The ASEAN Community 2015 and English Language Teaching in Thailand

ประชาคมอาเซียน 2558 และการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย

Poranee Deerajviset

Ph.D. (Education), Lecturer

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University

Abstract

The ASEAN Community 2015 has become the subject of considerable debate in the region during the past few years. As a member of ASEAN, Thailand will inevitably be influenced by the establishment of the ASEAN Community in several aspects. English language is considered as one of the most important keys towards the development of the ASEAN Community as it is the working language of ASEAN. The purpose of this article is to discuss the impact of the ASEAN Community on English language education in Thailand and the preparation for the ASEAN Community in 2015. This article provides a brief overview of the establishment of the ASEAN Community, by addressing the importance of the English language as the working language of ASEAN. It will then indicate the issues and challenges of English language teaching in Thailand at individual, institutional, and national levels to ensure the country's preparedness for the ASEAN Community. The article finally discusses Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as implications for enhancing the quality of English language teaching in Thailand.

บทคัดย่อ

ประชาคมอาเซียน 2558 กลายเป็นหัวข้อในการอภิปรายกัน อย่างกว้างขวางในภูมิภาคอาเซียนในช่วงสองสามปีที่ผ่านมา การก่อตั้ง ประชาคมอาเซียนจะส่งผลกระทบต่อประเทศไทยในฐานะสมาชิกของ อาเซียนในหลาย ๆ ด้านอย่างหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ ภาษาอังกฤษถือเป็น สิ่งสำคัญต่อการพัฒนาประชาคมอาเซียนเนื่องจากเป็นภาษาที่ใช้ อย่างเป็นทางการของอาเซียน บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออภิปราย ผลกระทบของประชาคมอาเซียนต่อการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษใน ประเทศไทยและการเตรียมความพร้อมเพื่อเข้าสู่ประชาคมอาเซียนใน ปี 2558 บทความนี้ได้อธิบายเกี่ยวกับการก่อตั้งประชาคมอาเซียน โดยเน้นเรื่องความสำคัญของภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะที่เป็นภาษาที่ใช้ อย่างเป็นทางการของอาเซียน และได้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงประเด็นปัญหาและ ความท้าทายของการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทยในระดับบุคคล ระดับสถาบันการศึกษาและระดับประเทศ เพื่อรับรองการเตรียม ความพร้อมในการก้าวเข้าสู่ประชาคมอาเซียน ท้ายสุดบทความนี้ยัง ได้อภิปรายเกี่ยวกับการสอนภาษาแบบสื่อสารซึ่งมีนัยต่อการพัฒนา คุณภาพการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ : อาเซียน ประชาคมอาเซียน การสอนภาษาแบบสื่อสาร การสอนภาษาอังกฤษ ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษากลางสำหรับการ สื่อสาร วิธภาษาอังกฤษ

INTRODUCTION

The ASEAN Community Establishment

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand. The ASEAN currently consists of 10 countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008a). The main purpose of ASEAN is to accelerate the economic, social, and cultural development aiming to enhance the regional peace and stability of the countries in Southeast Asia. ASEAN also aims to promote active cooperation and mutual assistance in the educational, professional, technical, and administrative fields in the form of training and research facilities (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2012).

In 2015, all ASEAN countries will be incorporated as the ASEAN Community under the strategic vision of "One Vision, One Identity, and One Community" (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008a). The purposes for establishing the ASEAN Community are to integrate ASEAN to be one community and to cooperate in three pillars which are: (1) ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), (2) ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and (3) ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2012). The ASEAN Community also aims to promote security and peace in the region, regional economic integration, and the well-being of the people on the basis of equality and mutual benefits of 10 ASEAN countries (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Education comes under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Pillar, which aims to enhance the academic

growth of every member country, as being seen as the development foundation of the ASEAN Community (Ministry of Education, 2010).

ASEAN is an increasingly harmonious and powerful regional organization (Ariff & Hill, 2011). The ASEAN Community will foster cooperation among ASEAN countries particularly in terms of economics by creating a single market and regional competitiveness (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2008). Predictions are that economic activities within the ASEAN Community will be impacted due to the establishment of the AEC such as free flow of capital, goods, services, investment, and skilled labors (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2012). After the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015, it is estimated that the AEC would create a competitive market of over 600 million people in ASEAN countries and a gross domestic product of over US$2 trillion (Petri, Plummer, & Zhai, 2012). Therefore, it can be seen that the establishment of the ASEAN Community would bring several advantages to ASEAN members, so importantly countries that are well prepared, will likely gain the full benefits from the ASEAN Community.

In terms of education, the ASEAN Community will provide the people with equitable access to human development opportunities by promoting life-long learning, human resource training, and capacity building and by promoting the use of English language, ICT, and applied science and technology (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009b). As the ASEAN countries are transforming into a single entity, English as the working language will be used among the non-native speakers of English in ASEAN. Clearly if any ASEAN member places emphasis on the Eng-lish language, there will be greater chances and higher benefits. Thus

Thailand needs to prepare and improve its human resources in terms of English language proficiency for the rising competition in the ASEAN Community in 2015. The next section therefore concentrates on the importance of English in ASEAN.

Importance of English in ASEAN

English is now considered as an international language or a global language (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Sharifian, 2009). A large number of non-native English speakers in many regions of the world use English as a language for multinational and multicultural communication (Sharifian, 2009). Cheng (2012) pointed out that Asia has the largest number of English speakers in the world who use English as second and foreign languages. In Asia, English serves the various roles such as being the official and semi-official language, as the medium of instruction, as a school subject, and as the lingua franca (Cheng, 2012). This creates a new role that English can play in Asian countries in the contemporary world.

As a matter of fact, English has become increasingly important in ASEAN countries (Kirkpatrick, 2012). English has always been the only official and working language of the region (Kirkpatrick, 2008). In many parts of ASEAN, English plays a dominant role in both intranational and international communication (Honna, 2012; Low & Hashim, 2012). Formerly, the members of ASEAN have their own different official languages; for example, the official language of Thailand is Thai; the official language of Myanmar is Burmese; and the official language of Vietnam is Vietnamese. Hence, ASEAN countries need an

official language to be a communicative tool among people in ASEAN. According to the ASEAN Charter, Article 34, it is stated that "The working language of ASEAN shall be English" (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008b : 29). As a result, using English as a means of communication in the ASEAN Community has recently become an important issue.

As ASEAN uses English as its working language, there is a strong commitment for all ASEAN members to promote the use of English and to improve English language education in their countries. For example, in case of Cambodia, English language required by ASEAN is not only limited to economics, but also to politics (Igawa, 2008). Cambodians communicate internationally in English with their trading partners among ASEAN members, rather than in French (Prusher, 2001). The use of English as the working language in ASEAN also drives Cambodia to develop English-speaking personnel as Clayton (2007) stated that ASEAN's language policy has a strong force for Cambodian officials, representatives, and delegates to learn English. In case of Indonesia, Deusen-Scholl and Hornberger (2008) examined the current situation for English in Indonesia and found that the former Dutch colonial country has turn to English as an international language. In Indonesia, English has spread across the country rapidly as a result of ASEAN establishment; however, the country has faced a lack of suitably qualified and linguistically proficient English teachers and also has broader problems of foreign language ability and pedagogy (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). This makes English teacher professional development become an important issue in English language education in Indonesia

(Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). Thus it can be seen that English plays a crucial role in ASEAN countries.

After the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015, professional mobility across ASEAN countries will be encouraged. As a result, there will be an increased competitiveness of working in professional careers among ASEAN citizens. For better employment opportunities, the graduates are required to have additional skills such as English and other regional languages used in ASEAN apart from their professional skills (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2008). As Rooth and Saarela (2007) stated, English language is considered to be one of the most important working skills as language is a fundamental part of workers' human capital. Since the demand for English has been growing so strong, the ASEAN member countries should prepare their citizens to improve both professional skills and English language skills for the changing situations and new challenges of the ASEAN Community in 2015. It is, therefore, crucial for the Thai workforce to improve their English language as it is the key success factor for Thailand in the ASEAN Community. However, as each country in the region forms its own development of English language use, different English language varieties reflecting local identity and culture have emerged when English is localized among ASEAN countries (Kirkpatrick, 2007). English varieties in ASEAN will be discussed subsequently in the following section.

English Varieties in ASEAN

The diversity in ASEAN can be characterized by several aspects

such as culture (including religion and language), politics, economy, geography, and the environment (Shimauchi, 2011). Varieties of English in Southeast Asia are highly diverse (Low & Hashim, 2012; Prescott, 2007). In each ASEAN country, a number of roles have appeared for English use in cultural and linguistic contexts, thus creating a unique variety characterized by distinctive structural and functional features (Honna, 2012). According to Low and Hashim (2012), English in Southeast Asia can be classified into two main groups. The first group includes the varieties of English used in the Outer Circle countries (Kachru, 2005), that were formerly colonies of the British Emperor, like Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore. The second group includes the varieties of English used as a foreign language in the Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 2005) such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Thailand. It is also found that new varieties of English which have its own linguistic identities occur in many parts of the world including Southeast Asia (Crystal, 2008; Mesthrie, 2008; Schneider, 2003). This means that people in ASEAN will use varieties of English (Kirkpatrick, 2008). Thus the issues of English varieties in ASEAN should be taken into consideration.

In the ASEAN context, it is clear that the English language used by speakers is likely to be characterized by variation and variety (Kirkpatrick, 2008). According to McArthur (2003) and Kachru (2005), World Englishes studies have documented many varieties of Asian Englishes. The term 'World Englishes' was formed by the belief that people have the right to own and utilize the language they want to utilize in their own standards (Seidlhofer, 2007). Bhatt (2001) provided the definition of World Englishes that it refers to "varieties of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts" (527). This is relevant to Jenkins (2006)'s definition that World Englishes is "the indigenized varieties of English in their local contexts of use" (157). Similarly, Bolton (2005) also emphasized local contexts and suggested that World Englishes can be replaced by several terms such as 'varieties of English', 'international Englishes', 'new Englishes', and 'English languages'. As a result of English localization, English is considered to have been adjusted from native norm to local norm or varieties norm to serve the needs in communicating between native and non-native English speakers (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). Therefore, in ASEAN countries, new varieties of English have been developed and used by non-native English speakers in local or individual contexts with unique identities.

Recently, in regard to English varieties, using English as a lingua franca has become a crucial issue for ASEAN since English will become the working language as soon as the ASEAN Community will be established in 2015 (Kirkpatrick, 2010). English as a lingua franca communication refers to "interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue" (House, 1999, 74). It is important to note that English as a lingual franca in ASEAN is not a single variety (Kirkpatrick, 2008). This means that learners of English in Thailand can expect to meet a wide range of speakers of different varieties of English from the ASEAN members, so learners might get confused if they are faced with the varieties which are not introduced in classroom. Taking into

consideration the changes in the current use of English as a lingua franca in ASEAN, it is essential not to teach EFL students only one single English accent or model (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Jenkins (2007) recommended that teaching various varieties of English taught by teachers with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds will be useful for English language learners. Thus Thailand needs to prepare and improve teaching and learning English situations in Thailand in order to get ready for the ASEAN Community in 2015. The next section will briefly provide the background of English language in Thailand.

English in Thailand

Thailand has a comparatively short history of involvement with the English language (Kirkpatrick, 2010) as Thailand does not have a history of colonization by the British unlike many other countries in the region, so its educational system is mainly monolingual. In addition, Thailand is typically classified as an Expanding Circle country which uses English as a foreign language (Kachru, 2005), and English is also considered as the lingua franca in the Thai context (Baker, 2008; Foley, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). In Thailand, English is used for both intercultural and intracultural communication, particularly in electronic communication (Baker, 2012). English is used in Thailand as a compulsory subject in school and in higher education (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2003). English has increasingly been used and viewed as an important skill for Thai urban middle classes (Simpson & Thammasathien, 2007), while access to English language education in rural or poorer communities is limited (Hayes, 2010;

Kosonen, 2008). In Thailand, although Thai people do not use English for their daily communication, English is considered as a necessary foreign language that Thai people use for educational purposes, careers, and communication with people from other countries including ASEAN.

Nowadays, English is increasingly important in Thai contexts. However, there are several concerns to be addressed. One of the issues in the expansion of English in Thailand has been providing inadequate English language education and the lack of resources for English language teaching (Baker, 2012). Moreover, proficiency in English of many Thai teachers and students remains relatively low. The overall perception of inferior English skills of teachers with many failing government English tests has also been a problem in Thailand (Hayes, 2010). With regards to the national test, the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in 2012 showed that the English average scores of Thai primary school students and high school students were 36.93 and 22.07 out of 100 respectively which can be considered as "very low" (Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2012). In addition, English skills are regarded as an obvious weakness of Thai university graduates (Marukatat, 2012). Khamkhien (2010) also found that Thai EFL learners' oral communication competency is quite limited. Another issue involves the imposition of teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which have been developed in contexts differently in Thailand with its local pedagogical practices and beliefs (Baker, 2008; Saengboon, 2004). The above concerns of English language education in Thailand are at the forefront of national debate and need to be resolved in sensible ways.

Although English is the official working language of the ASEAN Community, the status and user's proficiency level of English in these ASEAN countries are quite different (Kirkpatrick, 2008). In ASEAN, English language proficiency levels differ in a way that "English as a second language" countries (e.g., Singapore) produce more skillful speakers than "English as an international language" counterparts (Honna, 2005). Since English is used as a foreign language in Thailand (Darasawang, 2007), this means that Thai EFL students are likely to have less English language skills than students in the ASEAN countries who use English as a second language. Compared with many other ASEAN countries, Thailand has poorer ranking in international English tests like TOEFL. According to Educational Testing Service (2010), results of score data summary for TOEFL internet-based tests (iBT) indicated that Thailand ranked 116th out of 163 countries in the world. In ASEAN, Singapore ranked first with an average score of 98 while Thailand ranked number 6 out of 10 ASEAN countries with an average score of 75 which was below the international average of 80. Although TOEFL scores represent only the data on the test takers which are not representative of the overall Thai population, the test score results can reflect the low English proficiency of Thai students to some extents.

Under the forthcoming ASEAN Community in 2015, workers in ASEAN countries, including Thailand, will have to cope with competitive situations related to the free flow of labors among members (Saraithong & Chancharoenchai, 2012). With the free movement of skilled labors, Thailand will receive both advantages and disadvantages. As English language skill increasingly plays an important role in communication processes when working and influences labor productivity (Kim, 2003), so low English language proficiency of Thai students can be a barrier regarding future employment both domestic and international. This has significant implications for English language teaching in Thailand. Hence, Thailand needs to speed up enhancing Thai students in terms of their English language proficiency to ensure that they will stay competitive in the international market place.

The Preparation of English Language Education in Thailand for the ASEAN Community 2015

Since Thailand was one of the main founders of ASEAN, the ASEAN Community 2015 is one development that the government has taken very seriously by focusing on equipping Thai people with the essential awareness of being part of the ASEAN Community (Anatarangsi, 2011). Improvement in English language teaching is obviously crucial for Thailand to play a dominant role in ASEAN (Saraithong & Chancharoenchai, 2012). In order to prepare English language education in Thailand to response to the needs of the ASEAN Community, collaboration should be encouraged among stakeholders at individual, institutional, and national levels. It is, therefore, important to examine how Thailand deals with the issues of English as the working language in ASEAN and how Thailand strategically prepares Thai people for the ASEAN Community in 2015.

The preparation of English language education at the national level

As a core leader of ASEAN, Thailand is now trying to become educational hubs in the ASEAN region (Ministry of Education, 2010) and is actively internationalizing its higher education systems (Shimauchi, 2011). In preparation for the ASEAN Community in 2015, the Thai government has recently attempted to underpin and promote the improvement of education in Thailand. For example, the Office of the Higher Education Commission (2008) has established three strategic plans to prepare Thai people for the ASEAN Community in 2015, including improving newly graduates' competence to reach the international standard level, developing the quality of higher education, and promoting higher education institutions of Thailand to the ASEAN Community. The Thai government has also encouraged higher education institutions to produce the graduates of international quality who are equipped with professional skills, language skills, and inter-cultural skills (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2008). Furthermore, the government has intended to develop the function of ASEAN University Network (AUN) established in 1995 to promote collaborative research studies among scholars and scientists from 26 leading universities in ASEAN (Wongboonsin & Wongboonsin, 2011). Therefore, it can be seen that Thailand has placed the issue of the ASEAN Community into its top priority of concern.

In terms of English language education, the government has positioned English at the forefront of Thailand's development with the furthering of English education and a focus on the policy to enhance the English language proficiency of Thai people (Baker, 2012). A high emphasis is also given to teaching foreign languages particularly English to develop efficient communication among Thai students by integrating the English language at every educational level (Ministry of Education, 2010). In addition, the Ministry of Education has set a goal for students to be able to communicate in English and use English to find new knowledge from various sources such as the internet. Strength of ICT infrastructure for improving quality of English language education and higher education is also a priority including the use of the Inter-University Network, Thailand Cyber University, the e-library ThaiLIS, and the National Education Network (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Moreover, the Thai government has prepared many projects and activities associated with the improvement of English language education in Thailand. For example, the Ministry of Education has launched a program called "English Speaking Year 2012" in order to encourage the use of English in piloted schools (Marukatat, 2012). The purpose of the program is to prepare the country to be ready as part of the ASEAN Community in 2015, since English language is a major medium of international communication among ASEAN member countries (The Government Public Relations Department, 2011). Both teachers and students will have opportunities to speak English and build up their confidence without excessive concern about grammatical errors (The Government Public Relations Department, 2011). This strong commitment by the government has shown solid attempts to improve students' and teachers' English proficiency to prepare Thai citizens for

the ASEAN Community in 2015.

However, despite the continuous efforts in developing English language education in Thailand, it seems that English language teaching and learning in Thailand remains unsuccessful, and English proficiency of Thai students is still low (Khamkhien, 2010; Noom-ura, 2013; Siritararatn, 2013). The 1999 Education Act and the following 2002 curriculum placed emphasis on the value of local knowledge and wisdom (Wongsathorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2003), and there has also been an increasing awareness of and acceptance of local languages (Kirkpatrick, 2010). This may result in restricting the role of English in Thailand. In addition, the factors contributing to the unsatisfactory of English language education in Thailand also included unqualified and inadequately-trained teachers, low-motivated students, students of mixed abilities in oversized classrooms, and few opportunities for student exposure to English outside class (Dhanasobhon, 2010). As a response to the problems of English language teaching in Thailand, the government should promote the role of educational institutions at all levels in improving their students' English skills by focusing on students' strengths and weaknesses in language learning and providing appropriate English lessons to serve their needs. The next section will therefore focus on the preparation of English language education in Thailand at the institutional level.

The preparation of English language education at the institutional level

At the institutional level, changes should be introduced to directly affect the English language curriculum. According to the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015, there will be an increased demand for English language education at all levels of schooling and university. Since ASEAN countries have different cultures and languages, the content of the curriculum should be based on the context of each particular country in ASEAN. Regarding to the curriculum design, the shared and different linguistic features of the English varieties in ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2008) should be integrated into the syllabus. This strategy can help to raise teachers' and students' awareness of the ASEAN English varieties and change their "submission to native-speaker norms" and therefore shift the traditional status of standard English in the curriculum (Jenkins, 2006, 172). By adopting the ASEAN focus in the curriculum, students' awareness of ASEAN will grow, and students will feel more confident to use English in the classroom and in the real settings. Therefore, in curriculum design, both English language and social contexts of ASEAN should be integrated into the English language curriculum.

Furthermore, since English as a lingua franca has become a crucial issue for ASEAN, Kirkpatrick (2012) recommended the introduction of English language earlier into the primary curriculum together with the adoption of a "lingua franca approach" to English language teaching. The identification of learner communicative needs and the importance of English as a lingua franca should be taken into consideration. In the ASEAN context, students can study the cultures of ASEAN countries through English, including the study of pragmatic norms which means that the English language curriculum should provide opportunities for

students to study the cultures of the region (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Thus educational institutions should consider designing and developing the curriculum to respond to the needs of the ASEAN Community.

Currently, many Thai higher education institutions are responding to the changes required by the ASEAN Community in terms of professional development of English language teachers. These institutions (e.g., The Language Institute of Thammasat University) provide professional development by organizing training sessions, seminars, and conferences for teachers at all levels of abilities and experiences: novice teachers, teachers with some experience, and advanced teachers, who later will be able to play roles as leaders or trainers for their communities (Noom-ura, 2013). In order to prepare English language education for the ASEAN Community in 2015, it is recommended that the government should also play an important role in financially support for higher education institutions in terms of English language teacher development.

The preparation of English language education at the individual level

The goal for English language education has become more concerned with enabling learners to interact successfully with members of other societies (Hedge, 2000). As the English language will be used as an official means of communication in the ASEAN Community, competency in the English language is an important qualification for students especially university students since it is a communicative tool of empowerment for their educational successes and employment opportunities. Students must improve their English language proficiency in order to be able to communicate effectively as they interrelate more with the wider region, in person and virtually through e-communication. Additionally, the study conducted by the Ministry of Education indicated that Thai people appear to lack interest in the notion of the ASEAN Community (Ministry of Education, 2012). Thus, to prepare Thai students for the ASEAN Community in 2015, raising students' awareness about the importance of the ASEAN Community and improving students' English language proficiency are extremely important.

One key aspect is to explore what should be done to improve the English language proficiency of Thai students to get ready for the ASEAN Community in 2015. Pakir (2010) conducted survey research to investigate the important issues which should be taken into consideration for English language teaching in Southeast Asia. The top three responses from data gathered from 337 English teachers were related to English for special purposes, teaching methods, and instructional material development. English for special purposes was ranged as the most important issue as the AEC will become a single market with free movement of skilled labors. Thus English for special purposes should be intensively taught to students in specific fields in order to deal with the job competition among ASEAN graduates. In terms of teaching methods, as people in ASEAN, who are non-native English speakers, are going to use English to communicate with each other, the model of teaching English should be changed. Varieties of English in ASEAN should be introduced and taught in schools to make students get familiar with similar and different linguistic features. In terms of

designing instructional materials, ASEAN identities and characteristics should be integrated into teaching materials. A number of studies (e.g., Low & Hashim, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2008, 2010; Mesthrie, 2008; Prescott, 2007; Schneider, 2007) have been conducted to describe the English varieties of ASEAN countries. For example, Low and Hashim (2012) provided an extensive description of the linguistic characters of Malaysian, Thai, Philippino, Singaporean, and Bruneian Englishes. These findings are of great value for developing instructional materials used for English language teaching in ASEAN.

As mentioned above, in ASEAN, English is used as a lingua franca, which means people speak English for communication. However, the language spoken in every country has become an English variety within its own characteristics (Kirkpatrick, 2008). This means that there are different shared features of English as a lingua franca in the ASEAN region. English as a lingua franca is characterized by its fluidity with variety being its most distinguishing feature (Seidlhofer, 2009). Thai learners of English, like other English as a lingual franca users, need to be able to negotiate this English variety through developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes of successful multilingual intercultural communicators (Canagarajah, 2007; Kramsch, 2009). Therefore, to successfully communicate, one of the most priorities for Thai students is to be able understand different English varieties, so that they will gain more understanding when communicating with others non-native English speakers from ASEAN countries.

Successful language learning involves the use of effective and communication strategies (Richards, 2005). Language learners need to develop communicative competence, which is the ability to use the language they are learning efficiently in a given social context (Hiep, 2007). By doing so, English language teaching which aims to develop communicative and intercultural competence is considered necessary (Baker, 2011; Cogo, 2009). Baker (2012) suggested that it is important to develop English language teaching in Thailand in directions which are more relevant to Thai learners of English as a lingua franca, and multilingual models of communication may result in more positive perceptions of English language proficiency in Thailand. One of the most accepted instructional methods in the field of English language teaching is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), whose main goal is to increase learners' communicative competence (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Wu, 2010). Littlewood (2007) argued that one of effective teaching approaches to enable learners to effectively communicate in English and to improve their abilities to use English in real contexts is CLT. Taking into consideration the changes required by the ASEAN Community, it becomes imperative to place emphasis on CLT which will be addressed in the following section.

Communicative Language Teaching: Implications for English Language Teaching in Thailand

Since culture and language are intertwined, English language teaching and practice will definitely contribute to mutual understanding between countries with different cultures in ASEAN. The ability to communicate effectively in English has been a well-established goal in English language teaching (Hedge, 2000). In Thailand, discussions

of English language teaching, especially how to enhance the quality of English language education in schools, have been common government discourse. According to the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551, English is taught for communication aiming to promote the students' ability to use English for communicating in various situations (Ministry of Education, 2008). The learning areas of foreign languages include (1) language for communication, (2) language and culture, (3) language and relationship with other learning areas, and (4) language and relationship with community and the world (Ministry of Education, 2008). Baker (2012) stated that English language teaching in Thailand should be evaluated in relation to local pedagogical practices and proficiency in accordance with the needs of students and the communicative situations that are relevance to them. As a result, CLT is considered important for English language teaching and learning in Thailand.

CLT advocates teaching practices that develop students' communicative competence in authentic contexts of which linguistic ability plays an important role (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Widdowson, 2003). However, the theories and practices of CLT have faced various challenges in EFL contexts (Ellis, 1996; Takanashi, 2004; Yu, 2001). Stelma (2009) stated that the principal aspect of CLT is how to understand the idea of communication and how it should inform language teaching. Brown (2007 : 241) emphasized the four core characteristics underlying current CLT as follows:

(1) Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.

(2) Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather, aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.

(3) Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.

(4) In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

Richards (2005) indicated that that the current practice of CLT draws on earlier traditions of CLT (see Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Widdowson, 1978, 1990, 1998). These traditional approaches include developing students' communicative competence by learning grammar in context in inductive and deductive ways. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises can provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchange (Richards, 2005). CLT classroom activities should also focus on the creation of the need for expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon, 2005). Where possible, language practice should resemble real life communication with genuine exchange of information

and opinion (Swan & Walter, 1990). The role of the teacher in the communicative classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning (Richards, 2005). Thus CLT is particularly useful for English language teaching in Thailand where English is used as a medium of communication within the ASEAN region.

However, there is an issue of how CLT might be adapted and used by teachers and learners in relevant ways to local contexts and cultures. According to Kirkpatrick (2008), the communicative strategies adopted by the speakers may have important implications for English language teaching, especially in contexts where English is being learned as a tool for lingua franca communication. As Kirkpatrick (2008) stated, English is functioning as the lingua franca in ASEAN in various forms for communicative strategies. In order to promote effective communication, Thai EFL learners should be taught to understand the shared and different linguistic features of English varieties in ASEAN. For example, the function and meaning of the best-known Singaporean expression 'lah' (the particle used to suggest emphasis) (Deterding, 2007), and the phenomenon of Thai English speakers adding 'na' or 'na ka'/ 'na krab' (the lexical items indicating genders) (Jones & Deterding, 2007). Moreover, students should be taught how to use communication strategies to reduce communication breakdown (Kirkpatrick, 2007). According to Kirkpatrick (2007), these strategies include (1) avoiding to the use of localized idioms or lexis, (2) encouraging the continuation of conversation by adopting "let it pass" strategies such as backchannels, face gestures, etc., and (3) ensuring mutual understanding through paraphrasing. Therefore, CLT should be highlighted in English language teaching in Thailand in order to involve learners in realistic language practice which is embedded in meaningful contexts and which reflects and rehearses language as it is used authentically in the world outside the classroom. Thus CLT can help improve Thai students' communicative competence and enhance their English language proficiency to get ready for the ASEAN Community in 2015.

CONCLUSION

Since Thailand will be part of the ASEAN Community in 2015, it appears that this regional integration would have significant impact on English language teaching and learning in Thailand. As English is the working language that is used for communication among people in ASEAN countries, English language teaching in Thailand should be improved to strongly stand in this future challenge. Success of English language teaching in Thailand requires involvement by all stakeholders such as the government, the education institutions, the educators, the teachers, and the students. It is the priority of the Thai government to transform English language education to response to the needs of the ASEAN Community. Thai people should also realize the importance of mastering English as an important means of communication of the ASEAN Community. English language teaching in Thailand should place an emphasis on CLT which aims to teach students to be able to communicate effectively. By addressing all changes required at the

national, institutional, individual levels seriously and setting clear strategic plans and goals, Thailand will be well positioned to enhance the quality of English language teaching within the CLT framework for preparing the country towards the ASEAN Community in 2015.

THE AUTHOR

Poranee Deerajviset is a full-time lecturer at the English Language Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English (First Class Honors) from Khon Kaen University. She was granted a scholarship from Cambridge Overseas Trust and was awarded her Master of Philosophy in Education from the University of Cambridge, UK. She completed her PhD in Education at the University of Sydney, Australia on a Royal Thai Government Scholarship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Anantarangsi, S. 2011. "Thailand and the inflow of FDI under the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)" **SIU Journal of Management,** 1(2), 101–118.

Ariff, M. & Hill, H. 2011. **Export-oriented industrialization: The ASEAN experience.** Oxon: Routledge.

ASEAN Secretariat, 2008. **ASEAN Economic Community blueprint.** Jakarta, Indonesia: ASEAN Secretariat.

ASEAN Secretariat, 2009a. **ASEAN Political-Security Community blueprint.** Jakarta, Indonesia: ASEAN Secretariat.

ASEAN Secretariat, 2009b. **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community blueprint.** Jakarta, Indonesia: ASEAN Secretariat.

Association of Southeast **Asian Nations, 2008a. Association of Southeast Asian Nations: Annual report 2007–2008.** Jakarta, Indonesia: ASEAN Secretariat.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008b. **The ASEAN Charter.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.aseansec.org/translations-of-the-asean-charter/" http://www.aseansec.org/translations-of-the-asean-charter/ [2013, October 5]

Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2012. **ASEAN Overview.** (Online). Available: http://www.asean.org/asean/about-asean/overview [2013, October 2]

Baker, W. 2008. "A critical examination of ELT in Thailand: The role of cultural awareness" **RELC,** 39(1), 131–146.

Baker, W. 2011. "Intercultural awareness: Modeling an understanding of cultures in intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca" **Language and Intercultural Communication.** 11(3), 197-214.

Baker, W. 2012. "English as a lingua franca in Thailand: Characterizations and implications" **Englishes in Practice,** 1, 18-27.

Bhatt, R. M. 2001. "World Englishes" **Annual Review of Anthropology,** 30, 527-550.

Bolton, K. 2005. "Where WE stands: approaches, issues, and debate in world Englishes" **World Englishes,** 24(1), 69-83.

Brown, H. D. 2007. **Principles of language learning and teaching.** New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Brumfit, C. & Johnson, K. 1979. **The communicative approach to language learning.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Canagarajah, A. S. 2007. "Lingua franca English, multilingual communities, and language acquisition" **The Modern Language Journal,** 91(5), 923-939.

Cheng, L. 2012. "The power of English and the power of Asia: English as lingua franca and in bilingual and multilingual education" **Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,** 33(4), 327-330.

Clayton, T. 2007. Transition, culture, and language in Cambodia. In A. B. M. Tsui & J. W. Tollefson (Eds.) **Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian contexts** (pp. 95-120). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cogo, A. 2009. Accommodating difference in ELF conversation. In A. Mauranen & E. Ranta (Eds.), **English as a lingua franca: Studies and findings** (pp. 254-273). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Crystal, D. 2008. "Two thousand million?" **English Today,** 24(1), 3-6.

Dhanasobhon, S. 2010. **English language teaching dilemma in Thailand.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.curriculumand-instruction.org/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=5391345 23&Ntype=7" http://www.curriculumandinstruction.org/index. php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=539134523&Ntype=7 (2013, October 18)

Darasawang, P. 2007. English language teaching and education in Thailand: A decade of change. In D. Prescott (Ed.), **English in Southeast Asia: Varieties, literacies and literatures** (pp. 187-204). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Deterding, D. 2007. **Singapore English.** Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Deusen-Scholl, N. V. & Hornberger, N. H. 2008. **Encyclopedia of language and education: Second and foreign language education.** London: Springer.

Ellis, G. 1996. "How culturally appropriate is the communicative approach?" **ELT Journal,** 50(3), 213-218.

Educational Testing Service. 2010. **Test and score data summary for TOEFL computer-based tests and paper-based tests: January 2010-December 2010 Test Data.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.ets.org/research/policy_research_re-

ports/toefl-sum-10" \t "_blank" http://www.ets.org/research/
policy_research_reports/toefl-sum-10 HYPERLINK "http://
www.ets.org/research/policy_research_reports/toefl-sum-10"
\t "_blank" [2013, October 10]

Foley, J. 2007. "English as a global language: My two Satangs' worth"
RELC, 38(1), 7-17.

Hayes, D. 2010. "Language learning, teaching and educational reform
in rural Thailand: An English teacher's perspective" **Asia Pacific
Journal of Education,** 30(3), 305-319.

Hedge, T. 2000. **Teaching and learning in the language classroom.**
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hiep, P. H. 2007. "Communicative language teaching: Unity within
diversity" **ELT Journal,** 61(3), 193-201.

Honna, N. 2012. English as a multicultural language for international
communication in Asia. In C. B. Della, J. Scott, & C. Hinton (Eds.),
**Languages in a global world: Learning for better cultural under-
standing** (pp. 247-256). Paris: OECD Publishing.

House, J. 1999. Misunderstanding in intercultural communication:
Interactions in English as a lingua franca and the myth of
mutual intelligibility. In C. Gnutzmann (Ed.), **Teaching and learning
English as a global language** (pp. 73-89). Tubingen: Stauffen-
burg.

Igawa, K. 2008. **English language and its education in Cambodia, a
country in transition.** (Online). Available: www.shitennoji.ac.jp/
ibu/images/toshokan/kiyo46-20.pdf [2013, October 14]

Jenkins, J. 2006. "Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes
and English as a lingua franca" **TESOL Quarterly,** 40(1), 157-
181.

Jenkins, J. 2007. **English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity.**
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, S. A. & Deterding, D. 2007. **Phonics and beginning reading:
A practical guide for teachers in Southeast Asia.** Singapore:
McGraw-Hill.

Kachru, B. B. 2005. **Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon.** New Delhi:
Oxford University Press.

Kachru, Y. & Nelson, C. L. 2006. **World Englishes in Asian contexts.**
Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Khamkhien, A. 2010. "Thai learners' English pronunciationcompe-
tence: Lesson learned from word stress assignment" **Journal of
Language Teaching and Research,** 1(6), 757-764.

Kim, J. 2003. "Education, English language proficiency, and earnings
of male immigrants in the U.S. labor market" **Journal of Business
and Economics Research,** 1(3), 17-26.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2007. **World Englishes: Implications for international
communication and English language teaching.** Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2008. "English as the official working language of the
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Features and
strategies" **English Today,** 24(2), 27-34.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2010. **English as a lingua franca in ASEAN.** Hong Kong:
Hong Kong University Press.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2012. English as an international language in Asia: Implications for language education. In A. Kirkpatick & A. Sussex (Eds.), **English as an international language in Asia: Implications for language education** (pp. 29-44). London: Springer.

Kosonen, K. 2008. "Literacy in local languages in Thailand: Language maintenance in a globalised world" **International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism,** 11(2), 170-188.

Kramsch, C. 2009. **The multilingual subject.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Larsen-Freeman, D. 2000. **Techniques and principles in language teaching.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Littlewood, W. 2007. "Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms." **Language Teaching,** 40, 243-249.

Low, E. L. & Hashim, A. 2012. **English in Southeast Asia: Features, policy and language in use.** Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Marukatat, S. 2012. "Poor English skills could leave Thais out in cold" **Bangkok Post** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/274156/poor-english-skills-could-leave-thais-out-in-cold" http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/274156/poor-english-skills-could-leave-thais-out-in-cold [2013, October 30]

McArthur, T. 2003. "English as an Asian language" **English Today,** 19(2), 19-22.

Mesthrie, R. 2008. **Varieties of English: Africa, South and Southeast Asia.** New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Ministry of Education, 2008. **The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008).** (Online). Available: academic.obec.go.th/web/doc/d/147 [2013, November 24]

Ministry of Education, 2010. **Thailand's ASEAN Community educational preparation.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.en.moe.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=134:thailands-asean-community-educational-preparation-&catid=1:new&Itemid=42" http://www.en.moe.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=134:thailands-asean-community-educational-preparation-&catid=1:new&Itemid=42 [2013, October 2]

Ministry of Education, 2012. **Thailand not ready for ASEAN Community.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.en.moe.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=539:thailand-not-ready-for-asean-community&catid=1:news&Itemid=42" **http://www.en.moe.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=539:thailand-not-ready-for-asean-community&catid=1:news&Itemid=42** [2013, December 8]

Moussu, L. & Llurda, E. 2008. "Non-native English-speaking English language teachers: History and research" **Language Teaching,** 41(3), 315-348.

Noom-ura, S. 2013. "English-teaching problems in Thailand and Thai teachers' professional development needs" **English Language Teaching,** 6(11), 139-147.

Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2008. **Preparation for the ASEAN Community in 2015.** (Online). Available: http://inter. mua.go.th/main2/article.php?id=132 [2013, November 24]

Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2012. **O-NET summary reports: Academic Year 2012.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.onesqa.or.th/onesqa/th/ download/index.php? Download GroupID=121" http://www. onesqa.or.th/onesqa/th/download/index.php? Download GroupID=121 [2013, December 20]

Pakir, A. 2010. "Current research on Englishes in Southeast Asia" **World Englishes,** 29(3), 329–335.

Petri, P. A., Plummer, M. G., & Zhai, F. 2012. ASEAN Economic Community: A general equilibrium analysis. **Asian Economic Journal, 26, 93–118.**

Prescott, D. 2007. **English in Southeast Asia: Varieties, literacies and literatures. Newcastle, UK:** Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Prusher, I. R. 2001. The language of change in Cambodia. **The Christian Science** Monitor. (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www. csmonitor.com/2001/0828/p7s2-wosc.html" http://www. csmonitor.com/2001/0828/p7s2-wosc.html [2013, October 9]

Richards, J. C. 2005. **Communicative language teaching today.** Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. 2001. **Approaches and methods in language teaching.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rooth, D. O. & Saarela, J. 2007. "Native language and immigrant labor market outcomes: An alternative approach to measuring" **International Migration & Integration,** 8, 207–221.

Saengboon, S. 2004. "Second language acquisition and English language teaching" **PASAA,** 35, 11–34.

Saraithong, W. & Chancharoenchai, K. 2012. "Labour's language skill in the liberalisation era: A case of Thai vocational students' English proficiency" **International Journal of Management Cases, 14(4),** 361–382.

Savignon, S. J. 2005. Communicative language teaching: Strategies and goals. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), **Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning** (pp. 635–652). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Schneider, E. W. 2003. "The dynamics of new Englishes: From identity construction to dialect birth" **Language,** 79, 233–281.

Schneider, E. W. 2007. **Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seidlhofer, B. 2009. Orientations in ELF research: Form and function. In A. Mauranen & E. Ranta (Eds.), **English as a lingua franca: Studies and findings** (pp. 37–59). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Simpson, A., & Thammasathien, N. 2007. **Thailand and Laos.** In A. Simpson (Ed.), Language and national identity in Asia (pp. 391–414). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sharifian, F. 2009. **English as an international language: Perspectives and pedagogical issues.** Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Shimauchi, S. 2011. "Lingua francas in higher education in Northeast Asia and ASEAN countries: Implications for regional cooperation on languages" **ASEAN Regional Integration Review,** 3, 88–102.

Siritararatn, N. 2013. "English Self-Efficacy Beliefs of EFL Low Proficiency Graduate Students" **Academic Journal of Interdisci- plinary Studies,** 2(3), 461–468.

Stelma, J. 2009. What is communicative language teaching. In S. Hunston &D. Oakey (Eds.), **Introducing applied linguistics: Concepts and skills** (pp. 53–59). London: Routledge.

Swan, M. & Walter, C. 1990. **The new Cambridge English course: Book 2.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Takanashi, Y. 2004. "TEFL and communication styles in Japanese culture" **Language, Culture and Curriculum,** 17(1), 1–14.

The Government Public Relations Department, 2011. **Thailand 2012: The year of English speaking.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://thailand.prd.go.th/view_news.php?id=6053&a=4" http://thailand.prd.go.th/view_news.php?id=6053&a=4 [2013, December 2]

Usó-Juan, E. & Martínez-Flor, A. 2008. **Teaching intercultural communicative competence through the four skills.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/ 10045/10400/1/RAEI_21_09.pdf [2013" http://rua.ua.es/ dspace/bitstream/10045/10400/1/RAEI_21_09.pdf [2013, December 18]

Widdowson, H. G. 1978. **Teaching language as communication.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Widdowson, H. G. 1990. **Aspects of language teaching.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Widdowson, H. G. 1998. **Context, community, and authentic language.** TESOL Quarterly 32(4): 705–716.

Widdowson, H. G. 2003. **Defining issues in English language teaching.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wongboonsin, K. & Wongboonsin, P. 2011. **Preparation of integration of ASEAN Community in 2015: Personnel and research.** (Online). Available: HYPERLINK "http://www.ostc.thaiembdc.org/at- pac2011/Preparation_of_Integration- KUA-PW[1][1].pdf" http:// www.ostc.thaiembdc.org/atpac2011/Preparation_of_Integration- KUA-PW[1][1].pdf [2013, November 26]

Wongsothorn, A., Hiranburana, K., & Chinnawongs, S. 2003. English language teaching in Thailand today. In H. W. Kam, & R. L. Wong (Eds.), **English language teaching in East Asia today: Changing policies and practices (pp. 441–453).** Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.

Wu, K. 2010. "The relationship between language learners' anxiety and learning strategy in the CLT classrooms" **International Education Studies,** 3(1), 174–191.

Yu, L. 2001. "Communicative language teaching in China: Progress and resistance" **TESOL Quarterly,** 35(1), 194–179.

Yuwono, G. I. & Harbon, L. 2010. "English Teacher Professionalism and Professional Development: Some Common Issues in Indonesia" **Asian EFL Journal,** 12(3), 141–163.