Pronunciation Problems of Thai EFL Teaching Major Students

Raksamon Yordming
Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

Recent studies have shown that some English phonemes are not of phonemic character in Thai, such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/. So Thai EFL students may encounter problems to pronounce these English phonemes correctly. The present study compares pretest and posttest scores of such problematic English phonemes for 27 Thai EFL first year students, English Teaching majors, at Faculty of Education at Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University, Thailand. The aim of this study was to improve students' pronunciation skills and to enable them to efficiently teach their own students' English pronunciation when working as teachers in the future. For this purpose, pronunciation tips given in BBC Learning English were used.

Students were asked to do pretest by pronouncing a 30 – word list reading task. The corresponding posttest was done seven days after the pretest. The test scores were analyzed using SPSS for Windows. It was found that the students improved their pronunciation skills after actively having practiced English phonology – especially articulation – and some specific lesson tasks, which will be presented in this talk. Yet, it was found that students were unable to pronounce some final sounds of English, certainly because in Thai, such final sounds do not exit.

On the basis of these findings, teachers may design appropriate tasks for their students in pronunciation classes and choose suitable learning style for them.

Keywords: Pronunciation problems, EFL, English teaching major

1. Introduction

Pronunciation is very important for language teacher, especially in foreign language. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) showed that the significance of pronunciation can be define in general terms in two senses. First, sound is significant because it is used as part of a code of a particular language. So, we can talk about the distinctive sounds of English, French, Thai, and other languages. In this sense we can talk about pronunciation as the production and reception of sounds of speech. Second, sound is significant because it is used to achieve meaning in contexts of use. Here the code combines with other factors to make communication possible. In this sense we can talk about pronunciation with reference to acts of speaking.

Kelly (2007) stated that a consideration of learners' pronunciation

errors and of how these can inhibit successful communication is a useful basis on which to assess why it is important to deal with pronunciation in the classroom. When a learner says, for example, soap in a situation such as a restaurant where they should have said soup, the inaccurate production of a phoneme can lead to misunderstanding (at least on the part of the waitress). A learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another language community to understand. This can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis but have difficulty in understanding and being understood by a native speaker.

There are two keys problems with pronunciation teaching. Firstly, it tends to be neglected. And secondly when it is not neglected, it tends to be reactive to a particular problem that has arisen in the classroom rather than being strategically planned (Kelly, 2007, p.13)

In Thailand, some of elementary school teachers of English are the first models of English pronunciation. If teachers mispronounce certain words from the very beginning. It is likely that these words are not going to be correctly pronounced by the learners. Moreover, without corrections, these young learners, based on their prior pronunciation instruction which is flawed, will become accustomed to their own version of pronunciation (Kanoksilapatham, 2014: 10).

In my pronunciation teaching experiences found that most of Thai students of English teaching major,

Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabaht University lack of pronunciation skill and it might be affected to their students in the future. Sahatsathatsana, 2017, found the result of pronunciation problems of Thai students learning English Phonetics: a case study at Kalasin University, shown that students reported that they had serious problems with English pronunciation which might affect by some factors. Moreover, the qualitative data revealed two maid pronunciation problems reported by the students which were: 1 the difference in the sound system of English and Thai and 2) factors which negatively affect pronunciation. it is very hard to pronounce some English consonant sounds because they are not similar to Thai consonants, such as /θ/, /ð/.

In English teaching students of English pronunciation problem like /θ/, /ð/ continually led to the pronunciation errors, the main reason of which is that two sounds are non – existent as phonemes or sound system of the Thai language.

The purpose of this study is to compare pre – test and post – test scores of English problems sounds of first year student, English major, Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University, Thailand.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The example of this research was 27 first year students of English teaching major, Faculty of Education,

Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University, Thailand.

2.2 Research instruments

Lesson (adapted from techniques and activity, Kelly (p.16), and pronunciation tips of BBC learning English website.

The pronunciation tests includes pretest and post test which consisted of 30 word – lists which include vocabulary.

2.3 Data collection

The students were asked to pronounce the 30 word – list aloud before and after learning lesson. The test took approximately 5 minutes by person.

2.4 Research procedure

Every single participant did the pre test in order to identify their pronunciation ability before studying in lesson. Then the students learned how to pronounce English word correctly from my lesson plan. Seven days after studying the content in the lesson, all participants were given the post test. After that the data were analyzed.

2.5 Data analysis

The test were marked by researcher. Statistical analyses including t-test was conducted by using SPSS soffware program to provide descriptive statistics and to determine the main effect of explored.

3. Results

The result is represented by an arithmetic mean and standard deviation (SD.) in table 1.

Table 1 : The results of the pronunciation test

Groups	Mean	S.D.	t	Sig.
Pre-test	8.89	5.35	16.40	.000
Post-test	21.41	3.23		

df = 26

The scores of the pre-test and posttest were compared. The results show that the students improved their pronunciation. The pre-test and post-test of students were 8.89 < 21.41 t – Test = 16.40 Sig. = .000. This therefore suggests that lesson can help students to improve pronunciation.

4. Conclusion

The findings have shown that students reported that they had problems with English pronunciation which might affect by some factors. The problems in learning English pronunciation was affected by differences in the sound systems of English and Thai.

It was found that the students improved their pronunciation skills after actively having practiced English phonology – especially articulation – and some specific lesson tasks, which will be presented in this talk. Yet, it was found that

students were unable to pronounce some final sounds of English, certainly because in Thai, such final sounds do not exit.

On the basis of these findings, teachers may design appropriate tasks for their students in pronunciation classes and choose suitable learning style for them.

Acknowledgement

References

Daton, C. & Seidlhofer B. (1995). *Pronunciation.* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, (Chapter 1).

Kanoksilapatham, B. Thai Elementary School Teachers' English Pronunciation and Effects of Teacher Variables: Professional Development, *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language,* 18, 1-10.

Kelly, G. (2007). *How to teach pronunciation.* (9th ed.) Essex: Pearson, (Chapter 1)

Sahatsathatsana, S. (2017). Pronunciation problems of Thai students learning English Phonetics: a case study at Kalasin university, *Journal of Education Mahasarakham University,* 11, 67 – 84.

Appendix

Word list reading task

/θ/

1.	third	birth	teeth

/ð/

2.	the	with	this

/r/

3.	red	race	ridiculous

/l/

4.	lamb	leopard	lorry

/w/

5.	wake	wide	walrus

/s/

6.	salad	salmon	ice cream

/z/

7.	frozen	raisin	beans

/ʃ/

8.	shrimp	sugar	fresh

/tʃ/

9.	chocolate	cherry	chicken

/dʒ/

10.	orange	jam	cabbage

T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	post	21.41	27	3.226	.621
	pre	8.89	27	5.345	1.029

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	post & pre	27	.674	.000

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	
Pair 1	post - pre	12.519	3.965	.763	10.950	14.087	16.406	26	.000

Biodata

Raksamon Yordming is from Angthong province, Thailand. She was born on April 14, 1986. She earned her master of liberal arts degree in Linguistics for Communication at Thammasat University, Thailand in 2012.

At present, she is a lecturer at English Teaching Program, Faculty of Education, Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University, Thailand. Field of interests are linguistics and language teaching, English phonetics and phonology, educational technologies, and applied linguistics.