SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF PHONOLOGICAL TRANSFERENCE FROM ENGLISH TO THAI

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The study investigates the transference of English sounds into Thai in relation to non-linguistic variables of social context, i.e. occupational class, age, sex and style. The sounds under study consist of the initial clusters /bl, br, fl, fr, dr/ and the final consonants /s, f, l, c^h/ and they are referred to as "phonological variables". The transference involves different degree of integration. Each group of phonological variables is realized in Thai in a uniform pattern having a close set of variants. The frequencies of the variants are quantified and their correlation with occupational class, age group and sex of the speakers is studied. Such correlation enables us to draw a conclusion on the intra- and the inter-group transference patterns among the English-Thai bilingual speakers.

The term "phonological variable" has been used by Labov (1966b: 6 *et passim*) to refer to

> [. . .] any given linguistic feature which can be freely realized by two or more variants, which are the values of the variable.
>
> (Downes 1984: 75)

Each variant is arbitrarily assigned a value and its number of instances can be counted and an index can be calculated. This will give a quantitative representation of variation between individual speakers and between the social groups that they belong to.

The speakers in this study are classified into four large occupational classes.

Class I: Professionals
Class II: Semi-professionals
Class III: Students
Class IV: Clerical and skilled workers

The classification is based mainly on the speaker's type of work. It corresponds to the division of the labour force presented in the *Report of Labour Force Survey, July - August 1983* (National Statistical Office 1983). The speakers were recruited on the quota sampling basis. There is an equal distribution of speakers in each occupational class and sex group, but the number of speakers in each age group varies.

The contextual styles in which the phonological variants occur are also taken into account. Three tests were devised to investigate any variation in the pronunciation of the speakers when the style changes.

The words used in the tests are English words which are commonly and frequently used in Thai. These words contain the English sounds directly transferred into Thai. The words appear three times in three different contextual styles, i.e. casual speech (CS), reading short phrases and sentences (RPS) and reading word lists (RWL), so that stylistic differentiation in pronunciation can be studied.

A statistical formula, the Z-test, is used to test the significance of the difference between proportions representing the raw observed frequencies of variants.

It is found that the variants which have the least degree of integration, referred to as "standard" variants, occur with the highest frequency in every group of speakers. A "standard" form is the one that all speakers, regardless of their bilingual competence, attempt to use. The "standard" variants in this study are represented by the retention of initial clusters and of the final consonants. A further attempt is made to investigate whether the occurrence of these "standard" variants correlates with style.

Since full cluster retention is the Thai norm for correct pronunciation, it is expected that speakers are always cautious when they pronounce the clusters transferred from English. It is, therefore, expected that the frequency of cluster retention may not differ significantly as far as styles are concerned. The retention of final consonants, on the other hand, may reveal stylistic differentiation.

1. Initial clusters and their variants

The transference of initial clusters follows a consistent pattern. Each of these variables has three variants except for (dr-) which has only two. The following table shows the possible variants of initial cluster variables.

Table 1: Initial clusters and their variants

	Full clusters	Reduced clusters	Substitute clusters
(bl-)	/bl-/	/b-/	/br-/
(br-)	/br-/	/b-/	/bl-/
(fl-)	/fl-/	/f-/	/fr-/
(fr-)	/fr-/	/f-/	/fl-/
(dr-)	/dr-/	/d-/	-

1.1. Full clusters

Both consonants are retained. Thus, we have English C_1C_2 ——> Thai C_1C_2. This variant coincides with the "standard" form of Thai initial clusters and is usually the prestige form. Noss (1964) finds that most speakers of Standard Thai possess the phonemic distinction between [r] and [l]. The distinction is, however, a conscious result of normative pressure. The full clusters represent the variants Thai speakers acquire at school.

1.2. Reduced clusters

The second segment of the cluster, either [l] or [r], is not pronounced. Therefore, the cluster becomes one single initial consonant.

$$\#C_1C_2 \longrightarrow \#C_1$$

This phenomenon is not unusual in Thai. Beebe (1974: 34 *et passim*) finds that the second segment, viz. [l], [r] or [w], is frequently dropped by certain groups of speakers. She also finds that cluster simplification C_1C_2 ——> C_1 occurs regularly and is more frequent in lower socio-economic classes. Her conclusion is that there is a strong overall inverse relationship between cluster reduction and occupational prestige (ibidem: 159).

1.3. Substitute clusters

Substitution refers to both the use of [l] for [r] and [r] for [l]. /br-/ is, for example, pronounced as [bl-] and /bl-/ as [br-]. However, the study reveals that the instances of [r] for [l] occur in less than 0.10% of the 5,700 tokens while the use of [l] for [r] amounts to 7.14%. The speakers seem to be aware of the difference between the two consonants and seem to make an effort to distinguish them. However, they sometimes make errors.

Although the substitution of [l] for [r] is not considered to be correct and is stigmatized, it indicates an effort by the speaker to retain the full clusters.

2. Final consonants and their variants

The following table lists the variants of the four final consonants; they will be discussed in detail below.

Table 2: Final consonants and their variants

	Retained	Integrated	Deleted	Replaced	Switched
(-s)	/-s/	/-t/	ø	/-t/,/-c^h/	/-z/,/-st/
(-l)	/-l/	/-n/	ø	/-w/	-
(-f)	/-f/	/-p/	-	-	/-ft/
(-c^h)	/-c^h/	/-t/	-	-	-

2.1. Final consonants retained

When English words ending in /s/, /f/, /l/ and /t/ are transferred into Thai, they are represented in the written form by ส or ซ for /s/, ฟ for /f/, น for /l/ and ช for /tʃ/. The speakers are, therefore, left with two sets of rules, either to pronounce these final consonant symbols in the same way as they would do with Thai words, i.e. as unreleased [t], [p], or [n] or to retain the original English final sounds. As the data reveal, a large number of speakers try to retain these final sounds. Their pronunciation is similar to that of English except for [tʃ]. The voiceless alveolar affricate [tʃ] is realized as the voiceless palatal stop [c^h] which is a Thai corresponding sound.

Among these four final consonants, [s] is most frequently heard. This is partly due to the fact that English lexical items ending in [s] are common in Thai. In addition, those ending in /z/ and in clusters beginning with /s/ are also transferred as [s] which is considered a "standard" form. In some cases, /s/ is not the second segment of the cluster, as in English /-st/. This cluster is normally pronounced in Thai as [-s] and the final [t] is completely deleted. Examples can be found in words like *test*, *trust*, and *Foremost*. These words add to the number of words ending in [s] in Thai.

Only few words ending in [f] are transferred. Similar to the case of /-st/, the cluster /-ft/ is most often pronounced as [-f] or [$p^{\neg}$]. /-ʃ / is transferred as [-c^h] or, more commonly, as [-$t^{\neg}$].