

THE MIXING AND NATIVIZATION OF ENGLISH IN THAI RAP SONGS

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ABSTRACT

This article aimed to study the use of English-language mixing in Thai rap lyrics by collecting data from 20 songs published on YouTube between 2019 and 2023, each with at least 10 million views. A total of 445 English-language tokens were identified and analyzed according to the framework of Ho (2007). The most common category was phrases, with 141 tokens (31.68%), followed by lexical words with 121 tokens (27.19%), and the least common was short forms with 4 tokens (0.90%). According to the framework of Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003), reduplication was the most common pattern, with 13 tokens (59.09%), followed by truncation with 8 tokens 36.36%), and semantic shift with 1 token (4.55%). The findings indicated that the use of English-language mixing in Thai reflects linguistic influences and blending within Thai society.

Keywords: Thai rap songs, Code-Mixing, Code-Switching, Nativization

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, English is widely accepted as the universal language for international communication, covering many areas such as politics, business, technology, and education. This has led to English playing a crucial role in communication between nations around the world. As a result, learning English has become extremely important in modern times as it is still the primary language used to record information and knowledge in various fields such as computer technology and the Internet. The influence of English can also be seen in the Thai language, where English words are mixed into many areas, including sports, politics, business, and entertainment. This has caused changes in the structure of the Thai language at various levels from pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence structure, to even entire messages.

Nowadays, English plays a significant and influential role in Thai society, particularly among the educated or those proficient in the language. Thai speakers with knowledge of English often mix Thai with English when discussing topics related to the modern world and technology or when interacting with other English speakers. This behavior of using two languages together is referred to by linguists as “code-switching” and “code-mixing.”

Code-switching and code-mixing are phenomena that occur among individuals who are bilingual or multilingual. Code-mixing involves the use of words or phrases from another language during communication while code-switching refers to the use of entire sentences or larger units, often seen among individuals who are fluent in both languages (Romaine, 1994). In Thai society, code-mixing is more common than code-switching because English is considered a foreign language, not an official language. Therefore, code-switching tends to occur in informal conversations among people who are proficient in both English and Thai. In contrast, code-mixing is more widespread as speakers can incorporate English words or phrases without needing to understand the intricate grammar of the language (Gumperz, 1977). English code-mixing is found in both spoken and written forms, especially in informal settings such as Thai country and folk songs, and rap music, where it reflects a conversational tone and the casual nature of spoken language.

Thai rap music incorporates English in an informal written form, blending it with lyrics in the style of hip-hop music, which has gained increasing popularity in Thai society. This is evident in television programs such as *The Rapper* (TV: WorkPoint), *Show Me The Money Thailand* (TV: True4U), and *19 Lab* (TV: One), as well as through platforms like YouTube. Thai rap lyrics feature code-mixing at various levels, including words, phrases, clauses, and full sentences. It also serves as a medium for artists to express their identity and linguistic uniqueness by blending Thai and English, reflecting the growing use of English in Thai society, particularly among teenagers.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Definition of Code-Mixing and Code-Switching

Code-mixing refers to the integration of one language into another at all levels or in various forms, such as words, phrases, sounds, or extended texts. It can occur at the level of words, lexical units, grammatical structures, and vocabulary. This phenomenon is commonly observed in bilingual or multilingual communities and reflects a sense of unity within the group (Prasitratasin, 2005; Gumperz, 1977; Richards et al., 1992).

Code-switching refers to the alternation between two languages at the sentence level or longer, with speakers typically possessing a high level of proficiency in both languages. Prasitratasin (1999) explained that code-switching is often fluid, such as speaking in one language for several sentences before switching to another language. Romaine (1994) added that code-switching generally occurs naturally, with switches between sentences (intersentential) being more common than within sentences (intrasentential). Bloomfield suggested that an ideal bilingual is someone who has equal proficiency in both languages while Scotton and Ury (1977) and Gumperz (1982) noted that common instances of code-switching typically do not reach this

ideal level. This is particularly true in Thailand where few people are proficient in both Thai and English at a native-speaker level.

In conclusion, code-mixing involves incorporating words or phrases from another language into sentences of the original language to enhance communication diversity. On the other hand, code-switching refers to alternating between two languages at the sentence level or beyond, typically observed in individuals proficient in both languages. Code-mixing is common in bilingual or multilingual communities and reflects the identity of the group while code-switching requires expertise in both languages to occur naturally.

Classification of Code-Mixing

Ho (2007) classified code-mixing into seven types as follows:

1. Letters of the Alphabet: This involves using English letters to replace words, which can be divided into two categories: alphabet names and abbreviations. An example of alphabet names is “BTS,” which stands for Bangkok Transit System.
2. Short Forms: This refers to the shortening of words. For example, “hi-so” is an abbreviation for high society.
3. Proper Nouns: These are specific nouns used to refer to individuals, places, organizations, or things. Examples include Olympia, Barack Obama, and Thailand.
4. Lexical Words: This refers to nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. An example is: “ฉัน design ห้องครัวเอง” (BT: I design the kitchen myself).
5. Phrases: Phrases are structures formed by combining vocabulary into a unit, but lacking a subject to connect the clauses. For example: “follow your way and just a freak.”
6. Incomplete Sentences: These are fragments that lack a main sentence. An example is: “but that smell เหมือนกับตด” (BT: but that smell likes fart).
7. Single Full Sentences: These are complete sentences that contain a subject, verb, and object. For example: “I’m so sorry ถ้าหากไปทำอะไรให้คุณไม่ชอบ” (BT: I’m sorry if I did something you don’t like).

Until now, there have been many studies on the process of nativizing English in various parts of the world, such as Bodda (1994), Cheshire (1991), Kachru (1986, 1992), and Shim (1994).

Kachru’s theory on the process of “nativization” of English explains the adaptation of English to align with the social and cultural context of each country, particularly in countries where English is used as a second language or an official language (Outer Circle), such as India and Singapore. Kachru divided the global use of English into three circles: Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. The emergence of nativization in the Outer Circle causes English to take on characteristics that reflect the linguistic and cultural creativity of each region. Additionally, Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003) studied the adaptation of English to local languages, noting that the contact with English results in a specific feature called “Englishization,” which can be categorized as follows:

1. Truncation refers to shortening a borrowed word from a compound English term, such as “super” from supermarket or “condo” from condominium.
2. Semantic shift occurs when English words are incorporated into other languages with meanings that differ from their original ones. For example, in Korean, the word back refers to a “supporter,” and meeting means a “blind date,” or a meeting between people who have not met before. In some cases, English words acquire entirely new meanings. For example, in Cameroon English, the term deadline is replaced by date line.
3. Hybridization is the blending of English with Thai in a way that creates new words or phrases, using both the structure and vocabulary of both languages. For example, นัก football combines the Thai word นัก (person) with the English word football.

4. Conversion refers to changing the grammatical function of a word in English, such as from a noun to a verb. For example, the phrase งานนี้ success (BT: This job is a success) uses the word success as a verb, whereas in English, success is a noun. This shift in word class is part of the code-mixing process.

5. Reduplication is the repetition of a word, often used with terms of quantity or intensity. For example, “Your team played very very well.”

6. Word order shift refers to changing the word order of the second language (or foreign language) when mixed with the native language. For example, in the Thai phrase นักเรียนบางคนสนใจเรียนกราฟิก คอมพิวเตอร์ (BT: Some students are interested in graphic computer), the word order in Thai changes from the correct English form computer graphics to graphic computer.

It can be concluded that Ho (2007) classified types of code-mixing based on linguistic units while Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003) categorized code-mixing based on the inherent characteristics of the languages involved. In this study, the researcher has chosen to use the classification system of both scholars as the purpose of the study is to examine the nature of code-mixing between Thai and English in Thai rap lyrics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection

1. The researcher collected data from 20 rap songs published on YouTube as YouTube is a widely accessible platform globally. The selected songs must reach at least 10 million views and feature English code-mixing a minimum of 10 times per song (excluding repeated words, phrases, clauses, or sentences). These songs were released between 2019 and 2023. All data was recorded in a table classifying the code-mixing types based on the frameworks of Ho (2007) and Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003). Data collection was completed in January 2024, and all selected songs are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Name of Thai rap songs

No.	Name of song	Artists	Year of release	Viewers
1	Pom Man Mai Dee	1 Mill	May.28.2019	40,349,827
2	Tat 2	Pokmindset Ft. Fiixd, Jigsaw Story, UrboyTJ, 1 Mill, Nino	Jul.9.2020	34,005,960
3	Chob racks (ชอบ RACKS)	GavinD Ft. Fiixd, Jaokhun, Diamond MQT, Rachyo	Jan. 16. 2020	17,325,196
4	TMRW	Lazyloxy Ft. Organic, UrboyTJ	Feb. 25. 2019	72,007,861
5	30 BANK 1000	DJ T-Double E ft. 1MILL	May. 14. 2020	13,554,026
6	Ni Sai Raui (นิสัย รวย)	Nicky & Goyyog Ft. P-hot	Nov. 2. 2020	22,005,052
7	Sud Pung (สุดปัง)	Milli	Aug. 14. 2020	46,050,589
8	Intro	1 Mill	May. 30. 2020	30,070,380
9	Warzone	1 Mill Ft. Fiixd	Jun. 20. 2020	20,263,304
10	Saturday	1 Mill Ft. Sunnybone	Jul. 25. 2020	30,404,844

11	Hiphop	Younggu Ft. Timethai, CD Gunttee, Diamond MQT	Sep. 8. 2019	25,334,774
12	Ma Fear Spain (มาเฟียสเปน)	Youngohm Ft. Younggu, Diamond MQT, Peeclock	Aug.10. 2020	52,574,774
13	Pech Tem Tau (เพชรเต็มตัว)	Fiixd Ft. 1 Mill, 19 Hunnid	Jan. 30. 2020	25,034,375
14	Big Hit	Diamond MQT Ft. Big, Organic	Aug. 24. 2020	21,130,204
15	Illslick (age) 23 vs Illslick 34	Illslick	Dec. 18. 2020	45,104,649
16	Yan Chao (ยันเช้า)	F. Hero Ft. JSPKK, M-Pee, Fiixd	Jul. 11. 2019	40,252,972
17	Raindrop	1 Mill	Nov. 25. 2022	13,226,235
18	Doo Ork	Younggu Ft. Saran, Diamond.MQT	Jun. 30 2021	15,100,913
19	Aw Pen Wa Chan Ruk Kai Mai Pen (เอาเป็นว่าฉันรักใคร่ไม่เป็น)	Jigsaw Story	Nov. 7. 2020	50,200,172
20	Smoke	1 Mill Ft. Ngaz YB	Jun. 4. 2020	14,551,525

The data retrieve on January 2024

2. The English words, phrases, clauses, and sentences were compiled and organized into Table 2.

Type of English element	Number of occurrences	Occurrence Percentage (%)	Repetitions	Repetition percentage (%)
Word	182	40.90	77	69.37
Phrase	141	31.68	32	28.83
Clause	20	4.49	0	0
Sentence	102	22.92	2	1.80
Total	445	100.00 %	111	100.00 %

Data analysis

In this study, the researcher selected 20 Thai rap songs from YouTube, published between 2019 and 2023, with a view count of at least 10 million. The lyrics were transcribed in detail to examine the use of English within each song. The researcher then identified and counted the number of English “tokens,” including words, phrases, or sentences inserted into the lyrics, with each unit of English usage counted as a token for analysis. These tokens were classified into categories based on the framework of Ho (2007), including: Letters of the alphabet, Short forms, Proper nouns, Lexical words, Phrases, Incomplete sentences, and Single full sentences, to provide an overview of the various forms of English usage. Additionally, the tokens were categorized according to the framework of Kannaovakun & Gunther (2003), which distinguishes

the use of English into Truncation, Hybridization, Conversion, Semantic shift, Reduplication, and Word order shift, to identify the specific characteristics of language mixing in the Thai context. The categorization based on both frameworks allowed the researcher to analyze the patterns of English usage in Thai rap songs in a structured and clear manner. The analysis results revealed the trends and characteristics of English usage that have been influenced and adapted to reflect the unique identity of Thai rap music.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Twenty songs were analyzed and the findings were divided into two parts: Ho's (2007) framework and Kannaovakun & Gunther's (2003) framework. Table 3 presents the findings in the order of frequency according to Ho's (2007) framework.

Table 3 Classification of English items according to Ho's framework.

Types of English Items	Frequency	Percentage
Phrases	140	31.46
Lexical words	121	27.19
Single full sentence	103	23.15
Proper noun	49	11.01
Incomplete sentence	20	4.49
Letters of the alphabet	8	1.80
Short forms	4	0.90
Total	445	100.00%

The results of the study, as presented in Table 3, indicate a clear preference for certain types of English-mixed items within the dataset. Phrases emerged as the most frequent category, constituting 140 items or 31.46% of the total, closely followed by 'Lexical words' (121 items / 27.19%) and 'Single full sentence' (103 items / 23.15%). 'Proper nouns' and 'Incomplete sentence' were also present in smaller proportions, 49 items (11.01%) and 20 (4.49%), respectively. Notably, 'Letters of the alphabet' and 'Short forms' were found in minimal quantities, 8 items (1.8%) and 4 items (0.9%), respectively, suggesting a less common occurrence in the analyzed data. The findings in each type are exemplified in order as follows:

1. Phrase

An example from the song, "Smoke," is a mixture of an English verb phrase. In one line in the lyric, "Let me บอกมึง one more time" (BT: Let me tell you one more time.), "Let me" is a verb phrase mixed with a Thai phrase ("บอกมึง" which means tell you) and a noun phrase, "one more time).

2. Lexical words

Lexical words – e.g. adjective, noun, verb, adverb, etc. – can appear in any position in a sentence. In the line from the song, "Tat 2", "มัน remind ทุกเรื่องที่ผม survive" (BT: It reminds me everything that I survive.), "มัน" (meaning "it") referring to the tattoo and "ทุกเรื่องที่ผม" (me everything that I) were mixed with two English verbs, "remind" and "survive."

3. Single full sentence

In some lines, the use of single full sentences was found. For instance, in the song, “Illslick (age) 23 vs Illslick 34,” in the line, “ทุกคนตะโกน The king is back” (BT: Everybody shouts “The king is back”), “The king is back” is a single full sentence mixed with “ทุกคนตะโกน” (Everybody shouts).

4. Proper nouns

The research found the use of proper names. In the song, “Yan Chao,” the name of a watch brand, “Casio,” appeared in the line “ไม่สนเวลาบน Casio” (BT: I don’t care what the time is on Casio). Likewise, in the line, “หล่อเหมือน Keanu Reeves ก็ได้แค่มโน” (BT: You are handsome like Keanu Reeves, but you just only imagine you were like him.) in the song, “Ni Sai Raay,” Keanu Reeves, the name of a male Hollywood star, was used.

5. Incomplete sentence

Two distinctive examples of the findings in this category are the lines, “อนาคต if I got shots.” (BT: In the future if I got shorts.) from the song, “Intro,” and “Back when I was young มีแค่พี่กูเป็น my day one,” (BT: Back when I was young, there is only my brother who is my day one.) from the song, “30 Bank 100”. “if I got shot” and “Back when I was young” which were adverbial clauses were mixed with Thai clauses.

6. Letters of the alphabet

In the line – “ภู่วาจะหนีทุกคน ไปเที่ยวอยู่ที่ LA” (BT: I’m planning to escape everyone to travel to Los Angeles.) – in the song, “Raindrop,” “LA” standing for Los Angeles was used.

7. Short forms

In the song, “Tat 2,” “fam” in the line, “Imma tat that shit up for my fam ภู่วาเพื่อน 93 ไว้ที่แขน” (BT: I’m going to put that tattoo for my family. I put tattoo about my friend 93 on my arm.), was shortened from “family.”

The research also analyzed data based on Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003)’s nativization framework, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Results based on Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003)’s Nativization

Types of English Items	Frequency	Percentage
Reduplication	13	59.09
Truncation	8	36.36
Semantic shift	1	4.55
Hybridization	0	0
Conversion	0	0
Word order	0	0
Total	22	100.00%

According to Table 4, Reduplication displays the highest frequency (13 items/ 59.09%), followed by Truncation (8 items/ 36.36%) and semantic shift was found only once (1 item/ 3.57%) while Conversion, Word order and Hybridization were not found.

1. Reduplication

In the line, “โยนเงินขึ้นฟ้า *I got racks racks racks*” (BT: I throw money up to the sky. I got *racks racks racks*), in the song, “Chob Racks,” the word “racks” was duplicated three times.

2. Truncation

As a distinctive linguistic feature in the spoken Thai language, truncation was expected to be found in the songs. For instance, “ก๊อป” (pronounced as “cop” truncated from “copy”) in the line, “ดูออก ก๊อปทุกคำ” (BT: I know you copy all of my words.), was used. Another example is the line, “โชว์เสร็จก็นับแบงค์ sip *L*” (BT: After I finished performance. I counted cash and drank alcohol.), in the song, “Hip Hop,” where “L” truncated from “alcohol” was found.

3. Semantic shift

The research found only one word, “ดิส,” in this category. In the line, “ถ้ายังไม่เลิกทำตัวดิส ระวังพี่ปรี๊ดแตก” (BT: If you don’t stop acting weird, I will get angry.), in the song, “Ni Sai Ruay,” the word, “ดิส,” was shortened from “artist” meaning a person who creates a work of art. However, in this song, it means ‘a weirdo.’

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Findings based on Ho’s (2007) Framework

According to the findings based on linguistic unit proposed by Ho (2007), “Phrase” displayed the highest frequency. The result implies that lyricists mainly use phrases, especially verb phrase, for example, “*never give a fuck* ถูคนไทย” (BT: I never give a fuck because I’m Thai.) and ถูเดินทาง *cross the country*” (BT: I travel cross the country.) In addition, they used phrases to showcase their identity and English language proficiency, internationalizing their songs. This is consistent with Jaspal (2009), who identified that people use language—a tool appropriate for expressing “selfness” and relationships with others—not only to communicate with others but also to showcase their identity or distinctiveness from others.

Most of lexical words found in Thai rap lyrics were noun, such as “slime” in “ตอนนี้กูอยู่ข้างใน slime” (BT: I’m with my friends now) and “เมื่อคืนกูอยู่ใน club แฟนมีมาเรียกตัวเอง” (BT: I was in the club last night. Your girlfriend called me “baby”). This demonstrates how English nouns are substituted for common Thai words. Several factors may contribute to this use of English in rap lyrics, particularly the influence of Western rap and hip-hop culture, which primarily uses English. Consequently, the use of English nouns in Thai rap songs is associated with the original culture. Additionally, English is often viewed as a symbol of modernity, universality, and coolness, aligning with the rap genre’s desire to present a distinctive and unique identity. This is consistent with the definition of code-switching by Malmkjaer (1991) that the use of words from one language, often nouns, within the discourse of another language. The use of nouns not only diversifies the lyrics but also creates a unique atmosphere and connects with the commonly shared experiences of listeners in contemporary society.

Proper nouns displayed the second highest frequency in the study. Most of them were famous people’s names, e.g. Einstein, Elon (Elon Musk), Cigo (a former famous Thai footballer), etc. The use of proper nouns represents the impact of famous people on different social contexts including education, business, sports, etc. Proper nouns as well-known names are then used to create an impact one way or another.

The third majority of the findings were single full sentences. Thai rap singers always use complete English sentences to convey meaning clearly and directly to their audience. In the example, “ใช้ชีวิตทุกวันให้เหมือนมันเป็นวันเกิดกู *I’ll be ballin* จะตายเมื่อไหร่กูไม่รู้” (BT: Spending life every day like it’s my birthday. I will be ballin. I don’t know when I will die.) “*I gotta keep it real* เพราะชีวิตจริงมันไม่ chill” (BT: I have to keep it real because the reality of life isn’t easy.), the lyricist mixed Thai and English sentences in their songs. Due to the impact of English on music

industry in Thailand, English is utilized as a tool for making Thai songs interesting and presenting Thai art and rap to the eyes of the world. Another important factor that intensifies such impact is globalization where cross-cultural communication plays a vital role, resulting in the use of more English in media and music (Phillipson and Pennycook, 1992).

Findings based on Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003)'s Nativization Framework

In terms of the findings based on Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003)'s nativization framework, "Reduplication" displayed the highest frequency. This linguistic feature, which does not exist in English, serves to create rhythm and meter in music. For instance, phrases like "rap rap rap it up," "I got racks racks racks," or "กูยัง hustle hustle hustle hustle" (BT: I still hustle) demonstrate how this repetition contributes to the musical rhythm. This aligns with what Maniwong's (1994) said, "Songs are essentially literature with melody, created by people in different societies." Furthermore, the finding was consistent with the finding of Likhithphongsathorn and Sappapan (2013), who found the frequent use of reduplication.

Apart from reduplication used for creating musical rhythm, truncation – shortening of words – is another popular technique in songwriting to harmonize the lyrics to the music. In this research, truncation was found to be the second most common. For example, in the phrase "เจอมีงในเฟซมีงพูดหือไรทุกวัน" (BT: I see you on Facebook, what are you talking about every day?), the word "เฟซ" was shortened from "Facebook." Similarly, in "ไม่ได้ pop เหมือนเมื่อก่อน" (BT: I'm not popular like before.), "pop" was a shortened version of "popular." These examples demonstrate how truncating English words and incorporating them into Thai sentences creates a fast-paced communication style that aligns with musical rhythms. Furthermore, this finding was consistent with Prasitthirathin's (2005) finding that language contact and the ability to switch between multiple languages lead to mutual linguistic influence.

This linguistic phenomenon mirrors the broader trend of English usage in Thai society, particularly among youth who are familiar with Western culture and possess higher levels of English proficiency. As Norton (2000) suggests, this linguistic hybridization allows individuals to construct distinct social identities. The fusion of Thai and English broadens the appeal of Thai rap music and adds to its allure.

The results of this research revealed a prevalent use of code-mixing and code-switching at various linguistic levels including words, phrases, and sentences. The lyricists incorporated English to enhance their unique style, added a contemporary touch, and created a distinctive identity for their music. The integration of English phrases and words into Thai sentence structures results in a distinctive sound which appeals to audiences who know Thai and English. The results also reflect the influence of Western culture on Thai society, particularly among youth who are receptive to foreign concepts and languages. The blending of the two languages occurred at word and structure levels, often aligning with the rhythm and emotion of rap music. This phenomenon showcases the adaptability of English in Thai contexts and songwriters or lyricists' creativity in utilizing language to innovate and connect authentically with their audience.

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