

## A NOTE ON ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN THAI

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### 1. Introduction

During the last century it has been noticed that English loanwords have played an important rôle in the Thai lexicon. English, instead of the long used Sanskritic languages, has become the most-favoured source for new vocabulary. Though there is a traditional preference for Sanskritic coinage, the influx of modern technology from the Western civilization is so strong that the English words which are the carrier of such influences have been accepted with an increasing rate of current usage, colloquially as well as in writing.

Although the British people traded with the Thais of Ayudhya in the reign of King Songtham (1610-1628 A.D.), English words were not taken into the Thai language until the early Ratanakosin period when the British expanded their trade and power to Southeast Asian territories. A study of documents in the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851 A.D.) shows some seventy English personal names, titles and place names written in Thai orthography.<sup>1</sup> Some of them reflect a pronunciation very close to the English but others are beyond recognition, as for example:

ฟารังปัตกัน	/fă: raŋ patukan/	for	'Portugal'
กัปตัน	/kapî? tan/	for	'Captain'
จิม	/jím/	for	'James'

The study of the English language began first among Thai princes and some officers in the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868 A.D.) and became more widespread in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910 A.D.). Since then English words began to invade the Thai language and at present more than 1000 English words are accepted in the standard Thai literature,<sup>2</sup> not counting innumerable more in conversational forms and in informal usage among various professions such as scientific, industrial, trading and fashion circles.

### 2. Types of words which are borrowed

The English loanwords in Thai cover a wide range of vocabulary. The data of about 1000 words collected from articles written before 1910 A.D. produces at least 11 groups of vocabulary as follows:

science and technology	13.51 %
food and drinks	9.00 %
clothes and fashion	8.89 %
games and gambling	6.87 %
persons and positions	6.40 %
measurement	6.04 %
education	4.86 %
art and recreation	3.32 %
medical sciences	3.08 %
music and dancing	2.96 %
miscellaneous	35.07 %

The above percentages can give a rough picture of the types of words borrowed, but they cannot be taken as the most accurate because they are based only on the 1000 words which are widely accepted in literature. There are, however, technical terms in all branches of education, science and technology which, though very numerous, are not included, since these terms have not been satisfactorily standardised in spite of a number of attempts to do so. Also, there was probably, as there is at present, a general feeling against the use of English words in the written and formal language. Many English loanwords, which are widely used informally and cannot be satisfactorily replaced by other Thai or Sanskritic coinages, are still not welcomed in the standard language.

### 3. General characteristics of English loanwords in Thai

To quote Henderson, 'Loanwords in some Southeast Asian languages are normally recast in a form already acceptable to the borrowing language or they may retain some alien features.'<sup>3</sup> This is also true for English loanwords in Thai, but the characteristics are more complicated and should be treated in detail.

The acceptance of English words into the Thai language is via speaking as well as writing among a variety of classes and educational levels of the people in Thailand. Fundamentally, personal names were among the first English loanwords which were accepted, with changes in the articulation of sounds to facilitate the pronunciation as well as to help memorize those words, often with a mixture of humour and fun-making, for example:

แร้งกิน	/rɛ̌:ŋ kin/	'vulture devours'	for	'(Mr.) Rankin'
มิทหันเตร	/mít hǎn trɛ:/	'Mitr turns a trumpet'	for	'Mr. Hunter'
เยสับบุรุษ	/ye: sàp purùt/	'Yeh! good man'	for	'James Brooks'

Since World War II, there has been a large number of influx of English loanwords as a result of many interacting factors: more Thai students returning from their study in Europe and the United States of America; rapidity of communications and transportation between the Western world and Thailand; greater expansion of world industries and world trade; and the increased interest in Western styles of sports, entertainment and fashions brought about by the mass communication media. These loanwords have characteristics that are determined by the class and competency of the people who use them either in writing or in conversation of both. Their forms differ from one circle to another. Their written forms and meaning have undergone a number of attempts at standardisation without general public acceptance. In general, one can notice very easily the differences in the pronunciation of educated and uneducated people. The educated people accept the foreign influence more readily than the uneducated people, who in most cases will retain the primary phonological system.

<u>English</u>	<u>Educated pron.</u>	<u>Uneducated pron.</u>
plastic	/phlā:s-tìk/	/pát-tìk/
style	/stail, sta:j/	/sa-ta:j/
cream	/khri:m/	/khi:m/
clutch	/khlátch/	/khlát/
alcohol	/ʔɛl-kɔ-hɔ:/	/ʔɛn-kɔ-hɔ:/

#### 4. Realization of English loanwords in Thai

Following Henderson<sup>4</sup> in considering Thai as a polysystemic language, it may be found that most English loanwords conform to the Thai phonological system, some words are naturalized and others introduce certain innovations into the language. The investigation will begin at the syllabification problem then go on to the realization of the initial, vowel and final phonemes as well as tones.

##### A. Syllabification

Thai monosyllabic words appear to be either  $C(C)WV^{1-5}$   $C(C)V(V)C^{1-5}$   $C(C)VS^{2,4}$ , or  $C(C)VVS^{2,3}$ . Disyllables are either the combination of monosyllable types or of the form  $Cə-$  in the first syllable with the second syllable any of the monosyllable types.<sup>5</sup> Polysyllables are the combination of monosyllables and/or disyllables. Generally, the syllabification of the borrowed words conforms in number of syllables to the original words. There are, however, a few exceptions where weak syllables are reduced and long words are shortened to a simpler short form, e.g.

<u>English</u>		<u>Thai</u>
retire	รีไทร์	/ri:-tha:j/
metre	เมตร	/mé:t/
cashier	แคชเชียร์	/khét-chia/
carburetor	คาร์บู	/kha:-biw/
air-conditioning	แอร์	/ʔɛ:/

The English unstressed syllables are often accented, producing fully stressed syllables especially when such syllables occur as the final syllables of words.

<u>English</u>		<u>Thai</u>
over-coat	โอเวอร์โค้ด	/ʔo:-wâ:-khó:t/
eye-liner	อายไลน์เนอร์	/ʔa:j-la:j-nô:/
tennis	เทนนิส	/then-nít/
tutor	ติวเตอร์	/tiw-tô:/
popular	ป๊อปปูล่า	/póp-pu:-lâ:/
computer	คอมพิวเตอร์	/khom-phíw-tô:/

A few old borrowed words appear to show the assimilation of sounds and thus the reduction of some unstressed syllables, e.g.

<u>English</u>		<u>Thai</u>
Madame	แม่ม	/mêm/
shock absorber	โช๊คอัพ	/chó:k-ʔâp/
gigolo	จิกโก	/cík-kô:/

The number of syllables of an English loanword may be different from the original in another case, i.e. that of a syllable composed of a consonant cluster not permissible in the Thai phonological system. The following words appear to have more syllables in the Thai version:

<u>English</u>		<u>Thai</u>
spring	สปริง	/sa-prin/
stew	สตู	/sa-tu:/
scrum/scrummage	สกรัม	/sa-kram/
Christian	คริสเตียน	/khrít-sa-tian/
prism	ปริซึม	/príʔ-sûm/
rheumatism	รูมาติซึม	/ru:-ma:-tít-sûm/