

# Perceptions of Identity and Foreign Language Use in Thai Hotel Workers: Insights into Sociocultural Understandings of Foreign Language Learning

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## Abstract

The various ways in which the English language is used across the world has given rise to an assortment of foreign language variations and personalities. In considering the current position English has as the dominant world language, much attention has been directed into studies of World Englishes and to the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2001). In contrast, few studies have been done into the roles English fulfils and the attitudes towards it in the countries in which it operates, and how these impact the identities of its users. In order to address this lack of localised empirical research, the present study attempts to investigate the attitudes and opinions of local speakers of English as a foreign language. Semi-structured interviews were administered to provide a picture of the positive and negative ways English impacts upon the lives and identities of ten hotel workers in a tourist resort in Thailand. Emerging themes were categorised and then explored with reference to current literature and beliefs. The study indicates that although the English language is welcomed in Thailand for the opportunities that it creates, there is still a great deal of power attached to the language, which may well lead to negative feelings of inferiority. With reference to the interview data, traditional interlanguage theory is critiqued on the basis that it is disconnected from the language user and fails to include critical social-cultural influences on authentic language. It is suggested that to fully explain English language use in the Global World today, we need to understand second language acquisition in a different way. This involves a move away from traditional language theory that makes broad assumptions about the foreign language user in all contexts and ignores the variation present throughout the world. The study concludes that more emphasis is needed on a sociolinguistic perspective to language acquisition in which cultural representations of English are accepted and in which local identities are empowered.

# 1. Introduction

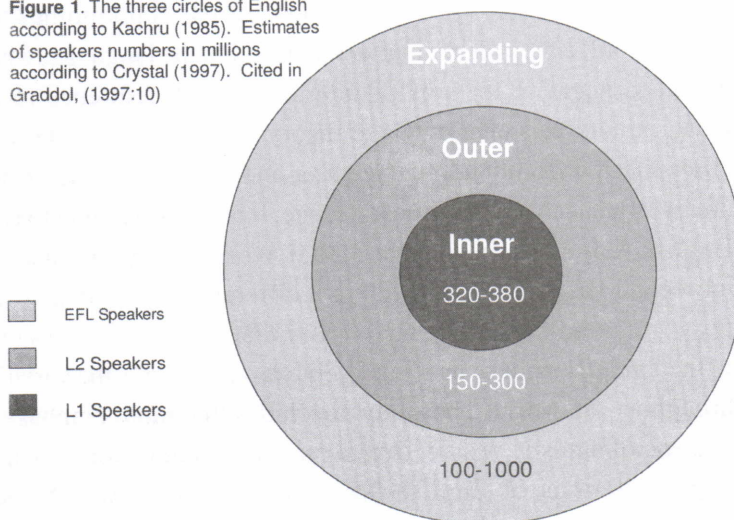
## 1.1 Background

We live in an incredible world at a very exciting time. There has never been a situation as this in history where ordinary people from such diverse countries as Ecuador and Laos can share education, culture, beliefs, dreams and love as it is possible today. Since the last world war, the need for a common system of intelligible communication, particularly for international and business communities, has thrust English to the forefront, chiefly due to the dramatic expansion in the roles of English as a language of international communication in trade, diplomacy, sport, science and technology (Graddol, 1997). A person is now more likely to be in touch with the latest thinking and research in a subject by learning English than by learning any other language. With advances in the internet and air travel, the language has been brought closer to local people than ever before (Crystal, 1997). Shifts in the distribution of English today mean that, “there are many more speakers of World Englishes and people who use English for international communication than there are native speakers of it” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 1).

As more and more people use English and adopt it as a common means of communication, it becomes shaped and moulded to suit its specific needs. Its use, alongside existing languages and ways of speaking, influences the English that is produced as well as the demands of specific cultural pragmatic situations.

Kachru (1985) distinguishes between three types of English speakers. The inner circle countries use English as a first language (L1) (e.g. UK & USA), the outer circle countries use it as a second language (L2) or language of administration (e.g. Nigeria & India) and the expanding circle countries speak English as a foreign language (e.g. France & Thailand).

**Figure 1.** The three circles of English according to Kachru (1985). Estimates of speakers numbers in millions according to Crystal (1997). Cited in Graddol, (1997:10)



According to Kachru (1985), it is the expanding circle or foreign language users which will increasingly shape the fate of English and strengthen the claims of English as an international language (EIL). In Thailand, English is used for academia, business, and as a common language for tourism. As more and more people in Thailand adopt English as a second language, the way this language is used locally and globally is of ever increasing importance for its users and language educators.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In my experience travelling through South East Asia, and in particular Thailand, I have found it fascinating to observe the myriad of ways people use English to satisfy their own particular needs. Living away from the standards that an official language promotes, there exists a remarkable range of lively personalities and linguistic interactions, flavoured by diverse accents and interesting grammatical concoctions. It seems that English (or a version of English) has become adapted by many local people rather successfully with little formal education and in a way that seems to incorporate the local culture. Many people in South East Asia struggle to find the time or are unable to pay for official language classes, but despite this, it seems that English is becoming adopted and shaped rather successfully by local people often driven by the economic rewards that a modest command of the language can bring.

In the traditional view of language learning based on an idealized native speaker's competence (Bloomfield, 1933; Canale & Swain 1980; Chomsky, 1986; Hymes, 1974), many English language users exist in a state of developing second language knowledge known as "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972). According to interlanguage theory (IL), the English of many of the L2 English speakers in Thailand would be classified as deviant and linked to L1 interference or developmental stages of language acquisition. Many of the deviant language utterances produced, for example, "What you do?" (What are you doing?) seem systematic and evident of learner English. On the other hand, there also appears to be a cultural and social element to the 'errors' that are encountered, one that seemed to bear little resemblance to the amount of time that people have been using English. It seems that, often with minimal amounts of formal tuition and operating with an amount of linguistic freedom, the interlanguages of many English users in South East Asia have diversified incorporating local structures and localized expressions. Many of these variations in English, traditionally seen as 'errors' and features of a learners' interlanguage, may be understood differently as 'authentic' language use expressed as cultural representations of English emerging from the local context (Tan, 2005).



### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

In this study, I explore the concepts of interlanguage and socialization into the target language community from the perspective of a group of hotel staff at a popular tourist resort in Thailand. I investigate what factors may influence their English use, how they position themselves as English users in addition to considering what English model they see as an appropriate target in their context of use. In particular, I investigate whether local English users regard their interlanguage as one of a growing number of World Englishes (Kirkpatrick, 2007), or whether they view the English of their speech community as deficient and fossilized (Selinker, 1992).

### 1.4 Research Questions

This study proposes to answer the following research questions:

1. How have the previous experiences of Thai hotel workers both as language learners and language users shaped their current identities in the foreign language environment in which they operate?
2. How do foreign language users in the expanding circle perceive the English that they use? How valued do Thai hotel workers feel as English users?
3. To what degree do cultural, social and linguistic influences impact upon the English that is used in an expanding circle country such as Thailand?
4. How do the opinions of the participants relate to current notions of World Englishes and appropriate targets for education?

### 1.5 Scope of the Study

Second language acquisition has long been dominated by cognitive views of learning which are very much based within the positivist paradigm of inquiry (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 44). In order to understand how the participants feel about the way they use English in the foreign language context of the hotel and to explore any issues emerging, it was necessary to pursue a personal line of inquiry where areas of interest could be explored without the constraints of replicability and validity. In this study, rather than drawing on causal relationships between psychological and social variables, varying learner interlanguage will be viewed within the context of the learners' broader life circumstances and goals (Benson & Nunan, 2004). It is therefore situated within the interpretative paradigm of research, which assumes that subjective meanings shape action (Richards, 2003). The research group presents a collection of individuals that function daily within the hospitality industry and use English with a range of people from a range of countries and different linguistic backgrounds. It is hoped that by keeping the study within this specific context it will help draw out common issues, which can then be applied more holistically.



## 1.6 Definition of Terms

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELT	English Language Teaching
IL	Interlanguage
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLL	Second Language Learning
SLLG	Second Language Learning group
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TLG	Target Language Group

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Interlanguage Theory

Selinker (1972) uses the term ‘interlanguage’ to describe the pathway through language acquisition in which a learner progresses from their first language towards a second language target. Learners are viewed as moving towards their goals along a set path passing through certain developmental sequences, which seem to be largely systematic and universal (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). It is true that a great deal of variation is found amongst the utterances of individuals who seem liable to switch between a range of correct and incorrect forms over long periods of time, indicating their gradual progression towards language targets.

Some of the forms of language learning fail to progress any further along the imagined pathway and seem to become stuck, exhibiting no change from deviant forms: a process generally known as language fossilization. According to Selinker (1972), fossilization is the “regular reappearance or re-emergence in IL productive performance of linguistic structures which were thought to be eradicated” (p. 36). These forms are thought to emerge when IL users fail to monitor their performance. Fossilization is seen to be a general cessation of interlanguage learning, which results in a learner displaying intermediate characteristics of their progression towards the target language (Figure 1 of Han, 2004, p. 15).

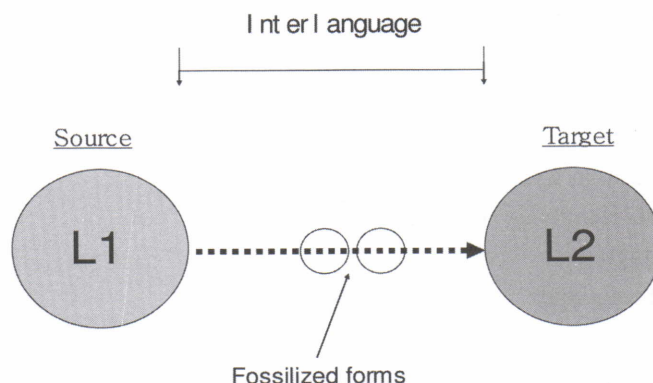


Fig. 1. Diagrammatical representation of Interlanguage based on Selinker (1972).

Learner error was originally thought to be a result of language transfer from L1, a belief deeply rooted in behaviourist theories and notions of ‘habit forming’. In the 1970’s, this was challenged by the idea of developmental sequences of language learning in which learners’ errors were similar to those of a child learning their L1 (Benson, 2002). It is now considered that both processes do occur but that interlanguage is a much more complex phenomenon involving the above processes as well as involving affective considerations, such as identity.

In this view of language acquisition, the attainment in language learning is ultimately measured against a native-like state and any level below this is characterized by general failure. According to this view, most adult learners can only hope to achieve a high level of fossilized interlanguage or incomplete success, a feeling that can be “devastating and de-motivating for students” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 188). With this fact in mind, it seems, therefore, that having an unattainable target although helpful in theoretical terms may serve to negatively influence the learning process by de-motivating students. Additionally, as English is now being learnt as a Lingua Franca, it is not occurring in the same closed environments as it once was. The influences that can potentially affect the language use of L2 speakers, especially in the expanding circle situation are much more than purely cognitive constructs like L1 interference. Global English users are likely to be using English with a whole range of different nationalities and not just native speakers of English, so may not aspire to the same targets we imagine language learners did in the past. It is indeed perhaps highly controversial and monolithic today to view the output of a whole speech community as “fossilized” against a native-speaker target (Jenkins, 2006).



## 2.2 The Socio-Cultural Perspective to Fossilization

There are a number of researchers that link fossilization with the social concepts of identity and culture. Tan (2005) criticizes the impressions given by researchers of learner corpora that “learner language is by default inauthentic, unnatural, and does not exhibit native-like language behaviour” (p. 133). She suggests that a definition of “authentic” language use should focus on “the genuine use of language to reflect the internal culture of the people in their local environment” (p. 133). Tan’s criticism of learner corpora and the concept of authentic language use based on some perceived standard norms highlights the danger of a monolingual bias (Kachru, 1994) when analyzing learner error. She argues that quite often language which is considered unnatural and unauthentic is based upon criteria which originate from imperialistic assumptions about the ownership of English, rather than its present role as a Lingua Franca. Tan’s paper (2005) demonstrates that the society in which a learner operates can have large impacts on the use of foreign language in their own contexts. It also highlights a point that all teachers working in foreign countries need to be aware of the fact that a consideration of the practices and beliefs of the local culture will provide a better understanding of why learners use a foreign language in the way that they do.

## 2.3 Acculturation into the Target Language Community

Schumann (1978) argues that there is a link between acculturation into the target language community and fossilization. In his study of an adult Costa Rican immigrant (named Alberto) in the United States, Schumann postulates the acculturation model as to an explanation for the persistence of variant forms. Social distance between the Second Language Learning Group (SLLG) and the Target Language Group (TLG) was seen as a dominant factor in understanding acculturation, which in Schumann’s (1978) view would lead to language learning. If the SLLG has a higher status in terms of political, cultural, economic and technical power than the TLG, then members are not likely to learn the language of their hosts (Block, 2007, p. 55). Less status would lead to greater pressure to learn the host language and perhaps feelings of inferiority. The ideal position was seen to be somewhere in between these two groups, where the SLLG can learn the host language under relatively equal conditions. In learning English as a foreign language in Thailand, it seems reasonable to consider acculturation in a similar way, although it is operating in terms of a foreign language. Equally the glorification of English and the distancing from Thai language and culture may only serve to distance the two groups, possibly making it undesirable for individuals who feel subordinate to the TLG.

## 2.4 Sociolinguistic Fossilization

Preston (1989) views the case of Schumann’s Alberto as one of *social fossilization* which occurs when adults feel little acceptance to the TLG and in feeling alienated; “gain usually only enough proficiency to carry out basic instrumental needs” (p. 255). This is

contrasted against the competent bilingual, “whose fossilized forms represent a more subtle construction of the variability which characterizes his or her identity in the speech community” (p. 255). *Sociolinguistic fossilization* (p. 255) occurs as a will to maintain a learners’ identity, a deliberate attempt to express the L1 identity of the language user. According to Preston (1989), “It is likely that the optimum performance for such a speaker will be variably nearly L2-like interlanguage which carries with it nevertheless, fossilized evidence of the eventual non-L2 identity of the speaker” (p. 255). Although I am well aware of the struggles Thai students have in learning English, I would also suggest that Preston’s sociolinguistic fossilization is an additional element influencing the variant language output discovered in the bilingual hotel workers. In expressing a cultural representation of English reflecting their Thai identities, these workers may well be satisfying the balance between the TLG and their Thai nationalities.

## 2.5 Identity and Ownership

Norton (2000) uses the term ‘identity’ to refer to “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). In her opinion, SLA theorists have struggled to develop a comprehensive theory that integrates the language learner and the language learning context. Relations of power between the SLLG and TLG are seen as having been largely avoided, which are often related to concepts such as race and social class. In this view “language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning” (Heller, 1987 cited in Norton, 2000, p. 5).

In considering the learners’ second language identity, it is important to get an idea of how much they feel that they have ownership and command over their new language. In the opinion of Widdowson (1994), as English is now used as an international language, its development throughout the world has little to do with native speakers. For any nation to claim custody over the language would be to “arrest its development and so undermine its international status” (p. 385). If learners of English cannot claim ownership of the language, they might not consider themselves legitimate speakers of that language (Bourdieu, 1977 cited in Norton, 1997, p. 422) and hence may always be operating within the linguistic shadow of native speakers. As I have already mentioned, Tan (2005) expresses these notions with regard to authenticity in Thai English speech. This is a crucial argument to me, because by not giving learners the freedom to adapt the new language into their existing identities, we are limiting them by preventing language uptake and killing linguistic creativity. English should belong to the people who speak it (Norton, 1997), to do with it what they desire; a process that will always be influenced by the context and cultures of operation.



### **3. Procedures**

#### **3.1 Subjects**

Ten volunteers from a small hotel on the island of Phuket in the south of Thailand took part in the study. Two of the participants were male and eight female. The jobs that the staff do involve using English for meeting and greeting guests, serving food and drinks, answering the telephone, dealing with any problems or issues arising and general conversation to welcome guests. The length of time that the staff have worked there and their English ability often directly reflect the types of interactions that they can partake in. In this way, some staff are required to consult the supervisor to deal with issues which require a linguistic competence beyond a simple transactional one. Although many of the participants went to university, their English fluency was generally very low before they started work at the hotel and a certain amount of on the job training has helped develop necessary language skills. Four of the staff worked before in other service jobs, such as shop keeping and working in a local restaurant, in which English was not necessary and subsequently their foundation of English is not so strong. All of the staff have observable accents and grammatical deviants from native speaker English, although this rarely impinges on intelligibility. Pseudonyms are used throughout the discussion of results to ensure confidentiality.

#### **3.2 Research Tool**

Themes drawn up from the relevant literature and from the research questions were used to form the basis of semi-structured interviews with the intention of providing open responses to questions (see Appendix). Having the main themes fixed whilst allowing the interviewer to improvise and explore meanings and areas of interest provided the freedom to allow respondents to talk about what is of central significance. The study involves a qualitative line of inquiry in which learners' experiences and feelings are what constitute the data. This kind of data may well be criticized because it does not provide the same scientific reliability as quantitative data; however, it is felt that as this study is an explorative one, the data is still very much valid at describing the situation for foreign language speakers in Thailand. There indeed exists a tension in SLA "between the search for universals of generalisability on the one hand and the identification of diversity and the goal of insight on the other" (Benson & Nunan, 2004, p. 151). In this study, insight and an understanding of the L2 user in their context of language use is of overriding importance.

#### **3.3 Procedures**

The interviews were carried out and recorded using an mp3 player. This allowed the interviewer to be an active interlocutor, help the conversation flow and keep eye contact. It also avoided the possibility of missing the opportunity to follow up on anything of importance and greatly aided the identification of key topics in the analysis stage.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The resultant recordings were listened to in depth and then selectively transcribed on the basis of what was relevant to the study. Great care was taken to listen thoroughly and not miss topics of interest. Transcripts were made of each individual and a numbering system was used to link the transcriptions to the emerging themes.

## 4. Results

The following section proceeds in the format of a discussion of participants' responses in which the salient features of the data from the ten interviews have been picked out.

### 4.1 Personal Experience of English

All ten participants found that initial experiences of English at school were rather unsuccessful in terms of giving them 'communicative competence' (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1974). Communicative competence refers to a learner's L2 ability, but includes factors other than merely the correct usage of grammatical rules and language structures. These include aspects such as the appropriateness of speech (sociolinguistic competence) and the suitable expression and understanding of meaning (discourse competence) (Canale & Swain, 1980). This lack of communication skills expressed by the participants seems to echo the situation described by Foley (2005), in which the "teaching of English (in Thailand) has been focused on 'form' and not sufficiently on its functional aspect" (p. 230). Generally, English education started at the age of 11 or 12 and typically for one or two hours a week, but this did vary depending on the local educational policy. According to Nawn, one of the participants, these classes consisted mainly of basic vocabulary and grammar classes, "*ABC first then 'what' and 'is'.*" He then goes on to describe the teacher-centred lesson style in which students, "*listen to teacher and just write.*" Similar feelings were expressed by Nit, another participant, when she talks about not being able to learn more English at school despite a strong desire to because, "*at school the teacher teaches me about ABC or verb 'to be' or '-ing', but I never talking, like in communication, that is why I can not speak English very well.*" It is interesting to hear that she is so explicitly aware of the limitations in her education that she has needed to overcome in order to learn English.

All the participants, although gaining a foundation for English from school, began to learn how to communicate in English from working at the hotel. Noon comments: "*Not enough at school... I not understand when I learn from school..... I start to learn English when I start work here (at the hotel)*". What is becoming clear is that a real need to communicate provides the motivation and the practice to enable English uptake. This is provided by the visiting tourists. Ban points out that:



*"I'm good luck because I born here, many of my friends from Bangkok know grammar very well, but when see farang (foreigners) shy for speak."*

She goes on to say *"I can speak well, but grammar I don't use."*

Interestingly, Ban admits that her grammar skills are poor, but she comes across pleased that she can communicate with foreigners despite this. She acknowledges that her friends, who have studied English at university in Bangkok, do not have the skills to communicate well in English despite having a good grasp of English Grammar. Already what is coming clear from learning EFL in Thailand is that what is fundamental to the English skills learnt is the context of operation. University students pick up writing and grammar skills due to the demands of their course, whereas people earning a living in the tourism sector quickly need to pick up the ability to communicate with or without the appropriate grammar. This claim is supported by Ploy when she reports on her first visit to Phuket after studying at a university in Bangkok:

*"Phuket people can speak, but don't know the words, I know many word, but I can not mix it (into sentences in order to communicate)."*

Mixed responses were received with regard to the participants' opinions on their English abilities. Seven were very pleased that they could now communicate with foreigners, despite the 'errors' that they felt were made. An observation from the interviews was that the three participants, who felt that their English was poor, were in fact strong speakers. Therefore, it may be reasonable to suggest that these participants set their language targets much higher. All but one of the participants felt that they would like to learn more. This is strongly related to future plans and perhaps self-perceptions as English users:

*"English is the central language, everyone speaks it.....I want to speak polite things and learn more."* (Ploy)

*"How can I talk to foreigners well, I want to speak perfect"* (Nit).

*"I want to speak English more, more words..... everything more, for job for understanding..... now I speak English 50%."* (Tip)

Pim, on the other hand, comes across as very happy with her abilities and despite the fact she realizes that she needs to learn more words suggests that she may not study anymore: *"I think I'm ok now and I understand, and foreigners understand me."* This seems to be enough for her and the needs for her life in Thailand and provides another example of language and needs being inextricably linked.

## 4.2 Interlanguage and Variation in English Use

The majority of participants seem aware of the way they speak English and any deviations from perceived norms of use. Three of the participants actually gave a percentage estimate when asked about their English level in relation to foreigners. This instantly creates the idea that they imagine themselves on a journey towards a target, that target in all cases in this study came across as the ability to speak like an American or British native speaker.

Ban gives a detailed account of her English deviants: *"sometimes don't have 'did' or 'it', sometimes take out '-s' (third person present tense)"*. It is interesting to discover the fact that she was so openly aware of her own interlanguage and when questioned whether she thought this was acceptable to her she comments: *"I want to change, this ok in Thailand, but in another country, not understand for I speak, not understand Thai-style."* Ban seems to understand that there is a particular style to the way she speaks and that although its use in her country is fine, it may lead to difficulties when used internationally. I also think that it gives rise to a potential claim to personal ownership of the language in Thailand with regard to her own authentic use and perhaps to the slowly emerging variety of Thai-English (Tan, 2005, p. 134).

According to Noon, one reason for the occurrence of a Thai-style of English is simply because its, *"easier to say"* and as it has not greatly affected intelligibility, the result seems to be the fixation of these simpler, perhaps more natural (to the user) variant forms. Four of the participants when commenting on the way they speak English agree with Ban in that deviant forms are acceptable in Thailand, but perhaps not on the world stage. Noi worries about her accent: *"happy about the way I speak, but maybe I worry about my accent. Sometimes they don't understand me especially people from Britain."* She goes on to say: *"Sometimes foreigners make a joke at the way we speak,"* again expressing concerns especially with her English use at home and abroad.

Ploy implies that her errors originate from Thai: *"Thai and English different grammar, Thai people like to cut some words and speak shorter. I know it's not good, but I still do."* Nit also suggests that her voice originates from L1 interference: *"Sometimes I think about the Thai words and try to change it into English and this is difficult for me."*

It is interesting to hear that so many participants are aware of what their actual errors are and that despite the fact that they feel it is not good to speak this way, they seem to make very little effort to change this. It is this awareness that, in my view, points to notions of Preston's (1989) social linguistic fossilization, in which the participants continue to produce deviant forms of the target language in order to help maintain their Thai identity. Nit remarks: *"I think Thai people not speak English good, accents not good."* I think comments like these suggest that some English users do not feel that their English is a valued variant of English. A lack of confidence is expressed by many speakers with their language abilities, which suggests that these workers are not getting the education that they need or that a negative power struggle exists between the users of English and the target language speakers in the tourist resort.



### 4.3 Struggles of Identity and Empowerment

The majority of the participants expressed initial fear of the target language community especially at a young age. Nawn describes his initial time working at the hotel as very uncomfortable: *“before I’m scared and after one week I want to finish here, I’m scared can not understand anything.”* Although Nit comes across as a very competent English user, she is very driven: *“I want more, I want to speak perfect to speak with tourists”*. It appears that the English language has a great deal of prestige in Thailand in relation to the economic benefits that it can lead to and that as West (1992 cited in Norton, 2000, p. 8) argues, “People who have access to a wide range of resources in a society will have access to power and privilege, which will in turn influence how they understand their relationship to the world and their possibilities for the future.” The English language is a growing resource that gives power and privilege to workers in Thailand. However, as this resource grows and develops, more power may well be given to English users who speak a variant which is closer to perceived native speaker norms, despite the fact that this may need to be compromised with local identity.

In the view of Pip:

*“If I not very good in English, I can not work reception, only room maid or housekeeping or something and very tired and money little bit. English helps me a lot, if I understand English I can talk with the people, watch movie, read signs and makes my life very happy.”*

Empowerment involves increasing the capacity of individual groups or individuals to make choices and improving their confidence. The benefits that English brings can help to empower its speakers in Thailand, but there is also the risk that people will always feel inferior to native speakers. The notion that arises from these interviews is that the quality of English is inextricably linked to concepts of class within a society. The style/quality of language used relates to concepts of power and hence the desire for perfect English, for access to that level of society. The perception of ‘high-class’ native-speakers can work to distance the SLLG and TLG in this respect, although the access provided by a high command of the language could also be argued to promote motivation and further learning.

### 4.4 Acculturation into the TLG

In many ways the interview data does seem to support the acculturation model in the EFL context. There is a strong need for English in Thailand, which may bring the TLG closer to local people. Thai is the language of the local people and English is the language which provides access to tourism and business and the economic benefits they bring. In this foreign language context, any feelings of inferiority or distance from the TLG may well support notions of fossilization, but it is unlikely to fully inhibit the learning

of English as it is has great importance for the economic well-being of people. Some of the participants claim to have friends who are native speakers and whether it is their English competence that enables them to make friends or their desire for closeness and acceptance to the TLG that brings them closer to the language and TLG, it is difficult to tell. What is clear is that Schumann's (1978) model is useful in highlighting the socio-cultural context of language learning without neglecting the role of individuals in the language learning process (Norton, 2000, p. 116). Feelings of acculturation seem to be evident in the progression made by Nawn in both his language learning and attitude to the TLG. Initially he states that he was scared and wanted to leave his job, but now claims:

*"Now I like English 100%, I want to learn more, I want to know about business, I want to learn from a teacher from England."*

His new found ambition expresses the empowerment that Nawn has gained, in part, a result of his language learning. This is far from feelings of intimidation, which were experienced when he first arrived at the hotel. Nawn's changing attitudes towards the TLG and English reinforces Norton's notions of Identity changing over time (Norton, 2000, p. 128). However, on the negative side it can serve to marginalize those workers that do not have an adequate command of English or the resources to learn.

#### 4.5 English in the Expanding Circle

When asked to comment on perceptions of her English ability, Bee states *"I feel good, I'm proud by myself to communicate with foreigners."* Bee's proud feelings as a Foreign English user seem to reflect the opinions of many of the staff in the hotel. In his book *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1992) questions the motives of the spread of English as not being a neutral tool, but rather serving the political, cultural and economic interests of the principal colonial powers at the expense of local and national development. In his view, it is a way for the inner circle countries to maintain dominance over the periphery.

Although I feel we need to be very careful in making claims on the impact ELT has on other languages and cultures around the world, it seems that in Thailand English provides access to information, education and economic trade in such a way that it serves as a highly valued commodity. In the words of Kachru (1986 cited in McKay 2004, p. 117), *"English provides linguistic power."* In this study, I met little resistance or threat from English in Thailand and I was surprised with the overall positive outlook on this increasingly prevalent new language. On the contrary, English was seen as providing opportunities for the local people and helping the country develop. Noi remarks:

*"English good for Thai, in the future people more smart, if people can speak English they are very clever. It's good to have a second language in Thailand."*



Perhaps Noi is referring to the access to information English can provide and the education opportunities associated with English in her country. This belief in the power of English is also found in neighbouring Singapore. Chew (1999 cited in McKay 2004, p. 117) argues that the learning of English in Singapore is the conscious choice of the local people who view English as key to their economic survival. Whereas some Singaporeans are concerned with a loss of ethnic identity and Asian values, many Singaporeans value the material and other rewards that English can bring.

Reflecting on my study situated in a country in which there is no colonial history, a few concerns did exist about the loss of Asian values. Pim comments on an apparent loss of some traditional morals and amongst the younger generations the presence of a new “freedom style.” This could be a result of western, more liberal beliefs being transmitted through English language media. Pim remarks that now “*not Thailand before, not take care mum and dad same before, now students are more interested in boy or girlfriends.*” These sentiments were also expressed by some of the other participants as well as concerns with regard to the influx of foreign nationals. As Thailand opens up, Noi is aware of another possible change in her country: “*Now we are open for people from the outside to come for investment, this not good everywhere Thai people be employee and work for foreigner.*”

Nevertheless, the underlying theme arising from the interviews is that the participants are pleased and value the presence of English in Thailand and the rewards it can bring. Despite her concerns, Noi does claim: “*English good for Thai, English makes Thailand develop, makes Thai and foreigner the same, before we were scared.*” In the view of Schumann’s (1978) model of acculturation, any increasing closeness between the SLLG and the TLG can only help to facilitate second language learning.

#### 4.6 An Appropriate Standard of English for Thailand

As the number of English users in the outer and expanding circle countries has outgrown that of the inner circle (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997), there is an ever increasing amount of literature that challenges the traditional notion of a native speaker-like target for English language learners. Some researchers argue that as English has been spread around different countries and developed its own varieties, it is these that should provide the appropriate model (Kachru, 1992). However, these models of pluricentricity can be challenged on the grounds of international communication. Arguably, if everyone communicates in their local varieties, the language will diverge to the point of mutual incomprehensibility, thus cancelling out its value as a Lingua Franca (Kirkpatrick, 2007). One way of overcoming these problems is to use a codified model of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2006; Seidhofer, 2004), in which the code is solely based on intelligibility. These researchers argue that as so many features of English grammar and pronunciation are not essential for intelligibility, these features could be removed to provide a more suitable World language or ELF. These features include features such as the non-use of the third person present simple tense -s (e.g. she look very sad) and the substitution of the voiced

and voiceless 'th' with /t/, /s/ and /d/ (e.g. 'think' becomes 'sink' or 'tink'). Both of these features provide no end of difficulty for English language learners and yet are non-essential for intelligibility.

In the views of all the participants at the hotel, American or British models of English were preferred because they provide "*the correct words and sounds*," as Pip explains. This preference for native-speaker norms contradicts the theories of ELF, which was similarly discovered in a study of learners' voice by Kuo (2006):

*The point I wish to make here is that my participants were in fact very much aware of their own and their partners' linguistic limitations and that, while interacting more often with other L2 learners than with native speakers in current and arguably future contexts, they all continued to push themselves towards more target-like production, referring to a native-speaker model, i.e. British English, as a point of reference. (p. 218)*

Timmis (2002) also suggests in his study that the views of teachers and academics may differ from those of students' expectations with regard to native-speaker norms. It seems that L2 learners' perceptions of their and other people's use of English are largely being ignored from current ELF research (Kuo, 2006). In developing an appropriate pedagogy in the foreign language context, it seems paramount to consider the learners' actual desires and conceited to ignore the fact that despite current thinking on World Englishes (Jenkins, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2007), EFL students still aspire to native speaker norms. Despite evidence to support cultural uses of English, the participants all seem to view their interlanguage as deviant and not some valued variant of English. How the concept of Thai-English may change in the future is unknown; however, the results from this study seem to suggest that native speakers, standards and models are still desired by language learners in Thailand.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

### 5.1 Implications from the Study

It seems apparent that a balance between communication and the expression of culture and identities is apparent in most ESL speaking contexts. When using a second or foreign language, especially one as domineering as English, this balance, as Crystal (1997) points out, is often conflicting:

*The need for intelligibility and the need for identity often pull people and countries in opposing directions. The former motivates the learning of an international language; the latter motivates the promotion of ethnic language and culture. (p. 133)*



In considering the interlanguages of tourism workers in Thailand, it is crucial to bear in mind these opposing struggles. For individuals to obtain a true position as empowered members of the speech community, these two forces of identity and intelligibility, although often working against each other, need to be taken into account. The dominance of native speaker norms in Thailand needs to be balanced with an acceptance of local varieties. The value attached to native-speaker models in Thailand may in part be due to the prestige not only the language holds, but also in the history of colonial powers, and to the wealth that the often middle-class visitors exhibit. Any pedagogy that can promote the empowerment of local people and validate their status as English language users—Thai, French or indeed native speaker—can only have beneficial impacts on its users. One way to do this would be to recognise cultural uses of English and take this into account when assessing learning and by promoting individual expression through the language. A curriculum is needed that teaches students about the cultures of the people that they are most likely to be using English with and how they can present and relate their own cultures to others (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Learning materials should focus on the students' realities and one way of doing this would be to include local culture in the class so that students feel a greater sense of worth.

Although I feel it is crucial for language users to be able to claim a stake in their English, I do agree with Kuo (2007) in that:

*The omission of linguistic redundancies or in fact any form of linguistic inaccuracy should only come as an end product and should not become a starting point in second language learning and teaching. (p. 269)*

In my view, teaching any form of reduced English or English as a Lingua Franca in expanding circle countries such as Thailand poses a grave danger. Reduced standards, although a reasonable explanation of intelligibility, serve to disempower language users by not providing them with 'insider' status or access to the most powerful forms of language. To not start with an internationally recognized standard would only seek to 'short change' its users by providing them with inferior, reduced form of English. This standard does not need to be forced upon our students, but provides a firm basis on which they can base and develop L2 identities.

Variances that occur in Thai English are natural and inevitable, but as all the participants aspired to native speaker norms, I feel that it is these that should be present in the language class. What is clear is that the language taught has to relate to the practical use of English in the real world outside of the classroom. Struggles of identity in expanding circle countries as well as having a linguistic element involve struggles between differences of race, beliefs and class. In other words, pedagogy needs to be concerned with the "enhancement of human possibility" (Norton, 2000, p. 146) in terms of "local complexities and possibilities" (p. 151). This needs to start with local teachers being confident that they

have a stake in their ownership of English, although recognizing the importance of internationally powerful forms. Cultural identities need to be celebrated and promoted to allow the subsequent development of empowered second language identities. Pedagogy in Thailand, therefore, needs to strike a balance between promoting a high standard of English in the classroom and allowing in the local realities of learners.

## 5.2 Reconceptualising Interlanguage

This study set out to explore notions of interlanguage in the Englishes of expanding circle users. Although I believe that it is a highly valid psycholinguistic notion, I feel that its use to describe expanding circle Englishes can only serve to simplify and undervalue language use in the foreign context. The participants were aware of a Thai style of English; however, I would argue that rather than be a substandard language, its use in the hotel provided a colourful, local flavour for the visiting tourist and helped to express their local identities. Native speakers of English need to be more accommodating to variations of English. All speakers of global English should develop more sense of the culturally different ways in which people use the language: an 'intercultural competence' (Hyde, 1998). Intercultural competence involves successful communication with people from other cultures and an understanding of difference. Speakers of World Englishes express a wealth of different cultures, "language reflects culture, so the English that learners end up using will reflect their own cultural norms" (p. 7). A language user with intercultural competence has the strategic competence to understand and successfully communicate with people from diverse cultures free from prejudices. In Thailand, learning at school needs to include this competence, especially considering the mix of nationalities that travel and do business there.

I have discussed problems with interlanguage and the trouble with applying it to language learning in the EFL context. The terms *interlanguage*, *fossilization*, *native speaker* and *communicative competence* all emerge from western understandings of language learning, situated in the West. They cannot be applied to learning English as a foreign language in Thailand in nearly the same way. What is needed is a re-theorising of SLA in these contexts, where no one language or code is appropriate in all cases (Kachru, 1994). The participants may well exhibit a Thai flavour to their English utterances, not because they are exhibiting interlanguage behaviour or fossilization, but because they are expressing linguistic and social-cultural competence (p. 798). Code mixing and code switching are often appropriate in many local and cultural situations and can lead to a varied expression of language. Concepts of fossilized error or interlanguage here are therefore irrelevant because the deviant language is actually serving a valued cultural function (Sridhar, 1994). The present growth of English as a global common language calls for an understanding of SLA that is removed from previous beliefs of language targets, processes and models. It is paramount to be critical of global assumptions about language teaching methods and models and be more in tune with local conditions. In promoting greater understanding of cultural differences of language use in classrooms, not only will students gain greater intercultural competence, but they will also be empowered users of their own English.



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## Appendix

### Interview framework

#### 1. Learning Histories and Self-perceptions

<p><b>Tell me about your experience of Learning English.</b></p>	<p>What motivated you to learn? Did you enjoy it? Was it difficult? What was the hardest part? What was it like to use English with foreigners for the first time? How did you learn?</p>
<p><b>What do you think about your English ability now?</b></p>	<p>Are you happy with the way you speak English? In which areas do you feel that you need improvement? Do you plan to do anything about it? How do you want to speak English? (which model?)</p>
<p><b>Do you have any problems using English?</b></p>	<p>Do you worry about how you speak English? Are you aware of the way you speak English? Do you enjoy speaking English?</p>

## 2. English Variations and Culture

<b>Thai English</b>	<p>Do you like to speak English Thai-style or do you try to speak like a native speaker?</p> <p>What differences do you notice in the way you speak English?</p> <p>Do you enjoy speaking English?</p> <p>Do you use Thai expressions when speaking English?</p>
<b>Variations in use</b>	<p>Do you notice that you speak English differently depending on who you speak with?</p> <p>Is it easier to speak English with another non-native speaker?</p> <p>What is your target when you try to speak English?</p>

## 3. Empowerment as English Users

<b>Second Language Personality</b>	<p>How do you feel when speaking English with native speakers?</p>
<b>Empowerment</b>	<p>How does English change your life?</p> <p>Does English bring with it any negative effects?</p> <p>What do you think about the way you speak English?</p>



## 4. English in Thailand

<b>How do you think that speaking English affects your life?</b>	Does poor English limit how successful you can be in your job?  Would you like to study English more? Why?
<b>Standards and Models</b>	Would it matter to you where your English teacher came from? What do you think is the best English to learn? Which has the most value? Are there any differences in the way you feel when you speak with non-natives or native speakers? Do you think that you treat them the same?
<b>Others</b>	How do you see English changing in Thailand? Would you like to speak any other language? Why?