

Spoonerism: A Creative Way of Communication in Thai

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0319

The Asian Conference on Asian Studies 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013



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Introduction

Spoonerism is a linguistic phenomenon in which corresponding consonants, vowels, or morphemes are switched between 2 syllables/words in a word/phrase. In general, spoonerism exists in 2 manners: 1)an error in speech, which is unintentional and rare, 2)a form of word play, which is intentional and more frequent.

A spoonerism, as an error in speech, may lead to the other common meaning, a meaningless utterance, a ridiculous utterance, or an impolite utterance. It may result in misunderstanding, embarrassment, harassment, and a sense of humor, as following examples.

Common meanings:

book case	-	▶	cook base
lighting a fire	-	▶	fighting a liar

Meaningless utterances:

criminal	-	▶	crinimal
tiny little birds	-	▶	biny little tirds

Ridiculous utterances:

wasted two terms	-	▶	tasted two worms
Is the dean busy?	-	▶	Is the bean dizzy?

Impolite utterances:

He filled her soul with hope.	-	▶	He filled her hole with soap.
She showed me her tool kits.	-	▶	She showed me her cool tits.

The term “spoonerism” is named after the Reverend William Archibald Spooner (A.D.1844-1930), who was notoriously prone to this linguistic phenomenon. Born in 1844 in London, Spooner became an Anglican priest and a scholar. During a 60-year association with Oxford University, he lectured in history, philosophy, and divinity. From 1876 to 1889, he served as a Dean, and from 1903 to 1924 as Warden, or president. (Austin, 2003)

Thai Spoonerism

Spoonerism in Thai, however, does exist and function in 2 more complicated and interesting manners: 1)avoidance of potential taboo spoonerisms in polite register, 2)spoonerist or spoonerized languages, in which spoonerized process is made to each syllable.

Avoidance of potential taboo spoonerism in polite register

In polite register, as prescribed by traditional teachers and textbooks, words or phrases that are potential to be spoonerized and then convey inappropriate meanings, are prohibited. “Rachasap”(1994), the book about polite register and royal language

published by The National Identity Office, The Secretariat of The Prime Minister, describes the use of Thai language in a delicate way. Examples of taboos and euphemisms are as follows.

<u>Taboo</u>	<u>Spoonerism</u>	<u>Euphemism</u>
κ ^ο ν π ^υ αΞφ person sick	κ ^ο υαφ ποΞν penis grinded	κ ^ο ν κ ^ο α⊥φ person fever
χεΞτ φααΞN seven kinds, types	χαΞαN φεΞτ bright to make love	χεΞτ πρα-κααν seven kinds, types
π ^θ θΞτ τυα eight classifier for animals	τ ^θ θΞτ σ ^ι Ξ κ ^υ υ⊥ (meaningless) clitoris	four pairs
τ ^υ αΞ N□□⊥κ bean geminating (bean sprout)	τ ^υ □□⊥κ Νυα⊥ cut (penis) (meaningless)	τ ^υ αΞ π ^υ □Ξ? bean planted
?υηε&ν rude title (proper name) (palm civet)	?εν ηυ& νααN ηε&ν tendon vagina	polite title (proper name)

Spoonerist or spoonerized languages

Spoonerist or spoonerized languages are languages in which each syllable is paired with a given word and then spoonerized immediately. There are many spoonerized languages in Thai such as “κ^ουΞκ” language, “σ□□” language, “σεε” language, “μαλακ□□” language, and “λ^υυ” language. As Luu language is the most widely-used one in Thailand, so this study aims to describe Luu language in terms of genesis, system, productivity, and usage.

Genesis of Luu language

It is assumed that Luu language is the first spoonerized language in Thai, it was created by gay people, exactly lady boys, about 3-4 decades ago. The reason why the given word is “λ^υυ” is that it should exactly be the word “ρ^υυ”, which means “hole”. As one of the most favorite interests of lady boys is sex, so the word “ρ^υυ” is picked.

It is the tendency of contemporary pronunciation that most people use the consonant sound “λ” in stead of “ρ”. Then the “ρ^υυ” language practically becomes “λ^υυ” language.

Step 4 is to adjust the length of the vowel of the word “συσ” to be as short as or as long as that of the corresponding syllable. And a diphthong is considered as a long vowel.

συσ⊥κ λ↔↔⊥κσυσσυν λιαν - ▶ συσ⊥κ λ↔↔⊥κ συσσυν λιαν

Step 5 is to switch the vowels between corresponding syllables

συσ⊥κ λ↔↔⊥κσυσσυν λιαν - σ↔↔⊥κ λυσ⊥⊥κ σιασσυν λυσσυν

In case of syllable with the vowel sound “υ” or “υσ”, the word “λυσ” is still used by following the same 5 steps, for example “δυσ πυλυσ?” (to watch fireworks) will be spoonerized into “ρυσ δυσ ρυσ? πυλυσ?”.

Productivity of Luu language

The morphology of Luu language relates to syllable-based process, which is applicable to any foreign word, no matter if they are from Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, French, Italian, and so on, as shown by following examples. Please note that foreign word in Thai will be phonologically adjusted to Thai tongues, especially in terms of tone.

- τιΞμ σαμ (dim sum, Chinese) - ▶ λιΞμ τυΞμ λαμ συμ
- συσ χι≡? (sushi, Japanese) - ▶ λυσσυσ λι≡? χι≡?
- κιμ χιΞ? (kimchi, Korean) - ▶ λιμ κυμ λιΞ? χιυΞ?
- η□≡τ δ□Ξκ (hotdog, English) - ▶ λ□≡τ ηυ≡τ λ□Ξκ δυΞκ
- κρυα σ□N (croissant, French) - λυακρυσ λ□N συN
- πι≡τ σαα⊥ (pizza, Italian) - ▶ λι≡τ πυ≡τ λαα⊥ συσ⊥

The above examples obviously show the productivity of Luu language. Sometimes foreign words are mixed in sentences, while sometimes a whole sentence is a spoonerized foreign language, as follows.

κ'α≡ω δυσ κη□ν σ↔↔Ξτ (He watched the concert.)
 λ'α≡ω κ'υ≡ω λυ↓ δυσ λ□ν κ'υν λ↔↔Ξτ συσΞτ

ω□≡τ ηΘ≡π π'ε⊥ν (What happened?)
 ↓ ↓
 λ□≡τ ωυ≡τ λΘ≡π ηυ≡π λε⊥ν π'υ⊥ν

χι↔↔ τΘμ (I love you, in French)
 ↓ ↓
 λ↔↔ χιυυ λΘμ τυμ

χ^οο≐τ τοΞ? μ^αα≐τ τεΞ? (wait a minute, in Japanese)
↓ ↓
λ^οο≐τ χ^υυ≐τ λ^οΞ? τυΞ? λ^αα≐τ μ^υυ≐τ λ^εΞ? τυΞ?

As the main purpose of spoonerized languages is to limit the understanding of others, it is possible that Luu speakers speak Luu with any foreign language they are able to. If it is Thai Luu, it is easily understood among general Luu speakers. If it is English Luu, it will be difficult for uneducated speakers to understand. And if it is Japanese or other languages of limited speakers, it will be much harder to decode.

Usage of Luu language

Most of Luu speakers are lady boys and gay people. They are very fluent in spoonerization in terms of both speaking and listening. So they can speak Luu language at least as fast as they speak Thai. In addition, they even speak faster than their usual speed, because they do not want anyone else to understand their conversations, as some people may try to decode or spoonerize Luu conversations. It is recommended that the faster they speak Luu language, the safer the conversations are.

Luu language is usually spoken in 2 specific situations: 1) gossiping or complaining, 2) mentioning secrets or private issues or impolite topics.

As a means for gossiping or complaining, it is better for the “victim(s)” not to understand anything. Due to high ability in pretending as if they were talking about other topics, Luu speakers are usually alright and successful in gossiping or complaining while they can achieve the communication. It is always good to avoid problems or conflicts with friends, colleagues, customers, and strangers.

As a means for mentioning secrets or private issues or impolite topics, Luu language is a definitely safe choice. Luu speakers just have to make sure that others in the same place or nearby really do not understand Luu language. Sometimes when people cannot wait to talk about such things, Luu language is helpful.

Conclusion

To sum up, spoonerism in Thai does function in 2 more interesting and unique ways. The avoidance of potential taboo spoonerism shows the magnificence of the traditional usage of Thai language. Spoonerized languages, especially Luu language, are the evidence that Thai people, particularly gay people, are creative indeed.

Luu language is a creative way to communicate appropriately with regard to the delicate manner of social interaction. As long as Thai people mind gossiping, complaining, revealing secrets, and taking dirty, spoonerized languages will still be used in order to keep the communication going while concerning to the social peace.

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