

Indigenous Language Impediment in English Speaking Setting: A Case Study of Thai EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study explores the ongoing issue of L1 interference from native Thai phonology impacting English speaking skills in Thai EFL students. Even with continuous formal English teaching, the native language still affects learners' pronunciation precision in EFL speaking activities. Using a qualitative case study design, the study was carried out with junior high school students at Nida Suksasat School in Satun, Thailand. Data were gathered via classroom observations and video-recorded discussions on the grammatical subject "Have Got" and examined using phonological characteristics consistently disrupt that Thai phonological characteristics consistently disrupt English pronunciation, especially via sound substitution and sound alteration, even during rehearsed speaking tasks. This study adds to EFL studies by offering empirical proof of sustained phonological transfer in regulated speaking situations, underscoring that memorization fails to remove L1 impact. From a pedagogically, the findings highlight the significance of context-aware pronunciation teaching and phonological awareness-focused methods to reduce the impact of indigenous language interference in Thai EFL speaking classes.

Article History

Received: 13-Jan-2026

Revised : 14-Feb-2026

Accepted: 25-Feb-2026

Keywords:

English Speaking

Performance;

L1 Phonological

Interference;

Thai EFL Learners;

Pronunciation Errors

;Thai Phonology

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it permits learners to express ideas, have interaction socially, and communicate meaning effectively in real-global contexts (Richards, 2008; Panjaitan & Seinsiani, 2025). In EFL settings, speaking is not simply an effective ability, however a complicated cognitive and social process that is strongly influenced by learners' first language (L1), particularly when publicity to the goal language is limited (Al-khresheh, 2015). One continual challenge in EFL speaking development is L1 interference, wherein phonological, lexical, or structural functions of the mother tongue affect the production of the goal language, regularly ensuing in decreased accuracy and fluency (Syafutri & Saputra, 2021).

This issue is particularly salient in EFL contexts characterized through substantial typological differences among the local language and English. In Thailand, for example, differences in phonological systems, stress patterns, and syntactic systems frequently lead Thai EFL learners to experience continual pronunciation problems and non-target-like speech production (Kurniasari & Ungu, 2025). Such phonological discrepancies regularly cause learners to substitute or modify English sounds that do not exist in Thai, ensuing in systematic pronunciation deviations and decreased intelligibility in spoken communication (Hidayati, Yatmikasari, & Sulaeman, 2023). Despite years of formal instruction, many Thai learners continue to struggle with spoken English, suggesting that classroom exposure and conventional speaking practices alone can be inadequate to overcome L1 influence.

Previous study have attributed speaking problems in EFL classrooms to elements including confined vocabulary, speaking anxiety, constrained publicity to English, and teacher-focused educational practices (Nation & Newton, 2009; Sha'ar, 2021). While those studies provide treasured insights, they frequently deal with local language interference as a peripheral factor, in place of as a principal explanatory variable shaping talking overall performance in actual lecture room contexts. As a result, the function of precise local language features in particular phonological characteristics remains underexplored in terms of learners' real oral production.

The novelty of this study lies in its express recognition on Thai phonological features as the primary source of continual L1 interference in EFL speaking, tested inside an actual classroom setting. Unlike previous studies that extensively categorizes interference sorts throughout EFL learners, this study situates L1 interference inside a particular linguistic ecology, demonstrating how Thai phonological patterns systematically have an effect on learners' English pronunciation even in managed and memorized speaking tasks. By displaying that memorization does now no longer put off phonological transfer, this study provides context-sensitive empirical evidence that deepens the explanatory scope of cross-linguistic affect studies in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), specifically in Southeast Asian EFL contexts (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Subandowo, 2017). Based on this gap, the study aims to: (1) identify dominant overall performance of Thai EFL learners, (2) examine how specific features of Thai phonology affect pronunciation accuracy and speaking fluency all through classroom interaction.

Theoretically, this study contributes to SLA through reinforcing the role of local phonological systems as a key variable in shaping EFL speaking performance. Pedagogically, the findings are predicted to inform the development of context-sensitive pronunciation guidance and phonological awareness-primarily based totally teaching strategies which might be attentive to the linguistic realities of Thai EFL learners (Hayeesa-i, 2023; Zhong, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore first language (L1) phonological interference in English Speaking inside an authentic EFL classroom context. A qualitative case study is suitable for analyzing complicated language phenomena as they evidently occur, allowing for in-depth interpretation of learners' spoken production and interaction patterns (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017; Siregar & Murhayati, 2024). Accordingly, this design enabled the investigation of Thai learners' pronunciation behaviors as located inside real educational practices in preference to experimental conditions.

Participants and Research Setting

The participants included a complete junior high school class (14 students) from Nida Suksasat School, located in Satun, Thailand. The class was chosen through purposive sampling, as the students frequently participated in English conversation activities and were seen as valuable cases pertinent to the research aims (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Ames, Glenton, & Lewin, 2019). The chosen class was engaged in a speaking lesson focused on the grammatical topic "Have Got," offering an appropriate setting to examine pronunciation patterns and possible L1 phonological influence during classroom interactions.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected via classroom observation and video recording. Classroom observations emphasized students' verbal performance during dialogue practice, while video recordings were utilized to document learners' oral output thoroughly. Video data enabled multiple listens and thorough analysis of pronunciation aspects, such as sound substitution, pauses, and articulatory differences. The integration of observation and video recording is commonly acknowledged in qualitative EFL research as a powerful method for capturing genuine spoken language use in real educational contexts (Creswell, 2009; Khamkhien, 2010).

Data gathering occurred during standard English classes. Students rehearsed conversations in pairs after the teacher's guidance and demonstrations. Despite the dialogues being mostly memorized, students' speaking performances displayed spontaneous pronunciation traits, rendering them appropriate for phonological examination. Feedback from teachers given during practice greatly enhanced the interactional setting where L1 interference could be seen.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using phonological analysis to determine how Thai phonological characteristics affected students' English pronunciation. The spoken outputs of students were recorded and methodically evaluated against standard English pronunciation standards. Deviations were classified into primary types of phonological interference, such as sound substitution, omission, and alteration. Every deviation was analyzed in connection with the differences between Thai and English phonological systems to identify potential sources of L1 influence (Khamkhien, 2010; Hayeesa-i, 2023). This analytical method facilitated a focused examination of pronunciation precision and clarity in speaking tasks conducted in the classroom.

Trustworthiness of the study

Multiple strategies were utilized to guarantee the reliability of the results. Data triangulation was accomplished by combining classroom observations and video recordings, enabling the cross-verification of pronunciation patterns. Analytic precision was upheld by repeatedly reviewing the recorded data and meticulously transcribing it to reduce misinterpretation. Moreover, a detailed account of the classroom environment and speaking tasks was given to improve the applicability of the results to comparable EFL contexts (Creswell, 2009). These method enhanced the trustworthiness and reliability of the qualitative analysis.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

This study shows that L1 phonological interference remains in the English-speaking abilities of Thai EFL learners, even during structured and rehearsed dialogue activities. Classroom observations and video recorded data show that students' speaking abilities are consistently affected by Thai phonological characteristics, implying that memorization does not eliminate cross-linguistic phonological influence. This discovery directly related to the research goals by showing how characteristics of the native language influence

pronunciation patterns, speech clarity, and learners' interactive behavior during speaking tasks in the classroom.

Patterns and Functions of L1 Phonological Interference

The analysis indicates that L1 interference in Thai EFL learners' speaking mainly appears at the phonological level, affirming that pronunciation is the most susceptible area of cross-linguistic influence in EFL situations with restricted target language exposure. Instead of happening randomly, pronunciation differences show consistent and stable patterns, suggesting a systematic phonological transfer from Thai to English. This discovery reinforces SLA viewpoints that regard phonological interference as a crucial element of interlanguage evolution instead of merely incidental performance mistakes.

Two main types of phonological interference were recognized: sound substitution and sound alteration, whereas sound omission was not detected. The lack of omission indicated that learners preserved the structural form of utterances while perceiving English sounds through the Thai phonological system. The dominant patterns of phonological interference identified in this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Phonological Interference Identified in Students' Speaking Performance

Type of Interference	Observed Phonological Features	Examples from Students' Utterances
Sound Substitution	Replacement of English consonant sounds with phonetically similar native language sounds.	<i>Wallet</i> pronounced as /walet/.
Sound Alteration	Non-native phonetic realization, vowel lengthening, and prosodic influence.	<i>Water</i> pronounced with a clearly articulated [t]; <i>Money</i> pronounced as "maniii" with prolonged vowel and rising falling intonation.

Sound Substitution as Adaptive Phonological Strategy

Sound substitution happened when students switched unfamiliar English sounds with Thai sounds that were phonetically closer. For instance, the English term "wallet" was articulated as "walet," demonstrating the replacement of a complex English vowel with a simpler one that corresponds with Thai phonological rules. This substitution demonstrates a flexible approach instead of a haphazard mistake, allowing learners to preserve fluency

by using their current phonological knowledge. This result corresponds with earlier studies suggesting that students replace target sounds when similar phonemes are missing or poorly represented in their native tongue (Artha & Bayu, 2025). From an SLA viewpoint, these substitutions illustrate how learners actively balance clarity and ease of articulation while producing speech.

Sound Alteration and Accent-Based Phonological Transfer

Sound alteration became the most prominent type of disruption in this study. In contrast to substitution, sound alteration entailed qualitative modifications in sound realization without replacing phonemes. For example, in the term *water*, learners generated the /t/ sound with heightened stiffness and articulatory strength, aligning with Thai consonant articulation patterns. In a like manner, "*money*" was articulated with extended vowels and Thai intonational patterns (e.g., *maniii*), resulting in speech that was clear yet appeared non-native.

These results emphasize that Thai phonological interference functions at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels, especially via intonation and vowel length. This corroborates by (Andestopano & Datuk, 2024) that claim the regional accents typically affect speech by altering sound quality instead of directly replacing phonemes. The continued presence of these changes in learned tasks strengthens the claim that phonological transfer is deeply rooted in cognition and resistant to superficial teaching methods.

Features of the Task and The Presence of Complete Sound Omission

Notably, no examples of sound omission were found in the data. This lack of spontaneity can be linked to the rehearsed and premeditated aspect of the speaking task, giving learners ample time for preparation before execution. Previous studies indicates that structured speaking assignments often decrease omission mistakes, since speaking less stress from immediate processing needs (Chaira, 2015; Artha & Bayu, 2025). This discovery highlights the significance of task design in influencing the kinds of phonological interference that arise in EFL speaking tasks.

Implications for SLA Theory and EFL Pedagogy

Overall, these results indicate that Thai phonological characteristics consistently influence English speech production, even in controlled settings. The findings broaden SLA studies on cross-linguistic influence by offering context-specific proof that L1 phonological transfer continues past spontaneous speech and into planned performance. This contests the belief that merely repeating and memorizing can solve problems with pronunciation.

From an educational viewpoint, the prevalence of sound replacement and sound modification indicates that EFL speaking training should include clear phonological awareness and contrastive analysis designed for Thai students. Instruction should emphasize not only fluency-oriented dialogue practice but also specific phonological contrasts between English and Thai, such as vowel quality, consonant articulation, and intonation patterns. Aligning teaching methods with learners' linguistic environments allows educators to better reduce ongoing L1 interference and promote clearer, more understandable spoken English.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that native language influence significantly and systematically affects the English speaking abilities of Thai EFL learners, especially concerning phonology. The results indicate that students' spoken output is consistently influenced by characteristics of the Thai phonological system, mainly via sound substitution and sound alteration, while sound omission was not detected. The reappearance of similar sound patterns among words suggests that the interference is systematic instead of accidental, showcasing profoundly ingrained first-language phonological representations. Additionally, while students' speech was mostly understandable, differences in vowel length, articulation, and intonation led to non-native-like pronunciation, impacting overall fluency and the naturalness of speech. Crucially, phonological interference remained evident during both memorized and teacher-led dialogue tasks, indicating that this interference is based on learners' phonological skills rather than familiarity with the tasks or anxiety about performance.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings hold significant implications for EFL speaking teaching in environments where students have a shared native language. The ongoing presence of phonological interference shows that activities focused only on fluency are not enough to tackle pronunciation issues. Consequently, EFL teachers are urged to implement more contextualized pronunciation teaching that specifically addresses phonological characteristics affected by students' first language. It can involve targeted practice on challenging vowel and consonant distinctions, heightened focus on suprasegmental characteristics like stress and intonation, and offering prompt, clear, and corrective feedback during speaking exercises. Incorporating local language awareness into pronunciation instruction can assist learners in

enhancing their phonological awareness and progressively boost speech intelligibility without compromising communicative confidence.

This study supports essential theories in Second Language Acquisition, especially those pertaining to cross-linguistic influence and phonological transfer. The findings endorse the idea that first language phonological systems persist in influencing second language speech production, even when learners exhibit effective communicative competence. This study offers classroom-based empirical evidence of systematic phonological interference, enhancing the understanding of how native language influences function in real EFL learning contexts. Thus, the study connects SLA theory with classroom application by emphasizing the necessity of teaching methods that recognize the lasting influence of first language phonology on second language speech progress.

This study enhances EFL teaching methods by highlighting the significance of explicit, context-specific pronunciation training and contributes to SLA theory by demonstrating how phonological transfer occurs in actual classroom interactions. These findings highlight the importance of tailoring pronunciation instruction to students' linguistic backgrounds to enhance more effective and realistic EFL spoken communication.

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