

# Intelligibility of Thai English Restaurant Menus as Perceived by Thai and Non-Thai Speakers

Warangrut Duangsaeng

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

Natthapong Chanyoo

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

**Abstract**—This study was conducted with the aims to measure intelligibility of English menus used in Thai restaurants as perceived by Thai and non-Thai speakers and to explore the most salient unintelligible features found on the menus as identified by native Thai speakers. Ninety-six participants agreed to complete an online survey. They were asked to rate their intelligibility level and identify the sources of confusing features found on Thai English menus. Independent t-test and simple descriptive statistics such as mean score, percentage and standard deviation were utilized for data analysis. The results suggest that there is the distinction between intelligibility of restaurant menus rated by Thai and non-Thai speakers. Translation is likely to be the most frequent rated as a source of unintelligible features. The data presented here leads to the conclusion that Thais seems to be harsher in rating intelligibility level. Further implications have also been discussed in this study.

**Index Terms**—intelligibility, restaurant menus, English as a lingua franca, ELF

## I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of restaurants in tourism sector is immense. The dishes they serve can be a representative of national culture and uniqueness to tourists who visit a city (Murcott, 1982). Culture, as defined as a way of life for a particular group of people who share the same values, beliefs and practice, is portrayed through names of the dishes, ingredients and eating behavior (Brittin, 2011). In the case of Thai food, the dishes such as *Pad Thai* and *Tom Yam Kung* are named using Thai language which is understood across the country and represents national identity (SIL international, n.d.). Thai cuisine also uses unique ingredients such as fermented fish sauce and shrimp paste in several dishes namely *Som Tam* (green papaya spicy salad) and *Nam Prink Kapi* (shrimp paste sauce). Culture is expressed through how Thais eat their meals as well. In the country, people share food and eat them with rice that is served individually (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.). It is, therefore, quite common that a relationship among Thais is considered as “interdependent”. Thais like to do things in group, and seem not so confident when they are among strangers. Moreover, restaurants generate jobs for local people and are a medium to promote tourism through their mouth-watering taste and quality service (Fuentes-Luque, 2017). In this sense, Bangkok holds its reputation in being one of the gastronomical destinations to visit for food lovers (“The World’s greatest cities for food,” 2016). Their love is clearly expressed through their 448-billion-Baht expenditure on food and beverage making Thailand’s tourism revenue to reach 2.53 trillion Baht in 2016 (Theparat, 2017). Furthermore, several food tours are reviewed and advertised in TripAdvisor.com (“Bangkok Food Tours”, 2017). It can be referred that food served in the restaurants is definitely an integral part of Thailand’s tourism. Quality travelers expect quality services, and restaurants are surely one of the factors that can offer such services to them (Fuentes-Luque, 2017). Therefore, the low quality of restaurants regarding both product and services, more or less, can menace the reputation and revenues the country can make in tourism sector (Fuentes-Luque, 2017).

One might argue that taste is what attracts customers, but taste alone will not effectively fulfill its duty without menus which directly communicate with customers. Menus state what will be served, ingredients and are the first impression for customers (Ozdemi & Caliskan, 2014; McCall & Lynn, 2008). They also help facilitate dish selection if they provide sufficient information and are designed properly (McCall & Lynn, 2008). To illustrate, the owners of the restaurants might include pictures in their menus and provide some additional information along with the name of the dish. With pictures and descriptions of the menus, customers can visualize what they are going to have and perhaps can choose the dishes from the pictures. In addition, international customers may only choose the famous dishes such as *Tom Yam Kung*, *Pad Thai* and *Somtam*, that is, some items which they are accustomed to or have heard of. Having high quality menus which clearly illustrate and explain the dishes will definitely help guide tourists to explore and enjoy the variety of Thai food.

In Thailand, restaurants that want to sell their food to foreign customers must write their menus in other languages. English is one of the predominant languages which restaurant owners pay attention to since it gains popularity and is recognized as the international language that is used for communication across the globe (Huebner, 2006; Ngampramuan, 2016; Ploywattanawong & Trakulkasemsuk, 2014). For Thailand, the situation of English usage fits the

definition of English as a lingua franca because Thai people use English mostly for the purpose of communication with international tourists (Huebner, 2006; Ngampramuan, 2016). However, English used by Thais on restaurant menus can probably lead to miscommunication as the language serves as a foreign language in the country (Baker, 2009; Huebner, 2006; Ngampramuan, 2016), for example, *Spicy 3 Frame Salad (spicy crispy mixed salad)*, *Friend, Fry (French fries)*, and *Pumpkin connection (candied pumpkin)*. These types of errors might lead to laughers, misleading or misunderstanding which, unfortunately, can cause health problem in case of allergies (Fuentes-Luque, 2017) as well as end up as a meme on the Internet. Due to these potential issues caused by English written by locals on restaurant menus, this study is interested in investigating Thai English as used on restaurant menus to measure to what extent do Thai and Non-Thai speakers understand English used in Thai restaurants and the confusing features found on the menus as perceived by Thai native speakers.

One way to measure how much participants understand English on menus is to evaluate intelligibility of the texts. Unfortunately, a search on intelligibility of English written on restaurant menus yields no empirical studies in Mahidol University databased powered by EBSCOhost. Rather, intelligibility usually has been extensively studied in terms of speech (Jin & Liu, 2014; Klien & Flint, 2006; Lam & Tjaden, 2013; Wilson & Spaulding, 2010). The most related study on intelligibility of English used in tourism sector was conducted by Ngampramuan (2016). In her research, she examined intelligibility of public signs in tourist destinations as perceived by Thai and foreign participants. The result showed that international participants seemed to understand Thai English when there was no errors or minor errors found, for instance, “2 free 1 and Happy toilet” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p.134), but unable to understand it when there were major errors such as “forbidden island glass (do not lean on the glass)” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p.134). Furthermore, it appeared that international participants paid more attention on the overall meaning level rather than ungrammatical features while Thai participants responded the opposite. As quite few numbers of studies undertaking with this issue, the current study is addressing two research objectives as follows:

- 1) To measure intelligibility of English menus used by Thai restaurants as perceived by Thai and non-Thai speakers; and
- 2) To explore the most salient ungrammatical features found on Thai English restaurant menus as identified by native Thai speakers.

Two research questions are addressed to fulfill the research objectives as follows:

- 1) To what extent do Thai and non-Thai speakers understand English menus written by Thai restaurants?
- 2) What are the most salient mistakes found on Thai English restaurant menus as identified by native Thai speakers?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Intelligibility*

The definitions of intelligibility given by various scholars and publications are quite similar, yet not identical. Longman Dictionary of Teaching and Applied Linguistics defines intelligibility as “the degree to which a message can be understood” (2010, p. 289). Smith and Nelson (1985) view it as “the recognition of words and utterances.” Nelson (2011) defines intelligibility as the ability to understand the messages conveyed by the utterances or texts. For the objectives of this study, the concept of intelligibility as defined by Nelson (2011) will be used for two reasons. First, intelligibility is situationally and contextually bound (Nelson, 2011). That is, to what extent people will be able to understand the messages is subjected to the contexts. In this sense, contexts can be the mutual experiences or knowledge in the past which people have and do not have to be further explained as if they are a “natural part of the discourse” (Ngampramuan, 2016, p. 6). In the case of Thai English on restaurant menus, it is essential that customers should be familiar and have some background or experience on Thai food in order to understand the menus. Second, intelligibility puts less emphasis on audience response (Ngampramuan, 2016). Therefore, restaurant menus seem to be best fitted with the definition of intelligibility because it does not concentrate on audience responses as they are one-way communication.

### *English as a Lingua Franca*

ELF refers to “a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). In other words, it involves with using English to communicate by people who have different first languages. However, this broad definition has its flaw since it seems to neglect the fact that native speakers (Inner Circle countries) and those who come from Outer Circle countries utilize English as well (Baker, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2005). For instance, an American diplomat speaks with a Filipino ambassador at the United Nations meeting in English. Thus, to expand the definition of ELF in order to include native speakers and those who use English as a second language, Jenkins (2006) proposes a term ELF to cover the use of English for communication between people who do not share the same “linguacultures” (p.164), regardless the countries they are from. Simply put, ELF is used to describe the use of English by people who do not share the same culture or a native language. For example, a Chinese tourist speaks English with Thai people in order to bargain and buy some souvenirs.

### *Features of English as a Lingua Franca*

#### *1) Lexico-grammatical Features*

Ngampramuan (2016) discovers the lexico-grammatical features of Thai English on public signs as follows:

- 1.1 *Misspelling* e.g. “Keep in mine (mind) for your parking spot.” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 64);

1.2 *Parts of speech* e.g. “using a noun instead of an adjective – Drink water” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 65);

1.3 *Inflection* e.g. “wrong verb conjugation or the disagreement of subjects and verbs – This area are under construction” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 65);

1.4 *Punctuation Marks, Spacing, and Capitalization* e.g. no punctuation mark – “new promotion start now” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 69), separating words without need – “water melon” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 69), mixing upper case with lower case letters – “BeKo BeKo Japanese crepe” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 70); and

1.5 *Ellipsis* e.g. “Please (use) next counter” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 71).

## 2) *Lexico-semantic Features*

This current study is influenced by the framework of Ngampramuan (2016) regarding lexico-semantic features of ELF found on signs. The features are following:

### A. *Translation*

The features of Thai English regarding translation are mostly found in the pattern of literal translation, inappropriate translation, online translation, mistranslation between Thai and English, wrong word order, loanshift (the extension of the meaning of words in order to cover a new concept), ambiguity, wrong idioms, and codemixing such as “Thai desserts ancient (Thai shaved ice)” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 74) and “A motorcycle works for invite 2 ladders (Use exit 2 for motorcycle taxi service)” (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 74).

### B. *Thainess*

In this regard, Thainess refers to socio-cultural knowledge that is required of the international visitors in order to interpret the messages on signs. That is, even if the texts are grammatically correct, it is possible that the audiences still find it challenging to understand due to the adequacy of socio-cultural knowledge. Thainess mostly involves with monarchy, local food and fruit, belief and tradition, exotic career and religious etc. For example, do not point your feet to Buddha (ไม่ยืนเท้าไปหาพระพุทธรูป).

### C. *Word Choice and Creativity*

English as used by Thais tend to use weird word choice, collocation. Moreover, they seem to be creative when using the language by altering words in order to make the messages more interesting, and forming unique words by adding suffixes e.g. eation (eat + suffix -tion) (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 83).

### D. *Transliteration*

Transliteration refers to the alternation of Thai into English script such as Wat Phra Kaeo (Emerald Temple) (Ngampramuan, 2016: p. 84).

#### *Previous Study*

As mentioned earlier that the study of intelligibility of English used on restaurant menus is rare in the Thai context. That is, there is only one research relevant to the current study. Ngampramuan (2016) investigates intelligibility of Thai English used on public signs in Thailand by adopting the concept of ELF. The study aims to examine the characteristics of Thai English used on the signs, the levels of intelligibility, the attitudes of Thai and non-Thai participants towards Thai English and the factors contributing to intelligibility level. Online-based survey is employed to measure the attitudes of Thai and international participants together with interviews. The total participants are 1,266 (810 Thais and 456 international respondents) for online survey and 51 for the interview. The results revealed that English proficiency levels indeed are the factors contributing to intelligibility of Thai English on signs. It means that the higher proficiency levels, the more the participants can negotiate for the meanings and be able to understand the messages. It also reported that international participants rated higher in intelligibility if they can grab the meaning regardless the grammatical correctness. That is, they think that the mistakes that do not interfere with the overall meaning of the message are not serious. In contrast, Thai participants pay more attention to grammatical correctness. They appear to rate low in intelligibility level if the Thai English signs are ungrammatical.

Ngampramuan’s (2016) research has shed light on the intelligibility of Thai English on sign domain. However, the study of intelligibility of Thai English on restaurant menus is left to be fulfilled. Therefore, this present study aims to do so by adopting Ngampramuan’s (2016) study, intelligibility and EFL as the primary conceptual frameworks. To give a clear explanation on how these conceptual frameworks are used as the foundation of this research, the following figure summarizes the relationship between Thai English mistakes and difficulties.

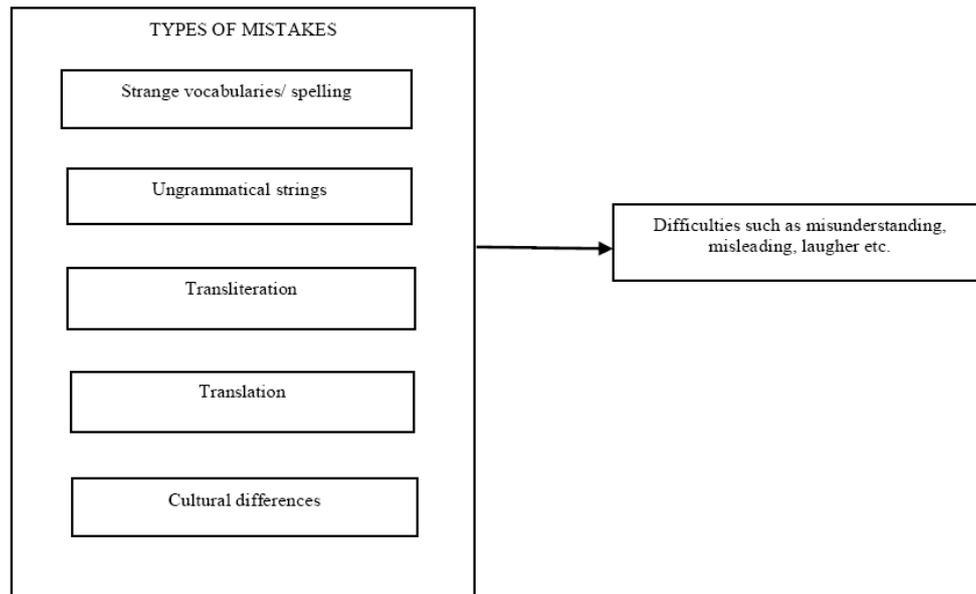


Figure 1. Relationship between Thai English Features and Difficulties.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *Restaurant Menu Collection Sites*

Menus were retrieved from Phra Athit Road, Maharaj Road, Tha Phrachan (Phrachan Pier), Yaowarat Road, Khao San Road and Sukumvit Soi 38. These neighborhoods were selected because they were the tourist destinations which had rich resources of Thai English menus. They were also easy to commute to since all of them could be accessed by public transportations such as bus and sky train. Furthermore, the neighborhoods were listed as recommended places for food lovers (Jorgensen, 2011; Nualkhair, 2015; TripAdvisor, n.d.).

#### *1. Phra Athit Road*

Phra Athit Road was located near Khao San Road and along Chao Phraya River. It was a home for various old palaces dated back to the early days of Chakri dynasty (Huebner, 2006). Restaurants in this area were the combinations of old and modern era. Most of menus in Phra Athit Road provided at least two languages (Thai and English). However, there were some restaurants offer Chinese as an additional language.

#### *2. Maharaj Road*

Maharaj Road was situated along Chao Phraya River. It was considered to be one of the oldest neighborhoods in Bangkok. The road was the house of Tha Maharaj community mall where there were several restaurants offering harmonious combination of local, Korean, western, fusion food, and dessert shops such as *Savoey* (traditional Thai food), *Tok pok ki jib* (Korean food) and *After you* (dessert shop). The language used on the menus in Maharaj Road were mostly Thai and English. Chinese was also found in some restaurants but not as pervasive as the former two languages.

#### *3. Tha Phrachan (Phrachan Pier)*

Tha Phrachan ran along Thammasat University's Tha Phrachan Campus. The area was filled with several local food restaurants. These restaurants appeared to offer two languages on their menus which are Thai and English.

#### *4. Yaowarat Road*

Yaowarat Road was considered to be Chinatown of Bangkok. The road had a great number of food stalls that attracted countless visitors. Its famous dishes included *Kuay Teow Kua Gai* (fried noodles with chicken), *Ka Pho Pla* (fish maw soup), and toasted bread. Regarding languages used on restaurant menus, most of them provide three languages which were Thai, Chinese, and English.

#### *5. Khao San Road*

Visitors would experience some local food such as *Pad Thai* and *Khao Soi (Northern style curry noodles)*. Nonetheless, if they wanted something exotic and strange, they could try fried scorpions, grasshoppers or bamboo caterpillars. Restaurant menus in Khao San Road were mostly written in Thai and English. However, there are some restaurants that only offered English menus.

#### *6. Sukhumvit Soi 38*

Sukhumvit Soi 38 was located near Thong Lor sky train station. Most of the vendors offered local food such as BBQ pork, noodles, and *Somtam*. Thai dessert such as sticky rice with mango served with coconut milk, coconut ice-cream and *Sarim (sweet noodles in coconut milk syrup)* could also be found here. Pertaining to languages on menus, Thai and English were dominant while Japanese was found in some stalls.

#### *Participants*

There were 55 native Thai speakers and 41 international participants making it 96 in total. The number of participants could be said to provide “a conservative estimate” as it was over 30 which were the lowest number of participants which yielded reliable results (Saunders, 2012). Participants were voluntary since they had to visit the link to complete the questionnaire. They were asked to rate their overall English proficiency and reading skill because this study had excluded those who were below the intermediate level. The description of intermediate level (B1) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for English (CEFR) guideline (The Council of Europe, 2001) is:

*[language users who are in this level] can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (p. 33)*

The assumption of doing so was that the participants with lower English proficiency skill might not be able to explain or identify the mistakes of the menus.

#### *Questionnaire*

There were two versions of the questionnaire in this research - one is for native Thai speakers and another for international participants. The questionnaire for Thais was divided into three parts: introduction, personal information and questionnaire. In introduction part, the name of the study, objectives, instruction, and how to contact researcher were listed. In personal information section, the participants were asked to answer 7 questions regarding gender, age, nationality, educational level, overall English proficiency level, English's reading skill and their knowledge on Thai food. In case of overall English proficiency level and English's reading skill, the researcher adopted the English proficiency levels from Ngampramuan (2016) which were elementary, beginner, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced, proficient and native. Questionnaire section consisted of 20 items. Each of them had 2 sub-items. The example of questionnaire is displayed in Figure 2. The participants were asked to rate their intelligibility level by selecting one of six-point Likert scale starting from 1 (totally cannot understand) to 6 (fully understand) in the first sub-question. Six-point Likert scale was employed because it could provide reliable data and short enough to not burden the participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2016). In the second sub-question, the participants were asked to explain the mistakes if they saw any. In this question, five common mistakes, as adapted from Ngampramuan's (2016) study, which were strange vocabularies/spelling, ungrammatical strings, transliteration, translation, cultural differences were listed as options. However, if the participants believed that there were other mistakes, they could provide their justifications in 'Other' box. Or, if they thought that there was no mistake, they could select 'No mistake' box. The respondents were free to choose more than one options.

For international participants, the questionnaire was also divided into three parts: introduction, personal information and questionnaire. It was identical for introduction part; however, for personal information, there were two additional questions which were “Have you ever been to Thailand?” and “How long have you stayed in Thailand?”. These questions were added with the presuppositions that the participants who had been to the country might somewhat have more understanding on Thai food than those who had never visited Thailand (Ngampramuan, 2016). For the questionnaire section, there was only one item for each menu which was “How well do you understand the English text written on the menu?”. The second sub-question regarding the mistakes was dropped because the foreigners might not be able to identify them as they did not understand Thai. The example of questionnaire for international participants is illustrated in Figure 3.

#### *Data collection*

The data collection was online-based. The primary reason was that it was convenient to gather data from international participants and Thais who lived in different regions of the country. It also helped save cost of travelling and facilitated fast data collection (Lumsden & Morgan as cited in Ngampramuan, 2016).

#### *Procedure*

First of all, the researcher made a trip to collect restaurant menus in Phra Arthit Road, Maharaj Road, Tha Phrachan, Sukumvit Soi 38, Yaowarat Road and Khao San Road. Next, all menus were examined and 20 of them were selected to be used in both versions of the questionnaires. The criteria for menu selection were following:

- 1) They had to be written in at least two languages (Thai and English);
- 2) They had to be matched with at least one of the common mistakes (see Diagram 1);
- 3) The pictures must be high quality enough to provide adequate information such as clear typeface and appropriate front size;
- 4) They must be from various categories such as side dishes, beverage and dessert; and
- 5) The lists had to be the combination of menus with no mistakes, minor mistakes (the mistakes that did not interfere with the overall meaning of the message such as *sweet corn boiled (boiled sweet corn)*) and severe mistakes (the mistakes that interfered with the meaning of the texts making them difficult to understand such as *spicy 3 frame salad (mixed spicy salad)*). These levels of mistakes were judged by three Thai native speakers who had upper-intermediate to advanced level of English proficiency.

1.1 How well do you understand the English text written on the menu? \*

**ข้าวราดหมูเกาหลี Food Korean**

1 2 3 4 5 6

Totally cannot understand       Fully understand

1.2 Regardless your understanding level of the menu, what kind(s) of mistake do you recognize from the English menu? (can choose more than one) \*

No mistake

Strange vocabularies/spelling

Ungrammatical strings

Transliteration e.g. Pad Thai

Translation

Cultural differences

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 2. Example of Questionnaire Items for Thai Native Speakers

1. How well do you understand the English text written on the menu? \*

**ข้าวราดหมูเกาหลี Food Korean**

1 2 3 4 5 6

Totally cannot understand       Fully understand

Figure 3. Example of Questionnaire Item for Non Thai Speakers

After that, the questionnaires were developed and reviewed by peers and a native speaker to ascertain that the questions were understandable before publishing it. Then, the data were analyzed by using simple descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage and standard deviation and inferential statistics such as independent t-test to address the research questions.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### *Intelligibility of Thai English Menus as Perceived by Thai and non-Thai Speakers*

In order to compare the intelligibility of Thai English menus used in Thai restaurants as perceived by both Thai native speakers and non-Thai speakers, t-test was conducted. Table 1 reports Thai and non-Thai speakers' intelligibility scores of Thai English restaurant menus.

TABLE I.  
INTELLIGIBILITY SCORES AS PERCEIVED BY THAI (N=55) AND NON-THAI SPEAKERS (N=41)

Source	Thai		Non-Thai		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Intelligibility scores	3.40	.83	3.84	.71	94	-2.75	.007

The results clearly showed that non-Thai speakers ( $M = 3.84$  out of 6,  $SD = .71$ ) appeared to rate higher intelligibility levels than that of Thai native speakers ( $M = 3.40$  out of 6,  $SD = .83$ ) for all 20 questions. The difference of the mean score was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ ,  $t(94) = -2.75$ ,  $p = .007$ .

##### *Mistakes of Thai English Restaurant Menus According to Native Thai Speakers*

To explore menus' mistakes, this current research provided five options for Thai respondents to select and added two additional choices in case they felt that there was no mistake, or the mistakes were not fit in the given categories. Table 2 illustrates the frequency of difficulties as identified by Thai participants.

TABLE II.  
THE FREQUENCY OF THAI ENGLISH RESTAURANT MENUS' MISTAKES  
(TOTAL FREQUENCY OF MISTAKES AS IDENTIFIED BY NATIVE THAI SPEAKERS = 1863).

Source of Mistake	N	%
No mistake	95	5.2
Strange vocabulary/spelling	372	20.2
Ungrammatical strings	345	18.8
Transliteration	368	20.0
Translation	453	24.6
Cultural differences	206	11.2
Other	24	2.3
Total	1863	100.0

The results revealed that the most frequent difficulty which Thai participants were able to identify from the menus was translation (24.6%) such as *Food Korean* instead of *Korean BBQ pork served with steamed rice*. Strange vocabulary/spelling e.g. *Coconuts Milk Icecream Wlegg yolk (coconut milk ice cream with egg yolk)* and transliteration such as *hoy tod* (crispy mussel and bean sprout pancake) also appeared to be among the leading mistakes contributing to intelligibility levels at 20.2% and 20%, respectively. Thai respondents further spotted ungrammatical strings e.g. *Sweet Corn Boiled (boiled sweet corn)* at 18.8 percent and cultural differences e.g. *Lahb Hed (spicy mushroom salad)* and *O'lieng (iced blank coffee)* at 11.2 percent. When extensively analyzed "Other" mistakes as described by Thais, the researcher found that most of them mentioned the problem of translation, for example, in Q. 7 Spicy 3 frame salad (spicy crispy mixed salad), the participants wrote that this menu was translated word by word. Unfortunately, the data was, in fact, related to translation category provided in the options; therefore, this additional information was not further investigated.

*Trip to Thailand, Duration of Stay and Intelligibility*

There was inadequate data to properly study the relationship between trip to the country and intelligibility as there was only four respondents out of 41 who had never been to Thailand. This was similar to duration of stay because there was only one participant in each category for 5-8 weeks and 9-12 weeks. Thus, a comparison of whether number of trip to Thailand and length of stay correlate with intelligibility level was not possible to identify.

V. DISCUSSION

*RQ.1 To what extent do Thai and non-Thai speakers understand English menus written by Thai restaurants?*

The findings revealed that there was a distinction of the intelligibility level of Thai English menus rated by Thai and international participants. Native Thai speakers tend to be more severe in evaluating intelligibility. The results lend support to Ngampramuan (2016)'s study which found that non-Thai raters seemed to be more tolerant to the errors found on public signs than Thai raters. Quite a few more researches, though not directly related to intelligibility, support this result. Lee (2009), for instance, conducted his study to explore native and non-native English speakers' behavior in rating Korean students' essays. He revealed that Korean raters appeared to more emphasize grammar while native raters were prone to be more severe in content measurement. Schmitt (1993) also reported similar results. He studied Japanese and native-speaking teachers' rating behavior and concluded that Japanese teachers appeared to be harsher in rating grammar.

There are a few explanations that can account for the fact that why there is a difference of the intelligibility level rated by two groups. First, non-native English speakers may pay closer attention to form-related mistakes than international raters. For them, it is likely that the mistakes which violate grammaticality would be rated low, for example *Food Korean (Korean BBQ pork served with steamed rice)* which mostly received 1 (totally cannot understand) from Thai respondents while most international participants rated it as 6 (fully understand). However, it should also take into the consideration that the international raters may misunderstand the meal as general Korean food instead of Korean BBQ pork served with steamed rice because they cannot read Thai scripts that stated the intended menu. Second, international participants are more tolerant to the errors if such distorted texts do not interfere with the overall gist of the message. That is, they tend to ignore the mistakes which are form-related. For instance, they mostly rated 6 for *Sweet corn boiled (boiled sweet corn)* as it has only a minor mistake regarding word order which certainly does not affect the intelligibility of the message. Third, international participants may have less expectation on the grammar of the menus because they understand that Thais use English as a lingua franca. Therefore, the mistakes that do not impede intelligibility are rated high, namely *Papaya Salad Beans (bean spicy salad)* which mostly receive 5 and 6, respectively. The work of Lee (2009) and Schmitt (1993), as previously discussed, also can be used to confirm that native English speakers seem to focus meaning of the text rather than grammaticality. Forth, the difference can also arise from the fact that Thai participants understand Thai scripts on the menus. That is, Thais are likely to use their knowledge of the language and food to make the judgment while overseas raters use only English to assess whether the menus are intelligible or not. Menu that employs transliteration such as *Tom Luerd Mhoo (coagulated pork blood soup)* shows that

while Thais appeared to rate both 1 and 6 equally, non-Thai speakers mostly rated this item as 1. It can be said that those who rate 6 may employ their Thai knowledge to judge it as there is no way they can grab the message out of the English scripts.

*RQ2 What are the most salient mistakes found on Thai English restaurant menus as identified by native Thai speakers?*

The most frequent mistake rated by native Thai speakers was translation. One of the explanations for this is probably because all of the menus selected for the questionnaire, at least, contain translation as one of the mistakes. For example, *EggNoodles no soup with BBQ pork, egg (egg noodles with roasted pork)* was identified as having strange vocabulary/spelling the most and translation a second. When looking at this menu from the raters' views who may not be trained in language-related field, it is acceptable to say that the translation in this menu is generally wrong. Therefore, it is not unexpected that the respondents choose translation as one of the most salient mistakes. Allowing participants to select as many difficulties as they want may contribute to the results as well. The findings reported that there were 1,863 responses for all 20 questions while the total number of participants was only 55. It seems that one participant provide more than a single answer in each item. Thus, it is high chance that they select translation in most of the items making it the most salient difficulty. Apart from translation, Thai participants also found strange vocabulary/spelling, ungrammatical strings, transliteration and cultural differences in the menus as well. The rationale behind these results probably lies in the participants' both Thai and English knowledge. As they can understand both languages, they tend to know what is right when writing the menus in English in terms of grammar, word choice, spelling and culture. Therefore, they are able to identify other difficulties besides translation.

#### *Implications*

The implications of this study are threefold. First, it can be an evidence to back up the need to design ESP curriculum that pay more attention to communicative purpose. According to the results, it clearly shows that international participants are likely to ignore the mistakes that do not interfere with the meaning of the message. Therefore, focusing solely on grammar does not improve Thai students' ability to use English nor it tremendously helps them get their meaning across. By focusing the use of English for communicative purpose, students will tend to be able to use the language more fluently and meaningfully. One possible way to so do is promoting theme-based instruction in ESP classroom where the emphasis of the course is on both grammar and other necessary component such as vocabulary that corresponding to students' need and speaking practices. Moreover, teachers should provide more corrective feedback when the mistakes impede intelligibility of the text and putting in less effort on correcting those which do not seriously violate it. Second, teachers may use restaurant menus as the authentic materials in the class. To write the effective multilingual menus, one must consider several factors such as the translation techniques, cultures and grammar. Having students experienced the authentic menus will surely make them recognize both quality and bad menus. Third, it can serve as a foundation to develop a guideline for Thai cuisine translation as it offers the insights into how people view the current menus and the mistakes that violate both Thai and non-Thai speakers' understanding which the restaurant owners should avoid.

#### *Limitations and suggestions for future research*

The following three major limitations are listed in this study. First, this research does not administer interview which may allow the researcher to gain more thorough understanding of the participants' answers. Some menu such as *Food Korean* might have been rated highly intelligible by the international participants due to the fact that they misunderstand it as the general Korean food not any specific types of meal. Second, the size of overseas participants is not sufficient to investigate to what extent trip to Thailand and duration of stay influence intelligibility. Finally, this study does not explore the relationship between English proficiency and intelligibility which may shed light on whether the proficiency affects intelligibility of the messages.

The limitations above allow future research to fulfill the gaps as follows. First, interview should be carrying out for it will give the insight into whether they actually understand the intended meaning of the menu, why participants rate the intelligibility level or determine the mistakes the way they do. Second, it is recommended to recruit more international participants so that the proper statistical analysis can be administered. Third, English proficiency and its relationship with intelligibility should also be studied.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Baker, W. (2009). The Cultures of English as a Lingua Franca, *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(4), 567-592.
- [2] Brittin, H.C. (2011). The food and culture around the world handbook. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [3] Council of Europe (2001). The Common European Framework of Reference for English: Learning, teaching, assessment. Malaysia: Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Crystal, D. (2003). The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Malaysia: Cambridge University Press.
- [5] Fuentes-Luque, A. (2017). An approach to analyzing the quality of menu translations in southern Spain restaurants. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(2), 177-188.
- [6] Huebner, T. (2006). Bangkok's Linguistic Landscapes: Environmental Print, Codemixing and Language Change. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3, 31-51.
- [7] Intelligibility. (2010). Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (4th ed.). Great Britain: Pearson.

- [8] Jenkins, J. (2006). Current Perspectives on Teaching World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 157-181.
- [9] Jin, S., & Liu, C. (2014). Intelligibility of American English Vowels and Consonants Spoken by International Students in the United States. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 57, 583-596.
- [10] Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2016). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*. USA: Sage.
- [11] Jorgensen, G. (2011). Best Bangkok street food hoods. *CNN Travel*. <http://travel.cnn.com/bangkok/eat/bangkoks-best-street-food-neighborhoods-972202/> (accessed 2/5/2017).
- [12] Kirkpatrick, A. (2010). *English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- [13] Kirkpatrick, A., Deterding, D., & Wong, J. (2008). The international intelligibility of Hong Kong English. *World Englishes*, 27(3/4), 359-377.
- [14] Klein, E., & Flint, C. B. (2006). Measurement of Intelligibility in Disordered Speech. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 37, 191-199.
- [15] Lam, J., & Tjaden, K. (2013). Intelligibility of Clear Speech: Effect of Instruction. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 56, 1429-1440.
- [16] Lee, H. (2009). Native and nonnative rater behavior in grading Korean students' English essays. *Asia Pacific Educ. Rev.*, 10, 387-397.
- [17] McCall, M., & Lynn, A. (2008). The Effects of Restaurant Menu Item Descriptions on Perceptions of Quality, Price, and Purchase Intention. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 11(4), 439-445.
- [18] Murcott, A. (1982). The cultural significance of food and eating. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 41(2), 203-210.
- [19] Nelson, C. L. (2011). *Intelligibility in World Englishes: Theory and Application*. New York: Routledge.
- [20] Ngampramuan, W. (2016). *English as a Lingua Franca in Thailand: A Case Study of English Used on Signs in Tourist Domains* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK.
- [21] Nualkhair, C. (2015). Bangkok's best street food: a guide to dishes and districts. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/nov/25/bangkok-best-street-food-guide-dishes-districts-thailand> (accessed 5/2/2017).
- [22] Ozdemi, B., & Caliskan, O. (2014). A review of literature on restaurant menus: Specifying the managerial issues. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 2(1), 3-13. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2013.12.001>.
- [23] Ploywattanawong, P., & Trakulkasemsuk, W. (2014). Attitudes of Thai graduates toward English as a Lingua Franca of ASEAN. *Asian Englishes*, 16(2), 141-156.
- [24] Saunders, M. N. K. (2012). Choosing research participants. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges* (pp. 37-55). London: Sage.
- [25] Schmitt, N. (1993). Comparing Native and Nonnative Teachers' Evaluations of Error Seriousness. *JALT Journal*, 15(2), 181-191.
- [26] Seidlhofer, B. (2005). Key concepts in ELT: English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal*, 59(4), 339-341.
- [27] SIL International. (2017). Why language & culture studies? <https://www.sil.org/why-language-culture-studies> (accessed 2/2/2017).
- [28] Smith, L. E. (1992). Spread of English and issues of intelligibility. *The other tongue: English across cultures*, 2, 75-90.
- [29] Smith, L. E., & Nelson, C. L. (1985) International intelligibility of English: directions and resources. *World Englishes*, 4, 333-342.
- [30] The Telegraph. (2016). The World Greatest Cities for Food. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/food-and-wine-holidays/The-worlds-best-cities-for-foodies/foodu-bangkok-cnw2/> (accessed 3/2/2017).
- [31] Theparat, C. (2017). Tourism to continue growth spurt in 2017. *Bangkok Post*. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/archive/tourism-to-continue-growth-spurt-in-2017/1199925> (accessed 17/2/2017).
- [32] Tourism Authority of Thailand. (n.d.). About Thai food. <https://www.tourismthailand.org/About-Thailand/Food-Drink> (accessed 5/2/2017).
- [33] Trip Advisor. (2017). Bangkok Food Tours. [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g293916-d2041858-Reviews-Bangkok\\_Food\\_Tours-Bangkok.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g293916-d2041858-Reviews-Bangkok_Food_Tours-Bangkok.html) (accessed 1/2/2017).
- [34] TripAdvisor (n.d.). Best Food in Bangkok. Retrieved from <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Guide-g293916-k787-Bangkok.html> (accessed 1/2/2017).
- [35] Wilson, E.O., & Spaulding, T. J. (2010). Effects of Noise and Speech Intelligibility on Listener Comprehension and Processing Time of Korean-Accented English. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 53, 1543-1554.

**Warangrut Duangsang** (first author) is a graduate student in the MA in Applied Linguistics program at Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand. Her research interests include systemic functional linguistics, English as a lingua franca, and sociology in foreign language education. She may be reached at [wduangsaeng@gmail.com](mailto:wduangsaeng@gmail.com)

**Natthapong Chanyoo** (corresponding author) received a PhD in English Communications Education and Applied Linguistics from the University of Pittsburgh, USA. He is currently a lecturer of Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University in Thailand. His research interests include systemic functional linguistics, sociocultural theory in foreign language education, language and mind, and research methods in language education. He may be reached at [natthapong.cha@mahidol.edu](mailto:natthapong.cha@mahidol.edu)