



English Language: The Speaking Fluency of Primary Thai Students

Meena Thonkhong Hamilton^{1*}  Wichan Artharo (Muanthong)² , Boonlue Sumethaso(Petchmak)³ 

^{1,2,3}Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Surin Campus, Surin, Thailand

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, English fluency is a crucial skill that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries for Thai university students. This article explored the challenges they faced in achieving spoken English fluency by addressing linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical factors. The differences in pronunciation, intonation, sentence structure, and alphabet between Thai and English are barriers to overcome. Traditional lecture-centric approaches may hinder conversational skills, and class size limits personalized attention. It also advocates communicative teaching methods, emphasizing language as a dynamic tool for communication. Genuine linguistic interactions with native speakers can be facilitated through language exchange programs and cafés. Fluency is enhanced by multimedia such as movies, TV shows, and podcasts, but authentic English exposure is hindered by Thai-dubbed movies. The transformation of learning environments into supportive spaces, where mistakes are embraced as opportunities for growth, is crucial. Constructive feedback and collaborative activities foster confidence. In conclusion, this article aimed to guide educators and students by addressing challenges and proposing solutions. As communication across the globe grows, improving spoken English is both a personal achievement and a contribution to society.

Keywords: English language, primary Thai students, speaking fluency

Introduction

At present, communication exceeds geographical borders and cultural divides, and English stands alone as the international number one language. It has evolved beyond being a mere medium of expression and has become a bridge between different cultures, a tool for global trade, and a gateway to higher education and professional success. As the echoes of English

*Corresponding author.

Email address: meenathonkong@gmail.com

reverberate across continents, Thai university students find themselves at a unique crossroads, where mastery of English holds the key to unlocking a world of opportunities.

However, the path to English fluency, particularly in the spoken realm, is not a simple route but a road full of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical hurdles. The harmonious accent of the Thai language, rich in tonal melodies, contrasts starkly with English phonetics (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

These distinctive sounds, so gracefully articulated in Thai, pose a challenge in attempting to mirror the nuances of English pronunciation. The foundation of linguistic expression is based on the formidable task of acquiring new phonetic territories, with each phoneme a note that must be mastered before fluency is acquired. Thai and English, while beautiful in their own rights, dance to distinct rhythms. Constructing sentences takes different forms, often leading to moments of linguistic contact, where one's native language casts a shadow on one's second tongue. Navigating this requires not only the mastery of words but also an understanding of rhythmic patterns.

The rich cultural heritage that Thai students carry influences not just their way of life, but also their approach to language acquisition. While cultural pride is a virtue to be cherished, it sometimes casts a shadow on the realm of language learning. A culture that places a premium on correctness and conformity can lead to fear of making errors, suppressing the natural flow of spoken language (Schulz, 2001).

Anxiety often lurks in the minds of aspiring English speakers. The dread of mispronunciation, fear of misunderstanding, and anxiety of navigating a linguistic terrain create an internal turmoil that can stifle the growth of fluency. Psychological barriers can, at times, loom larger than linguistic barriers, requiring delicate strategies to dismantle. Amidst these linguistic, cultural, and psychological challenges, pedagogy must evolve into a guiding compass. Traditional methods of instruction, although valuable in their own right, may inadvertently relegate spoken English to a secondary role (Lee, 2011).

The lecture hall, while a hallowed space for knowledge, may not always be the nurturing ground for linguistic expressions. Large class sizes, while fostering a sense of camaraderie, can limit avenues for individualized attention and interactive practice. The space between academic learning and real-world language applications requires a bridge that is both engaging and effective.

In recognition of these difficulties, this article endeavors to cast a spotlight on the challenges faced by Thai university students on their journey toward spoken English fluency. It sets out a voyage of exploration, crossing linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical impediments. It unearths evidence-based strategies through research and practice aimed at attaining fluent spoken English. This article does not merely seek to dissect challenges; it endeavors to light the way with a constellation of actionable methods designed to enhance English-speaking fluency

among Thai university students. In embracing this journey, educators and students alike step across linguistic divides, leading to eloquent expressions (Kim, 2017).

Language Exposure and Environment

At the heart of Thailand, Thai dominates everyday life. Yet amidst the draw of their native language lies a huge hurdle on the path to English language proficiency. This casts light on the reality faced by students – a reality where the grasp of English seldom extends beyond the classroom walls. The immersive environment that is pivotal for linguistic mastery remains elusive. The scarcity of English-speaking contexts in daily life acts as a double-edged sword, limiting both exposure to and opportunities for spoken language practice. In the bustling streets of Surin and the cozy corners of local cafés, the symphony of English remains a distant echo, a rarity in a world dominated by Thai vocals (Hart & Risley, 1995). This influential study highlights the impact of early language exposure on vocabulary development and cognitive abilities. It emphasizes the role of the home environment in shaping linguistic outcomes. Genesee (2009) explored the advantages and challenges of bilingual language exposure in early childhood. It also discusses how environmental factors influence bilingual proficiency development. In addition, Hoff (2006) delved into the social aspects of language development, emphasizing the role of the environment in providing opportunities for language learning and interaction.

The Influence of Technology on Language

The digital age has revolutionized the way individuals communicate, forming a new language landscape shaped by bytes and pixels of technology. In this brave new world, social media platforms, messaging apps, and online forums have flourished as linguistic gardens in which informal language and shorthand expressions blossom. Surin University students, while immersed in these virtual realms, are unwitting participants in linguistic evolution. Emojis, viral memes, and abbreviations are part of an interactive world in which language crosses boundaries. The shortcuts that abound introduce novel words and slang into English vocabulary. However, this has trade-offs. The prevalence of informal language can cast a shadow on students' ability to differentiate between the worlds of casual cyber interaction and the demands of formal spoken English, which is crucial for academic and professional pursuits. Baron (2015) discussed the impact of digital communication on language and reading. It explores the use of emojis and emoticons as visual elements that contribute to the expressive nature of online communication. Katz and Porat (2018) explored the linguistic implications of voice-activated virtual assistants. It discusses the challenges and opportunities presented by speech recognition technology in human-computer interaction.

Access to Native Speakers

English, as an international language, relies not only on vocabulary and grammar but also on pronunciation, intonation, and cultural nuances. For Surin University students, embracing these subtleties has become a daunting task, partly due to limited access to native English speakers. Access to native speakers is essential for achieving linguistic authenticity, improving

pronunciation, and gaining insight into cultural nuances. Whether through in-person interactions, study abroad experiences, or virtual communication tools, the quality and quantity of exposure to native speakers significantly contribute to language learners' proficiency and cultural competence. This resource highlights the importance of interactions with native speakers in second language acquisition. It discusses how interactions with native speakers provide valuable input for language learners and contribute to their language development. Within academia, the need for authentic spoken English experiences resonates. Exposure to quality native English Teachers or speakers adds authenticity and depth to their language (Gass & Mackey, 2015).

Behind the Fear of Making Mistakes

The core of language learning is evolution—a journey of exploration and experimentation. Digital communication can be used to transform this process. In the virtual world, words are etched in pixels, leaving little room for revision or erasure. This permanence is what pushes the fear of errors to the forefront. Students navigating Surin University's linguistic landscape can experience a unique sense of vulnerability.

Online exchanges, whether through social media, messaging apps, or discussion forums, often result in unspoken expectations of immediacy. The need to respond rapidly can paralyze even the most capable minds: students struggle with their thoughts and worry over every word choice. The fear of making mistakes and exposing oneself to possible embarrassment shackles their willingness to engage in spoken English practice.

A study conducted by Deci and Ryan (2000) unveiled the transformative power of a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment. The guidance of educators and the friendship of fellow learners will create a safe place where mistakes are not reprimanded but looked upon as stepping stones to proficiency. When students are allowed to make mistakes without criticism, the fear of making mistakes loses its grip and is replaced by the freedom to practice and experiment with the English language (Brown, 2007). They understood Second Language Acquisition. Ellis discussed different approaches to error correction in language teaching and how a positive and constructive approach can help alleviate the fear of making mistakes. Emphasizing the learning potential of errors is highlighted.

Addressing the fear of making mistakes involves creating a supportive learning environment, promoting a positive mindset, and recognizing that errors are a natural part of the language learning process. Understanding the psychological factors underlying this fear is essential for educators and learners to effectively navigate and overcome these challenges.

Asian Countries with the Highest English Proficiency

The Cambridge English Language Assessment may have research or reports on English proficiency in different countries. In addition, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are widely used English

proficiency tests. They may have reports or publications discussing English proficiency trends. The overall Asia rankings are as follows (Ministry of Education, 2010):

1. Singapore (4th globally)
2. The Philippines (18th globally)
3. Malaysia (28th globally)
4. Hong Kong (32nd globally)
5. South Korea (37th globally)
6. India (48th globally)
7. China (49th globally)
8. Macau (57th globally)
9. Nepal (62nd globally)
10. Pakistan (63rd globally)
11. Bangladesh (65th globally)
12. Vietnam (66th globally)
13. Japan (78th globally)
14. Indonesia (80th globally)
15. Sri Lanka (82nd globally)
16. Mongolia (83rd globally)
17. Afghanistan (87th globally)
18. Uzbekistan (88th globally)
19. Myanmar (93rd globally)
20. Kazakhstan (96th globally)
21. Cambodia (97th globally)
22. Thailand (100th globally)
23. Kyrgyzstan (101st globally)
24. Tajikistan (103rd globally)

The results are not specifically for students but rather for adults and include students.

Comparing Singapore and Thailand

This study compares the English language education systems in Thailand and Singapore (Krongkaew & Singhaseni, 2013):

Singapore: English is one of the official languages in Singapore, along with Malay, Mandarin, Chinese, and Tamil. The government has placed strong emphasis on promoting English language proficiency as part of its education system and overall national development. English is used as the medium of instruction in schools, and most subjects are taught in English.

As a result, Singaporeans generally have a high level of English proficiency. Many Singaporeans are fluent in English and use it for everyday communication, business, and academic purposes. The country's multicultural and diverse population, along with its international business connections, contributes to the continued use and development of English.

Thailand: In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language in schools and is not as widely used in daily life as in Singapore. While efforts have been made to improve English education, the overall English proficiency level in Thailand has traditionally been lower than that in Singapore.

English proficiency can vary significantly across regions in Thailand, with urban areas and tourist destinations generally having higher English proficiency levels. In rural areas, English proficiency may be limited.

Factors such as the quality of English education, exposure to English media, and economic development can influence the population's English language skills. Keep in mind that information may have changed since my last update in January 2022, so it is advisable to refer to more recent sources for the latest data and developments.

1. Comparison

This study explores the factors influencing the competitiveness of Singapore and Thailand. Education System: Singapore places a stronger emphasis on English education, using it as the medium of instruction for most subjects, which contributes to higher proficiency. In Thailand, English is taught as a subject but is not always used extensively in the classroom.

Exposure: Singaporeans are more exposed to English in their daily lives due to its use in the media, education, and official communication. English exposure may be less consistent across various parts of Thailand.

Cultural and Economic Factors: Singapore's status as a global business hub has driven the need for English proficiency, while Thailand's economy has also grown, but might not have the same level of international business interaction.

Tourism: Thailand's tourism industry has led to increased exposure to English, particularly in areas frequented by tourists. This has contributed to better English skills in these regions.

The effect of the English language on Thai TV on the culture of Thai youths.

The influence of language on culture is complex and multifaceted. The introduction of more English-language content on Thai television could potentially have both positive and negative effects on the culture of Thai youths, and nobody wants a nation of Huddie. Let's take a look at both sides

2. Positive Effects: Language Proficiency

In the ever-evolving landscape of television programming, the concept of diverse content plays a multifaceted role in bridging cultures, fostering understanding, and celebrating local heritage. Thai television, with its unique blend of tradition and modernity, has the golden opportunity to curate a programming lineup that harmoniously integrates both English and Thai content, effectively catering to a wide audience while maintaining the essence of its cultural identity.

However, the delicate art of balancing English and Thai content requires careful consideration of authenticity. Whether in its drama series, documentaries, variety shows, or news segments, each piece of content resonates with the values, customs, and stories that define Thailand. The nation's identity must be maintained through Thai television.

Collaboration is paramount to ensure the successful integration of diverse content. Partnerships among local artists, writers, directors, and creators can infuse English-language narratives with Thai nuances, creating a fusion that is both captivating and culturally accurate. Similarly, collaborations with international talent can provide new perspectives while maintaining sensitivity to Thai cultural norms. This synergy results in universally appealing content that is deeply respectful of the local way of life.

Moreover, the rise of streaming platforms and on-demand services allows for the customization of content consumption. Viewers can choose between English-dubbed and subtitled versions, enhancing their viewing experience and making it accessible to a broader audience, while preserving the integrity of the original content.

In essence, pursuing diverse content for Thai television is not just about striking a balance between languages; it is about fostering a harmonious coexistence of cultures. It is about presenting Thai stories in a global language while retaining the authenticity of its roots. It is about creating a bridge between nations through the shared medium of television. As Thai television follows this path, it has the potential to become a shining example of how media can transcend linguistic barriers and celebrate the beauty of diversity (Kumaravadivelu 2008).

3 Negative Effects

3.1 Cultural Erosion: An excessive influx of English content could potentially dilute traditional Thai culture, as the youth may become more exposed to foreign values, norms, and behaviors. Cross-cultural psychology research suggests that exposure to media from different cultural backgrounds can lead to acculturation, whereby individuals adopt the values and norms of the dominant culture portrayed in the media (Berry, 2003).

3.2 Language Shift: Overemphasis on English could lead to a decline in the usage of the Thai language, affecting linguistic diversity and identity. To mitigate the risk of language shift and preserve linguistic diversity and identity, it is important to promote bilingualism or multilingualism, support the use of indigenous languages in education and public discourse, and raise awareness of the importance of preserving linguistic heritage (Hornberger, 2002). Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure that English language education complements rather than replaces the teaching of indigenous languages and that policies promoting English proficiency do not inadvertently marginalize minority languages..

3.3 Disconnect with Local Issues: If Thai youths primarily engage with English content, they might become less informed about domestic matters, as local news and cultural programming might take a backseat.

3.4 Loss of Authenticity: Traditional forms of storytelling, media, and art that are deeply rooted in Thai culture might be overshadowed by Western-style content, affecting the authenticity of cultural expression (Menken & Garcia, 2010).

4. A Balancing Act

English language teaching often involves a balance between promoting proficiency and cultural sensitivity. McKay and Wong's study explores the complex interplay between language learning and cultural identity. To mitigate potential negative effects and harness positive ones, a balanced approach is essential:

4.1 Diverse Content: Thai television could aim to strike a balance between English and Thai content, ensuring that local culture and values are well-represented (Phillipson, 1992). It is argued that media outlets are responsible for reflecting the cultural diversity of their audiences, and it is suggested that striking a balance between local and international content can help maintain cultural integrity.

4.2 Educational Initiatives: The educational system could incorporate strategies to teach English as a second language without undermining the importance of the native language. Integrating cultural content into language instruction can enhance students' understanding of the cultural contexts in which languages are used and foster appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity (Kenter, 2016).

4.3 Cultural Preservation: Encourage the creation and promotion of content that highlights Thai traditions, history, and values, helping youths maintain a strong connection to their cultural roots. The concept of linguistic imperialism discusses how English, as a dominant global language, might influence language policies and practices, potentially marginalizing other languages. Encouraging the creation and promotion of content that celebrates Thai traditions, history, and values can instill a sense of pride and identity among young people. The concept of linguistic imperialism, coined by Phillipson (1992), refers to the dominance of a particular language, such as English, and its impact on language policies and practices worldwide.

4.4 Media Literacy: Teach youths to critically evaluate media content, fostering an understanding of the influence of media on cultural perceptions.

Introducing more English language content on Thai television can have both positive and negative effects on the culture of Thai youths. A thoughtful and balanced approach is necessary to ensure that cultural values are preserved while also preparing the younger generation for a globalized world (Kachru, 1992).

Conclusion

The Way to Linguistic Mastery

With the global spotlight on English as the lingua franca of our interconnected world, these students stand at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, with the challenge of mastering spoken English in an era characterized by unprecedented connectivity and technological advancement.

The acquisition of spoken English proficiency unfolds against the backdrop of a linguistic kaleidoscope, where the allure of the local Thai language weaves its enchanting melodies. The rich tapestry of Thai culture and heritage becomes. Yet, within the realm of tradition lies a linguistic puzzle to be solved—a puzzle that requires students to step beyond their comfort zones and embrace the nuances of English.

1. Immersive Learning: Language mastery is best achieved through immersive experiences, whether through living in a language-speaking community, engaging in authentic conversations, or consuming cultural content such as literature, movies, and music.

2. Consistent Practice: Regular and consistent practice is essential for maintaining and improving linguistic skills. This includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities that challenge individuals to use language in various contexts.

3. Cultural Appreciation: True linguistic mastery involves an appreciation of cultural nuances embedded in language. Understanding the historical, social, and cultural aspects of a language enriches communication and fosters a deeper connection with native speakers.

4. Adaptability and Flexibility: Language is dynamic, and linguistic mastery requires adaptability to changes in usage, slang, and evolving linguistic trends. Flexibility in communication style allows individuals to navigate diverse linguistic situations.

5. Self-awareness and Reflection: Linguistic mastery involves self-awareness, including an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses in the language. Reflection on language use and continuous self-improvement contribute to mastery.

6. Lifelong Learning: Languages are living entities that evolve over time. Achieving linguistic mastery is not a finite goal but a continuous journey of learning and growth. Staying curious and open to new linguistic experiences ensures ongoing improvement.

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