

นัยทางการใช้ภาษาไทยปนภาษาอังกฤษและความเป็นไปได้ในการใช้ห้องสนทนาทางอินเทอร์เน็ต
เป็นแหล่งเรียนรู้ทางเลือก

**The Implication for English-Thai Mixing and Possibility of Internet Chat Rooms as Alternative
Learning Environments¹**

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Abstract

This study examined motivations and attitudes towards the Thai and English mixing in the English-based chat rooms and the possibility of using the chat rooms as alternative English learning environments. The data were collected from 200 representative samples in the English chat rooms on *Sanook* and *Pantip* websites.

The findings revealed that the mixing of Thai and English was influenced by the chatters' new communicative behaviors, motivations and attitudes. The majority of the samples expressed positive attitudes towards the chat rooms and English. The main purpose of chatting in the English chat rooms was for language learning and social functions. The reason for switching of Thai and English while chatting was the incapability to express in English spontaneously. Other factors involved the lack of specific terms in English and the need to create a humorous effect and relaxed atmosphere.

Regarding the possibility for using Internet chat rooms as English learning sources, some chatters agreed that chatting in the English chat rooms helped improve their English, though there was a concern about the wrong usage of English. Moreover, the mixing had no significant impact on the chatters' English or Thai usage. Many even agreed that their English was better.

Keywords: Language mixing, motivations and attitudes towards codemixing, language learning through chat rooms

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ ศึกษาแรงจูงใจและทัศนคติที่มีต่อการใช้ภาษาไทยปนภาษาอังกฤษในห้องสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษ และความเป็นไปได้ในการใช้ห้องสนทนาเป็นแหล่งเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นผู้สนทนาในห้องภาษาอังกฤษในเว็บไซต์สนุกและเว็บไซต์พันทิพย์ จำนวนทั้งสิ้น 200 คน

ผลการศึกษาสะท้อนพฤติกรรมการปนภาษาว่าเป็นผลมาจากพฤติกรรมการสื่อสารแบบใหม่ แรงจูงใจและทัศนคติของผู้สนทนา ซึ่งส่วนใหญ่มีทัศนคติทางบวกต่อห้องสนทนาทางอินเทอร์เน็ตและภาษาอังกฤษ เหตุผลหลักที่เลือกสนทนาในห้องภาษาอังกฤษ คือการเรียนรู้ภาษาและการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคม ส่วนการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษปนกับภาษานั้น เป็นเพราะผู้สนทนาไม่สามารถคิดข้อความภาษาอังกฤษได้ในทันที ปัจจัยสำคัญอื่นๆ ได้แก่ การสื่อคำที่มีความหมายเฉพาะ ซึ่งเมื่อใช้ภาษาไทยแล้วเข้าใจได้ง่ายกว่า การสลับภาษาเพื่อสื่ออารมณ์ขันและสร้างบรรยากาศการสนทนาที่ผ่อนคลาย

ส่วนแนวคิดในการใช้ห้องสนทนาทางอินเทอร์เน็ตเป็นแหล่งการเรียนรู้ภาษานั้น กลุ่มตัวอย่างส่วนใหญ่เห็นว่า การสนทนาในห้องภาษาอังกฤษมีส่วนช่วยพัฒนาทักษะทางภาษา แม้จะมีความวิตกกังวลกระทบในด้านลบต่อการคุ้นชินกับรูปภาษาแบบผิดๆบ้างก็ตาม นอกจากนี้ ส่วนใหญ่เชื่อว่าการปนภาษาเช่นนี้ไม่ทำให้การใช้ภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษเสื่อมถอยลง ในขณะที่จำนวนหนึ่งเสริมว่า มีส่วนช่วยให้ภาษาอังกฤษของตนดีขึ้นด้วย

คำสำคัญ: การปนภาษา แรงจูงใจและทัศนคติต่อการปนภาษา การเรียนรู้ภาษาผ่านห้องสนทนาทางอินเทอร์เน็ต

1. Introduction

Not surprisingly, no one would challenge the fact that English is the most predominant foreign language in global communication. In Thailand, though English is neither an official language of the country, nor is it given any special positions in terms of language policy, it plays a more and more crucial part in various aspects. In education, integrated into the curriculum, English is set as a required course for schools, colleges and universities. The growth has been further accelerated by a startling expansion in the quantity and speed of technology, science and international tourism industries. The emergence of corporations also ensures its ever-increasing use in mass mediafilms, songs and television programs. English is therefore symbolic of education, sophistication and prestige (Kannaovakun and Gunther, 2003: 66). With prevalence of the language, intense eagerness to achieve it has been generated among Thai people, believing that knowing English helps open new horizons in the sphere of education and employment if one knows English, one can gain higher cognitive, social and economic benefits.

Historically, the kings of Thailand recognized the power of English. As early as 1612, the English language first came to Thailand through the contact with British people. During the reigns of King Rama IV and V, it was exclusively taught among the royal families. Under the process

of westernization and modernization (1851-1960), a number of selected young men were sent to foreign countries to extend their studies for the country's development. English, as associated with knowledge, power and modernization, consequently became a mark of the educated people and the elite. An expansion of English and attestations of switching and borrowing between Thai and English were first witnessed in this period (Warie, 1997: 25, cited in Suraratdecha, 2003: 67). Over the years, like the rest of the world, Thailand has been embracing the Internet at full speed. According to The National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, the number of Internet users in Thailand reached 12% of the total population in 2004 (Thailand Board of Investment, 2006), while English is also one of their preferable language choices. The expanding role of English is supported by Mathias (2007: 72), as in "... In Thailand, the realization has grown that English is the lingua franca for interaction with 'foreigners', rather than just 'native speakers'". Through this view, English is no longer restricted to upper-class groups, but widely used among common people. A frequent contact of English and Thai is unavoidable, leading to the 'language mixing' phenomenon.

Simply explained, language mixing occurs when more than one language are used simultaneously to convey speakers' intentions. When a sentence of two or more languages is

alternated within the same speech situation, it is called ‘code-switching’. However, when there is an embedding of linguistic units in a sentence, such as affixes, words, phrases and clauses, it becomes ‘code-mixing’. In other words, code-switching is an inter-sentential switching, whereas code-mixing is an intra-sentential switching. In this study, the neutral term ‘language mixing’ is employed to mean both intra-sentential and inter-sentential structures. Although various studies of English and Thai mixing, and the attitudes have been done so far (e.g. Dhithiwattana, 1996; Sriha-amphai, 1987; Boonkongsaen, 1999; Kannaovakun and Gunther, 2003), they focused on the real speech in Thai-based contexts. This gap has paved a challenging way for further investigation in the English dominant-chat rooms, in which language features are rather speech-like.

Besides, another study area comes in response to a pull on the researcher’s long-standing curiosity. From the personal observation in *English* and *International* chat rooms on particular Thai websites, it was clearly stated by the chatters that their main purpose is to improve their English. On the one hand, this statement is supported by many teachers and researchers (Poole et al., 2003; González, 2003; Su, 2005). They agree that online chat can develop learner autonomy, collaborative learning, and communicative skills. Also, this global context is beneficial for distance learning and provides opportunities for real interaction (Leh, 2006;

Phadvidulya, 2006: 50). On the other hand, some researchers remark that online interactions can be problematic. With the absence of social cues, people’s perception of contexts and their interpretation of messages could be misunderstood (Trevino, Lengel and Draft, 1987, cited in Leh, 2006). Learning cannot be enhanced because it is “less friendly, emotional, or personal and more business-link and task-oriented than other communication media” (Rice and Love, 1987). Hence, a systematic exploration for this argument is challenging. It is a frame for the study part of the possibility of incorporating the Internet chat rooms into the informal learning environments.

2. Objectives

To examine the motivations and attitudes of the Thai chatters towards the mixing of Thai and English in the Internet chat rooms, as well as to explore the possibility of employing the Internet chat rooms as English learning environments.

3. Significance

This investigation will contribute to an understanding of language mixing in online contexts. The findings can be useful for foreign language learning in terms of alternative teaching tools, activities and sources to serve different learning styles of the individual Thai learners. Also, it might be of interest to those who are

interested in other aspects of language variety as influenced by the digitally mediated communication.

4. Definitions of Terms

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Attitudes: | This term refers to a psychological phenomenon involving emotions, beliefs, opinions and tendencies to act towards a certain thing. Here, these aspects on (1) the mixing of Thai and English in the chat rooms and (2) the idea of learning English through the chat rooms are emphasized. |
| Behavior: | It generally refers to the manners of a person in response to certain environments. In the study, it is the Thai people's online manners mainly concerning (1) the language choice in daily speech and its frequency (2) the language choice in online chatting and its frequency |
| Motivations: | It is the psychological aspects showing the causes of a particular phenomenon. The focus of this study is on (1) the prevalence and proficiency of English, (2) behavior on and reasons for using the chat rooms, and (3) reasons for switching into Thai. |
| Native-language: | It refers to the Thai language, the native language of the study group. |

5. Literature Review

In recent years, the sociolinguistic theory of language shift has been a source of great interest among scholars. The phenomenon of language mixing or switching begins when the bilinguals (in a broad sense) mix or alternate between one language and another. For a clearer view, some insights into these linguistic aspects and studies are described.

5.1 Definitions and Concepts

Some researchers take step to distinguish between language mixing and switching. According to Muysken (2000: 1), code-mixing is defined as the embedding of various linguistic units (affixes, words, modifiers, phrases, clauses and sentences) from the two distinct grammatical systems within the same sentence and speech event. This is viewed in terms of the appropriate use of more than one language in a single sentence to convey the speaker's intents. In short, code mixing involves various levels of language without changing the topic of conversation. It is thus the intra-sentential switching. The following examples are taken from the speech of adults.

Ayer juimos a los movies.

(We went to the movies yesterday.)

Comieron turkey pa' Christmas?

(Did you eat turkey for Christmas?)

He is doing the best he can pa' no
quedarse atras, pero lo van a
fregar. (He is doing the best he
can in order not to be kept back,
but they're going to mess him
up.) (Dulay, Burt and Krashen,
1982)

These sentences involve an alternation of English and Spanish with different grammatical structures. The English words and a clause are found embedded in the Spanish sentences.

Referring to code-switching, it is the shift of two languages within a discourse, sentence or constituent. By this means, an inter-sentential switching occurs when alteration is made beyond a single sentence (Torres, 1989). The following is an example of the switching of the Filipino language and the English language:

... Babayaran kita (I'd pay you). I
was looking for you. I came with
my baby, on Friday. Hindi kita
makita (I couldn't find you.)
(Marasigan, 1983)

From the example, the mixing of Filipino and English is found in a separate sentence of the same discourse.

Some researchers employ the term 'code-mixing' to cover both inter-sentential and

intra-sentential alternations. The term used in this study refers to the linguistic phenomenon that a speaker intersententially and intrasententially uses Thai and English in the same speech situation and a shift of English to Thai in English-based utterances.

5.2 Functions, Motivations and Attitudes

Viewing linguistic investigations into code-mixing, functions, factors and motivations bringing about this phenomenon are numerous and various. In Li's (2000: 317-318) study of Cantonese and English switching, switching to English is attributed to the four content-specific motivations—*euphemism, specificity, bilingual punning and principle of economy*, showing that English is one of the significant linguistic resources to fulfill a variety of well-defined communicative purposes. Another major attempt is made by Kannaovakun and Gunther (2003). Their investigation of the mixing of English and Thai in Thai television programs suggests that the majority of mixing of English with Thai-based discourses serves neither an emphatic function nor a linguistic need. It instead falls into a prestige motive or expressive functions. What's more, because of the importance of English as a global language in science and technology, the use of English for discussion such topics will always give an impression of authority, credibility and authenticity. English mixes thus mostly occurs in high-technology fields and the electronic world even when Thai equivalents exist (Kannaovakun and

Gunther, 2003: 67). This study yields support to Holmes's observation on Chinese students flattening together abroad. Since these students have learned the vocabulary of economics, linguistics or physics in English, they do not always know the particular words in Cantonese. Cantonese can be heard, except when discussing about their studies (they switch to English) (Holmes, 1992: 44).

Language shifting can also be related to the expression of cultural information or social values. In other words, it symbolizes the values associated with a particular root. Li (2000: 312-313) finds that one of the pragmatic motivations for using English words in Hong Kong Chinese press is euphemism. A specific example from a 'showbiz discourse' is the use of the word and referent, '*bra*' which does have equivalents in standard written Chinese. Previously, Luke (1998, cited in Li, 2000: 312) claims that Chinese people use English '*bra*' to appear '*western*', but Li proposes a different motivation -- a desire of euphemism. English alludes to the same referent and does not explicitly describe potentially embarrassing female body part. This is also supported by Chen (1996: 271). Since modesty is much valued by Chinese people, they tend to use English swear words to avoid negative connotations of those words or phases in Chinese. In socio-cultural viewpoints, Ho (2007) suggests that the use of English in Cantonese utterances helps "divide those with good education, great

prestige and high social status from those without." According to Luke (1998, cited in Li, 2000: 312), people may code-mix to express westernized identity. This attitude is observed in the alteration of Tagalog and English in informal discourses by Bautista (2004). Thai is, switch is a linguistic feature of educated, middle and upper-class Filipinos. In Kenya where Swahili is officially adopted, English continues to maintain a firm role of a second language, and attitudes towards the language are generally positive, as associated with high status jobs, and middle- and upper-class children seem to be switching gradually to English (Gramley and Pätzold, 2004: 323).

Patterns reflecting a varying degree of code-switching depend on the social variables the person being addressed, topic, location and competency. It is an established norm for a particular social group to indicate membership, solidarity and status. This sociolinguistic function is asserted by Duley, Burt and Krashen (1982: 117) -- any person who alternates languages does so only in speaking with other members of the group, or to indicate acceptance of a non-member into group. Even in unilingual conversations, the occasional use of such terms as *OK*, *you know* and *and then* functions to symbolize the intra-ethnic character of the interaction. In examining Thai-English code-switching by Thai students studying at the University of Hawaii, Suraratdecha (2003) finds that code-switching is in fact an

accommodative practice affected by the speakers' attitudes of Thai and English, and their perception of self and others in relation to language proficiency. Thai speakers switch into one language if they think it is appropriate to the topic or to their notions of self and addressee, but some appear to actively resist code-switching, depending on their perceptions of others and their evaluation of their own linguistic skills. Crystal (1987, cited in Skiba, 1997) adds that speakers may not be able to express themselves well in one language, so switching to the other will be compensation.

The trends of inserting English may have some drawbacks. As noted by Gibbons (1979), though Chinese speakers in Hong Kong use English to express values in status and westernization, and use Cantonese to present an impression of Chinese humility and solidarity, the mix is considered ill-mannered, show-off, ignorant, and aggressive from the same Chinese's point of view. Chana (1984, cited in Luisa, 1994) agrees with this finding. In her study on the listeners' evaluative reactions to code-switched speech, when the speaker of perfect Punjabi and English uses the code-switched form, s/he is considered less fluent, less intelligent and less expressive than when using only Punjabi or only English. In Dhithiwattana's (1996) study of the mixing of English in Thai by lecturers, any person with a positive attitude towards language mixing may not mix languages in speaking due to inappropriateness and fear of not being accepted in society.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Determining Population

The chat participants in the representative free chat systems, *Sanook* (<http://www.sanook.com>) and *Pantip* (<http://pantip.com>), were selected as a population of the study. The reason for this website selection is their popularity. *Sanook* was considered the top-rank Thai website by 2005, and remained popular in 2006, with the increasing number of 254,616 visitors (9 November 2006). *Pantip* also shares similar popularity as surveyed by Truehits.net (2007), it was one of the most outstanding chat websites in the Thai language and claimed to be the first and largest online community in Thailand. There are English chat rooms available on these two websites in which Thai people are able to chat in English.

6.2 Data Collection

The research instrument is a question-naire which has been checked for content validity by a specialist in the field of the English language and mass communication before distribution. The questionnaire is composed of 5 parts: (1) personal information of the population, (2) awareness of English proficiency and language mixing behavior, (3) behavior in and reasons for using the Internet chat rooms, (4) reasons for switching to Thai Language, (5) attitudes towards the English language and the mixing of English and Thai, and (6) attitudes towards learning English through the chat rooms.

The questionnaires were distributed on voluntary basis by an online linkage between *Sanook* and *Pantip* websites and the questionnaire web-based channel over a period of approximate 2 months (January and February, 2007), from 6.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m., the most active time after school and working hours in Thailand. Since the total number of chat participants required for the study was set to be 200, the period of data collection had to be extended to two more months (March and April) so as to have enough respondents. The number of questionnaires finally collected is as follows:

Table 1: The Number of Population Studied

| Month (s) | Chat Population |
|-----------|-----------------|
| January | 60 |
| February | 60 |
| March | 50 |
| April | 30 |
| Total | 200 |

From the table, 200 chat participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. The questionnaires by the respondents on *Pantip* and *Sanook* were not separate as it has no effect on the research findings.

When collecting data, the researcher found that many participants in March and April were in the same group as those in January and February. This caused the inconsistent number of the chatters

in each month, and their smaller proportion in the latter two months.

6.3 Data Analysis

Responses to the questionnaires were calculated by means of percentages, and finally discussed in terms of the motivations and attitudes towards the English language, the factors and functions of mixing Thai in English in the English chat rooms, and the idea of employing the chat room as an informal English learning setting.

7. Limitations

The study employed the quantitative approach to explore the Thai chatters' motivations and attitudes towards the mixing of English and Thai. Only the chatters who mix English and Thai in their utterances were included. It cannot be checked and guaranteed that all of them are Thai nationals. However, as the on-line questionnaires are in Thai, it can be assumed that the respondents are Thais or at least can understand Thai at a satisfactory level, regardless of any help in translation.

8. Results

The findings were examined with respect to the chatters' general information, motivations and attitudes towards mixing Thai in English utterances, as well as the possibility of intergrating

the chat room into an alternative learning environment. The results from the questionnaires were calculated into a percentage. An interpretation in each aspect will be presented as follows:

8.1 Personal Information of the Study Population

The total population consisted of 200 people, with 193 Thais (96.5%) and 7 (3.5%) of

different nationalities (Australian, Thai-Australian, American, Thai-American, Burmese and Chinese), making Thais the largest study group (see Figure 1).

There were people of other nationalities, but in a relatively small number. Besides, with ability to fill in the web-based questionnaire written in Thai, they seemed to be able to understand the Thai language. Viewing the proportions of males and females,

Figure 1: Nationalities

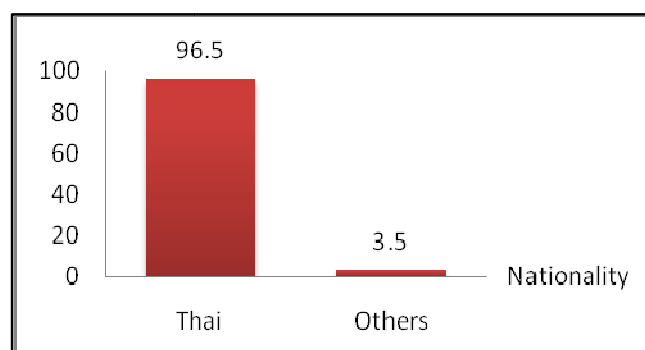


Figure 2: Sex

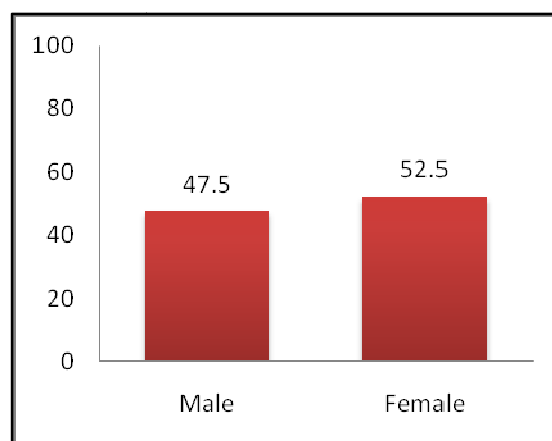
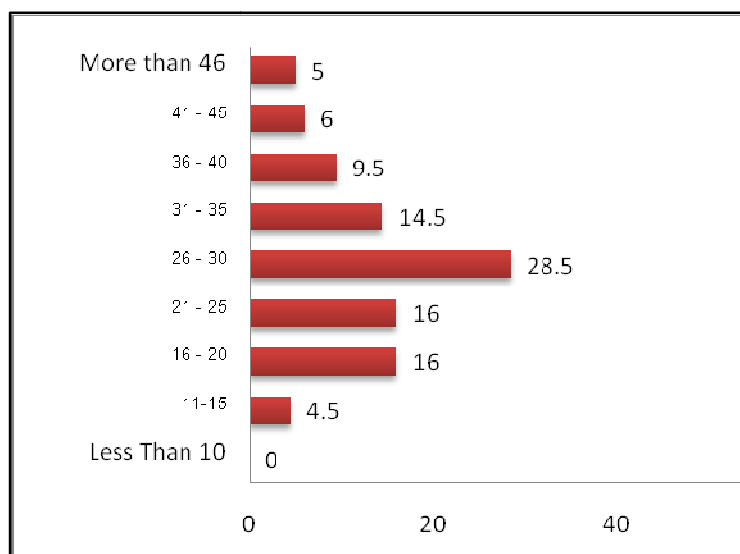


Figure 3: Age



the percentage was not much different, with 95 % males and 105 % females (see Figure 2).

These English-based chat rooms were preferable among people at various ages, ranging from 11 to more than 46 years, but the largest number was in the 26 to 30 age group (28.5 %). The second largest groups were the 16 - 20 and 21 - 25 years, both of which had the same percentages (16%), closely followed by the 31 - 35 age group (14.5 %) (see Figure 3).

As for their educational levels, almost half of the chatters (46.5 %) got a Bachelor's degree, 23.5% got a Master's, and 18.5% Senior High School Certificate. The rest comprised other educational levels (see Figure 4).

As regards language used in daily life, it is apparent that the majority (75 %) used Thai, while

only 19.5 % used English. The smallest number (5.5%) used Thai alongside another foreign language including English, Chinese, Burmese, German or Malay (see Figure 5).

8.2 Awareness of English Proficiency and Language Mixing Behavior

As requested to rate their English proficiency level from 1 (low) to 5 (excellent) in 7 aspects (1) words and idioms, (2) listening, (3) pronunciation, (4) reading, (5) grammar, (6) writing and (7) speaking, it is found that a high percentage evaluated their listening (40.5 %), reading (52.2 %) and speaking (37 %) at a good level, whereas their proficiency in words and idioms (40 %), pronunciation (38.5 %), grammar (37.5 %) and writing (38.5 %) were at an almost good level (see Figure 6).

Figure 4: Educational Levels

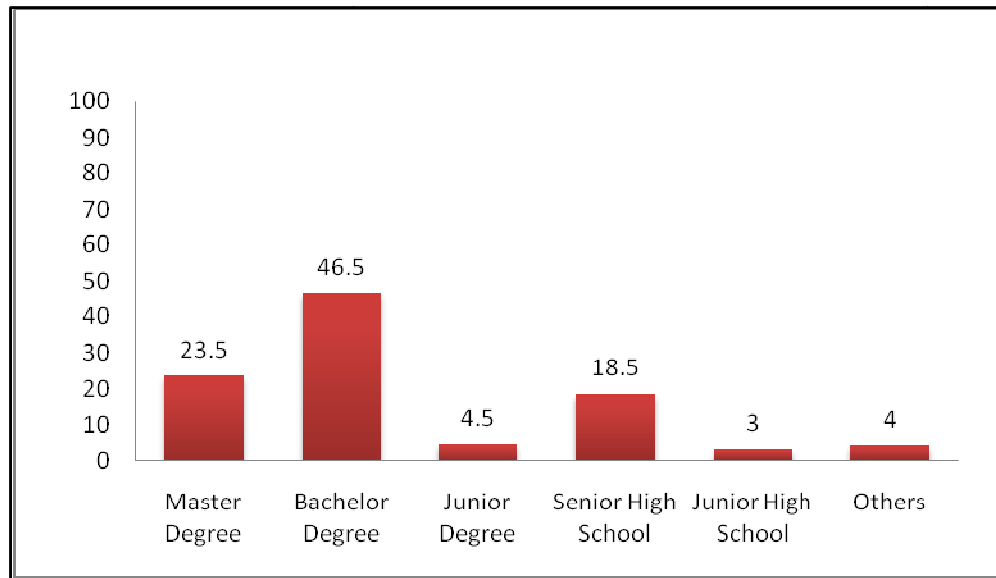
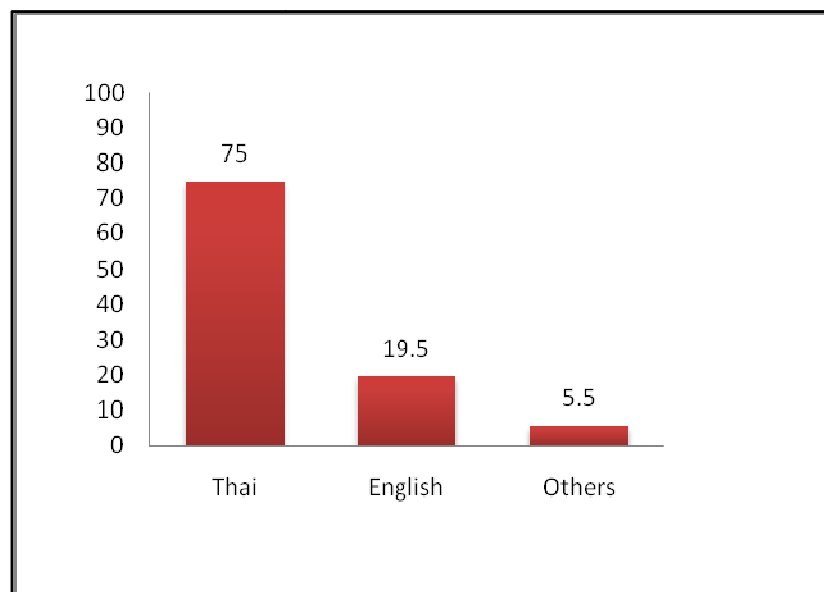


Figure 5 : Language Used in Daily Speaking



In addition, 68.5 % accepted that they was not distinctively high -- sometimes mixing mixed Thai and English in daily speaking (see Figure 7). However, the frequency of their mixing (20 %) (see Figure 8).

was not distinctively high -- sometimes mixing (29.5 %), seldom mixing (27 %) and often mixing (20 %) (see Figure 8).

Figure 6: Self-evaluation on English Proficiency

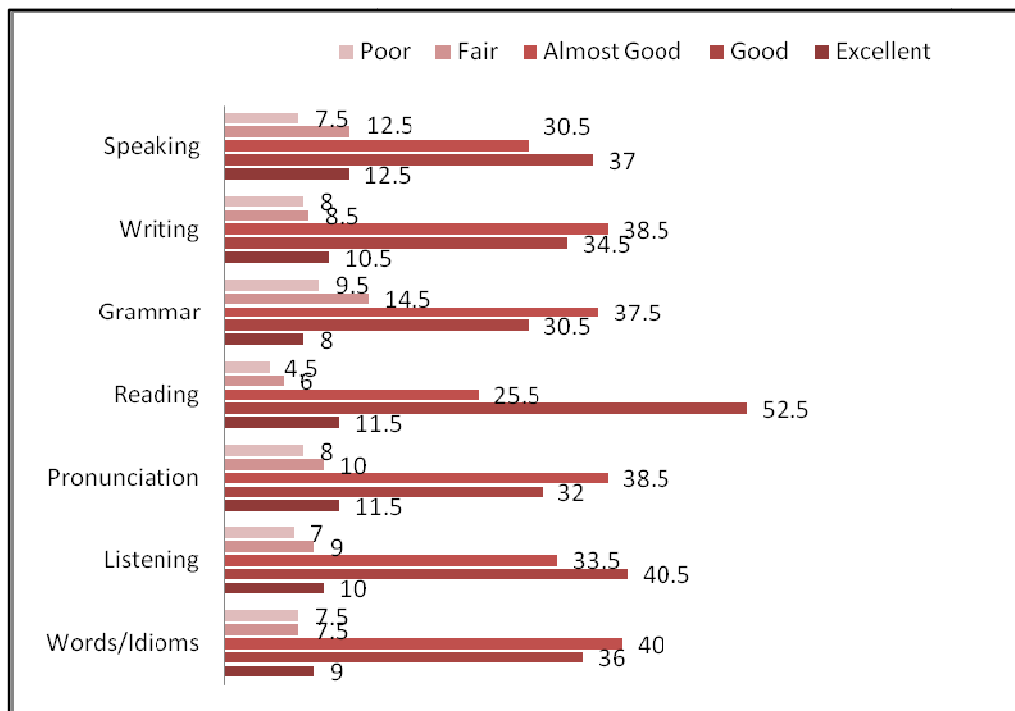


Figure 7: Thai and English Mixing in Daily Speaking

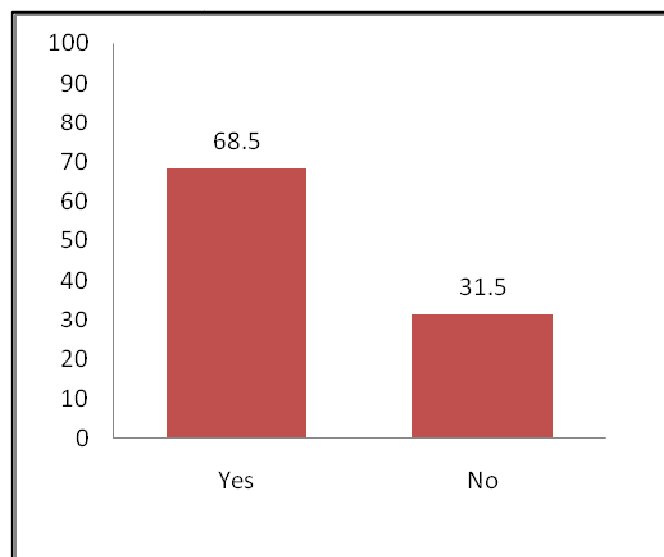
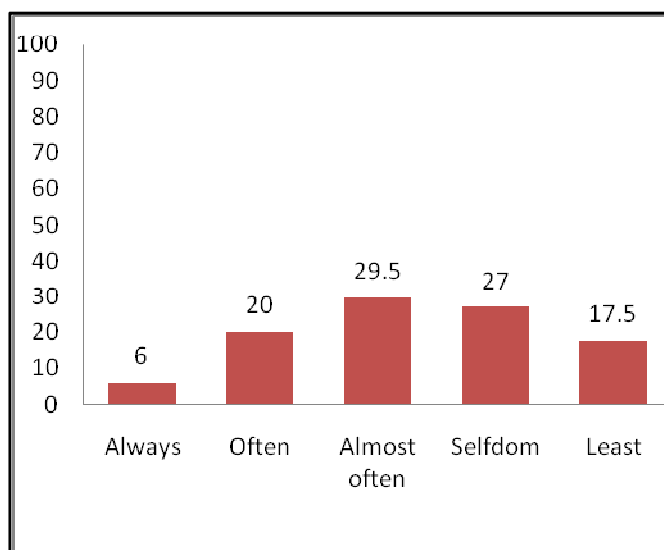


Figure 8: Frequency of Thai and English Mixing in Daily Speaking



As for the structural level of English usage, the respondents revealed that they used English at the sentence level the most (55.5 %), followed by the discourse level (22.5 %) and the lexical level (16.5 %)), whereas the least was at the phrase level (see Figure 9).

8.3 Behavior in and Reasons for Using the Internet Chat Rooms

It is found that 41% used the Internet chat rooms every day, and 25.5 % only a few days a week. The average online time (each time) was approximately 3 hours. The language most used when chatting was Thai (57.5 %), while English came the second (38 %) (see Figure 10).

Their general reasons for using the chat rooms varied. The first two main reasons were to

relaxation (74 %) and to meeting Thai friends (50.5 %), followed by the need for fast communication (39.5 %) and loneliness (39 %). It can be noted that these figures correspond to the general purpose of the chat rooms that is to be recreational. There were also other reasons including making friends with foreigners (32 %), being economical (20 %), learning and exchanging cultural aspects (17.5 %) and looking cool or keeping up with trend (14.5 %) (see Figure 11).

However, when the *English* or *International* Internet chat room was the focus, their purposes of chatting shifted. The majority (75 %) revealed that the main reason was to improve their English, while 35 % to make friends with foreigners, and 25 % to learn and exchange cultural aspects (see Figure 12).

Figure 9: Structural Level of English Used in Daily Speaking

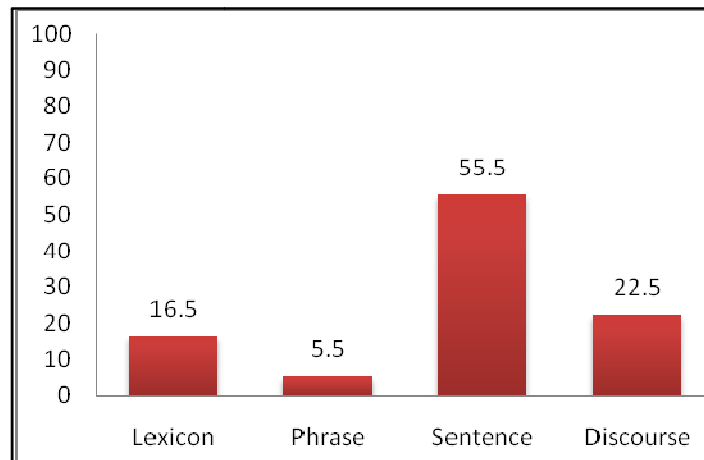


Figure 10: Language Often Used in the Internet Chat Rooms

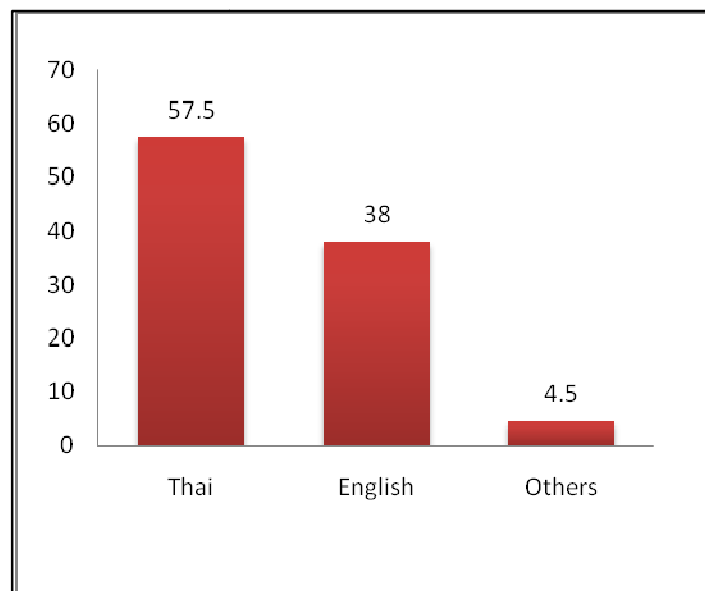


Figure 11: General Reasons for Using the Internet Chat Rooms

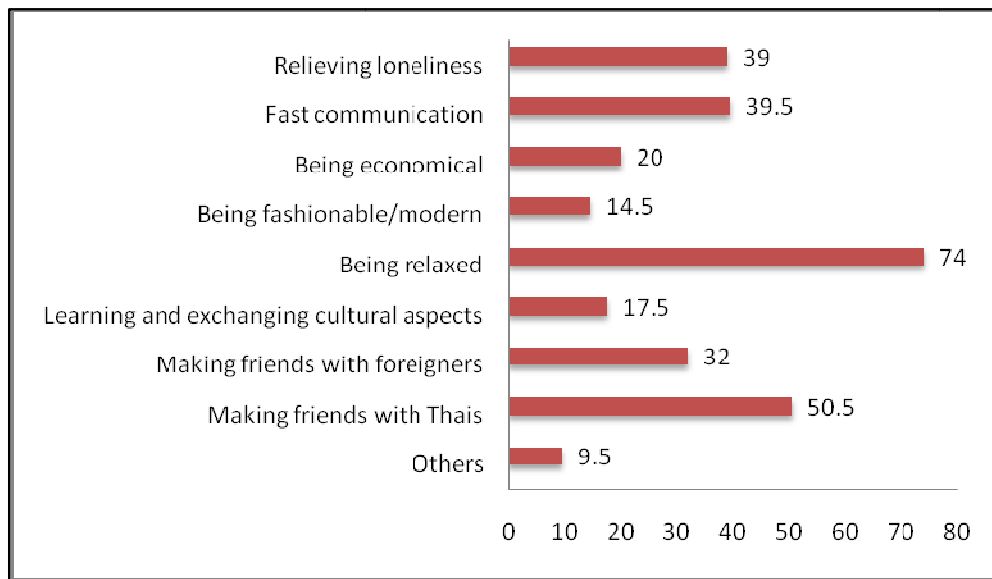


Figure 12 : Specific Reasons for Chatting in English in the *English* or *International* Chat Rooms

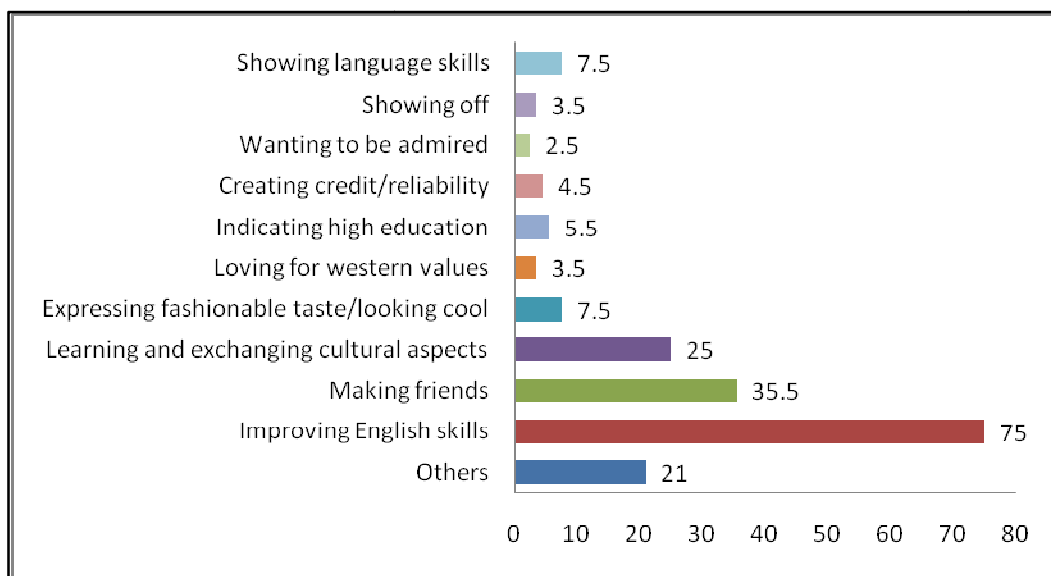


Figure 13: Structural Level of English Used When Chatting in the *English* or *International* Internet Chat Rooms

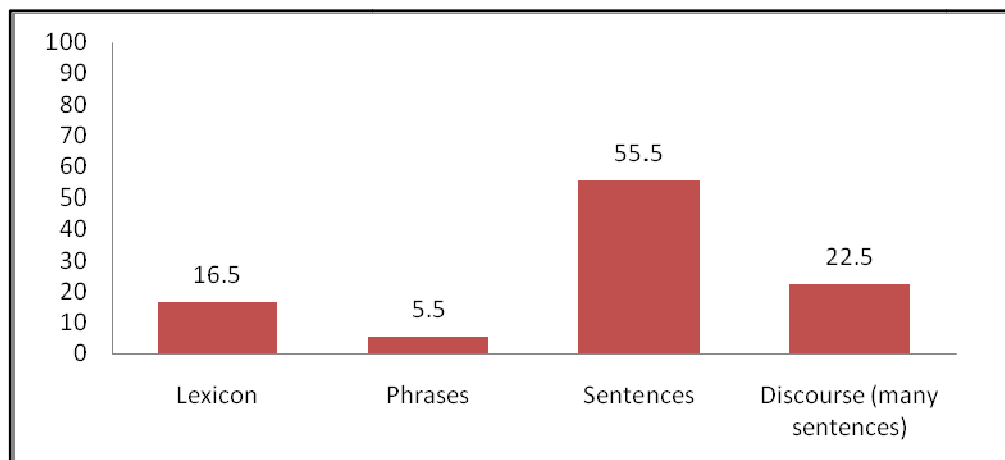
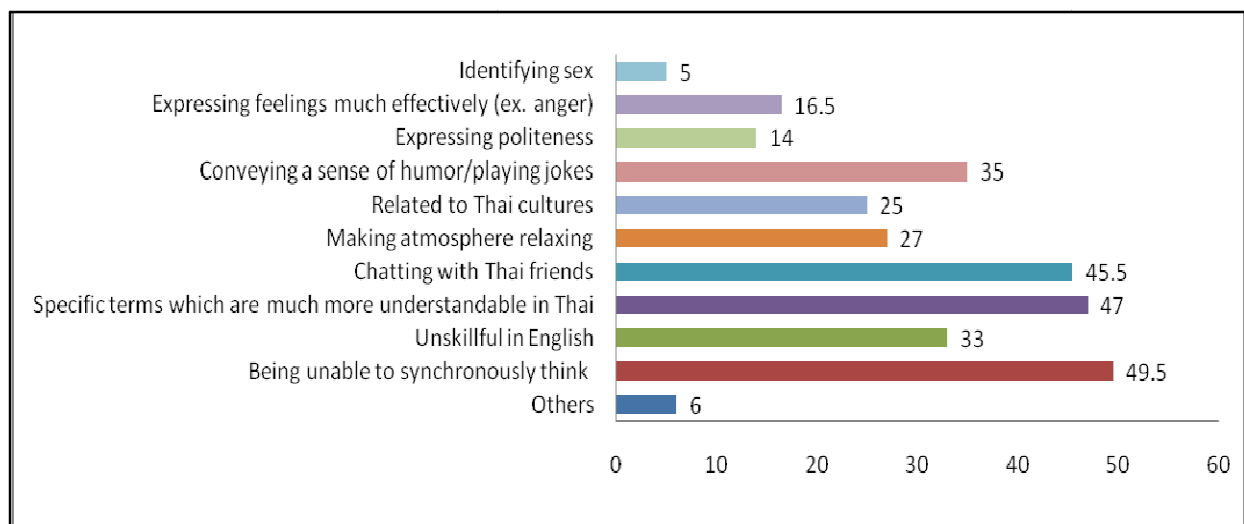


Figure 14: Specific Reasons for Switching to Thai in the *English* and *International* Internet Chat Rooms



Their English messages were mostly at the sentence level (55.5 %), followed by the discourse level (22.5 %), lexical level (16.5 %) and phrasal level (5.5 %) (see Figure 13).

8.4 Reasons for Switching to the Thai Language The first top-three reasons for switching from English to Thai were (1) the incapability to think of the right English words or sentences in English within a short time (49.5 %), (2) problems

with technical or specific terms (which would be more understandable in Thai) (47%), and (3) chatting with Thai friends (45.5%). Some preferred Thai to convey a sense of humor or to play jokes (35 %) and their poor English skills (33%). Other reasons were making the atmosphere more relaxing (27%), talking about Thai culture-oriented topics (25%), effectively expressing certain feelings (e.g. anger) (16.5%), and showing politeness (14%) (see Figure 14). It should be noted that problems in Thai typing and unavailability of Thai fonts on the computer were also mentioned in 'others', but in a low percentage (6%), closely followed by sex identification (5%).

8.5 Attitudes towards the English Language and the Mixing of English and Thai

In this part, the chatters were requested to rate the 5 statements about the attitudes towards

English and the blend of English and Thai on a scale of “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (see Figure 15). The finding suggested that a majority of the chatters (77.5%) strongly agreed that English was very important in today’s communication while 46 % agreed that using the right words, phrases and expressions was important. However, up to 70% (“strongly agree” and “agree”) revealed their personal concern with the correctness of the English grammatical structures. Most of them thought that chatting in English in the chat rooms helped develop their English skills. Fluency of communication (50.5%) had the highest percentage, closely followed by reading (48.5%), words and expressions (47 %), writing (45.5 %), grammar (41%) and speaking (39.5 %) (see Figure 16).

Figure 15: Attitudes towards Using English and the Mixing of English and Thai in the Internet

Chat Rooms

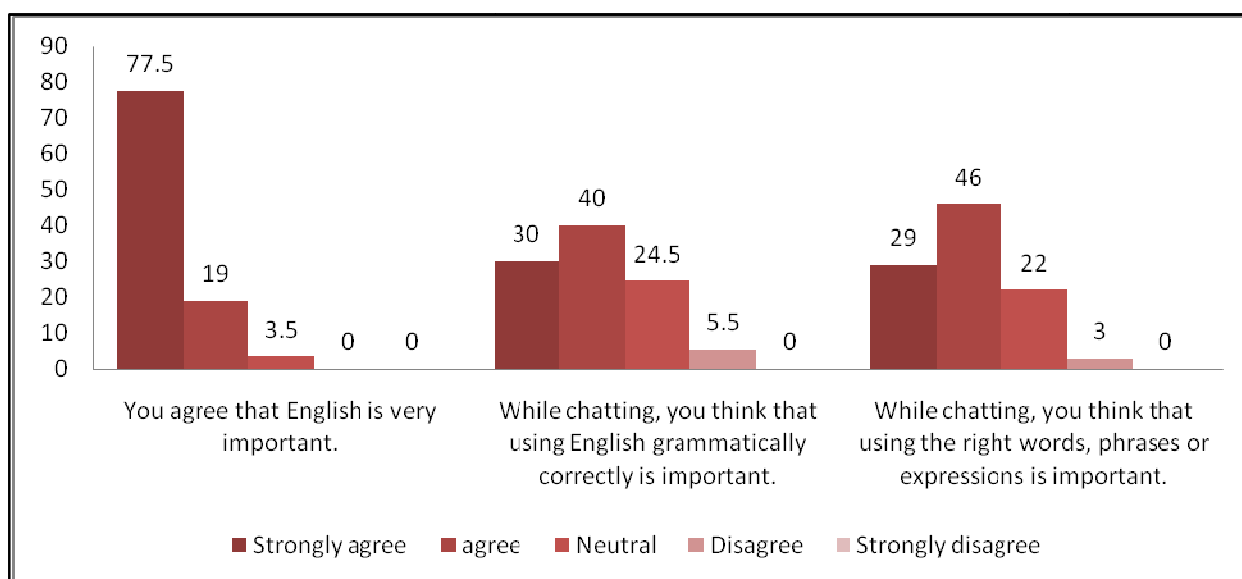


Figure 16: Attitudes towards Improved English

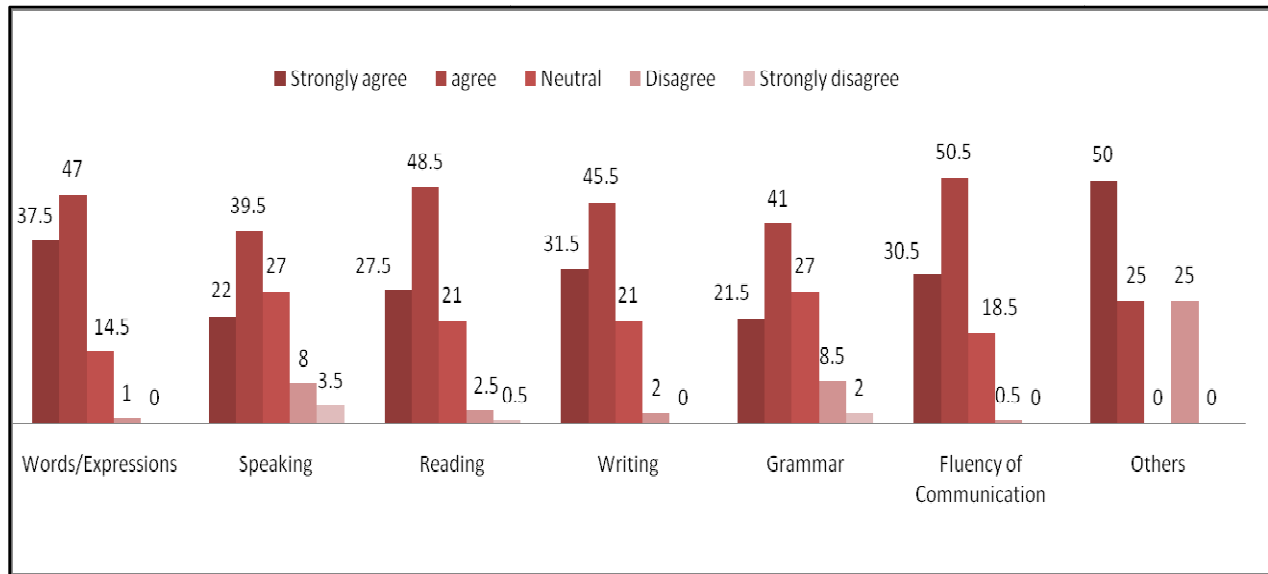
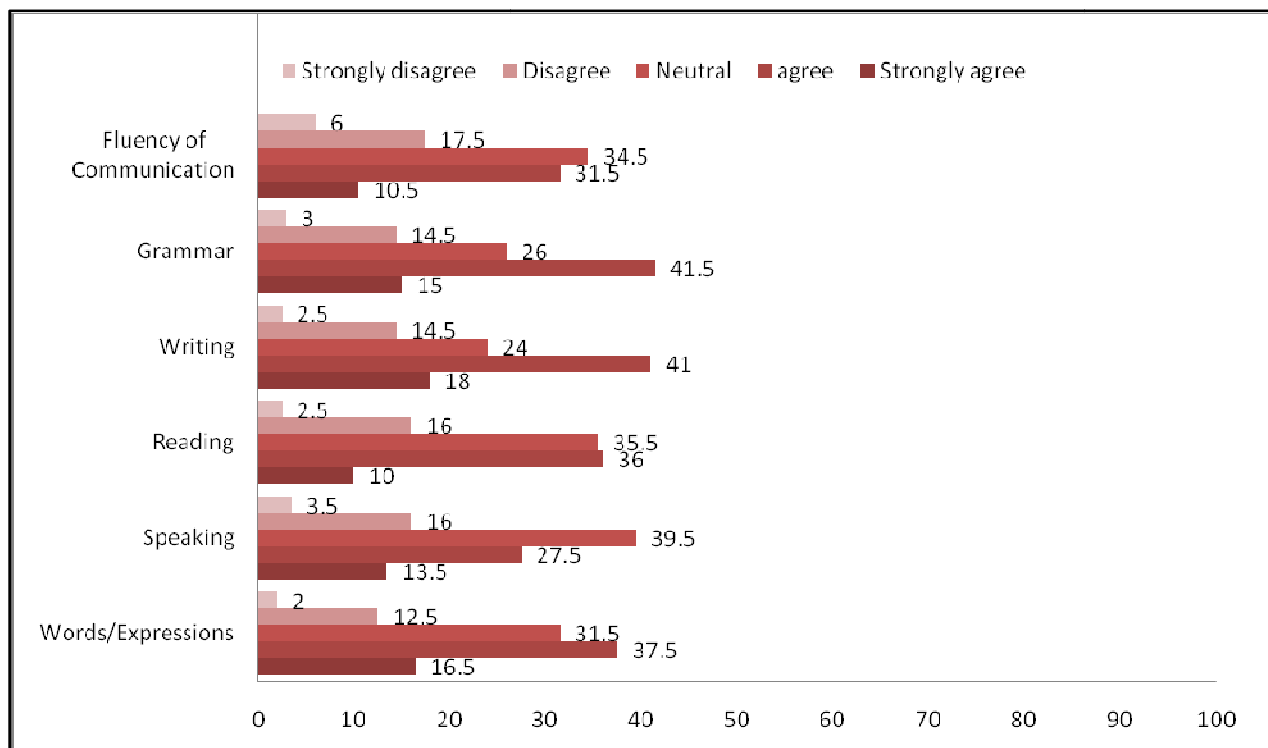


Figure 17: Attitudes towards Negative Impacts on English



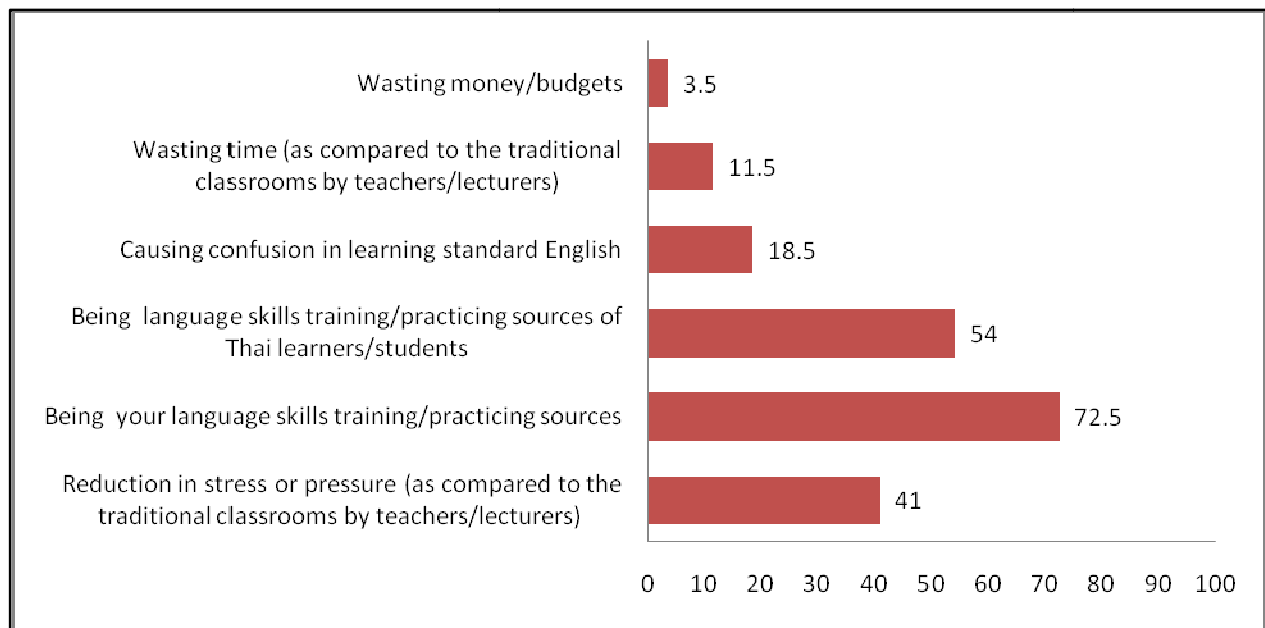
Other additional skills were also indicated typing, confidence in English talking, understanding as well as learning slang words.

Interestingly, the negative impacts on English in some aspects (as a result of using or seeing the wrong forms) were reported to be at a high level (“strongly agree” and “agree”) writing (59%), grammar (56.5 %) and words or expressions (54 %). It should be remarked that the percentages of “agree” and “neutral” in reading, fluency of communication, and words and expressions were not much different (see Figure 17).

8.6 Attitudes towards Learning English through the Internet Chat Rooms

It is found that 72.5 % of the chatters believed that the Internet chat rooms were beneficial for individual language learning, and 54 % thought that they could be employed as learning English sources for Thai students. 41% of the respondents agreed that the chat rooms helped reduce stress or pressure in learning. However, there were also some negatives sides -- 18.5 % said that learning English in the chat rooms can cause confusion on the correct usage; 11.5% thought that much more time had to be spent

Figure 18: Effects of Learning English through the Internet Chat Rooms



on learning than in traditional classroom; and 3.5 % considered it a waste of money (see Figure 18).

Most chatters (55 %) indicated that mixing English and Thai in the chat rooms had no impact on their English, and 35.5 % revealed that the chat rooms helped improve their English, rather

than making it worse (9.5 %) (see Figure 19).

Regarding the impact on their native language (the Thai language), the high number of the chatters (75%) did not find any effect on their Thai. The percentage between worse (12%) and better (13%) effects was not much different (see Figure 20).

Figure 19: Effects of Mixing English and Thai in the Chat Rooms on the English Language

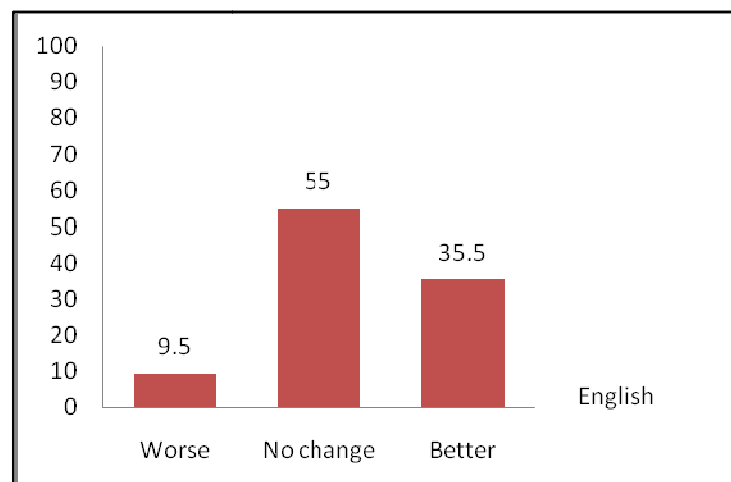
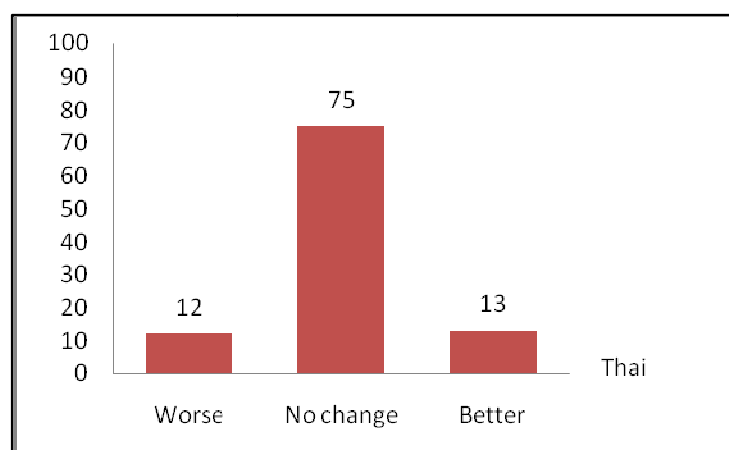


Figure 20: Effects of Mixing English and Thai in the Chat Rooms on the Thai Language (Native language)



9. Conclusion and Discussion

The study examined the motivations and attitudes of Thai people towards mixing Thai in English utterances in the chat rooms. The argumentative idea of employing the Internet chat room as another English learning source was at the same time explored. The findings not only reflect the chatters' new communicative behavior but also imply the possibility for an alternative e-learning environment as follows:

9.1 Motivations and Attitudes towards the Mixing of the Thai Language and the English Language

In this study, the chat rooms in which English is a means of communication are popular among both adults and young adults. The attitudes towards the chat rooms and the English language are rather positive, as almost half of them use the chat rooms every day for approximate 3 hours for each online connection. Their English is mostly typed in sentences and discourses. These positive attitudes and English competence might be the inspiring factors motivating them to chat in these English chat rooms, at a rather high level of structure. On this point, it seems that the traditional chat purpose is shifted since it is no longer only for the entertainment as the term 'chat' suggests. Instead, the chatters now aim at learning and sharing knowledge. This is emphasized by their direct chat messages below:

tom : can you speak english with me
tom : not karaoke

tom : i like to speak english
asuka : tom ok but give me reason why
must speak
english and no karaoke
tom : i want to practice my english

vanillaorchid 😊 : as i like to speak
more in English
vanillaorchid 😊 : as i'm thai so i can
have a chance to practice my english

somsri : my eng no good too, soda
somsri : soda, talk to me di
somsri : i want speak eng na , sod

~;+:Fay;+:~ +O : I'm not good English
but I try to chat na ja+ T^T
mink : no i'd love learn how to speak
English from you Loly Pop
freedom10 : wildcherri,my Eng. is so
poor, can you teach me that? I would
be apriciated [sic.] it
ละอองฟอง : who can speak English
with me but I'm stupid in English ja
ละอองฟอง : hahahaha becoz i want
speak eng now!!!!!!!
Jew love toon : hello i can speak eng
WesternHeart : ละอองฟอง, You can
talk to me, dear

These chat extracts show the Thai people's social positioning as English language active learners, while the chat rooms are regarded as their English learning environments. It does not mean that these chatters are able to speak perfect English, but have a positive attitude towards English and the chat rooms. This evidence is in accordance with the low percentage of the respondents' negative reasons for using the chat rooms.

Moreover, topics and chat partners can affect a type of the chat rooms. In the questionnaires, some chose to chat in the English chat rooms because they did not want to talk to any 'youngsters' on a 'childish' topic in other rooms. In other words, the topics and chat peers in these international rooms are expected to be more 'mature'. In discussing what factors make them shift to Thai during their ongoing streams of English conversations, the findings reveal an influence of real-time nature of the chat rooms -- the chatters could not think of the right English words within a short time, so switching to their native language was the expedient strategy. Besides, like in earlier studies, other factors include the specificity of the native terms and influence of the ethnic peers. On this point, code-mixing may not deserve any blames, but only serves an on-line communicative strategy -- a way people try to rapidly deliver meanings relevant to their culture and to relieve difficulty in communication. Since chatting is still for entertainment or relaxation, switching to Thai for a humorous effect in casual atmosphere is not a surprise. Yet, it is critical to see that Thai social

expectations in relation to politeness and modesty seem to be diluted in this nonvisual community. Some negative words can be expressed overtly in the native terms, but in a low percentage.

9.2 Possibility of Employing the Internet Chat Rooms as English Learning Environments

Although there are reports on communicative inconvenience and a concern about the negative effects of code-mixing, more than half of the Thai chatters believe that Internet chat rooms can be beneficial to English learning, especially in vocabulary, speaking, writing, grammar and fluency. This suggests that Internet chat rooms can be on the one hand self-learning environments in which Thai learners are no longer or less 'spoon-fed', but autonomously 'active' and 'motivated'. On the other hand, they reduce stress often found in traditional classrooms. As regards a general concern about the falling standards of the Thai and English languages, no significant impact on their Thai is reported while some respondents agree that their English would be better.

With the growth of the Internet and Information Technology, the new avenues for language learning are open wider, while the opportunities are free. Integrating virtual chat rooms into casual learning sources can bring excitement and add more to life, fostering autonomous learning further developed through practices in real situations. It is thus time for modern EFL teachers to take advantages of technology in order to provide a more stimulating learning atmosphere, which is supposed to be welcome among Thai learners,

as supported by the survey that Thai teenagers ranging in age from 15-17 were found to be the age group who used the Internet the most (The Survey of Information Technology, 2003). However, awareness of the appropriate use of the language (on how and when it is used) as well as the clear line between formality and causality is a crucial point to bear in mind, whereas the extent to which the chat rooms can provide benefits depends on attitudes, motivations and innovative minds of the individuals.

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