English Pronunciation Abilities of Chinese Undergraduate Students in Thai Environment

Kannikar Kantamas [1]

Khomkrit Tachom [2]

Phanintra Teeranon [3]

Sukanya Kaowiwattanakul [3]

Abstract

The research titled "English Pronunciation Abilities of Chinese undergraduate students in Thai Environment" objective was to identify the problems in pronunciation learning encountered for Chinese undergraduate students in Chiangrai Rajabhat University. The samples used in the study were 40 third-year Chinese undergraduate students in Chiangrai Rajabhat University with no official English proficiency in 2021. The samples were selected using simple random sampling. The research tools were a survey questionnaire and a structured interview with a quantitative survey research design. This data was analysed with frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and a content analysis. The results showed that the students often use strategies for coping with speaking and listening problems, but used negotiation for meaning while speaking the most rather than other strategies. Learning more the Thai language and culture were one of the priority and initially employed a set of strategies

---

[1] Ph.D. (Liberal Arts), University of Phayao, (2021). Currently a Lecturer in Western Language, Faculty of Humanities, Chiangrai Rajabhat University.

[2] Asst. Prof. Dr., Academic Vice Dean of the Liberal Arts, University of Phayao.

[3] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Vice Dean for Research, University of Phayao.

[4] Asst. Prof. Dr. , Head of Doctor of Philosophy and Master of the Liberal Arts Program (English).

to deal with and to solve all these problems by using English at first and trying to speak Thai and appreciate the differences such as language and religion.

Keywords: English Pronunciation Abilities, Chinese Undergraduate Students, Thai Environment

Introduction

Many universities in Thailand have entered into Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) for exchange programmes with those in China and other ASEAN member countries. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019 (2019)'s report showing that Thailand is a popular regional study destination and representing the third most popular study destination in Southeast Asia after Malaysia and Singapore. Preliminary observation by the researcher and other teachers working with these Chinese exchange students show a number of English-language problems associated with their pronunciation especially with spelling, reading and sounds. These problems are likely to result in misinterpretation of the contents of studies, mistakes in understanding, and eventually communication breakdown. (Arwae & Chinbone, 2013). Some pronunciation of English learners' problems in China and factors leading to these problems are the influence of the Chinese language, include with learners' age, attitudes, and their insufficiency in knowledge of phonology (Wen-Hsing Yang, 2015). From all these studies as mentioned show that communication strategies can be defined as the methods one uses when facing problems in the process of accomplishing a communicative goal (Wang, 2012).

As a lecturer who teaches the English courses in Chiangrai Rajabhat University, the researcher would like to investigate the correlation of English language ability on English pronunciation abilities of Chinese university students in a Thai environment. Also, the approach of communication strategies postulated by Oxford (1990), Cohen (2012) and Nakatani (2010) to analyse and interpret the Chinese undergraduate students' communication

strategies will also be used (see figure 1). The researcher would also like to meet the suitable solution for solving problems as proposed by Yangklang (2006) that there are many methods to improve students' pronunciation such as the English pronunciation test, competence strategies, youtube, television, exercises, drills, and multimedia. Based on the problems of English pronunciation abilities (defined as including reading, spelling, sound, and understanding) with 40 third-year Chinese students from Chiangrai Rajabhat University in a Thai environment, the contribution of the pronunciation test will be in the solution of problematic phonemes in different cultures.

Objective

This research is aimed to identify the problems in pronunciation learning encountered for Chinese undergraduate students in Chiangrai Rajabhat University.

Research Question: What are the problems in pronunciation learning encountered for Chinese undergraduate students in Chiangrai Rajabhat University.?

Expected Outcome

Address the pronunciation problem by arranging a test to improve the English pronunciation competence and communication strategies in Chiangrai Rajabhat University with the Chinese undergraduate students enrolled in the 2+2 Undergraduate Joint-Degree in English Studies Programme (the Faculty of Humanities).

Literature Review

Learning language styles and strategies in theory by Rebeca Oxford Oxford (2011) defines learning language styles and strategies as the method that help a foreign student learn a second or foreign language and each student apply various methods for acquiring new

language based on their preferences and context of learning. According to Oxford, it can be concluded that learning styles and strategies can assist teachers to identify the learning technique of their students and analyse how learning styles and learning strategies relate to the development of students as many scholars claim that both are the main factors enhancing the success of language learning. Therefore, learning language styles and strategies in theory by Rebeca Oxford had suggested to apply in this research area that help Chinese undergraduate students learn a second language such as English.

English Pronunciation Theory   One of the theories which greatly impacts the believe of English pronunciation teaching is Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core or Jenkins' theory which include with a set of pronunciation aspects considering crucial for mutual intelligibility (2000, cited in Gilakjani, 2016). Furthermore, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) theory is borrowed from WE theory regarding the outer circle; moreover, this theory is extended it to the expanding circle but different in that while L2 varieties of English are acceptable as norms. So, this means L1 English norms may also be used but only in so far as they contribute to intelligibility. This especially ELF means English is used for communication by second language users in the expanding circle regardless of the country in which English was taught (Jenkins, 2014).

English Teaching in Thailand Thai Constitution put English to be the key determinants for developing language teaching and learning in the country. English teaching has been a part of Thailand for decades and served multiple functions such as a foreign language (EFL), second language (ESL), and international language (EIL) (Nookam, 2010). However, the teaching of English in Thailand did not serve the role of English as an international language as the main focus of teaching has been focused only on raising awareness of standard English or the accent of native speakers (Ussama, 2013).

Pronunciation and Communication Problems among Chinese Students or Chinese English.   As we know English is a compulsory subject in high schools and

universities of the People's Republic of China most of Chinese students' English is still at a lower stage. This is because most Chinese students still believe that pronunciation is the most facilitative for communication but they are able to speak like native speakers with their traditional accents. This study focused only on English pronunciation abilities. Also, this research focused only 40 third-year Chinese students with no official English proficiency such as TOFEL or IELTS. The contribution of the pronunciation test was in the solution of problematic phonemes in different cultures (Xie & Fowler, 2013).

Communication Strategies (CS) According to Mirzaei & Heideri (2012), in learning a language, communication strategy (CS) was such a very useful mean for foreign language (L2) learners to be in a certain level of understanding in term of communication. This is also highly important to solve problems on how to fill the communication gap between student to student, and also teacher to students. Especially on the strategies for coping with speaking problems and the strategies for coping with listening problems.

More specifically, communication strategies refer to the strategies used by the Chinese undergraduate students to overcome communication difficulties and breakdowns due to a lack of available linguistic resources. Seven strategies for copying speaking problems (Oxford, 1990): 1) Social affective Strategy involves learning by interaction with others from the Chinese undergraduate students. 2) Fluency-oriented strategy which relates to the Chinese undergraduate students emphasizing speech clarity and pronunciation. 3) Negotiation for meaning while speaking relevant to the Chinese undergraduate students' attempt to negotiate with their speakers. 4) Accuracy-oriented strategy which relates to the Chinese undergraduate students paying attention to forms of speech. 5) Message reduction and alteration strategy which relates to the Chinese undergraduate students allowing the substitution of familiar words. 6) Nonverbal strategy which relates to things such as the Chinese undergraduate students giving hints by using gestures and facial expression and 7) Message abandonment

strategy which relates to a message abandonment by Chinese undergraduate students in communication.

Regarding to communication strategies (strategies for copying with listening problems) 1) Negotiation for meaning while listening clearly characterized by negotiating behavior while the Chinese undergraduate students are listening. 2) Fluency-maintaining strategy involves the Chinese undergraduate students paying attention to the fluency of conversational flow. 3) Scanning Strategy includes focusing on specific points of speech, such as subject and verb, the interrogative, and the first part of the Chinese undergraduate students's utterance, in which important information is usually contained. 4) Greeting the gist strategy requires paying attention to general information contained in speech rather than to specific utterances and considering the context and the Chinese undergraduate students' previous sentences to guess overall meaning. 5) Nonverbal strategy while listening is related to making use of nonverbal information, such as the Chinese undergraduate students' eye contact, facial expression, and gestures. 6) Less active listener strategy represents negative attitudes towards using active listening strategies for interaction and 7) Word-oriented strategy reflects the Chinese undergraduate students tendency to capture the meaning of speech by paying attention to individual words. This means the Chinese undergraduate students who utilize this strategy translate the message into their Chinese language little by little and depend heavily on familiar words. The framework is as follow (Figure 1).
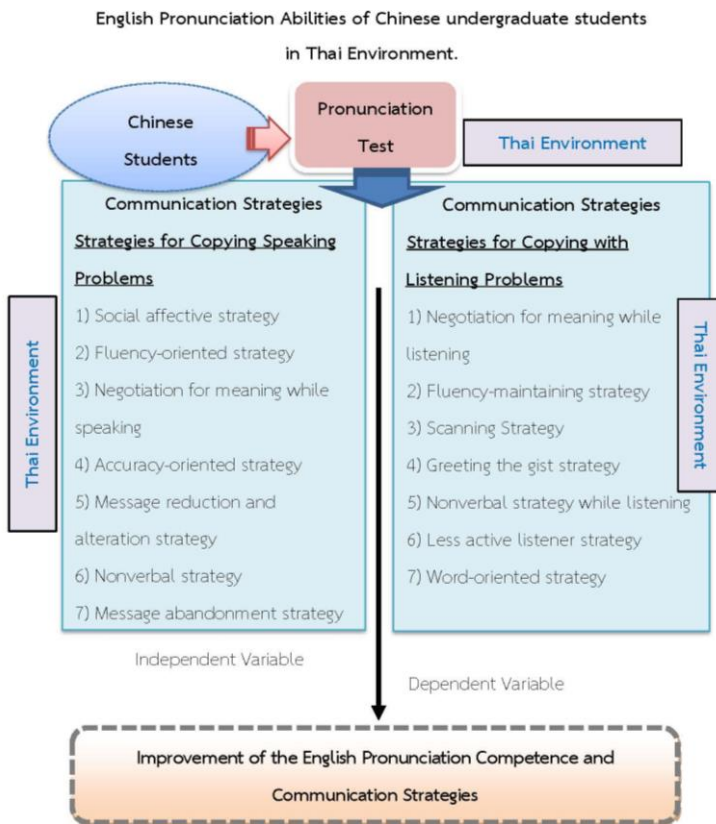
English Pronunciation Abilities of Chinese undergraduate students in Thai Environment.

Chinese Students → Pronunciation Test — Thai Environment

Communication Strategies

Strategies for Copying Speaking Problems

1) Social affective strategy
2) Fluency-oriented strategy
3) Negotiation for meaning while speaking
4) Accuracy-oriented strategy
5) Message reduction and alteration strategy
6) Nonverbal strategy
7) Message abandonment strategy

Communication Strategies

Strategies for Copying with Listening Problems

1) Negotiation for meaning while listening
2) Fluency-maintaining strategy
3) Scanning Strategy
4) Greeting the gist strategy
5) Nonverbal strategy while listening
6) Less active listener strategy
7) Word-oriented strategy

Thai Environment

Independent Variable   Dependent Variable

Improvement of the English Pronunciation Competence and Communication Strategies

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (adapted from Ryshina-Pankova, 2018; Thorne,2010; Stanley, 2013)

Research Methodology

Research Design A quantitative survey research design is employed in this study because it collects quantitative, numbered data using a questionnaire and statistically analyses the data to describe trends about responses to questions and the thematic content analysis was used to analyze the interview data using a structured interview (Creswell, 2012).

Population and Samples The populations in this study were 80 third-year undergraduate students (40 Thai and 40 Chinese) in English Studies Programme (Faculty of Humanities) with no English proficiency approval, in the first semester of the academic year 2021 at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand (Chiangrai Rajabhat University (CRRU), 2021) The samples were selected by simple random sampling from Thai-Chinese students who are studying at Chiangrai Rajabhat University (CRRU). The sample numbers were decided on by referring to Cooper et al (2014). According to the population of the Chinese students at, Chiangrai Rajabhat University (CRRU) is 40. Therefore, the sample is 40 Chinese students.

Research Instruments The research instruments were 1) a survey questionnaire with three parts. **Part 1** "Demographical Information" has 8 closed-ended questions. **Part 2** "Use of English Pronunciation Learning Strategies" has 32 closed-ended questions, with a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Low" to "Highest". The scales of abilities are categorized as follows: Very Low (1) Low (2) Moderate (3) High (4) Very High (5). **Part 3** "Other Suggestions on English Pronunciation Learning Strategies" the structured interview with eight open-end questions.

Data Collection

There were eight major steps for data collection as follows: 1) Identified the problems of letters, initial letter sounds and reading assessment of the Chinese undergraduate students. 2) Thirteen passage readings tested on Chinese undergraduate students. 3) Designed the pronunciation test. 4) Experimented (Try Out) the pronunciation test, Pronunciation Strategies and Communication Strategies. 5) Analyzed and interpreted after using the pronunciation test and Communication Strategies 6) Collected data for analysis evaluation. 7) Analysed the pronunciation abilities and communication strategies with the Chinese undergraduate students. 8) Presented the findings of the study.

Data Analysis Ratings on the population's forms were compiled by one native speaker and two non-native speakers that were the researcher and English expert or linguist. The data was statistically analysed underpinning the 5 rating scales of the agreement on communication strategies : Scale 5 (Very High) means very high with score rage at 4.50-5.00., 4 (High) means high with score rage at 3.50-4.49. 3 (Moderate) means neutral with score rage at 2.50-3.49. 2 (Low) means seldom with score rage at 1.50-2.49. 1 (Very Low) means very low with score rage at 1.00-1.49 (Silapajaru, 2008). Content analysis was used to analysed the audio recording data from the structured interview. The mean score for each item indicated the level of Chinese undergraduate students' frequency; the higher score indicated that students had high level of frequency, while the lower score indicated very low level of frequency.

Summary of Research Results

The results of the research titled intercultural communication strategies on English Pronunciation abilities of Chinese undergraduate students in Thai environment are as follows.

1. Questionnaire, it has two parts and the results are as follows. **Part 1 Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems**

Table 1 Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems employed by Chinese undergraduate students.

Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems	μ	S.D.	Level of Frequency
1) Social affective strategy	3.54	0.92	High
2) Fluency-oriented strategy	3.38	0.91	Moderate
3) Negotiation for meaning while speaking	3.41	0.94	Moderate
4) Accuracy-oriented strategy	3.62	0.81	High

Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems	μ	S.D.	Level of Frequency
5) Message reduction and alteration strategy	3.71	0.88	High
6) Nonverbal strategy	3.77	0.96	High
7) Message abandonment strategy	3.32	0.84	Moderate
Overall	**3.53**	**0.87**	**High**

Table 1 and Figure 2 above show the strategies for coping speaking problems employed by Chinese undergraduate students with the overall for strategies for coping speaking problems that the Chinese students was at a high level (3.53). To answer the research question, the problems in pronunciation learning encountered for Chinese undergraduate students in Chiangrai Rajabhat University were speaking problems. However, strategies for coping with speaking problems employed by Chinese undergraduate students were as follows. The results indicated, after an examination of the subcategories, that the Chinese students used non-verbal strategy the most rather than other strategies (3.77). The second strategy used were message reduction and alteration strategy (3.71). The last strategy which was at a high level used by Chinese students is Accuracy-oriented strategy (3.62). The least strategy that was at a moderate level used by Chinese students is message abandonment strategy (3.32). Therefore, the result is also in line with Yangklang (2006) who stated that lack of English conversation and communication could lead to many problems in speaking the target language.

Part 2 Strategies for Coping with Listening Problems

Table 2 Strategies for coping with listening problems employed by Chinese undergraduate students.

Strategies for Coping with Listening Problems	μ	S.D.	Level of Frequency
1) Negotiation for meaning while listening	3.83	0.7	High
2) Fluency-maintaining strategy	3.77	0.75	High
3) Scanning Strategy	3.60	0.86	High
4) Greeting people strategy	3.49	0.77	Moderate
5) Nonverbal strategy while listening	3.66	0.86	High
6) Less active listener strategy	3.70	0.72	High
7) Word-oriented strategy	3.61	0.83	High
Overall	**3.67**	**0.79**	**High**

Table 2 and Figure 3 above show the strategies for coping speaking problems which one of the answers on the problems in pronunciation learning encountered for Chinese undergraduate students in Chiangrai Rajabhat University. The overall for strategies for coping with listening problems that the Chinese students used at a high level (3.67). The results indicated, after an examination of the subcategories, that the Chinese students used Negotiation for meaning while speaking the most rather than other strategies (3.83). The second strategies used were fluency-oriented strategies (3.77). The last strategy which was used by Chinese students is less active listener strategies at a high level (3.62). The least strategy that was used by Chinese students is greeting people strategies at a moderate level (3.32). Therefore, the result is also in line with Oxford (2011) who confirmed that English as

Foreign Language could be learned by learners who understood how to use communication strategies such as negotiation for meaning while speaking.

2. Structured interview, there are five questions and the results are as follows.

The respondents were asked, in the Thai-speaking context, what kind of intercultural communication problems that they encounter. The results found that 39 (21.91%) respondents' encountered cultural differences. Also, 37 respondents (20.79%) encountered different ways of thinking and greeting and 28 respondents (15.73%) explained Thai people speak English just like Thai language respectively. The lowest percentage was 19 respondents (10.67%) reported that the syntactic order of Thai and Chinese is not the same, which leads to the wrong order of translation.

The respondents were asked when interacting with their interlocutors, what are their attitudes with regard to their cultural differences, such as race, religion, language, and age. The results found that 35 respondents (25.74%) interacted with their attitudes by respecting and understanding each other. In contrast, other 32 respondents (23.53%) reported that treating others as equally regarding to their cultural differences and 22 respondents (16.18%) had problems with differences voices and tones between Thai and Chinese respectively. The lowest percentage was only 5 respondents (3.68%) expressed that they do not care about inclusion regarding to their cultural differences, such as race, religion, language, and age.

The respondents were asked whether and how communication problems affect their study or daily life in a Thai-speaking context. The results found that 30 respondents (29.70%) experienced difficulties in communicating while shopping and eating in local area or around Thailand. Other 26 respondents (25.74%) had feeling to study more Thai words and knowledge instead of English and 23 respondents (22.77%) could repeat more words or sentences respectively. The lowest percentage was only 4 respondents (3.96%)

thought that if was not a big problem and they could handle it whether intercultural communication problems may affect their study or daily life in a Thai environment or not.

The respondents were asked how they immediately overcomes any communication challenges. The results found that 38 respondents (26.57%) knew about using English first and trying to speak Thai later when they have to immediately Although 34 respondents (23.78%) reported maintaining respect with study more and more and 32 respondents (22.38%) used body language respectively.

The respondents were asked after resolving these communication problems, how they reviewed the issues and prepare or formulate a strategy to deal with similar incidents in the future. The results found that 32 respondents (30.48%) knew about using English first and trying to speak. Although 29 respondents (27.62%) reported that maintaining respect with study more and more can be one of the strategies to deal with and 23 respondents (21.90%) practiced more and tried to keep contact with Thai people to look back Thai words.

Discussion

The results have found that the Chinese undergraduate students in Thai environment often use communication strategies for coping with speaking and coping with listening problems. This was because Chinese undergraduate students are speaking and listening English in a Thai environment that make them challenged. The respondents knew that when they go anywhere in Thailand, they use English first and then try to speak Thai later. This is because communicative skills and language competence or language proficiency can influence cultural adjustment process. These are associated to the previous researches as indicating that language competence and language proficiency influenced cultural adjustment process and the ability to function well in different cultures (Wu & Ying, 2010 and Xie, X & Fowler, 2013).

The results also found that the respondents often employ respecting and understanding each other in their daily life in Thailand. The results supported Mustaffa & Ilias (2013); Jenkins (2014); Ryshina-Pankova, (2018) concluded that it is important to treat all people as equals and it does not matter which cultural group they belong to. As the results indicated above, Chinese undergraduate students think all Thai people deserve to be included and deserve their respect. This means that Chinese undergraduate students thought that they never make people from different cultures feel they and their opinions are different human values.

Recommendations

Recommendation for applying the research results The results of this study might be beneficial for other foreign languages teaching and learning. The students might be taught and encouraged to use more and wider range of the strategies in order to keep their conversation going smoothly and effectively.

Recommendation for further research It is suggested for further research to discuss the most frequent writing and reading strategies with their challenges and solutions, the correlation between the strategies applied and the improvement of English skills and many more.

References

Arwae; S, Chinwonno; A. (2013). Development of reading materials to enhance
English reading ability of \students in Three Southern border provinces of
Thailand. Chulalongkorn University.

Chiangrai Rajabhat University (CRRU). (2014, June 10). Annual Report on Working
Planning Management. Retrieved July 15, 2014 from
http:/www.cru.in.th/mou/index.asp.

Creswell, J.W. (2012). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating
quantitative and qualitative research. (4th Ed.).

Cohen, A.D. (2012). Test Taker Strategies and Task Design. In: Davidson, F.; Fulcher,
G. (eds), The Routledge Handbook of Language Testing. Oxford: Routledge

Cooper, A. J., Duke, É., Pickering, A. D., and Smillie, L. D. (2014). Individual
differences in reward prediction error: contrasting relations between feedback-
related negativity and trait measures of reward sensitivity, impulsivity and
extraversion. *Front. Hum. Neurosci*. 8:248. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2014.00248.

Gilakjani, A.P. (2016). The Significance of Listening Comprehension in English
Language Teaching. *Journal Paper*. 1674-1675. Retrieved

December 27, 2016 from http://www.academypublication.com/ojs/
index.php/tpls/article/view/tpls060816701677/852.

Jenkins, J. (2014). English as a lingua franca in the international university: The politics
of academic English language policy. Routledge.

Mirzaei, A., & Heideri, H. (2012). Exploring the use of oral communication strategies
by (non) fluent L2 speakers. *The journal of Asia TEFL*, 9(3), 131-156.

Mustaffa, C. S., &Ilias, M. (2013). Relationship between students adjustment factors
and cross cultural adjustment: a survey at the northern university of
Malaysia. Intercultural Communication Studies XXII: 1, 279 –300.

Nakatani, Y. (2010). Identify strategies that facilitate EFL learners' oral
communication: A classroom study using multiple data collection procedures.
The Modern Language Journal, 94, 116-136.

Nookam. (2010). The effects of speaking rate on listener evaluations of native and
foreign-accented speech. Language Learning, 48, 159-182.

Oxford, R L (1990). Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.
New York: Newbury House.

Ryshina-Pankova. S. (2018). Discourse moves and intercultural communicative
competence in telecollaborative chats. Language Learning
& Technology, 22 (1), 218–239.

Stanley, G. (2013). Language Learning with Technology – Ideas for Integrating
Technology in the Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2019, January 19). Country Report:

Thailand. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from http://www.mua.go.th/know_ohec/ohec.html.

Thorne, S. L. (2010). The 'Intercultural Turn' and Language Learning in the Crucible
of New Media. In F. Helm & S. Guth (eds.),

Telecollaboration 2.0 for Language and Intercultural Learning (pp. 139-164).
Wang, Y. (2012). Chinese speakers' perceptions of their English in intercultural
communication. Doctoral thesis. University of Southampton.

Wen-Hsing Yang. (2015). The effects of speaking rate on listener evaluations of native
and foreign-accented speech. Language Learning, 48, 159-182.

Wu, Ying. (2010). Er Yu Xi De Zhong Mu Yu Fu Qian Yi Xian Xiang Ji Dui Ce Yan
      Jiu (A Study of L1 Transfer in Second Language Learning and the Strategies).
      Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology. Social Sciences
      Edition, (2), 188-189.

Xie, X & Fowler, C., A. (2013). Listening with a foreign-accent: The inter language
      speech intelligibility benefit in Mandarin speakers of English, Journal of
      Phonetics, 41(5), 369-378.

Ussama., R. (2013). Timing patterns in the production of a foreign language. Views on
      the Acquisition and Use of a Second Language (pp. 539-551). Universitat
      Autonoma de Barcelona.

Yangklang, W. (2006). Improving English Final /-l/ Pronunciation of Thai Students
      through Computer-Assisted Instruction Program. Thesis, M.A. (ELS),
      Suranaree University of Technology.