

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, ch/ 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 C₁C₂ → Thai C₁C₂. 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.

#C₁C₂ → #C₁

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 C₁C₂ → C₁ 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/, /-ch/	/-z/, /-st/
(-l)	/-l/	/-n/	Ø	/-w/	-
(-f)	/-f/	/-p/	-	-	/-ft/
(-ch)	/-ch/	/-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 ท for /s/, ฟ for /f/, ล for /l/ and ต for /t/. 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 [t̚]. The voiceless alveolar affricate [tʃ] is realized as the voiceless palatal stop [cʰ] 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 [p̚]. /-ʃ/ is transferred as [-cʰ] or, more commonly, as [-t̚].

2.2. Final consonants integrated

Some English final stops and fricatives are usually realized in Thai as unreleased voiceless stops. Final /l/ is often realized as /n/.

English	/-s/	—>	Thai	/-t/	[-t̚]
	/-t/	—>		/-t/	[-t̚]
	/-f/	—>		/-p/	[-p̚]
	/-l/	—>		/-n/	

Such realization is in accordance with the Thai reading pronunciation rule. We can say that these English final sounds are integrated into the Thai phonological system.

2.3. Final consonants deleted

Deletion is found in the case of [-s] and [-l]. It occurs particularly when [s] is the second segment of a final cluster like /-ns/. This is attributed to the fact that Thai does not have final clusters. In the case of /-ns/, /-n/ remains and serves as the final sound in Thai. Therefore, /-s/ is dropped. Some bilingual speakers may, however, retain the original pronunciation. Examples of final clusters /-ns/ can be found in words like *balance* and *bronze*. [z] in the latter word is transferred as [s]. The final cluster of this word is, therefore, /-ns/.

/-s/ and /-l/ are also generally deleted when they occur after any one of the diphthongs which in Thai was realized as a vowel and a glide (the glides /w/ and /j/ in Thai belong to the set of final consonants). English diphthongs like /ei/ and /au/ have no corresponding counterparts in Thai and are transferred as a single vowel /e:/. Such pronunciation also occurs with the last syllable of the word *blackmail*. This word is commonly pronounced /blɛ:kme:/. The English diphthong /au/ which occurs in both syllables of *townhouse* has an interesting transference pattern. Although /au/ is realized as a vowel, /a/, and a glide, /w/, the vowel duration in the two syllables is not of the same length. The first syllable is pronounced with a long vowel, /a:w/. The vowel is shorter in the second syllable. The word is usually pronounced /ta:wháw/ with the final /s/ deleted.

2.4. Final consonants replaced

Speakers sometimes attempt to pronounce English sounds they do not usually pronounce. This results in unsystematic errors with low frequency. [-s] is replaced by [-cʰ] and [-t̚]. [-l] is vocalized and

becomes [-w]. Trudgill & Hannah (1985: 13) note that the latter case is found in certain non-RP south-of-England accents where [ɪ] may be considerably darker than in RP or even become vocalized, e.g. *hill* [hiu]. The vocalization in the present study is found in the pronunciation of the final syllable of the word *Brazil* /-siw/.

2.5. Final consonants switched

Occasionally speakers retain the original English pronunciation of the sounds which are normally integrated into Thai. Though there are very few instances of this kind, it is necessary to include another group of variants for the variables (-s), (-f) and (-ch). What the speakers actually do in this case is switching back to English. We refer to these variants as final consonants and clusters switched.

Included in this group of variants are [-z], [-ʃ], [-st], and [-ft] the "standard" forms of which in Thai would be [-s], [-ch], [-s], and [-f] in this order.

3. Correlation between phonological variables and occupational classes

In Thai, occupational class is one of the most important sociological variables; it closely correlates with phonological variables. In her study of r-clusters in Thai, Beebe (1974: 85,99), for example, finds that there is a positive correlation between cluster retention and high occupational class.

The same sociolinguistic pattern occurs when speakers transfer English sounds. The phenomenon reflects a conflict within the speech community resulting from the adoption of different norms of "correctness". Speakers in higher occupational classes are aware of the notion of "correctness" in English as they transfer English language features. The data show that in these classes the proportion of the "standard" variants which derive from English is much higher than that of the "non-standard" variants. Being a dominant group in the speech community, these speakers introduce a new norm which, in the case of final consonants, contradicts the conventional Thai norm. Speakers who are aware of "pressure from above", as Labov (1966a: 84) calls it, know which variant is overtly treated as having prestige in the society. These speakers attempt to reach that norm. Despite the effort, however, not all of them are successful. Their failure can be attributed to the fact that a large number of them do not master the "standard" variants.

"Pressure from above" can also be exerted on the "non-standard" variants. As Downes (1984: 161) puts it, "people would attach overt prestige to the vernacular, and judge the use of the standard forms negatively". Some speakers avoid using the "standard" forms for fear of being different from their peers and, consequently, being the subject of ridicule. They are dominated by the social pressures associating the English pronunciation with pretension and ostentation. Brown (1976: 76) notices the prevalent use of English words written in Roman letters and pronounced with Thai sounds. He comments that

[. . .] any Thai who makes the unnatural effort to switch from Thai base to any English import whatsoever must be showing off. He is rightly met with ridicule and even social ostracism.

(ibidem: 73)

Although Downes (1984: 161) concludes that there are both conscious and unconscious pressures acting on all strata and that language innovation can emerge at any point in the social system, and eventually become overtly prestigious, there is a stronger connection between overt prestige, conscious norm and the pronunciation adopted by the higher occupational classes. These classes show a relatively high proportion of the "standard" variants and a low proportion of the "non-standard" ones. In lower occupational classes, however, the proportion of the "non-standard" variants is very high. In some cases, the difference between the proportion of the "standard" and the "non-standard" variants is not significant.

The general inter-group pattern of the transference is that the frequency tends to decrease from Class I to Class IV for the "standard" variants and a reversed pattern is found for the "non-standard" ones. In many cases, the difference in the decrease is so small that it is not statistically significant. Within each group of speakers, the frequency of the "standard" variants is, in most cases, higher than that of other variants. The decrease in frequency from the "standard" variant to the second major variant, which is always the Thai dominated one, is normally significant in all classes. The decrease in frequency from one minor variant to another, however, may be small and not always significant.

3.1. Occupational class and initial clusters

For initial clusters transferred from English, it was hypothesized that the sociolinguistic pattern Beebe (1974) finds in Thai initial clusters would also occur in this case. There are two different sources of normative pressure involved: Thai and English. The Thai normative pressure to pronounce full clusters is in accordance with the correct English pronunciation. Therefore, it was expected that the rate of cluster retention would rank higher than that of other variants in all occupational classes. Among the four occupational classes, cluster retention would occur most frequently in Class I and least frequently in Class IV.

This hypothesis is supported by the data collected. The difference between any two adjacent proportions is significant ($p < 0.05$). As expected, the intra-group pattern is that the cluster retention rate ranks highest followed by that of reduction. This means that most speakers retain the full clusters more frequently than the other variants. For inter-group patterns, the retention rate is highest in Class I and lowest in Class IV and vice versa for the reduction rate.

In all occupational classes cluster retention occurs at a much higher rate than does reduction. The general transference patterns of the initial clusters is that /bl-/ , /fl-/ and /dr-/ form one common pattern. The retention rate of these clusters is higher than that of reduction. Substitution is rare and is not significant. /br-/ and /fr-/ , however, have different transference patterns. For /br-/ , the high retention rate is followed by that of substitution. /fr-/ shows a clear distinction between the pronunciation of higher and lower occupational classes. In Class I, II and III, the retention rate is very high. In Class I and II, it is followed by those of substitution and reduction. In Class III, the difference between substitution and reduction is not significant. In Class IV, the reduction rate is very high and the difference between the reduction and the retention rate is not significant.

The general transference pattern of the two l-clusters, /bl-/ and /fl-/ , is that the retention rate of /bl-/ is at a higher rate than /fl-/ in all groups of speakers. Although in Class I and in speakers over 40 the difference between the retention rates for /bl-/ and /fl-/ is small and not significant, it follows the general pattern.

Among the r-clusters -- /dr-/ , /fr-/ and /br-/ -- /dr-/ is retained at the highest rate in all groups of speakers, followed by /fr-/ and /br-/ . Although in lower occupational classes, the retention rates for /dr-/ and /fr-/ do not differ significantly, the data

show a higher retention rate for /dr-/ than for /fr-/. We can conclude that it follows the general transference pattern shown in other groups.

3.2. Occupational class and final consonants

A large number of speakers try to maintain the English norm of correctness by retaining the original English pronunciation of the final consonants.

There is a positive correlation between occupational class and the occurrence of the retained variant of the final consonants and a negative correlation with the integrated variant. The higher the occupational status, the more often the speakers retain the final consonants. Correspondingly integration occurs less frequently among speakers of higher occupational status.

We can conclude that, in all classes except Class IV, the retention rates of the four final consonants are much higher than those of integration. The rate of retained and integrated /-f/ is not significantly different and the rate of integrated /-l/ and /-ch/ is slightly higher than the retained ones in this group of speakers. Among the four final consonants, /-s/ is most often retained. Other English final sounds, i.e. /-f/, /-l/ and /-ch/, are likely to be pronounced [p^h], [-n] and [t^h] by speakers with a low degree of bilingualism. This is the way they pronounce Thai final sounds.

Among these four final consonants, the retention of [s] is more familiar to Thai speakers than the other three. There seem to be more English loanwords ending in /s/ than ending in other final consonants. The retention of [s] is, therefore, more commonly heard although retaining it is sometimes, particularly in some words, considered ostentatious. Speaking to a person of a different socio-economic group, a speaker may adjust his pronunciation of the final /s/. He may pronounce it [s], [t^h] or shorten the [s] to the absolute minimum to make it less obvious. Some words ending in /s/, for instance, are well-integrated and are pronounced with an unreleased [t] in all socio-economic classes. To break the rule -- retaining the final /s/ in these words -- is not always acceptable. An example is the word *Paris* of which the pronunciation derives from English and is commonly pronounced [pa:rî:t^h]. The retention of the final /s/ in another form of pronunciation of the same word, [pa:rîs], is associated with pretention and is used to mock speakers who pretentiously release the final [s]. At the same time failure to do so in other words is considered "sub-standard" or "uneducated" pronunciation. Speakers, therefore, have to bear in mind to whom they are speaking and in which context.

The plural morpheme /s/ is also transferred to Thai and emphatically pronounced. This morpheme is tagged on to the Thai verbs and adjectives for "flashy emphasis" (Diller 1985: 58). Examples are:

/jâ:k/	/jâ:ks/	'difficult'
/ch ^h ə:j/	/ch ^h ə:js/	'to be square, old-fashioned, outdated'
/b ^h ŋ/	/b ^h ŋs/	'silly, crazy'

Although these words are slang, they are commonly heard. The result is that they make the final [s] more familiar to Thai ears. The data support this observation. The rate of the retained final [s] is higher than that of other final consonants in all classes followed by those of [f], [l] and [ch]

The fact that speakers with a low degree of bilingualism tend not to retain the other less familiar final consonants is partly due to imperfect acquisition of English. It can also be attributed to the fact that being in the lower rung of the hierarchy of prescription, this group of speakers is affected most by the puristic attitude to avoid using "foreign" sounds and words in Thai. As a consequence, these speakers attach a covert prestige to the Thai dominated variants, i.e. integrated final consonants. Moreover, these variants can signal group membership in the same way English dominated variants do in higher occupational classes.

4. Correlation between phonological variables and age

Higher age is, in this study, positively correlated with being a professional. Between the two factors which have an effect on the performance of the speakers, occupational class is certainly more important than age. In the Thai speech community, high occupational classes certainly have greater exposure to English. From the interviews it was found that speakers in Class I often use English in their work although mostly in reading and writing. Being a professional also implies that one has higher education and more years of English studies. These together with the psychological need to meet the social expectations associating professionalism with high standards in general bring about the high performance of professionals as far as "standard" pronunciation is concerned.

In regard to "standard" pronunciation, we find the same intra-group transference pattern in our age groups as in occupational classes. In every age group, the retention rates of initial clusters and final consonants are highest, followed by those of cluster reduction and

integrated final consonants respectively.

5. Correlation between phonological variables and sex

So far none of the studies on variation in Thai has examined the differences between male and female speech. The present study provides data to support the conclusion that in Thai the occurrence of "standard" forms in women is higher than in men. This pattern of occurrence is consistent in all variables studied.

It is found that speakers of both sexes have the same intra-group transference pattern. They retain the initial clusters and the final consonants more often than not. Between the two groups, the retention rates of initial clusters and final consonants are higher in female speakers and lower in male speakers and vice versa for the rates of reduced clusters and integrated final consonants.

6. Stylistic differentiation

In our data, speakers retain the English initial clusters and final consonants more frequently than not. The occurrence of the two variants: the full clusters and the retained final consonants can be expected to vary with style. When speakers are more careful with their speech they will show a tendency toward "standardness". This is reflected in a significant difference between the frequencies of each style. Nevertheless, with the full cluster variant this does not occur. The result of the Z-test is that the difference between the rate of the full cluster variant in casual speech (CS) is not significantly different from that in reading short phrases and sentences (RPS) or reading word lists (RWL).

Although there is an increase toward more careful style in three groups of speakers, the increase is so small that it is not significant. However, since all figures point in the same direction we can conclude that speakers change in more or less careful speech style, but that this change is very limited. This is probably due to the fact that speakers are cautious in retaining the clusters since cluster retention coincides with the norm of correctness in Thai.

In regard to the final consonants, the difference from one style to another is significant in some groups of speakers but not in the others. The data show that, although there seems to be an increase from CS toward RWL in Class I and II, the increase is so small that it is not significant. However, Class III and IV vary their pronunciation with style.

Labov (1972: 237) refers to linguistic features which show

a regular distribution over socio-economic, ethnic, or age groups, but are used by each individual in more or less the same way in any context

as "indicators". The full cluster variants in the present study can perhaps be classified as "indicators" since they clearly vary with sociolinguistic variables but to a very low extent with style. The retained variants of final consonants, however, do not only show social stratification, but also stylistic differentiation especially in the lower occupational classes. Labov (1970: 66) classifies such sociolinguistic variables as "markers". He concludes that

markers which show both stylistic and social stratification represent the development of social reaction to the change and the attribution of social value to the variants concerned

(ibidem: 77)

In the Thai speech community, the retained final consonants are, to a certain extent, true social markers. They serve as the easily-detected markers of the speaker's socio-economic status. Speakers are aware of their significance and are ready to adjust or accommodate when the context changes. This is less likely to occur with initial clusters. Speakers can, and often are expected to, retain the clusters in all contexts. The retained final consonants are used as social class distinction and identification of members of the same class.

7. Summary

Despite the fact that speakers vary in their pronunciation, we find that they are more likely to retain the initial clusters and the final consonants in English words used in Thai. Although the rate of phonological transference, when quantified, varies from one group of speakers to the other, the transference has a uniform intra-group variation pattern. In every occupational class, age group and sex group, the rate of the "standard" variants is highest followed by the Thai dominated ones which are the fully integrated variants. Inter-group variation has only been clearly established in occupational class and sex. Class I ranks highest in

the "standard" variants and lowest in the Thai dominated ones and vice versa for Class IV. A similar pattern is found in male and female speakers. Female speakers rank higher in the "standard" variants and lower in the Thai dominated ones and vice versa for the male speakers. Age may not be a strong determinant as far as inter-group variation is concerned.

Although most speakers retain final consonants at a higher rate than integrating them, in Class IV the higher rate of the retained final consonants can only be seen in /-s/.

Style has little influence on cluster retention. Speakers consciously retain the English initial clusters since it coincides with the Thai norm of correctness. Style differentiation is more obvious in the retention of final consonants especially in lower occupational classes. Although the retention rate of the final consonants in Class III and IV is low, the data show that it varies with style. This implies that Class III and IV speakers are more conscious of the prestige norm than speakers in higher occupational classes. We can conclude that the occurrence of initial cluster retention indicates social stratification. Initial cluster retention is, therefore, a social indicator. The retention of final consonants, on the other hand, indicates both social stratification and stylistic differentiation and is thus a social marker.

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