

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION



#### Background of the Problem

Language is the basic medium of communication among every known group of human beings. No tribe, even the most primitive, has ever been found which is without language.<sup>1</sup>

Understanding other languages is essential when communication between different speech communities is necessary. Even in primitive communities, relationships between one tribe and another, at least in times of peace, require understanding of each other's languages. Nowadays the increasing ease of communication as a result of modern technological progress has induced closer relationships between people all over the world. This has made the learning of foreign languages become more important than ever before.

As the number of languages throughout the world is approximately 2,796<sup>2</sup>, it is impossible for anyone to learn them all. People obviously prefer to learn those languages which have practical appeal on the basis of numbers of speakers, geographical

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Sapir, Selected Writings of Edward Sapir, ( California: University of California Press, 1949 ) p.7

<sup>2</sup> Mario Pei, One Language for the World, ( New York: Adair Company, 1958 ) p.5

distribution, commercial, scientific, cultural and political importance. On the other hand the speakers of major languages have rarely been interested in those languages which are of minor importance, except for certain special purposes such as religious proselytizing. English and French, for example, are studied as foreign languages in most parts of the world, while the westerners who has mastered even one Asiatic tongue is viewed as exceptional.<sup>3</sup>

Thailand has been in close contact with westerners since the period of King Rama IV and this contact increased with the expansion of colonialism during the last century. In order to keep abreast with the world developments and maintain her precarious independence, Thailand made tireless efforts to promote the study of English and French as well as encouraging more and more students to go abroad.

At the same time the number of westerners in Thailand increased. The majority of them are English and French speakers. They have come for many different reasons, mostly commercial but more recently for cultural exchange as well as economic and technical co-operation. It is obvious that the study of Thai has received less attention from the English and French residents than the languages of those speakers have from Thai people. Nevertheless within Thailand there is a need for a greater effort on the part of many long-term residents to learn to communicate in Thai for

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 8

purposes of mutual understanding.

The English and French speaking residents in Thailand, whether they are interested in learning Thai or not have to use many Thai words that are involved in their daily life, for instance, place names, name of some Thai people, etc. These words are written in the Roman alphabet for the Westerners. The different phonological patterns of English and French will cause the speakers of those languages to produce Thai words differently since "The individual who comes in contact with a foreign language brings with him his native linguistic habits-its sounds and structures which he tends to transfer to the new language"<sup>4</sup>.

Examples can be shown here as in the Thai words "pasin" /phâa sîn/ (ป้าสิน) and "namplaa" /nám plaa/ (น้ำปลา) English speakers may have a problem in pronouncing an initial unaspirated "p" in /nám plaa/ but no difficulty in an initial aspirated "p" in /phâa sîn/. On the other hand this problem is reversed for French speakers.

### The Problem

This study is an attempt to analyze the problems in learning Thai pronunciation arising from the different phonological patterns of English and French and in transcribing Thai into ordinary English

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<sup>4</sup> Foongfuang Kruatrachue, Thai and English: A Comparative Study of Phonology for Pedagogical Applications, ( Indiana: a thesis submitted for the Doctor of Education degree, Indiana University, 1960 ) p. 10

and French orthography. The findings resulting from this study may be helpful in preparing material for teaching Thai to English and French people in the area of pronunciation. Since the knowledge of Thai of many western residents is relatively poor because of various reasons such as: poor teaching by Thais, the lack of knowledge of the Thai Language by Thais, as well as poor teaching materials, it is believed by the writer that this study will help promote more efficient learning of Thai by Westerners, and a more efficient teaching of Thai by native Thai speakers.

#### Related Studies

It is only since world War II that there have been a few studies of the Thai language by modern linguists.<sup>5</sup> Their names and work have been referred to in the doctoral thesis of Dr. Foongfuang Kruatrachue: "Thai and English: A Comparative Study of Phonology for Pedagogical Applications".<sup>6</sup> Dr. Foongfuang Kruatrachue made a study of Thai and English phonology but her main purpose was to help in preparing material for teaching English to Thai students. However her study of Thai phonology will help as the basis for analyzing the problem of English and French speakers in learning Thai.

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<sup>5</sup>Kruatrachue, p. 12

<sup>6</sup>For detail, see footnote 4. pp. 12-15

### Objectives

The main purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To compare the phonological problems of French and English speakers in their recognition and production of Thai words.
2. To make suggestions for the preparation of materials for teaching Thai to English and French speakers.
3. To make suggestions for a more intelligible transcription of Thai into ordinary English and French orthography.

### Limitation of Survey

The findings of this study are based on the data obtained from the informants of only 12 English speakers and 12 French speakers living in Thailand. The study is concerned only with their pronunciation as two separate groups without differentiating between individual pronunciation. Individual names are omitted and code numbers are used instead.

The study of juncture is excluded since the corpus of data consists of a list of words, not a continuous text.