

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter reports the differences of the phonological features between Thai and English that cause English pronunciation problems for Thai people.

This report is divided into two parts:

4.1 The differences of the phonological features between Thai and English

4.2 English pronunciation problems of Thai people

4.1 THE DIFFERENCES OF THE PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES BETWEEN THAI AND ENGLISH

After viewing the phonological features of Thai and English, there seems to be a number of phonological differences between the two languages which should be considered and identified in order to indicate the sources of the English pronunciation problems of Thai people.

4.1.1 Consonants

According to Sumon Ariyapitipun (2003), Thai has twenty-one consonant sounds, whereas English has twenty-four consonant sounds. After studying the consonant sounds between the two languages, we can see that there are nine English consonant sounds that do not exist in the Thai phonological system. Those sounds are mostly fricatives such as /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /z/, /ʃ/, and / / and the other three sounds are /g/, /tʃ/, and / /.

Out of the English consonant sounds that do not exist in Thai, two of them sound similar to two Thai consonant sounds. Those sounds are /tʃ/ and /g/ (as in ‘guy’). The /tʃ/ sound is pronounced similarly to /c^h/ (for chor chang ‘จ ช้าง’) and the /g/ sound is similar to /k/ (for gawgai ‘ก ไก่’).

4.1.2 Consonant Clusters

Initial consonant clusters

The initial consonant clusters in Thai are formed of only two consonants at the most while English permits as many as three consonants (McKenzie-Brown, 2006). However, there are some of the initial two-segment clusters in English which are near Thai equivalents.

Table 10. English Consonant Clusters Which Are Near Thai Equivalents

English		Thai	
Letter	Sound	Letter	Sound Pronounced
gr	/gr/	กร-	/kr/ (pronounced as /gr/ in 'ground')
gl	/gl/	กล-	/kl/ (pronounced as /gr/ in 'ground')
cr	/kr/	คร-, ขร-	/khr/
cl	/kl/	คล-, ขล-	/khl/
qu	/kw/	คว- ขว	/khw/
pr	/pr/	ปร-	/pr/
pl	/pl/	ปล-	/pl/

From the table above, although these pairs are considered having similar sounds, unlike Thai, the first-segment of English clusters is always aspirated.

Final consonant clusters

In Thai words, there are no consonant clusters in the final position while in English, a lot of words have two or three-segment consonant clusters. Moreover, these final clusters in English could be added up to four consonants if their endings are affected by grammatical rules (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). Smyth (2001) said in his study that if you want to apply the initial clusters' pronunciation rules with final clusters, those rules are not at all applicable. For example, in 'stop' /t/ is unaspirated while /t/ in 'last' is aspirated. This means that even though /t/ in both initial and final positions follows /s/, the rule used with /st/ in the initial position that said "/t/ becomes unaspirated when it follows /s/" cannot be applied to the same /st/ in the final position of the words.

4.1.3 Vowels

Thai has a lot of vowel sounds and those sounds are not significantly different from English ones.

4.1.4 Stress

Stress in English is assigned to every polysyllabic word in English. Stress is important in English because without it, English words would not be comprehensible for speakers of English. Thai does not have stress. Each syllable in Thai polysyllabic words has only a tone and equally receives weight and timing.

4.1.5 Intonation

Thai has no intonation whereas intonation in English is important. Intonation in English occurs when high and low pitches are assigned to particular words in sentences in English. Thai does not have high or low pitch in sentences as in English since it is already attached in every syllable.

4.2 ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS OF THAI PEOPLE

4.2.1 Consonants

Thai people have difficulty pronouncing some of English consonants, especially English fricatives. Most Thais then tend to make substitutions for those sounds that they cannot produce (Smyth, 2001; Wei & Zhou, 2002) with the most equivalent sounds in Thai. There are some typical substitutions as following:

Table 11. Initial Consonants

English initials	/v/	/θ/	/ð/	/ʃ/	/z/	/r/
Thai substitutions	/w/, /f/	/t/, /s/, /z/	/d/, /t/, /s/, /z/	/tʃ/	/s/	/l/

Examples:

English Word

Thai Pronunciation

visa

wiisaa

thank

tɛŋk

show

choo

zip

sɪp

Table 12. Final Consonants

English finals	/d/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /tʃ/, / .	/v/, /f/	/l/
Thai substitutions	/t/	/p/	/n/

Examples:

English Word Thai Pronunciation

lord	ล๖ต
footpath	futbaat
boss	b๖ต
proof	pruup
bill	bɪn

4.2.2 Consonant Clusters*Initial consonant clusters*

There are two very common problems for Thai people when it comes to pronouncing the initial clusters in English. The first one is that they tend to add a short vowel in between the first and the second consonants.

Table 13. Examples of the Addition of Vowel Sound in Initial Clusters in English Words

English	Thai
smoke	sa-moke
frown	fa-rown
strike	sa-trike

(Adapted from Smyth, 2001)

The second mistake is that they drop the second or third consonant of the clusters as show in the table below;

Table 14. Examples of the Reduction of Initial Clusters in English Words

English	Thai
brake	bake
frown	fown
strike	stike

(Adapted from Smyth, 2001)

Final consonant clusters

When pronouncing the final clusters, Thai people tend to reduce them to a single final consonant that they are able to reproduce. According to Smyth (2001), the first segment of the clusters is retained and the rest dropped.

Table 15. Examples of the Reduction of the Final Clusters in English Words

English	Thai
perfect	perfec'
pump	pum'

(Adapted from Smyth, 2001)

4.2.3 Vowels

Since Thai has a lot more vowels than English, this allows Thai people to produce English vowel sounds without any significant difference.

4.2.4 Stress

Because of the fact that Thai is a tone language, Thai does not differentiate words based on stress (Wei & Zhou, 2002). Stress causes problems when Thai people pronounce polysyllabic words. Thais usually put stress on the final syllable of those English words (Smyth, 2001). This phenomenon can lead to misunderstanding when communicating with speakers of English. Three of the most common problems of stress are from:

(1) *Stress in words that can function as both nouns and verbs*: The problems occur when they produce the noun function of the words but it sounds like the verb instead.

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai pronunciation</u>
CONduct (n.)	conDUCT
IMport (n.)	imPORT

(2) *Stress in the number words ending with –teen or ty*: In this case the problems happen with –ty endings mostly. When Thais pronounce number words ending with –ty but stress in the final syllable, most of the time the speakers of English think that they end with –teen.

<u>English</u>	<u>Thai pronunciation</u>
THIRty	thirTY (but sounds like ‘thirteen’)
FIFTy	fifTY (but sounds like ‘fifteen’)

(3) *Stress in loan words*: Some of the words that Thai borrow from English are usually stressed in the final syllable and that sounds rather odd to English speakers.

English

PRETty

comPUter

Thai pronunciation

pretTY

compuTER

4.2.5 Intonation

As well as the pronunciation of the individual sound in English, its intonation can easily lead to a different interpretation put on an utterance (Wilkins, 1976). Since Thai has no intonation, Thai people are not used to using intonation. English, on the other hand, use intonation in every sentence. The bigger problem that Thai people have is using rising intonation to indicate Yes/No questions and the falling intonation to indicate Wh-question and Affirmative statements.

The findings of the study will be summarized and discussed in the next chapter.