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# ENGLISH BORROWING: A POTENTIAL RESOURCE FOR ENHANCING THE LEXICAL CAPACITY OF SOUTHERN THAI YOUTH

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## ABSTRACT

*Word borrowing, a key feature of language contact, reflects dynamic linguistic interactions in multicultural societies. In Thai communication, English borrowings have become so common that some surpass their native Thai equivalents in usage. This study investigates the extent to which Thai youth in a southern province comprehend English borrowings, particularly when encountered in their original English contexts. It was hypothesized that familiarity with borrowed words contributes to English proficiency. A total of 636 students from 13 junior and senior high schools in Nakhon Si Thammarat completed an online questionnaire comprising demographic items and a multiple-choice gap-fill task measuring receptive lexical knowledge. The task included two context-based subtests: one in Thai and one in English. Results showed high familiarity with English borrowings in Thai contexts but lower recognition in English contexts. A paired samples t-test confirmed the significant difference,  $t(635) = 26.95, p < .001$ , with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 1.07$ ), indicating better performance in the Thai-context task. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between knowledge of English borrowings and general English vocabulary. These findings suggest that English borrowings can serve as an accessible resource for enhancing lexical development, especially in environments with limited target language exposure.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Borrowing, Cognates, English Lexical, Loanword, Thai.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A common complaint among Thai educators as well as the public is that the English ability of Thai people is ranked very low among Southeast Asian countries and on the global level. Blame is often placed on the overemphasis of English grammar in schools, leaving students with difficulty in real-life English communication. However, the truth is hours of grammar classes do not lead to a high level of English proficiency either. This draws an interest in exploring ways to promote English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among Thai youth, especially since one's English proficiency is viewed as an incentive for professions (Vivas-Peraza, 2020). Currently, the advent of technology and the growth in a multi-cultural society stimulate the needs for English communication and expand channels of learning beyond merely the classroom. On top of that, English is an influential language in Thai society, used not simply as a foreign language, but as a medium of international communication. According to Snodin et al. (2024), linguistic landscapes in Thailand displaying a mix of Thai and English are not uncommon. English scripts (including vocal announcements) appear alongside Thai on street signs, public notices, advertisements, food menus in restaurants, local websites, entertainment channels, and radio broadcasts. The prevalence of English, however, is understandably more observable in urban and tourist areas while much less obvious outside of the classroom setting in provincial or upcountry towns. Notwithstanding of English communication skills, Thai people often borrow English lexical items into their communication, be it a language choice of daily conversation or as field-specific terminology. Many borrowed lexical items, such as 'check-in', 'online', 'drive-thru', 'gang', have become included in the Thai language and established as loanwords, and often turn to be cognates (despite being linguistically unrelated). Although several studies claim lexical borrowing is a resource for L2 learning (e.g. Brown, 1995; Daulton, 2004, 2008) more empirical research is required to show that such lexical adoption actually results in a higher proficiency in the donor language.

The language borrowing phenomenon, with English as a donor and Thai a recipient, may open a channel for the Thais' familiarity with the English language, which is a core subject for basic education. Upon completion of Grade 12, for instance, Thai

students are expected to have acquired the B2 level of CEFR<sup>1</sup>, possibly an overambitious goal despite the large number of classroom hours allocated for English courses. The Ordinary National Educational Test or O-NET reported in 2023 shows the average score for English proficiency of Grade 12 students from ordinary education to be 33.65%, highlighting the need for educators to find strategies for English development at the national level.

Vocabulary capacity plays a crucial role in one's communicative proficiency and is emphasized as central to language foreign language learning (Huckin & Coady, 1999). Sufficient exposure to a new language should lead to vocabulary strength, and this can be promoted through formal education that enhances intentional vocabulary learning, as well as through personal interest whereby new words are acquired incidentally (Webb et al., 2023).

In southern Thailand, students in tourist spots like Phuket and Krabi stand a better chance of gaining exposure to English outside of the classroom. However, young students from Nakhon Si Thammarat, which is not a major tourist destination for foreigners, rely heavily on the classroom or the online community when it comes to language learning. Like others, they use English borrowing sparingly in Thai communication. The current study views English borrowing as a means to acquire vocabulary and benefit the EFL learners. To date, studies have scarcely reported on the English proficiency of students in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Therefore, this study explores the level of high school students' familiarity with English borrowing in the Thai context and identifies a tendency of the students to comprehend words when they appear in English.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The borrowing of English words into the Thai language exemplifies contact-induced change. As Auer (2020) notes, loanwords are a primary form of evidence for language contact where the influence of a donor language on the recipient language leads to long-term shifts in the linguistic landscape. Historically a marker of prestige among the Thai elite (Snowdin et al., 2024), English has since become a pillar of the formal education system. This widespread exposure from an early age has significantly facilitated the prevalence of English loanwords. The socio-linguistic dimensions of this phenomenon extend beyond purely the linguistic

<sup>1</sup>CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference, a benchmark guideline for foreign language proficiency descriptions.

function (Jindapitak & Teo, 2011; Trakulkasemsuk, 2012), encompassing cultural and social factors.

The advent of technology has further intensified this linguistic phenomenon. Digital platforms provide venues for authentic communication, accelerating the adoption of English words, particularly among youth. Online communities ranging from game streaming and memes to various form of pop culture content act as powerful conduits for the swift dissemination and integration of English loanwords into the Thai lexicon (Sodikova, 2025).

### 2.1. Background to Lexical Borrowing

Lexical borrowing, a phenomenon resulting from language contact, has been defined and categorized in various ways by linguists. For instance, Bloomfield (1933) distinguishes between "intimate borrowing" where a borrowed word replaces an existing one, and "cultural borrowing" where both the native and borrowed words coexist. Esenova et al. (2024) offers a different classification, identifying three categories: borrowing of cultural concepts, internal borrowings from direct contact, and dialect borrowings where a dialect acts as the donor language. Another perspective is offered by Haugen (1950), who views borrowing as a deliberate and often influential choice made by a speaker. The more widely a borrowed term is used, the more likely it is to be assimilated into the recipient language, particularly within multilingual societies (Otwinowska, 2016). While the motivations of borrowing have traditionally been categorized as either necessary or luxury borrowing, Winter-Froemel (2017) argues that both types are driven by language functionality and a desire to serve specific communicative purposes.

Identifying the direction of lexical borrowing can be complex among languages in the same family, such as the Romance languages (Dinu et al., 2024). However, because Thai and English belong to distinct and distant language families, the borrowing of English words into Thai is easily identifiable. English loanwords are often used to introduce new cultural concepts (e.g., ice-cream, caravan), new inventions (e-ticket, mascara), or contemporary slang among younger generations (chill, chemy). In other cases, Thai speakers may opt for an English loanword even when a Thai equivalent exists, as the borrowed term may be perceived as conveying a more precise meaning (e.g., fake, sexy). Also, very often the Thai will adjust the borrowing to fit Thai linguistic structure. Hence adjective like 'sexy' is placed in a

verb position without a Thai copular 'be', as in "Maprang sek-si" for "Maprang is sexy".

These borrowings significantly impact communication and drive language evolution, requiring speakers to assimilate and understand new words introduced regularly into daily communication. The readiness of word classes to be borrowed often follows a clear hierarchy, with nouns being the most common and determiners the least, as reviewed by Winford (2010), citing Muysken (1981).

### 2.2. Borrowing, Loanwords, and Cognates

The terms borrowing, loanword, and cognate appear overlapped in research studies. Basically, word borrowing is an introductory stage of a loanword. Haspelmath (2009) maintains that despite the two terms being used interchangeably, loanwords specifically refer to words that have been fully integrated into the recipient language, typically from direct lexical transfer between languages of different families (also Haugen, 1950). A cognate, on the other hand, is a word in one language that shares a common linguistic ancestor with a word in another language, leading to similarities in form and meaning (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, 1999). For example, words in Romance languages often have cognates due to their shared Latin roots. Nevertheless, some word pairs, known as "false cognates" or "false friends,"<sup>2</sup> can have divergent meanings, such as the Italian *simpatico* (nice) and the English *sympathy* (pity).

Despite the theoretical distinction of loanword and cognate origins, recent studies have adopted the term "cognate" more broadly to describe loanword pairs that share semantic, orthographic, or phonological similarities, regardless of their linguistic ancestry (Allen, 2018b; Yip & Wakefield, 2024). This expanded view is particularly relevant in contexts like Hong Kong, where long-term English-Cantonese contact has led to extensive borrowing. In such cases, researchers may refer to "loanword cognates" to describe pairs that share meaning and form (Daulton, 2008), even between unrelated languages. This shift in perspective underscores how the assimilation of loanwords can create functional similarities that blur traditional linguistic boundaries.

### 2.3. Lexical borrowings in Multilingual Context

By the turn of the 21st century, most societies have embraced multilingual trends of which lexical

<sup>2</sup>False cognate: a word which has the same or very similar form in two languages, but which has a different meaning in each. The similarity may cause a second language learner to use the word

borrowings form part and appear relevant in foreign language education, bilingual education (Yip & Wakefield, 2024), and multilingual communities. For instance, Daulton (2004) conducted a study in Japan and found that over 50% of young adults understood English loanwords in a daily newspaper.

This language integration often involves phonetic re-adaptation; for example, Japanese loanwords written in the katakana script are re-phonologized according to the Japanese sound system, affecting communicative efficiency (Ogasawara, 2008). Currently, the high number of English loanwords in Japanese has created a "built-in lexicon" that can be leveraged for English language education (Daulton, 2008).

Lexical borrowing and cognate recognition offer a significant pedagogical advantage for EFL learners, as they provide a familiar entry point into a new language's lexicon. Studies consistently show that cognate recognition facilitates second-language learning across languages, regardless of whether they share the same script.

#### **2.4. Cognate Effect on Language Learning**

The cognate effect refers to the phenomenon where learners process cognates more quickly and accurately than non-cognates. This positively impacts vocabulary acquisition (Marecka et al., 2021; Otwinowska et al., 2020). Research confirms that cognates improve receptive vocabulary knowledge (Allen, 2018a), facilitate word recognition (Stoeckel & Bennett, 2013), and promote cross-language transfer even in children with developmental language disorders (Tribushinina et al., 2023). Psycholinguistic studies, including those measuring eye movements, generally agree that cognates are processed faster than non-cognates, though this facilitation may be weaker for higher-proficiency learners and vary by word class (Bultena et al., 2014; Tiffin-Richards, 2024).

#### **2.5. Practical Applications**

At a practical level, raising awareness of cognates can be a useful teaching strategy. For example, a study with high school students found that focusing on English-Spanish cognates enhanced their vocabulary acquisition (Benavides, 2022). Similarly, knowing original English words helps Chinese participants understand Korean loanwords (Ji Choi, 2020).

The positive effect of cognates on foreign language learning has been confirmed across diverse linguistic backgrounds, from Japanese and English to Spanish and English (Allen, 2018b; Urdaniz & Skoufaki, 2022).

While English borrowing is common in Thai, research on the cognate effect in this specific context is scarce. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the extent to which English borrowing is recognized and its potential to improve English language accuracy among Thai speakers.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Employing a quantitative approach to explore borrowing as a language phenomenon among the youth, this study focused on Thai youth in Nakhon Si Thammarat, a large province in upper southern Thailand (population of nearly 1.55 million in 2022)<sup>3</sup>. It observed the youth's comprehension of English borrowing in the Thai context, and explored if knowledge of English borrowed lexical items was related to receptive knowledge of English. To better identify the youth's background, we investigated participants' exposure to English language and activities conducted for English learning, through self-reporting.

**The following three Research Questions were pursued.**

1. To what extent are southern Thai youth familiar with English borrowed words in Thai communication?
2. Does familiarity of English borrowing accommodate the southern Thai youth in receptive English vocabulary task?
3. How do false cognates affect the youth's English proficiency?

#### **3.1. Participants**

The purposive sampling groups were students from thirteen schools in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, situated in the upper region of southern Thailand. They were recruited through the Secondary Education Service Area Office of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province by a formal invitation to the schools.

The participants had access to the Internet and completed an online Google form. While a total of 647 high school and junior high school students in Nakhon Si Thammarat responded to the questionnaire, 636 participants gave consent to be

<sup>3</sup>Nakhon Si Thammarat: Census Data 2022, <https://nksitham.nso.go.th/statistical-information-service/infographic-interactive/interactive-dashboard/population2565.html>

service/infographic-interactive/interactive-dashboard/population2565.html

part of the study. The demographic data are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants' Demographic Data.**

Institution	Number of schools	13
Age	Aged (years)	12.20 Average 15.70
Gender	Male (people)	204 (32.28%)
	Female (people)	425 (66.82%)
	Preferred not to specify (people)	7 (1.10%)
Type of learning program	English Program or international schools	110 (17.30%)
	Ordinary program	526 (82.70%)
Education level	Grade 12	101 (15.88%)
	Grade 11	215 (33.81%)
	Grade 10	175 (27.52%)
	Grade 9	4 (0.63%)
	Grade 8	32 (5.03%)
	Grade 7	109 (17.14%)
Top three methods of learning English	1) 2) 3)	In classroom Use of various online media Self-study

### 3.2. Instruments

The main data collection instrument was a questionnaire distributed electronically via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. The first part requested information about the participants, including gender, age, education, language history, and English language-related activities. This first part helped establish students' demographic profiles and served as a relevant indicator of potential connection with the individual's language performance.

The second part was a receptive lexical task in which the participants were asked to decide the word that best matched the meaning in the given context. The targeted lexical items were English borrowed words. These word samplings were collected from Thai written public media between 2017 and 2020, and compiled into an in-house corpus of 100 Common English Borrowed Words in Thai media (including popular webpages for local news, advertisements, and banners. Words were purposively selected for the instrument based on the distribution of word commonness, frequency of use, and level of familiarity, as determined by the researchers.

The receptive knowledge was tested in two sub-tasks.

Task 1 was in Thai. It had 15 three-choice questions, requesting participants to determine the English borrowed words whose meaning and usage

would fit in the given context. Table 2 lists all 44 tokens used in the task ('check-in' was used twice), with nine items written in Roman script. All the words listed were compiled from the language used in contemporary Thai media online. However, only 20 tokens were verified to have existed in the Thai National Corpus (TNC) database collected from 1998 to 2007; thus implying over half to be recently borrowed from English.

**Table 2: The Borrowed Lexicon Sampling used for Data Collection.**

พิน [fin]	ชิลล [chill]	อิน [in]
แพนิค [panic]	คัมแบ็ค [comeback]	ชัตดาวน [shut down]
สไตล [style]	รีโนเวต [renovate]	ไฮเทค [hi-tech]
ฟีล [feel]	ไอเดีย [idea]	ดราม่า [drama]
โลเคชั่น [location]	บาケชั่น [vacation]	ดีดดี้ [d-day]
New Normal	brand name	moment
แบล็คลิสต [blacklist]	เช็คอิน [check-in]	สตาร์ทอัพ [startup]
ออร่า [aura]	เน็ตไอดอล [net idol]	คาแรคเตอร [character]
เซอร์ไพรส [surprise]	ดราม่า [drama]	ฟีลดี [feel good]
ครีเอต [create]	ฮ็อต [hot]	โปรดไมต [promote]
แลนด์マーก [landmark]	เช็คอิน [check-in]	ทริค [trick]
social distancing	new normal	log in
insight	disruption	version
รีโนเวต [renovate]	ไลฟ์สไตล [lifestyle]	มูฟิน [move in]
มูฟออน [moveon]	เมรกลดดาวน [breakdown]	คริติกอล [critical]

Task 2 consisted of a set of 15 three-choice gap-fill sentences in English. It tested lexical comprehension, aiming to test comprehension of English words and phrases in sentence contexts. English proficiency and grammar knowledge were also required in several questions where correct answers depend on both the word's meaning and part of speech. The correct alternative was the one with semantic likeliness in context. The other two were distractors, one of which was a potentially false cognate, and another, an irrelevant borrowed word.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Inferential statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data using Excel and SPSS software programs to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. A qualitative analysis further studied the lexical items chosen incorrectly and their probable influence on English proficiency, for Research Question 3.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Exploring the extent of Thai youth's familiarity with English borrowings in contextualized Thai language and receptive knowledge of English lexical items in English contexts, this section synthesizes the findings and compares them with existing literature, highlighting their implications.

#### 4.1. The Youth's Receptive Lexical Knowledge of English Borrowed Lexical Items and English Contextualized Lexical Items

The results of the two tests investigating the youth's receptive lexical knowledge of English borrowed lexical items and English contextualized lexical items are shown in Table 3 and Table 4. Of the 636 participants, the mean score for the test of English borrowed words in Thai contexts was 10.81 while that of the test of English vocabulary was 7.4575. A

Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between scores on the English Borrowed Words Test and the English Vocabulary Test reveals a moderate positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .533$ ,  $p < .001$ . This suggests that higher scores on the English Borrowed Words Test are associated with higher scores on the English Vocabulary Test, and vice versa. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), implying a meaningful relationship.

*Table 3: Descriptive Statistics.*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
English_Borrowed_Test (in Thai)	636	2.00	15.00	10.8113	3.14864
English_Vocab_Test (in English)	636	1.00	15.00	7.4575	3.34001

*Table 4: Correlations of the Tests of English Borrowed Words and English Vocabulary.*

		Correlations	
		English_Borrowed_Test	English_Vocab_Test
English_Borrowed_Test	Pearson Correlation	1	.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	636	636
English_Vocab_Test	Pearson Correlation	.533**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	636	636

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Table 5: Correlations of the Tests of English Borrowed Words and English Vocabulary Model Summary.*

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	
1	.533 <sup>a</sup>	.284	.283	2.82746	
a. Predictors: (Constant), English_Borrowed_Words_Test					
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2015.322	1	2015.322	252.088
	Residual	5068.532	634	7.995	
	Total	7083.854	635		

a. Dependent Variable: English\_Vocab\_Test

b. Predictors: (Constant), English\_Borrowed\_Test

A simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether performance on the English Borrowed Words Test could significantly predict scores on the English Vocabulary Test, as displayed in Table 5. The results showed that the model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 634) = 252.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the predictor variable contributed meaningfully to the explanation of variance in vocabulary scores. The regression model explained approximately 28.4% of the variance in English vocabulary performance,  $R^2 = .284$ , with an adjusted  $R^2$  of .283. The positive regression coefficient reflects a moderate, positive relationship

between the two variables. This suggests that participants who scored higher on the borrowed words test tended to also perform better on the vocabulary test. These findings support the hypothesis that familiarity with English borrowed words is a significant predictor of general English vocabulary knowledge. This partially echoes findings from studies on various languages such as Allen (2018a), Bosma and Nota (2020), Bultena et al. (2014), Daulton (2010), and Ji Choi (2020) that acknowledge the lexical similarity between two languages for having a positive effect on lexical knowledge. A paired-samples t-test table 6 showed a

statistically significant difference between the test scores of the English borrowed words and English

lexical in context,  $t(635) = 26.95$ ,  $p <.001$ . Cohen's  $d = 1.07$  indicated a substantial impact size.

**Table 6: Paired Samples Test.**

	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference								
				Lower	Upper							
Pair 1	Receptive knowledge of English_Borrowed_Words and English_Lexical in context	3.354	3.139	.124	3.109	3.598	26.948	635	.000			

#### 4.2. The Youth's Familiarity with English Borrowed Words

The test of participants' receptive knowledge of the 15 English borrowed lexical items in Thai contexts is shown in Table 7. The table has two parts: A - the

percentage, and B - the word alternatives. Columns 1 and 4 refer to the best word in context. Columns 2 and 5 refer to the potentially common English borrowed words used as distractors in the test. Columns 3 and 6 refer to distractors which may involve either irrelevant meaning or ungrammatical features.

**Table 7: Percentage of Chosen English Borrowings in Thai Context.**

A - Percentage of use			B - Word Choices		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Best Meaning in Context	Potentially common	Irrelevant distractor	Best Meaning in Context	Potentially common	Irrelevant distractor
92.14	4.72	3.14	สไตล์ [style]	รีโนเวท [renovate]	ไฮเทค [hi-tech]
88.68	6.45	4.87	New Normal	Brand Name	Moment
86.48	6.29	7.23	มูฟเว่น [moveon]	เบรคดาวน์ [breakdown]	คริติคอล [critical]
85.22	7.08	7.7	เซอร์ไพร์ส [surprise]	DRAMA [drama]	ฟลัก [feel good]
82.7	11.64	5.66	aura	เน็ตไอดอล [net idol]	คาแรคเตอร์ [character]
82.55	9.75	7.7	โลเคชั่น [location]	ເວເຄຊັ້ນ [vacation]	ດີເດຍ [d-day]
77.2	16.67	6.13	social distancing	new normal	log in
75.16	13.99	10.85	รีโนเวท [renovate]	ไลฟ์ສ්ට්ල් [lifestyle]	ມູນເວັນ [move in]
73.58	23.11	3.3	ຟີ [feel]	ໄວເຕີຍ [idea]	DRAMA [drama]
72.48	13.36	14.15	ແລນດົມມາრ්ກ [landmark]	ເຊື້ອວິນ [check-in]	ທຣີກ [trick]
65.88	17.61	16.51	ຄຣີເວຕ [create]	ອວຕ [hot]	ໂປຣມົມ [promote]
59.59	33.81	6.6	ຟິນ [fin]	ໜີລ [chill]	ວິນ [in]
59.12	21.23	19.65	ແພັນິກ [panic]	ຄົມແບ່ນັດ [comeback]	ໜັດຕານ [shut down]
43.71	35.85	20.44	Insight	disruption	version
36.64	38.68	24.69	ແບລັກລິສຕ [blacklist]	ເຊື້ອວິນ [check-in]	ສຕາර්ගວັບ [startup]
AVG	72.08	17.35	10.58		
SD	16.35	11.15	6.84		

The average score for correct answers is 72.08%, with the word 'style' ranking the highest, receiving 92.14% of correct answers in the following context:

บ້ານ \_\_\_\_\_ MODERN ແນວຽບໄອວັນທີເວັງນິ້ນ

Home \_\_\_\_\_ MODERN that highlights the simple form.

The borrowed word that most participants got incorrect was 'blacklist' in this headline.

ສັງເກົນ \_\_\_\_\_ ໂຮງແຮມຈາກຫົ້ນຮາຄາ "ເຮົາທີ່ເຂົ້າຂັ້ນ"

Order given to \_\_\_\_\_ hotels taking advantage of "Travel Together" program by increasing the room rates.

While being the best borrowed word in the given context, 'blacklist' was the best meaning in context, but the majority chose the distractor ເຊື້ອວິນ [check-in] (38.68%) over ແບລັກລິສຕ [blacklist] (36.64%). This may reflect participants' greater familiarity with 'check in' which more strongly collocates with hotel. It is noticed that a minority of participants chose the irrelevant distractors, implying the ability to distinguish the less likely words in context.

#### 4.3. The Youth's Receptive Lexical Knowledge of English Words in Context

Table 8 summarizes the results from the test of English measuring the participants' receptive lexical knowledge of contextualized English words. On average, the participants chose about half of correct

answers (X 49.72) (as also seen earlier in Table 7, the mean score of 7.457 from 15 points). Their receptive vocabulary knowledge in this test may not match the reported academic grade, but the test reveals the participants' comprehension of the words, as tallied in the table.

*Table 8: Percentage of Chosen English Borrowing in English Context.*

Scores of English Word Test			English items in context		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Correct English in Context	Potential common cognate in Thai	Distractors	Best fit English	Potential common cognate in Thai	Distractors
76.73	15.72	7.55	move on	slow life	be on air
68.71	18.08	13.21	new normal	quarantine	infected patient
65.57	19.03	15.41	social distancing	social media	social network
57.39	26.57	16.04	lockdown	people	tourism
53.14	27.99	18.87	panic	start up	pain point
52.83	28.93	18.24	create	watch	imagine
48.58	38.36	13.05	They are too tight.	They fit your body.	They look good on you.
45.6	25.94	28.46	follow	agree	ready
44.03	18.71	37.26	the bill	pay	check bill
43.4	30.97	25.63	renovated	shutdown	constructed
42.14	32.39	25.47	satisfies	feels	fins
40.25	40.09	19.65	guard	mask	case
37.89	16.67	45.44	I jog every morning	I eat too much	I go to fitness
36.01	47.8	16.19	hotline	support	sideline
33.49	20.91	45.6	insightful	deep	information
AVG 49.72	28.31	21.97			
SD 12.68	11.34	9.22			

Among all lexical items, the one being best understood was 'move on' in the statement:

A: Why does Siri look so sad?

B: Well, her boyfriend left her, and she is not able to .....

The youth were able to select the correct word, indicating their familiarity with this word, which might appear common among the teenagers. The more frequent these terms appear in a known context, the more familiar the users will be to them; hence the language develops what Daulton (2010) calls a built-in lexicon, in which borrowed words are important to know, and are helpful for English language learners, especially the less active ones.

Other words familiar to the youth include those that have been integrated into everyday speech in Thai, such as "New Normal" and "social distancing", which in parts, highlights the influence of global events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) on language use. These borrowed terminologies are adapted to fit the recipient language orthographic and phonological features, as suggested by Mahmudova (2023). For instance, they are

transcribed to a Thai transcript to accommodate the general public with little background to English language.

The moderate performance in the English comprehension task—especially with more challenging items like "hotline" or "insightful"—suggests that while students are familiar with borrowed terms, their full understanding of these terms in context remains incomplete. The lexical distractors chosen instead of hotline, and insightful were, in order, support and information. And for the grammatical English I jog every morning, participants preferred using I go to fitness, which is a false cognate of I go to gym. These findings may suggest that the youth's English proficiency may not be high enough to process the foreign language in full.

#### 4.4. How False Cognates Affect the Youth's English Proficiency

The comprehension task highlighted certain challenges in grammatical accuracy and understanding of false cognates. For example, terms like "I go to fitness" (chosen by 45.44% instead of I jog (37.89%)) and "check bill" (chosen by 37.26% against the bill (44%)) were

frequently selected incorrectly. The participants' choice could be a result of what appeared more common to them, as these words were adapted when borrowed to Thai. This finding underscores the difficulty learners face in distinguishing between English terms that share similarities with Thai words but have different meanings or usages in English.

The relatively high error rate with phrases included "insightful talk" (33.49% correct) against "\*information talk" (45.6%), and "let the guard down" (40.25% correct) against "\*let the mask down" (40.09%). This further points to gaps in students' grammar knowledge and their ability to apply English expressions accurately in context. The presence of these false cognates suggests that students may need more explicit instruction on the nuanced differences between English and Thai vocabulary.

In a study by Otwinowska and Szewczyk (2017) that extensively explored the learnability of English-Polish cognates, it was pointed out that the participants relied on word similarity to their first language when guessing a foreign word's meaning. For our study, the errors in understanding cognates, such as the word "fitness" and "check bill" reflected the challenges learners face with false cognates. These words were borrowed and assimilated into Thai, but usage and semantic shifts might hinder the English proficiency although it could equip the Thais with English vocabulary. It should be noted, however, that the mis-usage in English as a result of L1 interference did no harm to semantic delivery, as Marecka et al. (2021) affirm in their study suggesting that learners also benefit from the L1-L2 overlapped form.

English is a major foreign language in Thailand where Thai is an official language. To master the language, a Thai needs to learn a completely new set of language rules, lexical glossary, orthographic forms and phonological customs, which impose a great challenge. The youth as particular participants in the current study have learned English through national formal education, and have acquired a moderate to high level of English proficiency. When English words are borrowed to Thai, they become cognates with some slight adaptation in orthography and phonology.

The findings of the youth's familiarity with cognates more than non-cognate words corresponded with that in Otwinowska et al. (2020). In terms of English language proficiency, the participants scored only nearly 50 per cent, pointing out the need for English language enhancement.

As the correlation test shows a moderate influence of knowledge of borrowed words on understanding English in context, we see the potential benefits of familiarizing students with the borrowed lexical items from English. Appropriate introduction to the items and explanation of the differences in usage between the two languages would promote the youth's vocabulary learning.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Language evolution happens all the time with or without our awareness. Lexical borrowing from foreign languages undoubtedly promotes the dynamic nature of the Thai language as a zealous borrower; resulting in non-stop vocabulary expansion. Such dynamism is surely enriched by social media communication of which the youth are heavy users. As there are almost no boundaries in cyber communication, borrowed lexicons bring in a multi-cultural atmosphere to the country. In Thailand, English borrowing remains the most pervasive, with new words borrowed, adopted, and assimilated. Had the database of current Thai language in use, the Thailand National Corpus, been updated regularly or recently, it would be resourceful for language education.

This study sheds light on the diverse ways in which Thai youth engage with the English language. While traditional classroom learning remains the dominant form of education, students also engage with English through self-directed learning and media, suggesting a high degree of motivation to improve language skills outside of formal settings. Despite this, the relatively low frequency of speaking English and the challenges in understanding borrowed terms in both English and Thai contexts indicate areas for improvement. These findings suggest that while students are exposed to English through multiple channels, there is still a need for more active and immersive learning opportunities to enhance their proficiency and comprehension. Since language undergoes evolution, future studies should explore how the youth, as linguistic innovators and influencers, may drive the future linguistic landscape in Thailand, particularly with regard to the linguistic phenomenon of 'Tinglish', a combination of Thai and English whereby effective communication is enabled and used in this era. We would also suggest that future research studies be designed to better understand cognate learnability and to explore ways to make use of cognates in expanding lexical capacity.

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