Empowering Thai Students Classroom Participation Through Teaching English as an International Language
การเพิ่มศักยภาพในการมีส่วนร่วมในชั้นเรียนของนักศึกษาไทย โดยการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติ

Singhanat Nomnian *

snomnian@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper offers practical and useful guidelines for teaching English to international students with a particular reference to the study of Thai students in a British university. Drawing upon McKay's (2002) comprehensive theory of English as an International Language (EIL) teaching, this paper examines ways to promote classroom participation among Thai students and create better understanding between Thai and other overseas students. Although there were differences between these students with regard to their first language, ethnicity, cultures of learning, age, academic expectations, and work experience, they spoke the 'same' language, i.e. EIL. EIL pedagogy can be applicable to teaching these groups of students because it may enable them to gain confidence in their spoken English in order to participate in academic and social contexts. This approach could also empower them, give them confidence about their spoken English, broaden their perceptions towards linguistic diversity and enable them to claim their right of being speakers of EIL.

Keywords: Thai students, British university, classroom participation, English as an International Language

บทคัดย่อ

บทความชิ้นนี้เสนอแนวทางเชิงปฏิบัติสำหรับการสอนภาษาอังกฤษให้กับนักศึกษาต่างชาติโดยอ้างอิงการศึกษา ของนักศึกษาไทยในมหาวิทยาลัย ณ ประเทศสหราชอาณาจักร ทฤษฎีการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติของ แมคคาย (McKay, 2002) สามารถนำมาประยุกต์ใช้ในการสอนเพื่อพัฒนาและส่งเสริมการมีส่วนร่วมในชั้นเรียน สำหรับนักศึกษาไทยและนักศึกษาจากชาติอื่นๆ ถึงแม้ว่านักศึกษาเหล่านี้มีความแตกต่างกันทางด้านภาษาที่หนึ่ง เชื้อชาติ วัฒนธรรมการเรียน อายุ การคาดหวังด้านการศึกษา และประสบการณ์การทำงาน พวกเขาเหล่านี้พูด "ภาษา เดียวกัน" นั่นก็คือ ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติ วิธีการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาตินั้นช่วยเสริมสร้าง ความมั่นใจในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาเหล่านี้ ในการมีส่วนร่วมในการสื่อสารในบริบทของห้องเรียนและ สังคม วิธีการสอนนี้ช่วยเปิดมุมมองด้านความหลากหลายทางภาษาให้แก่นักศึกษา และสามารถทำให้พวกเขารู้สึกว่า เขาก็เป็นเจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติได้เช่นกัน

คำสำคัญ: นักศึกษาไทย, มหาวิทยาลัยประเทศสหราชอาณาจักร, การมีส่วนร่วมในชั้นเรียน, การสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็น ภาษานานาชาติ

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* Lecturer at Mahidol University, Kanchanaburi Campus

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the pedagogical implications of English as an International Language drawing upon McKay's comprehensive theory of teaching English as an international language (2002) which can offer English tutors ways to empower, encourage, and enhance Thai students' classroom participation in their postgraduate studies. According to UK Council for International Students Affairs (2007), it is evident that the rapid growth of EU and non-EU students in UK higher education has directly resulted in the rise of linguistic and cultural diversity in British universities. Ippolito's study (2007), however, reveals that there is a complex interplay between power relations and the interconnectedness of home and international students' classroom experience with regard to linguistic inequalities and misunderstandings of classroom contribution, and thus many home students are keen to judge international students negatively. As a result, international students have been marginalised by group members who advise them not to take part in delivering the oral presentation in order to avoid getting a bad grade, and that calls for appropriate intervention to alleviate this inequality of opportunity by explicitly requiring all students to present as part of assessment criteria (Ippolito, 2007, p.760).

Ippolito's study (2007) suggests that linguistic inequalities and negative attitudes towards international students' spoken English can undermine and distort classroom practices, and that implies there are more serious and under-explored issues stemming from perceptions of international students' language use and existing power relations in classroom interaction in British universities.

The objective of this paper is to examine McKay's pedagogical implications of EIL (2002) which can provide a promising development for teaching speaking and listening skills to international students, particularly Thai students, in pre-sessional courses. This is because Thai students should be acknowledged the status of English used in multilingual academic settings, and can widen Thai students' perspectives towards linguistic diversity and encourage them to claim their legitimacy as speakers of EIL. As a result, they will feel more empowered and confident about their spoken English, and will not only become more willing to participate in classroom and group discussions, but also develop better attitudes towards social inclusion and tolerance while living and studying in the UK.

This paper has six sections. Following the introduction section, background to the study is provided in terms of the

research, methodology, findings, discussions and conclusions. Sections three and four discuss the definitions of EIL and its assumptions respectively. Teaching goals and approaches are examined in sections five and six. The last section offers the concluding remark of this paper.

2. Background to the Study

2.1 Research Participants

The research participants were seven Thai students, five females and two males, aged 22-26 from diverse academic backgrounds and with varying amounts of work experience, who were required to take a pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course prior to enrolling on an MSc Marketing programme. The pre-sessional course was provided by the Language Unit for international students whose IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score was less than 6, and thus they were expected to improve their English language proficiency and acquired study skills to meet the academic demands of postgraduate programmes. Having successfully completed the pre-sessional course in September 2005, the Thai students enrolled on an MSc Marketing programme which was offered by the Management Centre from October 2005 - September 2006.

2.2 Research Methodology

This study employed case study as a research method using a series of semi-structured interviews as a main research tool, supplemented by English speaking logs and classroom observations. This approach enabled me to develop a gradual understanding of the complex relationships and interactions Thai students had with their tutors and classmates from pre-sessional EAP to MSc Marketing classroom settings. Data were collected in two different time frames: first, during the summer from July - September 2005 for the prerequisite EAP course and second, during the postgraduate academic year from October 2005 - April 2006. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated from Thai to English, and the transcripts were then returned to the Thai students for verification to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. Data analysis was inductive since categories and themes emerged mainly from the Thai students' interview transcripts, and thus key factors related to each student were identified and compared across the students to summarise the common themes from the seven students and established the basis of the findings.

2.3 Findings

The findings suggest four key factors affecting Thai students' positioning in the pre-sessional classroom. These factors included tutors' teaching styles and methods, as well as their implicit expectations about student participation which significantly impacted on Thai students' involvement in class and group activities. Classmates also played a crucial role with regard to Thai students' willingness to engage in class discussions which was related to their relationships and the Thai students' attitudes towards their classmates' linguistic diversity. Thai students' personal identities and agency were vital in their decisions to take up participative subject positions in order to achieve their academic goals. There was also an interplay between social interactions outside the class and Thai students' language use within the class. In MSc Marketing classrooms, there were three additional factors, including lecturers' linguistic diversity, the perception of students from other business disciplines, and the large class size, which crucially determined the extent to which Thai students wanted to take part in class and group discussions.

The following extracts will illustrate changes of Thai students' classroom behaviours as well as the factors that affected their decision to participate in class and group discussions. One of the research participants Oudy, for example, finds it difficult to express her ideas in a large MSc Marketing class and prefers to study in a smaller class like those organised during the EAP course.

When I studied in the course EAP, there were just only less than 20 students in the class. That's why I felt comfortable to participate or to discuss with other students. But, when I study in a huge class in a MSc Marketing course, sometimes I feel a little bit shy. I didn't want to explain some ideas. I think most students came from European countries. They have a great idea. They speak English quite well, which is better than us. I mean better than Asian students.

(Oudy, 04/01/06)

This extract reveals Oudy's underlying beliefs regarding the relationship between language ideology and students' national identities. She believes European students' English is far better than that of Asian students. She notes that the European students can participate in the discussion much better than Asian students due to the fact that they have better English. Having better English also means that they are 'legitimate' speakers who can explain their

ideas clearly and are perceived as being knowledgeable. As a result, Oudy views herself and other Asian students as 'less competent' and 'illegitimate' language users compared to the European students. She believes that Asian students' language proficiency is a barrier to classroom participation.

Similarly, another research participant Julie believes that Chinese students will understand her but Europeans may not.

When a lecturer asks me, I want to give another opinion. But I don't dare answer because I am not sure if the class will understand me. Chinese students may understand, but European students may not.

(Julie, 04/01/06)

This extract reveals that Julie is a sensitive and considerate student as she is concerned that her response may confuse her fellow classmates, and thus she decides not to answer because she does not want to be positioned as a 'trouble maker' within the class. Having studied with Chinese students during the EAP course, Julie has a better understanding of these students and shares close relationships with them. She believes that they share similar levels of proficiency in English and may feel 'culturally closer' to this group as they are from East Asian countries. In the case of the European students, she does not develop the same sense of 'belonging' since very few of them take the EAP course, which signifies that their English proficiency meets the requirement of the MSc Marketing programme.

2.4 Discussions and Conclusion

The findings also reveal that Thai students' communication was constrained by certain sociological factors existing within the postgraduate classroom. These particularly stemmed from their classmates' linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity as well as different academic and career backgrounds, and the large class size. Influenced by socio-political power relations, 'standard' language ideologies and legitimacy, these sociological factors had a psychological impact, influencing the way the Thai students perceived their language use and viewed their 'non-standard' English as 'illegitimate' for classroom use. These students were, therefore, relatively reticent and hesitant to engage in postgraduate classroom settings. This phenomenon was reflected in the work of Jenkins (2000) who notes that 'non-native speakers' (NNSs) reticence and lack of confidence in classroom communication arises from a belief that the varieties spoken by 'native speakers'

(NSs) constitute 'desirable English' (p.8). The problem of Thai students' disengagement in the MSc Marketing classrooms might be attributed to deficiencies in the current EAP course. This course did not acknowledge the status and varieties of English and their impact upon language learners' attitudes, interactions, and inter-relationships with speakers of other languages. This study shows the dynamic trajectory of seven Thai students from the outset of their classroom experiences in a pre-sessional EAP course to an MSc Marketing programme, and develops a gradual understanding of the complex relationships and interactions they have with tutors and classmates in particular classroom contexts and practices.

The findings of this study suggest that Thai students had more opportunities to interact with NNSs than NSs due to the relatively large number of international students, and thus English in the pre-sessional EAP and MSc Marketing courses functioned as a medium of instruction and communication should be perceived as an international language rather than as a foreign language, and this will be discussed in the following sections.

3. Definitions of EIL

According to McKay (2002), English is quintessentially an international language that serves local and global communication for both speakers from the same country and between speakers from different countries. She further suggests that when English is used along with other languages in multilingual settings as an unmarked choice for purposes of wider communication, it can be considered as an international language (McKay, 2002, p.38). Drawing upon Kachru's (1990) three-circle model that distinguishes speakers of English in terms of three circles: the 'inner circle' which consists of the UK, the USA, Australia, which represent traditional bases of English, the 'outer circle' which includes countries, such as, India, SriLanka, Singapore, Malaysia, which use English as their second or official language, and the 'expanding circle' which includes speakers from China, Japan, and Germany, where English is studied as a foreign language, Seidlhofer (2005) claims that English, as a consequence of its international use, is being shaped not only by NSs but also by NNSs within and across 'circles' for intranational and international communication (p.339). Jenkins (2000) also notes that EIL can promote cross-cultural democracy due to the ownership of all who use it for communication regardless of who or where they are (p.4).

The concept of EIL is relevant for discussion in this study because the use of

EIL in multilingual classroom settings reflects the increasing number of international students in UK higher education in recent years. Kennedy (2001) notes that universities in the 'inner circle' countries recruit more students from the 'outer circle' and 'expanding circle' countries as a source of income due to the cuts in government funding of higher education. Consequently, the English spoken by students and academic staff in a British university is not only considered as native to British people, but also as a common language for wider communication among students from 'outer circle' and the 'expanding circle' countries. Tutors and a large number of international students enable Thai students to have interactions and establish relationships within and across different 'circles'. Although English is used as a medium of instruction and communication in the institution at which this study takes place, Thai students primarily interact with students from the 'expanding circle' countries, such as China, Taiwan, Japan, Greece, and the 'outer circle' countries, like, Ghana, Nigeria, and Nepal, rather than with NSs from the 'inner circle' countries, such as, the UK and the USA. Coleman (2006) states that SOCRATES-ERASMUS exchange students in English-speaking countries socialise more with other foreign students than with NSs, and can

better understand other NNSs than local students (p.11). As a result, English is used among NNSs who are the majority rather than NSs, and thus the use of English among NNSs offers a new perspective and opens a debate regarding English as an International Language (EIL) in multilingual classrooms.

4. EIL Assumptions

McKay (2002) makes three assumptions that can inform a comprehensive theory of the teaching and learning of EIL, which include i) language use in multilingual contexts, ii) the promotion of native speaker models, and iii) language variation (p.125), which will be discussed below.

4.1 Language Use in Multilingual Contexts

Firstly, the theory of EIL teaching and learning must recognise the various ways in which English is used by bilingual speakers within multilingual settings (McKay, 2002, p.125). This assumption reflects Creese and Martin's (2003) 'multilingual classroom ecologies', which concern the relationship and interactions between language users in particular classroom settings underpinned by linguistic ideologies and linguistic legitimacy. This impacts on how Thai students wanted to participate or withdraw from certain interactive situations because of the way they perceived their spoken English and that

of others. In addition, there were power relations existing within and outside classrooms. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), these power relations affect language users' positioning when they speak in multilingual contexts. Thai students often felt caught in a web of complexity and sophistication regarding the way they tried to achieve the balanced positions that could allow them to view themselves as 'legitimate speakers' of English, and this resulted in differences in their language use in the pre-sessional and MSc Marketing classrooms. In this study, English language was perceived as a 'natural' language that everyone used as a medium of classroom instruction and communication, and thus it was the 'legitimate' language of the classroom.

4.2 'Native-speaker' Model

McKay (2002) claims that 'many bilingual users of English do not need or want to acquire native-like competence for the following reasons: firstly, they may need to acquire NSs' registers for formal use only instead of their full range; second, they may not want to acquire native-like competence; and thirdly, there is no reason for some EIL users to provide NS standards for others because EIL belongs to its users' (p.126).

This assumption is debatable because it depends on each individual' views regarding what it means to be 'native' and 'non-native' speakers of English. Davies (2003) notes that this fundamental opposition of these two terms concerns power and membership, which are determined by 'non-native' speakers' assumptions regarding confidence and identity, and thus speakers of EIL can be considered as native speakers in their own right (p.214). It is thus relatively difficult to convince language learners not to consider adopting 'native-like' competence as their language learning model because each individual has different language learning goals and objectives. Unless they have experienced language use with others, they might not fully appreciate which model of English they aspire to use in multilingual classroom settings. Kirkpatrick (2007) claims that it is not necessarily true that learning a native-speaker model will help learners who plan to study in the UK, the USA, or Australia, because these host countries are likely to have a mixed multicultural population who speak 'localised' versions of their own variety of English (p.187). This point relates to the discussion, in the next section, of the third assumption regarding learners' acknowledgement and exposure to other English varieties.

4.3 Learners' Attitudes Towards Other English Varieties

McKay (2002) notes that EIL teaching and learning has to take English varieties into account, and thus students should be taught to acknowledge that all varieties of English are adequate, valid and appropriate for particular communicative demands in order to promote the equality of speakers (p.126). Davies and Harré (1990) claim that speakers' attitudes towards interlocutors are implicated in interactions; hence Thai students' attitudes towards their spoken English with a Thai accent compared with other students' varieties of English played a significant role in their discursive practices in the multilingual classrooms, and revealed how language ideologies affected interactions in contexts of language diversity. McKay (2002) also suggests that learners should simultaneously be exposed to varieties of English spoken in their communities and encouraged to learn relevant varieties of English in order to develop better understanding of their appropriate use (p.126). A language tutor's acknowledgement of EIL alone might not be sufficient because 'standard' English ideologies could be deeply rooted in learners' beliefs. Thus, encouraging them to expose themselves to other English varieties could enable them to gain 'first-hand' experience and recognise the relevance of EIL instruc-

tion. Exposure to other varieties of English not only allows these Thai students to recognise differences in phonological patterns, but also raises their awareness of contextual factors affecting their speaking, which can lead to effective communication in language classrooms. To conclude, McKay's (2002) EIL assumptions enable us to understand the rationale of how English is used in multilingual settings, which models of English should be employed in teaching and learning, and what kinds of attitudes language learners should adopt, and that helps us to view the use of English in a different light. As a result, there are new teaching goals that can offer us more realistic outcomes for learners, and these will be discussed next.

5. Teaching Goals for EIL

McKay (2002) claims that the spread of English has resulted in language change and variation, and this requires language teachers to ensure intelligibility among speakers of English because it is crucial to distinguish linguistic differences that may perhaps cause problems of intelligibility from those that could provoke negative attitudes (p.127). These two pedagogical goals: achieving mutual intelligibility and developing intercultural communicative strategies will be discussed below.

5.1 Achieving Mutual Intelligibility

The term 'intelligibility' is defined, according to McKay (2002, p.52), in its narrow sense, as the recognition of a particular expression, whereas, in its broader sense, the term 'intelligibility' includes 'comprehensibility' (knowing the meaning of an expression) and 'interpretability' (knowing what an expression signifies in a particular sociocultural context. For example, when a listener recognises the word 'salt' as an English word instead of Spanish, English is 'intelligible' to that listener; when the word 'salt' is known as a particular condiment, it becomes 'comprehensible'; and when the expression 'do you have any salt?' is interpreted as a request for salt, the language is 'interpretable' (McKay, 2002, p.52). Jenkins (2000) claims that 'intelligibility is dynamically negotiable between speaker and listener, rather than statically inherent in a speaker's linguistic forms' (p.79). Similarly, Rajadurai (2007) states that the goal of comprehensible communication is to recognise the dynamic and interactive nature of talk in multilingual contexts and the legitimacy of English varieties in order to improve mutual intelligibility and accommodation between interlocutors. The following section will elaborate the EIL teaching goals that entail how language teachers address EIL instruction and develop learners' strategies for intercultural communication.

McKay (2002) states that in the teaching of EIL language educators need to address linguistic differences, including grammatical and phonological patterns, which may not only hinder mutual intelligibility but also lead to negative attitudes; lack of intelligibility may not result from linguistic differences but rather from social attitudes towards particular linguistic differences (p.127). McKay (2002) suggests that language tutors must emphasise the fact that English as an international language belongs to every language user, and that means students from every 'circle' can take ownership of English and can potentially alter the language as long as those changes do not hinder mutual intelligibility (p.127). EAP tutors could have raised Thai students' awareness of 'standard' English pronunciation by drawing learners' attention to multilingualism in UK higher education. Thai students would have then become more aware and prepared for what they would encounter in British university classrooms. Raising awareness that other English varieties should be equally valued could enhance self-confidence and self-esteem in terms of their spoken English. EAP tutors could have raised this point by presenting international students with different contexts where

linguistic differences, i.e. grammatical and phonological features or new lexical items, existed, and could be found in different media such as movies, television programmes, and songs, or even real-life contexts such as university campuses or city centres. Students could develop a sense of ownership of their English variety and be proud of it. These additional goals of EAP teaching pedagogy could help equip international students to face challenges and be able to overcome their anxiety regarding their English, and this would contribute to more classroom participation and effective communication in their postgraduate programmes.

5.2 Developing Intercultural Communicative Strategies

The second goal of EIL teaching is to encourage learners to develop strategies, such as seeking clarification, establishing rapport, and minimising cross-cultural difference to achieve comity and create friendly relations, and thus the teaching of EIL pragmatics should seek ways to accommodate cross-cultural differences (McKay, 2002, p.127-128). To compare between these two classroom settings, there are two main reasons regarding the peer rapport and level of English proficiency that significantly impact on Thai students' classroom participation. The first reason is that, in the pre-sessional course, Thai students were more familiar and 'culturally closer' to their peers from the 'expanding circle' countries, like, China, Taiwan, and Japan, and thus cross-cultural differences were minimised and intercultural communication was promoted. In the MSc Marketing classes, however, Thai students faced a tougher challenge when cross-cultural differences signified a wider gap in their communication because of the increasing number of students from the 'outer circle' and the 'inner circle' countries whom they had never met in the pre-sessional course. This caused tensions and anxiety among Thai students because they did not know how responsive or friendly their new classmates would be when they spoke. Acquiring intercultural sensitivity is, however, a gradual developmental process, which allows learners to move from denial of, defence from, and minimisation of cultural difference to acceptance, adaptation and integration of difference that facilitates and enhances the language learning experience (Sellami, 2006).

In sum, McKay (2002) notes that the goal of teaching pragmatics in EIL should be the acquisition of interaction strategies enhancing comity. This entails attempts by a speaker to establish and maintain friendly relations with others in order to create

solidarity with and support for the listener (McKay, 2002, p.131). Brumfit (2006) claims that language teachers must avoid a pre-occupation with American, British, or Australian pronunciation models that have been a feature of much curriculum planning, and recognise the changed linguistic environment and the fact that most NNSs will be interacting with other NNSs. Sellami (2006) suggests language learners develop both the knowledge and skills necessary for intercultural competence in order to achieve effective communication; otherwise, without sufficient preparation, they are likely to develop stereotypes, false assumptions, biased beliefs, misconceptions, and prejudices in class.

6. Approaches to the Teaching of EIL

McKay (2002, p.116) mentions that the teaching of EIL in every classroom is influenced by a variety of local contextual factors embedded in political and social contexts (e.g. official language policies, the role of English in society, economic resources appropriate to ELT, linguistic and cultural attitudes towards EIL); the educational institutions (e.g. teaching aims and objectives, material resources, philosophy of learning, and class size); the teachers' background (e.g. their English training and philosophy of teaching), and students'

background (e.g. age, previous exposure to English, and learning goals). Kumaravadivelu (2003) notes that the concept of context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy should be based on the genuine understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural and political particularities. In this study, it seems important for EAP tutors to recognise the link between the pre-sessional and MSc Marketing classrooms in terms of the use of EIL in speaking and listening activities (such as group and whole-class discussions) to ensure appropriate teaching approaches are employed which support and promote language use more effectively in the MSc Marketing classes.

6.1 Being Culturally Sensitive to Classroom Diversity

McKay (2002) notes that the teaching of EIL needs to be culturally sensitive to the diversity of contexts in which English is taught and used, and suggests that the use of a source culture not only potentially minimises the marginalisation of values and lived experiences of language learners, but also enables them to share their own cultural insights by using EIL with students from other countries. Brumfit (2001) notes that there is a problem of mixing students from different academic disciplines in a pre-sessional course because the

expectations of teachers and peers differ from field to field (p.62). In the pre-sessional course in this study, EAP tutors provided students with various topics of discussion that catered for students who planned to enrol on different postgraduate degrees, such as, TESOL, Mass Communication, Marketing, MBA, Management, and Engineering, and thus students had different expectations regarding their contribution to the topic. As a result, the Thai students in this study did not find some topics, such as language improvement, law, politics or the Internet, relevant and practical for their postgraduate study, and thus they did not attempt to talk about their experience.

McKay (2002) notes that the cultural content of teaching materials should be taught reflectively by encouraging learners to realise why certain topics are chosen for discussion, and that this can provide learners with a sphere of interculturality whereby they learn about another culture as a basis for reflecting on their own (p.129). It is, however, important to recognise that learning about classmates' cultural insights is not necessarily confined to the classroom alone, but may also include informal settings outside class. Byram et al. (2002) suggest that language learners should be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors, as this could result not only in more effective communication, but also in developing human relationships with people from other cultures. It is crucial for learners abroad to have access to the social networks which provide opportunities for engagement in interactions for their language development (Kinginger, 2004).

In sum, language tutors should recognise the importance of formal and informal settings that can become potential channels for learners to create intercultural space. Bringing learners' experiences outside classroom into classroom discussion can allow richer and deeper recognition of cultural differences, and this will enable them to be more aware when socialising outside class. Acknowledging learners' source culture can potentially empower learners to be proud of their cultures and respect others', and can enhance communication through the use of English as an international language.

6.2 Recognising Learners' 'Cultures of Learning'

McKay (2002) states that EIL teaching should recognise the local 'culture of learning' by examining classroom interaction between learners and teachers; thus stereotypes or received views of cultures regarding the traditional role of teachers and learners can be avoided (p.129).

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), the term 'culture of learning' is defined as the framework of classroom behaviours, attitudes, expectations, values and beliefs of good learning and teaching methodology, but language teachers and learners are likely to be unaware of the impact of 'culture of learning' on the process of teaching and learning, and thus 'culture of learning' is part of the hidden curriculum (p.169). With reference to the stereotypes of learners, Asian students are likely to be perceived as passive and non-participative due to their collectivist cultures and reproductive approach to learning, which is often contrasted to Western learning approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Holliday (2005) argues that this essentialist perspective has a negative impact on Asian students because their approach to study is represented as negative, problematic, and inappropriate in Western academic settings. EAP tutors must not take for granted the way Asian learners learn in a pre-sessional course and assume that everyone knows how to behave according to conventions of British academia because this may cause anxiety for learners who are unaware of British study methods. Generalisation of the British academic system to Asian learners could be misrepresentative and threatening to their previous learning experience in their 'home' cultures

of learning. It might, therefore, be more productive and relevant for EAP tutors to make a connection between their teaching and the expectations of particular postgraduate departments where their students plan to enrol, as this would illustrate a more specific 'culture of learning' which students can expect to experience.

It is advisable for EAP course designers and academic departments to collaborate in designing pre-sessional courses which are relevant to respective academic disciplines to help students perform relevant academic skills, such as participating in seminars or group discussions in mainstream postgraduate classrooms in the UK (Nomnian, 2006). In this study, the MSc Marketing programme aimed to encourage students to work in groups, to develop their interpersonal skills, to share experiences and to support each others' learning. Learners' 'culture of learning' should not only be recognised by language tutors but also by fellow classmates, because in order to achieve effective team working skills and communication, learners have to be aware of their teammates' 'cultures of learning', and that can be a challenging task for learners as they are working with others from diverse linguistic, academic, and career backgrounds.

EAP tutors must acknowledge the situation of individual language learners

not only the expectations of postgraduate departments and set up relevant activities that will allow them to understand the 'local' culture of learning in their respective postgraduate programmes, and also raise their awareness about different students' 'cultures of learning'. Learners will, therefore, become more conscious of their own and others' classroom behaviours, which are not right or wrong but different.

6.3 Raising Learners' Awareness of Socio-Cultural and Political Influences

McKay (2002) points out that what happens in a particular classroom is influenced by socio-cultural and political factors that exist in the wider community (p.129). Following increases in the number of international students, multilingualism in British universities has flourished. This needs to be explicitly addressed by language learners, particularly those whose socio-cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds might be relatively monolingual in relation to British society and universities, such as the Thai students in this study. EAP tutors should be more cautious of multilingualism in a British university and consider it as a resource for language learners who can learn from other overseas classmates, as that can prepare them to face even greater linguistic diversity in postgraduate classrooms.

Canagarajah (2006) points out the need to develop a more dynamic relationship between classroom and society as they are interrelated with one another in language learning. Svalberg (2007) notes that Language Awareness (LA) is important for teachers and learners in multilingual society because a person's linguistic competence and repertoire increasingly entails different languages and varieties, and thus raising socio-cultural and linguistic awareness can mutually facilitate language learning (p.301).

Jessner (2006), however, claims that teachers are likely to ignore the fact that their students are in contact with other languages, developing language learning strategies and metalinguistic awareness, and thus teachers waste valuable resources that can enhance LA in their multilingual classrooms. In this study, despite the fact that Thai students experience multilingualism and English varieties in both the pre-sessional and postgraduate classrooms, EAP tutors do not seem explicitly to address these issues that later becomes challenges, as Thai students have to overcome their fears and anxiety regarding speaking in postgraduate classrooms. Jenkins (2007) suggests that it is important to raise learners' awareness of the global role of English, and that they should be provided with choices of both native and non-native

varieties of English rather than necessarily falling back on the British Received Pronunciation (RP) accent or General American (GA) accent (p.9).

Scales et al. (2006) suggest that language teachers should consider how learners can become versatile in participating in a variety of interactions to achieve their communicative goals, and that such an approach can promote learners' intelligibility, and increase communicative flexibility and respect for accent diversity (p.735). Jessner (2006) suggests that, prior to teaching LA to language learners, teachers have to experience consciousness-raising themselves as part of teacher education, and thus be able to integrate their own language learning experience by choosing the appropriate teaching techniques to engage learners. In this study, EAP tutors could have pointed out the benefits of studying with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds because it might have helped the Thai students to familiarise themselves with particular English accents in their postgraduate study.

Being optimistic about multi-lingualism in UK higher education would allow Thai students to acquire a comparative advantage in terms of understanding other people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and that helps to widen their world views regarding the way they perceive themselves and others. International students should thus be viewed as valuable resources that provide an additional dimension to the academic and cultural life of a university (Russel, 2005). Academic staff and lecturers, therefore, must ensure that they meet the needs and expectations of inter-national students in terms of academic achievement because international students have to adjust to British academic conventions regarding classroom parti-cipation and performance in their new learning environment (Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Carroll, 2005).

7. Concluding Remark

Drawing upon the findings from the pre-sessional EAP and MSc Marketing classrooms, it is evident that the Thai students found it relatively difficult to participate in classroom and group discussions during their postgraduate study due to negative attitudes regarding their spoken English which was not addressed on their pre-sessional course. The teaching of speaking and listening skills in the pre-sessional course should be re-evaluated to take into account the MSc Marketing classroom settings where speakers of different languages interacted and developed

relationships with one another through the use of English. McKay's (2002) comprehensive theory of EIL teaching offers practical and useful guidelines for pedagogy which could be applied to EAP teaching, and this may enable Thai students to gain confidence in their spoken English and negotiate their identities to attain more desirable subject positions. Despite the differences between Thai students and others overseas students in terms of their first language, ethnicity, cultures of learning, age, academic expectations, and work experience, they spoke the 'same' language, i.e. English as an international language (EIL). These Thai students should acknowledge that EIL aims to create friendship and promote mutual intelligibility across nations. Within linguistically diverse classrooms, EIL is a 'common thread' connecting and bringing everyone together through active discussion and participation instead of passive observation, and this has the potential to change the way Thai students initially view themselves and others, and vice versa.

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