

# Interlanguage Pragmatics: An Investigation of Pragmatic Transfer in Responses to English Tag Questions by L1 Thai Learners

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Article information	Abstract
<p><b>Article history:</b>  Received: 8 Aug 2021  Accepted: 19 Feb 2022  Available online: 7 Apr 2022</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  Interlanguage pragmatics  Pragmatic transfer  Responses to English tag questions  L1 Thai learners  L2 English</p>	<p><i>The research investigated pragmatic transfer in responses to English tag questions by L1 Thai learners based on Interlanguage Pragmatics, specifically pragmatic transfer (Kasper &amp; Blum-Kulka, 1993). The L1 Thai learners were categorized into two groups according to their English proficiency levels: advanced and intermediate. Oral and written discourse completion tasks (Blum-Kulka, 1982) were employed to elicit the participants' responses to English affirmative and negative tag questions in two modalities, speaking and writing. The major findings cast light on the L1 Thai learners' problems of responding to English negative tag questions, rather than positive ones, as a result of their strong reliance on the Thai pragmatic norm. The results also suggested that the responses to English negative tag questions by the intermediate group were less native-like than the advanced group's responses and manifested a higher degree of pragmatic transfer. Concerning pragmatic transfer in the two modalities, responses to English negative tag questions in writing showed a greater degree of pragmatic transfer than those in speaking. The results of the study are expected to elucidate the performance of the L1 Thai learners' responses to English tag questions in both modalities and their dependence on the Thai pragmatic norm in responding to English tag questions.</i></p>

## INTRODUCTION

Within the discipline of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Interlanguage (IL), the systematic knowledge of a second language (L2) learner depending on both these learners' first language (L1) and the target language (Selinker, 1972), has been well-attested and continuously studied. A number of interlanguage studies have focused on syntax (e.g. Akbarnezhad et al, 2020; Bili, 2019), morphology (e.g. Al-Surmi, 2013; Chiravate, 2018; Prapobratanakul & Pongpaibroj, 2019), and phonology (e.g. Contreras, 2018; Le Trung & Boonmoh 2020; Sridhanyarat, 2017) However, not only does interlanguage involve the three mentioned subfields of linguistics, but it also entails pragmatics. Later introduced by Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993), Interlanguage Pragmatics

(ILP) concerns how nonnative speakers use and acquire the ability to produce and understand communicative action—how language is used in its sociocultural context—in their L2.

Under interlanguage pragmatics, considerable attention has been given to negative pragmatic transfer, which leads to linguistic deviations from native norms. With respect to L2 learners, negative pragmatic transfer has resulted in their hindrance to correctly produce their L2 targets. ILP has been widely studied in the Thai context, most of which are speech act-oriented, for example, apologies (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Chiravate, 2019), apologies and thanks (Intachakra, 2004), refusals (Weerachairattana & Wannarak, 2016), and compliment responses (CRs) (Phoocharoensilp, 2012). In contrast, the only one study which focused on the language use aspect is Chantharasombat and Pongpairoj (2018) on an investigation of negative responses to English negative Yes/No questions.

One of the most problematic structures in English is English tag questions. Two academic articles related to how speakers in different L1s respond to English tag questions. The first study focused on problems of L1 Korean learners in responding to English tag questions (Shaffer, 2002), and the other claimed that L1 Japanese speakers encountered difficulty in answering any negative questions, which potentially caused problems in English language classrooms in Japan (Akiyama, 1979).

As far as the Thai context is concerned, to the best of our knowledge, there have never been any studies exploring responses to English tag questions by L1 Thai learners. There has been only a claim that the issue of responses to English tag questions is highly problematic (Senawong, 1999). Therefore, this current study will be designed to essentially fill the gap by looking into the problems of responses in different modalities, i.e. speaking and writing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP)

Under the discipline of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) is termed as “the study of nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language (L2)” (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 3). To shed light on the definition provided, it is of note that ILP is regarded from a perspective on pragmatics where learners’ linguistic comprehension and production of linguistic action based on contexts and based on learners’ prior language knowledge are investigated.

Interlanguage Pragmatics can be considered as one of the branches of SLA research. ILP is one of the subfields of interlanguage studies, namely interlanguage phonology, interlanguage morphology, and interlanguage semantics (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). ILP, considered one of the approaches to study pragmatic failure, follows methodology in interlanguage studies (Selinker, 1972) in that ILP researchers compare learners’ IL production and comprehension with L1 and L2 data (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 12). Then, it yields the research tools to establish how learners’ pragmatic performance differs from their L2 and how learners’ L2 is

influenced by their L1, leading to a major concern of ILP research where the interaction of learners' L1 influence is explored along the interlanguage toward the L2 norm (Alrefaee et al., 2020; Bou-Franch, 1998, 2012; Chantharasombat & Pongpairaj, 2018; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Wu & Takahashi, 2016).

More precisely, Kasper & Blum-Kulka (1993) claimed that the first potential impediment to learners' use of general pragmatic knowledge base is their rudimentary knowledge of L2 linguistics. Secondly, learners' lack of pragmalinguistic competence as well as negative transfer of L1 sociopragmatic norm are mentioned. Lastly, readiness to stay loyal to L1 socio-cultural patterns is counted. All mentioned significantly cause deviations from the native norm. That is, the three aforementioned factors inhibit L2 learners from producing native-like linguistic action patterns.

## **2. Pragmatic transfer**

The definition of pragmatic transfer has been provided throughout a few decades. Having been referred to as sociolinguistic transfer by Wolfson (1981), as discourse transfer by Odlin (1989), and as cross-linguistic influence by Beebe et al (1990), the term was specifically defined by Kasper as "...the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information (1992, p. 207, as cited in Bou-Franch, 1998)".

Pragmatic transfer, as in the notion of Kasper (1992), obtains from interlanguage pragmatic studies. Kasper (1992) divided pragmatic transfer into two types: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, based on Leech (1983). In detail, the first one pertains to illocutionary force and politeness values whereas the latter concerns socially appropriate linguistic behaviour. The classification briefly discussed is advantageous to theoretical and cross-cultural pragmatics, to language teaching, and to interlanguage pragmatic studies (Bou-Franch, 1998).

Bou-Franch (1998) offered the most obvious dichotomy of pragmatic transfer: positive transfer and negative transfer. While positive transfer, or facilitative transfer, refers to "pragmatic behavior or other knowledge that displays consistent across L1, IL, and L2", negative transfer, or interference, refers to "the influence of L1 pragmatic competence on IL pragmatic knowledge that differs from L2 target" (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). However, it is worth noting that negative transfer is of ILP researchers' attention, since the deviations of learners' pragmatic production from L1, the effects of self-representation, and the hindrance to successful communication all result from negative transfer.

Owing to the attention considerably paid to negative transfer, transferability constraints, the conditions which promote or inhibit transfer need to be mentioned. The three constraints are learners' linguistic proficiency and degree of dependence upon their L1 influence; learners' cultural competence and willingness to adapt L2 linguistic action patterns and use, and learners' exposure to L2 knowledge and duration of stay in L2 context (Bou-Franch, 1998).

### 3. Previous studies under the scope of pragmatic transfer from L1 Thai to L2 English

Even though most studies provide strong evidence regarding negative pragmatic transfer from L1 Thai to L2 English, they are more likely to be classified under speech acts, rather than second language acquisition. Only one study concerning negative responses to English negative Yes/No questions (Chantharasombat & Pongpairoj, 2018) is strongly associated with second language acquisition.

Chantharasombat and Pongpairoj (2018) investigated the negative responses to English negative Yes/No questions. Negative pragmatic transfer produced by L1 Thai speakers with low English proficiency level was hypothesized. For the data collection, Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was administered to 14 participants whose L2 English proficiency levels range from low to advanced. The hypothesis was confirmed that learners from low English proficiency group were more likely to rely upon their L1 Thai pragmatic and therefore demonstrated more negative transfer to their L2 English production influenced by Thai pragmatic, as opposed to their higher-level counterparts. To sum up, it can be seen that pragmatic transfer has a negative impact upon responses to English negative Yes/No questions.

### 4. English tag questions

English tag question is considered as one of the very particular phenomena of spoken language (Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006, p. 284). The form of English tag questions is more generally used in the spoken form than it was in the written form because it signifies informality in communication (Jovanović & Pavlović, 2014). More specifically, in terms of the usage, English tag questions, as opposed to other types of questions, is used to ask for confirmation of what an interlocuter has said, rather than seeking for information (Algeo, 1990, pp. 445-446).

In the matter of the structure, four grammatical features are required to form English tag questions: pronominalization (person, number, and gender), verb, inversion, and polarity. The polarity contrasts with the previous statement as can be seen from the following basic structures: (1.) negative clause + positive tag and (2.) positive clause + negative tag (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 787).

Apart from the aspects of usage and structures, the intonation of English tag questions and its interpretation should be mentioned. While the main clause in English tag questions has the falling tone, the tag is either rising or falling. More specifically, the rising tone of the tag can be interpreted to express doubts and ask for verification whereas the falling tone of the tag can be interpreted to only seek acknowledgement that the main clause is true. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, pp. 894-895)."

### 5. Responses to tag questions in Thai

As explained by Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005), a tag question is used when an individual requires confirmation from the addressee. To be more specific, Higbie and Thinsan (2002), provided certain forms of Thai tag questions: (1.) /chây máy/, (2.) /mây chây rú/, and (3.) /

cháy-rú-plàaw/. In addition, Smyth (2002) and Senawong (1999) stated that yes/no answers are reversed in Thai when compared to English. While in standard English, native English speakers say ‘Yes (I did)’ and ‘No (I didn’t)’, in Thai, Thais say ‘Yes (I didn’t)’ and ‘No (I did)’. Some examples of responses to Thai tag questions are as follows:

- 1) A:     mâj       dâj       paj   rk.       rt  
          NEG<sup>1</sup>    COMP<sup>2</sup>   go   PAR<sup>3</sup>   QUES<sup>4</sup>  
          ‘You didn’t go, didn’t you?’  
      B:     khâ?     mâj     dâj       paj  
          PAR       NEG    COMP   go  
          ‘Yes, I didn’t go’

(Senawong, 1999, p. 24)

- 2) A:       He isn’t going, is he?  
      B:       No, he is going too.

(Higbie & Thinsan, 2002, p. 63)

- 3) A:       khun     mây     rúu     chây     mây?  
      you    NEG     know   yes     QUES  
          You know, don’t you?  
      B:     chây (mây rúu)/mây chây (rúu)  
          yes (NEG know)/NEG yes (know)  
          Yes (I don’t know)/No (I do know).

(Chantharasombat & Pongpairoj, 2018, p. 194)

## 6. Responses to tag questions in English

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) threw light on answering to English tag questions in The Cambridge Grammar of The English Language. They stated, “In *Yes, it is* and *No, it isn’t*, the yes and no can be regarded as a special type of adjunct, a polarity adjunct, which agrees in polarity with the clause”. They added that *\*Yes, it isn’t* and *\*No, it is* are ungrammatical when they are used to respond to English tag questions. The following example is some grammatically correct responses to tag questions in English:

- 4) A:       He has gone, hasn’t he?  
      B:       Yes (he has)/No (he hasn’t).

<sup>1</sup> NEG = negative (Senawong, 1999, p. 31)

<sup>2</sup> COMP = completive verb (Senawong, 1999, p. 31)

<sup>3</sup> PAR = sentence particle (Senawong, 1999, p. 31)

<sup>4</sup> QUES = question marker (Senawong, 1999, p. 31)

- 5) A: He hasn't gone, has he?  
B: Yes (he has)/No (he hasn't).

(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 848)

- 6) A: You are not going out today, are you?  
B: Yes. (= Yes, I am going out.) /  
No. (= No, I am not going out.)

(Murphy, 2015, p. 102)

## 7. Responses to English tag questions by L2 learners with different L1s

This section offers some previous literatures regarding deviant responses to English tag questions produced by L2 learners with different L1 backgrounds: L1 Korean, L1 Japanese, and L1 Indonesian.

Shaffer (2002, p. 219) described two types of committed errors by L1 Korean learners of English. The first error type was called, "L1 syntax-influenced errors", and the second one was called, "culturo-syntactically related errors". With respect to responses to English tag questions, the second type was included here. In the Korean society, it was considered impolite when younger people refused to older people, which was regarded as, "Principle of Least Opposition". This said principle led to a deviant form of responses to English tag question by L1 Korean speakers. In greater detail, L1 Korean speakers tended to respond to English tag questions with the negative clause preceded by an affirmative adverb of response, in order to provide the hearer with more positive responses. Some examples from Shaffer (2002) could be seen below:

- 7) A: You don't have any questions, do you?  
B: \*Yes, (I don't.)

(Shaffer, 2002, p. 229)

- 8) A: Isn't this Hong Gildong's house?  
B: \*Yes, it isn't.

(Shaffer, 2002, p. 230)

In addition, canonical responses to English tag questions by native English speakers and Japanese speakers were delineated by Akiyama (1979). In English, acceptable responses to English tag questions were yes or no according to speakers' intention. Unlike English, Japanese speakers answered *hai*, which means, "what you just said is correct", and, *iie* which means, "what you just said is not correct". Accordingly, the distinction between these two ways of responses to English tag questions is the source of L2 committed errors made by L2 Japanese learners of English. Specifically, L2 Japanese speakers were prone to answer English tag questions by depending on the sense of the agreement between the question and their own intention. A conclusion regarding from Akiyama (1979) is shown below.

“Japanese speakers answer yes whenever the statement form (e.g., You aren’t going) of the question agrees with the intention (i.e., I am not going) and no whenever it disagrees with the intention (i.e., I am going).” (Akiyama, 1979, p. 488)

Akiyama also concluded that the pattern of responses to Japanese and English affirmative tag questions is similar, but the pattern of responses to Japanese and English negative tag questions is reversed.

Lastly, Ihsan (2018) conducted an error analysis in order to investigate linguistic and intercultural errors committed by thirty undergraduate students from a state university in Palembang, Indonesia. All of the participants were regarded as advanced EFL learners. The research instruments employed in this study aimed at eliciting the participants’ pronunciation, knowledge of parts of speech, grammatical structures, idioms, responses to yes/no questions, and tag questions.

In relation to the responses to English tag questions, twenty-nine participants (96%) correctly answered affirmative English tag questions. In contrast, only eight participants (25%) correctly answered negative English tag questions—in other words, twenty-two students (75%) gave incorrect answers to negative English tag questions. Examples of the incorrect answers are below.

- 9)      A:      You are a good student, aren’t you?  
          B:      \*Yes, I am not.

(Ihsan, 2018, p. 82)

- 10)     A:      This is a pen, isn’t it?  
          B:      \*Yes, it is not.

(Ihsan, 2018, p. 82)

The three studies provided empirical evidence of how L1 Korean learners, L1 Japanese learners, and L1 Indonesian learners of English produced deviant structures of responses to English tag questions. Pragmatic transfer is considered the root cause of the deviations as previously discussed.

At this stage, it is obvious that L1 Thai speakers tend to have difficulty in producing the canonical forms of English structure, especially responses to English tag questions, owing to negative pragmatic transfer from their L1. More specifically, the fact that L1 pragmatic transfer considerably hinders L1 Thai speakers in their performance based on L2 norms of English and that the responses to tag questions in Thai and English are markedly different, strongly reinforces the hypothesis of this present study that deviations of responses to English tag questions produced by L1 Thai speakers are due to negative pragmatic transfer from L1 Thai pragmatic competence.

Although the literature of Senawong (1999) briefly explained how Thai speakers responded to English tag questions with the deviant forms, to the best of our knowledge, the studies of



responses to English tag questions under the area of pragmatic transfer from L1 Thai to L2 English have not been conducted. This particular study was therefore conducted to fill the gap by investigating how L1 Thai speakers produce their responses to English tag question. To add values to the study, different English proficiency levels of L1 Thai speakers and two modalities of writing and speaking are also considered.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Participants

The participants were divided into two groups: a native English speaker control group and two experimental groups. The control group consisted of three (one male and two females) native speakers of American English. Their ages were 21, 33, and 38. Each of them was originally from different states in the U.S.: Hawaii, Tennessee, and Florida. All of them were born and raised in their own states, growing up speaking English as their native tongue. It is of note that the main purpose of recruiting the control group was that they could formulate the baseline data<sup>5</sup> for this current study.

Concerning the two experimental groups, they were composed of 16 intermediate L1 Thai learners of English and 16 advanced L1 Thai learners of English. The participants' average ages were between 18 and 24. Their English exposure before entering university has been through the Thai educational system in which they have been learning English for more than 12 years. They all had no English learning experience overseas. All the thirty-two undergraduate students were from three universities in Thailand and two universities overseas: Chulalongkorn University (n = 26), Thammasat University (n = 3), Civil Aviation Training Center (n = 1), Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (n = 1) and University of California, Berkeley (n = 1). The participants studied in a wide range of faculties including Arts (n = 16), Engineering (n = 3), Political Science (n = 3), Pharmacy (n = 3), Dentistry (n = 2), Commerce and Accountancy (n = 1), Education (n = 1), Law (n = 1), Veterinary Science (n = 1), and Aviation Management (n = 1).

In terms of their English scores, they were divided into two proficiency groups: the advanced proficiency group (n = 16) and the intermediate proficiency group (n = 16). The participants who were qualified for the advanced group were required to have a minimum CU-TEP score of 99 or a minimum IELTS score of 7, both of which can be compared to a C1 of CEFR levels. In contrast, the participants who were qualified for the intermediate group were required to have a minimum CU-TEP score of 35 or a minimum IELTS score of 4, both of which can be compared to a B1-B2 of CEFR levels (Wudthayagorn, 2018). Their amount of time learning English in an academic classroom setting was approximately 10 years. The participants' first language was Thai.

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<sup>5</sup> Baseline data is the performance of native speakers in a particular task. It is collected from native speakers. In second language acquisition research, the baseline data plays an important role in that it is used to be compared to the data elicited from non-native speakers (Richards, 1980).



## 2. Instruments

All instruments employed in this present study were in English. Aside from the CU-TEP and IELTS scores used to classify participants into groups based on their English proficiency levels, Discourse Completion Tasks (Blum Kulka, 1982), an oral DCT and a written DCT, were used as major instruments to elicit the participants' responses to English tag questions. The participants in both English proficiencies and the native control group were asked to complete both tasks in English in order to reveal their performance in their responses to English tag questions and to attain the baseline data of responses to English tag questions, respectively.

To produce the spoken and written DCTs, the researchers first drafted all the test items and distractors, some of which were freshly created and others were adapted from other sources, for the two DCT types. After the completion of the first draft, the researchers sent all the test items used in both the oral and the written DCTs to three lecturers who were native English speakers and had them validate the accuracy of the language used in the tasks so that the tests would be congruent with the research objective.

The following three experts were recruited in this study. The first expert (a native American English speaker) was teaching at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. The second and third experts (native New Zealand English speakers) were teaching English at AIMS, a tutorial school located in Bangkok, and Concordian International School in Bangkok, Thailand, respectively.

The validation was proceeded based on the Index of Item-Object Congruence (IOC). The IOC result of every test item was calculated and supposed to rate between 0.50 – 1.00, which was regarded as an acceptable score. For this current study, the IOC score of all the test items in the cloze test was 0.918.

### 2.1 Oral discourse completion task

An oral discourse completion task (Oral DCT) was used to evaluate production of test takers' routines and formulaic expressions (Culpeper et al., 2018). The oral DCT elicited the participants' pragmatic competence and real-time knowledge processing aspects.

To produce the oral DCT, recordings of situation and question parts were dubbed by two American male speakers originally from Carolina and Arkansas, the U.S., respectively. After the process of making the recordings for the oral DCT was completed, the oral DCT were ready to be used in the study.

In terms of the number of items in the oral DCT, it contained six items, each of which included one situation and one four-turn dialogue. Specifically, in the four-turn dialogue, it was composed of two question turns designed to elicit the participants' spoken discourses, and the other two blank turns left to be answered based on the situations given. These six items can be further divided into three groups: affirmative questions ( $n = 2$ ), negative questions ( $n = 2$ ), and distractors ( $n = 2$ ) which included one *wh*-question and one *yes/no* question. An example of the test items featured in the oral DCT is as follows.

- Situation 1: Shawn's going to see the new sci-fi movie tonight. You like all types of sci-fi works and would love to go too, but you need to babysit your little sister as your parents will be away.
- Shawn: I heard you enjoy reading sci-fi novels. So, I guess you also like sci-fi movies, don't you?
- You: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Shawn: Then why not join me for the new sci-fi movie tonight?"
- You: \_\_\_\_\_.

The English tag question in the **situation 1** above was intentionally designed to be the affirmative English tag question: an affirmative matrix and a negative tag. Specifically, the affirmative matrix was *So, I guess you also like sci-fi movies*, and the negative tag was *don't you?*.

## 2.2 Written discourse completion task

The written DCT was used to investigate L2 speech act production (Blum-Kulka, 1982). The written DCT was employed in a number of research to investigate transfer L1-based speech act strategies to learners' L2 and evaluate their L2 pragmatic development (Culpeper et al., 2018).

In order to produce the written DCT, after the test items and distractors of the written DCT were validated by the three experts in the step of 3.2.1, they were then ready to be used to elicit data from the participants.

Like the oral DCT, the written DCT contained six items, each of which included one situation and one four-turn dialogue. Specifically, in the four-turn dialogue, it was composed of two question turns designed to elicit participants' spoken discourses, and the other two turns include one declarative statement and one blank left to be answered based on the situations given. These six items can be further divided into three groups: affirmative questions ( $n = 2$ ), negative questions ( $n = 2$ ), and distractors ( $n = 2$ ) which included two yes/no questions. An example of the test items featured in the written DCT is as follows.

- Situation 2: You've invited a British friend over to your place for some Thai food. You're unable to handle spicy food because it irritates your stomach. So, you decide to cook Hoy Tod (Oyster Omelette) and Kai Yang (Grilled Chicken).
- British friend: The food doesn't seem spicy. What are they?
- You: You're right. They're not spicy. They're Hoy Tod and Kai Yang.
- British friend: I've always thought that all Thai people love spicy food. You don't eat spicy food, do you?
- You: \_\_\_\_\_.

The English tag question in the **situation 2** above was intentionally designed to be the negative English tag question: a negative matrix and an affirmative tag. Specifically, the negative matrix was ***You don't eat spicy food*** and the affirmative tag was ***do you?***.

### 3. Data collection

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 during the data collection process and the order for every citizen to stay at home to decrease the risk of contracting coronavirus, as encouraged by the government of Thailand, the oral and written DCTs were administered to the participants via Zoom, a computer software application used extensively as an online classroom by university lecturers and educators (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey & Lawless, 2019). The researchers provided the participants with directions in Thai for a thorough understanding of both DCTs. In addition, it is important to note that the tasks were administered in a counterbalanced order in order to prevent the order effects, which was where the English tag question forms which appeared in the former task might influence how the participants performed on such English tag question in the latter task (Kim, 2010). Hence, the first eight intermediate participants and the first eight advanced participants were asked to complete the oral DCT and the written DCT, respectively. The other eight intermediate participants and the other eight advanced participants were asked to complete the written DCT and the oral DCT, respectively.

With respect to the administration of the oral DCT, after the researchers provided the participants with a brief explanation of the task in Thai, the researchers used the *share screen* function on Zoom in order to play the recordings to the participants. In order to play the recording of each item, the situations and the questions were played, respectively. When it came to the response turn, the researchers paused the recordings to allow the participants to respond. For the administration of the written DCT, the researchers sent the pdf file of the written DCT to the participants via email. The participants were required to finish the test within 20 minutes and not allowed to consult any dictionaries while completing the written DCT.

### 4. Data analyses

With reference to the constructions of responses to English and Thai tag questions formerly discussed in the literature review section, the participants' responses will be considered in terms of either deviant production or target-like production. In greater detail, the deviant response was scored 0 when they failed to match the situation given, and the target-like response was scored 1 when they matched the situation given.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports results and provides discussions concerned with the responses to English tag questions elicited from the two DCT tasks, namely the oral DCT and the written DCT.

The overall results of the responses to English tag questions by the L1 Thai learners are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1. The overall results of the two experimental groups demonstrated that

the advanced group scored better on both oral and written DCTs (95.31% and 92.19%, respectively). The intermediate group scored lower on both DCTs with equal scores for each (75%).

Table 1

Overall results of the correct responses to English tag questions in the oral and written DCTs by L1 Thai learners

Proficiency level	Oral DCT	Written DCT
	Percentages (Raw scores)	Percentages (Raw scores)
Intermediate group	75.00% (48/64)	75.00% (48/64)
Advanced group	95.31% (61/64)	92.19% (59/64)

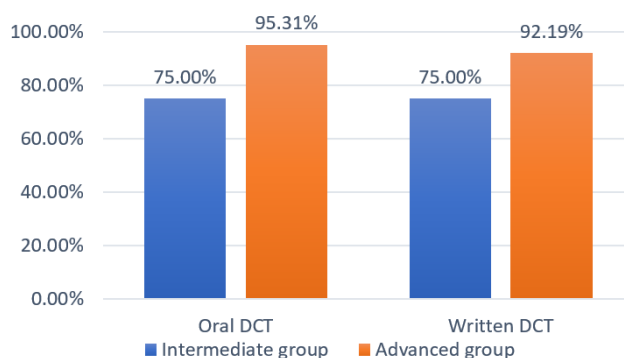


Figure 1 Overall results of the correct responses to English tag questions in the oral and written DCTs by L1 Thai learners

Based on hypothesis one of this study, variables of different English proficiencies and different modalities will affect how L1 Thai learners respond to English tag questions. The present study seeks a relationship between the L1 Thai learners' different English proficiencies and different modalities, both of which probably affected how L1 Thai learners responded to English tag questions. As Table 1 and Figure 1 show, the advanced learners seemed to perform well on both speaking and writing, 95.31% and 92.19%, respectively. In other words, the advanced learners' performance indicated that they tended to respond more native-like responses to English tag questions which were, for example, either Yes, it is (or any affirmative responses) or No, it is not (or any negative responses). Moreover, it can be seen that, despite the slight difference, the L1 Thai learners could perform marginally better on the oral production task than the written production task.

In contrast to the advanced learner group, the intermediate learner group was prone to respond to English tag questions with more deviations. That is to say, the intermediate learners responded to English tag questions which deviated from canonical ways to respond to English tag questions, such as answering with either \*Yes, it is not or \*No, it is. The intermediate learners' less native-like responses to English tag questions were found to be in line with Shaffer (2002) and Akiyama (1979). With respect to deviant answers, Shaffer (2002) reported that L1 Korean speakers

tended to respond to English tag questions with the structure of yes + negative sentences, which is considered ungrammatical in standard English. What is more, Akiyama (1979) reported that the responses to English negative tag questions and those to Japanese negative tag questions were opposite. The L1 Japanese speakers therefore tended to form deviant responses to English tag questions. At this stage, it can be said that L1 Thai intermediate learners, L1 Korean speakers, and L1 Japanese speakers produced the similar structure of deviant responses to English tag questions, resulting from L1 negative transfer.

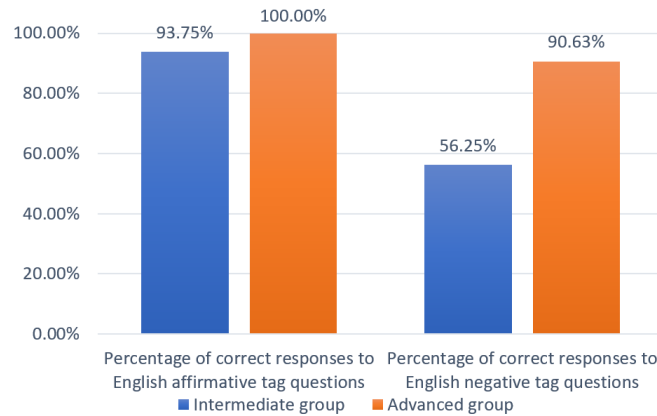
Another important point to be discussed is that the L1 Thai intermediate learners correctly responded to English tag questions at the exactly similar results, 75%, for both oral and written production. It then can be interpreted that the L1 Thai intermediate learners were still in their developmental process of the production of responses to English tag questions. In greater detail, the developmental process reflects the particular stage of L2 learners' increased competence. At this stage, L2 learners formulate hypotheses about the English language during their L2 learning process (Richards, 1970). In relation to the production of responses to English tag questions by the intermediate participants in this study, they were likely to respond more native-like responses to English tag questions (e.g. Yes, it is. / No, it is not.), than non-native-like ones when they produced some errors in verbs and polarity in responses to English tag questions (e.g. \*Yes, it is not. / \*No, it is.).

To summarize, the correlation was found that the L1 Thai advanced learners produced more target-like responses to English tag questions in both speaking and writing at the very high percentages, whereas the L1 Thai intermediate learners produced less target-like responses to English tag questions in both speaking and writing at the very same percentage. Based on hypothesis one which states that the variables of different English proficiencies and different modalities will affect how L1 Thai learners respond to English tag questions, hypothesis one is partially confirmed, since the two different modalities—oral and written—merely correlated with the L1 Thai advanced learners' responses to English tag questions, but not the L1 Thai intermediate learners' responses to English tag questions.

Concerning the pragmatic transfer demonstrated in responses to English tag questions by the L1 Thai intermediate and advanced learners, hypothesis two of this study is that L1 Thai intermediate learners will produce less native-like responses to English tag questions whereas L1 Thai advanced learners will produce more native-like responses to English tag questions. With the overall results, it was apparent that the intermediate learners produced less native-like responses to English tag questions than the advanced learners in both oral and written DCTs as presented in Tables 2 and 3 and Figures 2 and 3.

**Table 2**  
**Detailed results of the correct responses to English tag questions in the oral DCT by L1 Thai learners**

Proficiency level	Oral DCT	
	Percentages of correct responses to English affirmative tag questions	Percentages of correct responses to English negative tag questions
<b>Intermediate group</b>	93.75% (30/32)	56.25% (18/32)
<b>Advanced group</b>	100.00% (32/32)	90.63% (29/32)

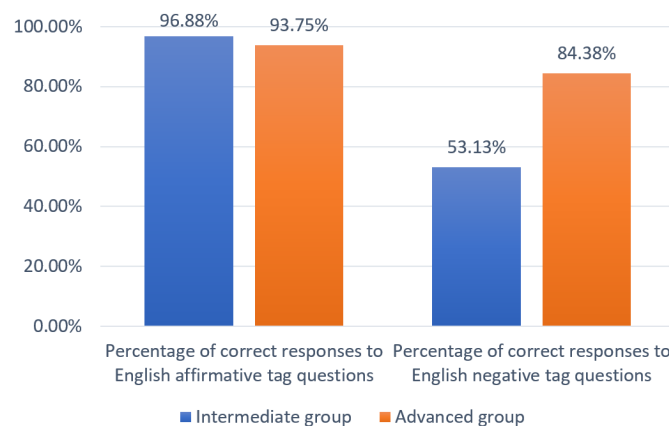


**Figure 2** Detailed results of the correct responses to English tag questions in the oral DCT by L1 Thai learners

**Table 3**

**Detailed results of the correct responses to English tag questions in the written DCT by L1 Thai learners**

Proficiency level	Written DCT	
	Percentages of correct responses to English affirmative tag questions	Percentages of correct responses to English negative tag questions
Intermediate group	96.88% (31/32)	53.13% (17/32)
Advanced group	93.75% (30/32)	84.38% (27/32)



**Figure 3** Detailed results of the correct responses to English tag questions in the written DCT by L1 Thai learners

That is, the L1 Thai intermediate learners' responses to English tag questions showed a higher degree of pragmatic transfer, which indicated that the intermediate learners were still dependent on their pragmatic knowledge in their L1 Thai. In contrast to the intermediate learners, the advanced learners' responses to English tag questions revealed a lower degree of pragmatic transfer, which signified that they seemed to be less dependent on their pragmatic knowledge in their L1 Thai. By way of explanation, the L1 Thai intermediate learners tended to produce yes + negative sentences to respond to English negative tag questions, which represents how

Thais normally respond to Thai tag questions, such as *khâ? mâj dâj paj* (= \*Yes, I didn't go.). The examples of the deviations by the L1 Thai learners are as follows: \*Yes, I don't eat spicy, and \*Yes, I'm not busy today.

Hypothesis two, which states that L1 Thai intermediate learners will produce less native-like responses to English tag questions whereas L1 Thai advanced learners will produce more native-like responses to English tag questions, was confirmed, as the Thai pragmatic norms of responding to Thai tag questions were more likely to be transferred to the L1 Thai intermediate learners' responses to English tag questions, rather than to those by L1 Thai advanced learners. This finding is consistent with Chantharasombat and Pongpairoj (2018). This might be further explicated that the L1 Thai learners were able to produce responses to English tag questions which contained a lower degree of pragmatic transfer in both oral and written production when they achieved the advanced level of English language proficiency and therefore produced more native-like responses to English negative Yes/No questions.

With respect to the pragmatic transfer demonstrated in responses to English tag questions in the oral and written production by the two participant groups, the results revealed that the responses to English negative tag questions in both oral and written DCTs were less native-like, or negatively pragmatically transferred from L1 Thai, as previously presented in Tables 2 and 3 and Figures 2 and 3.

More specifically in the responses in the oral DCT, as presented in Table 2 and Figure 2, the percentages of correct responses to English tag questions by the L1 Thai intermediate and advanced learners were illustrated. The scores of each proficiency group were generated as percentages of correct responses to English affirmative and negative tag questions, respectively. For the percentages of correct responses to English affirmative tag questions, the intermediate learners' scores stood at 93.75%, whereas the advanced learners' score amounted to 100%. For the percentages of correct responses to English negative tag questions, the intermediate learners scored 56.25%, while the advanced learners scored 90.63%.

It is apparent that both intermediate and advanced learners performed worse on answering English negative tag questions than on answering English affirmative tag questions. In other words, the L1 Thai learners' responses to English negative tag questions demonstrated a higher degree of the pragmatic transfer than those to English affirmative tag question in oral production.

More particularly in the written DCT, as Table 3 and Figure 3 show, the percentages of correct responses to English tag questions by the L1 Thai intermediate and advanced learners were provided. The scores of both participant groups were generated as percentages of correct responses to English affirmative and negative tag questions, respectively. With respect to the percentages of correct responses to English affirmative tag questions, the intermediate learners' scores were at 96.88%, whereas the advanced learners' scores were at 93.75%. It was worth mentioning, that even though the intermediate learners' scores were higher than the advanced learners' scores, the difference was considered small. Concerning the responses to English negative tag questions, the intermediate learners were at 53.13%, while the advanced learners scores were at 84.38%.



It can be seen that both intermediate and advanced learners responded to English negative tag questions far worse than they did to English affirmative tag questions. Hence, the L1 Thai learners' responses to English negative tag questions demonstrated a higher degree of pragmatic transfer than those to English affirmative tag questions in written production. This finding was similar to Ihsan (2018). More particularly, like L1 Thai learners, L1 Indonesian learners answered English negative tag questions less correctly than they did to English affirmative tag questions, even if their English language proficiency was already considered advanced.

At this stage, it is evident that the L1 Thai pragmatic norm was most likely to be transferred to the responses to English negative tag questions by the intermediate and advanced learners in both DCT types.

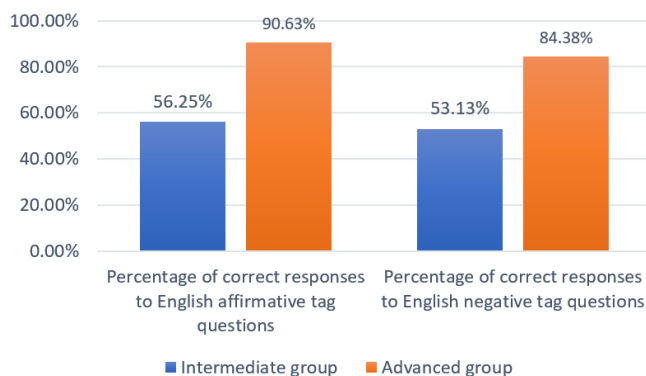
However, hypothesis three of this study states that responses to English tag questions in speaking by both L1 Thai intermediate learners and L1 Thai advanced learners demonstrate a higher degree of pragmatic transfer while those in writing by both learner groups demonstrate a lower degree of pragmatic transfer. Table 4 and Figure 4 are provided to illustrate detailed results of the responses to English negative tag questions by the intermediate and advanced learners in both oral and written DCTs.

Based on Table 4 and Figure 4 below, the advanced learners' responses to English negative tag questions in the written DCT (84.38%) were less native-like than those in the oral DCT (90.63%). Remarkably similar to the advanced learners' responses, the intermediate learners' responses to English negative tag questions in the written DCT (53.13%) were less native-like than those in the oral DCT (56.25%). From the comparison, it is clear that the responses to English tag questions in oral production by both L1 Thai intermediate and advanced learners demonstrated a lower degree of pragmatic transfer, whereas those in written production by both learner groups revealed a higher degree of pragmatic transfer.

**Table 4**

**Detailed results of the correct responses to English negative tag questions by the intermediate and advanced learners in both DCT types**

Proficiency level	Percentages of correct responses to English negative tag questions in oral DCT	Percentages of correct responses to English negative tag questions in written DCT
Intermediate group	56.25%	53.13%
Advanced group	90.63%	84.38%



**Figure 4** Detailed results of the correct responses to English negative tag questions by the intermediate and advanced learners in both DCT types

Such a result concerning the pragmatic transfer in the two modalities failed to confirm hypothesis three, which is that the responses to English tag questions in oral production by both L1 Thai intermediate and advanced learners showed a lower degree of pragmatic transfer, while those in written production by both learner groups manifested a higher degree of pragmatic transfer.

With hypothesis three rejected, it could be reasonable to assume that the structure of English tag question was highly regarded as one of the very unique phenomena of spoken language (Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006, p. 284). In addition, Holmes (1982, p. 61) stated that the English tag questions were considered as, “considerable conversational skills”, for speakers to be able to apply and precisely interpret. In a similar vein, Jovanović & Pavlović (2014) also shed light on the use of tag questions in spoken language that the construction of tag questions was more typically used in the spoken form than they were in the written form, since it indicated informality in communication.

All the evidence previously presented uncovered the reason why the L1 Thai learners’ responses to English tag questions in the oral DCT demonstrated a lower degree of pragmatic transfer. By way of explanation, due to the fact that the structure of English tag questions is generally used in a spoken discourse, rather than a written discourse, the L1 Thai learners of both proficiency groups were more able to orally produce responses to English tag questions, which contained less pragmatic transfer from their L1 Thai norms. In contrast, as mentioned that English tag questions were not frequently used in written language, the L1 Thai learners of both proficiency groups ineffectively produced written responses to English tag questions which resulted in more pragmatic transfer from their L1 Thai norms.

Another possible factor from some English textbooks specifically for L1 Thai learners could be of use to cast light on the L1 Thai learners’ ability to orally answer English tag questions correctly. To illustrate, the textbook *Your Space 3 Student’s Book* (Hobbs & Keddle, 2015, pp. 88-91), which was purposefully designed for ninth grade students in Thailand based on the Basic Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008), contained one unit (Unit 9), where the language focus concerns how to form tag questions and how to respond to them. Three dialogues provided included some examples of responses to English tag questions in context of dialogue, which

can help L1 Thai learners practice and achieve communication purposes. As well as in a textbook for university students in Thailand, for example, *the textbook English for Communication* (Pibulnakarin & Pokthitiyuk, 2012, pp. 3-4), students are provided information of how to produce canonical English tag questions and how to produce native-like responses to those questions. It can be implied that English textbooks for the L1 Thai learners in both secondary school and higher education levels play a great role in improving the L1 Thai learners' performance of responding to English tag questions.

Based on transfer of training<sup>6</sup> (Selinker, 1972), the textbooks which were designed particularly for the L1 Thai students in both secondary and higher education levels encouraged them to learn and practice responding to English tag questions in speaking, rather than in writing. Undoubtedly, the L1 Thai learners were more capable of responding to English tag questions in the spoken language, rather than in written language.

## CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at investigating the pragmatic transfer demonstrated in the L1 Thai learners' responses to English tag questions in speaking and writing. By seeking the degree of pragmatic transfer in the responses to English tag questions in the two modalities, the oral discourse completion task and the written discourse completion task were employed in order to elicit the data. The results revealed that the L1 Thai advanced learners produced more target-like responses to English tag questions at very high percentages in both modalities, while the L1 Thai intermediate learners produced less target-like responses to English tag questions at the same percentage in both modalities. Also, with respect to the participants' different levels of English language proficiency, it is evident that the advanced learners seemed to produce more native-like, or less pragmatically transferred, responses to English tag questions in comparison with the intermediate learners' responses. In addition, in relation to the two different modalities of production, the L1 Thai learners' responses to English negative tag questions in writing demonstrated a higher level of pragmatic transfer than those in speaking.

Based on the results, it could be inferred that the pragmatic transfer demonstrated in the L1 Thai learners' responses to English tag questions would become less, as the L1 Thai learners' English language proficiency levels reached the advanced level. Also, it could be rightly assumed that the L1 Thai learners' reliance on their Thai pragmatic norm was still found especially in their responses to English negative tag questions.

This current study yielded twofold implications: pedagogical and linguistic. For pedagogical implications, as the findings regarding the pragmatic transfer in the L1 Thai learners' responses to English tag questions were provided, they could help English language teachers in Thailand to design effective lesson plans and create teaching materials for teaching how to respond to

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<sup>6</sup> Transfer of training is one of the five major interlanguage processes of second language acquisition (Selinker, 1972). The transfer of training takes place depending on how L2 learners are taught. Moreover, the factors leading to the transfer of training are also the quality of textbooks and pedagogical approaches of teachers.

English tag questions effectively in both speaking and writing. More specifically, English language teachers should focus on differentiating between responses to English affirmative tag questions and responses to English negative tag questions, in order to increase awareness of the different linguistic patterns of the responses in both speaking and writing. For linguistic implications, it could be clearly seen that pragmatic transfer plays a great role in the L1 Thai learners' responses to English negative tag questions, especially in written production.

The limitation of this study is the number of participants per group in this study was relatively small. Therefore, more participants should be added for more generalizability in future research.

Last but not least, the following recommendations can feasibly be extended and implemented in future research. First, future studies can possibly include other pronouns, namely, He, She, We, and They, modal verbs, namely, Can, May, and Will, and other tenses, in order to be more conclusive. Second, as this is a preliminary study, the number of test items was quite small. The number of test items for both written and spoken tasks should be increased in future studies. Third, future studies can investigate L2 learners' perception to obtain more insight into their comprehension of responses to English tag questions and also to make a comparison and contrast between L2 learners' perception and production.

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