importance of language exposure in the process of acquiring all aspects of language: pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (p.16-

17). When students have little opportunity to surround themselves with the target language environment, it is the teacher's burden to provide an adequate model of the target language. Therefore, if the language teachers have wrong pronunciation, their students will definitely have problematic sounds.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

Harmer (1992) stated that pronunciation is the language skill that language learners need and teachers need to be sure that their students can be understood when they are speaking. Moreover, pronunciation is important not only for listening and speaking but also for spelling. Refer to "Teach Asia Online - Main – Pronunciation"; students can be confused in spelling if they cannot distinguish the different sounds.

Currently in language teaching, the communicative approach represents a primary purpose of language communication that leads to renewed urgency in the teaching of pronunciation. It has shown evidence that there is a threshold of pronunciation for non-native English speakers. If they are below the threshold level, they will have oral communication problems even though they are excellent and extensive in English grammar and vocabulary (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Additionally, the goal of teaching pronunciation is to enable learners to exceed the threshold level in order to avoid detraction in their communication ability. Therefore, there are six groups of English learners that need a high level of intelligible pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996, p.8) as follows:

1. foreign teaching assistants – and sometimes foreign faculty – in colleges and universities in English-speaking countries;
2. foreign-born technical, business, and professional employees in business and industry in English-speaking countries;
3. international business people and diplomats who need to use English as their working lingua franca;
4. refugees (adult and adolescent) in resettlement and vocational training programs wishing to relocate in English-speaking countries;
5. teachers of English as a foreign language who are not native speakers of English and who expect to serve as the major model and source of input in English for their students;

6. people in non-English-speaking countries working as tour guides, waiters, hotel personnel, customs agents, and the like, who use English for dealing with visitors who do not speak their language.

As mentioned earlier, it could be concluded that teaching and learning pronunciation should begin with intelligible pronunciation by language teachers who encourage students exposure to the target language.

2.3 RELEVANT RESEARCH

According to “Insight into English Pronunciation Problems of Thai Students”, Wei and Zhou (2002) investigated problems with English pronunciation among Thai students. It was found that Thai students had pronunciation problems with consonants and vowels: words with /r/ pronounced as /l/, words with /v/ pronounced as /f/, words with /z/ pronounced as /s/ and words with /ei/ pronounced as /e/. Stress and intonation between yes-no questions and wh-questions were also found as being problems of Thai students. The final consonant sounds are always unaspirated and unvoiced. The researcher made conclusions about possible causes of the Thai students’ pronunciation problems of which the important one was some teachers’ Thai style English pronunciation. A language teacher’s pronunciation is a model for the students who imitate teachers’ pronunciation, or the teacher will correct the student’s pronunciation. If the teacher’s pronunciation is with a Thai accent, the students’ pronunciation will be the same. Therefore, one of suggested solutions to solve English pronunciation problems of Thai students is to provide pronunciation training courses to language teachers.

Ratchanee Mano-im (1999) studied “The Pronunciation of English Final Consonant Clusters by Thai Students” and found that there were five responses in Thai students’ production: they correctly pronounced two given sounds, deleted one of two sounds, replaced one or both sounds, deleted one sound and replace the other, or inserted an extra sound. The researcher also found the degrees of difficulty in pronouncing final consonant clusters, ranked here from the easiest: a nasal followed by a stop /-nt/, a nasal followed by a fricative /-ns/, a lateral followed by a stop /-lt/, a nasal followed by an affricate /-ntʃ/, a stop followed by a fricative /-ks/, and a fricative followed by a stop /-sk/.

Krittika Panseetong (1996) studied “A Development of Practice Packages on the Vowels and Consonants in English Word Pronunciation Skill for Prathom Suksa Six Students”, which focused on the problematic sounds of Thai students: [ij], [ei], [əʊ], [tʃ], [ð], [θ-], [-θ] and [-g], and reported that in teaching pronunciation, the English teachers should practice three processes: production: language teachers should produce the target language like native; perception: language teachers should have good perception skill; correction: language teachers should be able to perceive and correct mispronunciation of their students.

The researcher also identified that Thai teachers of English do not adequately practice Standard English pronunciation which leads to the lack of confidence to be a role model. Therefore, the teachers cannot correct students’ pronunciation or demonstrate them how to produce the right sound.

Tippawan Janyasupab (1982) studied “An Analysis of English Pronunciation of English Major students at High Certificate of Education Level” from 100 subjects randomly drawn from four college teachers in the Bangkok Metropolis. The researcher concluded that errors were found in both segmental phonemes: vowels and consonants, and suprasegmental elements: stress and intonation in particular, the three causes of these errors were the influence of Thai on English pronunciation, the difficulties of English itself, and the students’ failures in their learning process.

Pratsaneeya Jarusan (1997) presented in research of “Perception and Production of English Word Stress of First Year Students at Rangsit University” that the learner’s experience played an important role in the perception and the production of English word stress. The English experience increased competence in relation to the time that learners were exposed to the language; as well, the listening ability needed constant practice and continuous exposure.

Sirirat Sirivisoot (1994) studied “Variation of Final /l/ in English Loanwords in Thai according to Style and Educational Background”. The researcher found that the final /l/ has four important variants: [l], [ɫ], [n] and [w]. The more formal the style, the more frequently [l] occurs and the more informal the style, the more frequently [n], [ɫ], and [w] occur. The more educated group uses [l] more than the less educated. In contrast, the latter use [n], [ɫ] and [w] more than the former.

Suchada Serthikul (2004) studied “The Production of Final /l/ in English words in Thai and English Contexts by Thai Speakers with Different English-Language Experience”. The 100 subjects were divided into two groups: high English-language experience and low English-language experience. The results showed that the final /l/ has five variants as: [ɫ], [ɰ], [w], [n], [Ø] which could be ranked from the highest: [w], [Ø], [n], [ɫ], [ɰ]. The high English-language experience group had less L1 transfer effect. However, [n] had the strongest L1 transfer effect in both groups almost equally; as well, [w] and [ɰ] were performed as interlanguage variants.

Pensinee Kijkar (2004) reported in a study of “The Production and Perception of English Monophthongs by Thai Speakers with Different English-Language Experience” that both high English experience speakers and low English experience speakers could produce the /i:-ɪ/, /ɑ:-ʌ/ and /u:-ʊ/ monophthong pairs systematically the same as the native speaker. However, on average, high English experience speakers could produce a closer similarity to the native speakers. Moreover, the relationship between the perception and the production of two monophthong pairs: /i:-ɪ/ and /ɑ:-ʊ/ were clearly found while the /u:-ʊ/ was not.

Angsana Charmikorn (1988) studied “Variation in the Pronunciation of Final Alveolar Fricatives in English Loanwords: A Case Study of Thai Navy Officers”. It was found that the final alveolar fricatives in English loanwords that Thai Navy Officers produced were the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ and the voiceless alveolar stop /t/. The frequency of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ was twice as much as the voiceless alveolar stop /t/. The social variables: sex, age, and experience abroad affected the production, particularly experience abroad. Additionally, the Thai voiceless fricative /s/ which is normally in the initial position is developing to be used as a final consonant in Thai.

Sranthorn Nimphaibule (1996) studied “Variation of Thai Air Hostesses’ Pronunciation of the Final Consonants (tʃ, dʒ, ʃ) in English Words”. The subjects were divided into two groups: speakers with more English experience and less English experience. The results showed that for the final consonants /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, the less experienced English speakers had bias towards the Thai pronunciation especially in the Thai context (Code Mixing), and reduced in English context. In contrast, the

more experienced English speakers had bias towards the English pronunciation especially in the English context, and reduced in Thai context. For the final consonants /f/ both groups produced a lot of interlanguage variants.

Moreover, a comment from <http://groups.google.co.th/group/soc.culture.thai/brows> mentioned that a great variation in the English of native-speakers is generally recognized. The writer accepted many non-native forms of English as equally valid, such as Indian English, African English, and Singaporean English. However, he would not accept that Tenglish should be the model for English language teachers in Thailand. In fact, Tenglish is the model among Thai teachers of English.

In “Future Directions for Pronunciation Teaching: Intelligibility, Content and Oral Communication”, Lewis (1999) stated that some theorists already admit that pronunciation teaching in the future must move back toward a greater emphasis on vowels and consonants to aid intelligibility. He gave an example of his student who skillfully did everything regarding suprasegments. However, that student remains almost completely incomprehensible because of a small number of pervasive vowel and consonant errors. He also mentioned that the power of contextual clues in aiding understanding for native speakers may not always be strong enough to overcome misunderstanding caused by vowel and consonant errors.

From the mentioned research and the related literature, the areas in which Thai learners have problems in English pronunciation from youth to adolescence are consonants, consonant clusters, vowels, stress, and intonation. Their model in Standard English Pronunciation is Thai English teacher. Therefore, the researcher is interested in English phonemic sounds regarding Thai English teachers’ self-perception of pronunciation difficulties, particularly in the top ten ranked problems of consonants and vowels.