Confused Words in English: Words That Sound or Look Almost the Same

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Abstract

Besides homophones or words with the same sounds, words that sound or look almost the same can be a big problem for students who study English as a foreign language. The writers, therefore, would like to help them pay closer attention to those words so that they can carry out their intended meanings for effective communication. The meanings of words are presented both in English and Thai (for our Thai students), but the sample sentences are in English only.

Keywords: English confused words, words that sound almost the same, words that look almost the same

Introduction

From our teaching experience at all levels, we have found that many Thai students have problems in understanding English, for they have problems understanding English words. One of the biggest problems is the understanding of words with the same sound (which have been presented in the earlier issue). Another big problem is the understanding of words that sound or look almost the same, thereby resulting in miscommunication, especially in writing. To help our students or learners ease such a problem, we will present such words with the meanings in English and Thai (for our Thai students) and sample sentences to show how they are used. We believe that to learn a foreign language effectively and to be able to be confidently use it, learners must know a lot of vocabulary, and certainly, they must know how to properly use them in a variety of context.

For part of speech, we use “adj for adjective, adv for adverb, n for noun, prep for preposition, and v for verb.”

Some of the words that sound or look the same

accept (v); receive, take responsibility for รับ ยอมรับ ตกลง
except (prep): leaving out, excluding ยกเว้น
except (v): exclude ยกเว้น
Would you accept my offer to work for me? If you do, you would have to work six days, because no one works only five days a week, except pregnant workers.

access (n): a way to a place; right, opportunity, or means of reaching ทางเข้าไปสู่ สิทธิ์ โอกาสที่จะเข้าสู่
excess (adj): too much; too great
excess (n): an amount of something which is more than reasonable ปริมาณที่เกิน
This is the only access to that building. Thus, if you have to walk, do not carry anything in excess of your needs. You can leave your excess things in the car.
affect (v): have an influence on มีผลกระทบ
effect (n): a result; an outcome ผลกระทบ
effect (v): bring about; accomplish ก่อให้เกิด

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The effects of thunder storms are too depresssing for many people. They have lost their beloved ones and properties. Needless to say, the severe storms have affected the survivors’ feelings and ways of living. They effect changes in people’s lives.

Allusion (n): an indirect reference. 

Illusion (n): a false idea or belief. 

Sometimes people just do not say things directly. They make allusions, especially about weight and age. In addition, they can create an illusion about the age by plastic surgery.

Almost (adv): nearly by.

Most (adj, adv): the greatest in number, quantity, the majority.

We almost left the house when most of our friends surprisingly stopped by to say hello to us.

Baht (n): the Thai unit of currency. 

Bath (n): washing of the body.

Beside (prep): at the side of; close to.

Besides (prep): in addition to; as well as.

Come and sit beside me. Then I will tell you what else we will have to do besides our research project.

Breath (n): air taken in and sent out of lungs.

Breathe (v): take air into the lungs and send it out.

When the doctor tells us to take a deep breath, we have to breathe in deeply, and sometimes we have to hold our breath for a few seconds.

clothes (n): material made by weaving. 

Janet wants to buy some new clothes for her new job; she also wants some clothes for other purposes.

Conscience (n): an inner sense of the moral right or wrongness.

Nowadays many people do not have a clear conscience of what they are doing. Some can commit very bad things without the sense of a guilty conscience. We should get rid of them. We do need more conscientious people; we do need more people who are conscious of their actions.

Considerable (adj): great; much.

Considerate (adj): thoughtful of the feelings of others. 

We do not live by ourselves in society. When we are with a considerable number of people, we cannot do whatever we want; we must learn to be considerate if we want to live peacefully together in the same society.

custom (n): a common tradition, an established habit.

We all know that it is a custom to go through the Customs before leaving or entering a country. Besides, before visiting a foreign country, we should learn about its custom so that we will not unknowingly offend anyone there.
council (n): a group that governs สา คณะกรรมการ ผู้ทำการนั่น บริหาร

counsel (n): advice; consultation; suggestions คำแนะนำ (v): advise; give counsel to ให้คำแนะนำ ให้คำปรึกษา

The university council will meet and discuss the counsel to be given to the university, especially during this era of the new educational system.

damage (n): harm or injury ความเสียหาย การบาดเจ็บ
damages (n): money claimed from or paid by a person causing loss or injury เงินดเย่ เงินดายจากความเสียหาย
The natural disasters this summer have caused a lot of damage to several families including properties and lives of their family members. The damages they have received can never replace what they have lost.

decent (adj): right and suitable; respectable เหมาะสม น่าเคารพ

descent (n): coming or going down; ancestry; sudden attack การลง ตกลง การโจมตี A decent person will not do such a bad thing like that. He should wait for the girls to take their descent of that safe landing first.

desert (n): waste land, waterless and treeless ที่ดินเปล่า ทะเลทราย (v): go away from ละทิ้ง A gang of teenagers took an old car to a desert, but then the car broke down. They had to desert it, and then walked miles and miles until they found a house. The owner of the house is an old lady. She gave them something to eat. They said it was the best, especially the dessert.

dessert (n): any sweet dish served at the end of a meal ของหวาน A gang of teenagers took an old car to a desert, but then the car broke down. They had to desert it, and then walked miles and miles until they found a house. The owner of the house is an old lady. She gave them something to eat. They said it was the best, especially the dessert.

device (n): a plan; a trick; a piece of equipment for a particular purpose แผน กลวิธี เครื่องมือ อุปกรณ์เพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะ devise (v): think out; plan คิดค้นแผนการออกมา ออกแบบ Some engineers have tried to devise a device to cope with the heavy dust particles in the air.

difference (n): the state of being unlike; a way of being dissimilar ความแตกต่าง different (adj): not the same; unlike ไม่เหมือนกัน แตกต่าง It is hard for people to tell the difference between these identical twins, but their best friends say like different kinds of food.

diner (n): a person who dines; a restaurant with a long counter and booths
dinner (n): main meal of the day, whether eaten at midday or in the evening That diner on Main Street is popular among dinners. They enjoy having their dinner there.

economics (n): science of the production and distribution of goods; the way in which something is influenced by economic considerations เศรษฐศาสตร์ economy (n): the system by which a country’s wealth is produced and used; avoidance of waste of valuable things เศรษฐกิจ การหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ให้เกิดความสูญเปล่าของสิ่งที่มีคุณค่า Susan has planned to study economics at college. She hopes she can help improve the economy of the country somehow.

elicit (v): draw out; cause to come out หาข้อมูลเอาออกมา 使之说出来 illicit (adj): unlawful; forbidden ผิดกฎหมาย ผิดที่นองละลอก Some people have intentionally tried to elicit ideas that the sale of marijuana is illicit.

emigrant (n): a person who/emigrates (goes away from one’s own country to settle down in another country) ผู้ที่ออกจากถือไปอยู่อีกประเทศหนึ่ง
immigrant (n): a person who immigrates (comes as a settler into another country) ผู้ที่ย้ายถิ่นฐานไปอยู่ต่างประเทศ

Many **emigrants** from all over the world have happily settled down as **immigrants** in the U. S.

element (n): a small part representing the whole; one of a number, part of a whole showing what the rest like ตัวอย่างของบางสิ่งบางอย่าง/คน

This is an example of a good research study. The samples of the study represented a wide range of the whole population.

exist (v): be real; continue living มีอยู่ ดำเนินชีวิต

exit (v): go out ทางออก

We cannot **exist** without more food and water. We should find an **exit** as soon as possible so that we can get out of this place. We can get more food and water out there!

farther (adv): comparative of far, used chiefly for distance

**farther** is used with technical terms.

**farthest** is used with actual measurements.

**far** is used with time or distance.

Tim works **far** from the state. He cannot drive there in a day.

Let’s stop here. I cannot go any **farther**. If you need **further** information, you can go by yourself.

form (n): shape; visible appearance แบบฟอร์ม รูปแบบ

(v): give shape to; make; produce สร้าง; ทำหรือจัด

Before becoming a great team of cheerleaders, those **youngsters** from the **City of Khon Kaen** tried very hard to **form** a cheerleading team.

formal (adj): in accordance with rules, customs, and convention เป็นทางการ แบบทางการ

former (adj): of an earlier period ในอดีต (ใช้นามหน้า คำนามเท่านั้น)

(n): the first (of two people or things) คนแรก สิ่งแรก (ของสองคน สองสิ่ง)

They are requested to wear a **formal** dress to the party tonight. The party is for the **former** and the new presidents of the company. The **former** is going to retire, and the new one is going to carry on with all the duties.

hard (adv): with great energy; with all one’s force ด้วยความยั่งยืนมาก อย่างหนัก ขยันมาก

**hardly** (adv): seldom, rarely; scarcely แทบจะไม่ เกือบจะไม่

Tim and Tom are completely different. Tim works **hard**. That’s why he succeeds in everything he does. On the contrary, Tom **hardly** works, and that’s why he fails.

hang (v): 1. support, be supported, from above so that the lower end is free แขวน (hang, hung, hanged)

2. put, be put, to death by hanging with a rope round the neck แขวนคอ ผูกคอตาย (hang, hanged, hanged)

When Jack entered the house, he **hung** his coat on a coat hanger. He did not see his big brother Jake, so he went to his room. He knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He, then, opened the door only to find that Jake had **hanged** himself there.

imaginary (adj): existing only in the mind; unreal อยู่ในจินตนาการ ไม่เป็นจริง

imaginative (adj): of, having, or using imagination ที่มีจินตนาการ

Little girls enjoy playing and talking to her imaginary friends. They are always full of
imaginative ideas, and they act like they are playing and talking with real friends.

immoral (adj): wicked and evil

immortal (adj): not subject to death

It is a fact of life that nobody is immortal. We should therefore do as many good deeds as we can in our lives; we should avoid all immoral conducts.

industrial (adj): of industries

industrious (adj): diligent; hard-working

Those engineering students are very industrious. They plan to work in industrial areas after their graduation.

inspiration (n): someone or something which gives others the urge or the ability to do something

aspiration (n): desire to do something or have something

My English schoolteacher was my inspiration to learn more English. Since then, my aspiration to share my knowledge in English with others has been in my soul.

intelligent (adj): having or showing powers of learning, reasoning, or understanding

Sometimes intelligent people give some intelligent suggestions that are intelligible only to their peers, not to the general public.

local (adj): of a place or district

local (n): someone who live in the area

locale (n): a place where something particular happens or is done

Many foreigners enjoy living in the Northeast of Thailand. They like the locals and local food in this area. They even try to find a locale for their future home.

lonely (adj): without friends; sad or melancholy

alone (adj, adv): without the company or help of others; by oneself

Old people often feel lonely if they have to live alone. They are happy when their children, grandchildren, or relatives visit them.

loose (adj): free; not tight or tense; not firmly or tightly fixed

lose (v): no longer have; not continue to have

I like to wear loose clothes. I feel more comfortable in them; and there is no need for me to lose weight to be able to wear them.

mark (n): something such as a line or scratch that spoils the appearance of something else

mark (v): put or leave a mark on something

Some woman do not want any marks on the face, so at night they would mask it with some kind of cream to get rid of the marks.

moral (adj): concerning principles of right and wrong; good in character and behavior

moral (n): a piece of guidance on how to live one’s life, how to act more effectively, that can be learned from a story

There are certainly moral principles for people to follow if they want to lead a...
happy life. Moreover, they can learn more about morals from what they have read and their experiences. They should be able to keep their morale as high ideals then.

part-time (adj, adv): for only a part of the working day or week bourgeois is an important one of the four pillars of industrial development. Immoral behavior is not acceptable.

pastime (n): anything done to pass time pleasantly; game สิ่งบันเทิง เกม สิ่งที่ชอบทำเวลาว่าง

The reason why she takes a part-time job because she wants some extra money for the family; it is not her pastime.

personal (adj): private; individual; of or for a person that is in a private setting.

personnel (n): staff; personnel employed in any work place

Most actors and actresses have a personal manager to help them their work and take care of them; but for people working for an organization, they have a personnel manager to deal with the relationships among the employees.

play (v): have fun; do things to pass time pleasantly เล่น

(play: a drama ละคร)

pray (v): speak silently to God or Lord Buddha to show respect, give thanks, or beg for something ความต้องการ

Children enjoy themselves when they play together in the playground, or when they watch a play for kids, They can also enjoy themselves when their parents teach them how to play at home or at a temple. (The switch of the letter “I” and the letter “r” in words can cause a lot of problems in communication. Many Thai students unknowingly do this. For example, they write “frame” for “flame,” or “fly” for “fry.”)

precede (v): come or go before มาก่อน

proceed (v): go forward; continue, go on ดำเนินการ ต่อไป

The very hot and humid weather usually precedes thunderstorms which can cause a lot of damage to people’s properties and lives. Later on, the government must proceed to do something to help those victims to recover their morale.

quiet (adj): with little or no movement or sound เสีย

quite (adv): completely; rather เดิมที่ มาก (ในการที่มีความหมาย) ค่อนข้าง ... เพิ่มเติม

Why is everyone so quiet today? Is there anything wrong? Are you quite sure that everything is okay?

raise (n): increase in salary เงินเดือนขึ้น

(v): life up; move up; bring up ยกขึ้น เลื่อนขึ้น เลื่อนขึ้น (ย้ายขึ้น) ย้ายขึ้น (ขึ้นชั้น)

rise (n): upward progress; increase in value and temperature

(v): appear above the horizon; get up; get out of bed; come to life again ขึ้น ลุกขึ้นฟื้นคืนชีพ (ไม่ต้องการกรม)

The teacher says to the students, “Raise your hand if you know the answer or if you have a question. The clerk says to everyone in the courtroom, “Please rise,” when the judge comes in. How about you? What do you say you want a raise in your salary? Anyway, we say the sun rises in the east, and the temperature rises every day this summer. Right?

sensible (adj): having or showing good sense; reasonable เรียบร้อย มีเหตุผล รู้ตัวรู้ต้นที่ใช้ประโยชน์ได้

sensitive (adj): quick to receive impressions; easily hurt in the spirit; easily offended มีอารมณ์ โกรธไม่อึดอัด รู้สึกไม่พอใจ Sensible people can give sensible answers to questions. They also know how to deal with sensitive people. They will avoid hurting their feelings.
sign (n): a mark, object, used to represent something; a movement of the hand, head, etc, used instead of words ป้ายสัญญาณ
(v): write one’s name to show that one is the writer ชื่อชื่อ

sing (v): make musical sounds with the voice ร้องเพลง
Can you see that sign on the door? What does it say? It says “Sign in.” That means we have to sign our names before entering the room. Oh, yes, we are going to learn how to sing songs for our play next month.

sleep (n): a condition of rest with the eyes closed; a period of sleep การนอนหลับ
(v): rest in the condition of sleep นอนหลับ

asleep (adj, adv): sleeping หลับ
Children need at least 10 hours sleep each night. When they are asleep, do not make too much noise so that they can sleep soundly.

sometime (adv): at some time; formerly เวลาที่ไม่ได้ระบุ
sometimes (adv): now and then; from time to time บางครั้งบางคราว
Can you spare me sometime tomorrow? We need to talk. I want to talk to you sometime tomorrow. It is important for us to talk sometimes.

suppose (v): guess; think คาดว่าคิดว่า
(be) supposed (to): be expected to คาดหมายว่าจะต้องทำขึ้นนั้น
I suppose all of us will have to work harder academically. That is to say, besides teaching, we are supposed to do more research and more articles or books.

tired (adj): weary in body and mind เหนื่อยจ่าง
tried (v): the past tense of try พยายาม
Almira tried very hard to finish her project on time. She became very tired afterwards.

thorough (adj): complete in every way; detailed รอบองค์ละเอียดถี่ถ้วน
through (adv): from end to end, side to side, beginning to end ผ่านจากต้นจนไปถึงด้านหนึ่งด้านเดียวกัน
You should be thorough about this. Be a thorough reader, and read through it by tomorrow.

Conclusion
It can be clearly seen that each of the words that sound or look the same has its own meaning. It could create a lot of misunderstanding or miscommunication if one word is used in place of the other. For example, if we say:

1. The children love to pray in the playground.

   The listener or the reader may wonder why the children love to pray there. That is not a place for an activity like that. (Actually, the intended meaning is the children love to play in the playground.)

2. Jane is very excited about wearing her new cloths to work.

   What? How can Jane wear her new cloths? Cloths cannot be worn unless they have been made into blouses, skirts, or dresses. (The intended meaning is Jane is very excited about wearing her new clothes to work.)

3. Ms. Jackson is the new personal manager of our organization.

   Whose personal manager is Ms. Jackson? Our organization does not need a personal manager. In an organization, a personnel manager is needed. (The intended meaning is Ms. Jackson is the new personnel manager of our organization.)

Therefore, we would like to seriously point out again that for effective communication, correct words must be appropriately used, or else misunderstanding or miscommunication could occur.
Bibliography
