

Chapter I

Introduction



1.1 Background of the study

This study is concerned with social class variation of Thai (r) (henceforth T(r)) and English (r) (henceforth E(r)), pronounced by native Thai speakers when speaking Thai and English, respectively. Previous studies of the T(r) have indicated that it has many variants. Treyakul (1986) has found five (r) variants in Thai, i.e. a trill [r], a tap [r], an approximant [ɹ], a lateral [l], and [∅] or r-lessness. The first four variants occur in the initial position and in clusters, whereas the r-lessness occurs only in clusters. Treyakul's work deals with stylistic variation of the T(r). (See review of Treyakul (1986) in 2.1.1).

An earlier research work undertaken by Beebe (1974) reveals a relationship between three social factors and variation of the T(r). The three social variables are age, educational level and occupational class. The T(r) under investigation is in clusters. (See review of Beebe (1974) in 2.1.1).

Both Treyakul (1986) and Beebe (1974) have confirmed that the T(r) has variation. It would then be interesting to see to what extent the variation of the T(r) has influence on the (r) in English pronounced by Thais, i.e. whether the E(r) has patterns of variation similar to the T(r) patterns and whether the variations of the T(r) and E(r) are related to the same social variation.

Schmidt (1977) is one researcher who has studied parallel variations both in native and foreign languages of the same speakers. The languages Schmidt studies are Egyptian Arabic and English, and the phonological variable investigated is the interdental (e) which is a phoneme both in Egyptian Arabic and in English. The phoneme (e) has two variants: [e] and [s]. The results of the research show that in the most formal situations, the Egyptians pronounce (e) as [e] in both Arabic and English. In the least formal context, they prefer [s] in both languages. In addition, the use of [s] in English correlates highly with the use of [s] in Egyptian Arabic at each style level measured. Schmidt's work suggests that learners of English may have a pattern of alternating variants of the phonological variable in English parallel to their mother tongue. (See review of Schmidt (1977) in 2.2.3).

(r) in English spoken by Thais has been studied by Beebe (1980). She finds that the trill [r], the most standard variant in Thai, is used in English in the most formal situation by Thais living in America. That is, the Thai informants apply sociolinguistic rules in the native language to the second language context. (See review of Beebe (1980) in 2.1.3).

In view of the findings by Beebe (1980) and Schmidt (1977), a further study should thus be done to find out whether or not the variation of the T(r), as evidenced in Beebe (1974) and Treyakul (1986), has any effect on the (r) in English spoken by Thais. In fact, no study has been done on social variation of (r) in English as spoken by Thais, nor on social variation of (r) in Thai in the single initial position, as can be seen from the following brief summary and comparison of previous work:

Treyakul (1986) studies stylistic variation of the T(r) in the speech of Bangkok's F.M. radio newscasters, representing Standard Thai speakers. The work is done on Thai, not English. Treyakul (1986:61) herself encourages more studies of T(r) especially in relation to other social variables e.g. educational level, age and sex.

Beebe (1974) explores social variation of (r) clusters in Thai. However, this study does not touch on T(r) in the single initial position. Once again, (r) in Thai is studied, not English.

Beebe (1980) studies variation of single initial (r) in English spoken by Thais, but does not include (r) clusters in English. Nor does it study social variation of E(r) as used by Thais.

Thus, the present study aims at exploring further from what preceding sociolinguistic research has accomplished, by concentrating on the relationship between variation of (r) in Thai and (r) in English and certain social variables that are related to the variation.

In this study, employees of first class hotels in Bangkok who have direct contact with hotel guests are the target population since they are required to use English in communicating face-to-face with foreigners in their daily work. Fifty-eight employees of various job positions were selected as subjects (for details, see 3.1).



1.2 Purpose of the study

The purposes of the present study are

1. To analyze the variation of (r) in Thai and (r) in English spoken by Bangkok Thai speakers working in leading first-class hotels in Bangkok.
2. To find out whether or not and to what extent the variation is conditioned by three social factors: sex, job level and English language background.
3. To explore the relationship between the socially conditioned variation of (r) in Thai and that of (r) in English spoken by Thai speakers.

1.3 Hypotheses

The analysis of this study is based on the following hypotheses:

1. (r) in Thai and (r) in English have variants.
2. Female speakers use more prestigious variants than male speakers.
3. Speakers of a higher job level use more prestigious variants than those of a lower job level.
4. Speakers with more English language background use more prestigious variants than those with less English language background.
5. There exists a relationship between variation

of (r) in Thai and that of (r) in English in the speech of Bangkok Thai speakers.

1.4 Scope of the study

The present study has the following limitations:

1. The study examines the T(r) and the E(r) in single initial position and in cluster or postconsonantal position of the word in the respective language.
2. The style chosen is conversational style.
3. The subjects are sampled from Bangkok Thai speakers of Thai nationality working in three leading first-class hotels in Bangkok, and having direct contact with hotel guests. (See details about sampling in 3.1).

1.5 Contributions of the study

1. This project will provide further knowledge of and methodology dealing with interlanguage variation.
2. The study will extend our knowledge of second or foreign language learning.
3. The results of this study may be applied to language learning and language teaching.

1.6 Variables used in the study

There are two types of variables used in the study: phonological variables and social variables.

1.6.1 Phonological variables

The phonological variables used in this study are the T(r) and E(r). Both T(r) and E(r) have variants. In terms of the social significance of the variants of a variable, two types of variants can be distinguished, i.e. *prestigious* and *stigmatized* variants. Prestigious variants are the variants used in standard language. Prasithrathsint (1990:19) defines standard language as the medium used in government domains, in socially important institutions, in formal situations and at school. Stigmatized variants are non-standard forms. They are considered "incorrect" and are not to be used as a model (Prasithrathsint 1989:13-14).

1.6.1.1 (r) in Thai

According to Treyakul (1986), the T(r) has five main variants:

- [r] a voiced alveolar trill
- [r̥] a voiced alveolar tap
- [ɹ] a voiced alveolar approximant
- [l] a voiced alveolar lateral

[∅] a zero representation of the
postconsonantal (r)

All, except [∅], occurs in both prevocalic and postconsonantal position; [∅] occurs only in clusters (Treyakul 1986).

Among all the T(r) variants, [r] and [r̥] are both prestigious variants. [r] and [r̥] are the variants school-children acquire at school. In addition, [r] and [r̥] are required of radio and television announcers by the Broadcasting Directing Board. According to Treyakul (1986: 42), [r] is most frequently used in the most formal style of minimal pairs, and [r̥] is most preferred in the formal style of news reading on radio and in the more formal style of passage reading.

In the prevocalic position, [l] is the stigmatized T(r) variant or, according to Beebe (1974:232), the lowest status variant for (r) when (r) occurs alone. In clusters, [∅] or r-deletion is the stigmatized variant while [l] has the in-between status of being non-standard, yet preferable to deletion (Beebe 1974:232-233).

1.6.1.2 (r) in English

On the basis of the above postulated T(r) variants and of Beebe's (1980) study, the (r) in English spoken by Thais consists of six variants. They are:

- [r] a voiced alveolar trill
- [ɾ] a voiced alveolar tap
- [ɹ] a voiced alveolar approximant
- [ɻ] a voiced retroflex approximant
- [l] a voiced lateral
- [∅] a zero representation of the postconsonantal (r)

Like the (r) variants in Thai, all variants of (r) in English spoken by Thais, except [∅], occur in the prevocalic and postconsonantal positions. [∅] occurs only in clusters. [ɹ] and [ɻ] are prestigious E(r) variants, depending on the varieties of standard English, i.e. British RP or American accent. According to Brown (1991: 94-95), the conflation of /r,l/ in English by foreign learners should be avoided, as many pairs of words rely on this distinction, e.g. "read"- "lead", "right"- "light". As for other kinds of (r) in English, in particular the alveolar tap [ɾ] and trill [r], which are relevant to the present study, Brown comments that these sounds may be heard in some native Scottish, Welsh and South African accents. Therefore, they do not constitute any real

barrier to intelligibility, although they may lead to the learner "sounding foreign" and are considered stigmatized if produced by speakers of other accents. In this study, [l] is considered stigmatized prevocalic E(r) variant while the tap [ɾ] is the less prestigious E(r) variant followed by the trill [r]. In clusters, [ø] is the stigmatized E(r) variant whereas the tap [ɾ] is the less prestigious, followed by the trill [r] and the lateral [l].

1.6.2 Social variables

There are three social variables used in this study: sex, job level and English language background. Regarding the first social variable, Wolfram and Fasold (1974:93) say that females tend to use stigmatized forms less frequently than males and the sensitivity of prestige norms demonstrated by women makes them prime candidates for linguistic change. Many sociolinguistic works (e.g. Trudgill (1972) and Sankoff & Cedergren (1971), reviewed in 2.2.2 and 2.2.4) have evidence to support the claim. In the field of second language acquisition, Preston (1989:64&71) comments that although numerous quantitative studies have been carried out, almost none includes sex as a variable. He says that the concern for male-female difference in the field has been slight and since so little quantitative work in second language acquisition on sex differences has been done, it is difficult to

generalize about learning perspective. He speculates that it may be important for women to be convinced that second language acquisition is a prestige activity.

Job level or social class is another social variable used in sociolinguistic research. Social status or class is with age, sex and style one of the four major concerns of quantitative sociolinguistics (Preston 1989: 113). A lot of previous findings (e.g. Beebe (1974) and Labov (1972). (see review of Labov (1972) in 2.1.2) reveal that a prestigious variant is more frequent in the speech of speakers of a higher job status than those of a lower. However, in the field of second language acquisition, little attention has been paid to social class as a variable mainly because the work in the field has been seen as predominantly psychological rather than social (Preston 1989:117).

The third social variable, English language background, is selected on the observation that speakers of English as a second language with different English learning background would yield different results. Particular reference is made to a speaker whose exposure to English through English medium instruction in a Western-run school and/or long-term residence abroad as against those without such experience. At least one previous work, by

Charmikorn (1988), has found that the speaker's experience abroad has a significant influence on the use of the final [s] in the English loanwords in Thai (see review in 2.2.1).

Each social variable used in the study is divided into different categories which will be described below.

1.6.2.1 Sex

The informants are classified into males and females.

1.6.2.2 Job level

The informants are categorized into four levels of job position, based on responsibility, the nature of work and salary:

Level I - Professional and managerial
e.g. beverage manager,
assistant executive housekeeper

Level II - Supervisory
e.g. assistant outlet manager,
reception supervisor

Level III - Skilled
e.g. captain, front office
receptionist

Level IV - Semi-skilled

e.g. waiter/waitress,

room attendant

(For details of all the sampled job positions in each job level, see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3).

In this study, Job level I is the highest status position, and Job level IV, the lowest status.

1.6.2.3 English language background

There are three types of English learning experience used in this study to characterize subjects' exposure to spoken English.

Type I - extensive

Speakers falling into this category are those who have been abroad for at least one year studying and/or working in a place where English is the medium of communication. Also included in Type I are those who have been exposed to interaction in English with English speaking people since school. When they were school children, they had to listen and speak to expatriate teachers whose English was their second language or native tongue. Type I subjects are more exposed to English than

the other two groups although their work experience in a hotel may be less than the latter.

Type II - job-experienced

Informants classified into this group have been working in a hotel for at least five years. Their first opportunity to speak English began when they came to work in a hotel. They may have been abroad for a short visit but never worked or studied overseas.

Type III - beginner

As the name implies, these are employees who are new to the job, thus their English exposure is limited. They have worked in a hotel for less than five years, and like Type II category, they never worked or studied abroad. In addition, they never spoke English at school.

Type I is considered most exposed to English and Type III the least exposed.

Two hotel employees, M4-3-3 and F1-1-2^{*}, are given

^{*}M stands for male and F for female. The three digits refer to the job level, type of English language background, and the ordinal number of the subject.

as examples to illustrate the classifications of subjects. M4-3-3 is a roomboy and has been working for three years. He started to speak English when he joined the hotel. Therefore, he is in Job level IV (semi-skilled) and his English language background is Type III (beginner). On the other hand, F1-1-2's position is catering sales executive. She studied in Singapore for four years and finished "O" level there. Thus she belongs to Job level I (professional and managerial) and her English language background is Type I (extensive) since she used English in an English speaking environment (Singapore) for more than one year.

As has been mentioned earlier, social status, age, sex and style are the four major concerns of quantitative sociolinguistics (Preston 1989:113). However, in this study, only two of them are selected, i.e. social status and sex, while age and style are not. The latter are left out from the study for different reasons. Age is not included as it is redundant: it is predictable from job level. Hotel employees of a lower job level are mostly younger than those of a higher job level. Conversely, those of a higher job level are older than those of a lower job level. With regard to style, its exclusion from the study mainly stems from the fact that Treyakui (1986) has already studied stylistic variation of the T(r) (see 2.1.1), and Beebe (1980) has presented the results of

stylistic variation of (r) in English as used by Thai speakers (see 2.1.3).

1.7 Abbreviations and symbols used in the study

The following abbreviations and symbols are used in the study:

T(r)	:	the (r) variable in Thai
E(r)	:	the (r) variable in English
ELB	:	English language background
>	:	greater than
/	:	or (on equal terms)

For tone marks:

/ø/	:	mid tone
/1/	:	low tone
/2/	:	falling tone
/3/	:	high tone
/4/	:	falling-rising tone