



Preparing Thai Students' English for the ASEAN Economic Community: Some Pedagogical Implications and Trends

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Abstract

In the globalized world, English is used in an outer and expanding circle and therefore plays a vital role in the global economy. Many parents believe that learning English can give their children chances of getting a good job and a hope for having a better standard of living. However, as the national examination or what is called "Entrance Examination" in Thailand influences teaching and learning, the use of multiple choices for grammar rules and reading is emphasized in the classroom. Little attention is paid to developing students' speaking and listening abilities since they are not assessed in the University Entrance Examination. Most of the time, L1 is the language used in the classroom, resulting in both opportunities for and threats to developing communicative competence and learning English. The notion of standard English is viewed as that used by the inner circles, leaving attention for English as used by a larger number of users in the outer and expanding circle. Therefore, this article suggests and discusses some pedagogical implications and trends for developing Thai students' communicative competence and skills and attitudes towards English in the globalized era, in the hope of preparing Thai students for the arrival ASEAN economic community in 2015 in which English is regarded as a working language.

Keywords: L1, L2, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Code-switching, Grammar translation method, English pronunciation, Accent-variation, ASEAN economic community

Introduction

English is playing a major role in Thai society because it is a compulsory subject in every school. In the globalized era, it is the working language for international conferences and organizations, advertising of global brands, tourism, etc. Many employers seek more and more Thais with 'good command of English.' English proficiency offers opportunities to have access to modern technology, communication and professional advancement (Foley, 2005, p. 226-227). In addition to this, based on Mackey (2003, p. 72), much has been made of the influence of economic power on the future of the language. The advent of the ASEAN community in 2015 is a clear reflection of globalization where 10 ASEAN member nations will open their national borders, resulting in Thai citizens having to compete against other member nations in the job markets in which candidates with English proficiency are needed. Karnnawakul (2004, p. 81) and Kimsuvan (2004, p. 79) revealed that the data for the business sector sample showed that the foreign language used and needed most was English, followed by Mandarin and Japanese respectively. It is expected that the demand for job candidates who have a high level of English proficiency will grow bigger and bigger with the arrival of the ASEAN economic community in 2015. In relation to this, Barbin & Nicholls (2012, p. 8) conducted a study about Thai students' readiness for AEC. The respondents in the study realized the importance of English language skills. In discussion of job security for Thai nationals, the fact that many ASEAN countries have a higher percentage of literacy skills in English was noted as a threat to Thai workers, given that many employers would prefer high levels of proficiency in English to meet the demands of ASEAN.

According to Nunan (2003, p. 597), English is a crucial tool for economic, social and technological advancement. English is believed to symbolize wealth and power as well as provide a better chance to get good jobs. This may make Thai many students feel insecure about their English proficiency and lose confidence because they believe that they may be at a disadvantage when it comes to competing in the labor market. Students in Cambodia who have not mastered English also fear employment opportunities will fade in the face of stiffer competition for English skills (Drenan, 2012).

Major issues of English language teaching and learning in Thailand: A gap in language policies and practices

Based on the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2542, 2545 and 2551 (A.D. 1999, 2002 and 2008), from which the language policies can be reflected, there are four main areas of foreign language learning. The first area is to use foreign languages for communication, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. The second area is to be able to harmonize the language itself with culture of the native speakers. The third area aims at using the foreign languages to link knowledge with other learning areas. The last area is that language learners are expected to be able to use the language in other situations, both in and outside the classroom as well as the global society. Upon graduation, it is hoped that Thai students are equipped with adequate communicative competences and be able to use the language communicatively in real-life settings.

However, although the ultimate goal of learning foreign languages is to be able to use the language communicatively, the students fail to have adequate command of using the language for communication, especially outside the classroom, resulting in a gap in language policies and what actually happens in the classroom. Nunan (2003, p. 589) investigated the impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. There were two ASEAN member nations in this investigation which are Malaysia and Vietnam. Thailand was not mentioned in the study. His article indicated that there is a gap existing in language policies and practices due to ineffective language instruction and inadequately trained and skilled teachers. The findings revealed a quite similar phenomenon to what happens in English language education in Thailand. Karnnawakul (2004, p. 80) and Kimsuvan (2004, p. 78) reported that a great number of Thai English teachers used Thai as a medium of instruction and were most proficient at reading and least proficient at speaking and listening. Little English was used in an English class as a result of teachers' lack of proficiency. Therefore, a lot of students encounter English in written form only and this leads Thai students to be unable to communicate effectively in spoken English. And many of them are too shy to speak out as they are afraid of making mistakes.

The more updated findings can also be drawn from Fitzpatrick (2011, p. 3), exploring how a group of Thai teachers of English conceptualized the English language policy in Thailand by investigating their practices and beliefs. He found a mismatch between the goals of the policy and what actually happens in the classroom. Fitzpatrick (2011, p. 127) discussed the communicative approach being employed in Thailand and found that many Thai English teachers find it difficult to implement the communicative approach due to the backwash effect of national examinations. This causes Thai students to feel that the aim of English language learning is to pass the national exam (Karnnawakul, 2004, p. 81; Kimsuvan, 2004: 79) and not to facilitate real world communication. Many students favor the presentation of grammar rules because they are assessed in national examinations. These facts revealed that national examinations play a vital role in learning and teaching English in Thailand. In the



national examination in Thailand, or what is known as the “Entrance Examination”, for high school students aiming for a bachelor degree, speaking and listening skills are not assessed. The mismatch of language policies and practices cause many Thai students to have insufficient command of English skills necessary for real-world communication.

Grammar translation method and communicative language teaching

This part attempts to give an overview of grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching. Grammar translation method and communicative language teaching (CLT) can be two sides of the same coin if we consider the “weak” version of CLT. Grammar translation method involves and relies heavily on teaching grammar and practicing translation. It usually focuses on reading and writing. It emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency so error correction is given by the language teachers. Little attention is paid to speaking and listening skills (Griffiths and Parr 2001, p. 247). Mother tongue or L1 is used in the language classroom as the medium of instruction with little active use of the target language. The lack of oral communication in the target language can be a weakness of this teaching method. For CLT, as its name suggests, the goal is communication. The students’ communicative competence and the fluency of the target language is the goal. However, if we look at the “weak” version of this approach, according to Nunan, (1987, p. 141), one must accept the value of grammatical explanation, error correction and drill. Based on Tan (2005, p. 109), some EFL teachers hold a misconception of CLT that L1 has no place in the classroom. In the classroom, it is undeniable that the students sharing L1 use their L1 when they do group work and pair work. This should result in negotiation of meaning of the target language.

Pedagogical issues in Thailand: Grammar-translation VS communicative English

The current status of English language teaching in Thailand in the past decades revolves around the grammar translation method although English language teaching policy in Thailand encourages teachers to use the communicative approach (Kwangsawad, 2007; Todd, as 2005 cited in Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 127). English is introduced to Thai students at an early age, mostly at the age of three in public schools in the urban areas of Thailand. However, it has been observed that the English language proficiency of Thai students is rather low when compared to many ASEAN member nations such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore (Wiriyachittra, 2002, p. 1). In regards to the upcoming of AEC in 2015, Matthuchad (2012, p. 39) conducted a survey about the learning of English to prepare Thailand for joining AEC. It was found that there are less native English speaking teachers in many schools in Thailand. In addition to this, some schools do not have native English speaking teachers at all. Some Thai teachers have low level of English language skills. Some cannot speak English. Most of the schools have a lot of native Thai teachers teaching English. Some teachers do not have enough experience about teaching English communicatively. Some schools hire Filipino teachers to teach English. This is because many schools do not have enough budgets to hire native-English speaking teachers. It was also found that most of the Thai students have rather low level of English skills, especially speaking skills as Thai teachers teaching English have a low level of English language skills themselves. To sum up, what happens in Thailand is that since learning English at early age, Thai students still lack abilities to communicate orally in English. Using L1 by native Thai teachers teaching English, emphasizing the instruction of grammar rules and error corrections given as well as

the backwash effect of entrance examinations which demand tutorial teaching and learning styles may obstruct students' communicative competence.

Opportunities for using L1 in the English classroom

In fact, using L1 to teach English does not hinder students' communicatively competence as proposed by many scholars. To clarify this, if Thai teachers teaching English are well-trained about teaching English communicatively, students may be able to use English orally although L1 is used in the classroom. Atkinson (1987, p. 243-245) pointed out that using L1 can be useful as this can bridge the gap to learn the target language. He exploited L1 on an experimental basis for many purposes and found many advantages of using L1 at an early level of language teaching and learning such as eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving instruction, co-operating among students, discussions of classroom methodology, presentation and reinforcement of language, checking sense, testing and development of useful learning strategies. To him, using L1 is "that translation techniques form a part of the preferred-learning strategies of most learners in most places."

Using L1 can play a positive role in boosting student's confidence and attitudes towards learning English. Miles (2004, p. 34-36) conducted action research to evaluate the use of L1 in the English language classroom as the average score for the class improved though he commented that it was possibly as a result of testing so soon after having taught the structures. He found that the use of L1 does not hinder learning and L1 has a facilitating role to play in the classroom and can actually foster learning by installing a sense of confidence among the students, based on trust in the teacher to support them when needed though he commented that his findings were a little biased in favor of the effective use of L1 in the English classroom.

The positive role of using L1 to develop students' confidence is also supported by Anton & Camilla (1991) and Nation (2003) cited in Morgan (2006, p. 53). They examined and proposed the positive role L1 plays in the L2 classroom where construction and scaffolding helps students use the L1 in developing strategies for making the task manageable and in cooperating to find a solution to the task. This also allows students to cooperate and work effectively together, creating a positive work climate. The use of private speech can also allow students to mediate new knowledge through verbalizing. This enables teachers and students to work together through careful and judicious use of both L1 and L2 to promote students' understanding and confidence in the L2. Additionally, Harbord (1992, p. 351) commented that allowing students to say what they really want is humanistic in the classroom, suiting individual learning styles and preferences.

Using L1 is perceived as a helpful method in teaching grammar rules for weak students and also to increase motivation. Al – Nofaie (2010, p. 74-77) surveyed the attitudes of the teachers and students towards using Arabic in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia public schools. He found that the teachers found it helpful to use L1 or Arabic to clarify difficult items for weak students so they can catch up with their friends. This also increases weak students' motivation. Based on Schweers (1999, p. 13), bringing the students' L1 such as Spanish into English classrooms has made learning English to be less of a threat. To him, using L1 can lead to positive attitudes towards of learning English and can encourage students to learn English better. In the survey, using L1 or Arabic appeared to be helpful for teaching grammar since the students could find it difficult to understand linguistic terms in English. Additionally, the teachers preferred explaining the meaning of words by using L1. For the students, it revealed that the students have positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic



in EFL class. They claimed that the role of Arabic as L1 can help reduce stress during exams. Another case of equal significance used Arabic for translating new words. This supports the belief that students prefer to learn new words through translation which could be a faster strategy. Looking for new meanings in a bilingual dictionary can be time-consuming.

Another support of using L1 to explain grammar rule is a case study by Choomthong, 2011, which aimed to investigate learning strategies of Thai students in coping with the use of “English passive voice”. It was found that successful language learners used translation strategy or used the Thai passive marker, *thùk*, to see if the English passive voice construction is needed in gap-fill tests. This gives the students the opportunity to check the target language structure with its closest meaning in their L1. The positive role of using L1 is that not only does it make students better understand and help teachers explain grammar rules and also lower anxiety of the language learners. To Cook (2010, p. 55), translation is a transfer of meaning from one language to another. Translation or using L1 in English classroom is necessary for communication between languages. He argued that it is unfair to ignore the use of L1 in the classroom as this presents an effective means of language teaching and learning as well as the maintenance of identity.

It is obvious that L1 can be used for many purposes. Treethawewongkul (2011, p. 26) examined novice teachers’ classroom language for their L1 use in an English classroom. It was found that teachers used L1 for many purposes such as to enhance students’ understanding and motivation, to maintain discipline, to highlight important points, to overcome communication breakdown and to save time as there were many factors influencing their choices of using L1 for example, time constraints and student factors. Although it is inevitable for Thai teachers to use Thai to teach English in the classroom, if they are well-trained, using L1 can be, to some extent, beneficial for students to become proficient in English.

Threats to using L1 in the English classroom

Although using L1 can be advantageous to both students and teachers, there are some arguments against using L1 in the English class. To begin with, it wastes too much valuable class time that would be better spent on the target language. This is sometimes referred to as the time spent on task management. Too much reliance on L1 can result in fossilization of an interlanguage. Thinking in L1 also inhibits thinking directly in the target language. The main objection to translation as a teaching method is therefore that this inhibits the development of the ability to think directly in the new language. In the survey about teachers and students attitudes towards using L1 in the EFL classroom conducted by Al – Nofaie (2010: 77), many students agreed that boring lessons become more boring when Arabic is used. This could be a sign that the students were motivated to learn English because they wanted their teachers to use English even in boring classes. In other words, boring lessons would be more interesting and challenging when English is used as the medium of instruction.

The harmful effect of using and encouraging students to think in an L1 can be seen in the study of Choomthong (2011, p. 80). In her study, although it was found that high-ability students used L1 by translating the English sentence by adding the Thai passive marker, *thùk*, to see if the English passive voice construction and meaning were needed, they failed to apply the language use to other English passive voice usage or in other contexts. They were unable to transfer linguistic knowledge by thinking in the L1 to other language contexts and usages. To some extent, thinking in L1 can hinder the development of the target language.

Supports for using L2 in the classroom

There has been some research into students' perception of teachers' language use in the classroom and it was found out that many students favor the use of English in the English classroom. In the study of Tsukamoto (2011, p. 152), which took place in a private university in Japan, most English teachers tried to maximize the use of L2 in the classroom. In the study, a paper-based questionnaire was administered to two groups of English major students on the last day of the classes and the students were allowed to use Japanese to write comments. The results revealed that most students had positive attitudes towards the use of English by the teachers in class. They seemed to be pleased to be able to practice their speaking and to develop their listening skills. The students expressed the development of listening skills and speaking skills during and after classes. They were satisfied with the use of language in the classroom the purpose of which was to increase language exposure. It is very interesting to find out that Japanese students in the study were aware that English-only interaction comes from the need to develop listening and speaking skills.

Another study which supported the use L2 in the classroom by the students was conducted by Mahmoudi (2011, p. 139) in Iran at pre-university level. The study used classroom observations and interviews to collect the data. It was found that both high-achieving and low-achieving students' attitudes towards using L2 in the English classes were similar. They supported the idea that L2 should be highly prioritized in L2 classes. The Iranian university students were reluctant to use L1 in L2 classes, believing that one minute spent using L1 would mean one minute less exposure to L2. The students of the study emphasized that in the context of English learning in Iran, where students are solely exposed to L2 in English classes, L1 should be used as little as possible.

Pedagogical implications and trends

Devoting years to explaining grammar rules and practicing reading comprehension using Thai language as a medium of instruction may not efficiently boost Thai students' ability to communicate orally in English. Though many Thai students are well-equipped with grammar rules and reading skills, L1-Thai students need more exposure to English during limited class time. English should be used more often in English classrooms to give students more opportunities to process English receptively and naturally to lead them to negotiation of meaning in English. It is about time to prepare them for oral-aural communication in order to meet the demands for English used in the workplace in the upcoming ASEAN community in 2015. Here are some suggestions.

(1) The effect of backwash and language testing implication

According to Hughes, (1989, p. 1), "the effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash. Backwash can be harmful or beneficial. If the test is regarded as important, then the preparation for it can come to dominate all teaching and learning activities." This may be a good idea to make use of the backwash effect of the entrance examination for high school students and also, for the National English proficiency test¹ that every university student will have to take. Testing can be regarded as one of the most

¹ It is the exam that university students in Thailand will take at any time and any number of times they wish to take. The test results will not be shown in the transcript but will be used to apply for a job and to further higher education in Thailand.



powerful means of shaping language behaviors. Therefore, it is proposed that the listening and speaking skills of English language learners need to be assessed and included in both tests. They could be done in an integrated manner or separately. This can encourage English language students to “speak out” in classroom and hopefully this can help them become more active students. Schools and stakeholders can prepare their students to achieve these skills and be able to “use” the language communicatively, rather than reciting and memorizing the language rules and doing drills. Here, administrators should develop the assessments by having more aural-oral elements. This is hoped to encourage Thai students and teachers to give more importance to speaking and listening skills as they appear in the test. They can devote more time to practice and “use” English orally. Although testing of listening and speaking is time-consuming and requires a lot of resources, computer and technology can be used in the syllabus design for language teaching and testing. Galaczi (2010, p. 40) agreed that computer-based oral tests have a strong advantage over their face-to-face counterparts in terms of reliability due to the uniformity and consistency of computer-delivered tests and computer-scored performances. Human-scored tests can also have acceptably high reliability coefficients, but an investment needs to be made into a cyclical, rigorous system of examiner training, standardization and monitoring. Additionally, Tabari & Tabari (2014, p. 378) illustrated the reconstruction of pedagogical choices and structure by adopting a computerized program which allows language instructors to create and administer quizzes and tests. The benefit of creating a computerized testing program for language courses stems first from the need to maximize the use of the teacher’s time and resources and second to give students a chance to better prepare for listening and speaking exams. However, making use of technology to support language teaching and testing require the collaboration between an expert programmer and a teacher trained in a second language pedagogy. Most importantly, more funds should be provided for local schools and universities if Thailand wants to be an educational hub.

Another issue of language testing in Thailand can be seen from the effects of using multiple choices to test speaking and listening. From decades of the English Entrance examination in Thailand, it has been observed that the multiple-choice test format hinders language learners from developing the ability to speak. Although scoring can be reliable, quick, and economical (Hughes, 1989), the backwash can be harmful to learning and teaching. Practice of multiple-choice items will not be the best way for students to improve their English command and one hopes this will serve to motivate teachers to use more L2 as the medium of instruction in the classroom. The effect of backwash is discussed by Prapphal (2008, p. 129) as this can be observed in the university entrance examination that the teaching and learning process in the last semester of the last academic year of Mattayom 6 (Grade 12) is that many schools focuses on reviewing the content and format of the university entrance exam and there are many cram schools opening for this reason. Of course, the use of a multiple-choice format for grammar tests and reading tests is highlighted. There seems to be no place for developing speaking and listening competence among the students. Prapphal (2008, p. 131) also found that nowadays TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS are standardized tests which are popular in Thailand. There are an increasing number of test centers in Bangkok and other parts of the country. Taking TOEFL iBT and IELTS for granted, though the backwash effect of these tests exists, there are opportunities for Thai high school students aiming to enter universities to develop their speaking and listening skills as they are assessed in an integrated fashion in these tests. It is proposed that the face of English language testing in Thailand is adjusted to meet the need of English for real communication. And this may look like the integration of four skills, as seen in the TOEFL iBT speaking test, which involves several language skills upon the completion of the task. To illustrate, a test taker may be

asked to read a short passage, listen to a short lecture and then provide an oral summary and compare and contrast the main points from the reading and listening. Moreover, being aware that English is used internationally by non-native speakers of English, the test takers are exposed to accent-variation in the listening test, signaling authentic use for English in the globalized era.

(2) The pronunciation of English as an International language (EIL)

Nowadays, English is a global language and is spoken by more non-native speakers of English. English is viewed as an international language rather than a foreign language. In this regard, Jenkins (2000, p. 206) emphasized convincingly that anyone teaching pronunciation for EIL should be aware that phonological variation is important. To her, accent variation is the rule and conformity is the exception; therefore phonological transfer, the influence of L1 pronunciation on L2 English accent is unavoidable. Based on this fact there is nothing wrong with L2 pronunciation that does not conform to native speaker accent but that varies in the direction of the speakers' own L1. Such variation does not mean 'errors' if the variation is in areas designated non-core. L2 variation can be regarded as L2 regional accent. Non-native speaker accents are therefore entitled to parity with native speaker regional accents. And because EIL speakers have L2 regional accent, the most relevant models are provided by fluent bilingual speakers sharing the students L1. It is possible to give students' exposure of a wide range of non-native speaker regional accents in order to prepare students for real world communication. Jenkins' point should shed light on teaching English pronunciation in a speaking class in Thailand that students need more exposure to English spoken by other member ASEAN countries, such as Laos, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, and so on.

The idea of English as an international language is also reflected in the work of Boriboon (2011, p. 51) about language, ideology and domination. He pointed out that the domination of English as a foreign language paradigm in Thailand does not match with communicative needs in the globalization era. To him, English should be taught as an international language (EIL) as English is used by world citizens and this is compatible with globalization in which English is used internationally in a workplace by many non-native English speakers. Thai teachers teaching English should equip their students with the confidence and readiness to use English communicatively. The idea of having native-like pronunciation should be minimized in the English classroom since this could be an obstacle to learning English successfully. It is suggested that the teachers point out to their students that there are many successful students in the non-native speaking countries speaking English with accents. Therefore, the teachers should not discourage their students from speaking English with Thai accents, but rather point out that accent-variation is acceptable. What the teachers should do when teaching English pronunciation is provide examples of successful Thais who use English efficiently and fluently even though they do so with accents. This can inspire and boost students' confidence in using and speaking English. Pronouncing English appropriately, not necessarily as native speakers do, should be at the heart of teaching English as an international language.

An empirical study carried out by Nomniam (2012, cited in Nomniam 2013, p. 587), aimed to explore Thai EFL teachers' reflections on teaching English pronunciation at a primary school level. This showed that Thai primary school teachers prefer to teach standard English pronunciation to their young students in order to promote students' effective communication. According to this fact, the teachers face challenges in teaching pronunciation due to the language learning behavior, young age, parental dependence and ethnic and



linguistic differences. The study suggests that appropriate training for both teachers' and students' English proficiency development can promote positive attitudes towards teaching and learning of English for intercultural communication in the globalized era. Drawing upon the critical reviews by Jenkins (2000), Boriboon (2011) and Nomnian (2013), though teaching English standard pronunciation to young students enhances students' effective communication, teachers, parents, and any stakeholders should not forget that English is viewed as a global language which is used by non-native speakers, perhaps in the expanding circle, and therefore students should be prepared for accent-variation, since this can promote communication and strengthen Thai students' confidence to speak English.

Drawing on the concept of teaching standard English, Jindapitak (2013, p. 118-124) agreed that it is unquestionable that English functions as an international language in the globalized world. English is used as a global language for wider communication. In her study, the notion of standard English construed by the Thai territory English majors was investigated and it was revealed that all participants seemed to voice the idea that the concept of English refers to varieties of English spoken by native speakers in the inner circle, such as American English, British English, Australian English, Canadian, and New Zealand English. Some students in the study justified that American and British English are regarded as standard English. Based on the findings, the students believe that the native-speaker of English is the authority of the language. The global role of English which can be used in the outer circle and expanding circle was not reflected in the notion of standard English. The language implication for this study is that English teaching should go beyond the construct of the native speakers. It should be made clear that the goal of learning English is not just to communicate with the native-speaker of English alone or to integrate into the inner circle community. The study mentioned the context of ASEAN of which Thailand is a member and proposed that local varieties of English should be focused on in addition to concentrating on ASEAN or regional discourse (Jindapitak, 2013). Students could then bear this fact in mind when giving importance to negotiating the cultural and pragmatic norms to the people in the community rather than people in the inner circle (Jindapitak, 2013).

(3) Code-switching in the English classroom

It is suggested that Thai English teachers use more English in the language classroom to set up an English-speaking environment in the language classroom. English should be mainly used in class while Thai language is permitted and used to serve some functions, such as to benefit low proficiency students. This is to make the students get used to accent and pronunciation as well as internalize language rules and usage from Thai English teachers. This may, to some extent, be similar to how small children learn their first language. Using English in the classroom benefits the students as they can acquire the language in a natural way by subconsciously picking up language rules and vocabulary. Although a lot of research revealed that many Thai English teachers are not confident of their spoken English, this is a good opportunity for teacher development. Thai English teachers can prepare lesson plans that include activities or tasks for the students to accomplish and to motivate them to use English more communicatively and orally.

However, the choice of language to be used in the English classroom is still controversial. For the teachers who think that using English in the classroom may not seem possible because of the purpose of the language class and students' proficiency, they can code-switch from time to time. In other words, using English as the main medium of instruction in practice, the teachers may switch to Thai. This is also to benefit low proficiency students. In the context of foreign language classroom, it refers to the alternate use of the first language and the target language, a means of communication by language teachers when the

need arises (Jingxia, 2010: 10). It can be said that code-switching is a teaching method in which the teacher shifts from the L1 to the target language in case English-only is not possible because of the students' lack of English proficiency. Switching to Thai can benefit low proficiency students to some extent.

In the study of Jingxia (2010, p. 19) and Yao (2011, pp. 21-24), it was found that switching to L1 necessarily serves some basic functions which may be beneficial in foreign language learning environments, for instance, using L1 for translating unknown vocabulary items, explaining grammar rules, managing the class, emphasizing some points and indexing a stance of empathy or solidarity towards students. Also, Yao (2011, p. 21) stated when encountering the cultural points in texts, teachers in preferred to use L1 to illustrate them better.

However, none of the teachers in the study mentioned the goal of the course taught in the classroom. For example, if the course focuses on oral-aural communication, the teachers may reduce the use of L1 and encourage the students to use English in class. Although the use of L1 in class is found to be useful to students for understanding grammar rules and defining new vocabulary, the teachers may limit its use to give students exposure to English as much as possible in a speaking course. As a lot of research suggests that the use of L1 is useful for students and serves many functions and provides scaffoldings, it is interesting to find out if switching to L1 can improve the speaking competence of the students.

In Thailand, where English is taught by Thai teachers, it is unavoidable to use Thai with students in the English classroom. It is not wrong to do so and it may provide scaffolds to students as well as reduce students' anxiety. However, the use of L2 or English should also be maximized. This can be done by shaping the curriculum to focus on speaking and listening skills. It is believed that the objectives of each course can shape the teachers' teaching methods and the language use in the classroom.

Conclusion

As the ASEAN community in 2015 approaches, English will not be just a subject that is learned and taught in the classroom, but one which is applied to other areas such as English in the workplace and English for social usage. It is obvious that English is used by more non-native English speakers i.e. in the expanding and outer circles. The paradigm of teaching and learning English has changed. Thai teachers and students should be aware of this fact and should adjust teaching and learning methods in line with the change. Practicing the multiple choice format for entrance examination with the focus on grammar rules and reading comprehension with little attention to speaking and listening skills may cause Thai students to lag behind their contemporaries in neighboring countries in the job market. Also, using Thai language to teach English should be minimized as English teachers may code-switch from Thai to English from time to time because this can give students as much exposure to English as possible, in the hope that this can enhance students' speaking and listening skills as well as communicative competence. Finally, teachers need to adjust the students' attitude towards English to understand that English varieties, not the standard one, are equally valid in the globalized world. Becoming a part of the global economy may not be easy, but if these facts are conveyed to the stakeholders and educational administration, there should be a place for Thailand to take its rightful position in the ASEAN economic community.



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