

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents: (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) discussions of the top ten problematic sounds of Thai English teachers in classroom language, (4) conclusions, and (5) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

One of the significant reasons that Thai students study English is because it is on the school curriculum. The school curricula in Thailand mostly concentrate on grammar-based instruction. Therefore, the teachers do not have to be able to speak the target language well. Nowadays, a communicative approach has more influence on the teaching English of Thai teachers. In a list of teacher ‘qualities’ ranked by preferences reported in “The Practice of English Language Teaching”, Harmer (1992), teaching good pronunciation and speaking good English are in the 2nd and 4th rank respectively. It implies that good oral English is one of a teacher’s necessary qualities. Kristina Panseetong (1996) studied “A Development of Practice Packages on the Vowels and Consonants in English Word Pronunciation Skill for Prathom Suksa Six Students” which 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 to them how to produce the right sound. Moreover, the phonological systems of Thai and English are significantly different (Swan & Smith, 1987). For example, English has more fricatives than Thai: /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. Therefore, it is difficult for Thai students to produce these sounds. In <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/singhal/index.html>, Sangdo Woo stated in the topic of “Non-Native Speakers Should and Can Teach Pronunciation” that pronunciation is the key element of English language teaching and learning and it has to be taught from the beginning and throughout the learning process. Non-native teachers of English should prepare themselves to be confident and effective pronunciation teachers.

Therefore, the question is whether Thai English teachers are aware of their problematic sounds in classroom language.

5.1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to analyze Thai English teachers' self-perception of pronunciation difficulties in English, particularly the top ten problematic sounds of consonants and vowels.

The subsidiary purpose is to raise Thai English teachers' awareness of standard pronunciation by crosschecking with native and ESL teachers.

5.1.2 Subjects, Materials, and Procedure

The subjects of this study were nine Thai English Teachers of the Business English Program at Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. The research instruments in the study were self-assessment questionnaires that were distributed to nine Thai English Teachers of the Business English Program at Suan Dusit Rajabhat University as well as a short passage for reading aloud by asking the subjects to read the given passage and then record both in tape cassettes and wave files. The three native teachers; Australian, British and New Zealander, and an ESL teacher; Indian, listened to the tape recording of the short passage reading and a standard pronunciation under consideration. This research investigates how many problematic sounds the Thai English teachers encountered and what were the top ten particular consonant and vowel sound problems.

5.1.3 Limitations

5.1.3.1 The sample size is small. Therefore, the findings in this study describe the English pronunciation difficulties from the points of view of this Thai English teacher group only.

5.1.3.2 The assessment by native and ESL teachers is through a recording which may have some problems in the quality of sound.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows

5.2.1 General Information

According to the questionnaires' responses of nine Thai English teachers of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, it could be concluded as follows:

All subjects graduated Master's Degrees or higher. One subject graduated with a Doctorate in Education (TESOL Policy), the rest graduated with Master's Degrees: three in teaching, four in Language and Linguistics, and two in Marketing but one is studying a TEFL program at the Master's level and the other had studied in Australia.

Five subjects had studied abroad: two in U.S.A, two in Australia, and one in six countries: U.S.A., Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Four subjects had never studied abroad. Eight subjects had studied phonetics at least one semester. Only one subject had never studied phonetics but she had studied Marketing in Australia.

All subjects are not members of English speaking clubs.

5.2.2 Self-Assessment

In the self-assessment section, the questionnaire shows that there is one of the subjects who considered that she does not confront pronunciation difficulties in English. Meanwhile, eight Thai English teachers of the Business English Program at Suan Dusit Rajabhat University assessed themselves as having English pronunciation difficulties with consonants, or consonant clusters, in all positions: initial, middle, final, but having fewer problems in vowel sounds. The self-assessment questionnaire reveals 59 phonemic sounds that Thai English teachers perceived as pronunciation difficulties. 37 of those consonants are not in the Thai sound system. They are in all syllable positions: initial, middle, and final. Only one vowel is rated as difficult. The difficulty of the 59 phonemic sounds could be ordered in a top ten ranking from the most difficult to the easiest one. The problematic sound ranking first in pronunciation is “twelfths” /twelfθs/ with **16 %**. In the second rank, one consonant cluster: “nymph” /nymf / and two phonemes: “chip” / tʃip/, and “ship” /ʃip/ are equally considered problematic sounds with **12 %**. The fifth to tenth are also equally considered in difficulty of pronunciation. They are teach / ti:tʃ/, rice /raɪs/, azure /æzə/ /æzjuə/ /æzjuə/ /æzə(r)/, Gwen /gwen/, midst /mɪdst/, thirsts (BrE: /θɜ:sts/),

(AmE: /θɜ:rstʃ/) with 8 %. There is only one teacher who considers that she has a problem while speaking the English vowel “sure” /sʊər/.

5.2.3 Reading aloud

The words were randomly selected from questionnaire list in order to compose the reading passage. The purpose of reading aloud is to crosscheck problematic sounds of Thai English teachers’ self-assessment and native and ESL teachers’ assessment based on standard pronunciation of English.

The results of pronunciation difficulties of Thai English teachers in reading aloud, as assessed by three native teachers and an Indian teacher, can be seen in Appendix H. It can be concluded that the omission of final “s”: always, holidays, ones, sounds was found. The consonants of /l/ i.e. ‘sailing’-/seɪ^lɪŋ/, ‘while’-/waɪ^l/, /tʃ/ i.e. ‘catch’-/kætʃ/, /ʃ/ i.e. ‘fish’-/fɪʃ/, ‘delicious’-/dɪlɪʃəs/, /f/ i.e. ‘face’-/feɪs/, ‘surfing’-/sɜ:fɪŋ/, /v/ i.e. ‘serve’-/sɜ:v/, /θ/ i.e. ‘third’-/θɜ:d/, ‘think’-/θɪŋk/, /ð/ i.e. ‘faher’-/fɑ:ðər/, /ŋ/ i.e. ‘singing’-/sɪŋ ŋ/ were difficult to pronounce. The consonant clusters, the great majority of pronunciation difficulties, were found: ‘twelve’-/twelv/, ‘crystal’-/krɪst^ll/, ‘first’-/fɜ:st/, ‘splashes’-/splæʃ/, ‘jumps’-/dʒʌmps/. The vowel sounds of ‘monophthongs’: ‘love’-/lʌv/ and ‘diphthongs’: ‘day’-/deɪ/, ‘time’-/taɪm/, ‘going’-/gəʊ/ /goʊ/, ‘boy’-/bɔɪ/ were also found to represent pronunciation difficulties. Some final “s” and varieties of “s” sounds: ‘loves’-/lʌvz/ were not found.

5.3 DISCUSSION

This section concerns pronunciation difficulties of the top ten ranked English problematic phonemic sounds for Thai English teachers’ which are discussed as follows:

5.3.1 Self-Assessment

In the self-assessment part, the questionnaire shows that there is one of the subjects who considers that she does not confront pronunciation difficulties in English. Eight Thai English teachers of the Business English Program at Suan Dusit Rajabhat University assessed themselves to be facing difficulty with phonemic sounds

of English consonants, and consonant clusters in all syllable positions. The first ranked is “twelfths” /twelfθs/. According to Sumon Ariyapitipun (2003), the syllable structure formula of English is (C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C)(C). The formula of Thai syllable structure is different. Thai language permits only two consonant clusters in the initial syllable position, and does not permit consonant clusters in the final position. In Thai, a syllable must consist of at least one initial consonant and one vowel. Therefore, the Thai formula structure of a syllable is (C)(C)V(C). The difference in formula structure of /twelfθs/ which consists of four final consonant clusters: /l/, /f/, /θ/, /s/ shows that the manners of articulation, lateral – fricative – fricative – fricative could cause pronunciation problems for Thai speakers. In “Variation of Final /l/ in English loanwords in Thai according to Style and Educational Background”, Sirirat Sirivisoot (1994) states that /l/ in Thai is pronounced when it is in the initial syllable position. Moreover, according to Praromrat Jotikasthira (1999), /l/ /f/ and /s/ of Thai in final positions are substituted by /n/ /b/ and /d/ respectively. In addition, there is no /θ/ in the Thai sound system. In the second rank, one consonant cluster: “nymph” /nɪmf/ and two phonemes: “chip” /tʃɪp/, and “ship” /ʃɪp/ are considered equally problematic sounds. As mentioned, final consonant clusters are problems for Thai speakers. /nɪmf/ consists of two final consonant clusters: /m/ and /f/, which show that the manners of articulation are nasal – fricative respectively. This point is mentioned in the research of Rachanee Mano-im (1999), stating that a nasal followed by a fricative is one of the final consonant clusters that Thai speakers find difficult in pronouncing correctly. The phonemes /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ are minimal pairs. /tʃ/ is voiceless post-alveolar affricate. /ʃ/ is voiceless post-alveolar fricative. They are different in manner of articulation. For /tʃ/, the airstream is completely blocked before it is released gradually. For /ʃ/, the airstream is forced to pass through a narrow opening in the mouth. Thai speakers not only have problems in pronouncing these sounds but also have problems in distinguishing them while listening, which causes misspelling as stated in Teach Asia Online website. The fifth to tenth ranked problems are teach /ti:tʃ/, rice /raɪs/, azure /æzə/ /æzjʊə/ /æzɪʊə/ /æzə(r)/, Gwen /gwen/, midst /mɪdst/, thirsts (BrE: /θɜ:sts/), (AmE: /θɜ:rsts/). Thai students also have problem of

pronunciation with /tʃ/ in the final position. Even though there is /r/ in Thai, it is different from /r/ in English in manner of articulation. Praromrat Jotikasthira (1999) mentioned that the English /r/ has various ways of pronouncing that depend on different speakers and dialects. However, one formation is called retroflex while the Thai /r/ sound is just a trilled /r/, the other problematic sound of a word “azure” which can be pronounced as /æzə/ /æzjʊə/ /æzjʊə/ /æzə(r)/. However, all of them are too difficult to be pronounced because there are no /z/ /z/ /j/ /ʊə/ sounds in the Thai sound system. The three last ranked are consonant clusters: **Gwen** /gwen/, **midst** /mɪdst/, **thirsts** (BrE: /θɜ:sts/), (AmE: /θɜ:rsts/). **Gwen** /gwen/ consists of two consonant clusters in the initial syllable position which is a plosive (stop) followed by approximant. In Thai language, there is no sound of /ŋ/. Therefore, Thai students usually substitute /ŋ/ with /k/, the voiceless velar plosive as mentioned in the research of “An Analysis of English Pronunciation of English Major Students at Higher Certificate of Education Level” (Tippawan Janyasupab (1982)). The word “**midst**” /mɪdst/ consists of three final consonant clusters: /d/ /s/ /t/ which are plosive – fricative – plosive. The word “**thirsts**” (BrE: /θɜ:sts/), (AmE: /θɜ:rsts/) consists of three final consonant cluster in British pronunciation: fricative – plosive – fricative. For the American pronunciation, it consists of four consonant clusters: approximant – fricative – plosive – fricative. Ratchanee Mano-im (1999) presented in her research that the first and second ranks of difficulty in pronouncing correctly are a fricative followed by a stop and a stop followed by a fricative and that the words “**midst**” /mɪdst/ and “**thirsts**” (BrE: /θɜ:sts/), (AmE: /θɜ:rsts/) completely follow her findings.

5.3.2 Reading aloud

The purpose was to crosscheck problematic sounds of Thai English teachers’ self-assessment and native and ESL teachers’ assessment based on standard pronunciation of English. The finding of pronunciation difficulties in reading aloud from the three native teachers and an Indian teacher mostly confirmed the Thai English Teachers’ self-perception. Firstly, the consonants of /l/ i.e. ‘sailing’-/seɪ^əlɪŋ/, ‘while’-/waɪ^əl/, /tʃ/ i.e. ‘catch’-/kætʃ/, /f/ i.e. ‘fish’-/fɪʃ/, ‘delicious’-/dɪlɪʃəs/, /f/ i.e.

‘face’-/feɪs/, ‘surfing’-/sɜːfɪŋ/, /v/ i.e. ‘serve’-/sɜːv/ were difficult to pronounce. Secondly, the consonant clusters presented the great majority of pronunciation difficulties found: ‘twelve’-/twelvɪ/, ‘crystal’-/krɪstl/, ‘first’-/fɜːst/, ‘splashes’-/splæʃ/, ‘jumps’-/dʒʌmps/. However, there were some different points of view in consonant and vowel sounds and final ‘s’. Four native English teachers found some missing final “s”: always, holiday, ones, and sounds. The consonant sounds /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/ were not in the top ten ranks of problematic sounds of Thai English teachers. However, they were found in reading aloud: /θ/ i.e. ‘third’-/θɜːd/, ‘think’-/θɪŋk/, /ð/ i.e. ‘father’-/fɑːðər/, /ŋ/ i.e. ‘singing’-/sɪŋ ŋ/. As well as the vowel sounds, both monophthongs and diphthongs were not considered as pronunciation difficulties by Thai English teachers. Nevertheless, the vowel sound of ‘monophthongs’: ‘love’-/lʌv/ and ‘diphthongs’: ‘day’-/deɪ/, ‘time’-/taɪm/, ‘going’-/gəʊ/ /goʊ/, ‘boy’-/bɔɪ/ were also found in reading aloud. Some final “s” and varieties of “s” sounds: ‘loves’-/lʌvz/ were not found.

From both Thai English teachers’ self perception and the assessment from native and ESL English teachers, there are four major areas that Thai English teachers should be aware of. The first one is the consonant sounds that are not in the Thai sound system i.e. /l/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/. Next, there are only two consonant clusters at the syllable initial position in the Thai sound system. The Thai syllable structure is (C)(C)V(C). This is the reason why Thai speakers confront pronunciation difficulties with English consonant clusters where the syllable structure is (C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C)(C). The last is vowel sounds. One monophthong is not in Thai: /ʌ/. Furthermore, there are no diphthongs in the Thai sound system. Thai speakers find the difficulties in pronouncing diphthongs i.e. /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /əʊ/, /oʊ/, and /ɔɪ/; the same result reported by Krittika Panseeton (1996). Lastly, there is no final “s” sound in the Thai sound system while there are varieties of “s” sounds: /s/, /z/ in the English sound system.

5.4 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion above.

5.4.1 Self-Assessment

In the self-assessment part, the questionnaire shows that there is one of the subjects who considers that she does not confront pronunciation difficulties in English. Most subjects graduated Master's and Doctorate level in linguistics and language, or TEFL/TESOL in which they studied phonetics for at least one semester. One subject had never studied phonetics but had studied in Australia. They still assessed themselves to have pronunciation difficulties in consonant and consonant clusters.

5.4.2 Reading aloud

Words were randomly selected from questionnaire list in order to compose the reading passage. The purpose was to crosscheck problematic sounds of Thai English teachers' self-assessment and native and ESL teachers' assessment based on standard pronunciation of English. The findings of three native teachers and an Indian teacher concluded that the consonants of /l/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/ were found as pronunciation difficulties. Secondly, the consonant clusters in initial, middle, and final positions represented the great majority of pronunciation difficulties found. Moreover, the vowel sounds of 'monophthongs' and 'diphthongs' were found as problematic sounds to pronounce. Some final "s" and varieties of "s" sounds: 'loves' -/lʌvz/ were not found.

From both the Thai English teachers' self perception and the assessment from native and ESL English teachers, it can be concluded that there are four major areas that Thai English teachers should be aware of. The first one is the consonant sounds that are not in Thai sound system i.e. /l/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/. Next, there are only two consonant clusters at the syllable initial position in the Thai sound system. The Thai syllable structure is (C)(C)V(C). That is the reason why Thai speakers confront pronunciation difficulties with English consonant clusters where the syllable structure is (C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C)(C). The last problem is vowel sounds. One monophthong is not in Thai: /ʌ/. Furthermore, there are no diphthongs in the Thai sound system. Thai speakers find difficulties in pronouncing diphthongs i.e. /eɪ/, /aɪ/,

/əʊ/, /oʊ/, and /ɔɪ/. Lastly, there is no final “s” sound in the Thai sound system while there are varieties of “s” sounds: /s/, /z/ in the English sound system.

The way to solve Thai teachers’ pronunciation problems is to gain more exposure to oral English language, for example, by being a member of an English speaking club, in order to constantly practice and be continuously exposed to the language as Pratsaneeya Jarusan (1997) stated.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This analysis was conducted in a small group. Therefore, based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research.

5.5.1 A larger number of subjects for a further research is suggested in order to investigate whether the same outcome will be found.

5.5.2 An analysis of Thai English Teachers’ Self-perception of Pronunciation Difficulties in English” at the kindergarten, primary, secondary or high school level is also recommended to investigate whether the same outcomes will be found.