Language Group: Thai
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Language Group Specific Informational Report: Thai

http://www.flags.net/THAL.htm

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TESL 539
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ภาษาไทย – Thai

- Language Family: Tai-Kadai
- Tonal Language
- SVO Language
- Isolating Language
- Alphabet
  - Based on Old Khmer
  - Devised in 1283 A.D.
  - 44 Consonants (21 Phonemes)
  - 15 Vowel Symbols
- Written L → R, No Spaces

Major Dialects

- Central Thai
  - High Prestige
  - Medium of Education and Media
  - About 65m Speakers
- Northeastern (Isaan) Dialect
  - Almost Identical to Lao
  - About 15m Speakers
- Southern Dialect
  - About 5m Speakers
- Northern (Lanna) Dialect
  - About 6m Speakers

http://maps.nationmaster.com/country/th/1
Registers

- Informal/Spoken
- Formal/Written
- Rhetorical
- Religious (Pali, Sanskrit)
- Royal (Khmer)

- Function words, pronouns, and grammar vary from register to register.
Pronunciation: Single Consonants

- The shaded phonemes above occur in Thai. The unshaded phonemes are problematic.
- The phonemic changes in the box to the right are often transferred into English.

(Swan, 2001, p. 345)

(James, 2001, p. 153)
Pronunciation: Consonant Clusters

- **Deletion**
  - [l] and [r] are often dropped from initial consonant clusters.
  - Only the first phoneme of a final consonant cluster is pronounced.

- **Epenthesis**
  - [a] is often added to split consonant clusters that do not occur in Thai.

(James, 2001, p. 149)
Other Phonological Issues

- When speaking English, Thai speakers often make errors related to:
  - Syllabic Stress
  - Vowel Length
  - Vowel Reduction
  - Replacement of [r] by [l]
  - Epenthesis of Glottal Stops Before Initial Vowels

http://listoftheday.blogspot.com/2011/05/effed-up-ronald-mcdonald-pics-of-day.html
Morphological Issues

- Thai is an isolating language. English inflectional affixes are difficult for Thai speakers to use correctly.
- Thai speakers commonly confuse:
  - Adjectives and Verbs
  - Adjectives and Adverbs

Table 4.15 English inflectional affixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>the books</th>
<th>John’s book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plural -s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive (genitive) -’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>He reads well.</th>
<th>He is working.</th>
<th>He worked.</th>
<th>He has eaten/studied.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd person sg nonpast -s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive -ing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense -ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past participle -en/-ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>the smaller one</th>
<th>the smallest one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparative -er</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superlative -est</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(O’Grady & Archibald, 2005, p. 127)
Syntactical Issues in English

- **Tenses** - Thai verbs are never inflected. Separate words mark tense.
- **Articles** – There are no articles in the Thai language.
- **Question Formation** – Thai uses more tag questions than English.
- **Omission of Subject**
  - In Thai, the subject may be omitted. This is often transferred into English.
  - **Example:**

    พอใจแล้วแค่นั้น
    por jai laew kae nan
    happy already just that

    (I'm) happy with just that.
Semantic Issues

- English does not have precise equivalents of Thai pronouns.
- เธอ (pronoun) you, she
- เขา (pronoun) he / she (not gender specific), they
- Thai uses untranslatable particles to indicate degrees of formality and intent. In English, Thai speakers may have difficulty conveying shades of meaning.
- ครับ / ค่ะ (particles) indicate respect
- วะ (particle) indicates informality / disrespect
Pragmatics

- Beliefs about the Body
  - Head – sacred, do not touch or reach over
  - Hands – use the right hand to give and receive
  - Feet – never point with the feet or step over someone

- Eye Contact
  - It is impolite to make prolonged eye contact with someone of higher social rank.

- Names and Titles
  - Thais tend to use a title followed by a first name.

- Proximity
  - Thais are more comfortable than Americans being close to members of the same sex and less comfortable being close to members of the opposite sex.
Significant Cultural Differences

• เก่งใจ
  • Respect, especially for elders
  • Uncomfortable denying requests

• ใจเย็น ๆ
  • Negative emotions not shown
  • Nonconfrontational
References

Books


Internet Resources

Internet Sites


Internet Resources

Maps & Images


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