

The Influence of English in Contemporary Thai Slang

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This paper is an exploratory investigation of the sociolectal trend among youngsters in Thailand particularly Bangkok area which represents the macrocosm of Thailand. The linguistic trend among the youngsters is part of the language space in any given community like in Bangkok. With globalisation the youth of today are more exposed to English through education and mass media and its influence can be seen through the use of the slang in Thai. The objectives of the study are:

- a. To identify the source of each selected slang word, phrase or sentence.
- b. To investigate the change of meaning (semantic shift) of each slang item from original.
- c. To examine the word formation of each slang item and
- d. To establish the magnitude of the use of English in Thai slang under study

The main problem that concerns this study is the investigation of the influence of English in contemporary Thai slang. The problem is approached through a comparison of original and slang meaning; and examination of the borrowing process, of Thai slang items under study.

This initiative to study Thai slang words will be useful towards gaining an insight into the culture through the interpretation of meaning. It is also an opportunity to study the use of slang for commercial purposes such as advertisement and to relate slang with Language Change and Language in Contact.

In British English the word slang itself is slang for "scold", Fromkin (2003). The definition of Slang quoted by Sappan (1969) from Oxford English Dictionary is "language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech and consisting of new words or of current words employed in some special senses". Whilst Longman Dictionary of Contemporary (1995), the meaning of Slang is stated as "very informal language that includes new and sometimes rude words, especially words used by particular groups of people such as criminals, schoolchildren, or people who take drugs" thus

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giving a rather negative perception to it. Slang has also been defined as "one of those things that everybody can recognise and nobody can define", Roberts (1958).

Holmes (2001) wrote "Slang is another area of vocabulary, which reflects a person's age. Current slang is the linguistic prerogative of young people and generally sounds odd in the mouth of an older person. It signals membership of a particular group – the young. Because slang is so ephemeral, vocabulary can be a real give-away if you are trying to guess a person's age on the telephone or radio."

Slang words tend to sound strange to the older people especially those with minimal contact with the younger generation. However, some slang words gain total acceptability and eventually becomes a standard lexical item as suggested by Fromkin (2001) "One generation's slang is another generation's standard vocabulary".

Fromkin (2003) also stated that "the use of slang, or colloquial language, introduces new words into the language by recombining old words into new meanings. .. Finally, slang often consists of ascribing entirely new meanings to old words." Foreign words and concepts have been detected in the slang words of various languages. Probably this is providing avenue for expressing new ideas, concepts and customs from foreign source.

Such is the case in Thai language where the influence of English has been so pervasive. Many Thai slang words and phrases are adapted from English and in certain instances the concepts are based on English language, thus the focus of this study.

In this study besides utilizing the concepts gained from the related literature above, the writer also adapted the concept of semantic shift as employed in Vandergriff (1971) which can be explained using the following categories: (1) specification of meaning, (2) restriction of meaning, (3) extension of meaning, (4) deviation of meaning, and (5) maintenance of meaning. However, to determine the extent of the influence of English the writer made use of the concepts of lexical borrowing process as presented in Heah Lee Hsia (1989) and in Umayyah (2003) in order to capture the better picture of the influence. In doing so, the category (5) maintenance of meaning is subcategorised into (5a) maintenance with least English influence, (5b) maintenance with moderate English influence, and (5c) maintenance with great English influence.

Fifty slang words and phases used in daily conversation have been selected for analysis. The data is collected by interviewing the control group, and by listening and observing their conversation while recording and noting down words considered as slang. The data is selected for their wider distribution and high frequency of usage. The control group consist of youth at schools and Universities and gay people interacting in pubs, as these groups are most likely to use slang words.

The data selected is counterchecked with other groups inclusive of other youngsters and adults. This is to validate that each item is slang and to determine frequency of usage. The analysis of data is presented in the following chart.

Item	Approximate Phonemic Shape	Literal and/or Original Meaning/Concept in English Language	Meaning of slang
1	/feekʔ/	<u>fake</u>	being in the world of make-believe
2	/sut tiin/	Tip of the feet (i.e. toe)	the ultimate e.g. greatest relative to great
3	/shi suo ka /	Shizuoka (famous plantation for Japanese green tea)	Greedy
4	/ruu hai/	outstanding appearance + <u>high</u> (high society)	smart looking (with high status)
5	/chiw chiw/	chill + chill (to calm down)	easy
6	/ta bai/	file (as used by carpenters)	make it nice
7	/phiaw khem/	<u>purely</u> + salty	person who is extremely stingy
8	/chii leetʔ/	<u>she</u> + <u>lesbian</u>	lesbian 'lady'
9	/ʔii leetʔ/	address term to a lowly woman + lesbian	lesbian 'man'
10	/w↔↔↔/	<u>over</u>	above average
11	/salam bɔmbee/	<u>slum</u> + Bombay	lowest of lowest social class, a derogatory term
12	/datʔcɔɔn/ Ⓢ /dat ca rit ʔ/	Ⓢ /dat ca rit ʔ/ = 'pretending' Derived from the concept of irregular verbs in English (present, past tense and past participle e.g. go, went & gone (/c n/ is derived from gone))	Pretending (behaviour)
13	/miitʔpeeruu/	<u>Miss</u> + Peru (/pee/ and /ruu/ are derived from Peru; the sound signifies the meaning of 'pay' in slang.	gay person who pays another male all his money
14	/cham samiilaa songkhlaa pattani fantasii phuuket ʔ/	Moist + Samiilaa + Songkhlaa + Pattani + fantasy + P huket (The focus is fantasy + Phuket with which Phuket is compared to paradise.)	extravagant or extremely amazing
15	/paatʔnaa kheekʔ/	to even off + surface + cake	stealing a male with a partner

Item	Approximate Phonemic Shape	Literal and/or Original Meaning/Concept in English Language	Meaning of slang
16	/sʊŋ lɛɛ/	Derived from concept of irregular verbs in English (present, past tense and past participle e.g. swing, swung & swung)	derogative term for liars
17	/lɔkʔɪn/	login (into the computer)	to link
18	/ʔoo/	OK	quite delicious
19	/cɛɛm/	jam (jam session – an occasion when musicians play music together informally)	join in or participate in group activity
20	/cuwɪn/	tune	to adjust one's self to mend a relationship
21	/cɔɔbɛɛn/	screen + flat	girl with flat breast
22	/thii wii cɔɔbɛɛn/	television + screen + flat	girl with flat breast
23	/sooŋee wekkaa/	Sony Wega (TV brand)	girl with flat breast
24	/thang kɛɛtʔ/	tank gas (LPG gas cylinder)	girl with a large body frame
25	/suung m←an yiiraafʔ/	tall + as + giraffe	very tall
26	/d↔n/	modern	modern
27	/hipʔhɔp/	hip hop	a style of dressing by the hip hop group (hairstyle and dressing)
28	/khaa coo/	leg (behaviour) + gigolo	males (in a group) disturbing others
29	/ʔoo mɛɛ caw/	oh+(mother+ God)	oh my God(an exclamation)
30	/ʔoo phra caw cɔɔtʔnay yɔɔt maak	oh + God + George (name of person)+second person pronoun(you)+top (excellent)+very	getting more than expected

Item	Approximate Phonemic Shape	Literal and/or Original Meaning/Concept in English Language	Meaning of slang
31	/tɛpʔ/	gay	gay who has removed his penis
32	/wɔtʰsɛpʔ/	what's up	what's up (slang)
33	/loo soo/	low society	person from low society
34	/sing/	racing (motorcycle racing)	speeding (vehicle)
35	/maw/	mouth	gossip
36	/doon/	to hit, to crash ,to function as a passive voice marker in spoken language.	To be impressed
37	/ʔin th↔n/	In the trend (trendy)	trendy
38	/ʔaw/	out	out of fashion/date
39	/chɔɔ raat/	Corrupt	stealing a friend's lover
40	/getʔ/	get	understand
41	/ooiʔ shii/	Japanese word: 'delicious'	Numbness of the body
42	/ʔekʔ/	x-rated	sexy
43	/kham kham/	giggle + giggle	just for fun
44	/taw kat yaang/	turtle + bite + rubber	extremely slow
45	/pari/ mon thon/	area surrounding city (Bangkok)	old fashion person
46	/pekʔ/	specification (specs = spoken language)	right (correct)

Item	Approximate Phonemic Shape	Literal and/or Original Meaning/Concept in English Language	Meaning of slang
47	/yaang ɾɔɔy/	Deliciously	best/excellent
48	/biw/	build (as in to set up the emotional state)	create the mood
49	/w↔↔↔kʰ/	work	having had sex (with the girl)
50	/hɛppii dii/	<u>happy</u> + good	I am fine

Guide to phonetic symbols:

Guide to phonetic symbols:

/ɔ/ = modern

/ɔ/ = God

/ɛ/ = mat

/ɨ/ = like "u" sound with clenched teeth and lips stretched sideways

/ʔ/ = glottal sound

/˘/ = the diacritic /˘/ signals an unleased sound.

Where the vowel symbol is written twice e.g. //, it represents a long vowel sound such as paw.

The focus is on meaning, as such, Thai tones for the words are not described.

As shown in the chart above, the data is distributed accordingly as follows:

1. Non-English element slang items = 11 items where 2 items are Japanese (numbers 3, 41) and 9 items are Thai (numbers 2, 6, 21, 36, 39, 43, 44, 45, 47).

2. With-English element slang items = 39.

*Note: Each category is differentiated using different colours that can be visible using coloured-ink printers.

Furthermore, the data is distributed according to the five (5) categories as follows:

1. Specification of Meaning = 9 items (numbers 1, 20, 28, 30, 34, 38, 42, 46, 48)

2. Restriction of Meaning = 6 items (numbers 7, 9, 18, 31, 35, 49)

3. Extension of Meaning = 3 items (numbers 5, 17, 19)

4. Deviation of Meaning = 6 items (numbers 13, 15, 22, 23, 24, 25)

5. Maintenance of Meaning (MM) = 15 items which is distributed further as follows:

5a. MM with least English influence = 2 items (numbers 12, 16)

5b. MM with moderate English influence = 4 items (numbers 4, 14, 29, 50)

5c. MM with great English influence = 9 items (numbers 8, 10, 11, 26, 27, 32,

33, 37, 40).

In this study, it is shown that the influence of English is high wherein 39 out of 50 or about 80% contemporary Thai slang items are English based and that only 11 out of 50 or about 20% are non-English based. However, it is only 9 out of 50 or about 20% of the items show great influence of English as characterized by the full use of the English word (in Thai script) and meaning in the slang item. However, it is noteworthy to consider the fact that the nature and characteristics of slang are bound with time element, that is, lifespan is shorter.

This study is described as exploratory and is still in its early stage. Much work and study are still to be done to shed more light on this field of Thai linguistics, language change, language in the mass media, cultural studies as explored in sociolinguistics.

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