

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on the following topics:

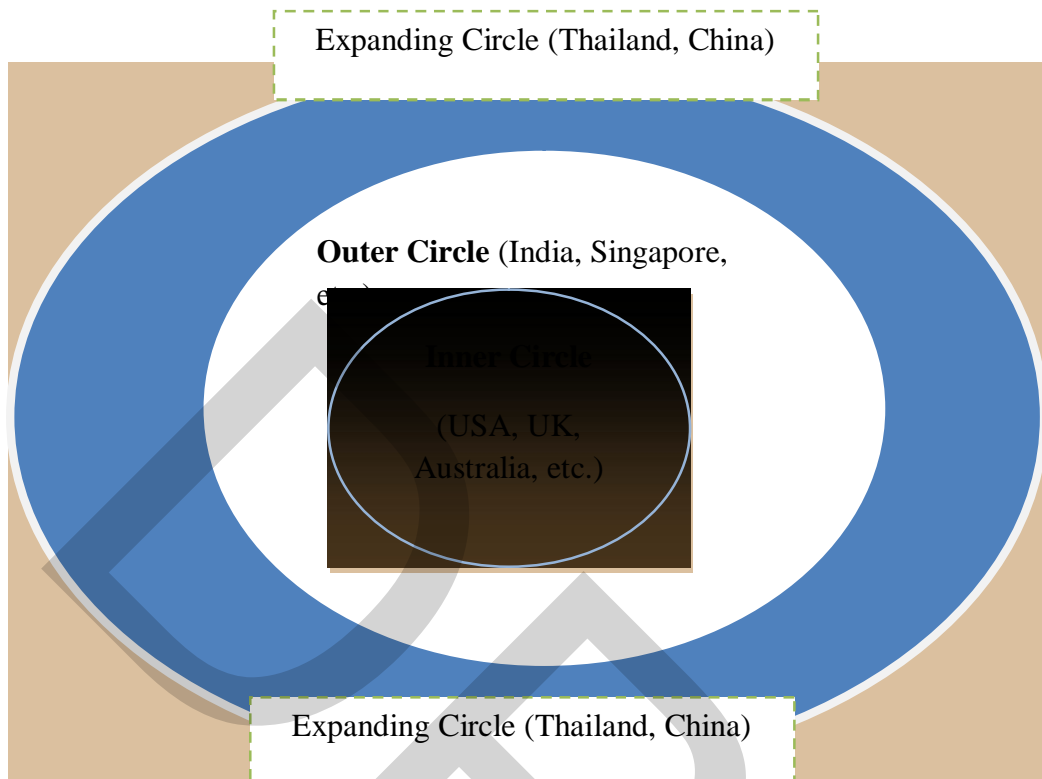
- English in Thailand
- The Role of English in the Thai Academic Communities
- Literature on the Use of English among Members of the Thai Academic Communities

2.1 ENGLISH IN THAILAND

Even though English came to Thailand during the Ayutthaya period, its influences on Thai culture were documented only during the early Rattanakosin period. At its first introduction, English was the language learned only by the ruling class. King Mongkut (Rama IV), for example, was probably the first Thai leader who used English to exchange knowledge between Thai and the Western countries (Watson, 1980). Publications in English and Thai came into existence during his reign (Prasithrathsint, 1985). After World War II, it has become a language learned by the ruling class as well as the general public.

Unlike in Singapore or Malaysia, English in Thailand is far from being its second language; it has been taught as a foreign language since its inception and it still is today. Thai students have been taught English as a foreign language. Standard Thai has been and still is the most important language in the Thai society. There are other foreign languages such as French, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, among others. Lately, Chinese has become the second most popular foreign language among Thai learners. Kachru (1985) describes the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle.

Figure 1 Three Circles of English Use According to Kachru (1985)



Based on Kachru's model (1985), countries within the inner circle are the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, among others. They provide norms and standards of English uses. The outer circle includes countries with their own norms and strong characteristics such as Singaporean English and Indian English. Thailand is one of the countries in the expanding circle. It relies on the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle. English is considered a foreign language.

In Thailand, English has also been gradually perceived as a global language. English as a global language is more than just a language for global communication (Crystal, 1997). In many countries, English has become a status symbol (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). Like in many other countries, the ability to speak or use English well in Thailand is seen as a means to enhance one's social status.

As English has become a global language, including its role as a language for academic purposes, coupled with the globalization of Thailand, Thai academics, in addition to good

knowledge of *Sanskritized Thai*, are required to know and use English well. Indeed, having sound English ability is one of the most important requirements for most Thai academics.

Nowadays, it is observed that English has permeated into all fabrics of the Thai society and culture, as evidenced by the greater amount of English words mixed with Thai words or phrases in Thai media (Kapper, 1992).

In 1992, a new organization was set up by the Thai government ---- the English Language Development Center, aiming to provide English language training for almost all professions in the kingdom. The following quote shows the main function of English perceived by a state authority, that is, English as a means for national development. The mission statement^{*}, in particular, reflects the many roles of English in the development of the country; it goes:

To promote the use of English in various professional fields, so that Thai professionals are equipped with skills and knowledge of English for the national development in various areas such as education, economy, and society.

Among the Thai academics, English is recognized as an academic language. In addition to utilizing the knowledge borrowed from the literature written in English, Thai academics generally use English words or terms in their communities. Loanwords (including loan-translated words or calques) have been used as a common practice. English, indeed, has become a language frequently used among Thai academics.

2.2 THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE THAI ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

Like academics elsewhere, Thai academics, have been using English for various purposes. In fact, they have been relying on knowledge and research findings from the West, especially the English-speaking cultures such as the US, Australia, and the UK. Being able to use English for utilitarian purposes, in addition to having excellent knowledge and skills of *Sanskritized Thai*, has been recognized as an almost indispensable requirement for one's role as a Thai academic.

^{*} From the official website of the English Language Development Center at http://www.eldc.go.th/eldc3/page/general/about_us.jsp [20 November 2009]

An online announcement of the Language Institute of Chiang Mai University about a course on academic English^{*} provides reasons why having sound English skills are important for their study.

For graduate study, in addition to learning the content of each field, students need to have reading skills necessary to read English texts for their education, researching sources of knowledge from various sources; they also need academic writing skills to write their works and to present their academic works.

There are similar training courses throughout Thailand. All graduate schools in Thailand require that candidates have necessary English skills and knowledge. Research on the learning process of Thai graduate students by Paitoon Silarat (BE 2543), for example, pointed out the need for English instruction, among others, for Thai graduate students, reasoning that they need English to access advanced and updated knowledge, which implies that students have English competence.

There are frequent discussions about the use of English among Thai academics. Research on the use of English by Thai academics, however, is still in its infancy. This study is probably the first attempt to investigate their English use across the four macro-skills, their identities, their perceived problems and difficulties, their coping ability, and their needs of English support.

2.3 LITERATURE ON THE USE OF ENGLISH AMONG MEMBERS OF THE THAI ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

Kanittha Thongsathit (BE 2538) investigated 60 graduate students' problems in conducting their master's thesis and their solutions. She found that during the stage of thesis topics selection, the main problem found was their limited English language ability. This deficiency hindered their ability to find research topics.

Naparath Dhithiwattana (BE 2539) investigated and compared the frequency and the pattern of mixing of English and Thai by lecturers of different disciplines at Kasetsart University and to study the relationship between their attitudes and behaviors of code-mixing. With regard to

^{*} The Language Institute http://www.li.chiangmai.ac.th/th/News/Academic_Thesis.html [20 November 2009]

the lecturers' attitudes toward code-mixing, it was found that their attitudes did not always correspond to their code-mixing behaviors; eight out of the sampled fifteen people had correspondence of attitude and behavior of mixing English in Thai. In other words, they code-mixed even if they considered the practice inappropriate.

Sriwilai Polmanee (BE 2544) conducted a study to find out about the needs and problems of the graduate students in two programs: the Thai language and the English language programs (n =60). The results showed that the students of the two programs were similar in their needs of the English language. The students recognized that learning English was important in their study at the graduate level.

Chirapan (1987) conducted a survey and found that among the four skills, reading was the skills that Thai graduate students needed the most. The research asked graduate students at Mahidol University about their needs, problems and instructor expectations in the academic use of English. The respondents included graduate students and lecturers in three main disciplines; Life Science, Physical Science and Applied Linguistics. Questionnaires were distributed to 154 graduate students and 71 lecturers. The findings indicated that the all four skills were necessary. Moreover, it was found that Life Science students needed to use English in a wider range of activities than other students did.

A survey conducted by Pinyosunun (2005) pointed out that one of the major causes of English language problems among Thai postgraduate students was in the lack of opportunities to use the language. The survey also noted that most students said they overcame problems in using English in an international program by self-learning. This suggested the lack of support structure for English use.

Praphasri Srino (BE 2543) investigated the use of the Internet for educational purposes of 565 graduate students at Chiang Mai University Information Technology. She found that one of the reasons for the infrequent use of the Internet was the lack of English language skills. A report on the national strategies for the development of quality education by the Office of Education Council of Thailand also pointed out that, among other things, many graduates from higher education institutions, needed to improve their language skills (Office of Education Council of Thailand, BE 2551).

The literature has reported the importance of English in graduate studies in Thailand. It must be noted that Thai graduate students have problems in their use of English, which negatively affected their ability to conduct research. Reading was found to be the most needed skill.

Summary

In summary, in Thailand, English is the most popular foreign language. It has been recognized as a means to access knowledge and exchange information between Thai and non-Thai academics. Previous research showed that reading was the most needed skill; the opportunities of English use were reported to be limited. What has been confirmed is that English is an important factor influencing the students' success of graduate study.