การแปรของเสียง /t/ ระหว่างสระในกลุ่มผู้เรียนชาวไทย

สุทธิณี พรหมกันดร[1]

(**Received:** *October 21, 2019;* **Revised:** *March 25, 2020;* **Accepted:** *March 31, 2020*)

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาเสียง /t/ ระหว่างสระที่มีการแปรผันในภาษาอังกฤษ โดยสามารถแปรเป็น เสียงธนิต [t^{h}] และเสียงแบน [ɾ] ในวัจนลีลาที่แตกต่างกัน 3 รูปแบบ ได้แก่ การสัมภาษณ์ การอ่านบทความสั้น ๆ และการอ่านรายการคำศัพท์ นักศึกษาเอกวิชาภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 40 คน จากมหาวิทยาลัยในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่จำนวน 4 แห่ง เข้าร่วมในการศึกษาครั้งนี้จากการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบจำเพาะเจาะจง เสียงแปรต่าง ๆ ที่ได้มาจากการออกเสียง /t/ จากวัจนลีลาทั้ง 3 รูปแบบได้รับการตัดสินจากเจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษ และจัดกลุ่มภายใต้คุณลักษณะของสำเนียงแบบบริทิช (Received Pronunciation) หรือสำเนียงแบบอเมริกัน (General American) และนำไปสู่การอภิปรายว่าสำเนียงใดเป็นที่นิยมมากกว่าท่ามกลางผู้เรียนชาวไทย ผู้วิจัยยืนยันผลการวิเคราะห์อีกหนึ่งครั้งเพื่อให้เกิดความน่าเชื่อถือของข้อมูล เสียงที่ยังไม่ชัดเจนจะได้รับการวิเคราะห์เพิ่มเติมโดยใช้โปรแกรมวิเคราะห์คำพูด ที่ชื่อว่า “PRAAT” เพื่อวิเคราะห์ลักษณะเสียงในเชิงลึก ผลการศึกษาบ่งชี้ว่าการแปรเสียง /t/ ระหว่างสระ เป็นเสียงธนิต [t^{h}] ซึ่งเป็นคุณลักษณะของสำเนียงแบบบริทิช ได้รับการใช้อย่างแพร่หลายท่ามกลางนักศึกษาในสถาบันต่าง ๆ ดังนั้น จึงนับได้ว่าเสียง [t^{h}] เป็นคุณลักษณะที่มีอิทธิพลที่นักศึกษาต้องการนำไปออกเสียง นอกจากนี้ ความนิยมต่อการออกเสียง [t^{h}] ยังพบได้จากเปอร์เซ็นต์การออกเสียงที่ค่อนข้างสูงในการอ่านรายการคำศัพท์ ซึ่งนับว่าเป็นรูปแบบที่เป็นทางการมากที่สุด มากกว่าในวัจนลีลาแบบอื่น ๆ การทดสอบไคสแควร์ยังยืนยันอีกว่า ความตระหนักในการออกเสียง /t/ มีความสัมพันธ์อย่างมากกับวัจนลีลารูปแบบต่าง ๆ (χ^2 = 17.11, df = 2, p<.01)

คำสำคัญ: เสียง /t/ ระหว่างสระ ตัวแปรเสียง การออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษ วัจนลีลา

[1]อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยพายัพ Email: Suthinee_p@payap.co.th

Phonological Variation of Intervocalic /t/ among Thai learners

Suthinee Promkandorn[2]

Abstract

This paper aims at investigating an English phonological variable of /t/ which can be realized as an aspirated t [t^h] and a flap t [ɾ] across three speech styles, including Interview, Reading Passage, and Wordlist. Forty English major students from four universities in Chiang Mai participated in the study by using a purposive random sampling method. Different realizations of /t/ from the three tasks were judged by a native English speaker and categorized under the feature of RP (Received Pronunciation) or GA (General American), which can lead to a discussion of which accent is preferable among Thai learners. The analysis confirmed once again by the researcher for credibility. Sounds that were still in ambiguity was further analyzed by using a speech analyzer program called "PRAAT" to view their spectral content. The results indicate that the realization of intervocalic /t/ as [t^h] which belongs to the Received Pronunciation is widely practiced among students in different institutes. It is, therefore, regarded as a prestigious feature that the students would like to adopt. The preference towards the [t^h] sound is also supported by the considerably higher percentage of [t^h] in the wordlist, which is the most formal style, than in other instruments. The Chi-square test also confirmed that the pronunciation awareness of /t/ is significantly correlated with the speech styles (χ^2 = 17.11, df = 2, $p<.01$).

Keywords: intervocalic /t/, phonological variable, English pronunciation, speech styles

[2] Lecturer, English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Payap University Email: Suthinee_p@payap.co.th

Introduction

Sociolinguists have carried out extensive research on linguistic variation and change over the previous few decades. Many studies were conducted on a phonological level under the influence of the Labovian sociolinguistic approach to language variation. Under the influence of major varieties of English, namely the Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA), one of the English consonantal phonemes which varies due to different social factors among Thai speakers is the 'intervocalic /t/'. Among many phonological variables under language variation studies, 'stops' (also known as 'plosives'), particularly the realization of /t/, have been widely studied and explored. Foulkes et al. (2010) mentioned that stops are highly complex sounds with complicated articulatory and acoustic properties. The sound (t) in words like '*later'* or '*betting'* can be realized as an aspirated t [tʰ] or a flap t [ɾ]. Consequently, the purpose of this research was to initiate a sociolinguistic investigation on one English phonological variable — the intervocalic /t/ — in three speaking styles i.e. Interview, Reading Passage, and Wordlist, to see different realizations of such sound among learners of English in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

1. Receive Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA)

When comparing the norms of different varieties of English around the globe, there are significant differences among World Englishes regarding their phonemic inventories. '*Received Pronunciation'* or RP is one of the English accents which has achieved a prestigious status. The RP accent is used at the royal court and is sometimes identified as 'the Queen's English' accent and is the most prominent accent. RP is also known as 'Oxford English' and 'BBC English'. It is the most familiar accent used by most announcers and newsreaders on BBC and British independent television broadcasting channels (Roach, 2009, p. 163). As it is commonly used in English radio and television, it is one of the most preferable accents in non-English speaking countries. Its real speakers, however, represent only 3-5 percent of England's population, and it is a social rather than a regional accent connected with the middle and upper class (Roach, 2009, p. 164).

The pronunciation of English in North America is, on the other hand, referred to as '*General American'* (GA). American English was the first major variety which was developed outside Britain. It is "the most influential and powerful variety of English in the world today" (Kirkpatrick, 2007). It is different from most accents found in Britain. The American accent is

often heard on international radio and television networks. General American English is also called 'Network English'. Jenkins (2002, p. 17) addresses that the absence of non-prevocalic /r/ is characteristic of 'English-based' accents, whereas voicing of intervocalic /t/ is found in 'American-based accents'. Trudgill and Hanna (1994, p. 5-6) further identify some criteria to distinguish accents of English as follows:

1) The quality of vowel (/ɑ:/ vs /æ/) as in *bath*, *half*, *dance*
2) The absence (in non-rhotic accents) or presence (in rhotic accents) of /r/ in post-vocalic positions, as in *hear*, *work*
3) A front or back vowel in words such as *father*, *part*
4) The absence or presence of contrast in length and vowel quality in word pairs such as *cot-caught*
5) The absence or presence of voicing intervocalic /t/, as in *later*, *letter*.

By adopting criteria no.5, this study aims to explore the realizations of /t/ produced by English major students under certain stylistic variations and to make an inference of which accent Thai students are based on.

2. Language variation

The differences between British and American English as stated in the previous section are often considered 'regional variations' where sounds vary geographically. However, 'not only where you come from affects your speech, but also your social and cultural background, age, gender, race, occupation, and group loyalty……' (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 143). The variations reflecting differences in social classes, education, ages, etc. are called 'social variations'. These variations in language use both regional and social are expressed by 'linguistic variables'. A linguistic variable is a linguistic item that has identifiable variants. For instance, *singing* and *fishing* are sometimes pronounced as *singin'* and *fishin'*. The final sound (ng) is the linguistic variable with two variants [ŋ] as in *singing* and [n] as in *singin'*. Linguistic variables are not restricted to only phonological matters. They can also be lexical or grammatical items.

Holmes (2013, p. 141) stated that "linguistic forms which are not part of Standard English are by definition non-standard." However, there is nothing inferior about non-standards nor good or bad about the pronunciation of any sound. They are just socially different forms from those which are used by more socially prestigious speakers. An interesting study

conducted by Romaine (1984) showed the different status of post-vocalic /r/ pronunciation in different cities, i.e. New York and Reading. In New York City, pronouncing /r/ is favored and considered prestigious, while in Reading City the result is reversed where the non-/r/ sound is preferable.

Apart from the differences between speakers (regional and social factors), speech is also influenced by the 'contexts' in which a language is used (Holmes, 2013, p. 239). This is referred to as 'speech styles', where language use varies in formality. The basis for the distinctions between the styles is the amount of attention people are paying to their speech during a course of conversation. A classic sociolinguistic interview, as mentioned in Thieberger (2012, p. 30) usually consists of four parts:

(i) reading a list of minimal pairs,
(ii) reading a list of words in isolation,
(iii) reading a short passage, and
(iv) talking to the interviewer.

An early study from Hiang and Gupta in 1992 investigated the distribution of post-vocalic /r/ in Singapore English. By adopting this same approach, three instruments i.e. interview, passage, and wordlist were used. The study concluded that post-vocalic /r/ is seen a favourable feature and many Singaporean children were influenced by their peers and positive attitudes towards American English. Hypercorrection was also found among some respondents and the number of instances increased from interview to wordlist.

Accordingly, this study focuses only on one phonological variable of the phoneme /t/ with two variants [t] and [ɾ] as in 'better' [bet^{h}.ə] and [beɾ.əɹ], which represent pronunciations of RP and GA respectively. Also, styles ranging from the most casual type to more formal ones, including talking with the interviewer, reading a short narrative, and reading a list of words, which demonstrate students' awareness will be investigated.

Research Objectives

1. To examine different realizations of /t/ among English major students in order to determine if they demonstrate a preference towards British English or American English.

2. To investigate students' pronunciation awareness towards the pronunciation of /t/ in different speech styles.

Research Methodology

1. Research Instruments

Following early studies on language variation, this research is quantitative-based. The researcher set three different tasks for the subjects as they may use different forms of language when they speak in different contexts. There are three tasks involved in the study: talking to the interviewer, reading a short passage, and reading a wordlist. These tasks are treated as forming a continuum in terms of the amount of attention speakers are paying to their speech, which indirectly provides evidence about the awareness and preferences of speakers towards the use of British or American English. The three tasks are described below.

a) Interview (CS – Casual Speech): the interviewer asked the subjects about certain topics in order to get the most natural response. The interview can reveal the actual pronunciation of the subjects. It is the most informal context under examination.

b) Reading passage (RD): the subjects read aloud a short passage of approximately 200 words. This passage consists of approximately 20 words containing the sound /t/ at an intervocalic position. The reading passage dealt with an informal topic. The lexical items included in the passage were not made too advanced to avoid any errors which might occur. Each participant was asked to read aloud the passage as naturally as possible, not in the manner of extensive reading to avoid the use of a formal slow reading style.

c) Wordlist (WL): the wordlist comprises 40 items. The subjects had to read aloud every word in the list with a pause between each. Twenty non-tested items (without intervocalic /t/) were included in the wordlist to avoid the subjects' consciousness about what is expected from them. The wordlist represents the most formal context. Participants were told to read the items in the list aloud at a normal pace and as naturally as they could.

All items in the Wordlist and Reading Passage were revised by three experts to enhance appropriateness and comprehensibility. These three contextual styles were set up to observe the correlation between /t/ and stylistic variation. Realizations perceived to be prestigious by respondents are expected to have higher usage in the formal contexts. Before they were revised by the experts, the three instruments were pilot-tested with 15 participants in Chiang Mai. After that, the researcher revised some items in the Wordlist and Reading Passage which might cause ambiguity or difficulty in the pronunciation to enhance appropriateness and comprehensibility.

Then, in the fieldwork, the qualified participants were asked to sign a consent form and complete the three tasks. All interviews from the three tasks were digitally-recorded for further analysis.

2. Participants

In order to get a broad overview of students' preferences and to decrease the influence of variables and enable the generalization, four universities in Chiang Mai (two government and two private) were randomly selected to represent the population.

The participants in this study were chosen by using a 'purposive random sampling method'. The sample size was 40 people from four universities, ten people from each university with an equal number of people from both genders. The four universities were randomly encoded as U1, U2, U3, and U4 in this paper. Male and female participants were represented with the letter 'M' for males and 'F' for females. The sample design is shown in the table below.

Table 1 Purposive random sample design by institutions and genders

	Institutions				Total
	Chiang Mai University	Maejo University	Payap University	Far Eastern University	
Male	5	5	5	5	40
Female	5	5	5	5	

The researcher asked for permission from the English departments in different universities. Once permitted, the researcher also requested the information regarding where

English major students usually gathered and went to such places to collect the data. All participants would be asked to sign a consent form for their permission in the study.

Subject screening

The screening criteria were placed in the first part of the questionnaire. The people who did not meet the requirements would not be tested and would not be a part of the target population. The criteria for subject eligibility are as follows:

1. The subject holds a Thai nationality, with both Thai parents.
2. The subject is currently an English major student either from year 3 or year 4.
3. The subject has never resided in any foreign country for more than one year.

The participants who satisfied the criteria were further investigated and interviewed through the three instruments by the researcher.

Data analysis

All sound recordings from the fieldwork were replayed, transcribed, perceived, and judged by a native speaker of English regarding which English variety (RP or GA) the sound belongs to by using the following criteria.

Intervocalic /t/ realized as

- [ɾ] would be categorized under "GA",
- [tʰ] would be categorized under "RP"[3],
- any other variants than [ɾ] nor [tʰ] would be categorized under "neither".

Actual sounds in which the participants pronounced rather than the expected variants would be noted down in the "remark" column. After the native English analyst marked the realizations of all recordings, the results would be confirmed once again by the researcher for credibility. Sounds that were still in ambiguity will further be analyzed by using a speech

[3] Although it may be argued that intervocalic (t) can be realized as [tʰ] in other varieties of English such as Australian or New Zealand English as well, this study would infer that the pronunciation of [tʰ] was probably due to the exposure to British English. Unlike other accents, the Received Pronunciation is the most recognized accent in Thailand and is used as instructional media in most schools. Thus, when students pronounced [tʰ], they were more likely influenced by RP rather than other English varieties.

analyzer program named "PRAAT" to view their spectral content as there may be subjectivity which was a primary concern since the analysis relied heavily on the analyst's perception. The use of acoustic analysis was employed to provide more reliable and detailed information of variants and could be used as an assistant for checking the auditorily disputed words. Therefore, in this study, auditory analysis is complemented by referring to waveforms and spectrograms.

After that, the occurrence of different phonetic realizations of the /t/ phoneme was counted from each task and, then, calculated into percentages using descriptive statistics. In order to investigate pronunciation's awareness, the number of occurrences between different variants were compared by speech styles. Realizations perceived to be more prestigious by the participants are supposed to show higher usage in more formal styles. In other words, students who are aware of the pronunciation towards certain sounds would exhibit a higher percentage of such sounds in Reading Passage and Wordlist. Chi-square was also used to provide a statistical correlation of factors under the investigation.

Finally, different realizations of /t/ i.e. [ɾ] or [t^h] were categorized into either GA or RP and led to the discussions if Thai students preferred the pronunciation system of British or American.

Results

Figures 1 and 2 below provide examples of a spectral description of different realizations of /t/ from PRAAT analysis. The distinction of an aspirated alveolar stop [t^h] from a flap alveolar stop [ɾ] was that there was a puff of air between connected syllables and the density of the flap alveolar sound was much greater. In addition, there is a shorter duration of stricture of the flap sound which distinguishes it from other stops.

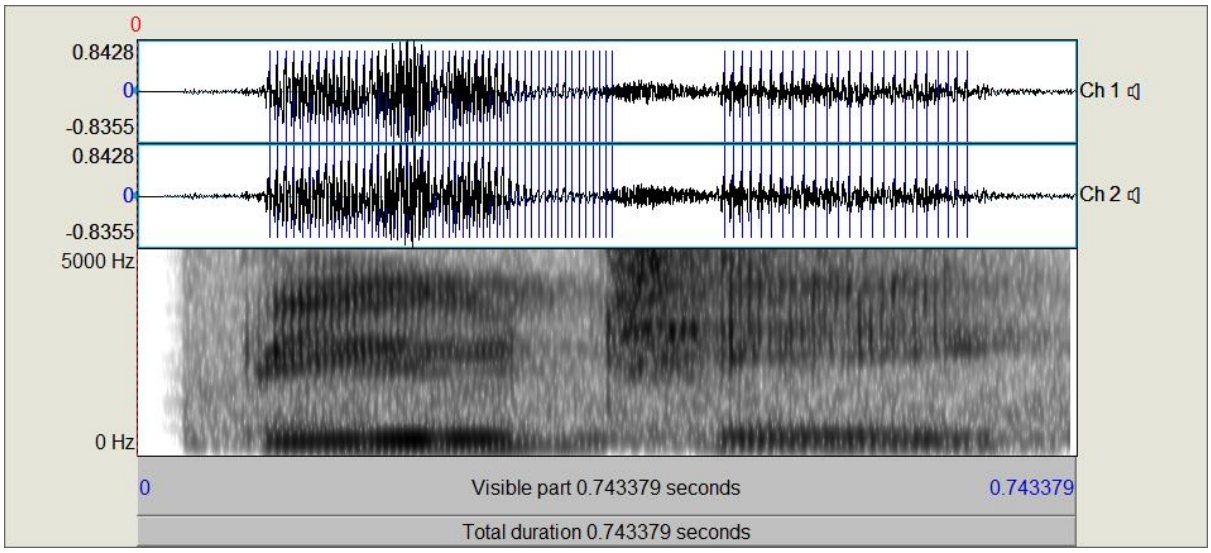

Figure 1 Spectrogram of the word “beauty” realized as aspirated alveolar stop produced by Male 4, University 1

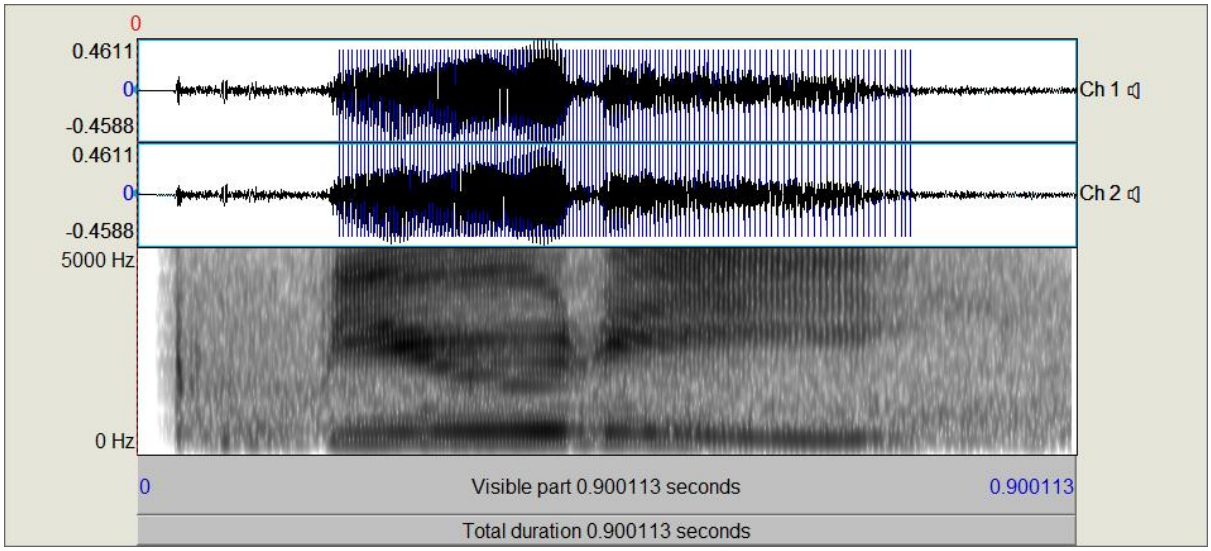

Figure 2 Spectrogram of the word “beauty” realized as an alveolar flap produced by Female 4, University 4

The overall distribution of intervocalic /t/

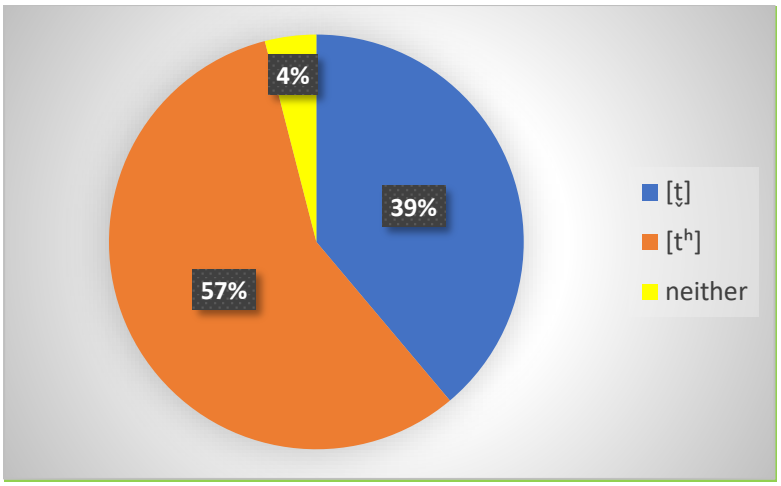

Figure 3 Intervocalic /t/ realizations of English major students in Chiang Mai

The figure above displayed the findings where intervocalic /t/ was most pronounced with aspiration t [t^h] as in the Received Pronunciation (57%). The use of alveolar flap [ɾ] was down to 39% and neither of the variants was 4%. However, the standard deviation from this data set (S.D.: [t^h] = 12.06, [ɾ] = 11.51) indicates that the data points were spread out over a wide range among students in different universities. This means that the students' preferences regarding the pronunciation of intervocalic /t/ varied considerably from one person to another. The table below illustrates the mean ($\bar{x}$) of /t/ variants by universities with a clear illustration in the bar chart in Figure 4.

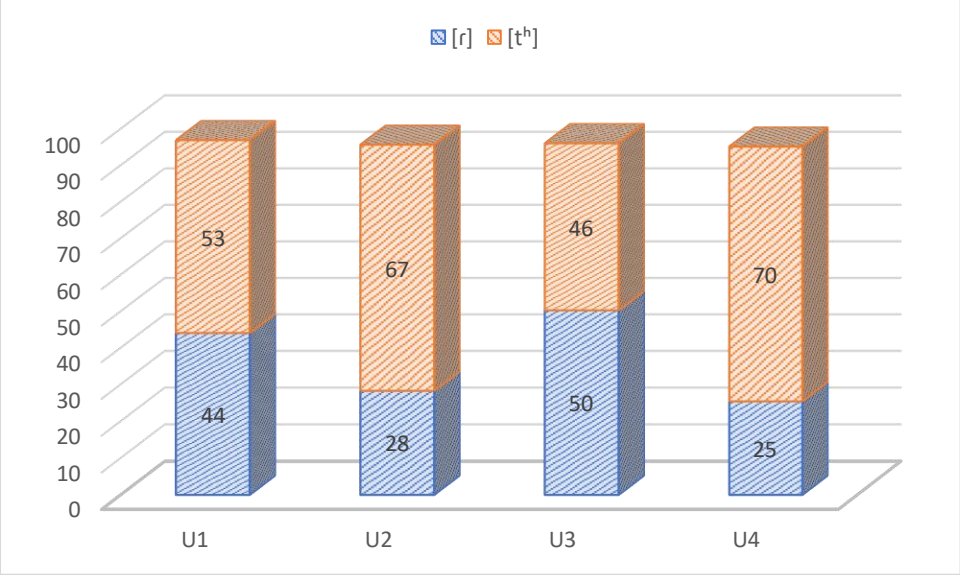

Figure 4 Intervocalic /t/ realizations by institutions (Mean scores)

The findings showed that the realizations of /t/ exhibited similar patterns among U1-U3 and U2-U4. The students at U1 and U3 showed almost equal use of [ɾ] and [t^h]. In other words, we can say that their /t/ pronunciation was neither based on GA or RP, but rather a mixture of the two varieties. Among the students of U2 and U4, however, the level of [t^h] was much greater than [ɾ] with approximately two-thirds of total frequencies. Therefore, we can infer that the students of U2 and U4 showed their preference towards the pronunciation of aspirated t [t^h], which is a feature of RP English.

To provide a detailed description of /t/ realizations among different individuals, the section below analyzed the preferences of each participant regarding their pronunciation of intervocalic /t/. The higher [t^h] percentage suggested a higher preference for RP, which was classified as follows.

- Red shades represent preferences towards RP: [t^h] > 60%
- Blue shades represent preferences towards GA: [t^h] <40%
- Yellow shades represent neutral preferences: [t^h] = 41% - 60%

Percentage of intervocalic /t/ as [t^h]	Color	Level of preference
0 – 20		strong preference in [ɾ]
21 – 40		moderate preference in [ɾ]
41 – 60		neutral preference
61 – 80		moderate preference in [t^h]
81 – 100		strong preference in [t^h]

PARTICIPANTS	Participant No.	U1	U2	U3	U4
F = Female	F1	24	n/a	33	43
M = Male		55	n/a	36	5
		21	66	83	54
	F4	58	63	53	29

F5	62	82	28	91
M1	93	63	19	78
M2	8	36	27	95
M3	65	71	15	53
M4	97	46	92	80
M5	46	88	71	79

Figure 5 Percentage of /t/ realized as [t^h] by each participant

The findings from this part demonstrated that most students pronounced [t^h] more than [ɾ], with a total of 18 participants to 12 participants (see Figure 6 below). The students who pronounced [t^h] and [ɾ] with almost equal frequencies were eight people. In addition, we found that U1 had a similar number of students who preferred [t^h] (n=3), [ɾ] (n=4), and a mixture of the two variants (n=3). Furthermore, U2 and U4 had a higher number of students who preferred aspirated [t^h]). Among the four universities, U3 had the most participants with [ɾ] preference (n=6). The /t/ pronunciation demonstrated that most students preferred the RP's pronunciation of aspirated t [t^h] in the intervocalic position. However, gender did not seem to be an influential factor for the pronunciation of /t/ (χ^2 = 3.46, df = 1, p< .05). To provide a clearer picture, the figure below illustrates the number of students with different /t/ preferences.

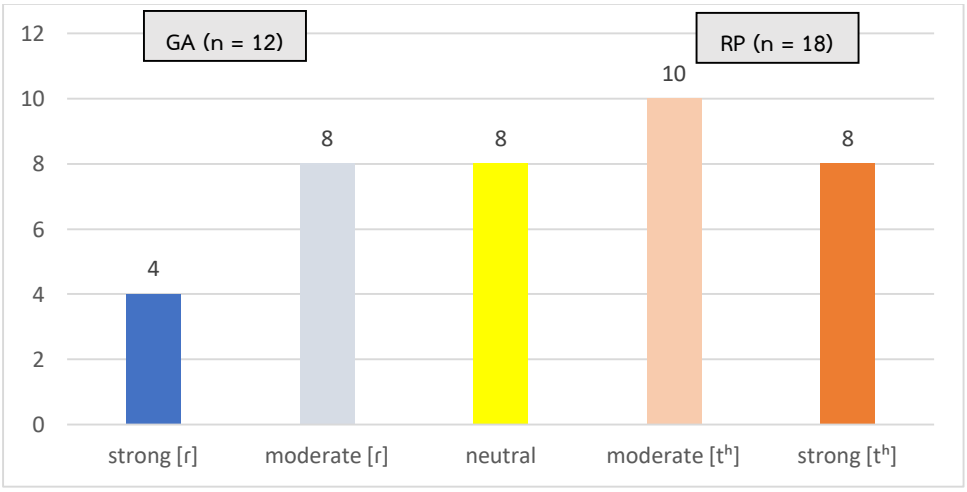

Figure 6 The number of participants with different /t/ preferences

Awareness towards using intervocalic /t/

This section discusses students' awareness towards the pronunciation of /t/ by different instruments, i.e. interview, reading passage, and wordlist.

Table 2 Percentage of /t/ variants in different speech styles

Instrument	[ɾ]	[tʰ]	neither
Interview	42	**58**	0
Reading Passage	50	**41**	** 10 **
Wordlist	25	**73**	2
Mean	39	**57**	4

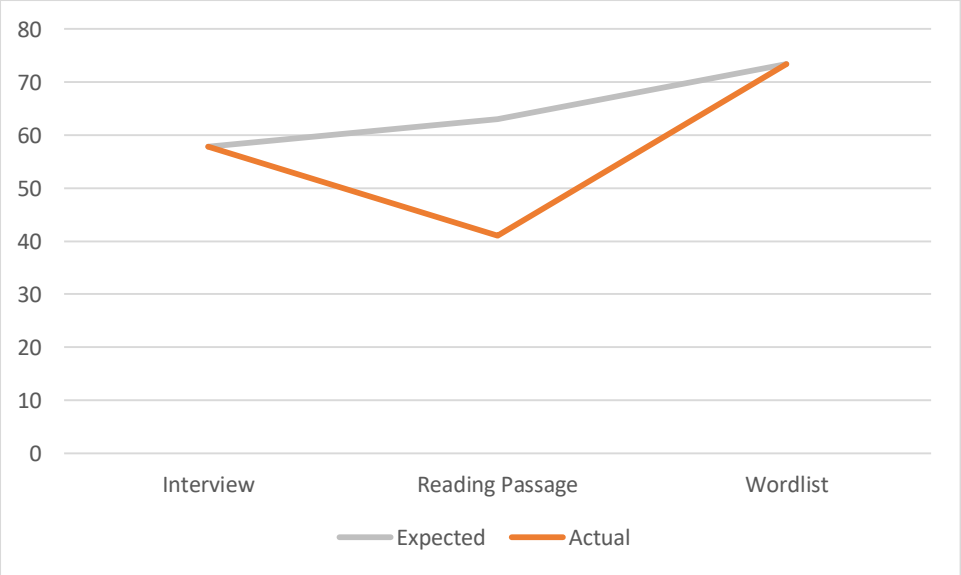

Figure7 Pronunciation of [tʰ] among English Major students by style of speech

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of /t/ over three speech styles among the four universities in the North of Thailand. The realization of /t/ as [tʰ] was chosen to represent the phoneme /t/ due to a higher frequency than its counterpart. According to the findings, almost 60 percent of the intervocalic /t/ was pronounced with aspiration in the interview. Surprisingly, the percentage dropped in the reading passage to only 41 percent and rose sharply to 73% in the wordlist. We can say that the students became more aware and attentive to their pronunciation in the wordlist. The frequencies of [tʰ] in the reading passage, however, was

unusual as the percentage was typically expected to range between Interview and Wordlist, but it turned out to be the lowest among the three speech styles.

From the researcher's observations, it was the reading passage in which the participants mispronounced some of the words, particularly words with *–ed* past tense/past participle marker. Since the passage was set as a past event, it contains a large number of verbs with –ed tokens after (t), which should be pronounced as an extra syllable. The "neither" percentage was as high as 10%. Words like *started*, *excited*, and *hated* were the three most mispronounced words where some participants omitted the final -ed /ɪd/ sound and pronounced *as start*, *hate*, and *excite* instead. This, therefore, resulted in a rather high percentage of "neither" in the analysis (see Table 4.4). The table below presents the percentages of /t/ realized neither **[ɾ]** or [t^h] in different universities.

Table 3 Percentage of /t/ realized as "neither" [ɾ] or [t^h] in the reading passage

	U1	U2	U3	U4	$\bar{x}$
Female	3.64	15.15	7.27	7.27	8.33
Male	9.09	5.45	14.55	20.00	12.27
$\bar{x}$	6.36	10.30	10.91	13.64	10.30

From the table, the participants from the four universities made similar mistakes of intervocalic /t/ pronunciation at around 10%, except the participants from U1. The males at U4 mispronounced as high as one out of four words (20%) and females at U1 made the least mistakes (4%). The students' /t/-mispronunciation in the reading passage may affect the overall percentage, resulting in an unconventional figure of the /t/ pronunciation.

Nonetheless, even with the inconsistency in the reading passage, the percentages from the interview and wordlist showed that the students were most relaxed in a casual interview and became more aware of their pronunciation in a wordlist. The average frequencies shifted from 58% in the interview to 73% in the wordlist. Results from the chi-square tests also strongly suggested the stylistic variation to be significant ($\chi^2 = 17.11$, df = 2, $p<.01$). As a result, it can be concluded that their awareness of [t^h] pronunciation significantly increased in the most formal style.

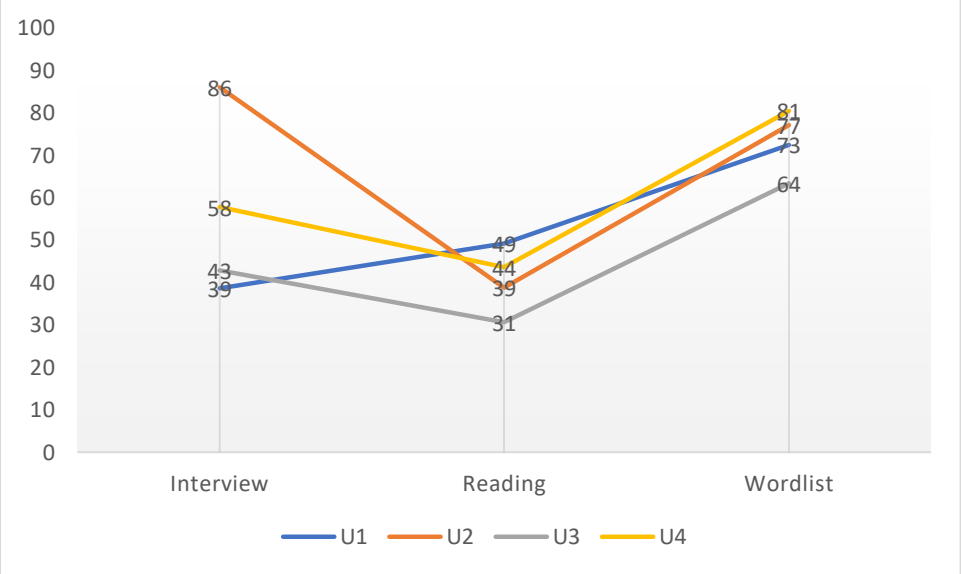

Figure 8 Pronunciation of [t^h] among English Major Students by speech styles and institutes

From the findings, U2 was the only institution where the level of [t^h] was very high in both the interview and the wordlist with over 80 percent of the total frequencies. It is possible to interpret that the students felt uncomfortable in the topics under the interview. In addition, they might too intentionally pronounce every word uttered and overcorrected their pronunciation in order to get the expected sound. However, it could be possible that they felt most relaxed in the reading passage as the story was more like storytelling.

Interestingly, the graph illustrates that U1 was the only institution where the percentage of [t^h] did not drop in the reading passage and the frequencies gradually rose from the casual style to the formal one. This piece of information, at least, confirms that students at U1 increase their awareness in the pronunciation of /t/ when the situation becomes more formal.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings in this study indicated that the pronunciation of intervocalic /t/ was realized as an aspirated stop [t^h] (57%) more than a flap [ɾ] (39%) among English major students in Chiang Mai. This suggested that, based on the quantitative evidence of /t/ realizations in this research, Thai leaners showed a preference for RP English. However, it is also noteworthy that the reasons why students pronounce [t^h] more than [ɾ] is probably because the transcription hints them to pronounce that way. For example, the sound /t/ between vowels as in *"water"*

and "*city*" takes not much effort to pronounce a clear (t) sound with aspiration, which may line up more directly with Thai orthography where (t) is often transliterated into "ท" [t^h] in Thai. Therefore, a high percentage of [t^h] might be led by the apparent "t" spelling. Students in U1 and U3 are examples in which they pronounced [ɾ] more than [t^h] in their casual speech and the percentages dropped in the reading passage and the wordlist. In other words, they were more likely to pronounce [t^h] when they were guided by the spelling.

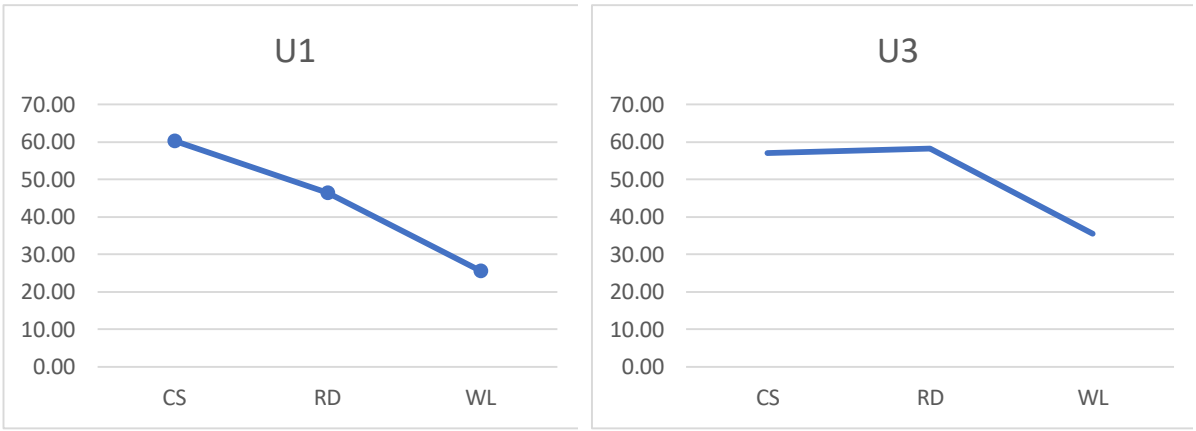

Figure 9 Comparision of [ɾ] among the students in U1 and U3

Another possible explanation of the higher use of [t^h] is due to L1 interference of (ท) /t^h/ sound. This is in contrast with the [ɾ] that is considered a non-existent phoneme in Thai. L1 interference, also known as language transfer, is a phenomenon where speakers apply the knowledge from one language to another. It is the transfer of linguistic features between languages in the speech repertoire of a bilingual or multilingual individual (Weinreich, 1953). In this case, we may assume that the students apply their linguistic knowledge of Thai to the pronunciation of English sounds, especially the aspirated t [t^h] which is one of the Thai consonantal phonemes. Also, ones would require some background knowledge and exposure to a certain degree of American accents in order to pronounce /t/ as [ɾ] as this sound does not exist in the Thai phonological system. A study of Kanokpermpoon in 2007 regarding the investigation of English and Thai consonants also found the L1 transfer phenomenon. His findings indicated that Thai students were likely to substitute difficult English sounds with Thai phonemes, such as the use of Thai tap /ɾ/ instead of using the English approximant /ɹ/ in the pronunciation of English 'r'.

Labov (2006) highlighted that speakers were more self-conscious about their speech when producing formal style speech, such as wordlist or passage reading. Other more recent studies

like Yaeger-Dror (2001) also confirmed Labov's findings by showing interviewees' accommodation of prestige standard or interviewer when reading wordlist as well as passage. This study, in the same way, proved that Thai speakers became more aware of pronouncing a more prestigious item. We can see that the realization of [t^h] exhibited the highest frequencies in the most formal speech style (wordlist) and lowered in the other instruments. In other words, students are relaxed in their casual speech, while they focus their attention and become more aware in their careful speech. Consequently, concerning the pronunciation awareness, [t^h] was proved to be a more prestige feature that most students would like to adopt as its pronunciation increase in more formal styles.

In conclusion, Thailand, as an Expanding Circle country, has used English as a foreign language and widely influenced by the Inner Circle nations particularly the USA and the UK. English in Thailand is regarded as 'norm dependent' which usually follows the standard sets prescribed by the nations who claim 'authenticity' of the English language (Mooney & Evans, 2015, p. 200). The recognized status of British English and American English, therefore, affects the pronunciation of English learners in Thailand dramatically. The pronunciation of an intervocalic /t/ is one of the sounds that distinguish the British from the American accents. This paper seeks to discover how the intervocalic /t/ is distributed among English major students from four universities in Chiang Mai to see which English variety, RP or GA, is widely practiced and more favorable.

The results indicate that the realization of intervocalic /t/ as [t^h] which belongs to the Received Pronunciation accent, is more widespread among the students. It is, therefore, considered to be a prestigious feature that the students would like to adopt. In other words, the Received Pronunciation accent with the pronunciation of /t/ aspiration between vowels has become very common among learners of English. This feature is highly valuable and favorable across English major students in different institutes. The preference towards the [t^h] sound is also supported by the increasing percentages of [t^h] in more formal styles even with some inconsistency. It is noticed that [t^h] usage is the highest in reading wordlist, suggesting that students are more aware of using the sound when the situation becomes more serious. The Chi-square test also supported that the pronunciation awareness of /t/ is significantly correlated with the speech styles ($\chi^2 = 17.11$, df = 2, $p<.01$).

However, it should also be noted that although the study has revealed a striking pattern of /t/ realizations, it was conducted on a small scale and only with English major students. In addition, there were no other Thai research regarding the /t/ pronunciation to compare with. Future research may need to consider other social factors, such as age, socio-economic background, personal ambition, etc. in order to provide conclusive evidence regarding this pattern. In addition, the pronunciation of /t/ at an intervocalic position is only one of many other phonological differences between British and American English. Even though it appears that most people speak using a more British /t/ sound, this does not necessarily indicate that they are making a conscious choice to speak with a Received Pronunciation accent. To make a more conclusive statement about whether the students prefer to speak with a British or an American accent, one would need to analyze more sounds that distinguish between the two accents, such as vowel length and vowel quality.

References

Foulkes, P., Docherty, G. J., & Jones, M. (2010). Analysing stops. In *Sociophonetics: A Student's Guide*. London: Routledge.

Holmes, J. (2013). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Routledge

Jenkins, J. (2002). A Sociolinguistically based, empirically researched pronunciation syllabus for English as an International Language. *Applied Linguistics*, *23*(1). 83–103.

Kanokpermpoon, M. (2007). Thai and English consonantal sounds: A problem or a potential for EFL learning?. *ABAC Journal*, *27*(1). 57–66.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). World Englishes: Implications for International Communication and English Language Teaching. *The Modern Language Journal*, *92*(4). 654–655.

Labov, W. (2006). *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mooney, A., & Evans, B. (2015). *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Roach, P. (2009). *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Romaine, S. (1984). *The Language of Children and Adolecents*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Thieberger, N. (Ed.). (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork* (1st ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Trudgill, P., & Hannah, J. (1994). *International English: A Guide to Varieties of Standard English*. London: E. Arnold.

Wardhaugh, R. (2010). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (6th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.

Yaeger-Dror, M. (2001). Primitives of a system for style and register. In *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation* (pp. 170–185). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.