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## The Language Contact Phenomenon in Thailand: English Borrowing, Comprehension, and Public Attitudes

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### Abstract

*As the English lexicon has become more frequently borrowed and used in Thai mass media and social media, Thais are quickly adapting to such foreignness and are open to language contact-induced change. The current study explores the extent of the public's familiarity with borrowed words in contemporary Thai public media and attitudes toward language borrowing. The study participants comprised 120 Thais who voluntarily completed a questionnaire. They were from different age groups and were relatively highly educated. The instrument for the data collection was an online three-part questionnaire probing demographic information, an individual's comprehension of the borrowed lexicon as tested via 15 questions of lexical borrowing in context, and personal views probed in the questionnaire questions about English lexical borrowing. Follow-up interviews with six selected respondents according to age groups verified and elicited attitudes toward lexical borrowing. The findings revealed that high exposure to English resulted in a high level of comprehension, especially when words were transcribed in the Thai script with tone markers. If the borrowing was in Romanized script, it was less likely to be understood. The majority of the respondents recognized the need for English language borrowing in Thai communication, especially for terminology. They also expressed positive views toward the adoption of the practice. English was perceived as necessary for effective Thai communication, particularly among acquaintances and professionals. The ubiquity of English in Thai society today has led to general adaptability*

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*and acceptance of borrowing as part of language evolution; such practices are no longer a sign of prestige. The study suggests that language classrooms should consider using borrowed English lexicons to assist Thai EFL learners in developing English proficiency.*

**Keywords:** Code-mixing, language contact, language-induced change, lexical borrowing, mass media, Thai.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language contact, one cause of language-induced change, is a prevalent sociolinguistic scenario in any language community. In Thailand, English plays a significant role and has dramatically influenced language change among Thais. Thus, the borrowing phenomenon is commonly observed in everyday conversation, social media platforms, advertisements, official documents, news reports, television programs, or any public media. Such lexical borrowing seems necessary for effective communication as many English words have been adopted and have become well-established in Thai. They may be identified as ‘borrowed’ or ‘loaned’ words. Many foreign words are officially recognized and compiled in the official loanword database of the Office of the Royal Society of Thailand<sup>1</sup>. Such borrowing and loans confirm the trace of language contact-induced change in our society, where foreign languages are in contact with the native language, resulting in language contact-induced change (Auer, 2020).

While factors involved in language change include politics, history, education, business, and social interaction, such changes may introduce a new variety of native languages (Endarto, 2020). Conventionally, knowledge of English might have empowered and earned Thai people high respect (Jindapitak & Teo, 2011) and implied a particular image or social status (Trakulkasemsuk, 2012). Today, it appears common for a Thai language user to switch to an English word because of the absence of direct equivalence of Thai words. Practically, English borrowing now appears natural among multilingual Thai speakers, and it helps clarify or strengthen communication semantics (Narkkaew, 2011).

Given that English borrowing is increasingly common, many popular loanwords have become a ‘must-know’ part of everyday Thai for effective communication. More commonly recognized loanwords refer to innovation and standard technical terms representing new inventions, such as ‘the internet’, ‘the computer’, or ‘the highway’. In other cases, English words are known as popular loanwords, such as ‘bill’, ‘mobile’, or ‘treatment’, that accommodate everyday communication. A demand to refrain from borrowing while speaking Thai would pose a significant challenge since these English lexicons are now well-accepted in the public media and are officially recognized. However, the adoption of lexicons from English as the donor language (Winford, 2010) into Thai as the recipient language has not led to the greater efficiency of English language education in the country. In other words, the prevalence of English in the Thai media has yet to convince the public to develop greater English competency. To

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of the Royal Thai Society of Thailand [www.orst.go.th] is responsible for the appropriate use of the Thai language and issues regulations concerning Thai as a national heritage language, usually in form of a gazette or *ratchakitcha* [https://ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/].

most Thais, English is only a medium to communicate with foreigners; there is no need to know it unless one deals with foreigners. Even though English is compulsory in school, the average Thai citizen is admittedly not highly competent in English, as evidenced by the average score for English in the Ordinary National Education Test (O-Net) of secondary education; roughly around 30 percent in 2016-2020 (Mala, 2021). This repeated low average score in recent years has stimulated broad criticism of the nation's failure to improve English language education. Among the factors that have been blamed are the learning environment, social factors in the classroom, personal learning attitudes, and many others (Waluyo & Tuan, 2021).

The mismatch between English prevalence in the country and Thai people's English competence has led us to develop an interest in bridging the gap between sociolinguistic phenomena and English language education. For example, studies in Japan show that English borrowing allows more exposure to the L2 used as cognates (Daulton, 2008) and builds vocabulary capacity, especially in borrowed lexemes (Ogasawara, 2008). Such notions could be applied to Thai EFL learners for future pedagogical development. Thus, a better understanding of sociolinguistic phenomena seems crucial to developing English language competency.

Several studies conducted in Thailand's context provided interesting views on the lexical borrowing phenomenon and influenced the current study. For instance, in terms of language contact, Bennui (2019) investigated the role of the Thai language being code-mixed in tourism magazines written in English. The approach proved that the two languages in contact influence each other. Our study, on the other hand, looked at the use of English in Thai mass media which seemed to be growing in number. Other studies in this area explored the types of borrowing (Narkkaew, 2011), the intentions of borrowing (Soh et al., 2020), and the differences in borrowing among age groups and professional experience (Ramat et al., 2019). None of these have explored the audience's perception of language borrowing.

Troyer (2012) explored the use of English in 82 Thai advertisements in Thai online newspapers to identify the status of the world Englishes linguistic virtual landscape in the Thai context. Troyer's focus on language in advertisements triggered our interest in exploring a broader linguistic virtual landscape. The current study pays attention to news articles and headlines where the communicative intention should be taken more seriously than the advertisement. It may be true that language code-mixing could enhance creativity (Padival et al., 2019), but it is unclear to what extent it effectively conveys the message. In terms of public opinion towards the practice of code-mixing in Thai newspapers, Kumtanit and Srisakorn (2016) surveyed a sample size of 30 people from three different age groups. Despite the claim that the participants reported no negative effect of code-mixing on comprehension, evidence of proof of their understanding was not present.

Thus, in our view, research has yet to adequately examine the level of public comprehension when English words are incorporated into Thai with empirical evidence. Also, we see the need to identify the public attitudes toward pervasive lexical borrowing in Thai society. The implications derived from this study could benefit educators in planning an effective pedagogical model or developing a guideline to accommodate EFL curricula in Thailand or a similar context.

The study was developed with two objectives, namely to determine whether the commonness of lexical borrowing matches the general public's comprehension of the

borrowed items and to explore the public view towards English borrowing as part of language contact-induced change. It addresses two research questions:

1. To what extent does the public comprehend English-borrowed lexicons in the Thai public media?
2. What are the attitudes towards English influence on lexical borrowing in daily Thai mass media?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section provides a brief report of the relevant literature on language contact, lexical borrowing, public attitudes toward lexical borrowing, and the adoption of lexical borrowing in Thailand, to present a background understanding for this study.

### **2.1 Language Contact**

Language contact is a crucial subfield of sociolinguistics. It encompasses language phenomena that have attracted public and scholarly attention in recent decades, as explored in human communities worldwide (Adamou & Matras, 2020). When any two languages are in contact, they will influence each other resulting in linguistic changes. For many nations, the influence of a foreign language is notably traced to the colonial era, such as in India, Malaysia, and Singapore, countries where English is currently a second and official language. In others, language contact can occur through migration (Clyne, 2003; Tramutoli, 2021) or by geographical proximity, resulting in language code-mixing, as reported in mixed English and Spanish in Gibraltar (Goria, 2021). These examples, however, are not typical of English influence on the Thai language because Thailand was never colonized and did not experience a large influx of English-speaking migrants. According to Snodin (2014), the English influence on the Thai language, especially when people code-mix, is typically attributed to globalization. In Kachru's (1985) famous three concentric circles model, English, with a status of foreign language in Thailand, is classified as an Expanding Circle. Before English, however, the Thai language had a large amount of loanword adoption from Pali, Sanskrit, and Khmer, whose influence has long been rooted in Thai language development. Although the decisive influence of these languages has been discontinued, their adoption has marked their historical importance and has long indicated social class and prestige. For instance, Sanskrit and Khmer loanwords are recognized in royal terminology and appear in archaic languages (Pattillo, 2021).

Contact with the English began to become more prominent at the royal court of Thailand, then 'Siam', during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851) of the Bangkok Period (Trakulkasemsuk, 2018). Contact with Western nations later compelled all Thais to learn English in school as a primary foreign language, and English became a second official language in the country. Thus, it is not surprising to see the extensive use of English in Thai media and business. The usage of English in Thailand has altered the country's linguistic landscape; English has become a language of prestige and professionalism (Trakulkasemsuk, 2012; Vivas-Peraza, 2020). However, the integration of English into the Thai language is nevertheless subject to the domination of the native language in terms of syntax and stylistics. For instance, as Snodin et al. (2017) have reported, the adoption of English names by Thai products is aimed at

appealing to international buyers. English words may not express appropriate semantics when styled in Thai. To some scholars, the modification of English used in Thai society may show that ‘Thai English’, ‘ThaiE’, or ‘Tinglish’, are in fact variants of world Englishes that will likely become more established in the near future (Buripakdi, 2011; Snodin, 2014; Trakulkasemsuk, 2012; Vivas-Peraza, 2020). According to findings in previous studies, Thais have assimilated the English lexicon and idioms to meet the Thai language’s rules and styles. Communication technology, in particular, has promoted linguistic contact and, to some extent, led to the further evolution of the native tongue.

## 2.2 Lexical Borrowing: A Contact-Induced Language Change

A typical result of language contact is lexical borrowing. Based on Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009), once a language is in contact with another, it is likely that contact-induced changes will follow. The recipient language borrows, transfers, incorporates, or copies elements from the donor language into its system. Consequently, the recipient language would contain ‘foreignism’ as a form of mixed language codes. Studies may refer to lexical borrowing as code-switching and code-mixing, the standard interchangeable terms referring to the alternative use of multi-linguistic codes. These deliberate or conscious actions of borrowing initiated by a language user will first start to influence others until the borrowed items become a norm, as pointed out in Haugen’s (1950) classic study of linguistic borrowing. The group consciousness of borrowing will then affect a language’s structure (Thomason, 2007, p. 45).

When a borrowed item is code-mixed in one’s native language, Poplack and Walker (2003) reviewed Muysken’s (2000) three main types: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization, as exemplified below.

- (1) Insertion refers to using a borrowed word in the sentence.

For example: ข่าวนี้ฮอต *khao nii hot*  
this news hot  
‘The news is hot’.

- (2) Alternation refers to switching to another language at a clause level.

For example: จริงไหม *Jing mai* that’s impossible  
*Jing mai* that’s impossible  
‘Really? That’s impossible’.

- (3) Congruent lexicalization usually occurs between two typologically not-too-distant languages in which the structures are rather similar. However, when this happens in a typologically distant language pair, the structure may be fused and the speaker is prone to refer to the native language structure. Thus, a Thai speaker may make the following statement.

For example: ไม่มีไฟล์ 오디오 *mai mee* file audio  
no have file audio  
‘There is no audio file’.

Generally, code-mixing is not grammar-bound and occurs at the intra-sentential level, unlike code-switching that is commonly more employed by a bilingual speaker with equal competency in two languages as a communicative strategy and with agreeable grammar usage (Poplack, 2018). At the inter-sentential level, code-switching notably happens when a user automatically picks a grammatical form of a



transferring language to mix with the dominating one, more likely at their convenience (Soh et al., 2020; Tanabut & Tipayasuparat, 2019).

At present, most societies are engaged in dynamic language movement. In multicultural societies in Southeast Asia, like Malaysia, Singapore, or the Philippines where language variations are broadly observed (Rusli et al., 2018), lexical borrowing and code-mixing reportedly accommodate communication, create a multicultural social identity, as well as project a socially meaningful act (Zenner et al., 2019). For example, in the Philippines, English and Tagalog are mixed for everyday communication (Tajolosa, 2013) and differ among users from different generations (Dreisbach & Demeterio, 2021). In addition, borrowing can occur even when a dialect influences the national language due to its commonness or popularity, such as in the case of over 130 Acehnese words being integrated into Bahasa Indonesia and resulting in language enrichment (Wildan et al., 2022). The same practice is observed when the Thai language uses words from regional dialects. Words such as *roy* in the southern dialect meaning delicious, or *sap* in the northeastern dialect meaning delicious, or spicy, for instance, are well-understood all over Thailand.

One agent to promote widespread lexical borrowing is undoubtedly the mass media and social media. A recent study in Indonesia explored the significant role played by social media influencers who deliberately code-mixed. Besides the difficulty of finding appropriate Indonesian words to express their meaning, influencers also expressed their intention to assist their followers' development of English language skills (Sutrisno & Ariesta, 2019). No matter what the purposes of code-mixing may be, these mixed codes must be mutually understood so that communication becomes effective and unity is maintained through shared background knowledge (Botha, 2017).

### 2.3 Attitudes of the Public towards Contact-Induced Language Change

Based on Albarracin and Shavitt (2018), attitudes are evaluative reactions to an object, also referred to as 'evaluative judgments' or 'values', which imply one's judgment based on one's own feelings. Thus, language attitudes can be defined as evaluative reactions to language and relevant context. Garrett (2010) asserts three components in attitudes: cognition, affect, and behavior. To simplify this, the construct of attitude involves one's desire, values, motivation, emotions, and choice of action that an individual has (Dragojevic et al., 2021). According to Bar-Anan and Nosek (2014), attitudes can be measured by direct measures and indirect measures. A common direct measure that is also employed in this study is having respondents self-report their opinion about the object, concept, or practice. Data obtained through responses in spontaneous evaluative reactions can be used for attitude inferences (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). For indirect or implicit measures of attitudes, seven indirect measures of evaluation and self-concept will engage the respondents in psychometric properties (Bar-Anan & Nosek, 2014).

Referring to language borrowing, one may perceive it differently depending on one's values and background. For instance, on the one hand, English is viewed as an international language, rather influential, widely embraced in multiculturalism, and undoubtedly well-recognized for lexical loans. On the other hand, the privileged place of English in some countries might evoke negative attitudes and imply a 'language imperialism' as a result of the colonial period. Thus, it should be noted that before

multilingualism became more natural and welcome as seen nowadays, it was once seen as potentially a psychological or social handicap, disturbance, and even a risk to ethnic identity (Otwinowska, 2016; Thomason, 2007).

The picture has changed now. As Matras (2013) clearly states, global mobility is currently the norm, and it surely has resulted in linguistic changes. In Thailand's context, lexical borrowing is as noticeable as in other countries. The Thai language borrows words signifying items or concepts from another culture (e.g., oasis, ice cream), the word representing innovation (e.g., fitness gym, software), and even slang (e.g., cool), and they contribute to language evolution.

## 2.4 English Adoption and Lexical Borrowing in Thailand

In surveying the previous studies conducted since the beginning of the 21st century, we found the practice of lexical borrowing to be relatively ubiquitous, with researchers trying to explain the English-Thai code-mixing mechanism. The growth in research interest among contact linguists is in parallel with the increasing public recognition and deliberate integration of lexical borrowing in society, as evidenced by many studies confirming the prevalence of English loanwords in Thai media, such as Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003), Kongkerd (2015), Ruanglertsilp (2018), and Yutthayotin and Tippayasuparat (2018). Fundamentally, the Thai language borrows from English the sound-meaning pairs or lexeme stems (Matras & Sakel, 2007). The features are “material” borrowing, rather than “structural” (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009, p. 38). An orthographical adaptation usually follows the lexical borrowing to match the Thai native language, using a completely different set of alphabets from the Roman script. It is also worth mentioning that lexical borrowing tends to be more common in the academic setting, in which scholars and researchers borrow vital terms such as verbs and nouns when discussing issues among themselves in Thai (Waluyo & Tuan, 2021).

In the past, the primary motivation for borrowing the English lexicon in Thai communication might have been the prestige of English in the country (Jindapitak & Teo, 2011) and the influence of the educated classes (Hoffer, 2002). It should be noted that English words are prevalent in most societies and are used for various functions. For instance, English words can emphasize and clarify meaning, even if Thai equivalents exist (Yutthayotin & Tippayasuparat, 2018). To illustrate this, the word ‘life’ is often placed as a collocation with ‘สด’ [*sod*], meaning ‘life’ or ‘fresh’ in Thai. When phrased together, [*laif sod*] means to broadcast live, which appears redundant in this form. In other cases, lexical borrowing and code-switching are used to express politeness and respect, as reported in Kongkerd's (2015) analysis of Facebook conversations as well as presenting group identities (Yiamkhamnuan, 2011).

The practice of lexical borrowing in public media such as dramas, TV series, sitcoms, reality shows, and advertisements is observable. For instance, Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003) report common code-switching in sports programs, groups of experts, celebrities, and authorities. People who have experienced living abroad tend to code-switch more often, and women code-switch more often than men, as reported by Ruanglertsilp (2018) in the reality show, ‘The Face Thailand Season Two’ and ‘The Face Men Thailand Season One’. One apparent feature of English loanwords in Thai worth mentioning here is their adjustment, probably to remove foreignism. For example, the words are shortened and frequently combined with Thai through the

technique of hybridization, as Yutthayotin and Tipayasuparat (2018) found in the Thai sitcom, ‘Pentor’. In addition, in the case of English lexical items used by teenagers in the Thai TV series, ‘Hormones’, apart from the word function change, the use of English words can also follow the Thai style of adjective repetitions in order to convey emphasis (such as ‘chill-chill’, sounding ‘chew-chew’ [*chew-chew*] in Thai) (Mutor, 2017). Studies also show that English lexicons are necessary to clarify the message, especially in advertisements (Chantarothai, 2011; Kumtanit & Srisakorn, 2016). Without English words, the products could fail to reach their potential consumers.

In summary, previous studies have hinted that English serves a communicative function when borrowed into Thai communication and that Thai mass media are prone to have adopted English words in everyday use. However, there are cases where it also projects redundancies. In terms of attitudes, the growing global mobility may also have resulted in favor of lexical borrowing, but more empirical evidence is still needed.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

The current study employed the mixed-method research design because it dealt with quantitative data through an online questionnaire and purposive sampling interviews as a follow-up for result clarification. The incorporation of qualitative data allowed data verification with the interviews with six respondents from different age groups. The unstructured interviews elicited the respondents’ views and attitudes when answering open-ended questions. By employing this method, the data from the two sources (quantitative and qualitative) could be used in support of each other and to allow in-depth discussion from the broader perspective gained from interviews although they could yield biased responses due to the researcher’s presence (Creswell, 2009, p. 197).

#### 3.2 Sample and Participants

The sample was 120 respondents who consented to participate in the study, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Overview of the participants (N = 120).

| Category | Detail   | Number (people) | Percentage (%) |
|----------|----------|-----------------|----------------|
| Gender   | Female   | 76              | 63.2           |
|          | Male     | 44              | 36.8           |
| Age      | 15-20    | 14              | 11.7           |
|          | 21-25    | 18              | 15             |
|          | 26-30    | 10              | 8.3            |
|          | 31-35    | 29              | 24.2           |
|          | 36-40    | 14              | 11.7           |
|          | 41-45    | 11              | 9.2            |
|          | 46-50    | 17              | 14.2           |
|          | Above 50 | 7               | 5.8            |



Table 1 continued...

|                  |                                   |    |      |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|----|------|
| <b>Education</b> | Bachelor's                        | 61 | 50.8 |
|                  | Master's degree                   | 44 | 36.7 |
|                  | PhD                               | 9  | 7.5  |
|                  | High school                       | 2  | 1.7  |
|                  | Secondary school                  | 1  | 0.8  |
|                  | Primary school and below          | 1  | 0.8  |
|                  | Others (e.g., vocational diploma) | 2  | 1.7  |

The demographic data show that most respondents were female, aged 31-35 years (24.2%), followed by 21-25 years of age (15%). The smallest group was above 50-year-old age group (5.8%), including a woman aged 92, without digital literacy. She was assisted through the questionnaire and further interviewed for extra information. In terms of educational background, half of the respondents (50.8%) held or were pursuing a bachelor's degree. In comparison, the ones with a master's degree came second (36.7%), thus, implying a high education background for the majority. Regarding this unequal distribution, we would tend to classify our participants as highly educated with some exceptions, in order to clarify the results and discussion. Unlike [Poplack's study \(2018\)](#) which classified participants' educational attainment and claimed that there was no significant effect on lexical borrowing, most of our participants had completed high school level; hence, they tended to represent a highly educated sample group.

Regarding the participants' English language ability, the self-rating results revealed that 61.7% identified their level of knowledge of English as moderate, while 15.8% identified themselves as having a low level of English. As many as 22.5% of the respondents identified themselves as having acquired a high level of English knowledge, which might align with their level of education.

### 3.3 Data Collection Technique

#### 3.3.1 Data collection process

Before the actual step of collecting data, four pre-requisite steps were taken to prepare the research instrument. In the first step, the researchers collected 100 borrowed lexicons from Thai mass media in January-June 2019 when the study project started. In the second step, the lexical items were selected based on their ubiquity. At this point, one hundred compiled words were sorted according to how frequently they appeared. The criterion helped identify the level of familiarity the public may have with the borrowed lexicon. In step three, we developed 15 word-in-context items for comprehension testing. Step four involved the technical stages, namely, designing the questionnaire of Google Forms and pilot-tested it with five colleagues. The actual data collection stage included administering the online questionnaire and interviewing with purposively selected sampling.

#### 3.3.2 Questionnaire

The main instrument was an in-house questionnaire in Thai, launched online for five days, accessible via the link posted on the Facebook social media platform, which

is popular among Thai communities. It was voluntarily completed by 120 respondents who consented to participate in the study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section aimed to gain general information about the respondent. The second section contained a set of 15 closed-ended questions with context clues adapted from Thai news, headlines, and advertisements in the contemporary media available at the time of the study (see Appendix 1). The selected words borrowed from English included: 'hot', 'idea', 'character', 'grab-bike', 'barrier', 'moment', 'real-time', 'mouth', 'damage', 'street food', 'checklist', 'digital', 'deal', 'influencer', and 'pain point'. The test items were limited to 15 so that the respondents would not be too overloaded when doing the online questionnaire. Each question came with three choices of English-borrowed words or phrases to choose from: one designated as the most appropriate for the context, and two distractors. These lexicons were selected from 100 words used in Thai mass media primarily compiled as they played an essential role in Thai communication (see Appendix 2). The sources of this compilation were popular webpages for local news, advertisements, and banners (such as Sanook.com, dek-d.com, Thairath news online, Khaosod news online, and marketingoops.com). The lexicons were classified based on their commonness, frequency of use, and level of familiarity by the researchers. The unfamiliar ones were written in English script, also marked 'barely known', and were selected to check the user's recognition of the English word when used in Thai communication. The third section of the questionnaire dealt with respondents' beliefs and attitudes in nine questions (see Appendix 3). Respondents were asked to judge on a scale, ranging from 1–Not True, 2–Sometimes True, 3–True, and 4–Absolutely True. The section aimed to explore respondents' consciousness of lexical borrowing being used and their opinion about the English lexical borrowing phenomenon in Thai media.

### *3.3.3 Interview*

The interviews were conducted to reaffirm the data on attitudes, a week after collecting the questionnaire data. Six purposively selected respondents of different ages (aged 19, 33, 40, 48, 51, 92) were interviewed either in person or via phone calls, and notes were taken. The interview questions repeated the questionnaire to explore and reaffirm respondents' attitudes (Appendix 3).

## **3.4 Data Analysis Technique**

The retrieved data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and classified into four sets: demographic information, the percentage of respondents' correct answers from the test set, the respondents' opinions about lexical borrowing, and interview notes. The data from the test and questionnaire were analyzed by using numeric analysis, as they involved closed-ended questions and pre-determined approaches (Creswell, 2009). The responses were then calculated for average attitudes and percentage of accuracy. On the other hand, the interview data extracted answers from open-ended questions and then interpreted the attitudes and opinions of individuals. This data complemented the findings from the quantitative data (Combs & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). Selected examples of statements from individual interviewees were translated into English and given to exemplify the point being addressed.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study reported results in two main areas: 1) comprehension of the selected borrowed lexicon and 2) attitudes towards lexical borrowing usage and English borrowings in Thai communication.

##### 4.1 Public Comprehension of the Selected English Borrowed Lexicons in the Thai Public Media

The data from 120 respondents revealed a high level of public understanding of the selected English lexicons when borrowed into Thai, based on the 15 close-ended questions gauging an individual's comprehension of specific code-switched items. The correct answers were an average of 89.9 percent, signifying that the respondents were familiar with the English borrowed lexicons.

###### 4.1.1 Established loanwords in Thai communication

Sequenced according to the degree of correct use, Table 2 illustrates the percentage of accurate responses. The more highly understood lexicons may indicate the probability of established loanwords from English. Note that phrases appear in orthographical adaptation, hybridization, and pure Roman script forms.

**Table2.** Comprehension of English lexical borrowing in Thai headlines.

| No. | English code-mixed item                | Level of the correct answer (%) |
|-----|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1   | ฮอต 'hot'                              | 99.2                            |
| 2   | ไอเดีย 'idea'                          | 99.2                            |
| 3   | คาแรกเตอร์ 'character'                 | 99.2                            |
| 4   | แกร็บไบค์ 'grab-bike'                  | 99.2                            |
| 5   | แท่งเบรียเออร์ 'taeng barrier'         | 97.5                            |
| 6   | โมเมนต์ 'moment'                       | 96.7                            |
| 7   | เรียลไทม์ 'real-time'                  | 95.8                            |
| 8   | เมาท์ 'mouth'                          | 95.8                            |
| 9   | คาเมจ 'damage'                         | 94.2                            |
| 10  | สตรีทฟู้ด 'street food'                | 90.8                            |
| 11  | checklist                              | 89.9                            |
| 12  | ยุคดิจิทัล 'yuk digital/ digital era'  | 88.3                            |
| 13  | รีอิล 'rue deal / reconsider the deal' | 73.3                            |
| 14  | influencer                             | 60.0                            |
| 15  | pain point                             | 58.8                            |

As Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009) argued, lexical borrowing after a while can lead to the creation of an established loanword. The data above may indicate that the top four words: ฮอต 'hot', ไอเดีย 'idea', แกร็บไบค์ 'grab-bike', and คาแรกเตอร์ 'character' were well recognized, and could be considered loanwords as they conveyed clearer meaning than their Thai counterparts. Our observation in mass media confirmed a higher frequency of the top eight words, which may have established themselves as loanwords by now, as supported by five interviewees. The only person who did not know these

words was a 92-year-old female respondent, who reported that she did not know English [Interviewee 06, aged 92]. She made random guesses with her granddaughter's assistance on the form while one of the authors was observing. The participant might have represented a conventional speaker of the Thai language with little exposure to English borrowing. However, with a small data size, we cannot claim that age groups matter in borrowing, unlike that of [Alnamer and Alnamer \(2018\)](#) who found younger generation employed loanwords more frequently. Additionally, as borrowing reflects contact-induced change, the change in the Thai language affects more noticeably with nouns, which are content words. This aligns with [Poplack \(2018\)](#), specifying nouns as the most prominent lexical borrowing, and not structural one. [Matras \(2020\)](#) further implies such need of borrowing as serving pragmatic motivation.

#### 4.1.2 Uncommonly borrowed lexicon

Among the 15 items, the borrowed words in English script were ranked bottom of the list. The phrases 'pain point' and 'influencer' appeared to be the least familiar to the respondents, with 58.8% and 60% of correct answers, respectively. This may indicate either the respondents' unfamiliarity with words in the Roman script or the inclusion of a loanword to the recipient language in which the concept did not exist. The latter supports the notion that the insertion process in borrowing is a result of cultural influence ([Monaghan & Roberts, 2019](#)). These terms are used in business newspapers that target a specific audience with background knowledge in marketing and business, as reflected in [Vivas-Peraza \(2020\)](#), highlighting the original need for lexical borrowing to enhance professionalism. One interviewee verified this phenomenon. Working in the financial service sector, Interviewee 05 maintained that terminology is much more explicit and precise when expressed in English.

- (1) I do not mind using English in Thai communication at all. English terms are necessary for our specific profession in the financial services sector, for instance, terms like 'traditional asset', 'digital asset', or 'hedge fund'. [Interviewee 05, aged 51].

Another unfamiliar borrowed phrase for which over a quarter of respondents chose incorrectly was the phrase 'รีอดีล' [*rue-deal*], meaning 'to reconsider the deal', as in the question item 13 (showing in order, the Thai statement, the English transcript, the word meaning, and the meaningful English statement):

หงส์ ... คุยกับโค้ชทีมคนใหม่  
[*Hong...khui kunsue theem khon mai*]  
Swan...talk coach team person new  
'Liverpool...talk over new manager'.

For this item, 73.3% of respondents answered correctly while over one-fourth chose ซัมมิต 'summit' or ไลฟ์สไตล์ 'lifestyle' instead. The use of hybridization, or mixing a Thai verb with the English noun 'deal', reflects a stylistic aspect of linguistic borrowing by maintaining the morphology and syntax of the recipient language ([Poplack, 2018](#)). A new lexical item is introduced instead of being paraphrased in the recipient language and is considered necessary borrowing ([Winter-Froemel, 2017](#)).

The word ‘deal’ is borrowed in business but not as often in everyday conversation, resulting in incorrect answers by a quarter of respondents.

In contrast, the hybridized phrase ‘*yuk digital*’ was better understood with over 88% of correct answers. The word ‘digital’ expresses a new concept, and thus has become an established loanword. At large, educated Thai speakers comprehend the borrowed lexicon ubiquitously used in everyday life. For one thing, as the participants are frequent users of social media, they likely absorb the English borrowing that appears on social media. According to Winford (2010), this indicates the foreign model influencing the native replica, which is rather prevalent in a community with language contact.

## 4.2 Public Attitudes towards Lexical Borrowing

### 4.2.1 Necessity of lexical borrowing

Regarding the necessity of lexical borrowing, the Thai community tends to have some skeptical views, as reflected in the average score of 2.62/4, shown in Table 3. They accepted the practice as being necessary as also found in the studies by Chantarothai (2011), Kumtanit and Srisakorn (2016), and Lee (2020), but the interview data suggest the need to avoid overuse of borrowing. In fact, nearly a quarter (24.2%) perceived English in headlines as extra and not necessary.

**Table 3.** Views of the necessity of lexical borrowing.

| No. | Statement                                                                            | Not true (1) | Sometimes true (2) | True (3)   | Absolutely true (4) | Average points/4 |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1   | I agree with the use of foreign words in Thai public media.                          | 13 (10.08%)  | 37 (30.8%)         | 53 (44.2%) | 17 (14.2%)          | 2.62             |
| 2   | I think Thais need a foreign language in the news headlines.                         | 29 (24.2%)   | 48 (40%)           | 32 (26.7%) | 11 (9.2%)           | 2.21             |
| 3   | I see lexical borrowing as necessary because the meaning cannot be conveyed in Thai. | 17 (14.2%)   | 36 (30%)           | 46 (38.3%) | 21 (17.5%)          | 2.59             |
| 4   | Mixed codes in the Thai language reflect a multicultural identity.                   | 17 (14.2%)   | 21 (17.5%)         | 52 (43.3%) | 30 (25%)            | 2.79             |

Nearly 40% of the respondents perceived English as necessary when there was no equivalent word in Thai, while only 14.2% felt that Thai words were adequate for communication. This seems to confirm the classic view that “borrowing always go[es] beyond the actual needs” (Myers-Scotton, 1992, p. 29). The interview data below supports a motivation of lexical borrowing for social identity and dynamics (Zenner et al., 2019).

- (3) To me, it is important to use English in media and everyday communication. It makes our conversations more casual with friends. Using Thai words may sometime sound rather formal. We find English words more common. [Interviewee 01, aged 19]



The respondents' openness and approval of lexical borrowing in this study imply Thai society's multicultural identity. That signifies an optimistic view of the adoption of a foreign language in the community, a finding which is similar to the academic view in South Korea (Lee, 2020).

Other than that, borrowing is necessary for professionals. As Winford (2010) suggests, the terminology is 'learned borrowing'. Words are borrowed in a scholarly way for one's education, and this phenomenon may not result from language contact. Interviewee 05, a corporate secretary in the stock exchange, clarified her view:

- (4) I need to use English terminology for work. I do not think the meaning in Thai will be understood. English terms are necessary for our specific profession in the financial services sector, for instance, 'traditional asset', 'digital asset', or 'hedge fund'. [Interviewee 05, aged 51]

At present, we may safely state that Thais are highly familiar with English, the most influential foreign language, especially in the field of education and in professional circles. Historically, knowledge of English implied social prestige and power (Jindapitak & Teo, 2011), but this might no longer be true in Thai society today. Our data imply that the lexical borrowing phenomenon is now more a necessity against luxury, as described in Winter-Froemel (2017). For us, this necessity reflects the user's "conscious selection and automatic production," as Verschik (2017, p. 2) suggests, and serves the purpose of communication in terms of personal and professional relationships.

Some additional pieces of information were retrieved from the interviews. Interviewees 03 and 05 stressed the essence of borrowing, especially in an international community, and the academic need. In the case of terminology without a Thai counterpart, English words are more acceptable. Three interviewees [03, 04, 05] raised an issue of mass media using English borrowing. They appealed that the message may fail to reach an audience without English knowledge. Indeed, while more common words, such as 'hot', 'winner', 'new look', or 'champion' can reach most audiences, the terms for example 'inspired', 'contribute', and 'disruptive' are more appropriate for a scholarly audience than for the general public. For example, Interviewee 04 recalled her experience when encountering unfamiliar English words:

- (5) I do not understand words like 'contribute' or 'disruptive' when they are used in media. I feel lost and question if the article reaches other audiences. [Interviewee 04, aged 48]

Additionally, one respondent interestingly discussed the mistaken use of English forms, such as 'fitness' instead of 'fitness gym', 'social' instead of 'social media', or 'featuring' being used in a different way from the original English usage. This point suggests the need for further study of the role of language misuse or deviation in Thais' use of English.

To sum up, English lexical borrowing in Thai was necessary. However, it should be conducted discreetly, such as when there was no counterpart in the matrix language (or the native one). Thais had a tendency to openness and adaptable towards word borrowing in Thai public media. Adopting English was by no means a threat to the Thai language. Instead, it was perceived as a cultural 'hybridization,' or 'transculturation', similar to how Sokolova (2020) describes the use of English in the Italian tourism industry.

#### 4.2.2 Attitudes towards and acceptance of lexical borrowing

Based on the questionnaire data, the respondents' attitudes toward lexicon borrowing in Thai society revealed a wide acceptance and refusal of the negative view of lexical borrowing. Such acceptance corresponds to our early assumption that English mixed codes are well-integrated into the Thai language for everyday communication. In Table 4, nearly half (49.2%) of the respondents did not see lexical borrowing as a sign of the users' low language competency at all, and only 2.5% judged borrowing as low competency in Thai. This may imply more acceptance to use English words instead of Thai.

**Table 4.** Attitudes and acceptance of lexical borrowing.

| No. | Statement                                                                       | Not true (1) | Sometimes true (2) | True (3)   | Absolutely true (4) | Average point |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 5   | English-borrowed items in Thai reflect the low language competency of the user. | 59 (49.2%)   | 37 (30.8%)         | 21 (17.5%) | 3 (2.5%)            | 1.73          |
| 6   | The use of the English lexicon indicates the user's pretentious manner.         | 63 (52.5%)   | 46 (38.3%)         | 7 (5.8%)   | 4 (3.3%)            | 1.60          |
| 7   | I feel annoyed when English is used in Thai communication.                      | 51 (42.5%)   | 43 (35.8%)         | 19 (15.8%) | 7 (5.8%)            | 1.85          |

For whether or not English borrowing has projected a certain image of the user, the study found that over half of respondents (52.5%) refused to associate the use of English with a negative image. This supports [Buripakdi's](#) suggestion (2011) of wider adoption and mix of English in Thai, and that knowledge of English may not indicate prestige ([Trakulkasemsuk, 2012](#)). However, quite many people (nearly 40%) linked it with a perception of pretentiousness, probably when English words are used unnecessarily or employed in an exaggerated manner. In the same direction, the majority of respondents (precisely 42.5%) showed no annoyance over borrowed items in public media, while a slightly smaller group (35.8%) admitted that such usage could, at times, be annoying. Since this kind of attitude had not been mentioned in previous studies about lexical borrowing in Thailand, it shed light that the overuse of English words can lead to negative feelings in the hearers. Since the questions in this set aim to probe negative attitudes toward English borrowing, the low average points imply a tendency of acceptance. Participants' positive attitudes toward borrowing match the broad adoption of borrowing worldwide ([Tanabut & Tipayasuparat, 2019](#); [Thomason, 2007](#)).

#### 4.2.3 Self-evaluation and personal preference in lexical borrowing

The self-rating questions further explored the respondents' attitudes toward lexical borrowing and their practice. The data in Table 5 confirm that these educated respondents comprehended the English words used in media. Five but one (Interviewee 6) interviewees confirmed their familiarity with the borrowed lexicon. This triangulation also implies Thai familiarity with 'foreignism' in everyday life.

**Table 5.** Comprehension and personal preference in lexical borrowing.

| No. | Statement                                                            | Not true (1) | Sometimes true (2) | True (3)   | Absolutely true (4) | Average points/4 |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 8   | I understand the meaning of foreign words in Thai headlines.         | 1 (0.8%)     | 26 (21.7%)         | 56 (46.7%) | 37 (30.8%)          | 3.08             |
| 9   | I prefer spelling in English when the word is borrowed from English. | 15 (12.5%)   | 20 (16.7%)         | 46 (38.3%) | 39 (32.5%)          | 2.91             |

Informants confirmed in the interview that English had been a part of their everyday communication.

- (5) Most of the time I understand foreign words in public media. Even if I do not get it right away, I can guess the meaning from context. [Interviewee 01, aged 19]
- (6) English words are needed especially for the communicative function. [Interviewee 03, aged 40]
- (7) I don't understand English, but I don't mind that people use it. [Interviewee 06, aged 92]

Apparently, only a minor portion of respondents without English knowledge reflected a difficulty with English borrowing. We would argue that however small portion that could be, media producers should not assume that all their readers have good English backgrounds.

Statement 9 explored whether the Thai respondents preferred using English scripts when borrowing. Over a third (38.3%) of the respondents specified their preference for English spelling instead of the orthographically adapted Thai, and nearly a third (32.5%) was inclined towards the English written form. Preference for Roman script could result from the group's high exposure to English. An insightful perspective about English spelling was from interviewee 05, aged 51, a corporate secretary. She maintained that the English spelling gives a straightforward meaning while English words rendered in the Thai script may be confusing because much of current English language terminology has no standardized Thai transcription. Since language borrowing is ubiquitous and inevitable (Poplack, 2018), we would encourage Thai citizens to develop English competency to smoothly adapt themselves to the global multicultural trend.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The English borrowing shows evidence of language contact that resulted in richness in the recipient language. The study argued that English lexical borrowing was a widely welcome language contact phenomenon in Thai society. It showed that borrowed English words in Thai media were well-understood by the public with a high educational background and access to online technology. The nature of borrowing is more for material borrowing than structural borrowing, with nouns as the most prominent lexical borrowing. The English borrowed nouns, such as 'idea', 'character', 'grab-bike', 'moment', and 'street food' was well understood. The deliberate use of these words may imply the need to refer to them as established loanwords. Another common category for English borrowings in Thai is adjectives, such as 'hot' and 'real-

time', which convey particular concepts and may be more convenient to use than the translated Thai. It is worth noting, though, that orthographic adaptation in Thai is necessary for word recognition or the borrowing may fail to be communicated due to the generally low level of English proficiency among the Thais.

Regarding public attitudes towards borrowing, English's role as a global language created a broad acceptance of this phenomenon in Thailand. The 'foreignness' of English has been deliberately incorporated into the native language, perhaps as a result of the multilingualism of the host society, and out of necessity. Such positive views are expressed even more strongly now with the current widely accepted argument that knowledge of another language is essential for the workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The positive attitudes also imply openness and adaptability to trends in global communications. However, the pervasion of English borrowing may not lead to Thai citizens being highly competent in English. While serving effective Thai communication, the English words in context may not improve an individual's strength in English. For instance, although our data pointed to a preference for Romanized forms in the headline, the point still needs clarification since Roman-scripted items in the questionnaire were not always well understood. This aspect appears to us as another intriguing phenomenon worthy of further investigation that would benefit English education in Thailand. Language learners and educators should be urged to put more effort to decode foreignness in their language for thorough comprehension.

As seen, the public adoption of English loanwords in Thailand suggested a movement of contact-induced language change that goes along with the world's trend and seems to affect the country's linguistic landscape, especially in the urban areas. Thus, there should be implementations at the policy level. In regard to the official loanword database of the Office of the Royal Society, we have noticed that the database requires updating since many borrowings have yet to be compiled as official loanwords despite their commonness in Thai communication. In addition, despite the regulations for transferring English words into Thai issued in 1989 by the Royal Thai Society ([Thailand Gazette, 1989](#)), many borrowings are not always unified nor conformed to the regulations. Therefore, the current linguistic phenomenon of lexical borrowing in Thailand requires an update of the loanword database and management.

Despite attempts to reach the general public, the current study has several limitations: a non-inclusive group of participants and a short data collection period. Future research should strive to reach a larger audience with a wider variety in terms of age, gender, education, and profession to yield strong empirical evidence.

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