Use of English in the Thai workplace

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A B S T R A C T

A number of features of business discourse in English in a Thai workplace, for example, in e-mail memos, are integral to modern business operations. In this study, a questionnaire was used to find the important situations in which English is used in business communication. For this purpose, Thai businesses were requested to provide samples of written business correspondence—mostly e-mails in English. These e-mails were examined using genre analysis to identify typical moves and steps in order to understand the use of English at the linguistic and discourse levels. Genre can be defined as a class of communicative events, with the members sharing some set of communicative purposes. Interviews were also conducted to gather data in order to describe in-depth, the nature of English language communication and possible problems arising in a Thai business context. The findings showed that despite a large number of errors in usage in the English samples, they rarely caused problems with the running of the business as Thai communicators employed a move/step structure in their e-mails and other communications strategies including follow-up inquiries for clarification. Pedagogical implications are discussed.

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Introduction

Since the economic crisis of the late 1990s, most Thai business organizations have undergone significant changes by having to develop new work structures and practices to compete effectively in a rapidly changing, global, business environment. Thai businesses have adopted corporate strategies such as mergers and collaborations with outside entities and thus, have experienced organizational restructuring necessitating deeper interaction with people from other countries and cultures.

Also, in recent years, the global economic environment has led to business focusing on Red Ocean strategies, aiming to shift from the battle for market share within known market spaces, to Blue Ocean strategies with moves to create new products or services and new demand in uncontested market space (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). This new perspective has further developed to a White Ocean Strategy, which emphasizes social concerns focusing on People, Planet, Profit, and Passion (Chanchaochai, 2012). These changing business strategies and attitudes have in turn influenced the way in which workplace English is used for communication.

In this context, English used as a foreign language in Thailand has gained an important role as a medium required for professional advancement as well as a tool to help businesses function more effectively. In addition, with increased expansion of communication technologies and electronic media, it is worth exploring the use of English and examining its features to supplement the many studies on the needs of English users in the workplace (So-mui & Mead, 2000). This is important as the findings will have implications for the design of course materials in English programs for business and hopefully lead to further empirical research.

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Several studies have analyzed features of specialized discourse genres in English business communication, for example, Devitt (1991) and Flowerdew and Wan (2006). Using traditional methods such as interviews to measure attitudes, these studies have come to conclusions as to learners' needs which have implications for the design of English for specific purposes courses (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012). However, to meet these specific needs, a number of courses in business communication including English for business correspondence have been provided. Most of them are likely to use commercial course books which rarely reveal the English use in authentic target business situation which is more relevant to students' career work. Research has been conducted to determine how English is used, for example, by Thais for communication at work revealing that the skills of most importance in firms related mostly to requirements for competence in spoken English (Pholsward, 1993). Other researchers who have looked into English requirements in the workplace have emphasized the importance of competence in listening and speaking suggesting that the English curriculum in Thai universities in its current form cannot meet the demands for English as used in the workplace (Wiriyachitra, 2001).

Office workers and business people have access to a variety of media including fax, e-mail and, recently, social media such as Facebook and the smart phone application, Line, to use for external correspondence as well as internal communication in the company. For example, a study of English communication trends in the Finnish business community revealed that the fax had become the most common medium for business communication (Louhiala-Salminen, 1996). Also, in terms of external communication for international trade between Thai companies and their business partners, it was found that faxes were used as an alternative to letters and that they contained certain distinctive linguistic features (Hiranburana, 1998). In order to achieve their goals, business communicators were likely to modify the generic structure of a typical text type, such as sales documents and replies to existing communications, by collapsing typical communicative moves. As an example, they tended to combine functions such as complaints and orders or replies to orders and collections, in one communication.

It has been estimated that 70 percent of business communication occurs electronically (Lehman & DuFrene, 2002). It would therefore be interesting to see whether e-mail is just another alternative medium or if it constitutes a new genre of English communication. This question was raised by Gains (1999) who based his study on e-mail messages used within businesses. He concluded that there were no essential differences between paper-based and electronic-based formats in terms of textual features such as the subject line, opening and closing salutations, register and abbreviations used. Therefore, from his study, one might conclude that e-mail is not a new distinct genre of communication.

In other studies, however, certain features distinctive to e-mail have been suggested. One such study is Crystal (2002) who investigated the nature of electronic media and the Internet and their effects on the language of e-mails, chat groups, virtual worlds, and websites. These findings show the emergence of a distinctive variety of language. Moreover, the exploration by Gimenez (2000, pp. 244—245) of external business e-mails suggests a shift from informal to a more formal style moving from personal e-mails/letters to business letters/faxes and legal documents. As such, the style of e-mails may reflect a greater degree of informality. Moreover, based on 40 e-mail replies to inquiries, Van Mulken and Van der Meer (2005) observed that electronic and paper-based replies were similar in terms of moves, but slightly different in degree of formality and interpersonal rhetorical strategies. Also of interest is an analysis of 327 English business e-mail messages written by Thais and Germans in profit and non-profit organizations by Thaweewong (2006) who found that e-mail messages typically contained seven moves, namely, Opening Salutation, Establishing Correspondence Chain, Introducing Purposes, Attaching Documents, Soliciting Response, Ending politely and Closing. Such moves reflect cultural norms of communication of the e-mail writers governed by the corporate culture of the organizations they work in. Investigating the textual features of 36 commercial e-mails, Zhang (2006) revealed they shared some characteristics with memoranda, particularly when e-mail routinely functions as a device to negotiate the accomplishment of small, immediate tasks in a work environment.

Given the increasing importance of English in the Thai workplace and the scarcity of studies on English use in Thai business, it is worth exploring the use of English in the Thai work context to discern typical linguistic features, preferred media, communication activities, topics, and features of the discourse involved. The current study thus aimed at disclosing the strategies Thai business communicators exploit along with several features of the English used to achieve their communicative purposes in the workplace.

Research Questions

1. What channels or media of communication using English are most often used in the Thai workplace and what are the features of English used by Thai business communicators?
2. What is the nature of the users' language skills and which communication activities are conducted in English?

Definition

Thai workplaces refers to business organizations situated in Bangkok or in its metropolitan area where most employees are Thais using English in their work both for internal and/or external communication purposes.

Genre can be defined as a class of communicative events, with the members sharing some set of communicative purposes recognized by the members of the community. A sample of the genre of the Thai business includes e-mail memos in the Thai workplace.

Literature Review

Target Situation and Genre Analysis

Two common approaches, Register Analysis (RA) and Target Situation Analysis (TSA) are commonly used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The former identifies grammatical and lexical features of different language registers, for example, scientific registers (Ewer & Hughes-Davies, 1971), and gives priority to the language forms that learners need. The latter focuses on the target situation in which learners need to function better and analyzes specific features of language use. TSA was first used by Chambers (1980) to refer to communication in the target situation. The term has been used to cover the identification and the assessment of needs in the target situation in terms of, not only language skills, learning needs and experience but also tasks and activities (Long, 2005) For pedagogical purposes, RA has been criticized for being limited to the sentence level (Allen & Widdowson, 1974) and because of time constraints which limit the possibility of teaching sentence patterns not directly relevant to learners needs in target situations. TSA is opted for due to its relevance and the possibility of meeting learners' needs to master target skills for communicative purposes (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). For ESP course design, it is appropriate to look into target situation analysis at the discourse level of communicative events. Holliday's (1995) assessment of English language needs for an oil company, Edward's (2000) needs assessment to identify English needs of German bankers for the bank personnel, Al-Khatib's (2005) workplace study of English use in tourism and banking, and Blue and Harun's (2003) investigation into the needs of hospitality and hotel students all take a target situation needs analysis approach to course design. Similar studies were conducted to find the target situation needs of cabin crew (Chenaksana, 2005) and those in banking (Luankanokrat, 2011) as well as those of aviation cadets (Phatinuwat & Meesri, 2011) in Thailand because the TSA of people in different business situations shows they are likely to share many communicative purposes and norms and manifest typical genre structures. In the present study, a TSA approach will yield useful information on common types of business communication media and communicative purposes common to the Thai workplace as the basis for investigation in terms of discourse and textual features.

Genre Analysis and Business Discourse Community

In the literature, a genre is characterized as a class of communicative events with members sharing some set of communicative purposes recognized by the members and also sharing similarities in structure, style, content, and intended audience (Swales, 1990, p. 58). Each move in achieving particular purposes consists of "a number of constituents or elements" known as "steps". Also, genre is defined as a specific product of social practice which can be described and taught because of its formal characteristics (Bloor & Bloor, 1983). To identify a genre, it must share the same communicative purposes it is intended to fulfill (Bhatia, 1993, p. 13). Thus, genre is a property of a text defined as a sequence of moves each contributing to the overall communicative purpose (Henry & Roseberry, 2001). Genre analysis, thus taps into the type of communicative purposes shared by members of a community and the relationship between communicative intent and language forms (Swales, 1990, 2004). In some business fields, Barron (2006) explored unsolicited promotional e-mail or "spam" and has noticed some sharing features of the promotional genre revealed in Bhatia's (1993) study. Cheung (2008, 2009) investigated sales e-mails collected in Hong Kong, using moves/steps analysis. The study revealed that the sales genre is likely to adapt in terms of its discourse strategy and textual features in today's marketplace. In Thailand genre analysis of e-mails in profit and non-profit organizations has been conducted to find patterns of typical moves and steps (Thaweewong, 2006). Also, a 4-move structure of e-mail writing has been revealed in the Thai travel and tourism industry (Santhi & Prappal, 2013). In this study, e-mail memos could be considered as the special written business genre of the Thai workplace community which needs to be explored in depth.

Research Methods

A questionnaire was designed based on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) communication needs in terms of what Thai business communicators need to do in the workplace and to discover problems encountered and solutions available. It was piloted and validated by two experts (one a business person and the other a teacher of business English). The questionnaire was sent to 100 Thai companies, joint ventures, and franchises randomly selected from a telephone directory of companies in Thailand and included local agents, representatives, and distributors. In all, 72 companies responded. They were requested to provide samples of communications for a study. A contribution of 5 letters and 81 e-mail messages in English written by Thais was thus collected. It was decided that the 81 e-mails should be classified and investigated using genre or move-step analysis because they were found to be the predominant written form used in Thai workplace communication. The five letters were not included in the data.

Apart from the questionnaire, nine companies (about 10%) representing main business sectors were selected to provide further information in semi-structured interviews to gather more details on certain issues derived from the questionnaires.

Results and Discussion

Results of the Questionnaire

Analysis of the questionnaire showed that Thai business people in the study used more written than spoken English to communicate in their work at 66.7 percent to 47.2 percent, respectively. This finding, surprisingly, does not support Pholsward's (1993) and Wiriyachittra's (2001) studies which revealed the importance of listening and speaking apart from reading. Pholsward (1993, p. 91) reported computing companies having an international

network and requiring contact with headquarters and their customers demand oral communication to keep up with the computing business and technology in tower-level jobs. In the current study, most of the subjects also held managerial positions and they considered that e-mail served their communication needs for it shared some features of the spoken language—it becomes more popular and it is more convenient and immediate than telephoning. Regarding specific media used for communication as shown in Table 1, it was found that e-mail is the medium most used (94.4%) followed by telephone (80.6%), and fax (48.6%) while communications using English the most were memos (66.7%), meetings (65.3%), and written reports (63.9%), while a number of staff kept minutes at meetings and gave oral presentations in English.

Table 2 shows the frequency of communicative activities conducted in English. It can be seen that participants used e-mail (97.3%) most often followed by reading and writing memos (83.8%), presenting facts and figures (52.8%), making proposals (52.8%), and conducting phone calls (51.4%), as well as oral presentations (51.4%).

The study did not include data on telephone use as such conversations are considered confidential and difficult to obtain, so it was determined not to be a fruitful source of information for this study.

Table 1
Media and types of communication in the workplace rated by Thai business

Media of communication	% (n = 72)	Type of communication	% (n = 72)
e-mail	94.4	Memos	66.7
Telephone	80.6	Meeting	65.3
Faxes	48.6	Written reports	63.9
Letters	26.4	Minutes of the meeting	44.4
Teleconferences	23.6	Oral presentations	40.3
Internet	22.2	Proposals	31.9
Telegram	4.2	Oral reports	26.4
		Negotiation	15.3
		Executive summaries	15.3

Table 2
Frequency of communication activities conducted in English rated by Thai business people

Activity	(n = 72)		
	Often %	Sometimes (%)	Seldom (%)
Communicating through e-mail	97.3		
Reading/writing memos	83.8		
Making proposals		52.8	
Presenting facts/figures	52.8		
Making phone calls		51.4	
Making oral presentations		51.4	
Reading/writing letters	48.6		
Making appointments	48.6		
Writing reports	48.6		
Negotiating		45.9	
Summarizing		45.9	
Greeting		43.2	
Making invitations	40.5		
Making complaints			40.5
Placing orders		31.4	

Regarding difficulties encountered in communication, more than half of participants (57%) had no problems while a few (26%) mentioned problems in communicating with foreigners in English. A small percentage (17%) revealed that they had difficulty sometimes. Table 3 reveals listening and understanding different accents to be the most frequent kinds of problems experienced.

It is notable that the two who claimed to have no problem in communication also mentioned that they had difficulty in grammar.

Results of Analysis of Written Samples

Participants were requested to submit samples of their communications which comprised e-mails (n = 81), for further analysis. Of the total, 66 were written to initiate a subject, 7 were responses and the other 7 were follow-ups to earlier interactions. The e-mails were investigated in terms of their deviations from norms or errors, types of topics, and discourse or move structure.

1) Deviation analysis

The data showed a large number of deviations made by Thai participants in English as illustrated in Table 4. It was revealed that the most typical error was in the application

Table 3
Types of problems encountered by Thai business communicators

Problem	%
Listening/accent	24.32
Words/expressions	16.22
Writing	10.81
Grammar	10.81
Cultural differences/different mindsets	8.11
Misunderstanding	8.11
Pronunciation	5.41
Speaking	5.41
Interpretation	5.41
Oral presentation	2.70

Table 4
Type of deviation in Thai e-mails

Error type	%
Articles	29.82
Prepositions	16.67
Singular/Plural	11.11
Punctuation	8.77
Verb form	7.31
Tense	6.14
Expressions	3.22
Subject–verb agreement	3.22
Voice	2.92
Spelling	2.05
Verb pattern	2.05
Part of speech	2.05
Fragment	1.75
Logical markers	1.17
Noun-pronoun reference	.88
Word order	.58
Modal	.29
Total	100.00

of the English article system followed by misuse of prepositions, singular/plural errors and incorrect punctuation.

A similar percentage of errors by other local business communicators, who were not native speakers of English, was found in a previous workplace study in Hong Kong (So-mui & Mead, 2000). It is worth noting, however, that the merchandisers in that study claimed frequent confusion distinguishing nouns from adjectives in addition to verb tense and word order. However, the frequent use of telexes, from which articles are usually omitted, may explain the lack of mention of articles in So-mui and Mead (2000) whereas Thai business communicators made frequent errors in the use of e-mail in which articles and prepositions are not omitted. The types and percentage of deviation in the Thai e-mails reveals that Thai business communicators made some frequent errors of those forms and function words in their communication and it has raised an interesting question if this deviation could really lead to communication problems since it is not likely to impair the message or the meaning.

2) Analysis of topics

Table 5 shows most of the topics mentioned in e-mails in our study were concerned with management systems, training, and sports days, while some mentioned documents used in sales, such as price lists and inquiries. Quite a number also dealt with sports such as golf and polo. Apart from these, topics concerned problems with their work and working conditions.

Interestingly, the topics discussed in English in the Thai workplace concerned not only business transactions such as buying and selling, but also problems and solutions related to blue-oceans such as new project proposals. Furthermore, prominent topics including sporting activities and work conditions as well as training, reflect a concern about stakeholders' quality of life which is a key concept of white ocean strategies.

3) Move analysis

Interestingly, the move structure of the e-mails in the current study showed a similar pattern to that found by Thaweewong (2006) but with just six moves, namely, *Opening Salutation, Establishing Correspondence Chain, Introducing Purposes, Soliciting Response, Ending Politely,*

and *Closing Salutation* (Table 6). While a small percentage of the samples included *Directing to Information/Documents*, it was considered a step leading to the main move, *Introducing Purposes*, and not the same move which Thaweewong (2006) refers to as Attaching Documents.

The pattern in the current study revealed that the more frequent moves/steps that were likely to be required (with the percentage of their occurrence over 70%) were *Opening Salutation, Introducing Purposes, Providing Information, Requesting action/Enquiring*, and *Closing Salutation*. This made e-mail communication in the Thai workplace very short and succinct whereas the communication to recipients who worked in the same company but in different workplaces, branches, or countries (e.g. ABC Thailand, ABC Japan) were likely to require more moves/steps such as *Establishing Correspondence Chain,* and *Referring to Previous Actions/Events/Activities/Contact.* Another notable feature of the e-mails was that the move *Introducing Purposes* comprised four steps, namely, *Providing Information, Directing to Information/Documents, Requesting Action/ Enquiring* (most frequent), and *Giving Justifications*. To realize the move, *Ending Politely*, the Thais tended to use three steps: *Expressing Gratitude, Expressing Optimism*, and *Giving a Promise.*

Also, Thai business people were likely to reduce the standard steps of e-mails sent internally. To illustrate, a sample e-mail included the step *Directing to Information/ Documents* with the phrase "For your information" or "FYI". Also, they tended to omit *Opening Salutation* and *Closing Salutation* in internal e-mails.

An analysis of linguistic realizations showed that samples tended to address receivers with "Dear all" (34.57%) and "All" omitting the address word "Dear" which is preferable alone, in both internal and external e-mails. Some

Table 5
Topics in Thai English e-mails

Topic	%
Management system i.e. virus crisis	25.93
Training	18.52
Sports/Golf day/Polo sport	14.81
Enquiry/price list	9.88
Problems and/or solutions	9.88
Working condition	8.64
Staff seminar trip	4.94
Project proposal	4.94
Sales	1.23
Outstanding payment	1.23
Total	100.00

Table 6
Move structure

Move/Step	Internal ($n = 62$) %	External ($n = 19$) %	Total ($n = 81$) %
1. *Opening Salutation*	79.03	100.00	[a]85.16
2. *Establishing Correspondence Chain*	29.03	84.21	41.98
2a. *Referring to Previous Actions/Events/Activities/ Contact*	29.03	78.95	40.74
2b. *Acknowledging the Existence of the Previous Mail*		5.26	12.35
3. *Introducing Purposes*	100.00	100.00	[a]100.00
3a. *Providing Information*	74.19	84.21	[a]76.54
3b. *Directing to Information/ Documents*	41.93	36.84	40.74
3c. *Requesting Action/ Enquiring*	74.19	73.68	[a]74.07
3d. *Giving justifications*	3.23	21.05	7.41
4. *Soliciting Response*	17.74	26.31	19.75
5. *Ending Politely*	33.87	31.57	33.33
5a. *Expressing Gratitude(e.g. Thanks)*	22.58	15.79	20.99
5b. *Expressing Optimism (Forward Look)*	9.68	10.53	9.88
5c. *Giving Promise*	1.61	5.26	2.47
6. *Closing Salutation*	79.03	100.00	[a]83.95

[a] Obligatory moves/steps

used the Thai term "Khun" (Sir/Madam) or "Dear Khun". However, in quite a number of internal e-mails the *Opening Salutation* was in fact omitted. The reason for this could be their preoccupation with continuity of a thread from a previous communication. Another striking feature was the use of more than one opening in the same e-mail addressed to multiple recipients (Figure 1). In this case, the intention of the e-mail is a collaboration of the business contacts in the team to find a solution for a problem. This finding reflects Colen and Petelin's (2004) challenges found in collaborative writing in the contemporary corporation. From this perspective, the flexible format of the e-mail genre is able to adapt successfully to the collaborative writing process demanded for problem solving which could lead to a collaborative report.

The *Closing Salutation* was frequently realized with terms either of gratitude such as "Thank you" or formal regards including "(Best/Kind) Regards" or a combination, as in "Thank you and (best) regards".

Important steps such as *Providing Information, Directing to Sources of Information,* and *Requesting Action/Enquiring* were often realized with imperatives whose forcefulness was somewhat toned down by the insertion of politeness markers, "please" or "kindly" as in, "Please kindly check the website for further news." Moreover, to mark a greater degree of politeness in *Requesting Action/Enquiring* and *Soliciting Response* interrogatives and conditionals were employed, for example "Could you send the copy of this invoice with details of work such as our service order or contract No. reference."

Further analysis revealed that the main step of *Introducing Purposes* in e-mail messages was mostly realized by *Providing Information-Requesting Action/Enquiring* (45.69%).

On the other hand, Thai business communicators used *Requesting Action/Enquiring-Providing Information* rarely (4.94%). The findings show a stylistic indirectness in the Thai business people in order to cushion their requests.

Results of Interviews

In order to uncover further detail from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews conducted with nine Thai business participants revealed interesting information about the nature and use of English including common problems and how to cope with them (Table 7).

The semi-structured interviews revealed the four skills necessary for typical Thai workers at different levels. First was literacy or the ability to read, especially names spelled in English; second, information reporting or the ability to understand and respond to direct requests received in English, for example, in phone calls; third, persuasion, including advertising and PR use of English to convince and get support; and lastly, negotiation, requiring precise language use for success.

The results also showed that most of the Thai firms interviewed used both Thai and English to read and write e-mails in typical business communication—Thai with locals and English with foreign customers and suppliers. All four skills of English were used by executives over the managerial level in internal communications, for example, in reading/writing e-mails/memos, and listening/speaking in meetings, presentations and negotiations, whereas Thai was used more frequently by the operational staff and in factories. However, in certain cases, there was an increase in the use of English among the operational staff including technicians when they negotiated special product features

From:	ruommaiLaka<market@starpack.com>
To:	Sales <sales@starpack.com>; Robert Malley<malley@starpack.com>;
	Boonrue<boonrue@starpack.com>; UmpaiSukyhang<umpais@starpack.com>
Subject:	Fw: Printing Defect on the variety ribbon

Dear All,

Do you all see the defects?

Does it come from the printing limitation or our own mistake?

Do we know the root causes of these defects?

Action plans?

K. Chanapol

50% price reduction on the defect goods?

It is not our policy to reduce price on any defect in practice: It should be on case by case basis.

We need to agree on this matter for Effam. I would like to call for a small meeting with samples and figures of the defects.

K. Boonrue: Could you look into the causes and provide the figure for our consideration and decision.

Regards,

Ruommai

Figure 1 Sample e-mail (adapted) with multiple opening salutations

Table 7
Semi-structured interviews (sample)

Business area	Skill	Activity	Problem	How to cope with problem
Packaging trading/ manufacturing	Writing E e-mails to international customers; Thai to locals	Operational staff meeting: Thai (encouraging more use of E) Visits, Management Meetings: E; Teleconference with regional customers: E	Unclear information	Ask for clarification, explanation, drawing pictures; E writing class, making announcement Training
Housing Estate	Writing E e-mails; Speaking	Use E only in investment section with foreign contact Slide/Power point presentation (E) but with Thai	Thai and E Technical terms	Training for all staff
Banking	O-writing M-Writing; Speaking	Management: Clarifying some terms in contracts Counter Service: reading, writing	Management	Training overseas 'not only in E but in other subjects
Jewelry exporting and trading	Use E with customers and Japanese experts but Thai in the factory	Sending e-mail/(E) to and telephoning to talk to customers in E; presenting work in E and in marketing and factories overseas	Communicating with members; Reading the proposal, documents; present the work	

E = English, M = Management, O = Operational staff

with clients and customers or to report to management regarding their work.

To solve the problem of a lack of familiarity with technical terms, they tended to ask for clarification and further explanation in follow-up emails and follow-ups and probes subsequent to answers. In some cases, cultural differences encountered by the business communicators created obstacles in achieving success.

When asked for their ideas on solving these communication problems, most participants gave suggestions such as providing in-house training in English or university courses or sharing sessions on experiences using English in international communication.

When asked about the use of social media networks such as Facebook and Line, more than half of the participant firms revealed that they did not allow their workers to use Facebook during work though the companies did have Facebook pages. In some companies which specialized in services and retail, such social media were used to disseminate information about new products and services and also activities to be organized for members. Facebook was also used to get immediate feedback from customers and members.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study showed that Thai business people made greater use of written English than spoken English for communication and that the main medium used was e-mail which, unlike other forms of written English, shares several features with the spoken language. The findings confirmed the conclusions of a study of English language needs in the Automobile and the Information Technology Industry conducted by the English Language Development Center (ELDC, 2003). In that study, personnel at all levels reported the importance of reading skills, in particular to read emails, but for administrators, writing e-mails was essential. Regarding the types of communication for which English was most frequently used, Thai business participants considered memos (66%), meetings (65.3%) and

written reports (63.9%) as the top-three. Moreover, some studies in needs analysis of Thai employees in different professions such as cabin crew (Chenraksana, 2005), and banking (Luankanokrat, 2011) revealed perceived problems in speaking and listening due to differences in accents of people of certain nationalities. Interestingly, most business communicators in the present study did not express difficulty in using English at work though some mentioned problems with listening skills especially understanding accents, idiomatic expressions, writing, and grammar, despite quite a number of deviations found in the authentic samples. It is clear that participants made use of common business conventions to help facilitate the flow of communication. They used the typical move/step structure in e-mails and effectively exploited certain e-mail features such as reducing moves or steps. Furthermore, the topics of their e-mails included not only business issues, but also issues of everyday activities and sports. In particular, as commonly found in teleconferences, Thai business people managed to achieve their goals by exploiting follow-up strategies to remedy miscommunications or for clarification in cases of cultural differences leading to misunderstanding.

To enhance learning of English for communication in business, course material designers should include common language patterns used in e-mails. Students should be encouraged to engage in collaborative and co-operative writing processes including problem solution and in the negotiation of meaning on a variety of topics, not only related to business. Students should also discuss issues to improve quality of life such as green projects and sports activities. These socially related topics could serve to enhance negotiation skills and facilitate communicative needs in general.

Further Research

Data gathered from a larger number of firms in all business areas could shed more light on Thais' use of English which could be useful for pedagogical purposes. The

role of new media such as social networks like Line might be studied to complete the picture. Finally, triangulation of data collected from site observation and a focus group would provide more relevant information which should be included in future research.

Conflict of interest

Noe declared.

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