CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND

When someone asks 'How old are you?' and you reply 'I'm sick,' instead of 'I'm six,' the person who is listening might think that you are actually 'sick'. That's why clear and correct pronunciation is important. In "The insight into English Pronunciation Problems of Thai Students", Wei and Zhou (2002) stated that there are difficulties for both Thai and English speakers to understand each other sometimes. Thais produce incorrect final sounds in many English words, for example, Thais use the borrowed word such as 'Lotus' without the final sound /s/ and they usually stress the last syllable, for example 'letTER' which makes it difficult for native English speakers to understand. Smyth (2001) also supported this point as he said in his article "Thai Speakers" that there are numerous English loan words (including brand names of hundreds of consumer goods) which have passed into everyday Thai. Although a native English speaker doesn't understand, it has also become a perfectly normal and legitimate strategy to pronounce English words in a Thai way among Thai people.

Wei and Zhou's study reported that Syananondh (1983) (as cited in Wei & Zhou, 2002) said 70.06 percent of his target population, Thai-speaking graduate students who were attending college or university throughout the United States, had the major causes of their difficulties in English listening comprehension and in understanding spoken English in different communicative situations when they first came to the United States. Those causes came from the different English pronunciation taught in Thailand, inadequate English vocabulary, and lack of English conversation training. Therefore, as a teacher, being able to understand what the pronunciation problems of our students are is definitely useful when it comes to choosing the way to guide the students in their speaking and listening classes.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.2.1 What are the differences of the phonological features between Thai and English which relate to the pronunciation problems of Thai people?

1.2.2 What are Thai speakers' pronunciation problems?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 To study the differences of the phonological features between Thai and English.

1.3.2 To use the differences of the phonological features between Thai and English to identify the English pronunciation problems of Thai people.

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms of this study are the following:

Phonology: is a subfield of linguistics which studies the sound system of a specific language (or languages).

Phonological system: the system of sounds used in a particular language

Phonological features: features used to distinguish and analyze each sound used in a particular language

Segmental: describes aspects of speech concerned with individual sounds such as consonants and vowels

Suprasegmental aspects: describes aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound: rhythm, stress and intonation

Vowels: A voiced segment characterized by generalized friction of the air passing in a continuous stream through the pharynx and opened mouth, with relatively no narrowing or other obstruction of the speech organs.

Consonant: speech sound produced with a significant constriction of the airflow in the oral tract.

Consonant clusters: A grouping of two or more consonants together. e.g., con**cr**ete, consona**nts**

Stress: Words can be divided into syllables, usually centered around a <u>vowel</u>. In English it is the duration and relative loudness of a syllable in a word. -- its stress – which is important.

Intonation: The changes in the tone or frequency of sounds during speech. For example, in English the tone usually falls at the end of a statement and rises at the end of a closed question.

Tone in Tonal language: a high-low pitch pattern permanently associated with a language so the meaning of the word changes when the tone is changed.

1.5   SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1   This study investigates research studies on pronunciation problems of Thai speakers from 1987-2007. They are conducted in both English and Thai.

1.5.2   The study concentrates on pronunciation problems that are caused by the differences between Thai and English phonology systems.

1.6   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1   The study will be beneficial to English teachers for better understanding of the problems in the pronunciation of Thai people.

1.6.2   The study may encourage teachers to improve their pronunciation teaching so that students can overcome their problems in an appropriate way.

1.7   ORAGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of the pronunciation problems of Thai people in this paper is divided into five chapters.

- Chapter One contains background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, definitions of terms, scope of the study.

- Chapter Two reviews the literature and related research.

- Chapter Three explains the methodology applied in the study which consists of subjects, materials, procedures and data analysis.

- Chapter Four presents the information compiled from research and studies to investigate pronunciation problems of Thai speakers.
- Chapter Five presents a summary of the study, a summary of the findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendations.