



# **BUILDING UP AWARENESS OF PRONUNCIATION AND CONNECTED SPEECH FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THAI STUDENTS' ACCENT WHEN SPEAKING ENGLISH**

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## **Abstract:**


This paper aims to encourage the building up of awareness of pronunciation and connected speech for the improvement of Thai students' accent when speaking English by pointing out the significance of the pronunciation components such as final single and cluster consonant collaborated with sound link in connected speech which benefits the learners of English to enrich their confidence when speaking English. The evidence results to convince the practice outcome after the period of time can tremendously assist the explicit pronunciation instruction of Thai teachers as well.

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**Keywords:** connected speech, sound link, consonant to vowel linking, linking 'r', sound disappear, sound join together, sound change.

## **Introduction:**

As we know that the English language is used worldwide to communicate among 7 billions of the world population by the mid-year 2011, so it becomes the world's language spoken around the globe. By the year 2015, there will be a regional cooperative society in the Southeast Asia called ASEAN Community. The AEC is one of three pillar (the other two being the ASEAN Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community) that make up the ASEAN Community (Denis, 2007) and the English language is agreed to serve as an official language amongst member nations that have a population of approximately 600 millions. For Thailand, the most important thing to be done is to prepare our people especially focusing on those in the next generation and those who are intellectuals to get ready to ASEAN Community. The first mission is to enrich them the English language skills that could help them communicate with fellows of other countries in the ASEAN Community. As we also know that the teaching of English in Thailand is a failure notice. Students in schools learn English for years, yet most of them cannot use English to convey their ideas or even communicate in general. Nowadays, teachers who are teaching English language in Thailand are trying hard to urge the students to communicate with foreigners effectively. Thousands of research studies have introduced techniques that help to solve the



problems. Currently, the writer is teaching the second year students in the subject of English for Communication at Rattaphum College, one of the faculties of Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya located in Rattaphum district, Songkhla province, Thailand.

When learning a language, there are many things to study-vocabulary, grammar, and practice reading, writing and speaking. A key to good speaking is good pronunciation (Ellis, 1997). Pronunciation is a language skill and what do I mean by good pronunciation? Pronunciation is the first and most important thing native speakers notice during a conversation. Knowing grammar and vocabulary is important but you need to pronounce those structures or words correctly. Also, native speakers are more likely to understand you, even if you make grammatical mistakes rather than if you make mistakes in pronunciation. Even the simplest words misspoken will keep you from effectively communicating with native English speakers. Achieving good pronunciation should be your main goal. You already know the grammar probably better than native speakers and the vocabulary will come in time. Many people, especially those who have not studied a foreign or second language, are easily irritated if they cannot quickly understand what non-native speakers are saying (Garrigues, 1999). This is sad but often true. Garrigues also claimed that the importance of good pronunciation can be easily realized by visiting a predominantly English speaking country and talking to the native speakers. If they constantly reply to your statements with “what?” ,”huh?” or ”could you repeat that”, then you know your pronunciation needs work. Going to a foreign country is the best way to assess your speaking skills. Keep in mind that your friends may be from the same country as you and make the same pronunciation mistakes. For this reason they cannot accurately judge your speaking abilities. If you should visit another country, go out and talk to people. You may want the comfort of speaking in your native language but to become a better English speaker, you have to talk like native speakers.


## **Literature Review:**

### **Pronunciation and accent**

Pronunciation-Teachers usually agree that there are three basic levels of English pronunciation:

- People usually don't understand what you are saying;
- People usually understand what you are saying but you may have to repeat your statements for clarification;
- People understand what you are saying the first time. This level is the goal of most English language learners.

Many non-native speakers worry about having an obvious accent when they speak English (Brown, 1992). This is unavoidable and depends on where you study English. Realize that the English spoken in England, Australia or Canada is different from the English spoken in the United States. Even within these countries there is a wide range of accents. People from New York speak different English than people from California (McArtur, 1998). You may beware though, that if your pronunciation is good, you will be understood anywhere you go. To achieve a “standard accent” in any country, you should listen to news broadcasts to get an idea of what typical native speakers in that area sound like.



The most important thing to remember is practice. Learning English takes time but if you practice often you will soon improve and be able to pronounce words like a native speaker. The ways to improve pronunciation include: (a) practice pronunciation in front of a mirror. You have to train your mouth to move in new ways in order to make new sounds. Watch your mouth as you speak, (b) think about each word before you say it. Try to imagine the position your mouth needs to be in to produce the sound, (c) remember that the spelling of words and their pronunciation are often different and (d) recognize that the English language has many different dialects depending on the country and the different regions within a particular country.

### **What is good English pronunciation?**

There are three levels of English pronunciation:

Level 1: People often don't understand what you want to say. You use the wrong sounds in English words.

Level 2: People understand what you want to say, but it is unpleasant to listen to you.

Level 3: People understand you, and your English is pleasant to listen to.


Level 3 will be called good pronunciation. Notice that good pronunciation is not "perfect American or British accent". You don't have to sound like the Queen of England or the President of the United States of America.

Why not? It is because there are many regional kinds of English. In England, people from Newcastle speak English differently from people in London. In America, people from New York City, California, and Texas each have their own pronunciation. So it is no problem if you have your own accent (Adrian, 1994).

But your accent must be close to the standards (American and British English). What does it mean? Turn on your TV and watch channels like CNN International, NBC, EuroNews, BBC, or Sky News. You will hear many different people (news anchors, reporters, etc.) from Germany, France, and other non-English-speaking countries. They all have good accents — easy to understand and pleasant (Dalton, 1995).

The rule is: If you are close to the standard, you can always communicate, and your English will be pleasant. If you are far from the standard, sometimes you won't communicate successfully.

In my English class, I have tried hard to explicit them on the pronunciation practice, for instance, final sound and linking sound tactic through easy expressions and songs for kids in the beginning in order to imitate the accent of the native speakers so that they can pronounce words, read and speak more fluently, correctly and sound like the native speakers as much as possible. I strongly believe that when the learners are able to pronounce words clearly and correctly, they will build up their confidence in using English automatically since they can use the linking technique in their speech naturally. I try to convince that the use of the



phonetic symbol and phoneme in the forms of picture and audio visual can help much in pronunciation instruction. Unfortunately, it is not much promoted in the English classrooms.

The problem I face is that most of the students I teach have difficulties with pronunciation of the single and cluster final consonants. It is because, in the Thai language, there are not any final single or cluster consonants to pronounce. In fact, they are supposed to be silent. Some of them are still unable to read even easy words. Besides, their accents are interfered with the Southern Thai dialect.

How can we put connected speech into English lesson? Teachers should realize the importance of the pronunciation practice and have the students pay attention to it and practice it as much as possible as the saying “practice makes perfect”. Try to make them notice that when the native speakers speak naturally, they do not pronounce a word, stop, and then say the next word in the sentence. Fluent speech flows with a rhythm and the words bump into each other. To make speech flow smoothly the way they pronounce the end and beginning of some words can change depending on the sounds at the beginning and end of those words. These changes are described as features of connected speech. What makes good pronunciation and what is it that native speakers do when they are talking that you can do to make your spoken English more fluent and natural (Morley, 1991). There are keywords to discuss below:

### **Sounds link**

Linking is a way of joining the pronunciation of two words so that they are easy to say and flow together smoothly. In English, there are different ways that this happens as followed:

Consonant to vowel linking - when the first word ends with a consonant sound and the second word begins with a vowel sound.


Vowel to vowel linking - when certain vowels come next to each other an extra sound is added to make the link smooth(Gerald, 2006).Linking 'r'

In standard British English (RP) the letter 'r' after a vowel sound at the end of word is often not pronounced. However, when the following word begins with a vowel the /r/ sound is pronounced to make a smooth link.

### **Sounds disappear**

When the sounds /t/ or /d/ occur between two consonant sounds, they will often disappear completely from the pronunciation. Sounds join together

When a word ends in a consonant sound and the following word begins with the same consonant sound, we don't pronounce two sounds - both sounds are pronounced together as one (Joanne, 1986).



**Conclusion:** Teachers should insert these approaches into their lesson plans and design some practical exercises for the students. These could help their students speak English with standard accent. In 2015, it is the timeline of the birth of Englishes in ASEAN community such as Brunei English, Cambodian English and so on. Thai students should at least have English standard accent in order to communicate and be understood by other people of ASEAN member nations.

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