English Speaking and Pronunciation competence in Students of Suan Sunantha Rajabhat University

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ABSTRACT

English language becomes a various domain as a means of communication such as international business and conferences science and technology. English speaking becomes essential to people in all aspects of life. However despite of studies and efforts contrivance of SSRU students was a lame. There are factors that are impeding the success of English communication and pronunciation in which SSRU students should be focused. The principles of this studies are to identify the features of pronunciation, factors affecting the learning of pronunciation, & elaborate the integration of speaking English into the curriculum. 1. Persuade the possible factor cause that are affecting the students pronunciation in learning English. 2. Investigate the probable grounds that interfere the student’s knowledge in words stress assignment. To accomplish this task, a general classroom activity has been randomly did among the students aging 18 years old up to 25 about 90 students of which 52 are females and 38 are males has been participated. The test consists of self introduction with their names, age, gender, and status in front of the class. The result showed that their skills in English speaking and pronunciation is very limited. In light of the result didactic suggestions were offered to improve teaching and learning English pronunciation to support the learner’s overall communicative skills and word stress in particular.

Keywords: English pronunciation features, SSRU students,& word stress assignment
Introduction

English has become the major communication in every part of the globe. One of the key requirements for language proficiency is to secure understandable pronunciation for the language learner. The importance of speaking English becomes a necessity. In response to the demands of this skills, SSRU has made a constant effort to improve the students learning skills both in speaking and writing performance. In order for them to enable to obtain job opportunities, promotions and career advancement. The expansion of the use of English in this direction has been documented and discussed by applied linguists thought the past decade.

With the surge in number of English users, English language teaching professionals has increased world wide. In order to meet the demands, SSRU includes in the curriculum materials, facilities and professional development for teachers, teachers need to be provided with courses and materials to help them improve their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation. Added with that high quality, effective materials, especially computer-based materials with audio demonstrations, for learners of ESL/EFL pronunciation, both for self-access and for use in classes where the teacher needs support of this kind. Despite of this effort, according to studies (e.g. Pongsiriwit, 2002) reported that the four skills of listening, speaking and writing are still far from average. Students are rather engage in other extra curricular activities rather than focusing on learning English language. English speaking seems to be difficult for SSRU students maybe because it is not their native language and since English is a foreign language to them the exposure of English speaking is somewhat limited. Second, Thai teacher should speak English like a native utterance English speaker as possible this accounts lies into pronunciation of Thai teachers of English as well. Both teachers and learners must change roles and teaching methodologies must change objectives. Teachers must act as pronunciation coaches and learners must be proactive learners taking the initiative to learn. The methodologies of teaching must change from emphasizing segmental elements of pronunciation to supra-segmental element.

Features Involved in English Pronunciation

As English becomes the language use in various domains of communications international speakers either native or non native English speaker should express the meaning persuasively.

- Perceptibility (the speaker should produce a sound pattern that is appreciable as English)
Articulateness (the listener is able to understand the meaning of the word that is said)

Intelligibility (the listener is able to understand the meaning/ the purpose of what you said)

For example, a speaker might say Lock the door as LIS look the door. This is unlikely to be intelligible because of inaccurate sound, stress and intonation patterns. As a result, a listener would not find the speaker apprehensible, because meaning is not available. Because the speaker is inconceivable, the listener would also not be able to interpret the assertion as an indirect request to close the door clear pronunciation is a must in every communication. Even where learners produce minor inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar, they are more likely to communicate effectively when they have good pronunciation and intonation (Burns, 2003). For this reason it is very important for SSRU students to be aware on how segmental and supra segmental interact with each other in speech production.

Segmental (e.g. consonant and vowels)

Suprasegmental (e.g. stress intonation, rhythm, rate, volume)

Suprasegmental plays an important role for making all kinds of meanings in particular speakers attitude to what they are saying. (to the person they are saying it too.) and in bringing out once spoken word relates to another.

Amongst this studies students focusing on speaking skills pronunciation is receiving more attention in SSRU classrooms. Students should acquire the fundamental skills in because it can affect accuracy and comprehension. The area of pronunciation in the field of Management Science by SSRU students seems to be relatively less explored. The importance for successful communication in this study wished to generate pronunciation competence and word stress assignment.

Literature Review

This section gives a description of factors which contribute to students’ pronunciation competence. Subsequently, previous studies concerning English pronunciation competence of SSRU students are presented.

A. Factors Affecting the Students Pronunciation

In this section, it discussed the factors that are affecting the SSRU students pronunciation speaking skills they are as follows:
Attitude

Attitude is one of the most important element affecting the learning skills in speaking English and is sometimes the strongest barriers SSRU students often neglected English as one of the vital way of communication Internationally or domestically they do not feel that learning English is important and most of them do not have perspective in the future. This phenomenon leads the researcher’s to study the personal characteristics of the student’s learner that mainly play a significant role in their success towards foreign language acquisitions. In a recent study, students are more focused on learning other skills such as animations, advertising and entertainment rather than focusing in the field of English studies. In the 70’s Roger Brown (Brown 1973) investigated and cited that some of first language acquisition (FLA) where he says that “despite individual differences in rate of language learning, all first language learners seems to progress through different stages of acquisition. Social environment plays a significant role affecting the child’s behavior. He/she is going to learn to speak the languages that he/she is exposed to and not the language that his biological parents used to. As pointed out by Brown (1992) students who has a positive attitude towards the people who speaks the target language were likely to learn pronunciation more successfully.

When discussing the attitude of the second language learners in relation to their pronunciation, it is necessary to note the work done by Schuman (1986) on acculturation and its role on the process of language learning. His acculturation model defines that learner will acquire the target language to the degree that they acculturate. (Celce-Murcia, et al 1996) He refers to the learners openness to a target culture as well as desire to be socially integrated in the target culture.

Motivation, courage and exposure

The learner’s motivation is the strongest factor contributing to the success or failure of each and every learner. It is the strength of every student to push through a certain goal in life without motivation, and courage one cannot be succeeded. It is their driving force to pursue a course of action in initiating and learning process of foreign language. Exposure contribute to the enhancement and development of one’s personality and self confidence. The group's amount of contact with the target culture has an effect on the amount of English acquired and used. Shy or introvert students would not prefer to participate in classroom activities they prefer to listen rather than to participate leading to the lack of any opportunities to make practices and to make full use of phonological activities. Teacher should
encourage them. It is important because its going to help students to have models to be followed and to develop self confidence and to make comparisons between different English varieties. However motivation or instinct comes from inside. Students who wants to learn English because they like learning new language and has a specific target in life. According to Dornyei (as cited in Despagne 2003) states that “attitude are created, and can be changed, through 4 factors: family, teachers, peers and school. They refer to Gardner and Lambert’s research on motivation wherein two types are highlighted. The first type of motivation is instrumental, which is motivation to learn the L2 for the value of linguistic achievement. Second is integrative motivation, which describes the desire to continue learning about the second language culture. According to Gardner and Lambert students with integrative motivation would be expected to work harder to develop communication skills in the second language because they are more likely than their less interested counterparts to seek out native speakers of the language.

Mother tongue influence

Students of SSRU often neglected the opportunity to interact with the native speaker either inside or outside the classroom. Since Thailand is one of the most visited countries in Asia particularly the European or Western people the feeling of anxiety and shyness to interact with them. The native speaker is having a significant advantage rather than second language speaker. In as much as native language speaker is having the most influential factor in accounting for student’s speaking and pronunciation especially foreign accent. Many native language speakers have foreign accent that identifies them as nonnative speakers. An understanding of the of the features learner’s accent and their impact on intelligibility can help teacher’s identify and characteristics of learner pronunciation. If the students are familiar with the sound it could be easier for them to distinguished and diagnose effectively their own impediment.

Age

Age has been one of the topic most frequently discussed in contribution to the learning skills and pronunciation of English language. As can be seen, if the learner can pronounce the words correctly with a native like accent, they must probably started it at early age probably childhood years. It has been found out that certain evidence for children over adult in second language learning. It is stated that pronunciation can be achieved at earlier stage. It is believe that children”s advantage over adults is due to the fact that they do not consider trying new sounds a risk and are not so worried
about social acceptance by peers, or any other people around while adults feel more at home with their established native language and have stress when trying to speak a foreign language (FL) at the prospect of sounding foolish and ridiculous. One view states that acquiring a language (native or foreign) is a natural achievement for children and becomes more difficult as one becomes older. This statement is supported by the belief that there exists a critical period during which the ability to acquire the competence reaches its peak, and after which this ability declines. It has been observed and suggested that full development of language is possible only if it is acquired before puberty. However, (Collier 2003) Stated that the older students were faster and more efficient than younger ones in the early stage of learning. He stated that older students and adolescents developed their language skills continuously but adult will soon be subside after the first year. However his study did not propose any guarantee or evidence for a candid link between age and the ability to speak and pronounce of a new language.

Exposure to target Language

SSRU Students often speaks their own native language wherever they are either in campus or outside. The influence of society affects greatly the fluency of speaking the second language. According to the language learner theories learners acquire language primarily from the input they receive and they must receive large amounts of comprehensible input before they are required to speak. Lacking of practice to English speaking and pronunciation is another hindrance in advancing their English learning skills. People who didn’t lived in an English speaking country find difficulties in speaking rather than those who live in an English speaking country. According to Siriwisut (1994) and Serttikul (2005) indicated that language experience had an effect on pronunciation ability. Based on their studies students who has a poor pronunciation considered as less experienced, and has more language problem rather that those students who has good communication skills. For this reason the students with the good communication and pronunciation experience would improve better rather than the poor ones. The success in learning speaking English and pronunciation depends on the students eagerness to learn and ability to overcome the hindrances that may arise. Practice makes it perfect. Teacher should practice and make it a habit to encourage the students to speaks in English whenever they are in the classroom or outside. Either for a foreign teacher or a native Thai teacher. Verbal communication also affects the supra-segmental features of speech such as pitch, stress and intonation. Such features are often not learned from
reading a textbook or dictionary. Beyond the supra-segmental features, are the non-linguistic elements involved in language such as gestures, body language, and facial expressions that contributes so much meaning yet are not learned through explicit instruction, but rather through sheer experience in a language and culture. Due to minimal exposure to the target language and contact with native speakers, adult English language learners often do not acquire a native-like level of pronunciation, regarding fluency, control of idiomatic expressions and cultural pragmatics (gestures, body language, and facial expressions) (Shumin 1997) The more they speak it on a day to day basis the better they will be. Students could simply improve their learning skills if they will spend more time and show interest and pay attention on it. There is no shortcut way in attaining a goal you have to work hard for it. You could simply improve the development of pronunciation competence if you are motivated and has a strong will to do so after all learning process takes time but it can be attain through working hard and dedication to expose to a certain target language that you wish to learn.

Fear of making mistakes

Generally speaking Thai people are afraid of making mistakes during the teaching and learning process. Different from other neighboring Asian countries students which are confident enough to express, participate and suggests in the classroom discussion. SSRU students often face difficulties in speaking English many of them prefers to keep silent rather than participate because of the fear that they may commit mistakes and laughed by their peers. They keep quiet and listen rather than expressing what’s inside their mind and be a part of the discussion and conversation with the teacher and fellow students. Students thinks they are un capable, less competent, Some research reported that the four English skills including, listening, speaking, reading and writing Thailand lagged behind from other ASEAN countries Thai students particularly in SSRU speaking English seems to be difficult for them because this is not their native language. Another problem in speaking in class is that participation is very low or uneven. Often at a time one participant will talk and speak in front of the class while the rest will just listen. There is a tendency to dominate while others speaks very little or not at all. To overcome this problem a general classroom activity is often practiced. Students are being asked by teachers to read a particular articles in order to find out whose student find difficulties in reading and pronunciation of a certain words. This practice is needed for them to overcome the difficulties in English learning. At the end of the discussion several question will be ask by the teacher to find out who
understands it among the students. Those who doesn’t participate and keep quite signifies unsatisfactory mode of learning and understanding.

Word Stress

Word stress relates to the eminence given to certain words in a pronunciation. These focus words are stressed (made long and loud) emanate • the rhythm of the speaking • the most meaningful part of the remarks. At the meaning level, some words are given more notable than others to differentiate which meaning is essential for example, compare: • Can you take the bag (not someone else) • Can you take the bag! (not the shoes ) Currently teaching pronunciation in computer-based contexts follow the communicative approach in teaching pronunciation. Students should learn to pronounce the word correctly They need to master —good pronunciation, not perfect accents. Accents cannot be achieved easily especially if you are not a native speaker. Accents is learned through a day to day basis of communication and basically it is acquired in early stage of childhood years. People who are a native speakers tend to pronounce the word with an accent. It is learned at the early stage of their childhood. That is, emphasis should be on suprasegmental features of pronunciation—not segmental aspects—to help learners acquire communicative competence. Over the past years, increasing attention has been placed on providing pronunciation instruction that meets the communicative needs of non-native speakers (NNSs)

In order to speak English clearly one has to consider the importance to stress the correct syllables in each word. This is called word stress, which signifies pronouncing one syllable of a multisyllabic word with larger significance than the other syllables in the word.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to asses the learning capacity of SSRU students. From 1st year college to graduating. To be able to determine the factors that impeding them to achieve a good learning English speaking skills and to overcome the difficulties that may arise. This studies aims to assess SSRU students learners in English speaking and pronunciation competence and the relationship between the three factors: faculty, gender and the experience in studying English and their knowledge regarding word stress assignment.
Participants

The participants of this study were students of SSRU in the Department of Management Science and International Communication. This participants were ideal for this study since they are Thai students and Thai language were their mother tongue and they don’t have exposure to the varieties of spoken language except in the classroom. This are the group of students with mixed ability in the class.

Instruments

The research instrument used to collect data from this study were questionnaires and class observation. The questionnaires consists of lists of selected words to test the participants “word stress” competence. Since the participants are college students in the university studying of English for at least 12 years has been taken into account.

The test regarded as the main instrument of the study. Part one is considered as the background questionnaire for the students citing the personal information of the participants (1) gender, (2) major of studies Part two comprises of list of words compiled from the textbooks that they are using . (Interchange 4th edition) by Jack C.. Richards with Jonathan Hull and Susan Proctor. The students were divided into two groups the other and the second group in International Communication. It was expected that the students will be familiar from the words given to them. Fifty words were given to set of students identifying the meaning of the words. The result of the study however signifies that most of the students doesn’t understand the exact meaning of the English words. As a result a list of 40 multi syllabic words was selected and used as the test of the words stress assignment competence of the participants. Another set is given to 10 students identifying the proper pronunciation of the words. Each participant has been called up to read and speak the correct pronunciation of the words. The result however is unsatisfactory. Pronunciation of “R” and “L” is somewhat confusing. They pronounce the word such as “sea shore” as sea sole.

Data And Analysis Procedure

After the test administration the data obtained the participants coded into group for statistical analysis. As for the data gained from the task of word stress assignment the test was scored manually among them. The qualitative data were derived from the class observation that usually happened everyday during the classroom session.

Results
The analysis and the descriptive statistics of the test were scored from word stress assignment showed in general the mean score is 16.84. The highest score is 26 and the lowest score is 9. And the SD value is 3.35. This clearly indicates that SSRU students were found difficulties in pronouncing five syllable words and two syllable words. The test has been taken from the textbooks that they are using in the classroom. The mean score of 16.84 shows that their ability/performance is low and therefore needs to improve.

The results of the test were indicated below

**Table 1. Data of the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. Of Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 Test Result by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>15.73</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>18.37</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>16.84</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*F=15.90  P=0.00

Among the 90 students participants as shown in Table 1 majority were Female (F= 57.78 or 52 students) and 38 students participants were male (M=42.22) As for the test result that illustrates in table 2 the female participants are more better than the male participants. The result analysis indicates that the mean score is 18.37 for female participants and 15.73 for male participants. The ANOVA reveals a statistically significant difference of (F=15.90, p=0.00) It shows that the gender contributes a significant effect in the learning process.

**Conclusion**

Pronunciation is consider as one of the most difficult parts of a language for SSRU students since they didn’t use to speak English during their childhood years. However students can overcome this difficulties in learning the pronunciation of a foreign language if the teacher and students participate together in the total learning process. Success can be attained if each has set individual teaching and learning goals. Pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of phonemes: it must be viewed in...
the same light as grammar, syntax, and discourse that is an important part of communication. Research has shown and current didactic thinking on pronunciation maintains that intelligible pronunciation is seen as an essential component of communicative competence. With this in mind, the teacher must then set obtainable aims that are applicable and suitable for the communication needs of the students. The students play an important role in the learning process and should be actively involved in their own learning. However, there are so many problems that interfere with the English learning skills among the Thai students particularly in SSRU. First, students are not exposed to native speakers since Thailand was never been colonized by the native speaker country such as European countries. It still has a great deal that contributes to the factors that impede the Thai learner to speak and understand the second language. Psychological effect that may contribute to an unsatisfactory rate in English learning. Students preferred to listen and keep quiet rather than to participate and talk in the class discussion. The feeling of anxiety, shyness, uneasiness, frustrations, self-doubt lack of confidence and motivation is a barrier to their learning skills.

The content of the course should be integrated into the communication class, with the content emphasizing the teaching of suprasegmentals, linking pronunciation with listening comprehension, and allowing the students for meaningful pronunciation practice in a day to day basis particularly in the classroom. By doing this so, the students can able to cope up the fear in talking in front of the class with the teacher acting as a 'speech coach', rather than as a mere checker of pronunciation, the feedback given to the student can encourage learners to improve their pronunciation. If these criteria are met, all learners, within their learner unique aims, can be expected to do well learning the pronunciation of a foreign language.

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Apart from me this research will certainly immerse for those who are interesting to learn about the subject and I hope they will find it comprehensible.

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References


