

Language Variation on Social Media:

How Thai Content Creators Teach the Pronunciation of /r/ in German

การแปรของภาษาในโซเชียลมีเดีย:

คอนเทนต์ครีเอเตอร์ชาวไทยสอนออกเสียง /r/ ในภาษาเยอรมันอย่างไร

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คำสำคัญ: การเรียนภาษาออนไลน์, ภาษาเยอรมันในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ, คอนเทนต์ครีเอเตอร์, อุดมการณ์ทางภาษา, เสียง /r/ ในภาษาเยอรมัน

Abstract

Background and Objectives: This article examines the teaching methods used by Thai content creators on social media to teach the pronunciation of the German consonant /r/. It focuses on how different variants of /r/ are presented and discussed, particularly the uvular fricative [ʁ], which is considered the standard variant, and the alveolar trill [r], which exists in Thai but is often regarded as a regional feature in German. This issue reflects the contrast between standard language ideology and linguistic diversity in society. The study addresses these key questions: Do Thai content creators on social media incorporate the different variants of the German /r/ in their instructional materials? What factors influence their decisions to include or exclude this linguistic diversity in their teaching content?

Methods: This study employs corpus analysis to examine how the German consonant /r/ is presented and evaluated, using German language teaching materials produced by Thai creators from the ten most-subscribed YouTube channels and the ten most-followed Facebook pages. In addition, ethnographic interviews were conducted with five of the seven creators included in the corpus in order to gain insights into their educational backgrounds, linguistic experiences, and attitudes toward the standard language.

Results: The analysis of the teaching materials identifies two distinct pedagogical approaches: while some creators strictly adhere to prescriptive norms and teach only [ʁ], others acknowledge and incorporate [r] as a practical alternative for learners. The interview findings indicate that linguistic and educational backgrounds influence both the perception of the German /r/ and instructional approaches to this phoneme. The creators who have received language instruction based on the standard variety tend to present only the variant they are familiar with or accustomed to. In contrast, those with exposure to linguistic diversity or experience living in German-speaking countries are more likely to adopt a more inclusive approach toward linguistic variation.

Application of this study: In sociolinguistics, the findings show that social media functions as an open space for exchanging and debating the issues of linguistic correctness and standard language. In language teaching, the study underlines the importance of recognizing linguistic diversity and encouraging learners to think critically about linguistic rules. Presenting linguistic variation in language instruction reduces society's exclusive adherence to a single standard form and helps foster more positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity, both in German and in other languages.

Conclusions: This study examined how Thai content creators teach the pronunciation of the German consonant /r/ on social media, focusing on how the variants [ʁ] and [r] are presented and with what attitude. The research analyzed language-teaching materials from 20 channels — 10 YouTube channels and 10 Facebook pages—and included ethnographic interviews with five creators. The findings reveal two main teaching approaches: one group adheres strictly to the standard language and teaches only the [ʁ] sound, while the other group embraces linguistic diversity and presents [r] as an acceptable alternative. The key factors influencing these approaches include linguistic background, education, and real experiences in using the German language. The findings indicate that social media serve as a space for exchanging linguistic ideas and embracing linguistic diversity, thereby fostering more open-minded language attitudes. This study demonstrates that language teaching materials do more than simply teach language; they also play a role in constructing and shaping ideologies of linguistic correctness, standard language, and linguistic diversity. Moreover, linguistic biographies and experiences with language diversity directly influence beliefs and attitudes toward languages.

บทคัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: บทความนี้ศึกษาวิธีการสอนการออกเสียงพยัญชนะ /r/ ในภาษาเยอรมันโดยคอนเทนต์ครีเอเตอร์ชาวไทยในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ โดยมุ่งวิเคราะห์วิธีการนำเสนอและการอภิปรายรูปแบบของเสียง /r/ โดยเฉพาะเสียงเสียดแทรกที่ลิ้นไก่ [ʁ] ซึ่งถือเป็นรูปภาษามาตรฐาน และเสียงกระดกลิ้น [r] ซึ่งเป็นเสียงที่มีในภาษาไทยแต่ไม่ถูกมองเป็นรูปแปรตามถิ่นในภาษาเยอรมัน ประเด็นนี้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความขัดแย้งระหว่างแนวคิดภาษามาตรฐานกับความหลากหลายทางภาษาในสังคม งานวิจัยนี้ตั้งคำถามสำคัญว่า คอนเทนต์ครีเอเตอร์ชาวไทยนำเสนอรูปแบบต่าง ๆ ของ /r/ ในสื่อการสอนหรือไม่ ปัจจัยใดมีอิทธิพลต่อการเลือกที่จะนำเสนอหรือไม่นำเสนอรูปแบบดังกล่าว

วิธีการศึกษา: งานวิจัยนี้ใช้การวิเคราะห์คลังข้อมูลเพื่อสำรวจว่าพยัญชนะ /r/ ในภาษาเยอรมันถูกนำเสนอและให้คุณค่าอย่างไร โดยใช้สื่อการสอนภาษาเยอรมันที่ผลิตโดยชาวไทยจากช่อง YouTube จำนวน 10 ช่อง และเพจ Facebook จำนวน 10 เพจที่มีผู้ติดตามมากที่สุด นอกจากนี้ มีการสัมภาษณ์เชิงชาติพันธุ์วรรณากับครีเอเตอร์ 5 คนจากทั้งหมด 7 คนในคลังข้อมูล เพื่อให้ได้มาซึ่งข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับภูมิหลังทางการศึกษา ประสบการณ์การใช้ภาษา ตลอดจนทัศนคติที่มีต่อภาษามาตรฐาน

ผลการศึกษา: จากการวิเคราะห์สื่อการสอนสามารถแบ่งวิธีการสอนออกเสียง /r/ ได้เป็นสองแนวทาง คอนเทนต์ครีเอเตอร์ส่วนหนึ่งยึดถือภาษามาตรฐานอย่างเคร่งครัดและสอนเฉพาะเสียง [ʁ] เท่านั้น ขณะที่ครีเอเตอร์อีกส่วนหนึ่งยอมรับและนำเสนอให้เสียง [r] เป็นอีกทางเลือกหนึ่งที่ผู้เรียนสามารถใช้ได้ ผลการสัมภาษณ์แสดงให้เห็นว่าภูมิหลังทางภาษาและการศึกษามีอิทธิพลต่อความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับเสียง /r/ ในภาษาเยอรมันตลอดจนแนวทางการสอน กล่าวคือ ครีเอเตอร์ที่ผ่านการเรียนการสอนภาษาที่ยึดภาษามาตรฐานเป็นหลักมักเลือกนำเสนอเพียงรูปภาษาเดียวที่รู้จักหรือคุ้นเคย ในขณะที่ผู้ที่มีประสบการณ์กับความหลากหลายทางภาษาหรือเคยพำนักอาศัยในประเทศที่ใช้ภาษาเยอรมันจะมีมุมมองที่เปิดกว้างต่อความหลากหลายทางภาษา

การประยุกต์ใช้: ในด้านภาษาศาสตร์สังคม ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เป็นพื้นที่ที่เปิดกว้างสำหรับการแลกเปลี่ยนและถกเถียงกันเกี่ยวกับความถูกต้องของภาษาและภาษามาตรฐาน ในด้านการเรียนการสอนภาษา งานวิจัยนี้ตอกย้ำความสำคัญของการยอมรับความหลากหลายทางภาษาและการกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณเรื่องกฎเกณฑ์ทางภาษา การนำเสนอการแปรของภาษาในการเรียนการสอนภาษาย่อมส่งผลให้สังคมยึดมั่นในภาษามาตรฐานเพียงรูปแบบเดียวน้อยลง และช่วยเสริมสร้างทัศนคติของสังคมต่อความหลากหลายทางภาษา ทั้งในภาษาเยอรมันและภาษาอื่น ๆ

บทสรุป: บทความนี้ศึกษาวิธีการสอนการออกเสียงพยัญชนะ /r/ ในภาษาเยอรมันโดยคอนเทนต์ครีเอเตอร์ชาวไทยผ่านสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ โดยมุ่งวิเคราะห์รูปแบบของเสียง [ʁ] และ [r] ว่าถูกนำเสนออย่างไรและด้วยทัศนคติแบบใด การศึกษาดำเนินการด้วยการวิเคราะห์สื่อจาก YouTube และ Facebook รวม 20 ช่องทาง และสัมภาษณ์ครีเอเตอร์ 5 คน ผลการวิจัยพบว่ามีสองแนวทางหลักในการสอน คือ กลุ่มที่ยึดถือภาษามาตรฐานและสอนเฉพาะเสียง [ʁ] กับกลุ่มที่เปิดรับความหลากหลายและเสนอเสียง [r] เป็นทางเลือกเพิ่มเติม ปัจจัยสำคัญที่มีอิทธิพลต่อแนวทางการสอน ได้แก่ ภูมิหลังทางภาษา การศึกษา และประสบการณ์ใช้ภาษาเยอรมันจริง ผลการวิจัยชี้ว่าสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เป็นพื้นที่ที่แลกเปลี่ยนแนวคิดทางภาษา ให้คุณค่าแก่ความหลากหลายทางภาษา ช่วยเสริมสร้างทัศนคติทางภาษาที่เปิดกว้างมากขึ้น การศึกษานี้แสดงให้เห็นว่าสื่อการสอนภาษาไม่ได้สอนแค่ภาษาเพียงอย่างเดียว แต่ยังมอบบทในการสร้างหรือหล่อหลอมอุดมการณ์เกี่ยวกับความถูกต้องทางภาษา ภาษามาตรฐาน และความหลากหลายทางภาษา นอกจากนี้ ชีวประวัติทางภาษาและประสบการณ์ที่มีต่อความหลากหลายทางภาษาส่งผลโดยตรงต่อความคิดความเชื่อที่มีต่อภาษาอีกด้วย

Introduction

Although German is the official language of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, it is also spoken as a first language in other regions, such as South Tyrol in northern Italy and the eastern areas of Belgium (Kellermeier-Rehbein, 2022). Nevertheless, most German as a Foreign Language (GFL) teaching materials primarily emphasize Standard German as it is spoken in Germany. Research by Schopf & Weidner (2021) highlights inconsistencies in the representation of language variation in GFL textbooks: while some materials acknowledge Austrian or Swiss standard varieties, vocabulary and pronunciation predominantly adhere to the norms of Standard German in Germany. In Thailand, where GFL textbooks used in educational institutions are typically produced in Germany, classroom instruction closely follows these norms as well (Kaewwipat, 2020 : 115–116). This focus on the German standard is not only prevalent in international GFL education but is also reflected within Germany itself, where dialects and non-standard varieties are often assigned lower linguistic value (Maitz & Foldenauer, 2015).

With the rise of social media platforms, new opportunities have emerged for independent educators to produce and share language-learning content outside institutional frameworks. A defining feature of these online resources is the incorporation of personal experiences and individualized teaching methods (Wolf & Kratzer, 2015). Given the potential for greater linguistic diversity in user-generated content, this study examines how Thai content creators on social media platforms approach the topic of language variation.

One of the most relevant topics for all learners, especially beginners, is pronunciation, with the German /r/ being among the most frequently discussed sounds. Its prominence in language learning discussions is due not only to its articulatory difficulty but also to its sociolinguistic significance, as different variants are associated with regional, social, and identity-related distinctions. The German /r/ exhibits extensive variation in both place and manner of articulation, ranging from alveolar trill [r] to uvular fricative [ʁ] and approximants (Wiese, 2003). This variability has caused it to become a subject of metalinguistic debate, particularly regarding issues of correctness, linguistic value, and standardization. As a result, /r/ serves as a particularly relevant case study for examining how pronunciation variation is addressed in online language instruction.

Research Objectives

This study aims to address two key questions. Do Thai content creators on social media incorporate the different variants of the German /r/ in their instructional materials? What factors influence their decisions to include or exclude linguistic diversity in their teaching content? By analyzing pronunciation instruction in digital language learning and incorporating ethnographic data, this study explores the connection between sociolinguistic awareness and pedagogical choices in the online GFL learning environment.

Theoretical Background

1. The German /r/

The *Duden Pronunciation Dictionary (Aussprachewörterbuch)* (Duden, 2023 : 52–55) distinguishes between two primary articulatory types of the phoneme /r/ in German: vocalic or vocalized, realized as [ɐ] in unstressed syllables or syllable-final positions, and consonantal, which encompasses several allophonic variants, including [ʁ], [R], [ʀ], [r], and [ɹ]. These consonantal variants exhibit significant regional and social variation:

1. Uvular Fricative [ʁ]: Produced via the friction of breath between the back of the tongue and the uvula. This is the most common consonantal variant in Standard German and is widely used across German-speaking regions (except parts of Switzerland). It is also the preferred form in professional speech.
2. Uvular Trill [R]: A rolled sound where the uvula vibrates against the tongue. While less frequent, it is used in some specific positions (e.g., between vowels), certain regions (e.g., Bavaria), and in more careful speech.
3. Pharyngeal Approximant [ʀ]: Produced by bringing the root of the tongue close to the back of the throat without creating friction. This variant is common in southwestern Germany, parts of east-central Germany, Tyrol, and certain regions in Switzerland.
4. Alveolar Trill [r]: A rolled sound made by the tongue tip vibrating against the alveolar ridge. This variant is typical in southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and is used in classical singing.
5. Alveolar Approximant [ɹ]: Similar to the English “r,” mostly used in loanwords and names from English.

According to Wiese (2003), despite significant variation in articulation, the phoneme /r/ remains stable in its phonotactic behavior. Regardless of whether it is realized as a trill, fricative, or approximant, its position within syllable

structures and phonological patterns remains consistent, meaning that intelligibility is not compromised. This variability makes /r/ a key sociolinguistic marker, particularly in relation to regional variation. Consequently, debates about which variant of the German /r/ is more correct, more standard, or holds greater linguistic value are widespread. The primary source of controversy lies in the two most distinguishable consonantal variants, [ʁ] and [r], which are frequently discussed on online platforms, particularly in relation to standard versus regional pronunciation and the distinction between German and foreign influences (Chowchong, 2021). In light of these discussions, this study focuses on the consonantal articulation of /r/, with particular attention to the variants [ʁ] and [r].

2. Standard Language in the Context of Language Teaching and Learning

Speakers of widely used languages such as English, French, and Spanish often perceive their language as existing in a standardized form. This ideology of the standard language shapes not only their perception of their own language but also their broader understanding of language as a whole, fostering awareness of a “correct” or canonical form and reinforcing a strong belief in linguistic correctness (Milroy, 2001). Schools serve as a key site for the production and reinforcement of beliefs about what constitutes “bad” or incorrect language forms (Davies & Langer, 2006). Teaching methods and classroom materials promoting the use of the standard language play a significant role in shaping how learners and society perceive linguistic diversity. For instance, Maitz & Foldenauer (2015) examined the representation of dialects in school textbooks used in Bavaria. Their findings reveal that, despite emphasizing linguistic diversity and the role of dialects, these textbooks primarily treat dialects as regional identity markers. Furthermore, they often depict non-standard varieties as barriers to communication, fostering negative societal attitudes toward linguistic diversity, particularly dialects, and reinforcing inequality between speakers of the standard language and those raised with non-standard forms. This aligns with the widespread standard language ideology in Germany that regards Standard German as the most accurate and valuable form of the language (Davies & Langer, 2006).

3. Teaching German in Social Media

As social media platforms continue to expand, digital spaces have become an increasingly significant medium for language learning, including German as a Foreign Language. The dissertation of Chowchong (2022) examined German-language YouTube channels from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on content created by German and American content creators. The study found that these materials closely resembled traditional GFL textbooks, reinforcing Standard German while largely neglecting linguistic diversity. The German /r/, for instance, was presented in a manner aligned with the standard language ideology, with [ʁ] regarded as the only correct or ideal pronunciation.

Research on Thai-language GFL social media content remains limited. A notable study by Charoenwong et al. (2023) analyzed the pronunciation of final consonants in German by five Thai YouTubers, examining the influence of differences between Thai and German phonological systems. The study concluded that first-language interference contributed to pronunciation difficulties for some speakers. Beyond this work, no sociolinguistic research to date has specifically examined language variation in GFL instruction or incorporated interviews with Thai-speaking GFL content creators.

The theoretical framework in this section establishes the basis for examining the phonetic variation of /r/, its sociolinguistic relevance, and its portrayal on digital platforms. Building on this foundation, the following section outlines the methodological approach of the study, followed by an analysis of how Thai content creators on social media address the pronunciation of the German /r/.

Research Methods

This study is divided into two phases: (1) analyzing online teaching materials and (2) interviewing content creators for the purpose of complementary analysis. The following sections outline the methodology for each phase.

1. Corpus Selection

This study examines pronunciation videos by Thai content creators on social media. To ensure a representative dataset, the ten most-subscribed YouTube channels and the ten most-followed Facebook pages dedicated to language instruction were selected initially.

The selection of YouTube and Facebook is based on their widespread popularity among Thai users. According to Statista (2024a), Thailand had approximately 50.05 million Facebook users as of April 2024, ranking among the top countries globally in terms of audience size. Additionally, YouTube had around 50.76 million users in Thailand in 2021, with projections to reach 54.02 million by 2025 (Statista, 2024b). These figures highlight the significant reach of both platforms, making them highly relevant for studying the teaching of pronunciation. Beyond these general statistics, the popularity of learning German through these platforms is reflected in the large subscriber and follower counts of German-language teaching channels and pages by Thai creators.



To ensure the dataset aligns with the study's focus, the following selection criteria were applied:

1. Only independent, non-institutional creators were included to ensure that the content originates from the creators themselves rather than adhering to a predefined curriculum or institutional teaching method.
2. Only creators who have published at least one video dedicated to pronunciation were considered.
3. If a video specifically addresses the pronunciation of the r-sounds in German, it was selected. If no such video was available, the general pronunciation video (such as an introduction to the German alphabet and its pronunciation) with the highest number of views on the channel was chosen.

At the first stage of corpus construction, the keyword “เรียนภาษาเยอรมัน” (“Learn German”) was used to identify Thai-operated YouTube channels and Facebook pages. During this process, an interesting observation emerged: many high-subscriber YouTube channels and widely followed Facebook pages do not address pronunciation but focus mainly on grammar or vocabulary topics. As a result, despite their large audiences, certain channels and pages were excluded from the corpus due to the absence of pronunciation-specific content. This resulted in an unequal distribution of videos across platforms, with six videos from YouTube and two from Facebook. Despite the smaller number of Facebook videos, their inclusion remains essential, as some creators are highly influential in terms of followers and reach but only active on a specific platform. Limiting the corpus to just one platform would fail to capture the full extent of their influence and the diverse teaching methods employed. Moreover, as will be discussed in the analysis, a specific case involves an influential content creator with a background in Swiss German. This creator offers unique insights into teaching pronunciation, particularly regarding pronunciation variation and influences beyond Standard German, making their contribution valuable to this study.

The final corpus, as shown in Table 1, provides an overview of the selected videos, including the channel/page, platform, and video title, with original Thai titles accompanied by English translations in parentheses.

Table 1 Overview of Videos and Channels/Pages in the Corpus

Channel/Page	Platform	Video Title
เยอรมันกับครูโบ Krubo German (German with Teacher Bo)	YouTube	ภาษาเยอรมันพื้นฐานที่สุด Ep. 1 ท่อง ABC - ฝึกออกเสียง ผสมคำ - เรียนภาษาเยอรมันด้วยตนเอง ฟรี (The Absolute Basics of German Ep.1: Reciting the ABCs - Practicing Pronunciation and Blending Words - Learn German by Yourself for Free)
ภาษาเยอรมัน กับ Jacky (German with Jacky)	YouTube	ตัวอักษร R ในภาษาเยอรมัน เรียนภาษาเยอรมัน (The Letter R in German: Learn German)
ครูปอนด์ สอนเยอรม - Kru Pond Deutschlehrer (Pond Teaches German – Pond the German Teacher)	YouTube	ตัวอักษร สระ และการออกเสียงในภาษาเยอรมัน : ครูปอนด์ สอนเยอรม  DE (Letters, Vowels, and Pronunciation in German: Kru Pond Teaches German  DE)
Germany and Napa	YouTube	เรียนภาษาเยอรมัน การอ่านและออกเสียงในภาษาเยอรมัน (Learn German Reading and Pronunciation in German)
Baanpasa (Language House)	YouTube	FB Live EP.03 แชร์วิธีการออกเสียงตัว R ในภาษาเยอรมัน (FB Live EP.03: Sharing How to Pronounce the Letter R in German)
ครูเบิร์ด เยอรมัน ฟันส์ดี (Teacher Burt – German is Fun)	Facebook	มาชวนออกเสียงในภาษาเยอรมันอย่างถูกต้องแบบเจ้าของภาษา (Let's Practice Pronouncing German Accurately Like a Native Speaker)
Born to Go German	Facebook	Die Aussprache von "R" (The Pronunciation of "R")

As this study primarily focuses on the inclusion of German /r/ variants, key instructional moments will be summarized rather than transcribed in detail. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) will be used to represent the variants discussed.

2. Conducting Interviews

After analyzing the videos, ethnographic interviews were conducted online with five of the seven creators included in the corpus. These interviews aimed to supplement publicly available data by exploring the creators' educational backgrounds, teaching experiences, content creation methods, and perspectives on Standard German and dialectal variation. Not all creators were available to participate in the interviews; therefore, only those who agreed to contribute were included: เยอรมันกับครูโบ *Krubo German* (Bo), ครูปอนด์ สอนเยอรม - *Kru Pond Deutschlehrer* (Pond), *Germany and Napa* (Napa), *Baanpasa* (Krit), and ครูเบิร์ด เยอรมัน ฟันส์ดี (Burt).

Research Results

1. Video Data

This section provides a summary and analysis of the videos, focusing on how the creators in the corpus instruct their learners to pronounce /r/, which variants they mention, explain, or suggest, and which variant(s) they personally use

in the videos. It is important to note that the descriptions are translations of the creators' phrasing in Thai, which may result in the absence of linguistic terminology in some instances.

In general, the instructions can be divided into two groups: those that introduce only one pronunciation of the consonantal /r/ and those that allow for multiple variants.

The first group consists of creators who present a singular pronunciation as the correct or preferred form. While going through all the letters in the German alphabet, Pond (Kru Pond Sorn Yoe – Kru Pond Deutschlehrer, 2022) pronounces the letter "r" as [ʁ]. He acknowledges that [ʁ] is the most challenging sound to pronounce in German and clarifies that, although many people treat [ʁ] as equivalent to [r], similar to the Thai consonant "ร", they are "not the same, just similar." He explains that [r] involves trilling the tongue, whereas [ʁ] relies on vibrations produced in the throat. Mastering the articulation of [ʁ] to match pronunciation used in Germany, he states, takes time and practice. Pond's commitment to the standard variant [ʁ] is apparent in his decision not to encourage learners to use [r] as an alternative. Similarly, Krit, the creator of Baanpasa (2020), humorously begins his video dedicated to /r/ by advising his audience to drink water as a preparation. He explains that the German "r" is distinct from the Thai "ร", describing it as a sound produced in the throat and comparing it to the act of gargling water.

The second group adopts a more pluralistic approach, allowing for more than one pronunciation variant. Bo (Yerman Kab Kru Bo – Krubo German, 2020) introduces the letter "r" by first presenting the voiced uvular fricative [ʁ], a variant that she herself uses throughout the video. She instructs her audience to begin by producing a sound similar to [ʁ] while leaning their body backward and allowing a deep internal vibration (although she does not specify what should be vibrating). After this demonstration, she immediately offers an alternative pronunciation. Acknowledging the difficulty of articulating [ʁ], even for herself, she introduces the variant [r], comparable to the rolled consonant "ร" commonly used in Thai. This alternative is supported by her verbal reference to a consultation with a German phonetics expert, who confirms that both [ʁ] and [r] are acceptable. Notably, Bo does not address regional differences in pronunciation but focuses exclusively on articulation challenges.

A similar perspective is taken by the creator of *Born to Go German* (2021), who follows the same approach. He begins by explaining that the Thai "ร" is articulated with the tip of the tongue vibrating against the roof of the mouth. In contrast, the German "r" is produced in the throat, and the tip of the tongue, he emphasizes, should not touch the palate. However, toward the end of the video, he acknowledges that if learners struggle to produce [ʁ], using [r] is also acceptable, as it would still be understood by Germans. Additionally, he includes a text overlay in the video noting that regional varieties in southern Germany also employ the rolled [r], similar to the Thai consonant "ร". Like Bo, he presents both variants as viable, emphasizing ease of articulation rather than rigid adherence to a single standard.

Jacky's dedicated video on r-sounds is divided into two parts (Phasa Yerman Kab Jacky, 2019). In the first part, she discusses the differences between consonantal and vocalized variants of /r/, personally using the consonantal variant [r]. The second half focuses on the pronunciation of the consonantal /r/, where she introduces two options: [ʁ] and [r]. She begins with [ʁ], describing it as the "standard" or "official" pronunciation in German, typically produced by individuals "who are born in Germany." She then introduces [r], noting that this variant is comparable to the Thai rolled consonant "ร" and is commonly used in southern Germany, Austria, and among Russian speakers of German. For those who wish to produce [ʁ] like speakers in Germany, Jacky advises starting with the [x] sound (voiceless velar fricative) as a preparatory step. After explaining and demonstrating both variants, she emphasizes that both are correct and can be chosen freely depending on one's environment or personal preference. However, for Thai speakers who are more familiar with [r], she reassures them that using this variant is perfectly acceptable. Similarly, in her short demonstration of the

letter “r,” Napa from the channel *Germany and Napa* (2019) also uses the [ʁ] sound herself but acknowledges that individuals unable to produce [ʁ] can use [r], similar to the Thai consonant “ร”. Her approach aligns with Jacky’s in recognizing the acceptability of both variants rather than enforcing a strict standard.

Finally, Burt presents both variants like others in the second group, but with a distinct influence from his personal linguistic background (Kru Burt Yerman Funs Dee, 2020). In the video addressing the German alphabet, during the discussion of the letter “r,” Burt begins by producing the sound [ʁ], immediately noting that [r] is also a valid alternative. He explains that [ʁ] is produced in the throat, whereas [r] is articulated with the tongue. Burt emphasizes that the choice between the two variants ultimately depends on the speaker’s preference. Throughout the video, the Swiss-influenced creator primarily models words using [ʁ]. However, when demonstrating a sample sentence in Swiss German, he deliberately employs [r]. This suggests that Burt focuses on teaching Standard German as spoken in Germany, temporarily setting aside his Swiss linguistic background.

The following table provides an overview of the content creators, including the variant(s) they use, the variant(s) they mention, and the variant(s) they suggest in each video. By “variant(s) mentioned,” this refers specifically to the variants or allophones of the phoneme /r/ within the German language. Sounds from other languages, which may be provided as contrastive examples (e.g., the English “r” or the Thai consonant “ร”), are excluded from the table.

Table 2 Overview of /r/ Variants in the Videos

Creators	Variant(s) Used	Variant(s) Mentioned	Variant(s) Suggested	Remarks
Pond	[ʁ]	[ʁ]	[ʁ]	-
Baanpasa	[ʁ]	[ʁ]	[ʁ]	-
Bo	[ʁ]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ], [r]	[r] is acceptable and easier to pronounce for Thai learners.
Born to Go German	[ʁ]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ], [r]	[r] is used in regional varieties in the south of Germany and “can be understood by Germans”.
Jacky	[r]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ] is considered Standard German. [r] is used in the south of Germany and easier to pronounce for Thai learners.
Napa	[ʁ]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ], [r]	[r] is an acceptable alternative.
Burt	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ], [r]	[ʁ] and [r] are equally valid options.

The analysis of the corpus reveals distinct patterns in how the content creators approach teaching the German /r/, reflecting varying orientations toward standardization and sociolinguistic openness. Pond and the creator of Baanpasa are strictly standard-oriented, emphasizing [ʁ] as the sole acceptable variant in alignment with prescriptive norms. Their instruction prioritizes linguistic accuracy and phonetic consistency, discouraging alternative pronunciations such as [r].

In contrast, other creators adopt a more inclusive, sociolinguistically rich approach, recognizing and accommodating pronunciation diversity. Creators such as Jacky, Bo, and the creator of *Born to Go German* acknowledge [ʁ] as the standard variant but also introduce [r] as a viable alternative. They emphasize its regional use in southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and suggest [r] as a practical option for Thai learners due to its similarity to the Thai consonant “ร”. This pluralistic approach provides learners with flexibility, allowing them to choose a variant based on personal

preference or articulatory challenges. Additionally, Burt demonstrates how personal linguistic background can shape instructional choices. While he primarily teaches the standard [ʁ], he occasionally incorporates [r] when discussing Swiss German, reflecting his Swiss German-speaking background. This balance between standard pronunciation and regional awareness highlights how some creators integrate both standardist and variation-inclusive perspectives in their teaching.

Beyond the specific variants introduced, it is also crucial to examine how pronunciation is framed and explained in these videos. Rather than presenting a full spectrum of phonetic variation (see Chapter 2.1), creators tend to focus on the most salient variants, leaving less widespread regional forms unaddressed. This absence reflects their emphasis on broader comprehensibility rather than detailed linguistic diversity in their materials. Furthermore, most creators do not use technical terminology to explain the place and manner of articulation. Instead, they rely on simple terms, frequently referencing the “tongue” and “throat” to make their explanations accessible to learners. Additionally, many creators frame their teaching around the acceptability or comprehensibility of their pronunciation choices among German speakers, using “German people” or “native speakers” as a point of reference for validation (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994 : 17).

To sum up, the way these creators teach, use, or rationalize certain variants reflects not only differences in linguistic orientation but also their personal backgrounds, pedagogical priorities, and awareness of Thai learners’ challenges. While the videos provide valuable insights into their instructional methods, they reveal only part of the picture. To gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and decision-making processes behind these approaches, the next section draws on ethnographic data from interviews with the creators themselves. This qualitative data offers a richer perspective on their teaching philosophies, attitudes toward standardization and variation, and how their personal and professional identities shape their instructional practices.

2. Ethnographic Data

The analysis of the videos alone may suggest that some creators adhere strictly to the standard norm, taking what could be described as a standardist approach by omitting any discussion of regional variation. This aligns with the ideological practice of erasure, as described by Woolard and Schieffelin (1994), whereby linguistic diversity is rendered invisible. However, insights from the ethnographic interviews reveal a more nuanced perspective on the creators’ sociolinguistic knowledge and the factors influencing their instructional choices.

Interviews with some creators indicate that their decision to teach the standard variant [ʁ] stems from limited exposure to other pronunciations. For example, the creator of *Baanpasa* explained that his early learning experiences in Thailand and later at a *Volkshochschule* (a publicly funded adult education center) in Germany exposed him exclusively to the standard uvular fricative [ʁ]. Despite living and working in Saarland, he admitted that his linguistic surroundings did not introduce him to alternative variants. Consequently, he teaches only the variant he knows, which aligns with the standard norm. Similarly, Pond shared that his education in high school, his exchange year in a town close to Frankfurt, and his university studies provided no exposure to other /r/ variants. Even the language books he used while preparing his course materials exclusively referenced the standard [ʁ]. Pond further explained that even if he were aware of other variants, he would still prioritize the standardized pronunciation to keep his lessons brief, clear and accessible to his audience.

The ethnographic data does not suggest that these creators deliberately adopt a standardist approach. Rather, it highlights that their understanding of the German /r/ is a product of standardism embedded within the educational system and language materials they encountered. For these creators, the standard [ʁ] represents not just a preferred variant but a linguistic “fact” to be passed on without the need for complex didactic considerations. In this case, standardism operates less as a deliberate preference for one variant over others and more as an implicit outcome of limited exposure and institutional norms.

In contrast, other creators demonstrate a broader awareness of variation. For instance, Bo explained that she was first introduced to the rolled [r] by her Thai high school teacher before becoming familiar with the standard [ʁ] during university-level pronunciation training. Her experiences teaching at the Goethe-Institut in Bangkok and the Volkshochschule in Munich, as well as her participation in various teaching workshops and seminars, have shaped her pragmatic approach to teaching /r/. She recognizes that the standard [ʁ] is a typical challenge for Thai learners and, for practical reasons, suggests adopting the rolled [r], which is already present in Thai phonology, as a temporary solution. However, she emphasized that if an effective method for teaching the standard [ʁ] were available, she would prioritize it. In her teaching, the inclusion of regional variants is driven by methodological and didactic considerations rather than a commitment to linguistic pluralism. Furthermore, she observed that linguistic variation, based on her experiences with German language textbooks, is predominantly addressed within the framework of cultural studies (*Landeskunde*), particularly in discussions of region-specific vocabulary from Austria or Switzerland, rather than in the context of phonetic instruction.

Napa, who moved to Germany as a teenager and later completed a bachelor's degree in German Studies in Heidelberg, exemplifies how personal linguistic experiences and higher education influence instructional choices. Despite living in Germany for over a decade, she reported that the standard [ʁ] was the only variant she regularly encountered in her environment and personally used. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, she acknowledges and accepts the rolled variant in her video. This inclusion may stem from her academic background in German Studies, which likely provided her with greater awareness of the sociolinguistic landscape of the language.

While Napa's experience demonstrates how formal education can shape linguistic awareness, Burt's case highlights the role of regional linguistic exposure in influencing teaching practices. Having lived in Bern, Switzerland, for 35 years before returning to Thailand, he includes both the uvular fricative [ʁ] and the alveolar trill [r] in his instruction. Though fully aware and proud of his Swiss background, he prioritizes teaching Standard German as spoken in Germany, as this is what most learners expect from a German language course. His exposure to German television programs broadcast in Switzerland also familiarized him with the standard [ʁ], making it easy for him to use in teaching. However, the dominance of the rolled [r] in Switzerland makes it an integral part of his linguistic repertoire, and he sporadically incorporates this variant into his lessons to reflect his own linguistic background and ensure that he does not abandon his linguistic reality. Additionally, like Bo, he views the rolled [r] as a practical alternative for beginners or students who struggle to confidently produce the uvular fricative.

In conclusion, the ethnographic interviews highlight the profound influence of personal linguistic histories, educational backgrounds, and sociolinguistic exposure on the creators' approaches to teaching the German /r/ (see Table 3). For many Thai creators, their initial exposure to the German language shapes both their understanding and instructional practices. Standardism, or an orientation toward the standard language, is often not a deliberate choice but rather a consequence of limited exposure to variation. The standard [ʁ] is often the only variant they are familiar with due to early encounters with prescriptive norms in language education. Even among those aware of the rolled [r], it is typically introduced as a temporary aid for communicative competence, while the standard [ʁ] remains the preferred form whenever possible. This pattern may extend to creators who were not interviewed, highlighting the influence of early learning experiences on their perceptions and methods. On the other hand, creators who have been exposed to greater linguistic variation or have extensive experience in German-speaking countries demonstrate a more open attitude toward linguistic diversity. These creators are more likely to acknowledge and incorporate regional or learner-friendly variants, reflecting a broader sociolinguistic awareness and adaptability in their teaching practices.

Table 3 Summary of Interviewed Content Creators and Their Approaches to Teaching the German /r/

Creators	Place of Residence	Exposure to /r/ Variants	Teaching Approach and Attitude Towards /r/
Baanpasa	Thailand/Germany	Exclusively exposed to [ʁ]	Teaches only [ʁ]; regards it as the factual standard due to lack of exposure to alternatives
Bo	Thailand/Germany	Learned [r] first, then [ʁ]	Uses [r] as a temporary pedagogical aid for Thai learners but promotes [ʁ] as the long-term goal; handles variation for instructional efficiency
Burt	Thailand/Switzerland	Familiar with both [ʁ] and [r]	Prioritizes [ʁ] but occasionally incorporates [r] to reflect his Swiss linguistic background; balances authenticity with learner expectations
Napa	Thailand/Germany	Primarily [ʁ], aware of [r]	Mainly uses [ʁ] but acknowledges [r]; awareness of variation stems from academic exposure and personal experience
Pond	Thailand/Germany	Exclusively exposed to [ʁ]	Consistently uses [ʁ] for clarity and efficiency; views standard pronunciation as pedagogically practical

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from the video analysis and ethnographic interviews provide complementary insights into the teaching practices of Thai creators regarding the German /r/, while also highlighting the limitations of relying on one method alone. The video analysis reveals how creators present /r/ variants in their lessons, often reflecting either a strict adherence to standard norms or a practical approach tailored to learners' needs. The interviews illuminate the creators' personal linguistic histories, educational backgrounds, and exposure to variation, shedding light on the factors shaping their decisions on what and how to teach. These interviews not only provide a deeper understanding of the creators' philosophies but also enhance the credibility of the analysis by ensuring interpretations are not biased or selectively aligned with expected outcomes. Together, the two methods reveal the interplay between institutional standardism, personal sociolinguistic understanding, and practical pedagogy, offering a nuanced and well-rounded perspective of the instructional approaches examined in this study.

Since the results suggest that a creator's views on variation, as well as their teaching approach, are shaped by their exposure to linguistic diversity, incorporating this awareness into language education and public discourse could be a meaningful step toward fostering more inclusive perspectives on language use. Actively promoting linguistic diversity—whether directly through explicit instruction on regional and social variation or indirectly by encouraging open discussions on pronunciation and standard norms—may help counteract linguistic discrimination caused by rigid standardism. By introducing learners and the general public to the social and communicative realities of variation, educators and content creators alike can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of language as a dynamic system rather than a fixed set of prescriptive rules. Such an approach not only enhances linguistic awareness in formal education but also helps shape broader societal attitudes toward language diversity, variation, and linguistic inclusivity.

The pronunciation of the German /r/ is a frequent subject of metalinguistic debate, particularly in online spaces where speakers and learners discuss correctness, variation, and acceptability. However, this is just one example of how digital platforms function as arenas for negotiating language attitudes and linguistic ideologies. Future research could examine similar discussions on other linguistic features of German, including phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar, or

expand to different languages, considering both pedagogical contexts and broader metalinguistic debates on standardization, identity, and language change. Additionally, social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and language-learning forums may provide new perspectives on how pronunciation, standardization, and variation are perceived. While this study offers an initial framework for exploring these issues, further research is needed to deepen our understanding of language variation and sociolinguistic awareness across different linguistic and digital contexts.

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