

บทความวิจัย (Research Article)

การศึกษากริบีในการสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมระหว่างอาจารย์เจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษ และอาจารย์ชาวไทยที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

Exploring Communication Strategies in Cross-Cultural Interaction Between Native English Teachers and Thai EFL Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate cross-cultural interactions between Thai teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) and native English-speaking teachers focusing on cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies (CSs) that Thai EFL teachers and native English-speaking teachers used in their conversations. The participants were high school teachers and university instructors in Phayao Province, Thailand. A total of 92 responses were gathered from 75 Thai EFL teachers and 17 native English-speaking teachers. The questionnaire and interview were used to collect data. The results of the study show that native English-speaking teachers had lower cross-cultural interaction apprehension than Thai EFL teachers. A majority of the participants regularly used communication strategies while interacting with people who come from different languages or cultures such as body language. There was a significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in Thai EFL teachers, but there was no significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in native English-speaking teachers. In addition, the way to use communication strategies between the Thai EFL teachers and the native English-speaking teachers were not significantly different. Moreover, the results show there was a significant difference in the cross-cultural interaction anxiety between the Thai EFL teachers and the native English teachers.

Keywords: Cross-cultural interaction, Communication strategies, Native English teachers, Thai EFL teachers

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Introduction

English has been a dominant language in the world for a long time and also is used as an international language for communication. The idea of a global world has become commonplace. Consequently, there are increasing opportunities for people to travel and use English language in their ordinary lives which means the role of English is more important in every day. In an education context, the countries which do not use English as a first language (L1) place English within their school syllabus in order to teach them the language [13]. In Asia, many schools have started to employ native English speakers to teach at their schools [61]. Nowadays, English language has become a necessity for Asian people. This is becoming especially important in countries which use English as a foreign language (EFL) such as Thailand which is set to join ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) community. This is important as the countries in ASEAN use English as their official language [12]. Certainly, difficulties among people who come from different languages and cultural backgrounds could happen such as misunderstandings.

Misunderstanding is the result of poor communication especially cross-cultural communication [22]. People then try to solve this problem by using communication strategies as tools for solving communication problems [20] such as body language or comprehension check. Communication strategies used for effectively communication and the effective communication in cross-cultural communication can be challenging because cultures provide people with ways of thinking, seeing, hearing, and understanding the world [60].

Cross-cultural interaction apprehension is defined by communication researchers Jim Neuliep and Jim McCroskey as the fear or anxiety associated with people from different groups, especially different cultural or ethnic groups [50]. Communication apprehension is also identified as a psychological phenomenon called social anxiety [38], where people experience social anxiety whilst speaking with others. Communication apprehension or anxiety is one of the primary reasons for the avoidance or disruption of communication (McCroskey et al., 1985). Apprehension or anxiety is frequently discussed in the literature in terms of second language learning. Foreign language anxiety has been related to difficulties, comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and word production [28].

Objectives

1. To investigate interactions between Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers focusing on cross-cultural interaction apprehension (CCIA) and communication strategies (CS) that are being used among Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers in high schools and at a university in Phayao province in Thailand
2. To identify a relationship between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies used among Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers
3. To compare how native English teachers and Thai EFL teachers use communication strategies
4. To compare the uses of cross-cultural interaction apprehension between native English teachers and Thai EFL teachers

Methodology

The research instruments used to collect information, data collection, and statistical analysis procedures are presented. The interviews were conducted in order to gather data and to fulfill the purposes of the study. This study addresses the following four research questions.

1. What are the Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers' perceptions on their cross-cultural interaction apprehension (CCIA)?
2. What are communication strategies (CS) that Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers use to verbally communicate?
3. Is there any relationship between cross-cultural interaction apprehension (CCIA) and communication strategies (CS) used among Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers?
4. Does the use of communication strategies (CS) and cross-cultural interaction apprehension (CCIA) differ between native English teachers and Thai EFL teachers?

The first research question used a self-assessment 'Personal Report of Cross-cultural Interaction Apprehension' (CCIA) adapted from 'Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension' (PRICA) by communication researchers Neulip and McCroskey [51] and interview questions. The second research question used a self-assessment on 'Communication Strategies' adapted from Váradi (1973), Tarone (1977), Færch, Kasper (1983a), Bialystok (1990), Dörnyei (1995), and Dörnyei and Scott (1997) with interview questions. For the third and the forth research questions the researcher used the results from the first research question and the second research question to answer.

Participants of the Study

In the present study, the participants were 20 Native English speaker teachers (UK, USA Australia, and New Zealand nationals) and 139 Thai teachers who teach English as Foreign language. These teachers were from twelve high schools from eight districts and a university in Phayao province.

Research Instruments

There were two research instruments used in this study: questionnaires and interviews. The collection of this kind of data has been called "mixed methods" [16] or "multimethods" [10]. Two forms of data are blended (Steckler et al., 1992) or combined together. Mixed methods include both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data are provides a better understanding of the problem than used only one datasets [16]. Using two types of instruments to collect data strengthened the trustworthiness and internal validity of the present study [63].

For this study I used a variety of methods to collect the data, I used qualitative data (interviews) only to support the quantitative data (the questionnaire). Both types of data were collected because they provided different strengths.

1. Questionnaires

1.1 To collect the data, each participant was asked to do self-assessment adapted from 'Personal Report of Intercultural communication Apprehension' (PRICA) by communication researchers Neulip and McCroskey [51]. The questionnaires were used to investigate Native English teachers' attitudes and Thai EFL teachers' attitudes towards cross-cultural interaction apprehension. The researcher distributed the same questionnaires in English to all participants.

1.2 Each participant was asked to do self-assessment on 'Communication Strategies.' Each participant had to check the way they used communication strategies. Communication Strategies (CS) adopted in the personal report questionnaires, in the present study, 11 CS selected from Váradi (1973), Tarone (1977), Færch and Kasper (1983a), Bialystok (1990), Dörnyei (1995), Dörnyei and Scott (1997) category of CS have been adopted and used in 'The Personal Report on Communication Strategies'. The researcher distributed the same questionnaires in English to all participants. In addition, the researcher used open-ended questions to ask the participants' opinions on cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies.

2. Interview

The semi-structured interview took approximately 30 minutes per a participant. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission.

Data Collection

This study took four weeks in July 2014 to collect the data. The participants of the study were 20 native English teachers and 139 Thai EFL teachers in all high schools and a university in Phayao.

The researcher sent the questionnaires to native English teachers and Thai EFL teachers and in the questionnaires had a place to check if they gave interview permission.

Results and Discussion

The findings from the study show that native English teachers had lower level of cross-cultural interaction apprehension than Thai EFL teachers. That means native English teachers had

more confidence when interacting with people who came from different languages or cultures while Thai EFL teachers reported that they were stressed while they communicated with people from different cultures or ethnic groups. This could be that most non-native English teachers have a sufficient English ability to perform their communication objectives but they had a lack of confidence in their language ability (Horwitz, 1996). According to the present study, the Thai EFL teachers knew that they were non-native English speakers.

A majority of the participants regularly used communication strategies such as body language while interacting with people who come from different languages or cultures. Besides, there was a significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in Thai EFL teachers; however, there was no significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in the native English teachers. In addition, the way to use communication strategies between the Thai EFL teachers and the native English-speaking teachers were not significantly different. Moreover, the results show a significant difference in the cross-cultural interaction anxiety between the Thai EFL teachers and the native English teachers.

In general, it can be concluded that cross-cultural interaction anxiety were more exclusive to the Thai EFL teachers and could be linked to the issue of being non-native English teachers or culture context. Neulip [50] pointed out that culture teaches the way to think, to feel, to act, especially the way to communicate with others. Some culture may be more collectivistic or more individualistic than other cultures.

According to Wang (2012), the different values, attitude, beliefs, and customs bring the different ways of thinking. The East and the West are different cultural systems thus the ways of thinking are different, the Westerners have very strong individual sense and the ways of thinking are generally from small to large while Oyserman et al., [52] reveals that most of Asian people are collectivism. Collectivistic cultures values that linked to a sense of duty of group, harmony, and working with the groups [50]. Mulder [47] asserted that Thai cultures were repression, respectful, politeness, and fear. In collectivist cultures people be a part of groups while individualistic cultures people believe in self-confidence [30]. It is important for both Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers to be aware of different cultures, concepts, and norms on people's speech and behavior.

Regarding the uses of communication strategies between the native English teachers and the Thai EFL teachers, the majority of all the participants ($n=64$) regularly used communication strategies while interacting with people from different languages or cultures. The results of the study revealed that there were many communication strategies that participants used to solve their cross-cultural interaction problems while interacting with people. The communication strategies most frequently used were other-repetition, clarification request, comprehension check, and asking for confirmation which was consistent with a few studies such as Cervantes and Roux's [12] study. They examined the uses of communication strategies in beginner EFL classrooms which suggested that the most communication strategies which were used frequently by the participants in their study were language switch which is changing between two

language (L1 and L2), clarification request, comprehension check, and asking for confirmation.

Interestingly, the study also found a significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction anxiety and communication strategies in the Thai EFL teachers, but there was no significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in the native English teachers. In addition, the ways to use communication strategies between Thai EFL teachers and native English-speaking teachers were not significantly different because the uses of communication strategies which were indicated by the native English teachers and the Thai EFL teachers were found to be the same at the moderate level. The communication strategies that the native English teachers and the Thai EFL teachers rarely used was message abandon as Dörnyei [21] stated that rather than abandon their communication, people may choose to try and remain in the conversation and get what they can from the conversation. Moreover, the results show there was a significant difference in the cross-cultural interaction apprehensions between the Thai EFL teachers and the native English teachers. However, the results of the present study suggest that understanding of how the Thai EFL teachers can deal with the frequent cross-cultural communication problems they encounter may lead to an effective communication for the native English teachers.

Conclusions

The objective of the study was to investigate cross-cultural interactions between Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers in Phayao province. The investigation was

conducted in July 2014. The study focused on cross-cultural interaction apprehension (CCIA) and communication strategies (CS) that were being used among Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers.

The results of the study determined a relationship between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies used among Thai EFL teachers and native English teachers. Moreover, it compared how native English teachers and Thai EFL teachers used communication strategies as well as comparing the uses of cross-cultural interaction apprehension between the native English teachers and the Thai EFL teachers.

The findings of the study show that the native English teachers had lower cross-cultural interaction apprehension than those Thai EFL teachers. Most of Thai EFL teachers stated that they were excited and worried to talk or communicate with native English teachers. A majority of the native English teachers and the Thai EFL teachers usually used communication strategies such as body language while communicating with people who came from different languages or ethnicities. Cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in the Thai EFL teachers were significantly associated.

Nevertheless, there was no significant correlation between cross-cultural interaction apprehension and communication strategies in the native English teachers. Likewise, the uses of communication strategies between the Thai EFL teachers and the native English-speaking teachers were not associated. Besides, the uses of the cross-cultural interaction apprehension among the Thai EFL teachers and the native English teachers were different.

Limitations and Recommendations

One of the limitations of the study was the time available during the school semester and time available to collect the data. Another problem was that some teachers might not have given as much attention to their choices. Then, interview might have got much information if the participants spent more time during the interview.

The current study only explored the cross-cultural interaction apprehension and the uses of communication strategies between the native English teachers and the Thai EFL teachers in Phayao. Future research should examine cross-cultural interaction anxiety and the uses of communication strategies in foreigner teachers of other languages such as Japanese teachers, Chinese teachers or French teachers.

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