

Research Report

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบวิธีการสอนและการเรียนทักษะการพูดสื่อสาร
ภาษาอังกฤษจากมุมมองของครูและนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยในบริบทภาษาอังกฤษเป็น
ภาษาต่างประเทศหรือภาษานานาชาติ

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRACTICES IN TEACHING AND
LEARNING ORAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS FROM
PERSPECTIVES OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AND LEARNERS IN EFL/EIL
CONTEXTS

Researchers

1. Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
 - 1.1 Asst. Prof. Kemtong Sinwongsuwat, Ph.D.
 - 1.2 David Allen Bruner, M.A., LL.B.
 - 1.3 Yaruingam Phungshok Shimray, M.A.
2. University of Novi Sad, Serbia
 - 2.1 Asst. Prof. Biljana Radić-Bojanić, Ph.D.
 - 2.2 Jagoda Topalov, M.A.

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Part I

Research Report (รายงานวิจัยฉบับสมบูรณ์)
Research Title (ชื่อโครงการภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษ)

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบวิธีการสอนและการเรียนทักษะการพูดสื่อสาร
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Researchers (คณะนักวิจัย)

1. Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
 - 1.1 Asst. Prof. Kemtong Sinwongsuwat, Ph.D. (หัวหน้าโครงการ)
 - 1.2 David Allen Bruner, M.A., LL.B.
 - 1.3 Yaruingam Phungshok Shimray, M.A.
2. University of Novi Sad, Serbia
 - 2.1 Asst. Prof. Biljana Radić-Bojanić, Ph.D.
 - 2.2 Jagoda Topalov, M.A.

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 ประเภทความร่วมมือกับต่างประเทศ

Fiscal Year (ประจำปีงบประมาณ) 2556

Project ID (รหัสโครงการ) L1A 560297S

Part II: Contents

1. Project Title ชื่อชุดโครงการ

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบวิธีการสอนและการเรียนทักษะการพูดสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษจากมุมมองของครูและนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยในบริบทภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศหรือภาษานานาชาติ

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRACTICES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ORAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS FROM PERSPECTIVES OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AND LEARNERS IN EFL/EIL CONTEXTS

2. Researchers คณะนักวิจัย และหน่วยงานต้นสังกัด (คณะ/ภาควิชา หรือ หน่วยงาน)

2.1 Department of Languages and Linguistics

Faculty of Liberal Arts

Prince of Songkla University-Hat Yai

Songkhla, Thailand

2.1.1 Asst. Prof. Kemtong Sinwongsuwat, Ph.D.

2.1.2 David Allen Bruner, M.A. & LL.B.

2.1.3 Yaruingam Phungshok Shimray, M.A.

2.2 Department of English

Faculty of Philosophy

University of Novi Sad

Serbia

2.2.1 Asst. Prof. Biljana Radić-Bojanić, Ph.D.

2.2.2 Jagoda Topalov, M.A.

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4. Thai and English Abstracts บทคัดย่อภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษ

โครงการวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษาเปรียบเทียบแนวทางการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษา รวมถึงวิธีการสอนภาษาเพื่อการสื่อสารซึ่งใช้อยู่ปัจจุบันในมหาวิทยาลัยที่มีบริบทการเรียนรู้และใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศหรือภาษานานาชาติ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในภูมิภาคเอเชียอาคเนย์และคาบสมุทรมัลดีเชีย โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลที่เกี่ยวข้องกับภูมิหลังของผู้เรียน มุมมองเกี่ยวกับวิธีและลีลาการสอนของครู ลีลาการเรียนของผู้เรียน แรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ และมุมมองของครูผู้สอนที่มีต่อวิธีการสอนในชั้นเรียน

งานวิจัยนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเชิงสำรวจอาศัยการเก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถามสำหรับนักศึกษาและครูผู้สอน รวมทั้งใช้การสังเกตและการสะท้อนประสบการณ์การสอนของผู้สอนเป็นหลัก ซึ่งโครงการวิจัยในครั้งนี้ก่อให้เกิดผลงานวิชาการประเภทบทความวิจัยและบทความวิชาการรวมทั้งสิ้น 4 รายการ ได้แก่ (1) บทความวิจัยเรื่อง มุมมองที่นักศึกษาไทย มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์และนักศึกษาเซอร์เบียร์ มหาวิทยาลัยโนวิสาด มีต่อการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารปากเปล่า (2) บทความวิจัยเรื่อง มุมมองของนักศึกษาไทยและเซอร์เบียร์ต่อการจัดการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ (3) บทความวิจัยเรื่อง การศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพฤติกรรมการเรียนรู้และแรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษาของนักศึกษาปริญญาตรีสาขาวิศวกรรมศาสตร์ และ (4) บทความวิชาการเรื่อง วิธีการสอนการพูด

สื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศจากมุมมองของนักศึกษาไทยที่มีสมิทธิภาพภาษาอังกฤษระดับ A2 มุมมองของครู และทัศนวิพากษ์จากเซอร์เบียร์ ซึ่งบทความนี้ได้สะท้อนสิ่งที่รายงานในบทความ 3 ชิ้นแรก รวมทั้งชี้ให้เห็นมุมมองของครูผู้สอนและนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยส่วนใหญ่ว่ายังคงสืบสานวิธีการสอนภาษาแบบเน้นสื่อสารในการพัฒนาทักษะการพูด นอกจากนี้ยังชี้ให้เห็นปัญหาต่างๆที่เกิดขึ้นในการสอนด้วยวิธีการดังกล่าว พร้อมให้ข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อการยกระดับสมิทธิภาพภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาไทยส่วนใหญ่ให้สูงขึ้นกว่าระดับ A2

ผลการค้นพบจากงานวิจัยในครั้งนี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าแรงจูงใจในการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษมีความสัมพันธ์ในทางบวกกับพฤติกรรมการเรียนรู้ของนักศึกษาทุกกลุ่มที่ศึกษานักศึกษาที่มีสมิทธิภาพภาษาอังกฤษในระดับพื้นฐานโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งไทยและเซอร์เบียร์มีความเห็นคล้ายคลึงกันในเรื่องวิธีการสอนของครูและแรงจูงใจในการเรียน แต่มีความเห็นที่ต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญในเรื่องลีลาการสอนของครู ลีลาการเรียนรู้อของตนเองและปัญหาในการเรียนภาษา ความแตกต่างดังกล่าวสืบเนื่องมาจากปัจจัยต่างๆ ได้แก่ สมิทธิภาพภาษาอังกฤษที่ต่ำกว่าของนักศึกษาไทย การไม่ได้สัมผัสกับภาษาอังกฤษนอกชั้นเรียนเท่าที่ควร ภาษาพูดที่หลากหลายของครูผู้สอน ความเหมือนหรือต่างกันระหว่างภาษาแม่กับภาษาอังกฤษ วัฒนธรรมที่ต่างกันระหว่างครูผู้สอนและผู้เรียน ความจำเป็นทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคม สิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกในชั้นเรียนที่แตกต่างกัน ลีลาการสื่อสารของผู้เรียนที่ต่างกันโดยเฉพาะผู้เรียนไทยมักเน้นการสื่อสารและลีลาการเรียนแบบร่วมมือ นอกจากนี้งานวิจัยนี้ยังชี้ให้เห็นว่าชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารปากเปล่าในมหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ยังคงใช้วิธีการสอนแบบเน้นการสื่อสาร โดยพบว่าในชั้นเรียนนักศึกษามีโอกาสกิจกรรมกลุ่มเป็นส่วนใหญ่ เมื่อเทียบกับกิจกรรมเดี่ยวหรือกิจกรรมที่ครูเป็นศูนย์กลาง มีการพึ่งพากิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดค่อนข้างมาก นักศึกษาไทยจึงแตกต่างจากนักศึกษาเซอร์เบียร์ ยังมีความจำเป็นต้องพัฒนาทักษะการพึ่งพาตนเอง สร้างความกระตือรือร้นในการเรียน ฝึกการปฏิสัมพันธ์ภาษาอังกฤษแบบอัตโนมัติ ปัญหาหลักอีกประการที่พบคือชั้นเรียนที่นักศึกษาละความสามารถจำเป็นต้องเรียนร่วมกัน

งานวิจัยครั้งต่อไปควรศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างนักศึกษาที่มีสมิทธิภาพต่ำกับการสร้างแรงจูงใจในการเรียน ผลการใช้กิจกรรมการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษเสมือนจริงในชั้นเรียนโดยลดทอนกิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดลง เพิ่มการเสริมสร้างความเข้าใจทางวัฒนธรรมระหว่างผู้เรียนและผู้สอน ทดลองการสอนร่วมกันในชั้นเรียน

ระหว่างผู้สอนที่ใช้และไม่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ การจัดกลุ่มผู้เรียนตามระดับความสามารถภาษาอังกฤษ การเปิดรายวิชาเลือกอื่นๆเพื่อรองรับนักศึกษาที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษสูงกว่าระดับพื้นฐาน การจำกัดจำนวนผู้เรียนในแต่ละชั้นเรียน รวมถึงการใช้กิจกรรมเดี่ยวและกิจกรรมกลุ่มอย่างสมดุลย์

คำสำคัญ: พฤติกรรมและแรงจูงใจในการเรียนรู้ภาษา มุมมองของผู้เรียนที่มีสมิทธิภาพภาษาอังกฤษระดับพื้นฐานที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศหรือภาษานานาชาติ การเรียนการสอนทักษะการสื่อสารการพูดภาษาอังกฤษปากเปล่า การสอนภาษาแบบเน้นการสื่อสาร ประเทศไทย ประเทศเซอร์เบีย กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบไม่มีบทพูด วิธีการสอนและการเรียนรู้

These project studies examined and compared the approaches, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), to enhancing elementary (A2) university students' oral English communication skills which are currently adopted by universities in EFL contexts, particularly in the Southeast Asia and Balkan regions. It was aimed at obtaining from students of selected universities data related to their background, perspectives on teachers' teaching methods and styles, students' learning styles, motivation and difficulties and teachers' perspectives on classroom practices.

Questionnaire surveys, and teachers' experiences and observations were the primary research tools. The project generated four research papers: (1) *Thai-Serbian A2 university EFL learners' perspectives on learning and teaching oral English communication skills*; (2) *Thai and Serbian perspectives regarding teaching approaches in the university EFL classroom*; (3) *A study of the relationship between learning related behavior and language motivation of engineering graduates*; and (4) *EFL oral communication teaching practices: A close look at university teachers' and A2 students' perspectives in Thailand and a critical eye from Serbia*, reflecting on the previous three research papers and

reexamining current EFL oral communication teaching practices from the perspectives of teachers and the A2 students attempting to embrace CLT to improve oral English communication. Problems have been identified and practical solutions have been proposed to move beyond A2.

Findings were that learners' learning-related behavior had a positive relationship with their language learning motivation. Thai and Serbian A2 students had different perspectives on their teachers, learning styles and learning difficulties, but similar perspectives on teaching methods and learning motivation due to Thais' lower oral English proficiency, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, varieties of English spoken by teachers, commonality between English and the students' L1, cultural disparities between teachers and students, different economic and social needs, different class facilities, different communication styles of the learners, and especially Thai cooperative styles of learning. The findings additionally showed that oral English communication classes at PSU continued to embrace CLT, and that the Thai A2 majority were frequently engaged in group activities rather than in individual and teacher-centered tasks. At PSU there was reliance on unrealistic, scripted role plays. Thai, unlike Serbian students, needed to acquire more independent skills, be less passive learners, and interact more spontaneously in the target language. A major problem at PSU was mixed ability classes.

The recommendations for pedagogical practice in an EFL setting emanating from the project included proposing further studies exploring the relationship between English proficiency and students' learning motivation, to conduct in Thailand real-life in-class communicative activities in English, a move towards non-scripted role plays, to foster greater cultural awareness between native teachers and students, team teaching of native and non-native teachers in English communication classes, placement tests, a range of more advanced elective courses for higher proficiency students, restricted class size, an appropriate balance

between group and individual tasks and investigating through further research the long-term effects of the implementation of such measures and principles.

Keywords: language learning motivation and behavior, EFL university A2 learners' perspectives, learning and teaching oral English communication skills, CLT, Thailand, Serbia, unscripted role plays, teaching and learning practices

5. Executive Summary บทสรุปผู้บริหาร ประกอบด้วย

5.1 Introduction

Amidst the globalization, the unsurpassably rapid spread and the pivotal role of English as the language of global and even local or personal business cannot be overstated. Today, in many countries, especially those in Kachru's (1985) Expanding Circle, where English has long been embraced as an important language for international communication, increasingly it is also used for intra-national purposes. Foley (2005, cited in Baker (2009)) asserted that English, for example, is the de facto second language of Thailand, blurring the distinction between Kachru's Expanding and Outer Circle, being compulsory at all educational levels, whether formal or informal. It is the language of academic advancement, social and economic growth, tourism industry, science and technology, the Internet communication, international businesses, and international legal contexts. Therefore, the language has transcended from being just an important foreign language to a global language for external and internal purposes. It has become a lingua franca that everyone receiving either formal or informal education has to learn at an early age. In fact, as many of the countries in these traditional EFL contexts both in the East and in the West are striving to compete in the

fast-growing world economy and to enter into some sort of economic union, English has undeniably become an essential part of human capital to invest on in order to produce human resources capable for successful competition and transition into desirable economies.

Given the considerably fast expansion of economies in Asia, CEOs of many companies have come forth stressing how important it is for people to possess strong English language skills if they want to progress in their career and capitalize on the increasing foreign investment pouring into the countries in this era (see e.g., Byrne, 2010). Speaking English has in fact become an even more essential goal as free trade and economic cooperation are promoted among both Asian and European countries. For instance, in response to the drafting of the ASEAN charter in 2008 in an attempt to solidify and integrate the ASEAN community into one seamless economy, a large number of companies in the region have already put forth hiring policies which require employees to have a good command in English. Likewise, with the prospect of future integration of the Balkan countries into the European Union, workforce with high English language ability is becoming even more critical in these countries. The feasible goal in English language teaching and learning appears to be to master the language such that international intelligibility is guaranteed while expressing and maintaining one's local or national identity (Crystal, 2003).

Given the urgent needs for human resources with strong English communication skills in any parts of the world, it has become especially crucial for language educators to reexamine the current English language teaching approaches adopted to see whether they really produce desirable students. In her study which examined the general English proficiency of ASEAN students measured by TOEFL-equated CU-TEP scores, Prapphal (2001) found that the average English proficiency of Thai and Laotian students was lower than that of students from other ASEAN

countries. While her study suggested certain changes be made in the components of a course syllabus such as goals and objectives, materials, methods of teaching, as well as testing and evaluation, this study has taken a step back to examine the course syllabi currently adopted by universities in these countries to determine what they are trying to achieve, what is really going on in the classroom where they are implemented and whether these syllabi are well-received by parties involved, particularly teachers or practitioners and students.

5.2 Purposes

Since one of the main goals in EFL teaching is to enable students to appropriately and effectively use the target language to communicate and participate in social situations and speaking is considered the primary means of communication, the study focused on investigating the approaches to the development of students' oral English communication skills currently adopted by selected universities in Southeast Asia and in the Balkan region. It particularly examined data related to students' and teachers' background, teaching and learning methods, lesson plans, structure of lessons, typical tasks used in the classroom, materials leading to such tasks, approaches to students' oral assessment, as well as challenges or difficulties involved in teaching and learning oral English communication.

The following are the main purposes of the study:

5.2.1. To arrive at the holistic picture of English language teaching and learning at the university level with implications for Southeast Asia and the Balkan region, especially the approaches to improving EFL students' oral English communication skills.

5.2.2. To diagnose problematic areas in teaching and improving oral English communication skills of EFL students in the universities in respective regions.

5.2.3. To make recommendations for designing a program or a syllabus to effectively improve the oral ability to communicate in English of the university students in the chosen regions.

The following research questions were investigated in the study:

- What are the current practices in teaching and learning oral English communication skills from the perspectives of teachers and students in Thailand and Serbia?
- What are the problematic areas of teaching and learning oral English communication skills from the perspectives of teachers and students in the respective regions?
- How can the findings of the study help improve the syllabus to teach oral English communication skills, particularly for low proficiency students?

5.3 Summary (Synopsis of All the Publications)

Using questionnaire surveys as the primary research method along with teachers' experiences and observations, materials analysis and class observations, the first research paper (hereinafter referred to as "Paper 1"), *Thai-Serbian A2 university EFL learners' perspectives on learning and teaching oral English communication skills* (published), analyzed the perspectives on learning and teaching oral English communication of A2 students, the majority of EFL undergraduates at the partner universities in Thailand and Serbia, both countries in Kachru's "expanding circle", looking specifically at perspectives on their teachers' teaching methods and styles and their own learning styles, motivation and difficulties. The differences in perspectives pointed to Thais' lower oral English proficiency, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, diversity of varieties of English spoken by teachers, the degree of commonality between English and students' L1, extent of cultural disparities between teachers and students, culturally affected communicative styles, their

motivation influenced by different economic and social needs and different class facilities.

Paper 2, *Thai and Serbian perspectives regarding teaching approaches in the university EFL classroom* (in press), adopted a sociological approach in comparing Thai and Serbian EFL learning settings and identified similarities, but significant differences in students' perspectives of teaching approaches to teaching EFL, owing to the culturally influenced respective communication styles of learners, the amount of exposure to English in a natural setting and the distinction between being taught by non-native and native EFL teachers.

Paper 3, *A study of the relationship between learning related behavior and language motivation of engineering undergraduates* (published), focused on the relationship between undergraduate English language learning motivation and their learning behavior in both Thailand and Malaysia and found that the two factors had a positive relationship resulting from a high motivation to learn English with a marginally greater degree of instrumental than integrative motivation.

Finally, Paper 4, *EFL oral communication teaching practices: A close look at university teachers' and A2 students' perspectives in Thailand and a critical eye from Serbia* (published) reflected on the previous three research papers and reexamined current EFL oral communication teaching practices from the perspectives of teachers and the majority A2 (elementary) students attempting to embrace communicative language teaching (CLT) to improve oral English communication and identified problems and proposed practical solutions to enhance the majority of students' oral proficiency beyond the elementary level.

5.4 List of Papers (Published and In Press)

5.4.1 Bruner, D., Sinwongsuwat, K., & Shimray, Y.P. (2014, January).

Thai-Serbian A2 university EFL learners' perspectives on learning and teaching oral English communication skills. Proceedings of the 34th Thailand TESOL International Conference 2014: 21ST Century English Language Education: Towards Global Citizenship. The Empress Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

5.4.2 Radić-Bojanić, B., Topalov, J., & Sinwongsuwat, K. (In Press)

Thai and Serbian perspectives regarding teaching approaches in the university EFL classroom.

Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development.

5.4.3 Rochanahasadin, R., Ka-J, W., & Sinwongsuwat, K. (2014,

February). A study of relationship between learning-related behavior and language learning motivation of engineering undergraduates. SILK2014. Hydro Hotel, Penang, Malaysia. (Best Paper Award)

5.4.4 Bruner, D., Sinwongsuwat, K., & Radić-Bojanić, B. (2015).

EFL oral communication teaching practices: A close look at university teachers' and A2 students' perspectives in Thailand and a critical eye from Serbia. *English Language Teaching.* 8(1), 11-20.

6. Appendixes

6.1 Methodology

Questionnaires, the primary research instrument, were given to teachers and students teaching and learning oral English communication at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University (PSU) and the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad (UNS), Serbia. The questionnaires were designed to adduce a comprehensive and holistic view of oral English language teaching and learning from both students and teachers' perspectives, with the focus on issues often encountered by and of concern to EFL language educators.

Four hundred thirty-nine and 106 undergraduate students investigated were the majority A2 (elementary) proficiency level students at PSU and UNS respectively according to the Council of Europe Levels (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2001). Twelve teachers in the study were currently teaching primarily oral English communication focused courses at the time of the research study in 2012-13.

With a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .918, the questionnaire for students consisted of two main parts. The first part had two subsections. Dealing with participants' demographic data, the first subsection aimed at eliciting their background and learning experience which were assumed to affect their perspectives on language learning and teaching. To analyze the first part of the questionnaire concerned with the demographic data of research participants, descriptive statistics, i.e., mean and standard deviation was used. The second subsection consisted of questionnaire items comprised of statements with the Likert scale. Students were asked to respond to each statement by indicating whether they strongly disagreed (1), disagreed (2), were neutral (3), agreed (4), and strongly agreed (5). The statements were divided into six categories,

namely students' perspectives on teaching methods, teacher factors (about the teacher's personality and style), learning styles, learners' motivation, learning difficulties and teacher-learner communication.

For teaching methods, the statements included whether the course was interesting, provided enough authentic examples of spoken English and communicative tasks for real-life communication, the balance between accuracy and fluency-focused activities, the appropriateness of the frequency of the teacher speaking English/Thai, awareness of world Englishes, opportunities to speak English in class, the requirement of group work, appropriateness and accuracy of assessment, freedom to volunteer answers and freedom for self-directed activities.

Regarding teaching factors, items included teachers' style and feedback, pronunciation, and attention to students' individual needs. Concerning learning styles, the focus was on student participation, group activities, self-study, and use of English outside the class. Learners' motivation dealt with both instrumental and integrative motivation, including whether students wanted to learn English for a better job, better grades, to satisfy parents, to travel abroad, because English is a global language, to be able to speak to native speakers and to learn more about other cultures and access English media. Statements on learning difficulties focused on class size, equipment, study facilities at home, time to study, family and peer support and access to English media and private classes. Finally, teacher-learner communication centered on communication only in class, only about course-related matters, and/or communication with the teacher about anything.

The second part of the student questionnaire canvassed students' perceptions of the English speaking course syllabus, teaching methods, class facilities, and schedule. Students were asked to check items that apply to each topic and rank them in order of frequency.

Similar to the questionnaire for students, the teacher questionnaire has two parts, of which one elicited teachers' background and the other was similar to the second part of the student questionnaire. Validated with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .874, the teacher questionnaire was used to elicit teachers' perspectives on the course syllabus, class activities, assessment, teaching methods, class size, facilities and arrangement, class schedule, and teaching difficulties. Statements about the syllabus involved the use of commercial or in-house course books, the Internet and other materials. Class activities statements adduced information about teachers involving students in pair and group work, class discussions, peer feedback, asking and answering questions and volunteering. It also addressed teacher priorities related to tasks concerning real-world uses of spoken English, accuracy, meaning and fluency focused activities, monitoring students' progress and providing feedback and strategies making oral English communication learning manageable.

The category of assessment canvassed assessment types often used, including oral presentations, grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension tests and term exams. Teaching methods elicited which methods were often used, including lectures, modeling, individual, pair and group work, teacher and peer feedback, whole-class discussions, structure of the lesson (e.g. instructions, wrap-up), and methods of correcting students. The statements about class size, facilities and arrangements sought to obtain information about the average class size, adequacy of equipment and arrangement of desks in the class.

The class schedule items focused on class-start time and teacher preferences. Finally, teaching difficulties concerned problems when teaching oral English such as class sizes, mixed ability classes and student motivation.

6.2 Findings and Discussion

Overview of current practices in teaching and learning oral English communication

Based on the researchers' own observations and findings from the survey, oral English communication classes conducted at PSU, whether compulsory or elective, clearly continue to embrace Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the key features of which focus primarily on authentic input and interaction in meaningful communicative contexts rather than on language structure and accuracy. Listening and speaking skills were emphasized and focused skills commercial textbooks were used. A learner-centered approach was also adopted following the 1999 National Education Act. The overall difference between Thai and Serbian oral communication classes was the emphasis on pair/group work in the former and individual work as well as teacher-centered lectures in the latter. Given an apparently higher student proficiency level, UNS used integrated skills textbooks fostering oral discussions, perceived by Thai teachers to be too advanced for the Thai A2 students. The lower proficiency of Thai students also dictated students being engaged more in pair/group work than in individual work.

Regarding perspectives of the students from both universities on learning and improving oral English communication skills, elicited via an itemized Likert scale, Thai and Serbian A2 students overall had rather similar perspectives on teaching methods and learning motivation, but very or moderately different perspectives on their teachers, learning styles and learning difficulties. The majority of students at both universities were satisfied with the oral English communication courses offered; the courses allowed them to engage in communicative tasks related to real-world uses of English, balancing accuracy- with fluency-focused activities and making them aware of varieties of English spoken in the world. They had

opportunities to work with their classmates and felt comfortable doing so. Their course teachers also made them feel free to volunteer their answers in class and helped them learn to take control of their own learning, and teachers were attentive to their learning progress.

Additionally, it was revealed that both groups of students were in fact highly motivated to learn English. They claimed that they attended class regularly and participated actively in the classroom. They similarly wanted to be able to speak with native speakers and learn about speakers of other cultures through the English language. They also found the target language beautiful and essential for consuming pop culture.

Sharing similar views overall on teaching methods and learning motivation, the Thai and Serbian A2 students were however very different on their views towards their teachers' teaching styles, as well as their own learning styles and difficulties. The Serbian students were more content with the frequency of their class teachers' English use, while the Thais preferred more Thai spoken by their teachers. The latter were apparently more used to studying English with Thai teachers often speaking Thai in the classroom; their first experience with oral English teaching at the university level in fact reinforced their previous experience. Most Thai university students had Thai English teachers in their first year of fundamental English courses, often using Thai to a high extent as the medium of instruction. When they reached the second year or higher at the university, they were abruptly exposed to native or near native English speakers in oral communication class with little Thai spoken. Such an abrupt change may have made their learning experience more difficult and challenging. In fact, some of the students surveyed reported having problems following their course teachers' fast English speech. By contrast, throughout their high school and university, the Serbs have Serbian teachers with primarily American accents who apparently can strike a

balance of L1/L2 use in the classroom for the benefit of their low-proficiency learners.

While wanting their teacher to speak their native language more, the Thai students nevertheless expected more English-speaking opportunities for themselves and more exposure to authentic examples of spoken English for real-life communication in class more than the Serbian students did. Apparently, for the Thais, examples of spoken English in real-life communication and opportunities to speak English in class mattered more than having English-speaking teachers teach the course given the fact that few English-speaking opportunities exist outside the classroom. The Thai students needed to put more effort to find the opportunity to use English than the Serbs, who by contrast had more opportunities to speak English both in and out of class.

The Serbians were also more satisfied with the fact they were continuously exposed to English teachers whose accents were closer to those of the speakers in the Inner Circle. They preferred their teacher's English more than the Thais. In Serbia, teachers mostly have homogenous American English accents. The Thais, on the other hand, were familiar primarily with British or American English accents mainly via commercial oral communication textbooks, but at university they learned English with foreign teachers from all the different circles speaking in a greater variety of English accents. At the time of the survey, the Thai A2 students were taught by American, British, Canadian, German, Indian, Sri Lankan, and Thai teachers, while the Serbian students were taught exclusively by Serbian teachers influenced by American English accents. Such a drastic change may have been unsettling for a number of the Thai A2 students who had had only limited exposure to so many varieties of spoken English.

Furthermore, the Serbians, whose native language is in the Eastern branch of the Indo-European group, appeared to be more accustomed to English, which is in the Western branch of the Indo-European language

family, by contrast with Thai belonging to a different language group (i.e., Tai-Kadai). In fact, for most Thais today, English is the only Indo-European language that they are exposed to. Additionally, the Serbians also reported more teachers' awareness of learner diversity than the Thais. This was apparently related to the fact that Serbian class was more ethnically diverse than the Thai class and the Thais may have perceived that teachers not sharing their native tongue may not completely understand them. The Thai cultural value with respect to the power distance between them and their teacher seemed to also influence their perception of their teachers' understanding them.

Concerning the students' views on themselves, one interesting difference between the Thai and Serb students was the Thais reportedly spent time with their English classmates not only working on class assignments but also socializing with them. The Thais' learning styles were apparently influenced by their group-oriented native culture; they seemed to prefer cooperative to individual learning, and group to individual work. In fact, such a learning style was also reinforced in their English classroom, which mostly involved them in group work. The Thai students reportedly favored group work but were least comfortable with volunteering and answering questions in class. Because of their collectivism cultural value, they were more likely to excel through group work rather than individual assignments and preferred to be assessed on group work. The Thais apparently needed to acquire skills to become more independent learners. The Serbian students on the contrary felt most comfortable with asking and answering questions but apparently disdained peer related activities such as peer feedback and group/pair work, embracing individualistic cultural values.

With respect to English learning motivation, the Thai students reportedly were much more driven than the Serbians by their desire to get a better job, work for a foreign company at home and abroad, and

satisfy their parents. They were driven less by their desires to consume English media. The Serbians' motivation was more driven by their desire to travel. Additionally, since English media are more readily accessible in the society, they exerted influence on the learners' motivation to learn the target language more than in the Thai context.

Regarding assessment, while Thai mid-term and final-exam requirements tested vocabulary, grammar and basic listening and conversation skills, the Serbs' exams were primarily reading comprehension-based. The Thai students' preference for assessment based on group scripted role-plays rather than reading comprehension and individual tasks favored by the Serbs also pointed to their lower proficiency.

There appear to be a number of factors contributing to the different perspectives between the Thai and Serbian A2 students, and these factors lead us to some implications for oral English communication teaching in Thailand. Although both groups of students investigated were A2 level based on the paper Cambridge Quick Placement Test, it is likely the Thai students had lower oral English proficiency than their Serbian counterparts based on our findings, observation and previous research on Thai oral English proficiency. Thais' lower proficiency and major cultural differences between the two groups affecting their learning styles account for most of the different perspectives of Thai and Serb students. The other major factors are the degree of exposure to English outside class, the degree of instrumental versus integrative motivation, the variety of Englishes spoken by teachers and the similarities between L1 and L2.

Problematic areas and recommendations for designing a curriculum to improve oral English communication ability of Thai university students

Problematic areas identified in the Thai oral English communication classroom included mixed ability classes, classes that have too many students, an overemphasis on pair and group work in Thailand resulting in an imbalance with individual tasks and the inability of Thai students to work independently.

With respect to mixed ability classes at PSU, teachers overwhelmingly reported the problem of having students with actual oral proficiency ranging from beginner to intermediate level in the same class, leading to boredom of higher proficiency students coming from faculties with higher admission standards and problems organizing communicative activities. Placement tests grouping students with the same or similar proficiency is one solution. Another is placing students in oral English communication courses based on the grades obtained from the Fundamental English Listening and Speaking course—a mandatory course for undergraduate students at PSU. Also, there should be more than one level of elective oral English communication courses to cater both high and low proficiency students' needs. Placement tests have been the practice in Serbia at UNS since 2007 which led to success in all areas, including oral proficiency.

Regarding class size, while Thais acknowledged the problem, this was apparently not a problem for Serbian students. Compared with typical classrooms at PSU, those at UNS were generally smaller, and this inevitably constrained the number of students in each class. Additionally, the number of students enrolled in oral English communication classes at PSU increases annually. Fifty percent of the teacher respondents at PSU reported class sizes that had 40 or more students. A class size that is too big gives students insufficient speaking practice and limits the ability of

the teacher to give students individual attention. It also makes it more difficult for the teacher to navigate the classroom to arrange and monitor communicative activities (Likitrattanaporn, 2014). At the Faculty of Liberal Arts, some classrooms can accommodate as many as 150 students. Additionally, the demand to take oral English communication courses increases annually, leading to pressure to increase class size. For an effective oral English communication class, there needs to be a rigorously maintained upper enrollment limit, say 40 students for instance. Given that demand to take elective oral English communication courses exceeds available teacher resources, higher level proficiency students could be relegated to more advanced courses, taking the pressure off class size for A2 learners.

The overemphasis on group activities at PSU, where speaking teaching and assessing methods overwhelmingly include group work such as role play at the expense of individual work, appears to be another problem keeping Thai students from becoming independent oral communicators. The Thai students reportedly preferred and excelled at group activities but were least comfortable with individual work such as volunteering and answering questions. This reflects Thai group-oriented, collectivist cultural orientation and fear of “losing face”, compared to Serbian individualistic cultural orientation in which the latter excel in individual tasks including individual assignments, asking and answering questions and individual assessment.

While most research today supports a high degree of cooperative learning in the EFL classroom, which involves emphasis on pair and group work that is consistent with the CLT approach (see Trong Tuan, 2010), at the tertiary academic level where individual achievement is paramount for success, there needs to be a balance between cooperative and individual tasks so that students do not fail miserably with the latter,

lacking the experience in confronting and overcoming anxiety and acquiring confidence to use the language spontaneously.

The imbalance of group work and individual work for A2 learners can be redressed to an acceptable degree by introducing more individual in-class oral activities such as individual oral presentations and an interview with the teacher as part of the course requirements.

Another problematic area closely related to the overreliance on group work is the over-application of scripted role plays. Since one of the key features of CLT is to expose the learners to genuine, authentic use of the target language in a meaningful interaction as frequently as possible, in-class oral activities such as non-scripted role-plays are more preferable than scripted ones. However, based on our observations, the role-play as applied in all the oral communication classes at PSU are of the scripted type in which the students were allowed to prepare and rehearse their conversation scripts in advance before the actual performance. This is apparently counterproductive given the spontaneous nature of ordinary conversation they need to master. In genuine conversation we rarely plan ahead what we say, leaving it to the moment-by-moment interaction contingency (Herazo Rivera, 2010).

It is a better learning experience for students to produce utterances in real time rather than ask questions they have rehearsed in a parrot-like fashion. In a non-scripted role play students ask questions based on their actual knowledge of the language or gained through the role play activity by interacting spontaneously with other students and thereby achieving the goal of developing spontaneous oral production (Ellis, 2003, cited in Herazo Rivera, 2010). Additionally, even though both scripted and non-scripted role-play activities can help learners to improve their English speaking performance, non-scripted role-plays have been proven to contribute to the improvement of the learners' discrete oral performance and conversation skills as appear in naturally-occurring conversation to a

more significant degree than scripted ones for both high and low proficiency learners. Non-scripted role-play activities better contribute to the holistic improvement in oral English performance of the Thai EFL learners than scripted ones (Phuetphon, Chayanuvat, & Sitthitikul, 2012; Rodpradit & Sinwongsuwat, 2012; Sinwongsuwat, 2012). The improvement was particularly evident in such practices as turn-taking and sequence organizing, overlap, reciprocal greeting, third-turn assessment, repair, and the use of turn-holding devices (Naksevee & Sinwongsuwat, 2013).

Finally, Thai students had problems accessing English media and were exposed more to Thai than English media; the majority of popular TV and radio channels are still in Thai. English TV programs are often dubbed into Thai. The Serbians are on the other hand exposed to a greater variety of English media such as news, movies, and music because the country is literally in the middle of Europe. While English TV and films are subtitled, the students reportedly enjoyed them without subtitles and preferred English music. In fact, with the Internet, there are limitless opportunities to access English media with the dominance of Western popular culture. Thai students need to be encouraged to utilize these resources at their disposal, while at the same time preserving and enjoying Thai culture.

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6.4 Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for pedagogical practice in an EFL setting emanating from the project included proposing further studies exploring the relationship between English proficiency and students' learning motivation, to conduct in Thailand real-life in-class communicative activities in English, a move towards non-scripted role plays, to foster greater cultural awareness between native teachers and students, team

teaching of native and non-native teachers in English communication classes, placement tests, a range of more advanced elective courses for higher proficiency students, restricted class size, an appropriate balance between group and individual tasks and investigating through further research the long-term effects of the implementation of such measures and principles.

6.5 Reprints of All the Published Papers and Papers Published in Conference Proceedings

Paper 1

**The 34th Thailand TESOL International
Conference Proceedings 2014**

**21st Century English Language Education:
Towards Global Citizenship**

January 17 - 18, 2014

The Empress Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Welcoming Message

The 34th Thailand TESOL International Conference in Chiang Mai early this year was successful in creating an intellectually stimulating atmosphere, providing our participants with opportunities to present and discuss innovations, trends and concerns in TESOL. We are privileged to inform our readership and contributors that the Proceedings of the 34th Thailand TESOL International Conference 2014 are now available online.

Under the conference theme of *21st Century English Language Education: Towards Global Citizenship*, the proceedings feature an interesting assortment of seven articles in which contributors share their insights from their teaching and research experiences from a variety of socio-cultural contexts. This collection of articles offers our local and international communities of TESOL practitioners and researchers both pedagogical and theoretical insights on current trends in TESOL in order to keep them abreast of developments in the field. We therefore hope that our readership will find the articles both intellectually inspiring and pedagogically useful in their research and teaching milieu.

We would like to take this opportunity once again to thank all of our conference participants, esteemed international partners, and devoted conference organizing committee members for their support of the conference. We appreciate having received a warm welcome and excellent coordination from site committee members in Chiang Mai. Our profound gratitude and appreciation also go to all authors, reviewers, and IT specialists for all their expertise, tireless work and dedication to bring the proceedings to fruition. It has been our pleasure working with true professionals.

On a final note, we trust that Thailand TESOL will enjoy the continued support of its wide and varied audience and that we will join hands in making the mastery of the English language a more readily achievable goal for English language learners. We thus look forward to welcoming you again in our next year's conference under the theme of *English Language Education in Asia: Reflections and Directions* to be held on January 29-31, 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Unchalee Sermsonswad, *Thailand TESOL President*

Pragasit Sitthitikul, *Proceedings Chair*

Pramarn Subphadoongchone, *Proceedings Editor*

Proceedings Chair

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Thai-Serbian A2 University EFL Learners' Perspectives on Learning and Teaching Oral English Communication Skills

David Allen Bruner

Kemtong Sinwongsuwat

Yaruingam Phungshok Shimray

Prince of Songkla University

Abstract

This research investigated perspectives on learning and teaching oral English communication skills of A2 students, the majority of EFL undergraduate students, at two partner universities in countries in Kachru's "Expanding Circle", namely Prince of Songkla University, Thailand and University of Novi Sad, Serbia. A questionnaire survey explored the students' perspectives on their teachers' teaching methods and styles, and their own learning styles, motivation and difficulties. Overall, Thai and Serbian A2 students had different perspectives on their teachers, learning styles and learning difficulties, but similar perspectives on teaching methods and learning motivation. The differences pointed to Thais' lower oral English proficiency, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, diversity of varieties of English spoken by teachers, commonality between English and the students' L1, cultural disparities between teachers and students, Thai cooperative learning, different economic and social needs, and different class facilities.

Keywords: university learners' perspectives, learning and teaching oral English communication skills, Expanding Circle, Southeast Asia, the Balkans, Thailand, Serbia

Background of the Study

Amidst globalization in the information era, the unprecedented rapid spread and the pivotal role of English as the language of global and even local or personal business cannot be overstated. Today, in many countries, especially those in Kachru's (1985) Expanding Circle, where English has long been embraced as an important language for international communication, the language has transcended from being just an important foreign language to an international or a global language that everyone receiving formal education has to learn at an early age. In fact, as many of the countries in these traditional EFL contexts both in the East and in the West are striving to compete in the fast-growing world economy and to enter into some sort of economic union, English has undeniably become an essential part of human capital to invest in to produce human resources capable for successful competition and transition into desirable economies.

Given the considerably fast expansion of economies in Asia, CEOs of many companies have come forth stressing how important it is for people to possess strong English language skills if they want to progress in their career and capitalize on the increasing foreign investment pouring into these countries in this era (see e.g., Byrne, 2010). Speaking English has in fact become an even more essential goal as free trade and economic cooperation are promoted among both Asian and European countries. In the integration of the ASEAN economic community which takes effect on December 31, 2015, English becomes the only official language, marking its importance for international communication in the region where in the vast majority of countries, English is not the native language. A large number of companies have already put forth hiring policies which require employees to have a good command of English. For university students and academics in the ASEAN region, English becomes essential not only for communication but for publication purposes. Likewise, with the European Union Council's endorsement of accession negotiations with Serbia by January, 2014, a workforce with high English language ability is becoming even more critical in the Balkan region.

Given the urgent need for human resources with strong English communication skills in all parts of the world, it has become especially crucial for language educators to reexamine the current English language teaching approaches adopted to see whether they really produce desirable students. In her study which examined the general English proficiency of ASEAN

students measured by TOEFL- equated CU-TEP¹ scores, Prapphal (2001) found that the average English proficiency of Thai and Laotian students was lower than that of students from other ASEAN countries. Almost a decade later, Thai students' English proficiency remained the lowest among Southeast Asian countries (Khamkhien, 2010). In a more recent study conducted by an international language training company using data from online English tests, Thailand was even ranked one of the Asian countries on the lowest end of English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2012; WhereisThailand.info, 2012). In response to this, it has been suggested that certain changes be made in the components of the course syllabus adopted in Thailand such as goals and objectives, materials, methods of teaching, as well as testing and evaluation.

While Thailand is infamous for low English proficiency, Serbia, by contrast, has a much higher English proficiency ranking according to the Business English Proficiency index (Global English Press Releases, 2012). It seems obvious that their advantage over the South East Asian nation of Thailand is that Serbia is in the middle of Europe where English is the most spoken language and that Serbian is also in the Indo-European language family like English. Serbs also have apparently much easier access to a variety of English media and are mobile in traveling, going to school, and working in other European countries and global businesses. However, given that Serbia is a country in the Expanding Circle planning to integrate into an economic union and teaching English as a foreign language like Thailand, their classroom practices related to the majority of learners merit comparative investigation.

With emphasis on developing oral communication skills of university students, this paper was written based on a study taking a step back to examine the course syllabi currently adopted by universities in Thailand and Serbia in order to determine what they are attempting to achieve, what is really going on in the classroom where they are implemented and whether these syllabi are well-received by parties involved, particularly teachers and students. Instead of trying to lay claim on changes to be made to the syllabus adopted in Thailand, it tries to explore the perspectives of the majority of learners at partner universities in both regions regarding the syllabi adopted, especially the learners' own views on learning and improving their oral English communication skills. Using international perspectives, the paper hopes to shed light on classroom practices and learners-related factors that possibly contribute to success or failure of oral English communication education in the respective countries. This,

¹Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency

we believe, is necessary before any appropriate change can be made, especially to the Thai syllabi.

Research Questions

This paper, in particular, examines the perspectives of the majority of university EFL learners at the partner universities in their respective regions regarding learning and improving their oral English communication skills, and if they differ, how do they differ and what factors may account for these differences. The following research questions have accordingly been addressed:

1. What is the overall picture of learning and improving oral English communication skills based on the perspectives of the majority of EFL university learners at the chosen universities in the respective regions?
2. Do the learners in the two universities differ in their perspectives and, if so, how are they different and what factors can apparently account for such differences?

Methodology

Research settings, population, and samples

The research sites were the Faculty of Liberal Arts (FLA), Prince of Songkla University (PSU)-Hat Yai, Thailand and the Faculty of Philosophy (FP), University of Novi Sad (UNS)-Serbia. The population included the majority of PSU and UNS undergraduate students enrolled in English courses aimed primarily at developing oral English communication skills in the Academic Year 2011 and 2012 respectively.

Selected through the purposive sampling method, PSU student samples consisted of 439 2nd - 4th year students with the majority level of English proficiency, Elementary (A2), who took the courses in the summer semester of the same academic year. Determined by the Cambridge Quick Placement Test, out of 557 2nd - 4th year PSU students taking the elective courses oriented towards developing oral English communication skills in the summer semester of the Academic Year 2011, March-May 2012, the majority (n=439) were of the Elementary (A2) level of English proficiency according to the Council of Europe Levels (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2001). The rest of the students (n=92 and n=26) were of the Beginner (A1) and the Lower Intermediate (B1) levels of English proficiency respectively. This proportion remained intact based on our rerun

placement-test with the new group of students in the summer semester of the following academic year. The students with the majority level of English proficiency, A2, were therefore the suitable focus group for the questionnaire analysis. Serbian participants, on the other hand, included the undergraduate students taking English language courses in the academic year 2012. These students took the same placement test at the beginning of the academic year in order to be placed in appropriate groups and the majority of them, who were A2 students, were examined in this paper.

Instruments

Questionnaires were given to the majority of the EFL undergraduate students at both universities in order to capture the holistic picture of oral English language teaching and learning from the students' perspectives. Developed around the issues that typically are of central concern to language teachers, the whole questionnaire is divided into five relatively equal sections; however, this paper only discusses the findings obtained from two main sections of the questionnaire. The first one is concerned with the participants' demographic data, and the second section with the learners' perspectives on oral English language teaching and learning.

The students provided written responses to the questionnaires in their native language while the researchers were present for explanation and clarification. To analyze the first part of the questionnaire concerned with the demographic data of research participants, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were employed. The aim was to arrive at the profile of the research participants concerning their background and learning experience, which were believed to affect their perspectives on language learning and teaching. As for the other parts of the questionnaire that comprise statements with the Likert scale, statistical correlations and interval-scale analysis were performed comparing the answers of Serbian and Thai students to find statistically significant sets of data.

Findings and Discussion

The perspectives of the majority of students from both universities on learning and improving oral English communication skills were elicited via an itemized Likert scale. The results obtained from Thai and Serbian A2 students were interpreted based on the following interval scale: 4.51 – 5.00 (strongly agreed), 3.51 – 4.50 (agreed), 2.51 – 3.50 (moderately agreed), 1.51 – 2.50 (disagreed), and 1.00 – 1.50 (strongly disagreed). Additionally, they

were compared to determine item differences. Those items whose differences between the two groups not only were statistically significant but also fell between different intervals are described as very different, whereas those with only statistically significant differences are considered moderately different. The rest of the items whose differences were not statistically significant were considered similar or the same between the two groups.

Overview of A2 students' perspectives on oral-English communication teaching and learning

It was found that overall, Thai and Serbian A2 students had rather similar perspectives on teaching methods and learning motivation, but very or moderately different perspectives on their teachers, learning styles and learning difficulties. As shown in Table 1 below, A2 students, the majority of students at both universities, were satisfied with the oral English communication courses offered; they found the content provided in the course books used interesting. The courses allowed them to engage in communicative tasks related to real-world uses of English, balancing accuracy- with fluency-focused activities and making them aware of varieties of English spoken in the world. They had opportunities to work with their classmates and felt comfortable doing so. Their course teachers also made them feel free to volunteer their answers in class and helped them learn to take control of their own learning. They adopted adaptive teaching styles and were receptive to the students' view of learning. Furthermore, the teachers were attentive to their learning progress.

Table 1: Thai and Serbian students' similar perspectives on teaching methods and styles

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Providing interesting course content	Serbian	107	4.08	0.92	1.45	0.15
	Thai	439	3.95	0.74		
Engaging in real-world communicative tasks	Serbian	107	3.64	1.14	-0.51	0.61
	Thai	436	3.69	0.8		
Balancing accuracy and fluency-focused activities	Serbian	105	4.1	0.88	1.69	0.09
	Thai	438	3.96	0.77		

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Raising awareness of world Englishes	Serbian	106	3.96	1.32	-0.01	0.99
	Thai	438	3.96	0.83		
Learning cooperatively	Serbian	107	3.83	1.33	-1.41	0.16
	Thai	439	4.02	0.79		
Fostering peer support	Serbian	106	3.79	1.61	-1.21	0.23
	Thai	439	3.99	0.76		
Participating voluntarily	Serbian	107	3.66	1.82	0.81	0.42
	Thai	438	3.52	0.95		
Nurturing autonomous learning	Serbian	107	4.24	1.64	0.74	0.46
	Thai	438	4.12	0.74		
Teacher's adaptive teaching styles	Serbian	106	4.56	2.02	1.92	0.06
	Thai	439	4.18	0.70		
Teachers' being receptive to students' view	Serbian	105	4.46	2.18	1.67	0.10
	Thai	439	4.10	0.68		
Teachers' being attentive to students' progress	Serbian	104	4.38	2.33	1.03	0.31
	Thai	439	4.15	0.72		

Additionally, it was revealed that both groups of students were in fact highly motivated to learn English. They claimed that they attended class regularly and participated actively in the classroom. They similarly wanted to be able to speak with native speakers and learn about speakers of other cultures through the English language. They also found the target language beautiful and essential for consuming pop culture.

Sharing similar views overall on teaching methods and learning motivation, the Thai and Serbian A2 students were however very different on their views towards their teachers' teaching styles, as well as their own learning styles and difficulties. Table 2 displays the statistical results related to the students' different perspectives on their teachers and teaching styles.

Table 2: Thai and Serbian students' different perspectives on teachers and teaching styles

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
authentic examples of spoken English* Providing sufficient	Serbian	107	4.45	0.84	4.68	0.00
	Thai	439	4.03	0.75		
Frequency of teachers' speaking English	Serbian	107	4.94	0.33	16.25	0.00
	Thai	438	4.12	0.81		
Frequency of teachers' speaking students' L1	Serbian	105	4.66	0.95	15.71	0.00
	Thai	438	2.96	1.16		
Giving opportunities for speaking English in class	Serbian	106	4.98	0.57	11.52	0.00
	Thai	439	4.22	0.75		
Providing essential learning opportunities	Serbian	107	4.39	1.16	3.71	0.00
	Thai	439	3.95	0.76		
Assessing students' performance	Serbian	106	4.70	1.25	8.24	0.00
	Thai	438	3.92	0.75		
Being communication facilitators	Serbian	106	4.56	1.50	2.50	0.00
	Thai	438	4.18	0.76		
Giving feedback*	Serbian	107	4.84	1.55	3.34	0.00
	Thai	438	4.51	0.67		

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teachers' accents	Serbian	107	4.89	1.60	2.90	0.00
	Thai	439	4.43	0.74		
Teachers' understanding of what they are teaching	Serbian	107	5.07	1.62	5.29	0.00
	Thai	439	4.22	0.77		
Teachers' awareness of learners' ethnic diversities	Serbian	107	4.80	1.83	6.93	0.00
	Thai	438	4.04	0.70		
Teachers' provision of input*	Serbian	105	4.48	2.18	2.35	0.02
	Thai	437	3.97	0.76		

*moderately different

As shown in Table 2, the Serbian students were more content with the frequency of their class teachers' English use, while the Thais preferred more Thai spoken by their teachers. The latter were apparently more used to studying English with Thai teachers often speaking Thai in the classroom; their first experience with oral English teaching at the university level in fact reinforced their previous experience. Most Thai university students had Thai English teachers in their first year of fundamental English courses, often using Thai to a high extent as the medium of instruction. When they reached the second year or higher at the university, they were abruptly exposed to native or near native English speakers in oral communication class with little Thai spoken. Such an abrupt change may have made their learning experience more difficult and challenging. In fact, some of the students surveyed reported having problems following their course teachers' fast English speech. By contrast, throughout their high school and university, the Serbs have Serbian teachers with primarily American accents who apparently can strike a balance of L1/L2 use in the classroom for the benefit of their low-proficiency learners.

While wanting their teacher to speak their native language more, the Thai students nevertheless expected more English-speaking opportunities for themselves and more exposure to authentic examples of spoken English for real-life communication in class more than the Serbian students did. Apparently, for the Thais, examples of spoken English in real-

life communication and opportunities to speak English in class mattered more than having English-speaking teachers teach the course given the fact that few English-speaking opportunities exist outside the classroom. The Thais were actually yearning for more opportunities to practice speaking English in class; they came to class expecting their teachers to help them learn to communicate effectively in the target language. In fact, they reportedly also tried more to find the opportunity to speak English with native speakers and speakers of other languages after class. Despite the increasing number of international students on campus, the students of other languages were spread out mainly among graduate programs, allowing little contact with the undergraduate student majority. The Thai students thus needed to put more effort to find the opportunity to use English. The Serbians by contrast have more opportunities to speak English not only outside the classroom, but also in the university oral communication classroom than they did at the primary and secondary school level.

In addition, while both groups of students liked their class teachers in several aspects such as accent, styles of teaching, teaching abilities, and awareness of learner diversities, the Serbian students preferred their teacher's English pronunciation more than the Thais. The Serbians apparently were more satisfied with the fact they were continuously exposed to English teachers whose accents were closer to those of the speakers in the Inner Circle. In Serbia, teachers mostly have homogenous American English accents. The Thais, on the other hand, were familiar primarily with British or American English accents mainly via commercial oral communication textbooks, but at university they learned English with foreign teachers from all the different circles speaking in a greater variety of English accents. At the time of the survey, the Thai A2 students were taught by American, British, Canadian, German, Indian, Sri Lankan, and Thai teachers, while the Serbian students were taught exclusively by Serbian teachers influenced by American English accents. Such a drastic change may have been unsettling for a number of the Thai A2 students who had had only limited exposure to so many varieties of spoken English. This corresponds in particular with the fact that the Thais rated lower on their satisfaction with their teachers' speaking English and with the comments they gave on their teachers' giving feedback and their understanding of the teachers' talk and the input provided.

Furthermore, the Serbians, whose native language is in the Eastern branch of the Indo-European group, appeared to be more accustomed to English, which is in the Western branch of the Indo-European language family, by contrast with Thai belonging to a different

language group (i.e., Tai-Kadai). In fact, for most Thais today, English is the only Indo-European language that they are exposed to. Additionally, the Serbians also reported more teachers' awareness of learner diversity than the Thais. This was apparently related to the fact that Serbian class was more ethnically diverse than the Thai class, and the Thais may have perceived that teachers not sharing their native tongue may not completely understand them. The Thai cultural value with respect to the power distance between them and their teacher seemed to also influence their perception of their teachers' understanding them (Thomgprasert, 2008).

Concerning the students' views on themselves, Tables 3, 4, and 5 below show the statistical results related to the students' different perspectives on their learning styles, motivation and difficulties respectively. Regarding learning styles outside the classroom, both groups of students reportedly spent time on self-study activities required by the course rather than on any other English activities not part of the course. However, unlike the Serbians, the Thais reportedly spent time with their English classmates not only working on class assignments but also socializing with them. They also preferred more to do other extracurricular English activities not part of the course requirements with their peers. Apparently, the Thais' learning styles were influenced by their group-oriented native culture; they seemed to prefer cooperative to individual learning, and group to individual work. In fact such a learning style was also reinforced in their English classroom, which mostly involved them in group work. Because of such a collectivism cultural value, the Thais are more likely to excel through group work rather than individual assignments. In fact, unlike the Serbs, most Thai students confirmed that they were able to fulfill in-class group activities more easily than self-study or individual exams. They thought that they could accomplish class activities more easily with their classmates, and preferred to be assessed by means of group rather than individual work. From their perspectives, group activities were more manageable and useful as they can assist and learn from each other.

Table 3: Thai and Serbian students' different perspectives on learning styles

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Socializing with peers out of the classroom	Serbian	105	2.41	1.29	-8.23	0.00
	Thai	439	3.50	0.85		
Working on assignments with peers out of the classroom	Serbian	106	2.13	1.25	-10.82	0.00
	Thai	436	3.52	0.84		
Doing required self-study English activities out of the class*	Serbian	106	3.86	1.19	2.72	0.01
	Thai	437	3.53	0.83		
Doing extra English activities out of the class*	Serbian	106	2.86	1.41	-3.70	0.00
	Thai	436	3.39	0.85		
Trying to find opportunities to speak English with native speakers outside the classroom	Serbian	105	2.38	1.33	-8.06	0.00
	Thai	437	3.47	0.85		
Taking the opportunity to speak English even with speakers of other languages*	Serbian	105	3.11	1.45	-2.06	0.04
	Thai	435	3.42	0.87		

*moderately different

With respect to English learning motivation, as indicated in Table 4, the Thai students reportedly were much more driven than the Serbians by their desire to get a better job, work for a foreign company at home and abroad, and satisfy their parents. They were driven less by their desires to consume English media.

Table 4: Thai and Serbian students' different perspectives on learning motivation

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
To get a better job	Serbian	106	4.28	1.07	-2.38	0.02
	Thai	438	4.54	0.75		
Not to disappoint other people	Serbian	106	2.42	1.49	-8.19	0.00
	Thai	438	3.67	0.97		
To travel abroad	Serbian	106	4.75	0.65	5.16	0.00
	Thai	438	4.38	0.78		
To work for a foreign company	Serbian	106	3.08	1.47	-7.87	0.00
	Thai	438	4.25	0.80		
To be able to enjoy English media*	Serbian	106	3.75	1.41	-3.73	0.00
	Thai	438	4.28	0.84		

*moderately different

Unlike the Thais, parents apparently did not influence the Serbians' learning English as much. The latter group's English learning was more driven by their desire to travel. They were more influenced by individualistic culture than the Thais, where groups and communities are paramount in society. English media are also more readily accessible in the society, thereby influencing the learners' motivation to learn the target language more.

As for learning obstacles, shown in Table 5, while overall the A2 students from both universities similarly denied that they were experiencing difficulties learning English, there were certain differences in discrete items reported.

Table 5: Thai and Serbian students' different perspectives on learning obstacles

Topics	Students	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Class size too big	Serbian	106	2.14	1.28	-6.07	0.00
	Thai	439	2.95	0.97		
Problems with teaching equipment	Serbian	106	1.25	0.69	-12.63	0.00
	Thai	438	2.29	1.03		
Lack of ones' own study desks	Serbian	106	1.25	0.81	-10.96	0.00
	Thai	434	2.27	1.03		
Lack of ones' own room to study*	Serbian	106	1.50	1.22	-5.49	0.00
	Thai	435	2.14	1.05		
Having disturbing roommates and/or neighbors*	Serbian	106	1.60	1.10	-5.64	0.00
	Thai	435	2.26	1.07		
Other subjects taking away too much time*	Serbian	106	3.41	1.37	5.13	0.00
	Thai	436	2.68	1.04		
Getting no support from family members*	Serbian	106	1.47	1.06	-6.11	0.00
	Thai	436	2.18	1.20		
Getting no support from peers*	Serbian	106	1.55	0.96	-5.85	0.00
	Thai	438	2.17	1.08		
No easy access to English media	Serbian	106	1.26	0.68	-13.33	0.00
	Thai	437	2.35	1.01		
Other learning difficulties	Serbian	106	0.06	0.23	-35.31	0.00
	Thai	292	2.53	1.13		

*moderately different

Unlike the Thai students, who did not completely deny the problem with class size, Serbian students rejected the statement that their English class size was too big. Compared with typical classrooms at PSU, those at UNS were generally smaller, and this inevitably constrained the number of students in each class. Some classrooms at LA in contrast can hold as many as 150 students, possibly contributing to the class size problem. Additionally, the number of students enrolled in oral English communication classes at the faculty is increasing every year. The Serbian students also reportedly had fewer problems with classroom teaching equipment than the Thai students. Unlike classroom facilities at PSU, approximately 40-50% of the classrooms in Serbia were equipped with a blackboard, chalk, and an overhead projector; this apparently did not pose as many challenges to users as more advanced equipment such as computers and LCD projectors provided in every classroom at PSU.

The Serbians also more readily rejected the problems with private facilities to study, disturbing roommates and/or neighbors, support from family and peers when studying. This did not seem to be a surprise given the fact that unlike the Thais most of whom lived in dormitories, the Serbian students mostly were local, living at their own homes. However, unlike the Thais, the Serbians did not quite deny the problem of other subjects taking too much of their times. Most Serbian students at the Faculty of Philosophy, UNS, are required to take EFL or foreign language courses, which unlike other compulsory courses, offer only practice classes with no hours of lectures and allow the students to gain at most 3 credits. This may apparently have led the students to give higher priorities to those courses with hours of lectures and more credits.

Additionally, the Thai A2 students reportedly had more problems with access to English media, thus lowering their motivation to learn English to consume the media as previously discussed. Outside the classroom, a typical Thai student would be exposed more to Thai than English media; the majority of popular TV and radio channels are still in Thai. English TV programs are often dubbed into Thai. The Serbians are on the other hand exposed to a greater variety of English media such as news, movies, and music because the country is literally in the middle of Europe. While English TV and films are subtitled, the students reportedly enjoyed them without subtitles and preferred English music. Finally, while Serbian students reportedly had no other learning difficulties, two per cent of Thai A2 students (sum=439) announced that they had problems learning other languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Apparently, Thai students were more concerned with learning languages other than English more than the Serbian students.

Factors responsible for different perspectives and implications for oral English teaching in Thailand

There appear to be a number of factors contributing to the different perspectives between the Thai and Serbian A2 students, and these factors lead us to some implications for oral English communication teaching in Thailand.

1. Lower oral English proficiency of Thai students and reinforcement of previous teaching methods at the university level

Although both groups of students investigated were A2 level based on the paper *Cambridge Quick Placement Test*, it is likely the Thai students had lower oral English proficiency than their Serbian counterparts based on the findings and the literature previously discussed. Therefore, they preferred to have their teachers' speaking more Thai in the classroom in the belief that it would improve their understanding and learning efficiency. In fact, most Thai university students have Thai English teachers in their first year teaching fundamental English courses and speaking Thai in class. However, using an abundance of Thai in the classroom may be counterproductive and will not prepare them well for elective courses with non-Thai teachers in later years. Therefore, it is recommended that at the outset of students' university career, teachers endeavor to make sure the majority of in-class communicative activities are conducted in English and the students are encouraged to use their English with speakers of other languages outside the classroom through interactive assignments.

2. Limited exposure to spoken English outside the classroom

In the Thai context, students mostly share the same Thai language and culture with limited exposure to cultures of English-speaking teachers. Their exposure to native or near native English speakers may be limited to their teachers and few opportunities exist for them to communicate with speakers of English outside the classroom. Given Thai students' having more limited exposure to English than the Serbians, Thai teachers, administrators, and policy makers should be responsible for creating more opportunities for the students to engage in English extracurricular activities outside the classroom, which they preferred according to the research findings. In fact, as previously reported, the Thais yearned for more English-speaking opportunities; therefore, in the classroom teachers should aim to adequately provide them with activities simulating real-life communicative situations in which they can really

use English in meaningful ways. Additionally, as suggested by Bell (2011) EFL students with limited exposure to the target language in real-life situations may demand different teaching strategies to accommodate their communication needs. Especially, in the Thai context in which students also have limited exposure to English media, the learners may need to be taught not only where they can use their English outside the classroom and with incentives but by increasing their motivation to learn English by tying their personal interests with the language (through virtual classrooms, blogs, social media, etc.), rather than mainly letting them navigate without intervention in the entertainment-driven world of music, TV and movies.

3. Diversity of varieties of English spoken by teachers

At the time of the study, non-Thai English teachers at Liberal Arts, PSU came from a variety of nationalities and language backgrounds and in the majority of cases, the teachers' L1 was not English. Not surprisingly, the students were exposed to a variety of English accents in the oral communication classroom. Even among native English speakers, accents also vary, proving to be challenging for the Thais with limited previous exposure to world Englishes. However, with continuous incentive-driven exposure to English activities both in and outside the classroom with native and non-native speakers of English, it is likely they will become more familiar with greater varieties of English, having fewer problems with the English-speaking teachers from different circles. And, in fact, as noted by Kessler (2003) international or multilingual English teachers having learned English as L2 learners themselves may benefit students through greater empathy, language learning knowledge and sharing cultural experiences. Native English speakers are just as prone to speak too quickly or not to pronounce words clearly. Having teachers whose English is not their native tongue can therefore be advantageous to the students especially as English speakers in the Inner Circle are rapidly being outnumbered by those from the other circles.

4. Commonality between English and the native language

Negative L1 interference may be felt more acutely among the Thai EFL students than Serbian students given the fact that Thai is from a different language family than English and Serbian. So, as teachers, we need to be cognizant of the essential linguistic differences between Thai and English. Specialized training may be required for non-Thai teachers. Students, on the other hand, should be made aware of the contrastive features between the two languages, especially in pronunciation, grammar and expression use as needed to

perform various actions in oral communication via various focused, awareness-raising activities. And the teaching aim should be to train students to start thinking in English rather than relying on translation aids without awareness of linguistic differences. When performing oral activities, they should be encouraged to speak spontaneously. The majority of communicative tasks used such as role-play, discussion, and public speaking should require non-scripted speech, bearing in mind the students' language level so that the students will not be over-influenced by negative L1 transfer.

5. Cultural disparity between teacher and students

Studies have suggested that L2 learning is greatly influenced by cultural values of the parties involved (Thongprasert, 2008). Very different cultural values of non-Thai teachers may hinder student learning in the classroom. Because of their high power distance cultural values, Thai students prefer the direction and control of their teachers because they see them as superior in both status and education. So, the students are inclined to be passive in the classroom. They are also often reluctant to ask questions, volunteer answers or come up with original ideas for fear of losing face. If their teachers are from very different cultures, cross-cultural misunderstandings between teacher and student seem unavoidable. Non-Thai teachers therefore need cultural-awareness through training or self-study. Given that Thai students are inclined to stay quiet in class and keep distance from their teachers owing to such high power distance and risk avoidance cultural backgrounds, teachers need strategies to get students to volunteer, ask and answer questions, and express opinions without the perception of being disrespectful or losing face.

In the case of Thai teachers, they should understand their own culture and how it can affect the classroom dynamics. While raising the students' awareness of the target language culture, the teachers may at the same time need to make effort to avoid reinforcing aspects of the L1 culture that could diminish the students' ability to acquire oral proficiency. For example, Thai teachers should encourage students to proactively participate in all classroom activities.

6. Reinforcement of group culture via cooperative learning

Thongprasert (2008) suggests that Thai students are more likely to learn by group work because of their collectivist cultural orientation. This coupled with the promotion of cooperative learning in an ESL/EFL classroom via the Communicative Language Teaching

approach makes teachers at any education level more inclined to assign group work than individual tasks. At the university level, this reinforces cooperative learning that the students experienced prior to university. However, if there is no balance between group and individual communicative assignments, Thai students may fail miserably when confronted by the latter. For example, in oral English communication courses at PSU, more than 60% of the requirements are based on individual achievements.

7. Different economic and social needs

The findings show that the Thai students are already instrumentally motivated to learn to communicate in English. They know that English as a global language will enhance their job prospect after graduation. With the AEC on the horizon, teachers should use motivation-teaching strategies to keep them focused on the fact there will be intense competition in the ACE job markets, particularly for positions in multinational companies. As suggested by Saraithong (2013), teachers should engage the students in activities that allow them to effectively improve skills essential in the workplace, in particular, listening and speaking.

8. Different classroom facilities and learning environment

PSU and UNS are located in very different environments. Given that PSU is in the Asian tropical zone and UNS is in central Europe, this may account for differences in the universities' different layouts and infrastructures. With respect to LA-PSU, the policy of the university is for all core English language training subjects to be centralized in one faculty. This results in challenges to the faculty given annually increasing enrollments, which may affect class size. As well, at present the Faculty of Liberal Arts can accommodate very large classes, which could affect their students' perspectives on class size and facilities. It is recommended that the oral English communication classroom size has a rigorously-encouraged upper limit in accordance with the students' learning needs. Consideration should also be given to hiring more English teachers given the increasing enrollment.

Conclusion

This research aims to highlight perspectives on learning and teaching oral English communication skills of A2 university students in Thailand and Serbia. It was found that Thai and Serbian students had similar perspectives on teaching methods and learning motivation, but different perspectives on their teachers, learning styles and learning difficulties. The differences reflect Thais' lower oral English proficiency, limited exposure to English outside

the classroom, diversity of varieties of English spoken by teachers, commonality between English and the students' L1, cultural disparities between teachers and students, reinforcement of group culture via cooperative learning, different economic and social needs, and different class facilities and environments.

To enhance oral English communication teaching in Thailand, it was recommended that real-life, in-class communicative activities are conducted in English and the students are encouraged to use their English with speakers of other languages outside the classroom through interactive assignments with incentives and tied to personal interests, in order to familiarize students with greater varieties of English. Effort should be made to acquaint both teachers and students with the contrastive aspects of Thai and English via various focused, awareness-raising activities for students and specialized training for teachers. Moreover, in order for teachers to encourage students to think in English, rather than translate from Thai, and to counter negative L1 interference, the majority of communicative tasks in the classroom should be non-scripted. Greater cultural awareness between teacher and student needs to be fostered so that ingrained Thai cultural values such as high power avoidance and risk avoidance will not act as barriers to the communicative process and oral proficiency. Team teaching between native and non-native teachers, if possible, probably will also help the students to overcome the cultural and linguistic barriers from having solely native teachers in class. This merits further research despite its logistical complexity. Finally, teachers should encourage oral skills essential to the workplace and class size and teacher-student ratios should be conducive for this purpose.

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The Authors

David Allen Bruner has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Department of Languages and Linguistics since 2008 and teaches English to both graduate and undergraduate students. His interests include English programs in Thailand and legal English.

Kemtong Sinwongsuwat (Ph.D.) is an assistant professor in the Department of Languages and Linguistics at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University-Hat Yai, Thailand. She has a special interest in Conversation Analysis (CA), interactional linguistics, corpus linguistics, and the development of Thai EFL learners' oral communication skills.

Yaruingam Phungshok Shimray joined Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai campus in 2009 as a lecturer at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Department of Languages and Linguistics. He regularly conducts leadership trainings, seminars, professional growth workshops to PSU students, staff, and teachers in and off the campus.

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Paper 2

Thai and Serbian student perspective regarding teaching approaches in the university EFL classroom

Biljana Radić-Bojanić^a, Jagoda Topalov^{a*} and Kemtong Sinwongsuwat^b

^a*Department of English Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Dr Zorana Đinđića, 2, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia;* ^b*Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University-Hat Yai, Songkhla 90112, Thailand*

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The research reported in this paper adopts a sociocultural approach to the comparative study of Thai and Serbian foreign language learning settings, seeking to identify similarities and differences in student perception of teacher approaches to teaching EFL. The participants in the research included a total of 439 Thai and 106 Serbian students. The instrument used in the study included a questionnaire constructed for the purposes of this research, comprising statements that covered general aspects of possible teaching approaches. The findings corroborate conclusions of other investigations in this field, particularly in terms of the respective communication styles of the learners, the amount of exposure to the foreign language in a natural setting and the distinction between non-native and native EFL teachers. The paper concludes with recommendations for pedagogical practice.

Keywords: perceptions; teaching practices; EFL; university students; Thailand; Serbia

Introduction

The globalisation in the late twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century has necessitated a world language of business and communication whereby English continues its role of the lingua franca of the nineteenth century period of colonisation. Today, in many countries, especially those in Kachru's (1985) Expanding Circle, where English has long been embraced as an important language for international communication, this language has transcended its role as merely an important foreign language to become an international or global language that is included in formal education from an early age (Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, and Shimray 2014, 14). Due to the fact that the countries from the Expanding Circle increasingly become part of the international economic and corporation network, there is an ever-increasing need for the type of foreign language education which will provide future employees with sufficient linguistic, communicative, pragmatic and intercultural skills that will allow both them and their future employers to grow and become part of the world market.

Describing the Asian economic and educational context, Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, and Shimray (2014, 14) state that there is a definitive call from many companies for the members of the workforce who would take advantage of the knowledge of English both for the advancement of their careers and in the wider context of the potential benefits

*Corresponding author. Email: jagoda.topalov@gmail.com

40 their employers might have. These authors, for example, point out that one of the consequences of the ASEAN charter in 2008 was the change in the hiring policies which stipulate a much higher level of proficiency of English of the employees than before, which is necessarily reflected in the inevitable changes in the educational systems of Asian countries, Thailand being in focus here.

45 A fairly similar context is found in European countries which are, or will become part of the European Union. Foreign language learning policies in Europe have for some time been regulated by the Common European Framework of Reference, which postulates the need to develop high competence not just in English but in other foreign languages as well since an early age. Some European countries have abided by these recommendations and others are to follow suit. In the context of higher education a workforce with high English language ability is becoming a key priority,¹ so it has become crucial for language educators to re-examine existing English language teaching approaches to see whether they in fact produce the results desired.

50 Since both educational contexts at tertiary level have exhibited certain shortcomings in relation to the development of oral competences, this paper aims at investigating in detail the reasons that lie at the core of the lack of fluency among Thai and Serbian students, focusing particularly on the role of the teacher in both foreign language education systems. The research included 439 Thai and 106 Serbian students, who filled out a questionnaire which tested their perceptions of various aspects of their teachers' work.

60 **Tertiary English language teaching in Thailand and Serbia**

Prior to the passage of the National Education Reform Act in 1999, a consensus existed among English language teaching practitioners, policymakers and concerned parents that the English curriculum in Thai universities was failing to produce graduates who could meet the demands of real-life English communication in the fast-changing world. Traditional practices of rote and teacher-centred learning in most subjects were seriously challenged for failing to produce students with international capabilities who could adequately stay connected with the global knowledge system and maintain lifelong learning experiences without language barriers. Despite a greater emphasis on real-life oral communication in language teaching, a more widespread use of technology-rich environments in language learning, and especially the progress made on education reform enforced by the National Education Reform Act, the overall English proficiency of Thai university students remains low, compared to that from other ASEAN countries. In fact, their English language skills and competencies for future careers in an international free-market economy have often been questioned (Chanawongse, 2009; Prapphal and Opanon-Amata 2002).

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Despite increasing attempts to achieve internationalisation at the university level, the English language competence of most Thai university students remains low, undermining their ability to enjoy the benefits of internationalisation. Attention still needs to be paid especially to those classroom practices involved in the development of oral English communication skills, which have been shown to be highly problematic among most Thai students yet hardly assessed in the national tests. An understanding of practitioner teaching processes is urgently required if Thailand seriously intends to prepare graduates for the nation's transition into the one seamless ASEAN community in the next few years.

85 When Serbia signed the Bologna declaration in 2003, it marked a new beginning for
the country's educational system, especially at the university level. The introduction of
the credit system and the need for greater student and staff mobility implied fundamental
changes in tertiary education in Serbia, where the existing system presented few
90 similarities with the three-cycle higher education system contemplated in the European
Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. In addition, the switch to the Bologna system
implied changing the concepts of curricula, not just formally but also in terms of course
content, in order to accommodate the idea of a high-quality knowledge base which would
in turn enable the exchange of students and teachers as well as consequent employment
and further education.

95 In response, English language education underwent a certain degree of change, but the
common aim of all institutions of higher education was to **harmonise** their English
language courses as closely as possible with the Common European Framework of
Reference for Languages both in terms of common reference levels and in terms of
teaching methods, principles and policies (e.g. transition from the enduring grammar
100 translation method to the communicative teaching method). Similarly, at the Faculty of
Philosophy of the University of Novi Sad, drastic changes occurred in terms of course
syllabi, class **organisation** and teaching materials, with the goal of achieving increased
communicative competence for students who were learning English as a foreign language.

105 However, the problematic aspect of these changes was the marked discrepancy between
students' receptive and productive knowledge. Using qualitative and quantitative methods,
Radić-Bojanić, Lazović, and Topalov (2011) established that among all the investigated
students placed at the B2 level, only some actually satisfied the criteria for independent,
spontaneous or planned oral communication. Similarly, Lazović and Radić-Bojanić (2009)
110 established that student writing at the B2 level failed to correlate with their receptive
knowledge. The general conclusion can be reached that, due to high exposure to the
English language through music and television, students were able to recognise, understand
and process much more than they could produce.

115 Besides linguistic factors, extralinguistic and cultural factors affected student
achievement and proficiency level, as established by Topalov and Radić-Bojanić (2011).
Namely, the analysis of student attitudes towards the culture and the society of target
language speakers on the one side, and towards their own culture and society on the other,
revealed a significant connection between language proficiency and attitudes relating to
the source language culture and society. In other words, students who felt a strong connection
120 with their own culture and language did not invest much effort in order to improve their
English language knowledge, with the outcome that the most neglected skill was speaking
(as students were not in any way motivated to seek opportunities to speak English with
native or non-native speakers).

125 English language reform in Serbia is still in the initial phases, and the first tangible
results remain to be seen. What students lack are opportunities to use the language in as
many different, real-life situations as possible, as this is the only way for them to activate
their receptive knowledge they have and to increase their knowledge of English,
eventually preparing them for employment and empowering them to find jobs in
the global free-market economy.

Theoretical background

130 This paper adopts a sociocultural approach to the comparative study of Thai and Serbian
foreign language learning settings, seeking to identify similarities and differences in

student perceptions of teachers and teacher behaviour in the EFL classroom. The study adopts this approach because the two settings show numerous similarities, particularly regarding the position of English as the main international language of communication and the general educational context in which students receive instruction, while also displaying striking differences in terms of respective cultures and social environment, the characteristics of teachers who act as mediators between the students and the foreign language in an institutional setting, as well as the extent of opportunities for informal and natural learning.

Communication styles

Even though language use is universal for all humans, the way in which we use language seems to be highly influenced by our culture and reflects the culture's affective, moral and aesthetic patterns (Neuliep, 2009). The manner in which communication is conducted in various cultures is a crucial issue that is especially relevant for foreign language learning.

According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), cultures vary in the degree to which speakers disclose their intentions through precise and candid verbal communication. In cultures which foster a direct style of communication, messages and meanings are carried by the words themselves. The direct style is found in low-context cultures (Hall 1989) in which non-verbal expressions convey very few meaning cues, so that the participants in acts of communication rely on explicitly coded verbal parts in order to get their messages across. In direct communication, interactants contend self-face needs, in which messages are used to clearly state the speaker's desires and aspirations (Neuliep, 2009). The direct style is preferred in most countries of North America and Western Europe (Chairsrakeo and Speece 2004), including Serbia (Hofstede 1980).

On the other hand, in an indirect style the speaker's intentions are implicit and only hinted at during interaction. The indirect style is found in high-context cultures, in which background information is implied and much of the message is carried in how the words relate to that implied information (Chairsrakeo and Speece 2004). Interactants in the indirect style of communication draw heavily on non-verbal communication channels in order to convey the message, employing tone of voice, gesture, posture, body language, physical distance, facial expression and silence. The use of the indirect language style is found in many Asian cultures, including Thailand (Chairsrakeo and Speece 2004). Goffman (1967) argues that indirectness reflects, in particular, the motivation to save face, to create a positive public image for others and to maintain interpersonal harmony, whereas directness threatens these goals.

Communication styles that are predominant in the learner's culture will strongly influence the manner in which the learner uses the language he or she is learning, as well as the choice of linguistic devices needed for the culturally determined communication. For example, when expressing disagreement, people from low-context cultures tend to use direct communication strategies, whereas people from high-context cultures prefer to disagree using indirect communication strategies such as indirect speech or silence. In the context of foreign language learning this means that learners who favour indirect speech will have a greater need for a variety of politeness expressions together with limiting and ambiguous devices, whereas learners from low-context cultures will require linguistic devices of high verbal precision that have a prominent potential for learner self-expression.

Formal and informal learning

In applied linguistics and teaching methodology a distinction can be drawn between the natural and educational settings in which learning occurs (Ellis 1994). Natural settings are where informal learning takes place. Informal learning is characterised by direct learner participation and observation without any articulation of the principles or rules that govern learning. The emphasis is on the social dimension of learning, as the content of what is being learned primarily satisfies the communicative purpose of transferring messages and meanings. On the other hand, formal learning occurs in educational settings. The main features of formal learning include conscious attention to rules and principles and mastery of the subject matter. In formal learning, the content of what is being learnt may be treated in isolation from its real, authentic uses and taught as a decontextualised body of knowledge (Ellis 1994, 611).

Research into the effectiveness of formal and informal foreign language learning has so far provided extensive coverage of the matter from different perspectives, without yet reaching a consensus. One group of research findings indicates that formal classroom instruction is more beneficial than exposure in developing foreign language proficiency, while a contrasting group suggests that formal instruction does not significantly contribute to the attainment of higher levels of proficiency, particularly in cases when learners have ample opportunity to practice language outside the classroom (for an overview of relevant research, see Ellis 1994, 612–630; Long, 1983). However, a third group of research findings seems to suggest that learners benefit most from a combination of formal instruction and exposure to the target language. Savignon's (1972) study conducted in a foreign language learning context argues that learners who received input in both formal and informal settings developed their communicative language skills. Spada (1986, 97) found that even though instruction was more important than contact in accounting for the differences in learner proficiency, contact was positively connected with improvement in grammar and writing when the instruction focused more on form, concluding that learners who received both types of instruction benefited the most. Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985, 329) in an ESL context found that a 'combination of form-oriented and meaning-oriented language teaching was more beneficial than form-oriented teaching alone' (1985, 329).

Learners develop their target-language proficiency most rapidly when exposed both to formal instruction and to informal learning opportunities. In other words, most successful learners seek out opportunities for communicating in the target language (Ellis 1994, 659).

Native and non-native teachers of English

Based on various survey findings, Medgyes (2001, 435) states that there are several notable differences between native and non-native foreign language teachers that inevitably affect their classroom behaviour, starting with the fact that native and non-native teachers differ in terms of their language proficiency. Native teachers are superior language users; they are more confident and have the ability to use the language spontaneously in any communicative situation. In terms of their teaching behaviour, this means that they are also more flexible and more innovative, focusing on fluency more than on accuracy. Their language proficiency gives them a superior position when it comes to providing learners with increased exposure to comprehensible input in the target language the importance of which is emphasised in Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis.

On the other hand, non-native teachers are aware of their disadvantages in terms of their target-language proficiency and therefore tend to focus on the formal features of the language and the formal registers, employing a more guided approach to teaching. Furthermore, non-native teachers are more likely to use their first language in the classroom for various purposes, thus reducing exposure to comprehensible input. Many educators associate codeswitching with grammar translation and believe that such a method should be avoided in the communicative classroom. As Turnbull and Dailey-O' Cain (2009, 3) point out, such views are primarily founded on the success of immersion programmes in producing functionally bilingual graduates. However, the majority of non-native teachers teach in foreign language classrooms, rather than in second language classrooms, as is the case both in Thailand and in Serbia. In such a context, some studies actually stress the benefits of the first language as a cognitive tool in aiding foreign language learning, pointing out that first language use may lead to more comprehensible input and target-language production (Cook 2001, 406). The benefit of using the first language is particularly evident in cases of learners with low levels of foreign language proficiency when they are confronted with more challenging tasks and content. Such learners benefit from using their first language as they negotiate meaning (Brooks and Donato 1994, 268), and in collaborative tasks (Swain and Lapkin 2000, 269); codeswitching can thus be viewed as part of bilingual interaction, rather than as a sign of deficiency in either of the languages (Li, 2000, 17). Furthermore, non-native teachers tend to provide a better learner model, as they themselves learned the target language after acquiring their first language, and are more insightful in terms of the cognitive processes activated while learning. They teach learning strategies more effectively, and can better anticipate and prevent language difficulties (Medgyes, 2001, 436–437).

In conclusion, there is a general consensus in the literature that the success of the language teacher is heavily conditioned by the teacher's proficiency in the target language. In this respect, the ideal non-native teacher is the one who has achieved near-native proficiency, whereas the ideal native teacher is someone who has acquired distinguishing features of the non-native teacher, or, in other words, someone who is fairly proficient in the students' mother tongue (Medgyes, 2001, 440).

Methods

This paper reports on a quantitative empirical research conducted for the purpose of analysing Thai and Serbian student perceptions and attitudes regarding the teaching approach adopted by their EFL university teachers. The goal of the paper is to investigate the perspectives of students in order to reach general conclusions which could help in formulating practical implications for teaching practice. Given that the students come from two greatly different cultural backgrounds, yet still share a number of political, economic and educational factors, the following research question is posed:

Do Serbian and Thai students differ in their perspectives regarding teaching approaches in the university EFL classroom?

Bearing in mind that both subsamples display approximately the same level of English language proficiency and work in similarly sized groups using commercial course books, and that the teachers in both situations rely on the communicative approach to language teaching, the null hypothesis corresponding to the research question is as follows:

There are no statistically significant differences in how the Serbian and Thai students respectively rate the teaching approaches of their university EFL teachers.

Participants

The investigation included a total of 545 students at A2 level studying at the Prince of Songkla University in Thailand and at the University of Novi Sad in Serbia, who are not English majors and who took a course in English as a programme requirement. The said number of students is part of a larger sample of 757 students at both universities who had done the *Quick Pen and Paper Test* (2001) prior to doing the questionnaire used in this research. Of the entire student population that was tested, only the students from both countries placed at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference via the same placement test participated in this particular research implying that both subsamples were homogenous in terms of their language competence. In the context of the present study this means that both Thai and Serbian students are expected to have elementary knowledge of the language in order to be able to communicate in simple and routine tasks and to use expressions related to subject matters of the most immediate relevance.

The sample consisted of 18.3% male students and 81.7% female students (see Table 1), with the gender structure of the sample corresponding to the total number of female and male students in the EFL courses at the two universities.

The gender structure of the Thai and Serbian samples was also internally controlled for appropriateness with an independent samples *t* test. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the two subsamples. The average age of the participants was 20.21, with the average age of Thai students being 20.36 and Serbian students 19.58. The sample is representative of the population and the sample size is adequate.

Although teachers are not considered to be participants in the narrow sense of the word, they will be briefly described here since their profile does influence the data collected during the research. In the Thai sample there are five native and seven non-native English teachers, of whom seven are male and five are female. They are between 27 and 58 years of age and have 4–25 years of teaching experience. The Serbian group of teachers consists of 14 females and 1 male, ages 28–42, with 5–15 years of teaching experience. All of the Serbian teachers are non-native speakers of English.

Instrument

The instrument used in the study included a 24-item questionnaire² constructed for the purposes of this research, composed of statements that the students rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The statements in the questionnaire were translated into Thai and Serbian (the students' native languages) and covered general aspects of the teaching approaches a teacher may adopt, including the following examples: *I like my teacher's style of teaching*

Table 1. Gender structure of the sample.

	Male	Female	Total
Serbian	25	81	106
Thai	75	364	439

and giving feedback and The teacher knows me and provides input I can handle. The internal consistency of the scale as indexed by Cronbach's $\alpha = .906$, which is generally considered an excellent internal consistency coefficient.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed during regular classes in the 2012–2013 school year. On average, the students completed the questionnaires in 15 minutes.

In order to test the differences between the two subsamples, independent samples t tests were performed using SPSS Statistics 20 software. In analysing the mean scores, four levels are suggested based on calculating the means: very high (4 and above), high (3 to 3.99), moderate (2 to 2.99) and low (1 to 1.99).

Results

The statistical analysis revealed that, out of 21 dependent variables in the questionnaire, 12 yielded statistically significant differences between the 2 samples. All items were assessed statistically higher by the students from Serbia:

- (2) The teacher provides sufficient authentic examples of spoken English for real-life communication ($t = 5.02$; $p = .000$).
- (5) I find the frequency of the class teacher speaking in English appropriate ($t = 9.97$; $p = .000$).
- (6) I find the frequency of the class teacher speaking in Serbian/Thai appropriate ($t = 13.67$; $p = .000$).
- (8) The teacher gives me plenty of opportunities to speak English in class ($t = 9.54$; $p = .000$).
- (9) The teacher always creates learning opportunities in class for me which I would miss otherwise ($t = 4.29$; $p = .000$).
- (13) The teacher provides an appropriate, accurate assessment of my performance ($t = 8.34$; $p = .000$).
- (15) The teacher helps me learn how to learn to communicate effectively in English ($t = 3.03$; $p = .003$).
- (17) I like my teacher's style of teaching and giving feedback ($t = 2.65$; $p = .008$).
- (18) I like my teacher's English pronunciation ($t = 4.08$; $p = .000$).
- (19) My teacher understands well what he/she is teaching ($t = 9.05$; $p = .000$).
- (21) The teacher's teaching styles are well adaptive to my needs, wants and class situations ($t = 2.56$; $p = .011$).
- (22) The teacher knows me and provides input I can handle ($t = 3.59$; $p = .000$).

The differences between the students' mean answers can be seen in Table 2, indicating that all statistically significant items were assessed higher by the sample of students from Serbia.

In order to make the findings clearer, all the results from Table 2 are also given in Figure 1.

As can be seen from Table 2 and Figure 1, mean differences between answers given by Serbian and Thai students are sometimes greater and sometimes smaller, with the highest difference recorded for variable (6) and the lowest for variables (17) and (21). All results will be discussed in the following section.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of statistically significant dependent variables.

Variables	Mean Serbian	SD Serbian	Mean Thai	SD Thai	Mean difference
2	4.45	0.84	4.03	0.75	0.42
5	4.92	0.27	4.12	0.82	0.80
6	4.63	0.89	2.96	1.16	1.67
8	4.93	0.29	4.22	0.75	0.71
9	4.32	0.97	3.95	0.76	0.37
13	4.60	0.74	3.92	0.75	0.68
15	4.44	0.88	4.18	0.76	0.26
17	4.71	0.70	4.51	0.67	0.20
18	4.75	0.63	4.43	0.74	0.32
19	4.92	0.44	4.22	0.77	0.70
21	4.38	0.90	4.18	0.69	0.20
22	4.29	1.04	3.97	0.76	0.32

In order to analyse and interpret the results with greater understanding of the contextual factors, all three authors also conducted a number of classroom observations in both Thai and Serbian settings in the same school year when the questionnaire was administered. The following section is the result of questionnaire data interpretation and classroom observation experience.

Discussion

The purpose of the paper was to investigate the Thai and Serbian students' perspective with regard to their teachers' teaching approaches and to diagnose possible problems which might affect language learning and oral fluency. The investigation started from the question concerning the provision of authentic examples for real-life situations. Like all other statistically significant items, this one was rated higher by Serbian students. In other words, Serbian students believe that their teachers provide them with more authentic

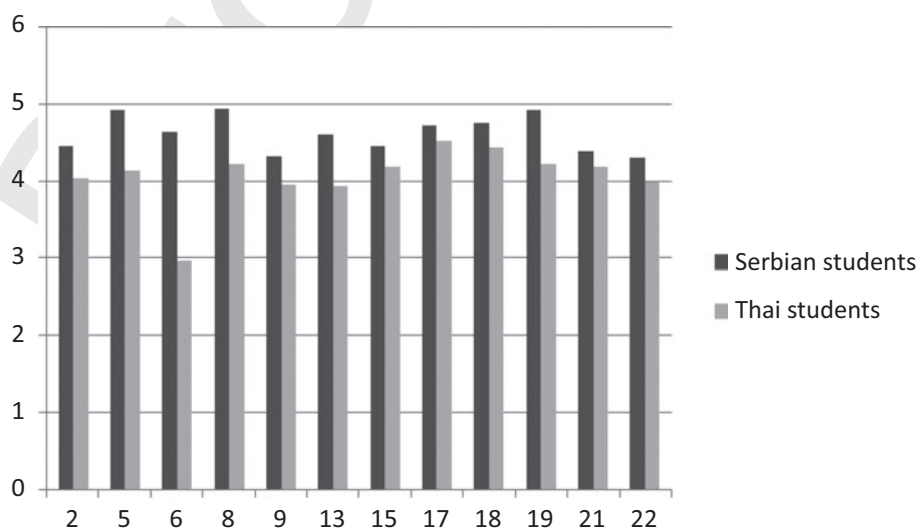


Figure 1. A comparative view of Serbian and Thai students' statistically significant responses.

365 examples of spoken English which could be used in real-life communication. This result
is unexpected, primarily because of the fact that Thai students are in most cases taught by
370 native English speakers, whereas Serbian students are exclusively taught by Serbian
teachers. The explanation for this may lie in the amount of exposure to English outside
the classroom, which in case of Thai students is significantly lower. Namely, most
television programmes and films in Thailand are in Thai, or dubbed in Thai, and the most
popular music among students is also Thai. In contrast, films and television programmes
375 in Serbia are subtitled rather than dubbed, and Serbian students prefer Anglophone music.
For this reason, the Thai students' perception of authentic examples of spoken language is
different from the Serbian students' perspective, which makes it difficult for the Thai
students to recognise authentic examples of language in the classroom context.

380 The next two variables which proved to be statistically significant concerning the
differences between Thai and Serbian students are the frequency of L1 and L2 use in the
classroom context. Again, Serbian students rated higher the appropriateness of frequency
of English and Serbian than Thai students rated the frequency of English and Thai. This
implies that Serbian students are very satisfied with the amount of English spoken by
their teacher in class (mean 4.92), as well as with the amount of Serbian spoken by their
385 teacher (mean 4.12). This suggests that the Serbian student perspective of L1/L2 ratio is
that languages are balanced and each is appropriately used as the need occurs. On the
other hand, Thai students have rated the use of English significantly lower than Serbian
students (mean 4.63), whereas the mean for the frequency of the use of Thai in the
classroom is the lowest in the study (2.96), indicating that they are not satisfied with the
390 amount of L1 usage by their teacher. This comes as no surprise since the Thai students'
English teachers are mostly native speakers of English who rarely know Thai, which
seems to pose a problem at the lower level of proficiency, indicating that A2 students still
need to rely on their mother tongue for further explanations of classroom activities, tasks,
assignments, etc.

395 The next item in the questionnaire which yielded a significantly different result
concerns the opportunities students are given for speaking English in class. A very high
mean for Serbian students (4.98) indicates that they are fully satisfied with the number of
opportunities they have for speaking English and for practicing communication and oral
skills. In contrast, Thai students rate these opportunities lower (mean 4.22), despite the
400 fact the similar factors of physical setting such as seating arrangement and the number of
students in the group. A possible explanation can be found in the functioning of the
affective filter, which seems to be much higher among the Thai students due to the
presence of the native English speaker in the classroom. For that reason they opt not to
volunteer and not to speak out in order to save face and avoid a threatening situation and
public assessment, preferring to become involved in group work rather than individual
speaking and to rely on peer help rather than teacher help.

405 In connection with the previous variable, the student perspective on the frequency
with which the teacher creates learning opportunities in class which students would miss
otherwise, Serbian students rated their teacher's approach higher than Thai students (4.39
> 3.95). This is further confirmation of the factors already discussed: on the one hand,
Thai students opt not to speak publicly because of the communication apprehension they
410 feel in front of a native English speaker and therefore deem that they do not have
sufficient opportunities, while on the other hand their limited amount of exposure to
English outside of the classroom affects the number of opportunities they might have in
the first place, which in turn reflects on their perception of the number of opportunities in
the classroom.

415 The next variable which proved to be significantly different for Serbian and Thai
students deals with student perception of the teacher's manner of providing assessment.
The high mean score of Serbian students (4.70) indicates that they are very satisfied with
the information they receive from their teacher regarding their language production. Thai
420 students, on the other hand, rate their teacher's style of providing assessment lower than
do their Serbian peers, which points to the conclusion that there exists a language barrier
between students and teachers, given that A2 level students require more accurate
information on their language production in their mother tongue, which native English
teachers are unable to provide.

425 The item in the questionnaire that deals with the teacher's role in the development of
metacognition, by asking students to rate the amount of guidance the teacher provides in
showing how to tackle various learning and communicative tasks, also yielded
significantly different results between the two subsamples. Namely, Serbian students
430 feel that their teacher appropriately teaches them how to learn to communicate in English
(mean 4.56), whereas the Thai students rated their teacher's ability slightly lower (mean
4.18). This lower rating is the result of the aforementioned language barrier between the
native English teacher and Thai students. In other words, students at such a low level
cannot fully understand the guidance which in this case is provided solely in English.
Furthermore, metacognition is already underdeveloped for the most part, and adding
another level of difficulty by trying to develop it through English poses a serious obstacle
for learning.

435 The next variable with a significantly different result dealt with student perception of
style of teaching and giving feedback. Both subsamples highly rated teacher style, with
the Thai mean score being slightly lower than Serbian (4.51 < 4.7). The statistical
difference in favour of the Serbian sample indicates that Serbian students are slightly
more receptive of their teacher's style of teaching and providing information regarding
440 their progress, whereas Thai students are somewhat more reserved in terms of accepting
the teacher's style. This could stem from the students' educational background and
previous experience, i.e. the Serbian university English teachers are similar to the
students' high schoolteachers, while Thai university English teachers are native English
speakers, unlike Thai high school English teachers, who are Thai natives.

445 This argument somewhat reflects on the ratings found for the next item in the
questionnaire ('I like my teacher's English pronunciation'). Namely, the Serbian
subsample again rated their teacher's pronunciation statistically higher than the Thai
subsample, which indicates that the Serbian students were previously exposed to a similar
type of pronunciation in high school and that their English teachers' pronunciation
450 reflects their own. On the other hand, the difference between Thai students' own
pronunciation and that of their teachers is considerable, as is the difference between the
pronunciation of high school and university teachers. In addition, the degree of exposure
to English plays a significant role in the different ratings between the two subsamples.
Namely, the majority of Serbian teachers speak in an American accent, which reflects the
variety of English to which both they and students are constantly exposed, while Thai
455 students, as has been previously stated, do not have such degree of daily exposure to
English and hence do not have opportunities to acquire the accent. That is why their
perception of the teacher's pronunciation of English is different.

460 The next item in the questionnaire with a statistically significant difference between
the two subsamples examines the students' perspective of their teacher's expertise in the
classroom and the subject matter. Both Serbian and Thai students rated their teacher's
understanding of what he or she is teaching as very high, with the statistical difference in

favour of the Serbian subsample (4.91 > 4.21). This result indicates that Serbian students feel confident about their teacher's skill and knowledge, whereas the Thai students are slightly less confident. The explanation for this primarily lies in the level of proficiency of the students themselves. Namely, as it has been mentioned earlier, their teachers are native English speakers who do not speak Thai and who are not able to sufficiently lower the level of their metalanguage which they use for explanations of the material, tasks, activities, etc. which in turn, results in the students not perceiving the teacher's level of knowledge and expertise properly.

The statistical analysis also yielded significant results for the item examining the students' view of the teacher's perception of individual differences. Serbian students rated their teacher's understanding of their needs, wants and classroom situations as very high, with a mean score of 4.38, whereas Thai students rated this factor as high, with a mean score of 4.17. The explanation for the difference in the results is again tied to the language barrier as a limiting factor in the Thai classroom setting. With students who have an elementary knowledge of the English language, the communication between students and teachers conducted solely in L2 poses a considerable obstacle to the student perception of themselves as individuals whose unique learning characteristics are recognised by the teacher.

The final item with a significant statistical difference between the Serbian and Thai students concerns student perspective regarding the teacher's ability to adapt the input to the students' level of proficiency. The Serbian students reported a very high degree of satisfaction with regard to how well the teacher knows them and adequately adapts the classroom material and tasks to their own learning needs (mean 4.28). On the other hand, Thai students are slightly more reserved in this respect (mean 3.96), which indicates that the classroom context, in which they do not freely and openly communicate with their teachers because of the language barrier, leads to increased affective filtering and communication apprehension, which in turn disallows their English teacher to get to know them better.

Conclusion

In this paper we analysed Thai and Serbian student perceptions of their teachers' teaching approaches, asking whether students judge these approaches differently. The null hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant differences in this respect can be rejected because we established statistical differences in 12 out of 21 dependent variables. In all the differences found, the Serbian subsample had higher mean scores than the Thai subsample. Having already discussed contextually and educationally based reasons for these differences, we would like to focus on a wider context and try to generalise our explanations and compare them with other research in the field.

The first large group of factors for such differences can be connected with student communication styles. Namely, while in the Serbian educational context both students and teachers predominantly employ a direct style of communication, thereby preventing any major communication breakdown or obstacle, in the Thai educational context there is a large discrepancy in terms of preferred communication styles. More precisely, while students favour an indirect, face-saving style of communication rich in avoidance strategies, teachers with a western background prefer direct communication. The goal of communication is, therefore, perceived differently: while the students see communication as a process in which interpersonal harmony is maintained, the teachers view communication as a means of asserting identity. This yields problematic situations in

which Thai students always prefer to address their peers in case they do not understand something, instead of addressing the teacher. This is similar to Tajino and Tajino's (2000) finding, who established that Japanese students with limited English language ability became confused and preferred to keep quiet rather than to lose face and address the issue with the native English teacher.

The second group of contextual factors that can be seen as contributing to the differences established in the survey concerns the formal and informal learning setting. While Thai students predominantly learn English solely within an institutional framework, Serbian students have ample opportunities for receiving and to some smaller extent producing English outside the classroom, as they are exposed to the language by means of television, the Internet, music and other channels of popular culture. In taking advantage of the models of real-life communication they receive in class, where they produce the target structures in similar circumstances to those that prevail in normal communication, they foster a positive attitude towards not only seeking out prospects for practicing language for real communicative purposes, but also communicating with native speakers of the target language. On the other hand, Thai students' limited informal learning experiences lead them to not recognise such opportunities and overlook the need for using L2 in real life communication and real life situations. It seems that a combination of informal and formal learning can be tied to a generally more positive student perspective regarding teacher approaches in the foreign language classroom.

Finally, the third group of contextual factors we must address concerns the differences in the perception of native and non-native English language teacher approaches in the EFL classroom. Namely, our research has shown that teachers who are native speakers of English are not conducive to the level of proficiency of Thai students in terms of metalanguage, explanations of classroom activities, tasks, assignments, assessment and feedback. Conversely, the non-native teachers who work in the Serbian classroom are evaluated much higher in this respect, which would suggest that non-native teachers, especially at lower levels of foreign language proficiency, are more empathetic and responsive to individual student needs and have more understanding of the process of foreign language learning as they themselves were in the same position, which accords with the results of Tajino and Tajino (2000). More precisely, with students who are at lower levels, non-native English teachers would be a better choice, while native teachers would have advantages with advanced students. The absence of the native English teacher in the classroom in the long run might prevent students from reaching higher levels of oral fluency, which is one of the ultimate goals of this educational process, as stated in the introduction. Furthermore, the issue of linguistic distance plays a crucial role here as Thai students learning English need much more complex metacognitive work to move back and forth between the two languages.

We believe that both of these situations could be resolved through team teaching, where teams would comprise a native and a non-native English teacher. This synergy would benefit not only students at lower levels of foreign language proficiency but also teachers, who would thrive in such an intercultural exchange and overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. In addition, students from both educational contexts could have a much better chance at improving their oral proficiency with increasing opportunities for learning English outside the institutional framework, informal learning experiences, etc. but this is well beyond the scope of the control of the educational system and depends largely on the cultural milieu. Generally speaking, students from both subsamples would surely benefit from a change of factors that are at least partly under institutional control,

i.e. the introduction of both native and non-native teachers in English language classrooms.

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Notes

1. For an elaboration of the Croatian context with respect to joining the EU and the subsequent changes in higher education, see Pašalić (2013).
2. The complete questionnaire is available upon request.

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APPENDIX 1.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Name: _____ ID: _____

Contact number or E-mail address: _____

PART 1: Demographic information

Please fill in the information below.

1. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female
2. Age: _____
3. Field of study: _____
4. Academic year: _____
5. City/Town of origin: _____
6. First language: _____
7. Any other languages you speak: _____
8. Other languages spoken in the vicinity that you do not speak:

9. Number of years you have been learning English: _____

Please respond to each statement on the scale provided where 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

	Statement					
1	I find the content of the English communication course interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
2	The teacher provides sufficient authentic examples of spoken English for real-life communication.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am always engaged in communicative tasks related to real-world uses of English.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The teacher appropriately balances accuracy- and fluency-focused activities.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I find the frequency of the class teacher speaking in English appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I find the frequency of the class teacher speaking in Serbian/Thai appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The teacher helps me aware of existing varieties of English spoken in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The teacher gives me plenty of opportunities to speak English in class.	1	2	3	4	5
9	The teacher always creates learning opportunities in class for me which I would miss otherwise.	1	2	3	4	5

10	I know all the students in my English class.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Most class activities require me to work with my classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I feel comfortable communicating and working with my peers.	1	2	3	4	5
13	The teacher provides an appropriate, accurate assessment of my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I feel free to offer an answer although my teacher does not call out my name.	1	2	3	4	5
15	The teacher helps me learn how to learn to communicate effectively in English.	1	2	3	4	5
16	The teacher helps me learn how to take control of my own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I like my teacher's style of teaching and giving feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I like my teacher's English pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
19	My teacher understands well what he/she is teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
20	My teacher shows awareness of learner diversities in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
21	The teacher's teaching styles are well adaptive to my needs, wants, and class situations.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The teacher knows me and provides input I can handle.	1	2	3	4	5
23	The teacher is always receptive to my view of learning.	1	2	3	4	5
24	My teacher is interested in my individual progress.	1	2	3	4	5

Paper 3

A Study of Relationship between Learning-Related Behavior and Language Learning Motivation of Engineering Undergraduates

Rongdara Rochanahasadin¹, Wilaiwan Ka-J²
& Asst. Prof. Dr. Kemtong Sinwongsuwat³

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia¹

Fatoni University, Thailand²

Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai campus, Thailand³

rondara@hotmail.com¹,

k.wilaiwan@gmail.com²

& ksinwong@gmail.com³

Abstract - This study aimed at investigating the relationship between engineering undergraduates' language learning motivation and their learning-related behavior, with a comparison between students of both genders. The sample included 98 engineering undergraduate students from Universiti Malaysia Perlis, attending the Foundation English course in 2013. The instruments included a set of questionnaire and two parallel versions of the Quick Placement Test (QPT) provided by University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. The collected data were analyzed by Pearson's correlation and *t*-test. The findings indicated that learners' learning-related behavior had a positive relationship with their language learning motivation, both as a whole and individually, with significant correlation at the 0.01 level. In addition, male and female students were not significantly different in their motivation to learn English.

Keywords; learning-related behavior, language learning motivation, engineering undergraduates

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Gardner (1985), language learning motivation refers to "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity". Many previous studies prove a significant role of English in determining engineering undergraduates' success, both academic and professional (Buriro & Soomro, 2013; Joseba, 2005; Pendergrass et al., 2001; Pritchard & Nasr, 2004). Accordingly, language learning motivation of engineering undergraduate students has been extensively studied (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Bobkina & Fernandez de Caley

Dalmau, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013; Wimolmas, 2013). It has been found students' adequate motives for learning English significantly relates to their academic achievements and improvements in English (Abdul Samad et al., 2012; Dornyei, 1990; Manakul, 2007; Su and Wang, 2009; Wang, 2008; Wimolmas, 2013). However, investigations on relationship between their language learning motivation and their learning-related behavior have been rarely found. With a test on engineering students' English proficiency, the present study thus focuses on exploration of the relationship.

1.1 Background of research setting

Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), Malaysia's 17th public institution of higher learning approved by the Malaysian Cabinet on May 2001, was originally known as Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia (KUKUM), or Northern Malaysia University College of Engineering, and renamed as Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) in February 2007. At the undergraduate level, the university offers 21 programs in Engineering, one in Engineering Technology, and two in Business. All engineering programs include microelectronic engineering, electrical system engineering, industrial electronic engineering, computer network engineering, electrical energy system engineering, electronic engineering, metallurgical engineering and construction engineering. *Foundation English* is a prerequisite course for all undergraduate students' enrollment in the university's compulsory English courses. Offered by the Department of International Languages (DIL), the course is held two hours a week, with English being the instruction medium. Nevertheless, in their daily routine, students often communicate with one another using their native language.

1.2 Purpose of study

The current study aimed at investigating the relationship between engineering undergraduate students' language learning motivation and their learning-related behavior, with a comparison between the students of both genders.

1.3 Research questions

Based on the above objectives of the study, the following questions were raised:

1. What is the English proficiency level of the engineering undergraduate students at UniMAP?
2. How do male and female engineering undergraduates differ in their language learning motivation and learning-related behavior?
3. Is there any relationship between engineering undergraduates' language learning motivation and their learning-related behavior?

1.4 Scope of the study

The study was conducted with the samples of engineering undergraduate students at Universiti Malaysia Perlis, attending the Foundation English course in 2013, in order to explore their English language learning motivation and their learning-related behavior. The data collection was done through questionnaire administered to the total number of 98 students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language learning motivation

Motivation plays an important role in language learning as a main factor in the learning process, driving learners to achieve their learning goals (Pearson et al., 2001). It can be considered an indicator of language learners' success (Dornyei, 1998; Brown, 2000; Gardner, 2006). Motivation construct is classified into two types: instrumental and integrative. Hudson (2000) considers the former a concrete construct, and a latter a universal one. Instrumental motivation refers to the desire for language learning in order to reach specific practical objectives (Hudson, 2000), focusing on career advancement, grade improvement, travel, entertainment (Lucas et al., 2010; Wilkins, 1972; Saville-Troike, 2006). On the other hand, contrasts are presented in integrative motivation, which involves global aspirations in learning a foreign language. That is, learners desire to culturally integrate themselves into the society of target language (Dornyei, 2006; Gardner, 1983).

There have been several investigations on language learning motivation. Zanghar (2012) found Libyan

undergraduates were highly motivated, both instrumentally and integratively, to learn English as a foreign language. Differently, Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) claimed that instrumental motivation was the primary force driving the petroleum engineering undergraduates to learn English. Similarly, Wimolmas (2013) discovered a slightly higher degree of instrumental than instrumental motivation in freshmen students. On the other hand, Abdul Samad et al. (2012) reported a positive relationship between integrative motivation and students' language proficiency. The integrative motivation is also a good predictor of the learners' proficiency in an IELTS exam. Japanese engineering students were reportedly instrumentally motivated to learn English to a high extent (Johnson & Johnson, 2010).

2.2 Motivation-behavior relationship

Behavior is activated by motivation (Singh, 2011). According to Ormrod (2010), there are many effects of motivation on learning behavior: directing learners' behavior toward particular goals, leading to increased effort and energy, increasing initiation of and persistence in activities, affecting cognitive processes, determining consequences of their learning behavior, and enhancing learners' performance.

2.3 Gender differences in motivation and learning

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the motivation theory was applied for better comprehension of gender differences in learning achievement (Meece, Glienke & Burg, 2006). There have been numerous studies on differences in motivation and learning between male and female students (Kissau, 2006; Nahavandi and Mukundan, 2013; Meece, Glienke & Burg, 2006; Parker, 2007; Rusillo & Arias, 2004; Tai et al., 2013; Yau et al., 2011). Male and female students reportedly have different learning motivation based on discipline areas. Males tend to focus their learning more on mathematics, science, and sports, while females manifest more motivation to learn language arts and reading (Meece, Glienke & Burg, 2006). According to Parker (2007)'s review on gender differences in three measures of motivation: interest, competence and goal orientation, among eight studies on interest and gender relationship, one study reported higher task value possessed by middle school male students than by females, while another found college aged females' higher intrinsic values than males. Male students obtained small interest advantages in Mathematics, while females were advantaged in language/arts. Significant relationships between gender and self-efficacy in social studies were also discovered. Again, females were reported possessing higher competency than males in language arts, while males were more competent in Mathematics. Kissau (2006) additionally discovered that female students had more positive goal orientation towards language learning. Male students were, on the other hand, less interested in learning a second language due to their fear of negative societal appraisal.

Studies on integrative and instrumental motivation, however, exhibited greater variation with respect to motivational differences between the two genders in second language learning. Some reported higher integrative motivation in female students and stronger instrumental motivation in male ones (Ahmadi, 2011), while others, e.g., Nahavandi & Mukundan (2013), found the same level of instrumental motivation in both genders but difference in their integrative motivation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The study participants included 98 engineering undergraduate students attending the Foundation English course in the second semester of 2013. The majority of them were freshmen and the rest juniors and seniors.

3.2 Research instruments

The instruments included a questionnaire and two parallel versions of the Quick Placement Test (QPT) taken from the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (2001). The questionnaire was partially adopted from the research project no. L1A 560297S, "Comparative study of approaches to the development of oral English communication skills adopted by universities in EFL contexts," funded by Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus, Thailand. The questionnaire consists of the following two main parts:

- Part 1: Demographic information of respondents including gender, age, field of study, first language, other spoken languages, a period of learning English, spoken-English proficiency
- Part 2: Variables of English language learning with 5-point Likert Scale statements ranging from 'Strongly Disagree (=1)' to 'Strongly Agree (=5)' covering learning motivation (items 1-10) and learning-related behavior (11-18)

3.3 Data collection

During a 120-minute period of normal class of Foundation English, all of the 98 student samples were assigned to do the Quick Placement Test (QPT) in 40 minutes. The questionnaire was distributed to all of them afterwards. Before responding to the questions in the questionnaire, the students were clearly explained the instructions and allowed to ask any questions they might have regarding the study.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of obtained data was conducted through the SPSS program. The data concerning the respondents' demographic background were descriptively analyzed and presented. Pearson's correlation and *t*-test were calculated to determine relationships and differences. To measure the motivational level and the learning-related behavior trend, a 5-

point Likert scale with an interval score of 0.08 was applied. The rating interpretation is as follows:

Mean range	Interpretation
3.68 – 5.00	High motivation / much learning-related behavior
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate motivation / moderate learning-related behavior
1.00 – 2.33	Low motivation / little learning-related behavior

IV. FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in six parts: (1) respondents' demographic data, (2) placement test results, (3) English language learning motivation, (4) learning-related behavior, (5) motivation-behavior relationship, and (6) gender differences.

4.1 Respondents' demographic data

The majority of the respondents were female (54.1%) and at the age of 19-21 years old (64.4%). Their first language was Malay (87.8%), followed by Chinese (7.1%) and Tamil (3.1). English was found the second language among the majority of them (72%). Nearly 50 percent of the students had learnt English for 13-15 years (48.9%), followed by 16-20 years (19.4%). Most of them identified their spoken English at an *average* level (70.4%), followed by *well* (14.3%) and *poor* (10.2%) ones, respectively. Only two respondents admitted that they could not speak English at all.

4.2 Placement test result

The students were asked to finish the Quick Placement Test (QPT) within 40 minutes to identify their English proficiency. The result shows that most of the students were at the lower intermediate level [B1] (51.0%, N = 50), followed by the elementary [A2] (36.7%, N = 36) and the upper intermediate [B2] (11.2%, N = 11), respectively. In comparison, female students' English proficiency was a little bit higher than male ones' (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Engineering Undergraduates' English Proficiency

Gender	ALTE Levels				Total
	Beginner [A1]	Elementary [A2]	Lower Intermediate [B1]	Upper Intermediate [B2]	
Male	1	17	22	5	45
Female	0	19	28	6	53
Total	1	36	50	11	98

4.3 English language learning motivation

To identify all the 98 engineering undergraduate students' motivation for learning English, the students were asked to rank a list of ten reasons for their learning English by checking the corresponding scales ranging from *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neutral* (3), *agree* (4), and *strongly agree* (5). The survey result indicates the students' high motivation, both instrumental and integrative. The students' instrumental motivation (4.37), however, was a bit higher than the integrative motivation (4.27) (see *Table 2*).

Table 2: Levels of Engineering Students' English Language Learning Motivation

Motivational constructs	Reasons for learning English	Mean	SD	Rating of motivation	Overall mean
	<i>I want to learn English because ...</i>				
<i>Instrumental motivation</i>	1) it will help me get a better job.	4.47	.749	High	4.37
	2) it will improve my grade.	4.46	.691	High	
	3) I do not want to disappoint other people (e.g. parents)	3.90	1.050	High	
	4) that will help me when I travel abroad.	4.53	.677	High	
	5) it is a global language.	4.61	.620	High	
	6) I want to work for a foreign company at home and abroad.	4.30	.840	High	
	7) I want to be able to listen to music and watch films in English	4.32	.781	High	
<i>Integrative motivation</i>	8) I want to be able to speak to native speakers.	4.42	.731	High	4.27
	9) I will learn more about other cultures/communities.	4.34	.759	High	
	10) I find the language beautiful.	4.06	.883	High	

4.4 Learning-related behavior

Similarly to the motivational assessment, the survey of the students' learning-related behavior also required the samples to rate the 5-scale statements corresponding to their actual behavior. The learning-related behavior was categorized into two types: in-class and off-class behavior. Based on

discrete items, regular class attendance was the most agreeable behavior ($\bar{X} = 4.43$). On the other hand, doing extra off-class activities was least practiced ($\bar{X} = 3.09$). The students, as a whole, manifested more in-class than off-class learning-related behavior (see *Table 3*).

Table 3: Levels of Engineering Students' Learning-related Behavior

Behavior construct	Learning-related behavior	Mean	SD	Degree of learning-related behavior	Overall mean
In-class	1) I am interested in the content of the English communication course.	3.90	.739	Much	3.91 Much
	2) I feel comfortable communicating and working with my peers.	3.96	.759	Much	
	3) I feel free to offer an answer although my teacher does not call out my name.	3.49	.900	Moderate	
	4) I attend class regularly.	4.43	.732	Much	
	5) I participate actively in any classroom interaction.	3.77	.784	Much	
Off-class	6) I spend time with my English classmates socializing outside the classroom.	3.57	1.065	Moderate	3.49 (Moderate)
	7) I spend time with my English classmates working on class assignments outside of classroom.	3.70	.888	Much	
	8) I do required self-study English activities outside of classroom.	3.49	.815	Moderate	
	9) I do extra English activities outside the classroom.	3.09	.920	Moderate	
	10) I try to find the opportunity to speak English with native speakers outside the classroom	3.52	.899	Moderate	
	11) I take the opportunity to speak English even with speakers of other languages.	3.55	.910	Moderate	

4.5 Motivation – behavior relationship

A two-tailed Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis was computed to explore the relationship between the engineering students’ language learning motivation and their learning-related behavior. The former was the independent variable and the latter the dependent one. The result indicates a positive relationship among all variables, with statistical significance at the 0.01 level (see *Table 4*).

Table 4: Correlations between Engineering Students’ Learning Motivation and Their Learning-related Behavior

Motivation	Learning-related behavior		
	Overall behavior	In-class behavior	Off-class behavior
Overall motivation	.44**	.83**	.91**
Instrumental motivation	.41**	.48**	.27**
Integrative motivation	.43**	.47**	.30**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

4.6 Gender differences

An independent *t*-test analysis was conducted to investigate difference between male and female engineering students in their learning motivation and their learning-related behavior. Both male students and female students shared similar learning motivation and learning-related behavior (see *Table 5*).

Table 5: Gender Comparison in Motivation and Learning-related Behavior

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	<i>t</i>	Sig	
Instrumental motivation	Male	45	29.82	4.39	1.747	.084
	Female	53	31.22	3.39		
Integrative motivation	Male	45	12.53	2.15	1.333	.186
	Female	53	13.05	1.73		
In-class behavior	Male	45	19.04	2.89	1.679	.096
	Female	53	19.96	2.51		
Off-class behavior	Male	45	20.17	3.85	1.891	.062
	Female	53	21.56	3.41		

5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The research questions have been answered as follows. First, regarding English proficiency, approximately fifty percent of the engineering undergraduate students at Universiti Malaysia Perlis were at the lower intermediate level [B1]. Only approximately ten percent possessed the upper

intermediate [B2] level of proficiency. Students of both genders were only slightly different in their level of proficiency.

Second, the students were highly motivated to learn English, with a slightly greater degree of instrumental than integrative motivation. This strengthened the concept that English plays an essential role in their lives, specifically in their education and career. The present study thus supported the previous ones. Al-Tamimi & Shuib (2009) also discovered instrumental motivation as the primary motivation source of Yemeni petroleum engineering students to learn English, and Johnson & Johnson (2010) reported high instrumental motivation of Japanese engineering students.

In gender comparison, the current study found indifference in learning motivation between males and females, contrasting with Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013), which discovered differences between the two genders. Males were more instrumentally motivated, and females possessed higher integrative motivation (Ahmadi, 2011; Parker, 2007). The former was also more excelled in Mathematics, while the latter in language arts (Kissau, 2006; Meece, Glienke & Burg, 2006).

The third question was whether engineering undergraduates’ language learning motivation relates to their learning-related behavior. The result showed positive relationship between the two variables, both as a whole and individually. That is, the students were highly motivated to learn English. Consistent with Ormrod (2010), this drove them to manifest positive learning-related behavior; for example, regular class attendance, cooperation with peers and active participation in class activities. However, their interest in off-class activities was low. This is apparently due to the fact that English is not used as the primary medium of communication in their daily routine unlike their native languages such as Bahasa Malayu, Chinese, and Tamil.

Additionally, the examination of gender difference in learning-related behavior revealed similarity in male and female engineering undergraduate students. This could be because of their similar pattern of motivation, orientating towards career and academic achievements.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study showed both similarities to and differences from those reported in previous studies on engineering undergraduates’ motivation to learn English. It is therefore very interesting to further explore how learning environments affect the different results. Additionally, rather than focusing mainly on gender difference, the relationships between English proficiency and the students’ learning motivation, as well as learning-related behavior, should be explored in future studies.

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Paper 4

EFL Oral Communication Teaching Practices: A Close Look at University Teachers and A2 Students' Perspectives in Thailand and a Critical Eye from Serbia

David Allen Bruner¹, Kemtong Sinwongsawat¹ & Biljana Radić-Bojanić²

¹ Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand

² Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia

Correspondence: Asst. Prof. Kemtong Sinwongsawat, Ph.D., Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Songkhla 90112, Thailand. Tel: 1-66-074-28-6771. E-mail: ksinwong@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper aimed to reexamine current EFL oral communication teaching practices from the perspectives of teachers and A2 students at two universities, namely Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Thailand and University of Novi Sad (UNS), Serbia. The main objectives were: (1) to analyze current practices from the perspectives of teachers and students, (2) to identify real problems encountered by teachers and students attempting to embrace Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve oral English communication, and (3) propose practical solutions for classroom practices to improve the majority of students' oral proficiency from the elementary level.

The findings were that oral English communication classes at PSU continue to embrace CLT and that the majority of Thai A2 students were frequently engaged in group activities rather than in individual and teacher-centered tasks. There was reliance on unrealistic, scripted role plays. Unlike the Serbian students, Thai students apparently needed to acquire more independent skills, become less passive learners, and interact more spontaneously in the target language. Other problems at PSU included mixed ability classes. Recommendations are placement tests, choices of more advanced elective courses, rigorous enforcement of upper enrollment limit, a balance between group and individual communicative tasks, and replacement of scripted with non-scripted role plays.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, EFL university students, non-scripted role plays, oral English communication, Serbia, teaching and learning practices, Thailand

1. Introduction

With globalization, and the phenomenal acendency of English as a lingua franca both domestically and internationally, the importance of English language acquisition is undiminished. Today in many countries, particularly in the "Expanding Circle" (Kachru, 1985), where English has earned the role of the main language of international communication, increasingly it is also used for intra-national purposes. Foley (2005, as cited in Baker, 2009) asserted that English, for example, is the de facto second language of Thailand, blurring the distinction between Kachru's Expanding and Outer Circle, being compulsory at all educational levels, whether formal or informal. It is the language of academic advancement, social and economic growth, tourism industry, science and technology, the Internet, international businesses, and international legal contexts. The use of English has evolved from just an essential foreign language to a world language for external and internal purposes. In the educational context, formally or informally learning English at the outset of one's educational career is essential. With globalization, countries in both the East and the West are endeavouring to form economic unions in order to compete, demanding an investment in human resources so that they are equipped with essential English language skills.

In fact, CEOs of major companies in rapidly expanding economies in Asia require their workers to have adequate English abilities in order to be an asset to the company and allow it to benefit from increased foreign investment (Byrne, 2010). English plays a pivotal role in policies promoting free trade and economic cooperation

in both Asia and Europe. For instance, in response to the drafting of the ASEAN charter in 2008 in an attempt to solidify and integrate the ASEAN community into one seamless economy, many companies have adopted recruitment policies requiring employees to have essential English language skills for the workplace. Likewise, with the prospect of future integration of the Balkan countries into the European Union, having workers with good English communicative skills has become a priority. The feasible goal in English language teaching and learning today appears to be to master the language such that international intelligibility is guaranteed while expressing and maintaining one's local or national identity (Crystal, 2003).

Admst these changes, it is now critical for English language educators to reevaluate the effectiveness of current English language teaching to determine whether the current practices are producing students who can communicate effectively in the international context, particularly ones who can effectively meet communicative demands of any speech events in international contexts. A close look at the oral communication classroom has become even more indispensable especially when Thai students' average English proficiency was often proven the lowest among (Southeast) Asian countries (Education First, 2012; Khamkhien, 2010; Prapphal, 2001; WhereisThailand.info, 2012).

Undoubtedly, the national education reform enforced by the National Education Reform Act of B. E. 2542 (1999) and now in its second phase (Government Public Relations Department, 2010; Laksanavisit, 2009; Sinhaneti, 2011) has instigated positive changes to English language teaching curricula in Thailand (see e.g. Chanawongse, 2010; Wiriyaichitra, n.d.). Over the course of her history, the country had in fact observed changes of English teaching practices from focusing on rote memorization, grammar and translation, reading aloud for pronunciation and comprehension, and teacher-centeredness to a more communicative, learner-centered approach (Darasawang, 2007). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has in fact become a major part of the reform launched by the government through the Act, as amended in 2001, alongside the embracement of learners' centeredness, diversity and local culture (Cheewakaroon, 2011; Darasawang, 2007).

Enforced particularly by the Basic Education Curriculum 2001, CLT has particularly changed the emphasis of teaching EFL at every level in the country to enabling students to use the language accurately and appropriately for communicative purposes (Saengboon, 2002). At the university level in Thailand, where every student is required to take two foundation English courses and at least two elective courses, learning strategies to acquire appropriate language competence are also considered of equal importance to learning to use the language in both academic and non-academic settings. The students are often engaged in task-based learning and encouraged to partake in independent learning in technology-rich environments offered by self-access learning centers across campus after class.

The National Educational Reform Act has undoubtedly made positive changes and provided a valuable roadmap for Thailand's 21st century education at every level. But the problem remains in transforming the vision depicted by the roadmap into reality, given that the overall English proficiency of Thai university students remains low in comparison to students from other ASEAN countries and internationally. Despite successive governments' considerable financial investment, it is admitted that internationally Thailand still lags behind on many aspects of education and human resource development. Too much emphasis has apparently been placed on management and infrastructures, constructing buildings and acquiring new teaching and learning resources, rather than focusing on improving the quality of teaching, learning and creating innovative, knowledge-building research (cf. Fry, 2002; Government Public Relations Department, 2010).

Additionally, even though there have been increasing attempts towards internationalization at the university level, the English language competence of the majority of Thai university students remains low, undermining their ability to enjoy the benefits of internationalization. According to Prapphal (2001), the average English proficiency of Thai university students measured by TOEFL-equated CU-TEP scores was lower than students from most ASEAN countries. In fact, PSU's in-house English proficiency test, which was recently developed and administered to 3rd-year students across different campuses, also revealed the average English proficiency score of approximately 40%, which is far from satisfactory (PSU Faculty Academic Board Meeting, 2011).

Moreover, the reform efforts put forth by educators and policy makers with regard to English language teaching and learning at the university level have so far been focused more on national proficiency test development, curriculum change, teacher training, management and utilization of ICT resources for teaching and independent learning. The implementation of the English education reform is still in its infancy stage, being limited mostly to policy enforcement. Taking a top-down approach, it has yet to directly address teaching and learning practices of language teachers and learners. Attention still needs to be paid especially to those classroom practices involved in the development of oral English communication skills which have been shown to be very problematic among

the majority of Thai students but hardly assessed in the national tests being developed. It is now critical to get a grasp of learners' and practitioners' learning and teaching processes in particular teaching and learning contexts if Thailand's graduates are to be prepared to contribute to and reap the benefits of the vision of one unified ASEAN economic community planned to take effect in 2016.

The rationale of this study and therefore its three main objectives are: to look closely at the current actual practices in the oral English communication classroom from the perspectives of those in the classroom on a daily basis, namely teachers and students, to identify real problems encountered by teachers and students attempting to embrace communicative language teaching and task-based, learner-centered, independent learning policies; and in light of the problematic areas, to propose practical solutions to the classroom practices for improving the oral English proficiency of the majority of university low proficiency learners.

The perspectives shared in this paper are primarily based on teachers' experience, observations, and the findings from a questionnaire survey of the majority of Prince of Songkla University (PSU) and University of Novi Sad (UNS) undergraduate students taking oral English communication courses, as well as of the teachers teaching the classes during the Academic years 2011-2014 as partly reported in Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, and Shimray (2014). The majority of students whose views were reflected in this paper were at the Elementary (A2) level of the English proficiency determined by the Cambridge Quick Placement Test (CQPT) (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2001). The Serbian participants referred to in the paper were Serbian teachers of oral English communication course and Serbian A2 undergraduates taking English language courses in the academic year 2012. It should be noted that while this paper is not a comparative study as such, references to results obtained from the perspectives of both Serbian teachers and students are used as a reference point against which the results from the perspectives of Thai teachers and students are assessed in order to highlight what may account for the higher proficiency of Serbian students in relation to their Thai counterparts. Despite being specific to local research settings, the findings on current practices in oral English communication classrooms, as well as problematic areas and recommendations proposed are applicable to teaching and learning in other EFL university settings.

2. Methodological Comments

As detailed in Bruner et al. (2014), the research venues were the Faculty of Liberal Arts (FLA), Prince of Songkla University (PSU)-Hat Yai, Thailand and the Faculty of Philosophy (FP), University of Novi Sad (UNS)-Serbia. The survey participants who were purposively sampled and whose views were reported in this paper included the majority of PSU and UNS undergraduate students enrolled in oral English communication courses where the focus was to develop oral English communication skills during academic years 2011 and 2012. Represented here were the views of 439 2nd-4th year students with the majority level of English proficiency, Elementary (A2), who were enrolled in the summer courses and administered the Cambridge Quick Placement Test (CQPT). The placement test was rerun in the summer semester of the following academic year with a new group of students and again the majority was at the A2 level. Accordingly the A2 group was chosen as the appropriate participants when analyzing the data from the survey questionnaire. The participants at UNS, Serbia, by contrast, were undergraduate students studying English in the 2012 academic year. The UNS participants also took the CQPT at the outset of that year and the majority was designated as the A2 level after their responses was analyzed. The teachers whose views are reported taught oral English communication courses at the respective universities at the time of the survey. The questionnaires given were designed to obtain a comprehensive look at oral English language teaching and learning from both students and teachers' perspectives; they were constructed based mainly on issues that are usually of concern to EFL language educators. The entire survey contained six relatively equally divided sections of concern. This paper discusses the two main sections dealing with teachers' and learners' perspectives regarding oral English communication teaching and learning. Therefore, apart from researchers' observations and experiences as oral English communication teachers, the discussion in this paper is in part based on PSU and UNS teachers' and students' responses to statements on the Likert scale and closed and open-ended questions in the constructed questionnaires. With respect to student responses to statements on the Likert interval scale (a range from strongly agreed (4.51-5.00) to strongly disagreed (1.00-1.50), statistical correlations and interval-scale analysis were undertaken. The information on the survey questionnaires used is provided in the appendix.

3. Current Practices in the Oral English Communication Classroom from the Perspectives of University Teachers and Thai A2 Learners

Based on the researchers' own observations and findings from the survey, oral English communication classes conducted at PSU, whether compulsory or elective, clearly continue to embrace Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT). The syllabus, teaching materials, class activities, and requirements were oriented towards Whong (2011)'s key features of CLT, namely authentic input and interaction. The priority was given to the learners' ability to communicate fluently in diverse contexts, not merely the mastery of the structure of the language. The methodology of pattern drills or rote memorization has been replaced by meaning and use of language forms in meaningful communicative contexts, aiming at enabling them to acquire the target language and express what they need to express in real world communication. It was observable that the teachers at PSU in fact engaged the A2 students in meaningful activities, giving priority to fluency rather than merely focusing on accuracy. This was obviously facilitated by contemporary commercial books used in which only essential grammar points were presented and activities promoting listening and speaking were emphasized (Richards & Bohlke, 2012; Stempleski & Robertson, 2007). The teachers additionally tried to provide feedback that did not disrupt their students' talk, often along with their modeling or after the students finished speaking. The errors were mostly tolerated unless they caused communication breakdowns.

Additionally, since in CLT, the language focus is based on students' present and future needs, CLT-oriented textbooks chosen were assured of authentic materials and English as used in real life. It was found that just as at UNS in Serbia, commercial textbooks with authentic audio-visual materials along with workbooks and the Internet were used in the overwhelming majority of the oral communication classrooms to facilitate teaching. However, unlike the classes offered at UNS, in which integrated-skills textbooks were used, the oral communication classes at PSU primarily employed textbooks targeting individual skills, particularly speaking and listening. The main aim of the conversation class at PSU apparently was to provide authentic materials stimulating oral communication on topics in daily life situations. Reading-integrated textbooks as used at UNS to provide content that feeds oral discussions were perceived by Thai teachers to be too advanced for the Thai A2 students.

Apparently, for the Thai A2 students, basic conversation skill training was seen as essential before moving onto more advanced oral discussion skills in higher-level courses. This was also reflected by the teaching and assessing methods adopted in English speaking courses at PSU; the majority of Thai A2 students were more frequently engaged in group activities such as practicing model conversations and role-playing rather than listening to English lectures. Additionally, to fulfill course requirements, apart from in-class role-plays, students were also asked to take both mid-term and final exams in which vocabulary, grammar, basic listening and conversation skills were assessed. The Serbian students observed on the other hand were mostly engaged in listening to lectures, giving individual or group oral presentations, and taking reading-based final exams, which also test vocabulary and grammar.

In-class activities were regarded as equally important by teachers and students from both universities. Following CLT, collaborative activities were emphasized. The Thai teachers always relied on group work, followed by pair work. Given the typical class size of 30-40 students in Thailand, the students were mostly asked to form a smaller group of three to four and work together on a speaking exercise. With a smaller class size, approximately 20-30 students each, the Serbian partners on the other hand more frequently engaged their students in pair work and individual work. In both countries, the desks were often arranged in the same way in rows with gaps to facilitate individual and group work even though classroom seats at PSU, which were loosely structured, appeared to better able to accommodate collaborative work. The Thais reportedly favored group work but were least comfortable with volunteering and answering questions; they apparently needed to acquire skills to become more independent learners. The Serbian students on the contrary felt most comfortable with asking and answering questions but apparently disdained peer related activities such as peer feedback, group work and pair work.

The Thais reportedly attached the most significance to core-skill class activities but the least to wrap-up activities and clear instructions, while the Serbs found clear instructions and lesson goals as well as post-skill training or wrap-up activities most useful. For Thai students, it remains mostly in the classroom that they have the opportunity to be exposed to the target language; therefore, their reliance on classroom activities did not come as a surprise. In fact, in-class activities which allow them to communicate and work with their peers were also viewed as being the most useful and easiest to fulfill for the Thais.

The Thai students reportedly preferred to be assessed in groups by means of such activities as role-play the most. The role-play mostly employed in a Thai conversation classroom was often of the scripted type, which allowed them to prepare their script and rehearse the conversation according to the situation assigned in advance. Additionally, given no reading was emphasized in the majority of oral communication courses at PSU, individual tests such as reading comprehension were reportedly not preferred by the Thais, which was different from the Serbs, who favored final exams with reading comprehension, the assessment type they were most accustomed to.

The teacher's role in a CLT classroom typically changes from primarily an information giver/care taker/lecturer/presenter to a facilitator/guide/motivator/director, and learners have become language users or explorers learning through doing or using the language and making a discovery. The Thai learners are required to be more active in their own learning. While teachers on both sides noticeably were classroom facilitators, the teachers at PSU apparently assumed more of the director's role, whereas those at UNS frequently gave a lecture, as reported by the students. The former frequently directed them into collaborative work, whereas the latter gave a lecture, taking the students through a structured lesson plan following the format of the textbook. Given apparently lower oral proficiency, the Thai A2 students were more passive, doing as instructed and hardly raising questions or offering voluntary responses. The Serbian A2 students' class interaction seemed to take place more spontaneously in the target language. The students were more prepared for class discussion stimulated by the course materials.

4. Problematic Areas in an Oral English Communication Classroom and Recommended Solutions

Through surveying the A2 majority of oral English communication students and their teachers at the two universities and through the researchers' experiences and observations, several problematic areas with the current classroom practices were identified. These include mixed ability classes, classes that have too many students, an overemphasis on pair and group work in Thailand resulting in an imbalance with individual tasks and the inability of Thai students to work independently. These problematic issues are likely to exist in other university EFL settings, particularly in Asia, and the solutions recommended here should be applicable to those settings as well.

4.1 Mixed-Ability Classes

Over 83% of the teachers surveyed at PSU reported the problem of students with different levels of English proficiency in the same class. Even though the majority of Thai students were assessed at the A2 level based on the Cambridge Quick Placement Test, which is a paper test, based on our observations in many classes the students' actual oral proficiency apparently ranged from the beginner's to the intermediate level. Having students of mixed ability may lead to boredom of higher proficiency students and makes it difficult to arrange communication activities (Likitrattanaporn, 2014). At PSU, students at all faculties take both mandatory and elective oral English communication courses at the Faculty of Liberal Arts. This leads to students with higher proficiency, coming from faculties where admission standards are usually high (e.g., agro-industry, dentistry, medicine, pharmacy, law, nursing) being mixed with students of lower proficiency.

One obvious solution is to employ a placement test so that each class section contains students of the same or similar proficiency level. Another feasible solution is to place students in elective oral communication classes based on their final grade in such mandatory fundamental listening and speaking courses as 890-101 Fundamental English Listening and Speaking. Finally, consideration should be given to having more levels of elective English oral communication classes (currently there is only one level) so students with higher levels of proficiency could elect to take more challenging courses such as those targeting debating and critical thinking skills.

The Serbian context as presented in this paper is a result of the implementation of such changes; namely, until 2007 students who took English as an elective course at UNS were not grouped according to their level of English but were taking mixed-ability English classes. In 2007, a placement test was implemented for the first time, when it was assessed for validity (Radić-Bojanić, 2008, 2009), and the present-day situation, where students are streamlined after the CEFR levels, illustrates how homogeneous groups of students of approximately the same levels of language proficiency lead to success in all areas, oral competence included.

4.2 Class Sizes Too Big

Fifty percent of the teacher respondents reported class sizes that had 40 or more students. A class size that is too big gives students insufficient speaking practice and limits the ability of the teacher to give students individual attention. It also makes it more difficult for the teacher to navigate the classroom to arrange and monitor communicative activities (Likitrattanaporn, 2014). At the Faculty of Liberal Arts, some classrooms can accommodate as many as 150 students. Additionally, the demand to take oral English communication courses increases annually, leading to pressure to increase class size.

For an effective oral English communication class there needs to be a rigorously maintained upper enrollment limit, say 40 students for instance. Given that demand to take elective oral English communication courses exceeds available teacher resources, higher level proficiency students could be relegated to more advanced courses, taking the pressure off class size for A2 learners.

4.3 *Overemphasis on Group Work*

All the Thai teachers surveyed reported that their teaching methods involved pair work, followed by group work (91.7%) and individual work (58.3%). When it came to assessment, all the teachers used role plays to assess their students (a requirement) as well as mid-term and final exams. The Thai students' perspectives apparently supported their teachers' reported teaching methods. The Thais were however least comfortable with individual work such as volunteering and answering questions. In this respect, they appeared less independent than the Serbians. As reported in Bruner et al. (2014), Thai learning styles were affected by a group-oriented Thai culture in which cooperative and group work is preferred over individual learning and individual work. They also excelled more in group work because of their collectivist cultural orientation. By contrast, the Serbians have an individualistic cultural identity, enabling them to excel in individual tasks including individual assignments, asking and answering questions and individual assessment.

Most research today supports a high degree of collaborative or cooperative learning in the EFL classroom, which involves emphasis on pair and group work that is consistent with the CLT approach (see Trong Tuan, 2010). But academic success at the tertiary level leading to a successful post-graduate career is in large part based on individual achievement with a reliance on university admission tests, proficiency tests and examinations for assessment, all of which measure English proficiency. A case in point is that while all graduate students at PSU must pass the in-house Test of English Proficiency (TEP) and score at least 45% in order to graduate, the undergraduates are now also required to take an in-house test to assess their English proficiency during their third year of study before graduation.

Reportedly, similar to those of other Asian cultures, Thai students often shied away from individual communicative tasks such as volunteering, asking and answering questions and expressing opinions for fear of "losing face". Since this can hinder the development of their oral communication skills, teachers should play an active role in building the rapport between class participants and creating an environment in which learner anxiety can be minimized (Burden, 2004). At the same time, they should try to strike a balance between cooperative and individual tasks, so their students will not fail miserably with the latter due to a lack of experience in confronting and overcoming their anxiety and thereby acquiring confidence to use the language spontaneously.

The imbalance of group work and individual work for A2 learners can be redressed to an acceptable degree by introducing more individual in-class oral activities such as individual oral presentations and an interview with the teacher as part of the requirements. The latter requirement was recently introduced in the English conversation elective course at PSU Liberal Arts. Students are required individually to speak with their teacher about their family, their personal and academic interests and goals as well as describing a photograph.

4.4 *Unrealistic Dialogues in Role-Play Contradicting CLT*

Closely related to the overreliance on group work is the over-application of scripted role plays. Since one of the key features of CLT is to expose the learners to genuine, authentic use of the target language in a meaningful interaction as frequently as possible, in-class oral activities such as non-scripted role-plays are more preferable than scripted ones. However, based on our observations, the role-play as applied in all the oral communication classes at PSU are of the scripted type in which the students were allowed to prepare and rehearse their conversation scripts in advance before the actual performance. This is apparently counterproductive given the spontaneous nature of ordinary conversation they need to master. In genuine conversation we rarely plan ahead what we say in real conversation, leaving it to the moment-by-moment interaction contingency (Herazo Rivera, 2010).

It is a better learning experience for students to produce utterances in real time rather than ask questions they have rehearsed in a parrot-like fashion. In a non-scripted role play students ask questions based on their actual knowledge of the language or gained through the role play activity by interacting spontaneously with other students and thereby achieving the goal of developing spontaneous oral production (Ellis, 2003, cited in Herazo Rivera, 2010). Additionally, even though both scripted and non-scripted role-play activities can help learners to improve their English speaking performance, non-scripted role-plays have been proven to contribute to the improvement of the learners' discrete oral performance and conversation skills as appear in naturally-occurring conversation to a more significant degree than scripted ones for both high and low proficiency learners. Non-scripted role-play activities better contribute to the holistic improvement in oral English performance of the Thai EFL learners than scripted ones (Phuetphon, Chayanuvat, & Sitthitikul, 2012; Rodpradit & Sinwongsuwat, 2012; Sinwongsuwat, 2011). The improvement was particularly evident in such practices as turn-taking and sequence organizing, overlap, reciprocal greeting, third-turn assessment, repair, and the use of turn-holding

devices (Naksevee & Sinwongsuwat, in press).

5. Concluding Remarks

The study focused on current EFL teaching practices in the oral English communication classroom based on the key players, teachers and A2 level university students in starkly contrasting cultural settings, namely Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Thailand and University of Novi Sad (UNS), Serbia. The rationale of the study and overall objectives were to identify current practices from the perspectives of teachers and students, identify key problems faced by teachers and students committed to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve oral English communication, and make some practical recommendations to improve classroom practices in an attempt to help A2 students in Thailand at the university level move beyond elementary level proficiency.

The main findings were that oral English communication classes at PSU continue to employ the CLT approach and that this resulted in the majority of Thai A2 students frequently undertaking group activities at the expense of individual and teacher-focused tasks. Moreover, students spent a great deal of time preparing and performing unrealistic scripted role plays. The Thai students, in light of the apparent higher proficiency of the Serbian students, need to work at acquiring more independent skills, to be proactive and to use English spontaneously. Both teachers and students encountered difficulties with mixed ability classes and classes that had too many students to be conducive to oral English communication. Practical recommendations included placement tests, a range of more advanced elective courses, restricted class size, an appropriate balance between group and individual communicative tasks to suit A2 learners, and adding non-scripted role plays to the syllabus. Further research should investigate long-term effects of the implementation of such measures and principles. In addition, Thai teachers should emphasize the importance of out-of-class English language learning in order to raise the students' awareness of the variety of possibilities for incidental language learning through the media (the internet, TV, music, films, etc.). This will, in fact, provide authentic language contexts in which students could first witness the application of all the principles they had been taught in class and then could themselves try to use English independently, without scripts or teachers, which will definitely be an illustration of authentic language application they will be required to partake after their graduation in their future work place.

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Appendix

Information on the student and teacher questionnaires used

As indicated in the methodology section 2 of this paper, the questionnaires given were designed to adduce a comprehensive view of oral English language teaching and learning from both students and teachers' perspectives, with the focus on issues often encountered by and of concern to EFL language educators.

With a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .918, the questionnaire for students consisted of two main parts. The first part had two subsections. Dealing with participants' demographic data, the first subsection aimed at eliciting their background and learning experience which were assumed to affect their perspectives on language learning and teaching. The second subsection consisted of questionnaire items comprised of statements with the Likert scale. Students were asked to respond to each statement by indicating whether they strongly disagreed (1), disagreed (2), were neutral (3), agreed (4), and strongly agreed (5). The statements were divided into six categories, namely students' perspectives on teaching methods, teacher factors (about the teacher's personality and style), learning styles, learners' motivation, learning difficulties and teacher-learner communication.

For teaching methods, the statements included whether the course was interesting, provided enough authentic examples of spoken English and communicative tasks for real-life communication, the balance between accuracy and fluency-focused activities, the appropriateness of the frequency of the teacher speaking English/Thai, awareness of world Englishes, opportunities to speak English in class, the requirement of group work, appropriateness and accuracy of assessment, freedom to volunteer answers and freedom for self-directed activities.

Regarding teaching factors, items included teachers' style and feedback, pronunciation, and attention to students' individual needs. Concerning learning styles, the focus was on student participation, group activities, self-study, and use of English outside the class. Learners' motivation dealt with both instrumental and integrative motivation, including whether students wanted to learn English for a better job, better grades, to satisfy parents, to travel abroad, because English is a global language, to be able to speak to native speakers and to learn more about other cultures and access English media.

Statements on learning difficulties focused on class size, equipment, study facilities at home, time to study, family and peer support and access to English media and private classes. Finally, teacher-learner communication centered on communication only in class, only about course-related matters, and/or communication with the teacher about anything.

The second part of the student questionnaire canvassed students' perceptions of the English speaking course syllabus, teaching methods, class facilities, and schedule. Students were asked to check items that apply to each topic and rank them in order of frequency.

Similar to the questionnaire for students, the teacher questionnaire has two parts, of which one elicited teachers' background and the other was similar to the second part of the student questionnaire. Validated with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .874, the teacher questionnaire was used to elicit teachers' perspectives

on the course syllabus, class activities, assessment, teaching methods, class size, facilities and arrangement, class schedule, and teaching difficulties. Statements about the syllabus involved the use of commercial or in-house course books, the Internet and other materials. Class activities statements adduced information about teachers involving students in pair and group work, class discussions, peer feedback, asking and answering questions and volunteering. It also addressed teacher priorities related to tasks concerning real-world uses of spoken English, accuracy, meaning and fluency focused activities, monitoring students' progress and providing feedback and strategies making oral English communication learning manageable.

The category of assessment canvassed assessment types often used, including oral presentations, grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension tests and term exams. Teaching methods elicited which methods were often used, including lectures, modeling, individual, pair and group work, teacher and peer feedback, whole-class discussions, structure of the lesson (eg. instructions, wrap-up), and method of correcting students. The statements about class size, facilities and arrangements sought to obtain information about the average class size, adequacy of equipment and arrangement of desks in the class.

The class schedule items focused on class-start time and teacher preferences. Finally, teaching difficulties concern problems when teaching oral English such as class sizes, mixed ability classes and student motivation.

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