

“We Wear Face Shield and Mask”: COVID-19 Related Words and Phrases Used by Thai Learners of English

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Received: November 11, 2022

Accepted: December 27, 2022

Online Published: December 28, 2022

doi: 10.5539/elt.v16n1p100

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v16n1p100>

Abstract

Since 2020, measures against the COVID-19 pandemic have been implemented worldwide, and these are reflected in language. The objectives of this study are to explore the use of COVID-19 - related words and terms in Thai learners of English, document their usage, and investigate their varieties and errors, and suggest pedagogical implications for using authentic online materials in teaching English. The data were the written language that were collected from January 2021 to July 2021 from online Facebook groups administered by students of an open university in Thailand. A qualitative descriptive method of analysis was used. Words and terms related to the pandemic were thematically categorized and analyzed considering loanwords and borrowing. Patterns of use were analyzed and compared with corpora. The findings emerged from the analysis. There are a number of COVID-19 related loanwords from English used by Thai learners of English and the conventionalization of these loanwords, varieties and errors are observed. Most of the loanwords were used in code-mixing, and this is likely the source of errors when Thai learners use these words in their English. The findings have some pedagogical implications. The paper recommended that teachers identify and correct students' errors immediately. Students should sometimes also be given some explanation about the errors in order to prevent potential overgeneralization of word use. Furthermore, the paper recommended that further research be carried out on the new terms that have been transferred to Thai language as loanwords, loan-translations and loan-blends.

Keywords: COVID-19, Thai EFL learners, words and phrases, errors analysis, corpora

1. Introduction

Since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in March 2020, information and guidelines from public health agencies have been the source of knowledge disseminated by media outlets. With the volume of news and exposure to the Internet, people around the world began adopting COVID-19 terminology, especially in English.

The pandemic has brought changes to the English language. In 2020, the Oxford English Dictionary (2020) issued two special updates in an unscheduled update, to include coronavirus-related language. Editors noted that these updates included new words brought on by the pandemic and the resurgence of not well-known terms, as well as obscure medical definitions not incorporated in previous editions. The Coronavirus corpus is another example of how the pandemic has had an impact on the English language. Developed in March 2020, the corpus has been collecting more than million words and allows users to see the frequency and patterns of use of words people said in online newspapers and magazines in English-speaking countries.

Glossaries and guides to COVID-19 related terms are common in English-speaking communities, thus promoting understanding of the terms and increasing the input to the public. In the United States, Anna Orso (2020) published an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer “A glossary of coronavirus terms to understand the pandemic” to explain 4 categories of terms: the medical, business, social and governmental terms. In Canada, the Government also featured a glossary of the COVID-19 pandemic on its official website. The government mentioned, “ever since COVID-19 emerged in December 2019 and the World Health Organization declared a

pandemic in March 2020, the knowledge of the disease and the resulting public health crisis has kept evolving, and people need to learn about the terms and use them consistently. In India, the Times of India (2020) also has published the article “COVID-19: Your guide to all the key terms related to coronavirus”.

A similar thing has happened to the countries where English is not an official language like Thailand. The rapid flow of information about the pandemic from international public health agencies and medical professionals whose body of knowledge is built on the English language has been a spur to the great volume of medical terms and COVID-19 related terms used by Thai speakers. For example, Thailand’s Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) inform the public about infection rates, death tolls, policies, measures, developments, and updates. The CCSA’s spokesperson and his assistants are medical professionals, so English medical terms and COVID-19 related terms are used and explained. As a result of that, an increase in COVID-19 English loanwords in interactions among Thais, code-mixing as well as varieties of usage have been observed everywhere especially the social media that were mostly used in Thailand which are Facebook, YouTube and Line.

During the lockdown period, Online Distance Learning was the main platform of learning and social media was a way for most people to get rid of boredom and stress from online studying. Moreover, social media is a platform for interaction between students and alumni (experience sharing, expressing themselves during challenging times) and according to data collected in 2021, the number of Facebook users in Thailand reached around 59.2 million (Statista Research Department, 2021). Also, almost every day, people come across many medical terms and words and phrases associated with COVID-19. Covid-19 has become a dominating global discourse. To study the use of COVID-19 related terms is another way for language teachers to learn, plan and increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to fully understand how social media provides affordances to language learning or hinder students’ language learning, two research questions are proposed: 1) what are English COVID-19 related words used by Thai students at an open university? 2) how do Thai students at an open university use them?

1.1 Literature Review

The news and the internet not only contribute to globalization but are a source of language input and language change. According to Crystal (2006), newspapers today have become language forming institutions; their language informs and influences broader linguistic trends. Similarly, the Internet has also become a potential environment for language change – not merely for the coining of the new words but also grammaticalization. Sayers (2014) asserted that mass media plays a role in the modern era in linguistic innovations. The novel coronavirus pandemic is an illustration of how an influx of news and the Internet have increasingly globalized healthcare policies, prevention measures, and new normal ways of life. This has given rise to new terms and phrases and loanwords from English.

Fromkin and Rodman (1984 p.309) defined loan words as a process by which one language or dialect takes and incorporates some linguistic elements from another, Gal (1979 p.79) also defined loan words or borrowings as consisting of the introduction of single words or short idiomatic phrases from one language into the other. Robin (1964 p.313) also explained that loan words must be considered as those words, which were not in the vocabulary at one period and are in at a subsequent one, without having been made of from the lexical stock of language or invented as entirely new creation as for example, certain name of products. Loan words, are therefore, words adopted by the speakers of one language from a different language. Borrowing words from another language or lexical borrowing takes place when people find that there are no equivalent words in their language, they can use to express a concept or an entity. Borrowed words are grammatically adapted to the speaker’s native tongue (Holmes, 2001).

There have been a few studies and scholars around the world that have explored English borrowing or loan words during COVID-19. Abdulloh, Sarsono, and Muslim (2020) found that English borrowings, mostly medical and healthcare terms, were used by Indonesians through adoption and adaptation. Claria, Artawa, Satyawati, and Putra (2022) classified borrowed words that appeared during the pandemic into five forms: words, phrases, synonyms, abbreviations, and acronyms. Onishi, (2021), an instructor of Foreign Personnel, AEON Japan, mentions that with each passing year, it seems more and more English loanwords are added to the Japanese lexicon. Perhaps some of this can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, with words like クラスタ (kurasutā, cluster) and パンデミック (pandemikku, pandemic) being thrown around by everyone—specialists, newscasters, governors, even your average “salary man”. Breitenbach, (2021) discusses numerous new words inspired by COVID-19 in Germany. He states that The Mannheim-based Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS) has listed more than 1,000 new words that are all related to the pandemic. For each term, the

institute quotes a newspaper article where it was used. Whether first adopted by the population or popularized through political discussions, the words reflect how German-speaking countries dealt with the pandemic over the past year. "Lockdown" and "shutdown" have become part of everyday vocabulary in Germany and some of those words are all borrowed from the English language, such as "Social-Distancing-Shaming."

Lexical borrowing can be viewed in tandem with code-mixing. Both are conceptually related to speakers' alternate of codes. Code-mixing involves the change of one or more languages into another in a sentence, across sentences, and across discourse types (Kachru, 1978). Studies of code-mixing reveals how this linguistic phenomenon interacts with individual values and socio-cultural status (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Ho, 2007) and reflects linguistic hybridity in an increasingly globalized world (Hall and Nilep (2015). With the English language being a factor in globalization and English being a lingua franca (Dewey, 2007), it would be informative to investigate lexical borrowing and code-mixing together.

English-Thai code-mixing has been examined in various discourse types, especially in the past decade. Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003) studied English mixing in Thai television shows. Janhom (2012) investigated code-mixing patterns of English-Thai code-mixing in Thai health magazines. Thai songs with English mixed items are also investigated (Likhithongsathorn and Sappapan, 2013). Patterns of code-mixing and code-switching in Thai songs as well as listeners' attitudes towards the songs are explored (Chairat, 2014). The findings of these studies show that code-mixing takes place in the category of nouns the most and that the English-mixed items undergo some modifications such as grammatical forms and pronunciation.

Studies suggest teaching EFL/ESL students in the 21st century by using authentic materials so as to make the learnings more meaningful to the students; however, in the time of disruption, teachers' awareness of the word-formation processes evident in the new COVID-19 vocabulary should be raised (Nushi & Fadaei, 2022). Teachers should be able to explain how new words are formed and how the new words function in a sentence (Situmorang, Pramusita, & Nugroho, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). Social media are famous communication channel that people communicate, comment, express their personal opinion. As the study of Chiraratanasopha (2021) suggest social media users in Thailand frequently comments on their Facebook in relation to four main groups of terms: disease prevention, worry, healthcare and treatment, and government policy (p.66.). As can be seen here all the terms mentioned are mixed some are borrowed words and some are loanwords. In addition, the recent studies also suggest the covid-19 pandemic has changed people's behavioural norms and how people conceptualize everyday life. This has evident in their new normal ways of communication when code mixing and code switching the covid-related terms are used (Andriyani & Santika, 2021; Foster & Welsh, 2021; Pratama, 2022).

1.2 Research Objective

The research objectives of this study are to explore the use of COVID-19 - related words and terms in Thai learners of English, document their usage, and investigate their varieties and errors.

2. Method

This research study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected from online Facebook groups administered by students at an open university in Thailand from January to July 2021. The data were collected manually; utterances that showed code-mixing and loanwords are captured and highlighted; the date on which they were posted was documented. In the other words news, quotes and posts that contain COVID-19 related words in English are captured and typed up. Then hashtags that contain COVID-19 related words in English are followed, and instances of use are captured and typed up.

The data were analyzed from two angles: loanwords and code-mixing. Ho's linguistic units of code-mixing (2007) was used as an analytical framework. Then a fine-grained analysis was conducted with the usage of the code-mixed lexical words and phrases. They were compared with the instances of use in the Coronavirus Corpus. Features of code-mixed items were also analyzed based on Kannaovakun and Gunther's categories (2003).

3. Results

This section analyzes the data collected according to the method applied in the present research. The collection of English loanwords related to COVID-19 from online Facebook groups administered by students at an open university in Thailand will be presented and explained including linguistic units of Code-Mixing.

In Thailand, there are many different technical and legal terms that have been utilized in official governmental guidance, media reports, and throughout the general public with respect to the 2019-nCoV (2019 Novel Coronavirus) and the resulting COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019). Most of those words have Thai words to use as appearing in the second column of table one, it depends on each person to use Thai or English words.

Jaihuek et al. (2011) stated that many Thai people believe that those who are knowledgeable in a topic mix English words when talking. This is also related to Yiamkamnuan (2010) who said since English has been blended into Thai daily interactions, Thai people tend to use more English words in Thai contexts. Code Mixing and Borrowing make them easier to interpret the messages when their first language cannot express what they are meant to be. There were a number of words described as code mixing since they were used by Thai learners which were observed through online Facebook groups administered by students at an open university in Thailand as follows:

Table 1. English words, Thai words, Linguistic units, frequency of occurrence and explanations

English word	Thai word	Linguistic units	Frequency of occurrence	Explanations
WFH/ work from home	ทำงานที่บ้าน	Phrases	3492	WFH is believed to be the new normal of the present world and so does Thailand as many companies have offered this flexibility to their employees even post-COVID period. However, sometimes they used “work from home” and work for home” in the Facebook comments.
Alcohol Gel	Gel alcohol เจล แอลกอฮอล์	Phrases	3402	In Thai language, noun modifiers and adjectives are placed after the noun that they are describing or modifying. Therefore, in this case, Thai people will call it “Gel alcohol” and Spray alcohol.
PCR test	การตรวจหาเชื้อในทางเดินหายใจ	Phrases	3392	
Face shields	เฟซ ชิลด์ / หน้ากากกรองอนุภาคชนิดใช้แล้วทิ้ง	Phrases	3272	
Swab	แยงจุ่มก	Lexical Words	3019	For this word there are a lot of mistakes when Thai learners sometimes pronounce and write it on their Facebook comments as “swap” and “swok”. Although ‘swap’ versus ‘swab’ are not homophones, the final sounds of both words do not occur in the Thai sound system.
Alcohol Spray	สเปรย์แอลกอฮอล์	Phrases	2983	In Thai language, noun modifiers and adjectives are placed after the noun that they are describing or modifying. Therefore, in this case, Thai people will call it as “Gel alcohol” and Spray alcohol.
Mask	หน้ากากอนามัย	Lexical Words	2604	However, the pronunciation of Thai learners is different. We can hear both /mɑ:sk/(BrEng) and /mæsk/(AMEng) depending on their background, In FB comments we will see both of them.
Drive-thru	แบบขับรถผ่านหรือไต่رف-ทรี	Phrases	1349	
Social distancing	เว้นระยะห่างทางสังคม	Phrases	1322	
N95 mask	มาสก์ N95	Phrases	1083	
Quarantine/Self-quarantine	กักตัวเอง	Phrases	1076	Thai people started using the word “Quarantine” together with Thai word “ตัวเอง” (tua-eng) which means “self/ myself” by saying “Quarantineตัวเอง” (self-quarantine”) according to Thai word order.
Lockdown	ปิดประเทศ	Lexical Words	1072	

rapid test	ชุดตรวจโควิด แบบรวดเร็ว	Phrases	563	
Pandemic	การระบาดใหญ่	Lexical Words	225	
Vaccine	วัคซีน /ฉีดยา	Lexical Words	485	
New normal	ชีวิตวิถีใหม่	Phrases	669	
ATK	ชุดตรวจโควิด ด้วยตนเอง	Proper Nouns	377	In May 2021, The Ministry of Public Health approved the Antigen Test Kits (ATK), allowing Thai citizens to buy and use these kits by themselves at home.
WHO		Proper Nouns	322	
CDC		Proper Nouns	241	
PPE	อุปกรณ์ป้องกันส่วนบุคคล	Proper Nouns	223	
Cluster	กลุ่มก้อนการระบาด	Lexical Words	125	
Airborne	ละอองที่มีขนาดเล็กรวมกันสามารถแพร่กระจายทางอากาศ	Lexical Words	42	The occurrences of the token “airborn” were found in students’ posts which were mainly about their worries about contracting the virus in air-conditioned rooms or crowded places. This indicates their confusion about the homophones: the adjective ‘born’ and ‘borne’ which is the past participle of the verb ‘bear’.
State Quarantine	สถานกักกันของรัฐ	Phrases	33	
Shutdown	ชัตดาวน์	Lexical Words	32	
Super Spreader	ผู้ที่แพร่เชื้อออกเป็นวงกว้าง	Phrases	25	
Droplets	ละอองฝอยของสารคัดหลั่ง / ละอองเสมหะ	Lexical Words	22	
Hospitel	หอผู้ป่วยเฉพาะ	Lexical Words	10	The word is from “hospital” and “hotel”. Thai Hotels Association has proposed “hospitels” as a temporary hospital for Covid-19 infection patient as the government needed more space for the growing number of patients whose symptoms were not severe and needed observation.
PUI	ผู้ที่เข้าเกณฑ์ตามนิยามผู้เสี่ยงสูง	Proper Nouns	4	
Herd immunity	ภูมิคุ้มกันหมู่	Phrases	3	
Flatten the curve	การลด “ความชัน” กราฟ	Incomplete/Minor Sentences	2	

As seen from the table, phrases and lexical words were found the most, while only one incomplete sentence was found. This finding is consistent with those of the previous studies on English-Thai code-mixing especially in health magazines (Janhom, 2012). The absence of more complex linguistic units like two-sentence units is interesting. This might be because the audience and readers of the posts and news articles were Thais and longer stretches of English or may not be able to facilitate understanding.

Besides, the noun “mask” and the phrase “face shield” collocate with the verbs ‘wear’ or /sâj / and ‘take off’ /tò:t/ only, and they were used without an article as in “wear mask and face shield”. A search on the noun and the phrase in the Coronavirus Corpus revealed the high frequency of “wear a mask” and “wear a face mask” and a stark difference in the collocations of these two types and the tokens. Examples included “mask policy”, “mask mandate”, “mask requirement”, “mask guidance”, and “mask wearing. The absence of an article (“wear mask and face shield”) and the limited range of collocations in this data set should be noted. While they may illustrate some grammatical errors or limitations, they can be used as baseline data for students to compare the data from a corpus or even corpora.

The code-mixed data also showed some patterns of use and linguistic features that were different from its English use. For example, the phrase “new normal” is used without an article, a determiner. That is, the phrase “the new normal” or “a new normal” was not seen in the data set. Another interesting finding is conversion of the phrase “social distancing” from a noun phrase to a verb phrase. This conversion resulted in an increasing use of this noun phrase in the verb phrase in our students’ writing at the time this manuscript was being prepared. We suspect this nativized feature is likely to be the cause of error. Table 2 illustrates the features and instances of use from the data set and the English translation.

Table 2. Modifications of Code-Mixed Items

Features	Examples of use	IPA Transcription	English translation
1. Hybridization	จะให้รู้ตัวเลขที่ชัดเจนก็ต้องทำ swab กันทั้งพื้นที่	cà? háj rú: tualê:k tí: cʰátce:n kô: tó:ŋ tʰam swa:b kan tʰáŋ pʰú:ntí:	Swab tests must be performed if we need to know the exact number of infected cases.
	ใช้ชีวิตแบบ new normal	cʰáj cʰi:wít bè:p nu: 'no:rml	Living the new normal lifestyle
	กินข้าวแบบ new normal	kin kʰá:w bè:p nu: 'no:rml	The new normal way of eating out.
2. Conversion	เราต้อง social distancing กัน (noun to verb)	raw tó:ŋ 'səʊŋl 'dɪstənsɪŋ kan	We must be socially distant.
3. Semantic shift	ทั้งชั้นรวมถึงลิฟท์จะต้อง clean ให้หมด	tʰáŋ cʰán ruam tʰáŋ lɪft cà? tò:ŋ kli:n háj mòt	The entire floor and the elevators will have to be cleaned and disinfected.
4. Reduplication	-	-	-
5. Word Order	คลัสเตอร์โควิดในสมุทรสาคร	'klɑstə 'kəʊvɪd naj samùtsá:kʰɔ:n	COVID clusters in Samut Sakorn
6. Truncation	ถ้า lock ก็ไม่ได้สอบ	tʰá: lək kô: mǎj dáj sò:p	If there's a lockdown, I can't sit in an exam.
	หน้ากากกับ alcohol gel อย่าให้ขาดกินาจะเอาอยู่	nâ:kà:k kâp 'ælkəhɔ:l dʒel jà: háj kʰát kô: nâ: cà? ʔaw jù:	With masks and alcohol-based sanitizer gels, things should be under control.

4. Discussion

It's been about 2-3 years since the outbreak of a new strain of coronavirus was first reported in the world; therefore, we need words to describe things and situations occurring every single day. In many countries loanwords can be used to describe a new thing or a new word; even though they have the exact same meaning of words to communicate. In Thailand, it seems that more and more English loanwords are added to Thai lexicon and Thai learners seem to use them quite often both in speaking and in writing. This might be because of several reasons as follows:

1. Thai words may not possess the sufficiently precise equivalent lexicon to express new English pandemic related terminology. Before the pandemic, words such as 'new normal', 'social distancing' and 'hospital' were largely unfamiliar to Thai people and are now part of their daily lexicon.

The empirical evidence from print media, news reports and daily updates are the major reason or a key driver of language change in Thailand as Damanik, B. A. R. (2017) stated that Lexical items are typically "borrowed" by an individual or group, and may thereafter enter common usage factors that encourage dissemination include the mass media and current events.

Nevertheless, it can be noticed that many words might not exist in the standard-form of English and they may be used in completely different ways when compared to the original such as Alcohol gel and alcohol spray.

2. Nowadays, social media platforms are used as the main method of communication among younger generations especially during the COVID-19 lockdown. They seem to be casual communication platforms; therefore, we can normally see normal online behaviours such as ignoring punctuation, capitalization, correct spelling and grammar rules in the English language. They pay little attention to spelling when posting their opinions on Facebook, because their friends care less about their spelling mistakes. It is difficult for younger people to separate communication online and in real-life situations.

The results show that most students tend to use the short form of words, misspelt words and omitted or used wrong punctuation when communicating with friends. This might lead to similar habits in their academic writing and use of short forms of words, omitted punctuation and misspelt words. Moreover, there were some errors students made, particularly in the Facebook comments such as "Swap" or "Swok" instead of "Swab", "Work For Home" instead of "Work From Home". When teaching online, these errors are also found in verbal communication. Once the mistake has been made and seen, teachers should identify and correct student's error immediately; thus, students can still remember their mistake and learn from it. Although Huang Jing, Huang & Xiaodong, Hao & Yu, Liu. (2016) stated that when correcting students' errors, teachers must pay much attention to the time, the way its used and our attitude; this can be done differently, sometimes during class, sometimes after class. We must be friendly and patient. In the case of online errors over social media, teachers might correct it immediate in an indirect way by replying to the comment and repeating the word in the correct way. Students will learn it right there and not make the same mistake over and over. Sometimes, teachers can post some explanations about new words and common errors they have seen on their Facebook Fan pages; so, students can learn and prevent making those errors. This is related to Freeman (2016) in that social media can be a useful tool for educational activities when approached in the right way.

3. There are many researchers studying spelling mistakes, the use of short forms and grammar rules on social media and Facebook in particular. Selwyn (2009) pointed out that Facebook failed to improve students' writing because students used informal writing structures rather than formal academic writing styles. Gonzalez (2003) also reported a problem with using online communication; that it negatively affects the student's use of language, grammar, and spelling. In Shih's (2011) interviews with students, he found that students heavily relied on the online correction; so, when they had no help from the online correction tool, they often used incorrect vocabulary and misspelled words in a regular classroom writing. However, teachers can't truly blame technology for poor writing skills, as there are many advantages of using those kinds of Social Media platforms. In this case, as the messages and posts on Facebook does not really observe correct spelling and grammar rules as academic writing, Chepkemoi, Situma, & Murunga, (2018) suggested that students should use formal English in their Facebook posts. Wilson F (2018) recommended that more time should be channelled and spent on productive academic engagement and institutions should come up with ways of harnessing such virtual platforms academically in order to enhance students spelling ability since they are so addicted to social media. Moreover, teachers should encourage to use spell checkers. Currently we have spell checkers in many of the programs such as Wordpad, Word on both Mac and Windows and on Social Media platforms. The spell checker will probably help students improve their spelling; nevertheless, teachers should advise students not to trust these programs 100%. In short, the options are endless.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the language changes happening during the pandemic among Thai learners in an Open University. The fact is, language never stops changing; it will continue to respond to the needs of the language users. As the situation of the coronavirus outbreak is changing fast, and it keeps changing, news and information about the disease can be overwhelming. Understanding those terms is very important and essential to helping people stay informed about COVID-19 news. For English learners in Thailand, nouns and noun phrases in English are the most common code-mixed items. In this data set, learners' unfamiliarity of English medical terms, conversion and modifications of word order are likely to be the source of errors. As an English teacher, this underlines the importance of using authentic data in teaching English. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we teach and how students learn. It is a must that teachers use authentic materials available online to class and explicitly discuss the terms found with the students. This is to prevent errors that may occur.

These terms which were used in the 19th century are now put to modern use. The recent epidemics and crises have led to new words, abbreviations acronyms and phrases. These new words are associated with the COVID-19 epidemic, and these have wider use all over the world. At the time of writing this manuscript, new terms are emerging in relation to medical advances and social needs. This proves to be useful for a more systematic review of words and phrases related to the pandemic. We will continue to collect data in the third and fourth waves of the pandemic and analyse them as needed as the situation evolves.

For further studies discourse analytic approach to students' concerns, complaints, requests, and suggestions should be studied.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our students at Sukhothai Thamthirat Open University for inspiring us to do the study after reading all their comments on Facebook during the lockdown period.

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