Characteristics of English Used amongst the People in the Rawai Community of Phuket [1]

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Abstract

This study focuses on the characteristics of spoken English by the people in a community located in Phuket called Rawai, by comparing the syntactic and lexical features to the standard English. The total amount of informants were 28, consisting of a group of traders and inter-married families. Data was tape-recorded by using the techniques of observer-as-participant and complete participant. Later on, the recorded conversations were transcribed and were analyzed.

The results illustrate that English use among Rawai people was different from those of the standard English, as seen in the aspects of grammar, word order, and word choice. Those characteristics also correspond to what has been suggested in previous studies of pidgin in sociolinguistics, that is, pidgin speakers use English vocabulary in Thai syntax. For example, *You buy my shirt quick quick madam*. (You should buy my shirt quickly.). It was also found that their second language usage reflects the experience of language learning from the real situation because of their necessity of living and trading. Interestingly, the linguistic usage found, demonstrates the influence of the first language on constructing another language, and further shows the self-creation of sentence structure and lexicon.

ลักษณะการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษของกลุ่มคนในชุมชนหาดราไวย์ จังหวัดภูเก็ต

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ได้ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับลักษณะภาษาอังกฤษที่พูดโดยกลุ่มคนในชุมชนราไวย์ จังหวัด
ภูเก็ต โดยการเปรียบเทียบกับลักษณะไวยกรณ์ และการใช้คำศัพท์ของภาษาอังกฤษแบบ
มาตรฐาน ผู้ให้ข้อมูลเป็นกลุ่มคนที่ติดต่อค้าขายกับชาวต่างประเทศ และกลุ่มคนที่สมรสกับชาว
ต่างประเทศจำนวน 28 คน ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยใช้วิธีการสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วม และการมีส่วนร่วมอย่าง
สมบูรณ์แบบ ประกอบกับการบันทึกเสียงบทสนทนาระหว่างการเก็บข้อมูล หลังจากนั้น จึงถอด
เทปบันทึกเสียงและวิเคราะห์ลักษณะการใช้ภาษา

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ลักษณะภาษาอังกฤษของกลุ่มคนในชุมชนหาดราไวย์มีความแตกต่าง
จากภาษาอังกฤษแบบมาตรฐานในด้านไวยกรณ์ การเรียงประโยค และการเลือกใช้คำ ซึ่งตรงกับ
ลักษณะภาษาพิดจิ้นในทางภาษาศาสตร์สังคม คือ ผู้พูดจะใช้คำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ ในโครงสร้าง
ไวยกรณ์ภาษาไทย ตัวอย่างเช่น *You buy my shirt quick quick madam.* (You should buy my
shirt quickly) เป็นต้น การใช้ภาษาที่สองในชีวิตประจำวันของกลุ่มคนเหล่านี้ เป็นการสะท้อนถึง
การเรียนรู้ภาษาที่เกิดขึ้นจากความจำเป็นในการดำรงชีวิตและการค้าขาย ซึ่งไม่ได้เกิดจากการ
เรียนในห้องเรียนตามระบบการศึกษา แต่เป็นการเรียนจากสถานการณ์จริงที่เกิดขึ้นใน
ชีวิตประจำวัน ความน่าสนใจของลักษณะการใช้ภาษาดังกล่าวจึงออกมาในรูปแบบของการได้รับ
อิทธิพลจากภาษาแม่ และในบางครั้งก็จะปรากฏการสร้างประโยคและคำศัพท์ใหม่ขึ้นเอง

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาศาสตร์สังคม ภาษาพิดจิ้น ภาษาอังกฤษ จังหวัดภูเก็ต

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Introduction

Nowadays it is easy to learn foreign languages autonomously through various ways such as the internet, television, games and songs to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. People can access these kinds of communication mediums anywhere and anytime because of the way modern technology has evolved. In the past, it was obvious that people could learn English only in the classroom with teachers. Grammar memorization and vocabulary repetition were mostly utilized as learning and teaching activities. One advantage of classroom learning is that it disciplines students or learners to study in class rather than to study by themselves. Learners, however, may not pay much attention in language learning with awareness of its application because they study English in class in order to pass an exam or get a job in an organization or institute. Language learning achievement is always seen in the form of scores rather than a communicative ability, which is the main reason for language learning.

Learners' awareness in daily language need is the first factor to motivate learners to be curious to learn language. The study of English usage of the Rawai people in Phuket showed that their basic characteristics are similar. They learn English as a second language in order to communicate with others in their career and daily life. They learn by interacting directly with foreigners and they study by using other self-study methods relying on their own experiences. Thus, their language usage was not grammatically correct in regards to standard English, and they are not complete as spoken by British English and American English.

The research aimed to gather lexical and syntactic features, including sentence structures spoken by the Rawai people in Phuket when they communicated with foreigners by comparing to standards of English used in England and the United States of America. According to Wardhaugh (2002), a language phenomenon, which learners are not able to communicate by using a second language completely, is called "pidgin" or "a putting up language". Wardhaugh (2002) also stated that learners learn language through their own experiences in communicating directly with language owners or language users, which related to the subjects in this study. Therefore, literature, theories, and research related to pidgin in many countries were reviewed in order to analyze English spoken by the Rawai people.

Pidginization

Pidgin is defined as a language which develops as a contact language when two groups of people with different mother tongues try to communicate with one another. There are no owners of pidgin. Pidgin is mostly used with purposes such as trading (Wardhaugh, 2002; Allen, 1992; Hudson, 1980). As mentioned by Mauranen, (2009), this group of people needs to have a Lingual Franca as a medium for communication in a multicultural society. Pidgin is one of the languages people use as a Lingual

Franca.

According to Thomason (2001), pidgin is a combination of two different languages. One is a prestigious language, while another is a vernacular language. Pidgin users usually employ vocabulary from the prestigious language and combine it with speech following their own language structures. For example, English is spoken in Malaysia where there are Malay, Chinese-Malay, and Indian-Malay. Malay, Chinese and Tamil are dialects, while English is the prestigious language. As a result, Malay English is different from Standard English. This is because speakers usually use the present tense when they talk about the past, but they put the adverb of time to indicate the past tense. For instance, "*she study already yesterday*" means "*She studied yesterday*" (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In the past, the prestigious language was utilized by a group of western countries seeking colonies in the late 16th century. England was one of those countries which had a great influence on others in politics, economics, society and education. Once, it was found that England was able to govern over 40 other countries. It can be claimed that one of the official languages of those countries was English such as South Africa, Jamaica, India, Singapore and Hong Kong. This results in their citizens being able to speak English as well.

Bartering between communities can be an initial activity leading to pidgin in communication. Due to the needs of living, people with different languages are forced to communicate with pidgin among themselves. In the 18th century, there was the slave trade in Africa, Asia and Australia, where European capitalists owned slaves to work in their own countries. As a result, inequality occurred between both groups of people. Back then, it was necessary for slaves to learn the language of their masters for the purpose of work. However, they continued to speak an incomplete language. It was soon realized, that the results of this phenomenon was that the slave masters or capitalists, were unsatisfied if their slaves were able to speak on the same level of their native language. Hence, they allowed their slaves to know the language only superficially (Adler, 1977; Todd, 1974).

Although pidgin has been found in many tourist attractions in Thailand, there has been so little research on this issue. For instance, Boonreung (1995) studied the language used by the people in the Sukhumwit Road area where the most important business center is located. Chomjinda (1995) studied language strategies for people communicating in the Chaosarn Road area. Moreover, Hiranyapat (2004) also investigated sentence structures and ways to learn vocabulary of females working in the entertainment industry in Patpong.

The Community and Population

Rawai is a big community situated in the southern part of Phuket covering 38 square kilometers. There are many famous tourist attractions such as Promthep Cape, Rawai Beach, Naihan Beach and Thai Mai village (Sea Gypsies, or Chao Le in Thai language). There are natural resources where there are native inhabitants and they are

appropriate for tourists who love peace and a long term of relaxation. Further, the population is diversified between ethnic and religious groups such as Thai- Buddhist, Thai-Muslim, and Thai Mai, as well as foreigners who tend to live permanently and build their own residences. In general, the people living in Rawai have jobs related to using English for communication such as pub and bar owners, souvenir shops, seafood stall sellers and taxi drivers. This community is also home to artists in Phuket. The galleries can be found all over the road and it is commonly known as the Rawai Art Village. The researcher tended to study and choose Rawai as a target community because it is different from other destinations in Phuket in terms of the relationship between local people and foreigners. They always help each other. Surprisingly, foreigners living in Rawai maintain a simple "Thai style" of life. They love eating Thai food, and they buy food in common fresh markets. On the contrary, there are foreigners living in Patong Beach as well as tourists who really enjoy the nightlife there. Most of local people take profits from their sales to tourists. As a result, it is obviously seen as a casual relationship between these two groups of people. Thus, the present study investigated language use in trading only.

Subjects and Data Collection

The subjects of the study were 28 Thais living in Rawai. Considering the frequency of using English to communicate with foreigners, the subjects were put into 2 groups. The first group consisted of 24 people who were working in the commerce and service sectors such as tour agents, masseuses on the beach, taxi drivers, souvenir sellers, seafood sellers and artists in Raiwai. 4 Thais, who got married with foreigners; German, British, Dutch, were assigned as another group. Total subjects finished either primary school or secondary school. Hence, the subjects may have a chance to study beginning English only in the class, which emphasized on grammar rather than its functions for communication. The findings showed that the subjects acquired language through their communicative experiences much more than they did in the classroom.

Tape recording and writing down conversations were used as research instruments in this study. Two techniques for data collection were 1) a researcher as an observer; when customers talked with the subjects, their conversations were recorded, and 2) a researcher as a participant; pretending to be a customer, the researcher spoke English to ask about product details such as prices, quality and usage and their conversations were recorded at the beginning.

The Characteristics of Spoken English in Conversations

The findings from an observation showed that the conversation between the subjects and interlocutors was about 3-5 minutes for each topic in order to convey the main idea. The subjects produced sentences by expressing words in a simplistic way. There was not any grammatical or structural complexity in their dialogue.   It was

also found that the subjects memorized words and sentences into their work and their daily life (Dulay et al., 1982). For instance, the subject spoke *"How are you, madame? You look good today"* to greet their customers. In selling their products, they said *"How can I help you?* or *Would you like any drink?* From the conversations, it was obviously seen that the subjects' English differed from British English and American English in lexicon, grammar, and sentence structures.

Characteristics of uncomplicated sentences

The subjects usually spoke a single simple sentence, which was produced by using limited vocabulary. They said *"I have price here"* (I put a price tag here), which is called a simple sentence. This sentence is complete and clear. Sometimes, the speaker may need complex meanings, and then he/she added a conjunction such as *because, although, when* or *if* to generate a new sentence. The speaker, however, continued speaking in simple sentences. For instance, the speaker said *"You buy one kilo discount for you"* instead of *"If you buy a kilo, I will give you a discount"*. Actually, the speaker wanted to express what he/she was saying in a conditional sentence, but he/she didn't put the *if clause* in, therefore not making his/her sentence meaningfull. Additionally, it was found that the subjects frequently spoke in unstructured sentences. *"This number one today fishing"* was produced, which was considered not to be a complete sentence. Analyzing this dialogue separately (*this/ number one/ today/ fishing)*, it was found that the speaker wanted to convey that *"This fish is the best for our fishing today"* Mcneill, an American psycholinguist, (1987; 213) raised the question how humans process their thinking before speaking. He also demonstrated an interesting link between imagination and linguistics, in that people have two kinds of thinking systems consisting of syntactic thinking; a sentence generation following what people are thinking to communicate with others, and imagistic thinking; the visual component of the conceptualization of language that is ultimately manifested in the gestures which accompany speech. When these theories were linked to subjects' dialogues, it was illustrated that the speaker tried to talk about the highlight of fish, but he/she was not able to speak English correctly. Then, he/she pointed to a referred object and spoke only words in their minds, so the speaker didn't speak a full sentence. He/she, however, would say those words constantly. The sample sentences were described as follows.

Subject's utterance: *Thai food, Pong Pang seafood, name yeah, near Chalong bay.*

Correct sentence: That Thai restaurant is named Pong Pang Seafood. It's near Chalong Bay.

Omission of Unimportant Words or Phrases in Sentences

One similarity of Thai and English is their word order, which employ *Subject-Verb-Object* as a base form to produce sentences by using words as same as the speakers' mother tongue. However, it can be noted that sometimes the speakers

omitted the subject of the sentence in order to shorten what they were saying. The sample sentences are illustrated as follows.

Subject's utterance: *Pick up your hotel very morning early six.*

Correct sentence: I'll pick you up at your hotel around six o'clock in the morning.

Subject's utterance: *If you cola, I give you last price.*

Correct sentence: If you want the cola, I will give you the last price.

In general, English grammar and Standard Thai are similar in transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. The study showed that many speakers didn't usually use objects of verbs. For example, the speakers said "*I want to eat*", "*I hope I can eat*", "*I try*", "*I think I can eat*" instead of "I *want to taste it*", "*I hope I can eat it*", "*I try it*", "*I think I can eat it*" Thai people don't usually put "it" after verbs in their Thai speaking because they understood this kind of messages without an object "it" as they said "*I want to eat*" meaningfully. The subjects also produced incomplete sentences without adding an object "it". For instance, they said "*The seller sells*". They didn't place an object of verb to sell, so this manner of speech is not meaningful. It is clear that Thai transitive verbs are different from those in English, which always require objects.

Topicalization

Persuading or negotiating is always seen in Thai society. Generally, walking along the streets, shorten forms of words are usually produced by sellers or shopkeepers. For instance, "Koh?" means "Would you like Pa Tong Koh (Pa Tong Koh is a name of deep-fried dough stick)?" or "Kwai?" means "Do you want to go to Sawan kwai (Sapan kwai is a Thai name of a place)?" The shopkeepers or sellers speak out loud to highlight their products by using Topicalization. According to Speyer (2010), Topicalization is not recognized as a British written language. It was illustrated as a spoken language of Northwestern Americans influenced mostly by people of Jewish ancestry.   For instance, one said "***My trousers** I dried by the gas stove in my bedroom and **tall, narrow houses** they are*" Actually, he or she tried to say "*I dried my **trousers** by the gas stove in my bedroom, and they are tall and **narrow houses***" Another example was taken from A conversation between a masseuse and her client. She said "***Thai massage** I have, **whole body** can do*" It was referred that "*I have the Thai This massage. I can massage whole body*" The examples showed that speakers wanted to stress the name of the products or services at the beginning of the sentences (Here is **Thai massage**). Sometimes, the speakers wanted to stress who did an action. They put pronouns after stating the names immediately. "*Foreigner people **they** come to training here*" (foreigners train here) and "*Phuket Gazzette.com **they** always tell you everything*" were two of examples showing show how they spoke.

Using Wrong Words and Wrong Meanings

People who use pidgin share important characteristics. It was noticeable that

they produced words without any realization of their functions or parts of speech. For example, the speaker said "Beautiful coming" He wanted to convey that the beautiful lady has come. The word 'beautiful' is an adjective, which modifies a noun, and usually precedes nouns. Additionally, it was found that the speaker used words with similar meanings incorrectly. The speaker said "*Thailand drink cold water*" referring that "*Most Thais like to drink cold water*" The word "Thailand" means a country. Although the sentence is grammatical correct, it is not meaningful. It was explained that the subject, which is the name of the country, cannot drink or eat anything. Moreover, it was shown that the speakers want to state an existential construction, but they usually began the sentence by using "*have*" instead of "*there is/are*". They said "*Have one chair for you*" instead of "*There is a chair for you*". It can be said that the subjects tended to use "*have*" because "มี (*have*)" can be placed anywhere in Thai sentences. Contrary, in the English language, words with similar meanings are classified depending on their meanings.   They cannot always replace each other in different contexts. For instance, in Thai the word "mee (มี)" can be used to show both in possessive and existential construction. On the other hand, in English, "have" is used in a possessive construction while "there be" is employed in an existential construction.

Conclusion

The study of the characteristics of spoken English by the people in the Rawai community showed that there was a diversity in the use of English, such as aspects of grammar, word order, and word choices. The study showed that some subjects were able to communicate and respond to interlocutors within 30 minutes fluently. Some of them were able to express their own feelings understandably. However, it was found that a small number of subjects were able to speak only in a language needed for their careers or in their daily life. It was seen clearly that the subjects used pidgin to communicate with foreigners because of their experiences and eagerness to learn language from the conversations. Respectively, the research reflected the characteristics of spoken English by the people of Rawai, which was similar to the findings of a previous study in Thailand.   The pidgin, used widely in Rawai as well as in many other countries was similar, in that they use uncomplicated sentences, omit unimportant words or phrases, topicalize, and produce words with wrong meanings. As a result, the researcher believes that the study of the characteristics of spoken English spoken by Thai people can be conducted widely. This can be done by studying the characteristics of spoken English by Thai people working in many tourist attractions in various provinces such as Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Udon Thani. According to pidgin theories, speakers, who speak the same native language, produced similar speech because they were influenced by their mother tongue. Further study may include subjects from a diverse area where people speak different local languages in order to determine the influence of their local language on speaking English.

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