An Analysis of the Influence of Mother Tongue on English Pronunciation: A Case Study of EFL Learners at Bakong Pitthaya School, Thailand

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Abstract*. This study investigates the impact of Thai students' first language (L1) on their English pronunciation within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Bakong Pitthaya School in Thailand. The researcher used a descriptive qualitative method design on a case study with Contrastive Analysis Theory on English pronunciation. Recorded interviews and pronunciation testing were the main techniques of data collection instruments. The subjects of this research were secondary grade students of Bakong Pitthaya School Pattani, Thailand. The results of this study aimed to provide actionable recommendations for the teachers to enhance pronunciation instruction and improve student pronunciation skill. This research contributes to the understanding of L1 influence on L2 pronunciation, offering insights that can inform teaching practices in similar EFL contexts.*

Keywords*: Contrastive Analysis, EFL, L1, Pattani Malay, Pronunciation*

1. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Acquiring proficient English pronunciation is a fundamental aspect of language learning. Particularly those learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the journey to mastering pronunciation can be fraught with challenges. Despite advances in educational methodologies that integrate English into the curriculum, many learners continue to face challenges in mastering English with accurate pronunciation, which aligns with Ellis's (1997) assertion that pronunciation is a key component of second language acquisition and overall communicative ability.

In Thailand, as a country that learn English as a foreign language, English is taught in classes but rarely used in daily life. For a language learner, it is common to make pronunciation mistakes when they learn new vocabulary of the language they learn. Structure differences or rules differences between English and learners' first language or national language could be one of the factors influencing Thailand EFL learners' pronunciation. Learners' mother tongue also one of the crucial aspects of the interference, which shapes their perception and production of sounds in English. This struggle is often attributed to the phonetic and phonological differences between Thai and English Flege (1995), where the learner's L1 phonological system influences the acquisition of L2 sounds.

This issue was also experienced by students at Bakong Pitthaya School Pattani, Thailand. During an internship program at the school, the researcher observed that many students

struggled to pronounce words they were unfamiliar with. Specifically, learners often faced difficulty pronouncing some sound that were not available in their language. Errors in pronunciation, stress, and phonological features were seen as the main errors made by learners. This phenomenon could have been affected by a variety of circumstances. The differences between learners' native language and the acquired language contributed significantly to these challenges. In Bakong Pitthaya School, the educational context played a significant role in shaping students' English pronunciation skills. Traditional teaching methods often prioritized grammar and reading comprehension over speaking and listening skills. Consequently, students received little guidance on how to produce English sounds accurately. Moreover, students at Bakong Pitthaya School had limited exposure to genuine English-speaking environments, which stifled their ability to develop native-like pronunciation patterns. Students there also seemed to lack motivation in learning English. They found English difficult to learn and were afraid of making mistakes while speaking English. This aligns with Gardner (1985) socio-educational model, which identifies motivation as a key factor in successful second language acquisition, especially integrative and instrumental motivation. The fact that the script they used in daily life was Thai script, which was different from English script, became one of the aspects affecting students' English learning processes.

The students at Bakong Pitthaya School grew up in an environment that used Pattani Malay as their first language and Thai as their national language. The students also learned English as one of the compulsory courses in the Thai educational system. They also learned Arabic since Bakong Pitthaya School was an Islamic school. This meant that the students there had been exposed to at least five languages (Pattani Malay, Thai, Arabic, Standard Malay, and English) since they started school. This multilingual context can lead to both positive cross-linguistic transfer and interference, as described by Grosjean (2010) in his work on bilingualism and multilingualism. The Thai language, characterized by its tonal nature and distinct phonetic inventory, presents unique challenges for learners attempting to acquire English pronunciation. For instance, Thai has five tones that can alter the meaning of words, while English relies more on stress and intonation patterns. Thai fundamental difference in how sounds convey meaning can lead to confusion and mispronunciation among Thai EFL learners. Wells (2006) explains that tonal language speakers often struggle with English stress-timed rhythm and intonation patterns because their L1 uses pitch lexically rather than pragmatically. Moreover, the phonological transfer from a tonal L1 to a stress-based L2 can result in prosodic errors that affect intelligibility Derwing & Munro (2005).

This study offered a distinctive contribution by focusing specifically on Thai EFL learners at Bakong Pitthaya School, addressing a notable gap in research that predominantly centered on university-level learners or other linguistic contexts. This research adopted a descriptive qualitative methodology grounded in contrastive analysis theory to provide an in-depth examination of the phonological influence of the Thai mother tongue on English pronunciation. The present study narrowed the focus to secondary school learners in a specific Thai school context, aiming to uncover detailed insights into pronunciation errors unique to this group. Furthermore, this research highlighted practical implications for pronunciation teaching tailored to the Thai EFL classroom, considering factors such as classroom management and learner motivation that had been insufficiently explored in prior literature. Ultimately, this localized and theoretically informed investigation enriched the understanding of mother tongue interference and offered valuable guidance for enhancing English pronunciation instruction in Thailand.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

Previous Study

Several previous studies related to first language or mother tongue interference have been reviewed. The first research, a study titled "Mother Tongue Interference Towards Students' English Pronunciation: A Case Study of Fatoni University Students in English for Communication Course" by Hayeesa-i (2023), focuses on how the mother tongues of Pattani Malay, Thai, and Arabic influence the English pronunciation of 30 Fatoni University students. The findings reveal distinct patterns of interference unique to each mother tongue, with varying percentages of correct pronunciation across consonant positions. A similar study by Kurniawan & Thren (2024) titled "The Influence of the Mother Tongue on English Pronunciation: A Case Study on Indonesian EFL Learners" analyzes common phonological errors among Indonesian speakers, such as difficulties with English phonemes absent in Indonesian. Another study by Fitriani & Zulkarnain (2019) investigates how mother tongue interference manifests in the speaking performance of EFL learners, focusing on pronunciation errors and their impact on overall fluency and intelligibility. In another research by Faradila, Thohir, & Amin (2024) with the title "Mother Tongue Interference Toward Students' Ability in Producing English Sounds", the study finds that students commonly mispronounce English sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue, substituting them with native language equivalents or omitting difficult sounds. A study entitled "Mother Tongue Influence on English Pronunciation: A Case Study in College Students" by Aruldhas & Rajendran (2022) analyzes vowel and consonant substitutions based

on the similarity or dissimilarity between the phonemic inventories of the mother tongue and English. From another research entitled "The Impact of First Language on Students' English Pronunciation" by Octaviani, Jannah, Sebrina, & Arochman (2024), the study identifies persistent pronunciation challenges related to mother tongue interference, including substitution, omission, and distortion of English sounds.

Unlike previous studies that often concentrate on university-level learners, single data collection methods, or broader language groups, this research narrows its lens to the unique phonological challenges faced by Thai-speaking adolescents. By incorporating both student and teacher interviews alongside pronunciation tests, this study not only identifies specific pronunciation errors but also explores the perceptions and experiences behind them. As a result, the research is expected to provide a deeper, context-rich understanding of how Thai as a first language interferes with English pronunciation and to offer practical insights for targeted pronunciation teaching strategies in Thai EFL classrooms.

First Language (L1)

The first language (L1), also known as mother tongue, is the language a person acquires naturally from birth and uses most fluently. It forms the foundational linguistic system in an individual's cognitive framework and strongly influences subsequent language learning. Research shows that L1 impacts how learners perceive, process, and produce a second language, affecting various linguistic components such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary acquisition (Cheng, 2023). The influence of L1 on L2 acquisition is multifaceted. It can facilitate or hinder learning depending on the similarities or differences between the two languages. When L1 and L2 share linguistic features, learners often experience positive transfer, where knowledge of L1 structures aids in mastering L2. Conversely, negative transfer or interference occurs when differences cause errors, confusion, or fossilization of incorrect forms in L2 (Biju, 2024). The mother tongue, synonymous with L1, deeply shapes cognitive and linguistic development. Its influence extends beyond language structure to affect learning strategies, communication styles, and cultural understanding in L2 acquisition. Mother tongue interference can lead to persistent errors in syntax, phonology, and pragmatics if not addressed properly in language education (Soma, 2018).

Pronunciation and Phonology

Pronunciation is defined as the way in which a language is spoken. Pronunciation is the way in which a language's sounds are produced and articulated by speakers. It involves both segmental features (individual sounds such as vowels and consonants) and supra-segmental features (such as intonation, stress, and rhythm). Accurate pronunciation is crucial for effective communication in a second language, as mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings or communication failure. Pronunciation features refer to the various characteristics of spoken language that affect how words and sentences are articulated and understood. These features can be broadly categorized into segmental and suprasegmental elements. Segmental features are discrete, independently controllable elements of speech sounds that define how each phoneme is produced and perceived. Suprasegmental features are critical components of spoken language that extend beyond individual phonemes to influence the rhythm, melody, and expressiveness of speech.

Thai learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) face significant challenges in English pronunciation primarily because of the phonological differences between Thai and English. Thai phonology lacks many English sounds, especially certain consonants and consonant clusters, which leads to mispronunciations and communication barriers (Piyamat & Deekawong, 2021). Phonological interference refers to the influence of a learner's first language (L1) phonological system on their production of sounds in a second language (L2). This interference manifests as substitution, omission, or addition of sounds that do not exist in the learner's native language (Piyamat & Deekawong, 2021). Pattani Malay speakers are often multilingual, exposed to Thai and Arabic, which influences their phonology. Phonological interference from Thai and Arabic affects pronunciation patterns, especially in vowel quality, stress, and intonation (Chapakiya, 2020).

English as a Foreign Language

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the study and use of English by non-native speakers in a country where English is not the primary language. EFL learners typically acquire English for academic, professional, or social purposes within their own country rather than through immersion in an English-speaking environment (Kalapakdee, 2021). The differences between Pattani Malay and English can be understood across several linguistic dimensions including vocabulary, phonology, grammar, and sociolinguistic context (Samoh, 2018).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a case study type of research. This study is a descriptive study in the field of English pronunciation, particularly phonological interference which is elaborated in qualitative way. Pronunciation test, interview and observation are the instruments. This research was conducted at Bakong Pitthaya School which located on Bang Khao, Nong Chik District, Pattani Province 94170, Thailand. The subjects of the research were fourth grade of secondary level students with total of 17 students as the sample. To analyze the data, this study use Lado's Contrastive Analysis Theory which consist description, selection, contrast, and prediction.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The English pronunciation challenges faced by Thai learners at Bakong Pitthaya School, Thailand

Based on the observation conducted from July to September 2024, the researcher gathered that at Bakong Pitthaya School, the teacher predominantly employed traditional teaching methods that emphasized grammatical learning and vocabulary acquisition rather than practical speaking practice. This approach limited students' opportunities to develop their conversational skills and build confidence in using English verbally. Additionally, both the teacher and students were heavily influenced by the tonal nature of the Thai language and its distinct vowel sounds, which significantly affected their English pronunciation. The phonological differences between Thai and English posed considerable challenges for the students, making it difficult for them to grasp proper English pronunciation and intonation. As a result, many students found English to be a hard subject to learn and often felt afraid of making mistakes during speaking practice, which further hindered their progress.

The learners at Bakong Pitthaya School were primarily operating within the memorization phase of learning, which placed them in the category of Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS). This reliance on rote memorization limited their ability to engage in higher-level cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation, and creative use of the language. Moreover, the absence of exposure to native English speakers contributed to the struggle both teachers and students faced with correct pronunciation and natural language use. Without the influence of native speaker models, their English learning experience remained constrained, and pronunciation errors persisted, impeding their overall communicative competence.

Based on the interview from the students and the teacher, several key difficulties students faced in mastering English pronunciation were identified, primarily due to limited exposure

and inadequate learning strategies. One major issue was the lack of immersive practice opportunities. Unlike in environments where English was widely spoken, students in this context only engaged with the language during formal classroom instruction, with minimal reinforcement in daily life. This restricted exposure resulted in a heavy reliance on rote memorization rather than genuine phonetic understanding. For instance, students often memorized speeches or dialogues without comprehending the meaning or proper pronunciation of the words, leading to mechanical recitation rather than fluent communication.

Additionally, the absence of proper language-learning infrastructure exacerbated these challenges. Schools lacked essential resources such as audio-visual labs, soundproof classrooms, and high-quality listening materials. Teachers were forced to improvise with personal laptops and portable speakers, but ambient noise and distractions significantly reduced the effectiveness of listening exercises. Common pronunciation errors, such as confusing similar sounds (e.g., "L/R," "V/W," and "X/S"), persisted due to insufficient corrective feedback and practice. For example, students frequently mispronounced words like "then" as "when" or struggled with minimal pairs like "now" versus "no." These errors were compounded by the fact that English spelling and pronunciation rules were inconsistent, making it even harder for learners to internalize correct phonetic patterns.

Pedagogical methods, though well-intentioned, often fell short in addressing these issues. Techniques like Total Physical Response (TPR) and drama-based activities were employed to make pronunciation practice more engaging. However, these approaches sometimes resulted in superficial learning, where students memorized lines for performances without truly grasping pronunciation nuances. The curriculum's heavy emphasis on religious studies further marginalized English instruction, leaving little room for dedicated pronunciation training. Without systemic changes—such as integrating multimedia tools, establishing conversation clubs, and providing teacher training—these pronunciation challenges were likely to persist.

The influence of the learners' first language on English pronunciation at Bakong Pitthaya School, Thailand

According to the teacher and students from interview and observation at Bakong Pitthaya School, the students' native languages (Jawi, a Pattani Malay dialect, and Thai) plays a significant role in their English pronunciation difficulties. This linguistic interference manifests in predictable patterns, as learners unconsciously apply the phonetic rules of their mother tongues to English. This phenomenon is well-documented in second language acquisition research. For instance, Odlin (1989) in Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in

Language Learning explains that first-language (L1) phonological systems heavily influence second-language (L2) pronunciation, often causing transfer errors that are systematic rather than random. Similarly, Flege (1995) emphasizes that the phonetic inventory of L1 shapes learners' perception and production of L2 sounds, leading to predictable substitution patterns.

For example, Jawi's phonetic system leads to mispronunciations such as reading "CUT" as "KUT," while Thai's tonal and consonant structures cause substitutions like pronouncing "V" as "W." These ingrained habits are difficult to overcome, as they are reinforced daily in home and social environments where Jawi and Thai dominate. This aligns with findings by Best & Tyler (2007), who argue that phonological interference is persistent because learners' L1 sound categories are deeply entrenched and reinforced by constant exposure in natural settings.

The strong presence of these native languages creates a dual challenge. First, students struggle with English sounds that do not exist in their mother tongues, such as the English "th" sound or the distinction between "L" and "R." Second, the phonetic patterns of Jawi and Thai often conflict with English rules, leading to persistent errors even after correction. For instance, students may repeatedly mispronounce "very" as "wery" despite being corrected, as the "V" sound is absent or rarely used in their native languages. This phenomenon highlights the deep-rooted nature of first-language interference and the need for targeted phonetic training to rewire these habitual pronunciation patterns. Research by Derwing & Munro (2005) underscores that persistent pronunciation errors often require focused phonetic instruction and extensive practice to overcome, especially when the L2 sound contrasts are absent in L1 phonology.

Moreover, the sociolinguistic environment reinforces these challenges. In regions where Jawi and Thai are the primary languages of communication, students have few opportunities to hear or practice English outside the classroom. This lack of exposure means that even when teachers correct pronunciation errors, students revert to familiar phonetic patterns in their daily interactions. This observation is supported by Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which stresses the importance of meaningful exposure to comprehensible input for language acquisition. Without sufficient input and practice in naturalistic settings, learners' L2 pronunciation development is limited. Additionally, Cummins & Swain (1986) emphasizes the role of output and interaction in language learning, suggesting that opportunities to use English in authentic contexts are crucial for internalizing correct pronunciation.

Explanation of Error Types and L1 Influence

- **Substitution of /r/ and /l/:**

    The substitution between /r/ and /l/ is a common pronunciation error among Pattani Malay and Thai speakers due to the phonetic characteristics of their first languages. In Pattani Malay, the rhotic /r/ is typically realized as a tap or trill, which differs from the English approximant /r/, and the lateral /l/ may not be distinctly contrasted in all phonetic environments. Similarly, Thai does not strongly differentiate between /r/ and /l/, often leading to overlap in their production. This phonological overlap causes learners to confuse these two sounds when speaking English, resulting in errors such as pronouncing "rice" as "lice" or "like" as "rike." This substitution can affect intelligibility because /r/ and /l/ are phonemically distinct in English and can differentiate meaning.

Table 1. Error of /r/ and /l/ Substitution.

English Word	Correct Sound	Common Mispronunciation	Error Type
Rice	/r/	/l/	/r/ → /l/ substitution
Like	/l/	/r/	/l/ → /r/ substitution

- **Fricative and Affricate Substitution**

    Fricative and affricate substitutions occur because Pattani Malay and Thai lack several English fricative and affricate phonemes. For example, the voiced labiodental fricative /v/, alveolar fricative /z/, dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, and postalveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are absent or differ significantly in these languages. Consequently, learners replace these unfamiliar sounds with the closest native equivalents available in their phonological inventories. For instance, /v/ is often replaced by /w/, /z/ by /s/, /θ/ and /ð/ by /t/ or /d/, and affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ by /ʃ/ or /j/. This substitution pattern reflects the learners' reliance on their L1 sound system when encountering unfamiliar English phonemes, which leads to systematic pronunciation errors such as "very" pronounced as "wery" or "think" as "tink." These substitutions can hinder effective communication, especially in words where these sounds are contrastive.

Table 2. Error of Fricative and Affricate Substitution

English Word	Correct Sound	Common Mispronunciation	Error Type
Very	/v/	/w/	/v/ → /w/ substitution
Zoo	/z/	/s/	/z/ → /s/ substitution
Think	/θ/	/t/, /s/	/θ/ → /t/ or /s/ substitution
This	/ð/	/d/, /z/	/ð/ → /d/ or /z/ substitution
Chicken	/tʃ/	/ʃ/, /s/	/tʃ/ → /ʃ/ or /s/ substitution
Juice	/dʒ/	/j/	/dʒ/ → /j/ substitution
Ship	/ʃ/	/s/	/ʃ/ → /s/ substitution
Pleasure	/ʒ/	/z/	/ʒ/ → /z/ substitution

- **Vowel Insertion in Consonant Cluster**

Vowel insertion, or epenthesis, in consonant clusters is a strategy employed by Pattani Malay and Thai speakers to accommodate English words that contain consonant clusters not permitted in their native phonotactic rules. Both languages typically have simpler syllable structures and do not allow complex clusters at the beginning of syllables. Therefore, when encountering English clusters such as /gl/ in "glass" or /str/ in "street," learners insert a vowel, usually a schwa /ə/, between consonants to simplify pronunciation. This results in pronunciations like /gə.las/ for "glass" and /sə.trit/ for "street." Such vowel insertion serves as a phonotactic adjustment that reduces articulatory difficulty and cognitive load during speech production. While this strategy makes pronunciation easier for learners, it deviates from standard English pronunciation and may affect fluency and comprehensibility.

Table 3. Error in Vowel Insertion in Consonant Cluster

English Word	Correct Cluster	Common Mispronunciation	Error Type
Glass	/gl/	/gə.las/	Vowel insertion in cluster
Street	/str/	/sə.trit/	Vowel insertion in cluster
Smoke	/sm/	/sə.mok/	Vowel insertion in cluster
Drive	/dr/	/də.raiv/	Vowel insertion in cluster
Crime	/kr/	/kə.raim/	Vowel insertion in cluster

- **Final Consonant Deletion**

Final consonant deletion is a frequent error among Pattani Malay and Thai learners due to restrictions in their first languages regarding permissible syllable codas. Both languages have limited use of voiced stops and fricatives at the end of syllables, which leads learners to omit these sounds when pronouncing English words ending with such consonants. For example, words like "map," "hand," "bus," "love," and "back" are often pronounced without their final consonants, resulting in /mæ/, /hæn/, /bʌ/, /lʌ/, and /bæ/ respectively. This deletion reduces the phonological complexity of syllables to conform to L1 norms but can cause misunderstandings in English, where final consonants often carry important lexical distinctions.

Table 4. Error in Final Consonant Deletion

English Word	Correct Final Sound	Common Mispronunciation	Error Type
Map	/p/	/mæ/	Final consonant deletion
Hand	/d/	/hæn/	Final consonant deletion
Bus	/s/	/bʌ/	Final consonant deletion
Love	/v/	/lʌ/	Final consonant deletion
Back	/k/	/bæ/	Final consonant deletion

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the English pronunciation difficulties encountered by Thai EFL learners at Bakong Pitthaya School were deeply influenced by first language (L1) interference, primarily stemming from Pattani Malay (Jawi dialect) and Thai. Through detailed analysis, it became evident that these learners' pronunciation errors were not random but systematic, reflecting the phonological contrasts between their native languages and English. This discussion interprets these findings through the framework of Contrastive Analysis Theory (CAT), providing insight into the linguistic mechanisms underlying the observed errors, while also exploring broader pedagogical and theoretical implications.

One of the most salient patterns that emerged involved consonant substitution errors, particularly the confusion between the English phonemes /r/ and /l/. Participants frequently replaced /r/ with /l/ and vice versa, as seen in pronunciations like "rice" rendered as /laɪs/ and

"like" as /raɪk/. This phenomenon was closely tied to the phonological characteristics of both Pattani Malay and Thai, where a clear phonemic distinction between these two sounds is absent. In Thai, for example, the /r/ sound is often realized as a trill or tap, whereas /l/ may be articulated as dental or retroflex, leading to perceptual overlap that complicates learners' ability to differentiate these sounds in English. Similarly, Pattani Malay speakers tend to merge these sounds, resulting in interchangeable use when speaking English. This confusion had significant communicative consequences, as it reduced lexical clarity and sometimes led to misunderstandings, particularly in minimal pairs such as "light" and "right".

In addition to consonant substitutions, the study uncovered consistent patterns of fricative and affricate substitutions. Learners commonly replaced English sounds absent in their L1 phonologies with the closest available equivalents. For instance, the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ was often substituted with the labio-velar approximant /w/, resulting in "very" pronounced as /ˈwer.i/. Similarly, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ were replaced by stops or sibilants, such as /t/ or /s/ for /θ/ ("think" → /tɪŋk/) and /d/ or /z/ for /ð/ ("this" → /dɪs/). Affricates like /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ were simplified to fricatives or approximants, as seen in "chicken" pronounced /ˈʃɪk.ɪn/ and "juice" as /juːs/. These substitutions were clearly influenced by the phonemic inventories of Pattani Malay and Thai, both of which lack several of these English sounds. The learners' reliance on L1 phonological resources to approximate unfamiliar English sounds aligns with the predictions of CAT, which posits that L1 phonological gaps lead to predictable transfer errors in L2 acquisition.

Another noteworthy pattern involved the simplification of consonant clusters. English words beginning with complex clusters such as /str-/ or /gl-/ were frequently pronounced with inserted vowels to break the clusters into simpler syllables. For example, "street" was pronounced as /sə.triːt/, and "glass" as /gə.læs/. This epenthesis reflected the phonotactic constraints of the learners' L1s, where complex initial clusters are generally prohibited. Both Pattani Malay and Thai favor simpler syllable structures, typically consonant-vowel (CV) patterns, and the insertion of schwa vowels served to conform English words to these native syllable templates. This phenomenon demonstrated how deeply ingrained L1 phonotactic rules influenced learners' production of English, often leading to syllable structures that diverged from the target language norms.

Final consonant deletion was also a recurrent feature in the learners' speech. Words ending with consonants such as /b/, /d/, or /g/ were often truncated, as in "map" pronounced /mæ/ and "hand" as /hæn/. This pattern was attributable to the restrictions in the learners' L1 phonologies; Thai permits only a limited set of consonants in word-final position, and Pattani

Malay allows only voiceless stops and nasals in coda positions. Consequently, English voiced stops and certain fricatives were either omitted or devoiced to fit these native phonotactic constraints. This final consonant deletion not only altered word forms but also affected intelligibility, especially in contexts where the final consonant carried lexical or grammatical meaning.

Beyond segmental errors, the study highlighted significant suprasegmental challenges shaped by L1 interference. English's stress-timed rhythm contrasted sharply with the syllable-timed nature of Thai and Pattani Malay, leading learners to produce speech with relatively equal syllable durations and misplaced lexical stress. For example, learners often confused the stress patterns in minimal pairs such as "DEsert" (noun) and "deSSERT" (verb), resulting in monotonous and unnatural intonation. Additionally, vowel reduction, a common feature in unstressed syllables in English (e.g., the schwa /ə/ in "photograph"), was inconsistently realized or omitted, further affecting the naturalness of learners' speech.

Tonal interference also emerged as a critical factor. Thai is a tonal language with lexical tones that convey meaning, and this tonal system appeared to interfere with learners' acquisition of English intonation patterns. Learners struggled with producing the rising intonation typical of English yes/no questions and had difficulty employing emphatic stress, which relies on pitch variation. This interference underscored the complexity of transferring prosodic features from a tonal L1 to a non-tonal L2 and highlighted the need for focused suprasegmental training.

While L1 interference was the primary source of pronunciation challenges, the study also identified several contextual factors that exacerbated these difficulties. Pedagogically, the English curriculum at Bakong Pitthaya School emphasized grammar and vocabulary over speaking skills, and pronunciation instruction was often limited to rote repetition without addressing the specific L1-induced errors identified in this study. Teachers frequently resorted to using Pattani Malay and Thai during English lessons, which reduced students' exposure to authentic English sounds and limited opportunities for meaningful oral practice. Socio-environmental constraints further compounded these issues. English exposure was largely confined to the classroom, with minimal opportunities for immersion or interaction with native speakers. This limited exposure hindered learners' ability to internalize accurate pronunciation models. Additionally, many students exhibited low motivation to practice speaking English, often due to the perceived difficulty of English phonology and fear of making mistakes. The multilingual context, where learners navigated three or more languages including Pattani Malay, Thai, Arabic, and English, increased cognitive load and cross-linguistic interference,

further complicating pronunciation acquisition. Resource limitations also played a role. The absence of audio-visual aids such as pronunciation software and authentic listening materials restricted learners' access to acoustic models necessary for developing accurate phonetic and prosodic skills. These deficiencies highlighted the need for integrating technology and multimedia resources into the language learning environment.

Theoretically, the findings lent support to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), as the predictable nature of errors corresponded with phonological contrasts between the learners' L1s and English. For example, the substitution of /θ/ with /t/ was directly linked to the absence of /θ/ in Thai and Pattani Malay. Moreover, the learners' systematic errors, such as vowel insertion in consonant clusters, reflected an interlanguage system that blended L1 phonological rules with emerging L2 input, consistent with Interlanguage Theory. This evolving linguistic system demonstrated how learners construct a dynamic, intermediate grammar influenced by both their native language and the target language environment.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study, based on descriptive qualitative analysis of pronunciation errors among fourth-grade secondary students at Bakong Pitthaya School, Pattani, Thailand, conclusively demonstrated that learners' first languages, Pattani Malay (Jawi dialect) and Thai, profoundly influence their English pronunciation. Using Lado (1957) Contrastive Analysis framework, the findings revealed systematic errors directly attributable to phonological and phonotactic differences between the learners' L1s and English. Key findings include:

Consonant Substitutions

Learners consistently replaced English sounds absent in their L1s. For example, /r/ and /l/ were confused (for example; "rice" → /laɪs/, "like" → /raɪk/) due to overlapping realizations in Thai and Pattani Malay. Fricative and affricate sounds were often substituted: /v/ → /w/ ("very" → /ˈwer.i/), /θ/ → /t/ or /s/ ("think" → /tɪŋk/), /ð/ → /d/ ("this" → /dɪs/), /tʃ/ → /ʃ/ ("chicken" → /ˈʃɪk.ɪn/), and /dʒ/ → /j/ ("juice" → /juːs/).

Consonant Cluster Simplification

Vowel epenthesis occurred to break complex clusters that violate Pattani Malay/Thai phonotactics, for example; "glass" → /gə.læs/, "street" → /sə.triːt/.

Final Consonant Deletion

Word-final consonants were often omitted (for example; "map" → /mæ/, "hand" → /hæn/), aligning with L1 restrictions on syllable codas.

Suprasegmental Errors

Misplaced stress and flat intonation patterns resulted from the influence of Thai's tonal system and the syllable-timed rhythm of both L1s conflicting with English's stress-timed prosody.

Phonological gaps in Pattani Malay and Thai (absence of /θ/, /ð/, /v/, and complex clusters) triggered predictable errors via negative transfer. Multilingual exposure (to Thai, Pattani Malay, Arabic, and English) increased cognitive load and cross-linguistic interference. Traditional teaching methods focusing on grammar and vocabulary over oral practice, limited exposure to native English input, and low student motivation exacerbated L1-induced errors. These findings validate the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CA), confirming that phonological differences between L1 and L2 directly shape pronunciation challenges in EFL contexts.

Based on these insights, several pedagogical recommendations emerged. Pronunciation instruction should be explicitly informed by L1 phonological characteristics, incorporating contrastive drills that focus on problematic sound pairs such as /r/ and /l/ or /v/ and /w/. Training in consonant clusters should be scaffolded progressively, beginning with simplified forms and gradually moving toward accurate cluster production. Suprasegmental features, including stress and intonation, require targeted practice through interactive dialogues and shadowing exercises to enhance naturalness and comprehensibility. Enhancing learners' exposure to authentic English input was also deemed crucial. The integration of multimedia resources such as YouTube videos and podcasts with subtitles could provide valuable acoustic models. Establishing English conversation clubs would create supportive environments for oral practice and boost learner confidence. Teacher development programs should equip instructors with phonetic knowledge to diagnose and address L1-specific errors effectively, while promoting English-only zones during speaking activities to maximize target language use. Curriculum reform was recommended to allocate dedicated time for pronunciation practice, such as daily 15-minute drills, and to incorporate gamified applications like ELSA Speak to encourage autonomous learning outside the classroom.

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