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.[1] Some of them reflect a pronunciation very close to the English but others are beyond recognition, as for example:

ฝารั่งปัตุกัน	/fǎː raŋ patukan/	for	'Portugal'
กปิตัน	/kapîʔ tan/	for	'Captain'
ยิ้ม	/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,[2] not counting innumerous 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.'[3] 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	/rɛ́:ŋ kin/	'vulture devours'	for	'(Mr.) Rankin'
มิตรหันแตร	/mít hǎn trɛ:/	'Mitr turns a trumpet'	for	'Mr. Hunter'
เยสับปุรุษ	/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 unedu-
cated people, who in most cases will retain the primary phonological
system.

English	Educated pron.	Uneducated pron.
plastic	/phlã: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[4] in considering Thai as a polysystemic language,
it may be found that most English loanwords conform to the Thai phonolo-
gical 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 $C(C)VV^{1-5}$ $C(C)V(V)C^{1-5}$
$C(C)VS^{2,4}$, 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.[5] Polysyllables are the
combination of monosyllables and/or disyllables. Generally, the syllabi-
fication 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.

English		Thai
retire	รีไทร์	/riː-thaːj/
metre	เมตร	/méːt/
cashier	แคชเชียร์	/khét-chia/
carburetor	คาบิว	/khaː-biw/
air-conditioning	แอร์	/ʔɛː/

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

English		Thai
over-coat	โอเวอร์โค้ต	/ʔoː-wə̂ː-khóːt/
eye-liner	อายไลเนอร์	/ʔaːj-laːj-nə̂ː/
tennis	เทนนิส	/then-nít/
tutor	ติวเตอร์	/tiw-tə̂ː/
popular	ป๊อปปูล่า	/pɔ́p-puː-lâː/
computer	คอมพิวเตอร์	/khɔm-phíw-tə̂ː/

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

English		Thai
Madame	แหม่ม	/mɛ̀m/
shock absorber	โช้คอัพ	/chóːk-ʔâp/
gigolo	จิ๊กโก๋	/cík-kǒː/

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:

English		Thai
spring	สปริง	/sa-priŋ/
stew	สตู	/sa-tuː/
scrum/scrummage	สกรัม	/sa-kram/
Christian	คริสเตียน	/khrít-sa-tian/
prism	ปริซึม	/príʔ-sŵm/
rheumatism	รูมาติซึ่ม	/ruː-maː-tít-sŵm/

B. Initial phonemes

The English initial consonant phonemes are mostly compatible
with the Thai ones and are thus taken into the language without problems.
In the pronunciation of English words in Thai the speakers replace
English consonant phonemes by the Thai ones. There are, however, a few
initial consonants which have to be changed in the realization of sounds
into the similar Thai phonemes. The English phonemes /v/, /z/, /ʃ/, tʃ/
and /dz/ are then realized as /w/, /s/, /ch/ and /c or j/ respectively.

English		Thai
volt	โวลท์	/wó:n/
violin	ไวโอลิน	/waj-ʔo:-lin/
visa	วีซ่า	/wi:-sâ:/
zipper	ซิบ	/síp/
zigzag	ซิกแซก	/sík-sέk/
shampoo	แชมพู	/chɛm-phu:/
furniture	เฟอรนิเจอร์	/fə:-ni-câ:/
tincture	ทิงเจอร์	/thiŋ-cə:/
blue jean	บลูยีน	/blu:-ji:n/
jelly	เยลลี่	/jen-lî:/
joint	ยอย	/jɔ:j/, จอยท์ /cɔ́j/

The Thai initial clusters are limited to /pr, pl, phr, phl, tr,
kr, kl, kw, khr, khl, khw/ with a previously naturalized /thr/ cluster
from Sanskritic loanwords. Here, the wide range of English clusters has
been adopted by the Thais in two interesting manners:

(1)   A number of English loanwords introduce new clusters into the
Thai language, especially in the pronunciation of modern educated people.
The clusters already accepted are the following /br, bl, dr, fl, fr/ and
the plosives preceding by /s/, as occuring in the following examples:

English		Thai
brake	เบรค	/brè:k/
brassière	บราเซีย	/bra:-sia/[6]
blackmail	แบลคเมล์	/blέk-me:/
drape	เดรป	/dré:p/
draft	ดราฟต์	/drá:p/
free	ฟรี	/fri:/
frank	แฟรงค์	/frέŋ/
fluke	ฟลุค	/flúk/
flat	แฟลต	/flὲt/
ski	สกี	/ski:/
steak	สเต็ก	/sté:k/
spray	สเปรย์	/spre:/

For those who normally have no clusters in their normal pronunciation of the Thai language, the above clusters will automatically be reduced to a simple initial with the second-place consonants omitted. Therefore one will hear the previously cited words as /bè:k/, /ba:-sia/, /bɛ́k-me:/ and so on.

(2) Some English clusters are separated by an unstressed vowel /a/ when such clusters occur in the borrowed words.

English	Thai	
Twiggy	ทวิกกี้	/tha-wík-kî:/ 'a hair style'
brandy	บรั่นดี	/ba-ràn-di:/
skirt	สเก็ร๊ต	/sa-ké:t/
twist	ทวิสต์	/tha-wít/

C. Vowel phonemes

In realizing the English vowels in Thai language, simple vowels are naturally changed to the Thai vowels which possess the quality closest to that of the English counterparts. The diphthongs and triphthongs other than those ended by close vowels /i, u/ are generally reduced to simple vowels. The diphthongs which are ended by close vowels /i, u/ are phonologically analysed in Thai as simple vowels with finals /j, w/ respectively. In English loanwords the diphthongs /ai, ɔi, au, iu/ and the triphthong /aiə/ are therefore changed into /aj, ɔj, aw, iw/ and /aj/, e.g.

English	Thai	
neck tie	เนคไท	/nék-thaj/
boy	บ่อย	/bɔ̌j/
knock out	น็อคเอ๊าท์	/nɔ́k-ʔáw/
view	วิว	/wiw/
(hair) dryer	ดราย	/dra:j/ and /daj/

The diphthongs /ei, eə, ou, ɔə/, on the other hand, are replaced by the long vowels /e:, ɛ:, o:, ɔ:/, e.g.

English	Thai	
sundae	ซันเด	/san-de:/
share	แชร์	/chɛ:/
dope	โด๊ป	/dó:p/
sophomore	โซเฟอร์มอร์	/so:-fə-mɔ:/

The English diphthongs /ai, au/ followed by a final consonant is also pronounced with the simple vowel /a/ or /a:/ followed by the semivowels /j, w/ to close the syllable. The final consonants of the original English words are omitted in the pronunciation of common and uneducated people but may be pronounced with very weak articulation in the speech of educated people.

English	Thai	
strike	สไตรค์	/sa-tráj/
design	ดีไซน์	/di:-sa:j/
exercise	เอ๊กเซอร์ไซส์	/ʔék-sə:-saj/
dynamite	ไดนาไมท์	/daj-na:-máj/
down	ดาวน์	/da:w/
gown	กาวน์	/ka:w/

D. Final consonant phonemes

In Thai the final phonemes are limited to the following /p, t, k, ʔ, m, n, ŋ, j, w/ which occur singly after a vowel nucleus; although in English words more than one phoneme can occur after a vowel. The processes of adopting English final phonemes in the loanwords are quite interesting and are described below:

(1) The final stops /p, t, k/ and the nasals /m, n, ŋ/ are substituted by the Thai /p, t, k, m, n, ŋ/, respectively. The voiced stops /b, d, g/ are also naturalized as /p, t, k/, e.g.

English	Thai	
soup	ซุป	/súp/
boot	บูต	/bú:t/
cook	กุก	/kúk/
serum	เซรุ่ม	/se:-rûm/
prune	พรุน	/phrun/
swing	สวิง	/sa-wiŋ/
club	คลับ	/khláp/
card	คาร์ด	/ká:t/
peg	เป๊ก	/pék/

(2) Final consonants /l, w/ after long vowels and /r/ after diphthongs are usually not pronounced but may have very weak articulation in the pronunciation of educated people, e.g.

English		Thai
mail	เมล์	/me:/
show	โชว์	/cho:/
bow-tie	โบว์	/bo:/
beer	เบียร์	/bia/
gear	เกียร์	/kia/
tour	ทัวร์	/thua/

The final /dz/ is sometimes omitted and sometimes pronounced with the final /t/, although educated people may retain the palatalized quality and pronounce it with the final /c/, e.g.

English		Thai
gauge	เกจ์	/ke:/, /kè:c/
bridge	บริดจ์	/brìt/, /brìtc/
garage	การาจ	/ka:-rà:t/, /ka:-rà:c/

(3)   Many English finals are replaced by the Thai phonemes. Therefore, the Thai final /n/ will be used to substitute for the English /l/, and the final /t/ for the English /d, ʃ, tʃ, dz, θ/, as evident in the following examples:

English		Thai
scale	สเกล	/sa-ke:n/
foot-ball	ฟุตบอล	/fút-bɔn/
hotel	โฮเตล	/ho:-ten/
guard	การ์ด	/ká:t, kà:t/
brush-on	บรัชออน	/brát-ʔɔ:n/
coach	โค้ช	/khó:t/
flash	แฟลช	/flét/
clutch	คลัช	/khlát/
footpath	ฟุตปาต	/fút-pà:t/

(4)   The English final clusters of two or three consonants are automatically reduced to a single final consonant. Thus the finals -kt, -ns, -st, -pt, -lk, -lm, -ft, -lv, -tʃ, -kst/ etc. are reduced to /-k, -n, -t, -p, -n, -m, -p, -w, -t, -k/, respectively, as in the following examples:

English		Thai
act	แอ๊ก	/ʔέk/
balance	บาลานซ์	/ba:-lá:n/
test	เทสต์	/té:t/
script	สคริป	/sa--khríp/
milk shake	มิลค์เชค	/mín-ché:k/
film	ฟิลม์	/fi:m/
lift	ลิฟต์	/líp/
valve	วาวล์	/wa:w/
switch	สวิทช์	/sa-wít/
text	เท็กซ์	/thék/

(5) Surprisingly enough, new final consonants are found to be widely accepted in the pronunciation of newly borrowed English words. These final consonants are realized as /s, f, ch/ e.g.

English		Thai
jazz	แจส	/cé:s/
topless	ท็อปเลส	/thɔ́p-lê:s/
transistor	ทรานซิสเตอร์	/thra:n-sís-tə̂:/
golf	กอล์ฟ	/kɔ́f/
safe	เซฟ	/sé:f/
march	มาร์ช	/má:ch/

(6) It is noticeable that some new borrowed words also retain English phonemes more closely than was the case in the older borrowings A remarkable innovation is the acceptance of the final consonant clusters of two consonants, as for example:

English		Thai
waltz	วอลซ์	/wɔ́ns/, /wɔ́lz/
greyhound	เกรย์ฮาวนด์	/kre:-ha:wn/

(7) There are a few colloquial terms generally regarded as slang, the finals of which are influenced by the English plural suffix. These terms then have final clusters of two consonants, e.g.

มากส์	/mâ:ks/	'a lot'
เซยส์	/chə:js/	'very awkward and out of date'
บ๊องซ์	/bɔ́ŋs/	'very crazy'

E. Tones

Since Thai is a tonal language, the foreign words before acceptance
must automatically be assigned particular tones which are suitable to the
pronunciation and to the syllable-type of the borrowed words. The reali-
zation of tone in the borrowed and non-tonal English words is described
below:

(1) The borrowed words are written in Thai script using the Thai
alphabet to transliterate the English phonemes as well as the English
spelling. Tone marks are not used in the written form of these words but
their pronunciation follows the Thai rules of orthography, resulting in
middle, low and high tones in spite of no tone mark written in.

English	Thai	
team	ทีม	/thi:m/
violin	ไวโอลิน	/waj-ʔo:-lin/
serve	เสิร์ฟ	/sə̀:p/
grade	เกรด	/krè:t/
wig	วิก	/wík/
foot	ฟุต	/fút/

(2) The borrowed words are pronounced with particular tones which
are characteristic of English loanwords. These tones are realized as the
falling tone and the high tone. The falling tone often occurs in the
last syllable of disyllabic and polysyllabic words, especially when that
last syllable is an open syllable or closed by a nasal or a semi-vowel.
The high tone occurs with a syllable closed by a stop. It is here that
borrowed words introduce two new characteristics into the Thai language.

Firstly, there is a lack of conformity between the written form and
the pronunciation of the English loanwords, as can be seen from the
following examples:

English	Thai	
motor	มอเตอร์	/mɔ: tə̂:/ instead of /mɔ:-tə:/
calorie	แคลอรี	/khɛ:-lɔ:-rî:/ instead of /khɛ:-lɔ:-ri:/
computer	คอมพิวเตอร์	/khɔm-phíw-tə̂:/ instead of /khɔm-phiw-tə:/
technique	เทคนิค	/thék-ník/ instead of /thê:k-ník/
chalk	ชอลค์	/chɔ́:k/ instead of /chɔ̂:k/
tube	ทิวบ์	/thíw/ instead of /thiw/
oxide	ออกไซด์	/ʔɔ́k-sáj/ instead of /ʔɔ̂:k-saj/
sphinx	สฟิงค์	/sa-fíŋ/ instead of /sa-fiŋ/
metre	เมตร	/mé:t/ instead of /mê:t/
tank	แทงค์	/thɛ́ŋ/ instead of /thɛ:ŋ/

Secondly, in the Thai language, a long syllable closed by a stop consonant is always accompanied by a low or a falling tone and never possesses a high tone. The English loanwords which are long syllables and closed by stops can be pronounced with a high tone.

English		Thai
joke	โจ๊ก	/cóːk/
jeep	จี๊ป	/cíːp/
oat	โอ๊ต	/ʔóːt/
graph	กราฟ	/kráːp/
tape	เทป	/théːp/
pleat	พลีต	/phlíːt/

The high tone seems to be the favourite tone for English loanwords. It is also found in loanwords having a short vowel and closed by a nasal or a semi-vowel, the original form of which has a stop following the final nasal, e.g.

English		Thai
pump	ปั๊ม	/pám/
gang	แก๊งค์	/kéŋ/
bank	แบงค์	/béŋ/
camp	แคมป์	/khém/

It is also noticeable that the rising tone hardly ever occurs in English loanwords. The examples found so far are three old borrowed words /bɔ̌y/, /kě:/, and /cík-kɔ̌:/ from English 'boy, gay,' and 'gigolo' respectively.

5. Conclusion

This brief article is by no means a complete study of English loanwords in Thai. However, it serves to point out in general the basic characteristics of English borrowed words and how they are naturalized into the Thai language at various stages from the time of King Rama V in circa 1868 onwards. The present influx of English loanwords through various mass communication media have brought about a number of problems in an attempt to standardize their written forms as well as to accept them freely in the formal and in the spoken languages. Although common trends exist, the process of borrowing still undergoes various states of change and hence it is as yet difficult to lay down a definite formulation for the characteristics of the English loanwords in Thai.

NOTES

[1] Udomwong, Watana (1978).

[2] The report on 'English Words in Thai,' by postgraduate students of Chulalongkorn University in 1974.

[3] Henderson, E.J.A. (1951), pp. 131-132.

[4] Ibid. pp. 131-158.

[5] Nacaskul, Karnchana (1977), pp. 105-120.

[6] A loanword via English from French.

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