

## Chapter VIII

### Conclusion

#### 8.1 Summary

This study attempts to survey the variation of the Thai (r) and English (r) in the speech of Bangkok Thai speakers who work in first-class hotels in Bangkok. The purpose of the study is three-fold: to analyze the variation of the phonological variables; to examine the relationship between the three selected social factors, sex, job level and English language background, and the variation of the Thai (r) as well as the English (r); and to explore the relationship between the variation of the Thai (r) and that of the English (r). Among the four major variants found in this study, [r] is prestigious in Thai while [ʀ] is prestigious in English. In both languages, [l] and [ø] are the stigmatized (r) variants in the prevocalic and postconsonantal positions, respectively.

The subjects in this study consist of fifty-eight Bangkok Thai speakers, selected by purposive sampling from three leading first-class hotels in Bangkok. There is an approximately equal number of males and females in four job levels. They were tape-recorded in a face-to-face

single interview in Thai with the researcher and in English with a native English speaker. The interviews were carried out at the subjects' place of employment. Percentages and two statistical tests, i.e. the chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) and the Spearman rank correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ), were used in the data analysis.

The results show that the patterns of the variants used in each language are not identical. In Thai the rate of [l] is much higher than [ɹ] which is higher than [r] in the prevocalic position. In clusters, the rate of [∅] is much higher than [l], [ɹ], and [r]. In English, the frequency of [ɹ] is greater than [l] and [r] in the prevocalic position. In clusters, the frequency of [ɹ] is greater than r-lessness, followed by [l] and [r]. The findings also reveal that when speaking Thai the subjects use the stigmatized T(r) variants of the relevant positions, i.e. [l] and [∅] extensively. In contrast, when speaking English they pronounce predominantly the prestigious English (r) variant [ɹ]. The rate of [r] in each language is always the lowest, although [r] is prestigious in Thai or less prestigious in English.

Concerning the variation of (r) according to sex, job level and English language background, the findings reveal that these social factors tend to have a significant

relationship with the variation of the two phonological variables, the Thai (r) and English (r), in both positions of occurrence. In general, female speakers make greater use of prestigious variants than male. There are a few exceptions, however. Female speakers of low status with less English language exposure use less prestigious variant than their male counterparts. This may be due to the fact that, of the two sex groups of low status the males may be more ambitious to climb up through their social scales. Besides, the findings show that there is no sex differentiation in the use of E(r) among the speakers of the middle job level with more English exposure. This is probably due to the fact that both sex groups have been abroad and are familiar with [r] pronunciations.

In relation to the variation of (r) according to job level, the results show that speakers of a higher status tend to make greater use of prestigious variants than those of a lower status. This is particularly true in the case of [r] for the E(r), irrespective of the sex group and type of English language background. However, with regard to the T(r), there tends to be no class differentiation in group of either sex with more English exposure. This is probably because they all have the same background, i.e. they have been abroad, and for them that may be considered more prestigious than adopting a

prestigious T(r) form. The study shows that (statistical) hypercorrection is evident among low status speakers of the male group with less English language background. Their rate of [r] for the T(r) is greater than high status and middle status counterparts. The data has also shown that the linguistic behaviours of the two middle job levels qualify them as belonging to the same group.

With regard to the relationship between (r) and type of English language background, the findings show that speakers with more English language background tend to have a higher frequency of prestigious variants than those with less English exposure. However, the results indicate that speakers with less English language background of either sex group in the managerial position make greater use of the prestigious T(r) variant than their counterparts with more English language background. This may result from the fact that the former are more aware of the social value of the T(r) than the latter who have spent part of their life living abroad. The study also shows that English language background has no effect on the use of E(r) of either sex of speakers in the high status job level. This is probably due to the fact that they have to use the E(r) variant most appropriate to the high status position they hold. The data analysis finds that the two groups of speakers with less English exposure have similar linguistic behaviour in

the use of prestigious variants. They were subsequently combined into a single group.

Finally, a statistical analysis of rank correlation coefficients shows that there are significant correlations between the use of

- a. [l] in English and [l] in Thai in the prevocalic position
  - b. [ø] in English and [ø] in Thai in clusters
- of the subjects as a whole.

The statistical analysis indicates further that the three social variables tend to have an effect upon the level of association between the use of stigmatized variants in English and those in Thai. The level of association is likely to be higher in the female group than the male, in a lower job level than a higher, and in the group with least English language background than that with more English language background. Two social groups and one sub-social group have significant correlations between prevocalic [l] in English and in Thai. They are female speakers as a whole, speakers with least English language background (Type III), and middle status female speakers with less English exposure. The only social group that has a significant correlation between the use of [ø] in English and [ø] in Thai is female speakers as a whole.

## 8.2 Discussion

The discussion in this section will be mainly concerned with the implications of the findings for the concept of *prestigious* and *stigmatized* variants, the study of sound change, and language transfer.

8.2.1. As far as the T(r) is concerned, the concepts of socially *prestigious* and *stigmatized* variants in conversational style need to be reconsidered. As can be seen from the findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the subjects use [l] and [ø] extensively for the T(r) in the prevocalic and postconsonantal position, respectively, regardless of social factors. Prevocalic [l] and [ø] in clusters have in fact become norms of the T(r), at least in conversational style. Previous findings on the use of the T(r) in Beebe (1974) and Treyakul (1986) reveal similar results. The prestigious T(r) variant, [r], turns out to be scarce in conversation. This is in sharp contrast to the prestigious E(r) variant, [ɹ], which occurs most frequently in the subjects' English conversation. The status of [r] and [l]/[ø] in this regard becomes doubtful. The question is whether prevocalic [l] and [ø] would still be considered stigmatized in view of the fact that the great majority of people use it. On the other hand, would

[r] be still considered prestigious in spite of the fact that it is hardly used and heard in real life situations?

Wolfram and Fasold (1974:82) comment that the relationship between prestigious and stigmatized variants is not always a stable one. They say that it is quite possible for the prestige value of a variant to be eventually lost, and the variant is simply adopted with little or no prestige value. Examples of such change of the prestige value can be cited from previous findings.

In New York City, Labov (1972) has shown that the prestige value of postvocalic (r) presence has changed from generation to generation. For the older generation, the presence of the (r) is of little or no prestige value, because there is very little differentiation between social classes of older informants. But for younger informants, the presence of (r) is quite clearly correlated with class. It has a clear-cut prestige value. (See also 2.1.2).

In Edinburgh, Romaine (1978) describes change in the value of postvocalic (r) in Scottish English. At the turn of the century, the trill [r], which might be reduced to the tap [ɾ], was the most common as well as socially preferred form. At present, however, the

approximant [ɹ] is more frequently found. In addition, [ɹ] is associated with the middle-class, and particularly in teacher training colleges in Scotland. (See also 2.1.2).

In the light of these examples of (r) changes, it can be said that the T(r) is in the process of changing phonetically and possibly, socially. On the basis of previous and present findings, it can be expected that [ɹ] will remain the traditional prestigious variant in formal style while prevocalic [l] and [ø] will eventually be the norm for the T(r) and possibly be no longer considered stigmatized in the informal style of conversation.

8.2.2. The research findings reveal that the T(r) is in the process of changing. Its most frequent variant is [l], which is the realization of another phoneme in Thai, i.e. /l/. If the trend still continues, it will lead to an inevitable merger of two distinctive sounds or phonemes in Thai, /r/ and /l/, in the prevocalic position.

As regards (r) in the postconsonantal position, the change is mainly concerned with the loss of /r/ in /r/-clusters. The change is in fact totally different



from that in the prevocalic position, in which /r/ is replaced by /l/.

Since two kinds of change are involved, it may be concluded that these are two separate phonological phenomena. If it were the same process of sound change, one would expect the use of [l] for (r) in clusters, and thus the cluster structure would be retained. As it turns out, (r) in clusters is most frequently realized as [Ø], not [l].

8.2.3. The statistical analysis indicates that the uses of stigmatized (r) variants in English and in Thai of subjects as a whole are significantly correlated. Their use of stigmatized English (r) variants is in fact not independent of their linguistic behaviour of (r) pronunciations in Thai. They borrow the variants from their mother tongue in their English. Therefore, it can be concluded that the subjects' use of prevocalic [l] and [Ø] for (r) in English occurs as a result of *language transfer*.

Language transfer also plays an important role in the use of stigmatized English (r) variants of most social and social sub-groups of subjects. The level of association varies from moderate to high, although most of the  $r_s$

values may not be large enough to be statistically significant. At the same time, the study shows that there is a relationship between the social variables and the level of association. The association tends to be lower in the male group, and in the high status group. Thus, in learning a second or foreign language, one must take into account not only the language systems of both mother tongue and second or foreign language, but also the social factors. James (1980) refer to these two considerations as "microlinguistics" and "macrolinguistics", respectively.

English is a second language for the Thai subjects. Since the study shows that various social groups use the *r* variable in English with different degrees of influence from their mother tongue, it can be concluded that the English *r* used by the subjects is unstable. It may move closer to the target language if the speakers are motivated, e.g. given a job promotion. On the other hand, it may not develop further if the speakers deem it unnecessary.

8.2.4. The study shows that the subjects use [ɹ] for the Thai *r*, too, but not as much as one would have thought. A great deal of evidence indicates that they are able to pronounce [ɹ], particularly when they speak

English. The fact that they do not seem to prefer [ɹ] for the T(r) is probably due to the fact that [ɹ] is an alien sound. [ɹ] is not native to Bangkok Thai (Beebe 1980:387). Since [ɹ] does not exist in their Thai phonological system they do not use it as much when speaking Thai.

### 8.3 Suggestions

This study has investigated only certain aspects of social variation of (r) in Thai and (r) in English spoken by Thais.

There are still many other related topics that were not included in the study but would merit further research. Some of them will be presented in the following section.

8.3.1. A study of variation of the T(r) among speakers of various Thai dialects is one topic that deserves attention. Since /r/ does not exist in the phonological system in some Thai dialects, it could be hypothesized that people born and living in Bangkok would pronounce more prestigious T(r) variants than other dialect speakers. Whether the hypothesis is supported or rejected still remains to be seen since, as Beebe (1974), Treyakul (1986) as well as the present study have found out, various groups of Bangkok Thai speakers adopt an extensive use of single initial [l] variant and r- simplification for the T(r).

8.3.2. Based on Reid (1978, reviewed in 2.2.2), social and stylistic variation of the T(r) in the speech of schoolchildren in Bangkok would be another subject for research. So far no study has been attempted. Their T(r) usage pattern, as compared to that of adults', and their awareness of the significance of the trill [r] and the tap [r̥] would be a valuable indicator of the future trends of the T(r).

8.3.3. The rate of r-dropping in the speech of Bangkok Thai of Bangkok origin at the present time is another challenging topic. It has been almost twenty years that Beebe (1974) presented her findings and since then no other work has been done on this area. The findings may be used as empirical evidence for change in real time. Of equal interest is the survey on the prevocalic (r) and its social variation in the speech of Bangkok Thai speakers of Bangkok origin. Recently, the pronunciations of /r/ as well as clusters /l/ in Thai were brought to public's attention again. A former Prime Minister explicitly expressed his concern over the "correct" pronunciations of /r/ and /l/ in several cabinet meetings (Secretary to the Cabinet, 12 January 1988, translated into English in Senawong (1989:313)).

8.3.4. Another topic for future research is comparison of the use of the T(r) among speakers of various occupations, e.g. teachers of the Thai language compared to doctors and engineers. Another study may involve T(r) variation of teachers of different subjects, e.g. teachers of Thai compared to those of arithmetic, physical education and science.

8.3.5. Variation of the T(r) and the factor of time is another subject that is worth investigating. Douglas-Cowie (1978, reviewed in 2.2.2) finds that in speaking to an outsider, the informants use a prestigious variant more frequently in the first hour of conversation than in the second when they become more familiar with the outsider. It would be interesting to see whether a parallel study of the T(r) will yield a similar result. That is, prestigious T(r) variants occur more in the first half of conversation than in the second half.

8.3.6. A further research project on social stratification of both T(r) and E(r) can be undertaken by extending the results of the present study and by using Labov's model (1972:43-69). By selecting three hotels in Bangkok representing high status, middle status and low status, one can test a hypothesis about the effect of social status on the variation. Sex and job level are

included as social variables. It may be hypothesized, for example, that employees of a higher status hotel would use more prestigious T(r) and E(r) variants than those of a lower status. Another hypothesis to be tested may be that the rate of prestigious variants is higher among male and female speakers of a higher status hotel than those of a lower status. Within each hotel further distinctions could be made among the speakers of different job levels.

8.3.7. Stylistic variation of (r) in English as spoken by Thais has been studied by Beebe (1980; see also 2.1.3). More can be done on the topic by expanding levels of style, e.g. the most formal style of minimal pairs, and the formal style of passage reading. (Beebe studies two styles: formal word listing and informal conversation). In addition, social factors, e.g. age, sex, type of English exposure and social class can be incorporated.

8.3.8. The hypercorrect use of [r] or [ʌ] for /l/ in Thai and [ɹ] for /l/ in English is another topic of study. In the present data, though not included in the study, such occurrences are observed in both languages. This phenomenon is what Beebe (1974:355) calls "hypercorrection", which is the same notion as what Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 87-88) call "structural hypercorrection" (5.1.2).

8.3.9. l-deletion in Thai as well as in English was also noticed in the data collected in this study. Social variation of (l) clusters in Thai has been studied by Beebe (1974) and its stylistic variation in both prevocalic position and clusters has been investigated by Treyakul (1986) but research on l-cluster simplification in English spoken by Thais and its social variation has never been done before. Correlation of l-deletion in Thai and in English, similar to the present study, should also be incorporated to see whether there is any significant relationship between the two. The existing data gathered for the present study are readily available for such investigation.

8.3.10. Another subject of study deals with the post-vocalic /r/ and the word-final /l/ in English spoken by Thais. Both /r/ and /l/ are phonemes in Thai but they occur only in the initial position or clusters. In American English, /r/ can occur in the postvocalic position, as in *cart*, *fourth*. The post-vocalic /r/ and the word-final /l/ in English words are alien to Thais. Many Thais pronounce these sounds while others do not and still others may substitute the word-final /l/ with other sounds, e.g. [n] [ø] and [w] (see Williams). The questions are what are the factors responsible for such variations, and to what extent

some social factors like sex, social status and English language background have impact on these variations.