

Intelligibility of English in Thai Street Food Menus Perceived by East Asian Tourists

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the intelligibility of Thai English used by local vendors on street food menus for East Asian tourists. To achieve the primary goal, the characteristics of Thai English used in dishes on street food menus, including Moo Nam Tok (Spicy sliced pork salad), Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles), Khao Pad (Fried rice), Som Tam (Papaya salad), and Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps), were collected from five famous street food areas, namely, Chinatown, Old Town, Sukhumvit, Silom and Sathorn, and Saphan Lueng. The research made use of Ngampramuan's (2016) framework that divides Thai English features into two types: grammatical features and lexico-semantic features. Then, these characteristics were applied in the survey asking 100 Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean tourists to determine the extent of the intelligibility. The findings revealed that the grammatical features had higher intelligibility mean score, while lexico-semantic features had lower intelligibility mean score. This implies that Thai English with grammatical features on street food menus are easier to understand than lexico-semantic features.

Keywords: intelligibility, East Asian tourists, street food, Thai English, menu

Introduction

Travel and tourism is one of the most important components driving Thailand's economy, contributing around 20.6% of the national GDP in 2016. The travel and tourism industry in Thailand is expected to grow by 21.9% in 2017 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). In 2017, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) set gastronomy tourism as one of the major focuses in the TAT's marketing strategy 2018, aiming to motivate tourists to start a culinary journey to taste signature dishes across the country as a way of experiencing real Thai culture and ways of life (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017).

For foreign tourists on a culinary journey to Thailand, the menu is essential as a means to grab their attention and encourage them to taste particular signature or well-known local Thai dishes. Menus consisting of food names and main ingredients can impress customers. If menus have sufficient information and are well designed, they can also help facilitate dish selection (McCall & Lynn, 2008). Hence, menus should have clear illustrations and explanations of the dishes. Intelligible menus will guide foreigners to explore and appreciate a wide range of Thai food (Duangsaeng & Chanyoo, 2017).

Restaurants that cater to foreign diners must provide menus in foreign languages. English obviously plays an essential role as a lingua franca, especially in this situation. In the tourism industry, Todd (2006) explains that Thais who are employed in this industry generally use English to communicate with foreign tourists who are mainly non-native

speakers of English; nearly 70 per cent of them are Asian. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2016) also reports that over ten million East Asian tourists visited Thailand in 2016 and more than 35 per cent of the total number of the tourist arrivals in 2016 came from China, South Korea, and Japan.

It is undeniable that Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese tourists have to use English as a lingua franca to communicate with native Thais. Both East Asian tourists and Thais normally use English as a foreign language. Miscommunication can probably be the result of English communicated by Thais to foreigners on menus (Baker, 2009; Huebner, 2006; Ngampramuan, 2016) such as pumpkin connection (candied pumpkin), or friend fry (french-fries), the likes of which seemingly cause laughter and could lead to misunderstandings (Duangsaeng & Chanyoo, 2017; Ngampramuan, 2016). In addition, these errors may lead to health issues in case of allergies (Fuentes-Luque, 2017). Owing to these problems caused by English written in local street food menus, the researcher was interested in investigating Thai English as used on street food menus in an attempt to measure how East Asian tourists using English as a lingua franca understand English used for Thai food names and their perceptions toward these Thai English texts.

Several studies have been conducted on intelligibility in English as a lingua franca through written messages. Ngampramuan's (2016) research focused on the use of English on signs in tourist attractions across Thailand. Her research aimed to investigate the variety of English in Thailand or Thai English to see if it is intelligible to Thai and non-Thai people. Duangsaeng and Chanyoo's (2017) study used the conceptual framework of Ngampramuan (2016). Their study aimed to determine the intelligibility of English menus as identified by Thai and non-Thai speakers, and then explore the unintelligible features on Thai restaurant menus as perceived by native Thai speakers. This current study applied Ngampramuan's (2016) study as the theoretical framework to categorize Thai English found in menus. However, this research aimed to focus the investigation on street food menus and East Asian speakers who use English as a lingua franca including Chinese, Japanese and South Korean tourists. Considering the aforementioned research's aims, the following research questions are asked:

1. What are the characteristics of Thai English used in street food menus by Thai local vendors?
2. To what extent do East Asian tourists understand Thai English on street food menus used by Thai local vendors?

Review of Literature

The literature review consists of three main parts. The first section emphasizes the role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in Thailand. The next section focuses on Thai English. In this section, the concept of Thai English and characteristics of Thai English will be discussed. The last section provides a discussion on intelligibility.

The Role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Thailand

Over two billion people in hundreds of countries use English in their daily life (Seargeant, Tagg, & Ngampramuan, 2012). Surprisingly, the majority of users are in countries where English is regarded as a second language or a foreign language (Crystal, 2012). Hence, English is obviously a lingua franca all over the world. The term 'English as a lingua franca' has been used by Seidlhofer (2011) to refer to using English among different first languages speakers who use English as a communicative medium. For example, a Thai waiter uses English as a lingua franca with a Japanese tourist while taking an order in a Thai restaurant.

Since Thailand was not colonized by the British or English-speaking countries, English is regarded as a foreign language in the country. Baker (2009) points out that Thailand is an expanding circle country, according to Kachru's (1995) three concentric circle model. However, English's position is not the same as other foreign languages in Thailand such as Chinese, Japanese, or French. English has been used as the first most important foreign language (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2003) and it is regarded as the 'de facto' or unofficial second language in a wide range of domains such as education, international relations, business, and tourism (Baker, 2008).

English generally plays an important role as a lingua franca, especially in the tourism industry (Upayokin, 2007; Smalley, 1994; Prachanant, 2012). For example, Thais who work in this industry mainly use English to communicate with foreign tourists, although approximately 70% of them are Asian (Todd, 2006). Tourism employees use the English language for giving information, providing services and offering help (Prachanant, 2012). In addition, it is important for customer service professionals to make an impression and provide outstanding services to their foreign customers, as well as for resolving issues occurring in customer service interactions (Upayokin, 2007). Moreover, Smalley (1994) observed public signs on Sukhumvit Road in Bangkok and found that dominant languages represented in environmental print are English or Thai and English. Smalley (1994) concluded that "English messages are directed at tourists and others from abroad," which means English is the chosen language for international communication (Smalley, 1994, p. 204). Likewise, restaurant professionals see English as an important language because it is known as the international language for communication with foreign customers (Duangsaeng & Chanyoo, 2017).

Concept and Characteristics of Thai English

Thais use English in a number of activities and the use of it ranges from isolated words or fragmented speech to complete sentences according to levels of proficiency (Sripracha, 2005). The unique role of the English language in Thailand has encouraged several researchers (Watkhaolarm, 2005; Chutisilp, 1984; Ngampramuan, 2016) to investigate the emerging characteristics of Thai English. However, Chamcharatsri (2013) questions whether the term "Thai English" is a legitimate codification because it is still in the "infancy stage" compared to other varieties of Asian English such as Singaporean English or Indian English (Chamcharatsri, 2013, p. 22).

According to Buripakdi's (2008) research, the majority of Thai professional writers describe the Thai variety of English as "an oral, secondary, lower-standard, and broken English variety" (Buripakdi, 2008, p. 202). Her study determined that Thai English is placed in a lower position than mainstream English. However, Chamcharatsri (2013) conducted research on Thai language users' perceptions of Thai English. This research found that Thai people recognize English is used for communicating with others as a lingua franca (ELF) and Thai English has the potential to further develop in the future.

Due to its initial stage and a lack of research (Rogers, 2013), Thai English has yet to be broadly recognized by many researchers (Lim & Gisborne, 2011). Hickey (2004) argues that English varieties found in countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Indonesia that were never colonized by native English-speaking countries show a low level of exposure to the English language, especially in education. Building on Hickey's (2004) assertion, it can be inferred that Thai English "has had no colonial ties to both the U.K. and the U.S.A., so their speakers have had lower exposure to native English speakers. The variety has been developed from the formal education realm and the tourist industry" (Rogers, 2013, p. 37).

In terms of the characteristics of Thai English, Chutisilp (1984) undertook pioneer research analyzing non-literary texts in short stories, newspapers, and magazines and found

some common characteristics of Thai English. Further developing Chutisilp's (1984) study, Watkhaolarm (2005) conducted research by analyzing Thai novelists' literary texts written by Thai English bilingual authors. She found that Thai English is the result of the process of 'context transfer' and 'lexico-grammatical transfer' (Watkhaolarm, 2005, p. 157). Context transfer is related to cultural and social aspects categorized by using kinship or social terms. Meanwhile, translation, lexical borrowing, shifts, hybridization, and reduplication followed by names are grouped as the lexico-grammatical transfer that represented Thainess in literary texts (Watkhaolarm, 2005).

Chamcharatsri's (2013) work confirmed previous studies by investigating the perceptions of characteristics of Thai English among native Thai speakers who use English as a second or foreign language. This study revealed that both lexico-grammatical transfers such as writing Thai words in English and cultural element transfer such as adding politeness markers are considered to be the characteristics of Thai English (Chamcharatsri, 2013).

Ngampramuan (2016) selected 30 signs from 1,828 photos of Thai English signs at tourist attractions across Thailand. She divided Thai English into two main features: grammatical features and lexico-semantic features. Grammatical features refer to the items that are grammatically incorrect including misspellings, parts of speech, inflection, punctuation marks and capitalization, and ellipsis. Lexico-semantic features refer to the items that contain no grammatical errors but can be unintelligible to international visitors because knowledge of the socio-cultural background of Thailand is needed. It includes four subcategories: translations, Thainess, word choices and creativity, and transliteration.

Duangsaeng and Chanyoo (2017) developed their framework based on Ngampramuan's (2016) study. Duangsaeng and Chanyoo (2017) have noted unintelligible features identified by native Thai speakers. However, one of the limitations with this explanation is they categorized these characteristics in general terms including strange vocabulary/spelling, ungrammatical strings, transliteration, translation, and culture differences.

Intelligibility

In this present study, the word 'intelligibility' means the ability to fully understand the text or message according to Ngampramuan (2016), who used this word in her research; however, 'intelligibility' also refers to the recognition of words or utterances in Smith and Nelson's (1985) study.

In Ngampramuan's (2016) study, intelligibility refers to "the ability to understand the gist of the message" (Ngampramuan, 2016, p. 6). Intelligibility was chosen for her research because it relates to the ability to understand by focusing on the text itself and situations, which is similar to Thai English. Courtright (2001) also used intelligibility to refer to what readers understand of a particular text and how they understand it.

The widely influential conceptualization of intelligibility in the field of ELF is Smith and Nelson's (1985) tripartite paradigm. They categorized intelligibility into three levels: intelligibility is the ability to recognize words or utterances; comprehensibility is understanding words or utterances' meaning; and interpretability is the ability to understand the meaning behind words and utterances. To distinguish between intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability, Gilner (2017) clarifies that intelligibility relates to physiological processes as decoding words or utterances, comprehensibility relates to cognitive processes such as the ability to link word forms with meanings, and interpretability relates to pragmatic processes such as assimilating words' meanings into receivers' worldview.

Intelligibility studies have invariably focused on native speakers' (NS) judgments of outer or expanding circle speakers (Jenkins, 2002). However, for the past ten years, there has been a rapid rise in the use of intelligibility among non-native speakers (NNS) interaction based on the increasing trend of international communication. In the ELF paradigm, research has focused on international intelligibility in the field of 'norm-abiding' or 'norm developing' contexts of lingua franca use (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006). In the World Englishes paradigm, intelligibility may help to increase the acceptance of particular varieties by identifying local varieties' differences (Sewell, 2010).

While intelligibility is becoming an increasingly vital factor in ELF highlighting pronunciation (O'Neal, 2015; Sewell, 2010; Pickering, 2006), research focusing on the intelligibility of written texts remains limited. Courtright's (2001) research focused on the way that readers from different linguistic and sociocultural background read and understand contact literary texts, one from Nigeria and one from India, containing the local context of the situation of the writer such as code-mixing, lexical borrowing, or cultural values and beliefs. Courtright (2001) investigated readers' responses by analyzing a think-aloud protocol to identify the level of readers' intelligibility to given texts. Ngampramuan (2016) and Duangsaeng and Chanyoo's (2017) study discussed intelligibility on public signs and restaurant's menus but analyzed the intelligibility levels of words or utterances in specific situations.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 28 Chinese, 45 South Korean, and 27 Japanese native speakers who were traveling or had been in Thailand. Moreover, all individuals must be proficient enough in English to participate in this research.

Questionnaire

To answer the first research question 'To what extent do East Asian tourists understand Thai English on street food menus used by Thai local vendors?', the questionnaire was used as the instrument. This questionnaire was adapted from Smith (1992) and Ngampramuan's (2016) research aiming to determine participants' intelligibility towards the English text written on the menus at two levels: intelligibility and comprehensibility. The questionnaire contained 40 items, which were divided into two parts: first four questions asking for participants' personal information and the remaining 36 questions relating to Thai English street food menus using a five-point Likert scale for rating the intelligibility, followed by questions asking respondents to compare the similarity of Thai English menus with their English translated version.

In the personal information section, the participants were asked to answer four questions regarding their country of residence, educational level, self-evaluated English proficiency level, and previous experience about Thailand.

To assess the intelligibility of English used in menus, Thai English street food menus related to Thai English characteristics by Ngampramuan (2016) were followed by a question that reads, 'How well do you understand this Thai menu written in English?'. Participants indicated their level of understanding using a five-point Likert scale with polar opposites. As for intelligibility, 1 referred to totally don't understand, 2 meant generally don't understand, 3 was no opinion, 4 referred to generally understand, and 5 meant clearly understand.

To investigate the level of comprehensibility according to Smith's (1992) research, participants were asked to compare the Thai English menu with the English translated version collected from 'Thai street food in 4 regions' published by the National Food Institute (NFI). The question 'Do you think (given the Thai English menu item) is the same menu item as (English translated version)?' was introduced to participants. Participants selected the answer based on their opinion: 'Yes', 'No', and 'I don't know'.

Procedure of Data Gathering

1. To answer the first research question 'What are the characteristics of Thai English used in street food menus by Thai local vendors?', the data were collected from local street food menus by non-probability purposive sampling method from the five tourist street food sites include Chinatown, Old Town, Sukhumvit, Silom and Sathorn, and Saphan Lueng. The selected five street food menu items were Moo Nam Tok (Spicy sliced pork salad), Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles), Khao Pad (Fried rice), Som Tam (Papaya salad), and Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps). These menu items should consist of one of the Thai English characteristics presented by Ngampramuan (2016).

2. The Thai English menus collected from five tourist street food sites were analyzed and categorized in terms of grammatical features and lexico-semantic features. All 18 Thai English features were selected and randomly arranged in the questionnaire.

3. The questionnaire was pilot tested with 10 sample participants to avoid confusing statements, loaded questions and complexity. Screening questions asking the participants' nationality were included in the survey to determine and identify participants who were not qualified. The questionnaires were distributed to Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese tourists at tourist attractions in Bangkok.

4. The questionnaires were distributed to 142 participants including Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese tourists. However, the researcher received 100 completed questionnaires from all of those distributed to participants. This research used both self-completion questionnaires at five tourist street food sites and also an online-based questionnaire, which aimed to collect data from international tourists who didn't feel comfortable completing the questionnaire during face-to-face data gathering. The participants were asked for an e-mail address for sending the questionnaire's link. The researcher used the SurveyMonkey website to create an online questionnaire, which contained the same questions and templates as the paper-based questionnaire. As a result, 64 completed paper questionnaires were collected from participants at the tourist sites, with 36 participants completing the questionnaire online.

5. Data from the questionnaire were screened and coded into SPSS format for further data analysis. Data also were interpreted using SPSS, making use of frequency, means, and percentage.

Results and Discussion

Thai English in Street Food Menus

Ngampramuan (2016) divided Thai English features on signs from 40 tourist attractions into nine major types: misspelling, parts of speech, inflection, punctuation marks, ellipsis, translations, Thainess, word choices, and transliteration. By applying Ngampramuan's (2016) framework, this research also grouped Thai English features found in street food menus into nine types as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Thai English Features Found on Street Food Menus

| | Thai English Features | Frequency | Examples |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Grammatical Features | 1. Misspellings | | |
| | 1.1 Typing error | 5 | FAIED RICE CHIC KCN |
| | 1.2 Minimal pair | 2 | Crap papaya salad |
| | 2. Parts of speech | 8 | Spicy Salad with Slice Grilled Pork Neck |
| | 3. Inflection | | |
| | 3.1 Using singular forms instead of plural forms | 15 | PADTHAI SHIRMP/PORK,CHICKEN |
| 3.2 Affixing plural markers to mass nouns | 12 | Fried rice with chicken/pork/seafoods | |
| Grammatical Features | 4. Punctuation marks, spacing and capitalization | | |
| | 4.1 Combining two words into one word | 9 | PADTHAI |
| | 4.2 Mixing upper and lower cases | 18 | Pad thai |
| | 4.3 Redundancy of the hyphen (-) | 2 | Pad-Thai with shrimps |
| | 5. Ellipsis | 13 | FRIED RICE CHINESE SAUSAGE |
| Lexico-Semantic Features | 1. Translation | | |
| | 1.1 Literal Translation | 4 | Tom Yum pot dish with prawn |
| | 1.2 Poor Translation | 3 | Mix Tom Yum |
| | 1.3 Using Translation Software | 4 | Pad thai Vermicelli |
| | 1.4 Different message between Thai and English | 2 | PADTHAI |
| | 1.5 Word Order | 6 | Hot & Spicy Soup Shrimp, Fish or Seafood |
| | 1.6 Ambiguity | 5 | Sour prawn soup |
| | 2. Thainess | 5 | pork salad Isaan style |
| | 3. Word Choices | 4 | Pork in Spicy Condiments |
| | 4. Transliteration | | |
| 4.1 Different Spelling | 6 | TOM YUM GUNG | |
| 4.2 Mixing transliterated words with some English words | 5 | NUMTOK PORK | |
| 4.3 Using all transliteration | 16 | Pad Thai Goong Sod | |

Regarding the issue of misspelling, there were few instances of typing errors and minimal pairs in the menus. A possible explanation for this is that menus are important for providing information about what is being sold and leading customers to select particular items (Autun & Gustafson, 2005), so the vendors normally check the spelling. Moreover, misspelling is an obvious error that is easily noticed - especially misspellings of well-known menu items compared to other Thai English features. Surprisingly, the typing errors 'FAIED' and 'CHIC KCN' were found in this research. A possible reason for this error might be that the vendor typed the menus from illegibly handwritten English. In addition, it also could be that the vendor did not create the menu by him/herself and did not recheck the spelling.

As the verb conjugation and the plural form of noun do not exist in Thai language (Becker, 1995), this could be an explanation for the part of speech and inflection features found in street food menus. The plural form of Thai English features was commonly found in this group. The implication of this is that the vendor was not able to identify the differences between mass nouns and countable nouns. A recent study by Wongranu (2017) found the reason might be that Thai nouns always take the same form regardless of the quantity. On the other hand, English nouns have different grammatical functions that can be divided into

countable and uncountable nouns. Moreover, countable nouns can take a singular or plural form, depending on the quantifier.

The issue of punctuation marks, spacing and capitalization was most repeatedly discovered in street food menus especially capitalization. Since there are no capitalization and punctuation marks in the Thai language, Thai vendors may not be familiar with them. Moreover, capitalization is frequently used as a tool for emphasizing words, especially when the whole word is capitalized (Yiamkhamnuan, 2011). Therefore, Thai vendors may apply this technique to the menus.

It is almost certain that preposition ellipsis is commonly seen in street food menus as a result of the limitation of space. It is possible to say that only necessary words were put on the menu to free up space for other menu items or proper font size. Preposition ellipsis also may be influenced by the different grammar rules between Thai and English, as prepositions are not required for the food menu items.

Translation was the dominant type of Thai English that may affect the intelligibility of street food menu items as the actual dish and the name written on the menu might be different, for example 'PADTHAI' also used to refer to 'Vegetarian Pad Thai.' The present findings seem to be consistent with Ngampramuan's (2016) research, which found that translation appears to be the most frequently found patterns on signs in Thai tourist domains. Ngampramuan (2016) suggested that these features may have originated from first language interference, low English proficiency, and the attempts to save costs for translations by using free translation software.

Thainess refers to culture, religion or food that require prior knowledge (Ngampramuan, 2016). Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles), Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps), or Som Tam (Papaya salad) may be categorized as Thainess, but these menu items are well known among foreign tourists due to the popularity of Thai cuisine. However, the word 'Isan,' which appears in spicy pork salad, is a more specific word that requires a more extensive social and cultural background to understand the meaning. Isan, which means 'Northeast,' is a Thai Sanskrit-derived word for Northeast Thailand (Draper, 2010). It consists of 20 provinces on the Khorat Plateau where the spicy sliced pork salad originated from. It could be that the local vendors used the word 'Isan' because Thais always use it to refer to the 'Northeast.' Moreover, a local vendor from the Northeastern region might use this word to display some aspects of their indigenous or ethnic identity through the name of the local food.

There were limited instances of word choice features in street food menus as the four selected street food items are globally known: Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles), Khao Pad (Fried rice), Som Tam (Papaya salad), and Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps). Creating or changing some words in the dishes may affect tourists' perceptions. On the other hand, Num Tok Moo (spicy sliced pork salad) is not well known enough to have universal acceptance. There are various names for this dish. One of the words found in this research is 'condiment,' which literally can be defined as a mixture to be added to foods when eaten (Hirasa & Takemasa, 1998). Hence, generally, it refers to ketchup, salt, or fish sauce. It seems possible that the vendors choose this word to make the menu more sophisticated, but they might not be aware of its definition and usage.

Finally, transliteration is usually used for Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles) and Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps) because these dishes are well known among tourists across the world. Contrary to expectations, this study found unfamiliar transliteration of these menus such as Phat Thai, Phad Thai, and Tom Yam Goong. As there is no universal standard for transliterating Thai into the Roman script, this could result in different spellings of the same word or phrase (Ngampramuan, 2016). For the issue of 'NUMTOK PORK', the mixing of transliterated words with English words or code mixing

could be due to translation difficulties. As ‘Numtok’ is a Thai cooking method, it is likely that no equivalent English word can adequately describe its meaning. This is supported by Bassnett (2000), who found that some words are difficult to translate in other languages due to cultural untranslatability.

Intelligibility of Thai English in Street Food Menus

This part sought to determine the extent of the intelligibility of the Thai English on street food menus used by local vendors at five famous street food spots: Chinatown, Old Town, Sukhumvit, Silom and Sathorn, and Saphan Lueng. The five selected street food menu items used in this research consisted of Moo Nam Tok (Spicy sliced pork salad), Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles), Khao Pad (Fried rice), Som Tam (Papaya salad), and Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps).

Table 2 Intelligibility Mean Scores

| Rank | Menu | Thai English Feature | Mean (SD) |
|-------------|--|---|------------------|
| 1 | Fried rice with chicken/pork/seafoods | Affixing plural markers to mass nouns (G) | 4.72 (0.59) |
| 2 | Pad-Thai with shrimps | Redundancy of the hyphen (G) | 4.62 (1.05) |
| 3 | Pad thai | Mixing upper and lower cases (G) | 4.48 (1.12) |
| 4 | PAD THAI SHRIMP/ PORK, CHICKEN | Using singular forms instead of plural forms (G) | 4.45 (1.06) |
| 5 | Hot & Spicy Soup Shrimp | Word order (L) | 4.21 (1.21) |
| 6 | Spicy Salad With Slice grilled pork neck | Using a verb instead of an adjective (G) | 3.97 (1.27) |
| 7 | Crap papaya salad | Minimal pair (G) | 3.97 (1.24) |
| 8 | PADTHAI | Different message between Thai and English (L) | 3.89 (1.55) |
| 9 | Phat Thai | Different spelling (L) | 3.76 (1.57) |
| 10 | Tom Yum pot dish with prawn | Literal translation (L) | 3.59 (1.43) |
| 11 | pork salad Isaan style | Thainess (L) | 3.52 (1.45) |
| 12 | Sour pawn soup | Ambiguity (L) | 3.28 (1.41) |
| 13 | Mix Tom Yum | Poor translation (L) | 3.10 (1.54) |
| 14 | FAIED RICE PORK | Typing error (G) | 3.07 (1.53) |
| 15 | Pork in Spicy Condiment | Word choices (L) | 2.97 (1.45) |
| 16 | Pad thai Vermicelli | Using translation software (L) | 2.69 (1.28) |
| 17 | NUMTOK PORK | Mixing transliterated words with some English words (L) | 2.59 (1.27) |
| 18 | Pad Thai Goong Sod | Using all transliteration (L) | 2.41 (1.35) |

G = Grammatical Features, L = Lexico-semantic Features

As can be seen from Table 2, the results show that the grammatical features including affixing plural markers to mass nouns, redundancy of the hyphen, mixing upper and lower cases, and using singular forms instead of plural forms were the first four features that had the highest intelligibility mean score. It could be that East Asian tourists tended to see these grammatical features not significant to recognize the particular street food menu item because the crucial part deriving the word’s meaning still remained. This also agrees with the results of Duangsaeng and Chanyoo (2017), which found that the international participants were more tolerant to form-related errors in English menu items if the overall main idea was clear. On the contrary, the findings from this study suggest that lexico-semantic features have a

greater effect on the intelligibility of street food menu items since using all transliteration, mixing transliterated words with some English words, using translation software, and word choices were found to be the bottom four features that had the lowest intelligibility mean score. The results implied that an existence of unclear words on the menu item such as ‘Goong Sod’ ‘NUMTOK’ ‘Vermicelli’ or ‘Condiment’ can reduce the intelligibility level among East Asian tourists. The effect of using unclear words was found not only in lexico-semantic features but also grammatical features. Typing error had the lowest intelligibility mean score among grammatical features because the main word ‘FAIED RICE’ is indistinct.

With to the goal of investigating the intelligibility and comprehensibility levels, this study asked the participants to compare the Thai English menu items with the English translated versions. The findings from this section also suggest that lexico-semantic features are more significant than grammatical features in terms of understanding the Thai English in street food menu items at both the initial level and comprehensibility level. All the features including affixing plural markers to mass nouns, redundancy of the hyphen, and mixing upper and lower cases were among the grammatical characteristics that had the highest percentages of positive answers from the respondents who thought that the Thai English menu items were similar to the English translated versions.

Table 3 Similarity of the Menu Items from Thai English and English Translated Menu Items

| Thai English | English Translation | Yes (%) | No (%) | I don't know (%) |
|--|---|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Pad-Thai with shrimps | Pad Thai with shrimps | 85 | 3 | 12 |
| Pad thai | Pad Thai | 85 | 6 | 9 |
| Spicy Salad With Slice grilled pork neck | Spicy salad with sliced grilled pork neck | 84 | 3 | 13 |
| Fried rice with chicken/pork/seafoods | Fried rice with chicken/pork/seafood | 84 | 6 | 10 |
| PAD THAI SHRIMPS/ PORK, CHICKEN | Pad Thai with shrimps, pork, or chicken | 81 | 13 | 6 |
| Hot & Spicy Soup Shrimp | Hot & Spicy Shrimp Soup | 78 | 16 | 6 |
| Phat Thai | Pad Thai | 78 | 19 | 3 |
| Crap papaya salad | Crab papaya salad | 64 | 27 | 9 |
| FAIED RICE PORK | Pork fried rice | 55 | 24 | 21 |
| Tom Yum pot dish with prawn | Tom Yum Kung served in pot | 48 | 26 | 26 |
| pork salad Isaan style | Northeastern-style pork salad | 46 | 27 | 27 |
| Pad Thai Goong Sod | Pad Thai with prawns | 45 | 26 | 29 |
| Sour pawn soup | Tom Yum Kung | 44 | 37 | 19 |
| Mix Tom Yum | Tom Yum with pork, chicken and seafood | 39 | 35 | 26 |
| NUMTOK PORK | Spicy sliced pork salad | 26 | 35 | 39 |
| Pad thai Vermicelli | Thai-style stir-fried glass noodles | 19 | 42 | 39 |
| Pork in Spicy Condiment | Spicy pork salad | 16 | 52 | 32 |
| PADTHAI | Vegetarian Pad Thai | 9 | 63 | 28 |

Another important finding is that a low percentage of respondents thought Thai English menus with lexico-semantic features were similar to the English translated versions as shown in Table 3. It is interesting to note that ‘different messages between Thai and

English' had the lowest percentage from participants' answers, even though they had high ratings in intelligibility mean score from the initial phase of the survey. This result can be extrapolated by the fact that participants might misunderstand 'PADTHAI' refers to 'Pad Thai,' which is different from 'vegetarian Pad Thai.' Moreover, the vendor might not know how to translate the word '๒๓ [Jay]' (vegetarian), which originated in the Chinese language. Hence, the omission of this word may be the result of avoidance of translation difficulties.

Transliteration in Street Food Menus

The purpose of transliteration is to provide Thai words or phrases using the Roman alphabet so that foreigners can read or pronounce those words or phrases (Seargeant, Tagg, & Ngampramuan, 2012). In terms of street food menus, the current research found that transliteration was generally used in two menu items: Pad Thai, and Tom Yum Kung. However, some local vendors used different spellings for these two dishes such as Phad Thai, Phat Thai, Tom Yum Goong, and Tom Yum Gung. Undoubtedly, the results of the present study show that using different spellings may not affect East Asian tourists' understanding of these two dishes as Pad Thai and Tom Yum Kung are famous Thai street food across the world.

On the other hand, mixing transliterated words with some English words from 'NUMTOK PORK' (spicy sliced pork salad) was categorized as one of the lowest intelligible menu items with a 2.59 mean score. The reason may be that the word 'Num-tok' is not well-known among foreigners. Similarly, using transliteration from 'Pad Thai Goong Sod' (Pad Thai with prawns) was the lowest rank in intelligibility mean score (2.41) among all Thai English features. Foreigners commonly found 'Goong Sod' as an unintelligible word even they might know the word 'Pad Thai.'

According to the results of this present study, it might be reasonable to conclude that transliteration is not recommended for use in street food menus because foreigners might not understand the dishes that they would like to order. However, transliteration can probably be a valuable technique to represent the authentic Thai gastronomy. The reason is that there is a meaning gap between the Thai and English translated versions of Thai dishes, which is caused by cultural untranslatability (Catford, 1965) or the absence of equivalent English words for particular Thai dishes. According to Larson (1984) and Baker (1992), using loan words plus explanation is an effective strategy to solve the issue of the lack of equivalent words. For example, [Lab Moo] can be translated as Lab Moo: Spicy minced pork with chilies, lemon, spring onions and shallots. Moreover, using Thai transliteration in a menu can emphasize the Thai language, highlighting either the national origin of the dish or its background.

In initial stages, it might take time for foreigners to recognize and understand transliteration. However, when it is frequently used by local vendors, restaurant owners, tourists, advertisements, or social media, Thai transliterated menus will gain more acceptance, just like Pad Thai and Tom Yum Kung have. It is also necessary to present the clear characteristics of the dishes by providing the explanations regarding taste, the main ingredients and appearance to a target audience. In addition, foreigners could be encouraged to learn more about the cultural background and meaning of Thai words in transliterated dishes.

In summary, The most obvious finding to emerge from this study was that the grammatical features of affixing plural markers to mass nouns (4.72), redundancy of the hyphen (4.62), and mixing upper and lower cases (4.48) had the highest intelligibility mean score, while the lexico-semantic features of using translation software (2.69), mixing transliterated words with some English words (2.59), and using all transliteration (2.41) had

the lowest intelligibility mean score. Likewise, these grammatical features also had the highest percentages of affirmative answers from the respondents who thought there were no differences between Thai English menu items and English translated versions. All things considered, these results support the idea that Thai English with grammatical features on street food menus are easier to understand than lexico-semantic features.

Conclusions

To investigate the characteristics of Thai English used in street food menus by Thai local vendors, the street food dishes including Moo Nam Tok (Spicy sliced pork salad), Pad Thai (Thai-style stir-fried noodles), Khao Pad (Fried rice), Som Tam (Papaya salad), and Tom Yam Kung (Hot and sour lemongrass soup with shrimps) were observed by using Ngampramuan's (2016) framework. 56 Thai English menu items were collected from 44 shops in five famous street food areas among tourists, which are Chinatown, Old Town, Sukhumvit, Silom and Sathorn, and Saphan Lueng. The data were divided into grammatical features and lexico-semantic features. The findings showed that mixing upper and lower cases, using singular forms instead of plural forms, and preposition ellipsis were commonly found in street food menu items. However, these features may have an insignificant effect on the intelligibility level as the overall main idea was clear. Thai local vendors should be more concern about using all transliteration and different message between Thai and English because transliterated menu items may be not well known enough to have universal acceptance for all East Asian tourists. In addition, using different messages between Thai and English for menu items can be misleading and lead to misunderstandings. Even transliteration was categorized as one of the lowest intelligible menu items, transliteration with the English explanations regarding taste, the main ingredients and appearance can be a suggested technique to represent street food menus. The reason is that this technique can highlight the origin of the dish and solve the issue of the lack of equivalent words.

Implications

The findings on the intelligibility of Thai English used by local vendors on street food menus for East Asian tourists have a number of important implications.

1. These findings can be used to develop authentic learning materials for English teachers and learners to replace commercial textbooks. For example, 'Fried rice with chicken/pork/seafoods' can be an example for English teachers to clarify how to use an affix of plural makers. English learners may also apply the translation strategy to demonstrate how to translate 'Pad thai Vermicelli'.

2. This information may be of use to tourists in terms of increasing awareness about the varieties of dishes they will come across on Thai English menus while traveling in the Kingdom of Thailand.

3. The findings may raise awareness among Thai restaurants and local street food vendors with regard to the use of Thai English on their street food menus. They should pay more attention to the Thai English used in the menu because some characteristics may lead to misunderstandings and cause health problems in case of allergies.

4. This research may increase awareness in the tourism industry in Thailand about the essential aspects of English writing and translation when it comes to communicating with foreign visitors. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) should, therefore, provide relevant English courses or improve access to learning resources for restaurant owners and local vendors.

5. Using Thai transliteration and providing clear descriptions is recommended for street food menus because they will help foreign customers get a clear picture of the dishes ordered. Moreover, using Thai words on the menus can serve as an effective tool to promote the Thai gastronomic tradition and culture.

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