The Effects of Cross-Cultural Issues on Language Learning in Thai Classrooms

■ **Marlon Domagco Sipe**

Abstract. *English language learning in Thailand has become popular in Thai schools through the years. This mixed qualitative and quantitative study recognizes the incessant influx of foreign English teachers, along with the cultural concerns it brings to Thai classrooms. These problems prompted the researcher to investigate various issues that are both beneficial and disadvantageous to Thai students and foreign teachers. A total of 136 Thai secondary school students in Khon Kaen were surveyed and observed in actual classroom settings, and 50 foreign teachers from 15 countries participated in the survey and 13 of them were selected for interview. The surveys were analyzed quantitatively, while the classroom observation notes and interviews were qualitatively assessed. The findings revealed several themes that included the common problems that foreign teachers experienced in Thai classrooms, the factors that affected the learning interest of Thai students, and the factors that affected the foreign teachers. Ethnicity, discipline and language barrier appeared to be the leading classroom issues among Thai students.*

Keywords: Cross-cultural issues, Language Learning, Socio-cultural Theory, Culture, Language Acquisition, Second Language Acquisition

Introduction

Culture has become an increasingly important component of English language teaching in recent times, as it plays a vital role in language learning, especially in a classroom of cultural distinction between the teacher and the students. Culture and communication are inseparable. This is because culture does not only dictate who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds; it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for the messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Culture, therefore, is the foundation of communication (Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981).

With culture as the groundwork of communication, English has become firmly established as the international language. Thais, for example, have decades of experience learning English in the classroom, as the language is used and taught in a diverse range of situations and cultures throughout the world, often far removed in both distance and in beliefs and values, from the cultures of the original English speaking countries (Baker, 2003). Though English has been introduced in Thai classrooms for a very long time now, the language remains invisible in Thai communities. One reason probably is the importance of English as a whole in Thai society. This is because Thai culture promotes Thai language as part of its identity as a nation. In the classroom, the minimal periods of time for English classes are highly evident, except in the expensive schools with English programs. Another reason may be due to lack of English teachers or the lack of interest among students towards English. With this situation in mind, the best way to learn the language is applying it often in daily life situations. The bottom line is that it is not our accent that matters, it is how we convey our messages in the conversation, so that the people who we are talking to will be able to understand what we mean.

English language teaching in Thailand has become more popular these days, as it aims towards global competitiveness. Because of this aim, the demand for English teachers, especially foreign, native speakers, has soared. As a result, the continuous influx of these foreigners has become unabated.Consequently, while many Thai students learn the English language with foreign teachers, it is undeniable that most of them have been facing cultural gaps apart from the language barrier, which is one of the most visible issues in the classroom. This research, through a socio-cultural perspective, has explored the effects of cultural differences between Thai students and foreign teachers in language learning which primarily aims to promote a mutual cultural understanding, and to narrow the cultural

gaps among them. To illustrate this multicultural use of English, this paper has explored the effects of the cross-cultural issues on language learning in Thai classrooms.
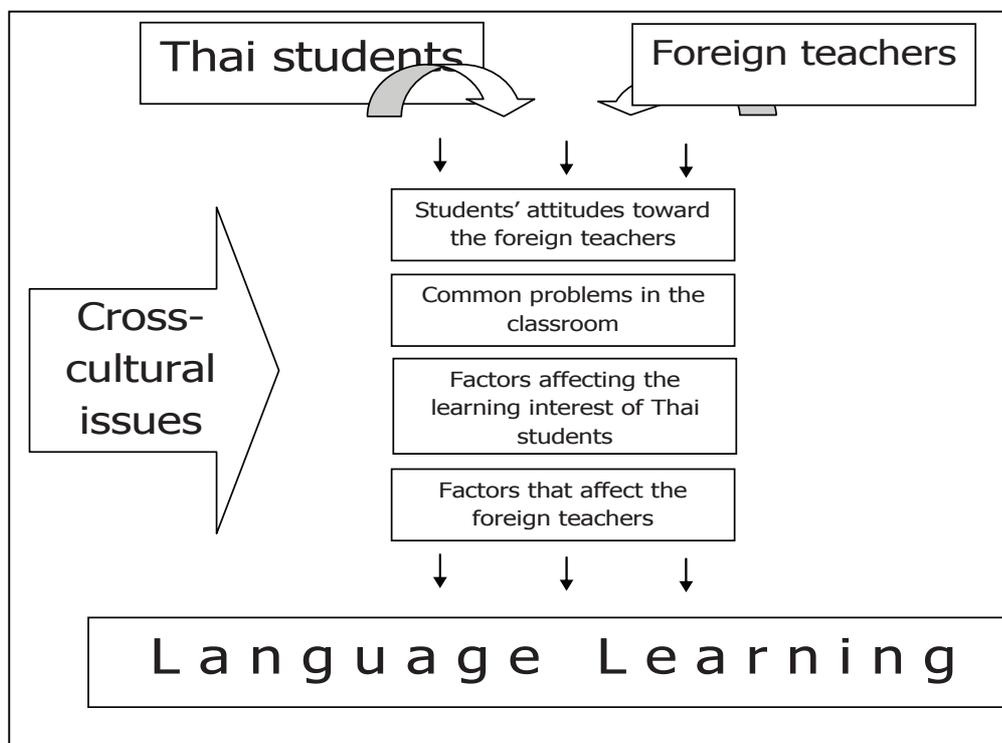

Figure 1. Cross-cultural issues on language learning in Thai classrooms.

The second language learning of English in Thailand, for example, has indeed motivated me to conduct this field of study, as more and more foreign teachers nowadays are engaged to teach English language in Thai classrooms. This is because foreign teachers in fact include not only 'farang teachers' (or Westerners), but also Asian teachers. Indeed, I personally have experienced teaching the language to Thai students for about five years along with a number of both native and non-native English speaking teachers. Thai students have obviously shown different attitudes and feelings toward the foreign teachers, especially towards the Western native speakers of English. Unique accent and perfect English have always been tagged to them. Most students demonstrate positive attitudes towards the so-called "*farang teachers*". These are just a few of my observations in Thai classrooms which I think in one way or another will affect language learning among Thai learners.

This dynamic reality at one point has further pushed me to explore the effects of the cross-cultural issues on language learning in Thai classrooms. This study aimed at helping prepare Thai students to face, interact and learn the language with the foreign teachers. English programs and international schools in Thailand have been increasing, so that more foreign teachers are needed. With this background, it would be interesting to understand how foreign teachers may affect Thai students' learning outcomes.

Research Questions
This research investigated and answered the following research questions:
    1. What are the attitudes / feelings of Thai students toward foreign teachers of English?
    What is the general attitude of foreign teachers toward the students?
    Do these affective issues affect their learning outcomes? If so, how?
    2. How does culture play a role in language learning in the classroom?

Review of Literature

The teaching of a foreign language inevitably involves the teaching of foreign cultures. English, as a foreign language in Thailand, should be regarded, not only as a resource for learning foreign cultures, but also as a means of cultural interaction. As Corson (1989) noted that it necessitates cultural interaction, this paper will discuss language and culture, roles of culture in the classroom along with the socio-cultural theories in language learning, and the classroom culture among Thai students.

Language and Culture

Language is arguably the most important component of culture, because much of the rest of it is normally transmitted orally (O'Neil, 2007). Learning a new language is not only to be able to communicate in that language. In language learning, he stressed that teachers need to have the children gain the knowledge and understand the culture of the target language. Teachers need to be aware that children learn a language easier if they learn also the behavior code of the language. It is important also to include culture in the foreign language curriculum, because it helps avoid stereotyping. It allows students to take control of their own learning process. As many of the Thai schools open their doors for foreign teachers to teach English, this study explored the effects of cross-cultural issues in language learning between the foreign teachers and Thai students. Because of the mounting demands for English speaking foreign teachers in Thailand, the influx of English-speaking teachers form the different parts of the globe has recently continued unabated. These teachers are composed of native English-speaking Teachers (NESTs) and non-NESTs. So, the conduct of this study is indeed necessary to help prepare Thai students to deal, interact, and face foreign English teachers in the classroom.

Indeed, English language learning in Thailand does not only needs to focus on the target language itself, but also a deeper cultural understanding of it is necessary, as language is an integral component of one's culture. English language classrooms in Thailand, in this regard, promote a cultural mutual understanding between the foreign teachers and Thai students. The teachers' task is to stimulate students' interest in the target culture, and to help establish the foreign language classroom 'not so much as a place where the language is taught, but as one where opportunities for learning of various kinds are provided through the interactions that take place between the participants' (Ellis, 1992, p. 171, cited in Kramsch, 1993, p. 245). Thai classrooms in general serve as a venue for cultural interaction between the L2 Thai learners and the foreign teachers.

Incorporating Culture in L2 Teaching

The usual tandem between culture and language in the areas of learning has always been the concern of most ESL teachers in the classroom. Whether the culture of the target language is to be incorporated in L2 teaching, it will remain a subject of rapid change throughout the language teaching history (Genc & Bada, 2005). In the course of time, the pendulum of ELT practitioners' opinion has swung against or for teaching culture in the context of language teaching. The advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 1970s marks a critical shift for teaching culture, from an approach based largely on form and structure to a plurality of approaches causing an unintended side effect: the negligence of culture (Pulverness, 2003). In contrast, having foreign teachers who teach English language in Thai classrooms does not necessarily mean that the teaching of culture is totally forgotten. The fact that foreign teachers are speakers of the target language, means that the incorporation of culture takes place in whole or in part of the language teaching. The teachers' own cultural experience can be a source of cultural interaction between the Thai students and the foreign teachers in the classroom which is a part of language learning.

Culture in the Classroom: The Thai Perspective

Having taught in Thailand for about 5 years now, I found myself to have adjusted to its classroom culture, especially in an atmosphere of mixed levels of students. Thai students are generally polite.
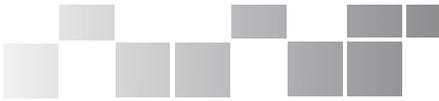
Most of them are well-mannered as a result of their culture. As a matter of fact, according to the website www.thaicultureblogs.com which I accessed on 14 September 2010, Thai people are world famous for their hospitality and their smiles. From an early age they are taught to be well-mannered and considerate of other people. Surprisingly, most of this is done in schools across the country. The website seems to agree with my own observations, as it said that students are just polite, maybe too polite in the classroom. Whenever a teacher walks into the classroom for an English class, the class captain will shout out "please stand up" in English. They all then stand up and say "sawatdee krap/ kaa" to the teacher. This is the Thai greeting. The teacher then replies with the same greeting and tells the students to sit down. They then say "thank you". What a teacher always finds amusing is the little routine the students have at the end of the lessons. When a teacher is about to leave, the class captain will then signal that the lesson is over. They then thank the teacher for teaching them that lesson.

Socio-cultural Theory

Vygotsky's theory assumes that cognitive development, including language development,arises as a result of social interactions. Primarily among these interactions are those between individuals. Unlike the psychological theories that view thinking and speaking as being tightly interwoven.Vygotskyan theory has also been compared to the interaction hypothesis, because of the interlocutor's role in helping learners understand and be understood. These two perspectives differ primarily in the emphasis they place on the internal cognitive processes. In the interaction hypothesis, the emphasis is on the individual cognitive processes in the mind of the learner. Interaction facilitates those cognitive processes by giving learners access to the input they need to activate internal processes. In Vygotskyan theory, greater importance is attached to the conversations themselves, with learning occurring through the social interaction.Socio-cultural theory holds that people gain control of and reorganize their cognitive processes during mediation, as knowledge is internalized during social activity.

Factors that Influence Language Learning

Language development is even more impressive when we consider the nature of what is learned. It may seem that children merely need to remember what they hear and repeat it at some later time. But, as Chomsky (1959) pointed out so many years ago, if this were the essence of language learning, we would not be successful communicators. Verbal communication requires productivity. This endless novelty requires that some aspects of language knowledge be abstract. Chomsky's key point was that since abstractions cannot ever be directly experienced, they must emerge from the child's own mental activity while listening to speech. The course of language development reflects the interplay of factors in at least five domains: social, perceptual, cognitive processing, conceptual and linguistic (Johnston, 2005). Theorists differ in the emphasis and degree of determination posited for a given domain, but most would agree that each is relevant. There is a large body of research supporting the view that language learning is influenced by many aspects of human experience and capability. In relation to this, Thai L2 learners could further improve their communication skills of the language if the Thai society uses English to support language learning in schools. Social interaction plays a very essential role in language acquisition in general.

Research Methodology

This investigation was a mixed methods qualitative and quantitative research study, designed to explore the effects of cross-cultural issues on language learning in Thai classrooms.

Participants

A joint participation of 50 foreign teachers who were teaching English in Thailand and 136 Thai students was highlighted in this investigation, as the researcher explored the issues in cross-cultural classrooms in Thailand.

Foreign teachers

The participants who took part in this inquiry were 44 male and 6 female foreign teachers. Five of these foreign teachers were 21-25 years old, 5 were 26-30, 12 were 31-35, 8 were 36-40, and 20 were above 40. These teacher participants were purposively selected using the following criteria: First, their length of teaching experience. This revealed that 12 of them had 1-2 years of teaching experience in Thailand, 18 of them had 3-5 years, and 18 of them had 5 years and above. Second, was their nationality. These teachers were composed of 19 Americans, 8 British, 2 New Zealanders, 3 Canadians, 2 Australians, 2 French, 1 Russian, 6 Cameroonians, 1 German, 1 Ghanan, 1 Indian, 2 Filipinos, 1 Chinese, and 2 Japanese teachers. They were all working in Thailand at the time the data were collected. These teachers have had experienced teaching Thai students in the country for at least a year. They were both primary and secondary teachers, and a number of them were teaching university students. Fifty foreign teachers were purposively chosen from the different parts of Thailand, as they represented the different nationalities of foreign teachers currently working here. Thus, this number was sufficient to provide the researcher the data needed for this study.

Thai students

One hundred thirty-six students from 3 different secondary schools in Khon Kaen province, located in the northeastern part of Thailand, were selected to participate in this study. The students were purposively selected as the researcher's work place is in the same province. Also, the selected schools offer English Programs (EP) and Mini-English Programs (MEP) which employ foreign teachers.Moreover, these schools cater for students from Grades 7-12 (M1-M6 in Thailand)

Other criteria included: the participants must have experienced learning English with foreign teachers in school and must be Thai students in either Grade 7, 8, or 9 (Matthayom one (M1), M2, or M3 class in Thailand). These students were enrolled in schools that have either EP (English Programs), Mini-English Program (MEP) or Bilingual Programs. The researcher chose secondary school students who have had foreign teachers teaching English and other subjects to them. In other words, in the first secondary school, only Matthayom 1 (M1) was asked to participate. The second secondary school was only M2, and third secondary school was M3. This was because 3 classes (136 students) were enough to represent the target participants of this study.

Methodology

The data for this research were collected in the selected secondary schools in Khon Kaen for the period of about 7 months, from May to December 2010. As I employed triangulation process in my investigation, the 3 data sources: the survey questionnaires, interview, and classroom observation have played vital roles in this study.

Part 1: The Instruments and the Data Collection Procedures

1. The survey questionnaire

The general purpose of this tool was to collect sufficient information on the issues arising from a Thai classroom in language learning and in order to answer the research questions of this study. This collection method aimed to know more about the participants' background information, and their own personal experience in having Thai students/foreign teachers in the classroom. Though a part of the survey questionnaires was patterned after the work of Lee et al. (2009), the rest of it was developed by the researcher. The researcher found a part of Lee's survey form related to his study. The questionnaire was checked by my thesis advisor and his co-advisor and by a Filipino expert before trying it out with a similar sample of participants. This validation process was done to ensure the content validity of this instrument.

1.1 Questionnaire for teachers

The questions were written in English and were structured based on the research questions. This means that the foreign teachers' answers to the questions focused on the attitudes of Thai students toward them, along with the issues in the classroom that included the problems in managing the students, the factors that affect their learning interest, and the factors that also affect the foreign

teachers, among others. Twenty-eight open-ended questions and multiple options were prepared for the participants to answer. Part A asked about the background of the foreign teachers, Part B asked about Thai students, Part C investigated their personal perceptions, and Part D asked about their experience in the classroom. Fifty teachers participated in the survey through personal meeting and/ or through email. A Likert scale (Sclove, 2001) was used in the questionnaires for the teachers. It was structured into two parts, and the questions were structured within each part. A variety of questions were asked such as: the informants' knowledge about their culture that the researcher can discover, the concepts the informants use to classify their experiences, the way the informants define these concepts, and the way the researcher can translate the cultural knowledge of his informants into a cultural description his readers will understand (Spradley, 1979).

1.2 Questionnaires for Thai students

The questions were designed in English with a Thai translation so that it was easier for the students to understand the questions prepared for them (Griffee, 2001). The questionnaire was also structured based on the research questions. The researcher sought assistance from his Thai colleague who served as the school's coordinator for foreign teachers for the Thai translation of the survey questionnaires. The Thai translated questionnaires were checked by two other Thai teachers who had studied English abroad and were competent in both oral and written English. Later, I also adopted some suggestions from my thesis advisor as part of my validation process. This is because it cannot be assumed that the translated items are valid simply because they were translated (Griffee, 2001). Thirty questions with multiple optional answers. These survey questionnaires were administered in person by the researcher, with a 97% response rate. As for the teacher questionnaire, the key points raised in most questions were focused on culture and the feelings/ attitudes of the students toward English as a subject and the foreign teacher as well.

A Likert scale was also used for the student participants. It was structured into two parts, and the questions were structured within each part. Part A was about the background information of Thai students including sex, age, and contact information., while Part B focused on their own self-assessments in Thai classrooms, and their own views on the cross-cultural issues on language learning arising in Thai context.

2. The interviews

The conduct of the interviews aimed to see how the participants expressed their feelings and their experiences. A qualitative research interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level, though it is usually more difficult to interview on a meaning level (Kvale, 1996). This research tool is particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. With this, interviews are useful as a follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, for example, to further investigate their responses (McNamara, 1999). The interviews were semi-structured in nature and were conducted online (*via* live chatting),allowing 30-minutes to an hour. The interviews were done on-line because of the interviewees'locations around Thailand. Also, the interviews were done online, as most of those chosen for interview were very far from researcher's residence and were busy in their respective jobs. The teachers who were interviewed were purposefully chosen by the researcher based on their length of teaching experience in Thailand. The foreign teachers who were interviewed were composed of those who had taught in Thailand for at least a year and those who had experienced teaching Thai students for 3 or more years. Thirteen foreign teachers were interviewed, as the researcher only needed at least 20% of the total teacher participants. Since 13 of them went online by the time the researcher conducted the interview, he interviewed them one at a time. These teachers were composed of 5 Americans, 1 British, 1 Hawaiian, 1 French, 1 Russian, 2 Cameroonians, 1 Indian, and 1 Filipino. Of these 13 teachers, 9 were male and 4 female.

2.1 Memo-writing

Memo-writing was also utilized as a technique for my interviews. While conducting the interviews, I also took notes of the important issues and information that arose from the interviews. I

listed down the themes and issues that were formed later as the interview went on. After the interview, memos were reviewed and typed into my computer. Lengthy descriptive data were also reduced as they were reviewed, so that it would be easier to analyze later. The filtered information was later coded and categorized. Memo-writing served to assist the researcher in making conceptual leaps from raw data to those abstractions that explain research phenomena in the context in which it is examined (Birks et al. 2008).

3. Classroom Observations

Another tool that was employed by the researcher was classroom observation. It was very useful as it aimed to follow-up certain respondents to interviews, and questionnaires, for example, to further investigate their responses. Three secondary schools were visited for classroom observations. Two of these secondary schools were taught by native speakers of English and were conveniently located in the city proper of Khon Kaen, while the other one was taught by an Asian teacher and was in the far south of the city. One class from each of these schools was observed in an actual conversation class. Each class was paid a series of class observations. Classroom 1 (M1 students) was taught by a British teacher with 51 students. These students were enrolled in the MEP. Classroom 2 (M2 students) had 32 students, and was taught by a Filipino teacher. Students from this class were enrolled also in the MEP. Classroom 3 (M3 students) had also a conversation class with a South American teacher. This class had 53 students who were enrolled in the English program of the school. About 6 class hours were conducted to the 3 schools. Field notes were used during the classroom observation sessions to grasp the important necessary thoughts that emerged in the actual classroom atmosphere. For both the interviews and class observations, I made use of the reflection to simply portray a written depiction of the participants' behavioral standing in the language learning process. These written reflections were used along with the interviews, and other documents to analyze the data. In the classroom, I took my seat at the back of the class, and took field notes. This tool aimed to see the actual reaction, feelings, and involvement of both the foreign teacher and the Thai students in the real classroom atmosphere.

3.1 Field notes

One technique that I employed while observing classes was using field notes. As it was a running account of what actually happened in the classroom, it was important to be thorough in taking field notes, particularly at the earliest phases of research (Corsaro, 1981). As much as possible, I tried to get the whole picture of what was happening. I took notes in the classroom, as it is usually best to write field notes by hand at the site (Corsaro, 1981), then typed them into the computer at the end of each day or at least by the next morning. When observing, I wrote very concretely. In my notes, I avoided inferences, generalizations, and the use of vague terms. I also avoided sophisticated terms that obscured what actually occurred. I went down to the level of detailed observations, even if they seemed irrelevant at first.

Part 2: Data Analysis

After the data have been collected, the responses of the participants from the survey questionnaires, interviews, and class observations were discussed for analysis. I made sure that every single piece of data that emerged as significant was covered with total importance. Since I employed three major data sources (i.e., survey, interviews, class observations) in this research, the data procedures that have been undertaken were clearly defined. With the data collected from the three data sources, the researcher firstly had to reduce the transcripts of data inductively. It was very important to filter information that emerged as vital in my investigation. The analyses for each data type are described below.

1. Data from the questionnaires

The data collected from the survey were analyzed quantitatively. Getting the percentage of the collected data played a vital role in determining the results of the surveys. The two sets of questionnaires were analyzed separately for Thai students and foreign teachers.

2. Data from the interviews

After the data collected from the interviews were saved, first, I filtered the necessary information. It is important for data to be reduced inductively rather than deductively, and to organize what turned out to be essential. It is very necessary to have the transcripts reduced so that it was easier to manage. Secondly, codes were then formulated from the data sources. Other issues were also coded accordingly. Moreover, I created theme categories/subcategories for the information collected. The classification of data into theme categories and data codes was undertaken to clearly describe the presentation of data. In due course, I also needed to categorize the eventual saturation of data.

3. Data from the class observations

After the data from the class visit have been collected, I reviewed my field notes for my analysis. Like the data from the interviews, the data collected from the class observation were also reduced inductively. This was to analyze the data easier. Codes were also formulated. Coding helped me identify the issues in the classroom simply. Other issues were also coded accordingly. In addition, I created theme categories and subcategories for the information collected. This procedure was undertaken carefully so as not to create confusion on my part. With this, I defined each category/subcategory. The categories and definitions needed to be revised many times as I continued the analysis (Corsaro, 1981). I kept track of the revisions and reasons for revisions of categories and definitions in theoretical notes (revisions occur because data indicates that previous definitions were not sufficient). Also, I gave examples of categories in my theoretical notes, indexed specifically to pages, line numbers, etc. of field notes. I also included exemplars—the best examples that represent the core of the category (Corsaro, 1981). Also, outliers were included--poor examples, but nevertheless examples of the category, as they defined the limits of the category. Finally, I created linkages between categories that need to be specified, and also I noted the kinds of linkages involved. Another category was created for the eventual saturation of data.

Part 3: Validation of Analysis

After having followed the analytical procedures, a validation of analysis was employed. For this, an individual content analysis was undertaken. The initial findings from each data source were constantly compared to each other as part of my triangulation process. Data from the major data sources were classified and organized, so as to maintain reliable results. As soon as I completed my analysis, I compared the survey results to the interview and class observation findings for consistency and \validity purposes.

Findings

A careful examination to this view revealed that Thai students were not accustomed to the teaching methods of the foreigners, especially the practice of ecouraging the students to think critically by themselves, and the application of English outside the classrooms and in real life situations, which were believed incompatible with Thai learning style.

Research Question 1

The first research questions asked "What are the attitudes / feelings of Thai students toward foreign teachers of English? How about the attitudes of foreign teachers toward the students? Do these affective issues affect their learning outcomes? If so, how?" To sum up the findings for the abovementioned questions, Thai students had an overwhelming positive attitude towards their foreign teachers, especially the native speakers of English.

A. Thai Students' Attitudes toward Foreign Teachers.

The first recurring theme of this research is the attitudes of Thai students towards their foreign teachers. These attitudes are categorized into two: the positive and the negative attitudes.

A.1 <u>Positive attitudes</u>. Most foreign teachers felt they were warmly welcomed in Thai classrooms, especially the Caucasian foreign teachers, both native and non-native speakers of English language. Most foreign teachers agreed that Thai students are polite and excitable in nature, especially to their Caucasian foreign teachers.

A.2 <u>Negative attitudes</u>. The data also suggests, however, that not all foreign teachers are happy with the attitude of Thai students towards them, particularly those coming from Asia and Africa. This may be because the teachers from these countries do not have the accent, Western culture, and white skin that was attractive to the students. Though these teachers speak English, Thai students' attitude and learning interest are greatly affected by the accent, ethnicity or nationality of their teachers.

B. The Foreign Teachers' Attitudes toward Thai students

If Thai students' attitude towards their foreign teachers showed an overwhelming positive result, it is also undeniable that foreign teachers have the same mutual attitudes towards their students. It has been said that the facial reaction of a person reflects what he/ she feels. A survey item below shows the attitude of foreign teachers to their students. When asked to respond to 'Our English teachers always smile when he /she teaches us', 75% of the students agreed, 11% disagreed, and 14% of them had no definite position on the issue.

C. Common Problems of Foreign Teachers in Thai Classrooms

The next recurring theme of this investigation was the problems in Thai classrooms. Misbehavior and signs of disrespect were the few common problems of the foreign teachers. Many teachers also included the following in the list of issues between the foreign teachers and Thai students: being less attentive, too quiet, short attention span, cheating or copying, lack of individuality, laziness, punctuality and being dependent on spoon-feeding approach.

D. Factors that Affect the Learning Interest of Thai Students

The third recurring theme in this study focused on the factors that influenced the learning interest of Thai students in subjects taught by foreign teachers, especially English. Ethnicity and accent are just a few common factors that affected the learning interest among Thai students, followed by the importance of English, grading system and fun in the classroom.

E. Factors that Affect the Foreign Teachers

There were also factors that can affect the performance of foreign teachers in Thai classrooms. These factors included: student behavior, student learning style/grading system, students' shyness and poor interest, language barrier, class participation, and racist comments.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, "How does culture play a role in language learning in the classroom?" Culture in the classroom has always played a vital role on language learning. In this study, Thai culture played an integral part of English language learning, and Thai students have demonstrated this. The following issues revealed some cultural concerns among foreign teachers and Thai students in a language classroom.

F. Students' Culture-based Behaviors that are Advantageous to Learning

Though a number of foreign teachers agreed that lack of student discipline is a big factor that negatively affects their teaching, it remains undoubtedly evident that student behavior (e.g., discipline, respect) is likewise a big factor that has a beneficial effect towards language learning according to the results of my interview with the selected foreign teachers .

G. The Students' Culture-based Behaviors that are Disadvantageous to Learning

For one thing, most foreign teachers share the same points of view on the classroom issues that are disadvantageous towards learning among Thai students. Disrespect leads these issues, followed by the attitude of not asking questions/fear of making mistakes, poor speaking skill, fun/games and easy lessons, punctuality/lack of interest, cheating or lack of individuality, and critical thinking/free thinking.

Finally, with the recurring themes that arose, most Thai students appeared incompatible with the teaching approaches introduced by the foreign teachers to them. This is because Thai students' culture of expecting so many games in class and being timid in a language classroom hindered learning. The students' voice also seems to have a large effect in schools, whether it is teacher concerns or lesson issues. Another weakness of many schools is that, most of their directors are not accustomed to handling foreign teachers, since most of them do not or cannot speak English. They should know the bottom line why there are some foreign teachers who are not happy with the system, as this could affect the teacher-student relationships, which could affect the teaching-learning process.

Conclusion

With the recurring themes and classroom issues which appeared in this study, Thai students' learning style appeared incompatible with the teaching approaches introduced by the foreign teachers to them. A careful examination of this view indicates that Thai students are not accustomed to the foreign teachers' teaching methods - the interactive, and the free-thinking approaches. The reasons that turned out to have affected this, is the 'no failing grade policy' of Thai schools, student empowerment in the classrooms, and the choice for foreign teachers with their English accent and ethnicity.

While many Thai students learn English language with foreign teachers, it is undeniable that most of them have been facing cultural gaps apart from a language barrier, which is one of the most visible issues in the classroom. Although Thais have a long history of studying English, many demonstrate low degrees of proficiency, particularly in the productive skills of speaking and writing. It seems that English language pedagogy in Thailand is still in its infancy (Wongsothorn *et al.* 2002, cited in Laopongharn, & Sercombe, (2009).

Recommendation

Hopefully, this study has brought a cross-cultural awareness in Thai classrooms. The next step would be to evaluate how the issues in the classroom connect the dots of cultural understanding, leading to productive language learning between the foreign teachers and Thai students.

References

Baker, W. (2003). Should culture be an overt component of EFL instruction outside of English speaking countries? The Thai context. *Asian EFL Journal*, *5*(4). Retrieved October 15, 2010, fromhttp://www.asian-efl-journal.com/dec_03_sub.wb.php

Chomsky, N. (1959). A Review of B.F. Skinners Verbal Behavior. Language, 35, 26-58, Reprinted in Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the theory of syntax. Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press.

Corsaro, W. A. (1981). Communicative processes in studies of social organization:sociological approaches to discourse analysis. *Text*, *1*, 5-63

Griffee, D. (2001): *Questionnaire Translation and Questionnaire Validation: Are they the same?* Retrieved October 15, 2010, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal

Johnston, J. (2005). *Encyclopedia on early childhood development. Factors that influence language development.* British Columbia, CA: University of British Columbia.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Laopongharn, W., & Sercombe, P. G. (2009). *What relevance does intercultural communication have to language education in Thailand?* Newcastle, UK: School of Education Communication and Language Sciences Newcastle University.

Lee, P., et al. (2009). *Language learning & multicultural education.* International Language Center Southern College of Technology, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Thailand.

Samovar, L., Porter, R., & Jain, N. (1981). *Understanding intercultural communication.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview.* Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College.