



**The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension and on
Perception of Thai Undergraduate Students on Literary Texts**

Prasit Petnoosed

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as an International Language
Prince of Songkla University**

2019

Copyright of Prince of Songkla University

Thesis Title The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension
and on Perception of Thai Undergraduate Students on Literary
Texts

Author Mr. Prasit Petnoosed

Major Program Teaching English as an International Language

Major Advisor

Examining Committee:

.....Chairperson
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thanyapa Palanukulwong) (Asst. Prof. Dr. Atipat Boonmoh)

..... Committee
(Dr. Panida Sukseemuang)

..... Committee
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thanyapa Palanukulwong)

The Graduate School, Prince of Songkla University, has approved this thesis as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Teaching English as an International Language.

.....
(Prof. Dr. Damrongsak Faroongsarng)
Dean of Graduate School

This is to certify that the work here submitted is the result of the candidate's own investigations. Due acknowledgement has been made of any assistance received.

.....Signature
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thanyapa Palanukulwong)
Major Advisor

.....Signature
(Mr. Prasit Petnoosed)
Candidate

I hereby certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any degree.

.....Signature

(Mr. Prasit Petnoosed)

Candidate

ชื่อวิทยานิพนธ์ อิทธิพลของความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรมต่อความเข้าใจในการอ่านและทัศนคติของ
นักศึกษาไทยต่องานวรรณกรรม
ผู้เขียน นายประสิทธิ์ เพชรหนูเสด
สาขาวิชา การสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติ
ปีการศึกษา 2562

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยกึ่งทดลองขึ้นนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรมต่อความเข้าใจในการอ่าน และศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษาไทยวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษต่อการอ่านเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษ กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ คือ นักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 3 ที่เรียนวิชาวรรณคดีอังกฤษ ณ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ จำนวน 35 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้คือ (1) เรื่องสั้นอเมริกันและเรื่องสั้นไทยที่เขียนเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ทั้งสองเรื่องมีอรรถาธิบายเหมือนกัน ระดับความยากง่ายทางภาษาเท่ากัน และความยาวใกล้เคียงกัน แต่มีบริบททางวัฒนธรรมต่างกัน (2) แบบทดสอบการอ่านทำความเข้าใจจากเรื่องสั้นทั้งสอง และ (3) แบบสอบถามทัศนคติของกลุ่มตัวอย่างต่อการอ่านเรื่องสั้นทั้งสอง ผลการวิจัยพบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างเข้าใจเรื่องสั้นไทยที่เขียนเป็นภาษาอังกฤษได้ดีกว่าเรื่องสั้นอเมริกันอย่างมีนัยยะสำคัญ ทั้งในระดับตรงตามตัวอักษร และระดับตีความ และมีทัศนคติที่ดีกว่าต่อการอ่านเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนักเขียนไทย ในด้านการสัมผัสได้จริง ความง่ายต่อการเข้าใจ ความเพลิดเพลิน จินตภาพ ความรู้สึกร่วม ความรู้สึกว่าเป็นเรื่องใกล้ตัว ($p < 0.1$) และอารมณ์ร่วม ($p < 0.5$) อย่างไรก็ตาม ไม่มีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ในด้านความรู้สึกเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกับตัวละคร ความน่าสนใจ แรงจูงใจ ความชอบ และคุณค่างานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้นำเสนอแนวทางในการเลือกงานวรรณกรรมสำหรับชั้นเรียนวรรณคดีอังกฤษในระดับมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ ความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรม โครงสร้างความรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม ความเข้าใจในการอ่านวรรณคดีอังกฤษ วรรณกรรมท้องถิ่นในภาษาอังกฤษ

Thesis Title	The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension and on Perception of Thai Undergraduate Students on Literary Texts
Author	Mr. Prasit Petnoosed
Major Program	Teaching English as an International Language
Academic Year	2019

ABSTRACT

This study reported on a quasi-experimental study assessing the impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. In addition, this study also aimed to explore Thai English-major students' perception on reading English short stories. Participants of this study were thirty-five English-major students taking English literature courses at Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University. The instruments were (1) two short stories with comparable theme, linguistic complexity and length but in different cultural contexts – one in American and the other in Thai context, (2) a reading comprehension test from the two texts and (3) a questionnaire on the participants' perception on reading the two texts. The findings showed that the culturally familiar text resulted in significantly better literal, inferential and overall comprehension. The findings also demonstrated that the participants had significantly better perception on reading the Thai short story in terms of *authenticity, ease of understanding, enjoyment, imagery, personal involvement, relevance* ($p < 0.1$), and they also reported significantly more emotional reaction ($p < 0.5$). However, there was no significant difference in aspects like *identification with characters, interest, motivation, preference* and *value*. Implications for selecting reading materials for English literature class are discussed.

Keywords: cultural familiarity, cultural schema, reading comprehension, English literature, local literature in English

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank many people who contributed one way or another to the success of this thesis. It is difficult to overstate my deep gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thanyapa Palanukulwong. Throughout my thesis-writing period, she provided me with encouragement, sound advice, good teaching, good ideas and never lacked compassion. I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis readers, Asst. Prof. Dr. Atipat Boonmoh and Dr. Panida Sukseemuang for their time examining this thesis and their constructive comments.

I am indebted to Mr. Naratip Jindapitak for introducing me to an article on Thai literature written in English, without which this thesis would not see its beginning, for inspiring me and encouraging his students to participate in my study as the subjects, and Asst. Prof. Dr. Suraiya Sulaiman for arranging her students as the subjects in the pilot study.

My grateful appreciation goes to all instructors as well as staff in the M.A. Program in Teaching English as an International Language, Prince of Songkla University for the knowledge and support to carry out this research.

I also would like to express my appreciation to my classmates for exchanging, supporting, accompanying from the beginning until the end of the course.

Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank my beloved parents for their great support. This thesis is respectfully dedicated to them.

Prasit Petnoosed

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT (THAI)	v
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF PAPERS	xi
LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE	xii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Rationale of the Study.....	1
1.2 Purpose.....	3
1.3 Research Questions.....	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Reading Comprehension.....	4
2.2 Cultural Familiarity.....	4
2.3 Cultural Familiarity and Perception on Literary Texts.....	5
2.4 Related Studies.....	6
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	12
3.1 Participants.....	12
3.2 Research Instruments.....	12
3.2.1 Short Stories.....	12
3.2.2 Reading Comprehension Tests.....	13
3.2.3 Perception Questionnaire.....	15
3.3 Data Collection	16
3.4 Data Analysis.....	16

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	17
5. CONCLUSION.....	27
6. IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION.....	28
7. REFERENCES.....	29
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A: American Short Story.....	35
APPENDIX B: Thai Short Story.....	47
APPENDIX C: Reading Comprehension Test from American Short Story.....	60
APPENDIX D: Reading Comprehension Test from Thai Short Story.....	64
APPENDIX E: Perception Questionnaire.....	68
MANUSCRIPTS	
Paper 1: The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension of English Short Stories Written by A Native Speaker And A Thai Author.....	71
Paper 2: English Major Students' Perception on Reading English Short Stories Written by A Native Speaker and A Thai Author.....	80
VITAE.....	98

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1: Difficulty level of the American and the Thai short stories.....	13
2: Example of paralleled question construction for the two short stories.....	14
3: Example of scoring based on Chan's (2009) rubric.....	14
4: Participants' performance on the two short stories.....	17
5: Participants' perception on reading the two short stories.....	20

LIST OF PAPERS

- Petnoosed, P. & Palanukulwong, T. (2019). English Major Students' Attitudes Towards Reading English Short Stories Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai Author. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Applied Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Thailand.*
- Petnoosed, P. & Palanukulwong, T. (2019). *The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension and Attitudes Towards Reading English Short Stories Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai Author.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

LETTERS OF ACCEPTANCE 1



LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

**Faculty of Liberal Arts,
King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang**

No. ๗๖ 0524.29/292

1 Chalongkrung Road,
Ladkrabang, Bangkok
10520, Thailand
Tel/Fax: +66-2329-8445

2 May 2019

Authors: Mr. Prasit Petnoosed and Assoc. Prof. Dr.Thanyapa Palanukulwong

Paper title: English Major Students' Attitudes towards Reading English Short Stories
Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai

Dear Author(s),

We are writing to inform you that your paper has been accepted to present in the 2nd International Conference on Applied Liberal Arts (ICAA 2019): Liberal Arts for Interdisciplinary Practice and Research, organized by the Faculty of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang on Friday, the 24th of May, 2019 at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology main campus.

The aim of this international conference is to provide for all participants a forum for sharing experience and expertise in the fields related to Applied Liberal Arts, involving creating innovative and successful learning, teaching, research and outreach environments fit for Higher Education in the 21st century. All submissions are peer reviewed and acceptance is based on quality, relevance, and originality. Presenters will be given the opportunity to have their submissions included in the printed conference proceedings.

We thank you for your work involved in preparing the paper, presenting it, and sending the final version for the proceedings. We look forward to your participation in ICAA 2019.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Atinuch P.'.

Dr. Atinuch Pin-ngern
Head, ICAA 2019
Faculty of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang

LETTERS OF ACCEPTANCE 2



ที่ อว 6801.11/1514

คณะศิลปศาสตร์
มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์
อ.หาดใหญ่ จ.สงขลา
90112

8 ตุลาคม 2562

เรื่อง ตอบรับการได้รับบทความ

เรียน นายประสิทธิ์ เพชรหนูเสด

ตามที่ท่านได้ส่งบทความ เรื่อง อิทธิพลของความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรมต่อความเข้าใจในการอ่านและทัศนคติต่อเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนักเขียนเจ้าของภาษาและนักเขียนไทย เพื่อตีพิมพ์ในวารสารศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ ตามความทราบแล้วนั้น

กองบรรณาธิการได้รับบทความของท่านแล้ว และจะนำบทความของท่านเข้าสู่กระบวนการประเมินคุณภาพโดยกองบรรณาธิการและผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิต่อไป ทั้งนี้ กองบรรณาธิการจะแจ้งผลให้ท่านทราบอีกครั้งหนึ่ง

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อโปรดทราบ

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

(รองศาสตราจารย์มนตรี มีเนียม)

บรรณาธิการวารสารศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์

งานวิจัยและวารสาร

โทรศัพท์/โทรสาร 0 7428 6675

E-mail: waraporn.no@psu.ac.th

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the Study

It was not until the past two decades that literature regained its importance in English class after having lost its role in the audio-lingual era. Valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement are the main reasons for incorporating literature in English class (Tevdovska, 2016). In addition, among many other merits of literature are motivation, intensive and extensive reading practice, sociolinguistic/pragmatic knowledge, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, overall language skills, emotional intelligence and critical thinking. In literature, there are real life-like elements of conversations, expressions of feelings, functional phrases, and contextualized expressions. Motivation driven by literature can keep students enjoying and going ahead to pursue the end of stories (Khatib, Rezaei & Derakhshan, 2011).

However, studies show that many EFL/ESL students in Asian countries face difficulty in understanding literature written by native speakers of English. Jayakaran (1993) found that students often struggle with comprehending native English literature because it portrays unfamiliar culture. Teo (1994) who conducted a survey in a Singaporean secondary school pointed out that students had problems of comprehending “alien cultural settings” in native English literature.

Although literature is universal in concept as it deals with human nature of emotion, feeling, heart and mind that are common to all languages and cultures, this commonality is perceived differently by members of different culture (Maley, 1989a cited in Khatib et al., 2011). As language and culture are complexly intertwined, authors think and write mainly through culture-specific schemas (Alptekin, 1996). Literature often portrays a specific cultural perspective; thus, conceptually, it can be quite difficult for non-native students. Certainly, one common experience shared by most ESL students is their struggle with a language and culture with which they are unfamiliar (McKay, 1982).

English literature written by British and American authors is difficult for students to comprehend due to cultural block. Cultural elements in such literature affect reading comprehension due to lack of wide awareness of foreign culture (Jayakaran,

1993). According to Carrell (1984), a schema is specific to a particular culture and is not shared by an ESL reader; therefore, it may fail to exist.

In fact, when readers are distant from and have never lived in the geography and socio-cultural environment of the target language in which a story is set, they will miss the relevant cultural background assumptions and constructs and most likely experience problems in comprehending English texts as they are presented through unfamiliar contexts (Alptekin, 1993). Even if the elements are explained, they may still fail to understand the text as normally evoked in the mind of native speakers, as one's natural tendency is to refer to their own cultural system (Alptekin, 1996).

Winfield & Barnes-Felfeli (1982 cited in Alptekin) stressed the difficulties encountered by foreign language learners not only in reading but also in writing activities involving unfamiliar content schemata (1993). Students face difficulty in expressing a culture of which they have no experience, leading to demotivation in learning (Alptekin, 1993). Also, due to explanatory inadequacy of a text, much of the text meaning is in readers' background knowledge. If this knowledge is also insufficient, it becomes difficult to interpret the text meaning (McKay, 2018).

Alptekin & Alptekin (1984) suggested that monocultural English teaching should be replaced by international contexts which are familiar and relevant to students' lives. McKay pointed out that it was not necessary for students to study the culture of the native speakers of English as English has become de-nationalised, no longer belonging to particular nations (2003). The status of English in many countries has shifted from a foreign language to lingua franca and towards international or global language (Graddol, 2006).

However, Boriboon pointed out that most of literary texts used by Thai teachers in English classes are native English literature in order to encourage students to know the origin of the language and its cultural aspects. Thai educational system and disciplines imitated those of the west, especially Britain and USA. In English classes at tertiary level, the compulsory subject for English major students is British and American literature. Thai teachers of English still uphold and prioritize culture of native speakers of English (2013). In Thailand, English is perceived from hierarchical point of view in which the type of English spoken and written within the U.S. and Great

Britain is legitimized while other varieties are de-emphasized (Buripakdi, 2012; Methitham, 2009).

From the researcher's informal interview with Thai lecturers of English literature, it was found that major universities in Thailand do not use local literature in English as materials for English literature courses. This is also supported by a study of Watkhaolarm who found that Thai readership of Thai literature in English almost does not exist because the concept of local literature in English is unfamiliar to the majority of Thai teachers and learners of English literature (2005), although many studies demonstrated that local literature in English contributed to better reading comprehension of ESL/EFL students (Alptekin, 2006; Carrell, 1987; Erten & Razi, 2009; Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2013; Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979).

Reading comprehension of literary texts would be fruitful if there is a congruity between the reader and the text. The former connects and interact with the latter. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to investigate the effects of readers' cultural background on their reading comprehension of literary texts.

1.2 Purpose

This study aimed to fulfill the following objectives.

1. To compare readers' comprehension of culturally familiar and unfamiliar literary texts
2. To compare readers' perception on culturally familiar and unfamiliar literary texts

1.3 Research questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions.

1. To what extent do the participants understand English literary texts with varying cultural familiarity at literal and inferential levels?
2. What are the participants' perception on reading English literary texts with varying cultural familiarity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Readers extract the essence of a text and construct meaning by themselves because a text only provides direction. Reading comprehension involves three elements: the reader who comprehends, the text being comprehended and the activity in which comprehension is a part. This phenomenon occurs within a sociocultural context (Snow, 2002).

Reading comprehension is further divided into text-based and knowledge-based processing. Readers employ lexical and syntactic knowledge to understand texts at literal level. At this level, the processing is bounded with the text, hence driven by data. Literal comprehension is dependent on linguistic competence. At higher cognitive level, readers draw inference to understand what the text is about, relying on their knowledge beyond the text. This process includes synthesizing, summarizing, generalizing, predicting; thus, it is driven by knowledge (Alptekin, 2006; Pearson and Johnson, 1978).

Comprehension of literary texts in particular does not only involve attention to literal aspects but also interpretation which builds on an understanding of plots, characters, and other elements of the literal story for greater meanings beyond the story (McCarthy & Goldman, 2015; Weaver, 1994). Extensive experiences and deep cultural knowledge are required for the reader to understand literary texts at inferential level.

2.2 Cultural Familiarity

Background knowledge or schema helps the interaction between a text and a reader in the process of reading comprehension (Snow, 2002). Schema refers to an active organization or mental representation of past experiences or some part of general knowledge (Bartlett & Burt, 1933; Matsumoto, 2009), structural units, framework or abstracted pattern into or onto which information can fit and can be organized (Phillips, 1969; Rice 1980). Schema or background knowledge can be generally categorized into two types: formal schema and content schema. A formal schema is background knowledge relative to the formal, rhetorical organizational structures of different types

of texts while a content schema is background knowledge a reader brings to a text; it is relative to the content domain of the text (Carrell, 1987).

A content schema also includes cultural schema which is specific to a particular cultural context (Ketchum, 2006). Cultural schema is shared by population of a specific cultural group (Rice 1980). It involves cultural familiarity, helping readers reconstruct the story line of personally and culturally relevant texts and making interpretation with lessened workload. With cultural familiarity, readers are involved with authentic experience in one's own sociocultural context with which they can identify themselves and find some common ground (Erten & Razi, 2009). In fact, cultural schema and cultural familiarity are highly interrelated. Cultural familiarity is the interaction of culture in a text and readers' background knowledge which makes the texts easier to read and understand (Steffensen, Joag-dev and Anderson, 1979; Johnson, 1981; and Carrell, 1987). In reading comprehension, culture plays a crucial role in arousing expectation and prediction about a story, it makes the text familiar to readers (Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2013). Texts with familiar settings are appropriate because they are relevant to the students' world and are, thus, easier to read (Paulston and Bruder, 1976 cited in Carrell, 1983).

Familiarity leads to the construction and activation of the relevant schema (Alptekin, 2006; and Clark & Fiske, 2014). Second language readers who are familiar with cultural content of texts are more successful in drawing inferences based on their cultural schema (Alptekin, 2006), thus making a better interpretation (Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979 cited in Erten & Razi, 2009) in top-down processing (Alptekin, 1993), achieving global comprehension than those readers who are unfamiliar and tend to refer to their own cultural properties, resulting in poor interpretations of the text (Erten & Razi, 2009).

2.3 Cultural familiarity and perception on literary texts

Cultural schema in relation to perception on literary texts was studied by many scholars. The term 'perception' is an umbrella term for *evaluation*, *appreciation* (Larsen & Laszlo, 1990), *affect* (Zajonc, 1984), *emotion* (Lazarus, 1982), *value/significance*, *enjoyment*, *liking* (Clarke & Fiske, 2014), *imagination* and *imagery*

(Larsen & Laszlo, 1990; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, & Anderson, 1982), *interest and motivation* (Abu-Rabia, 1999).

Schemas are representations of experience that guide perception and thought. The congruity between the schemas and new events encountered is suggested to be the basis of some judgments of value, giving rise to valuations of familiarity, acceptability and a basic sense of liking (Clark & Fiske, 2014).

Cultural background or familiarity exerts some influence on not only reading comprehension but also evaluation of the literary texts as such texts require readers' imagination. Readers' cultural background in general and personal experiences in particular come into contact with the reading process and play a role in appreciation of literary texts. Appreciation of literature is assumed to depend on readers' personal experiences accumulated within a cultural context. Individual's personal experiences under certain cultural circumstances provoke reminding of relevant past events and arouse imagery during the reading process (Larsen & Laszlo, 1990). Therefore, readers from different background would not have the same amount of experience with the setting, the same level of identification with characters, the same judgment of value, the same imagination of actions and scenes, the same emotional reactions and the same predictions of the story line (Reynolds et al, 1982).

2.4 Related Studies

2.4.1 Studies on the influence of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension

Among the pioneers who investigated schema, Bartlett and Burt explained 'schema' as familiar form of association consisting of image, which is implicit, and words, which are explicit. Words are visual representation of image; they serve as a device for recall, depending on social condition, interest and attitude. People use schema to retrieve a story and reconstruct it. In his experiment of remembering, he used reproduction and distortion to examine successive modification from one person to another person in reconstruction of stimuli (1933). His method of reproduction and distortion was operationalized in successive studies.

The review of literature on the influence of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension was divided into three major groups based on methodology employed in the studies.

The earlier group of researchers who studied cultural schema and reading comprehension assigned two groups of participants from different cultural backgrounds to read culturally different texts, some of which were syntactically adapted for ease of reading. These texts were non-literary religious texts highly familiar to readers from respective religious backgrounds. This group of researchers included Steffensen, Joag-dev & Anderson (1979), Johnson (1981) and Carrell (1987).

Steffensen, Joag-dev & Anderson (1979) studied the effects of cultural schema on reading comprehension through recall and reconstruction of two culturally different texts. Both texts were held linguistically constant through readability measurement while the text contents were different in terms of culture. Twenty American and Nineteen Indian participants were assigned to read texts about American and Indian weddings. The participants' comprehension and text recall were compared. The methods used in measuring level of comprehension included reading time, amount of recall of overall text elements, amount of recall of important and unimportant elements, and appropriate and inappropriate modification of the passage. It was found that, with the culturally familiar text, participants spent less time reading, recalled more information and elaborated cultural elements more appropriately than with the culturally unfamiliar text.

In another study, Johnson (1981) examined the influence of both cultural schema and formal schema on forty-six Iranian and nineteen American students' reading comprehension of American and Iranian folklores. Linguistically, each text was of two variables: original/unadapted and adapted/simplified. Half of the participants read the unadapted version of the two stories; the other half read the same stories in simplified English. The participants' reading comprehension was tested through multiple-choice questions. The finding was that cultural elements affected reading comprehension more greatly than linguistic difficulty. The participants relied more on cultural schema both in original and simplified texts.

Carrell (1987) investigated the effects of both content and formal schema on twenty-eight Muslim and twenty-four Catholic ESL students' reading comprehension.

Both groups read “Ali Affani”, an Islamic text, and “Saint Catherine”, a Catholic text. Half of each group read original well-structured version and the other half read rhetorically-altered version. The finding showed that cultural schema had greater effect on the reading comprehension of the participants than did formal schema.

Another group of researchers looked at the comprehension of participants from the same cultural background, i.e. Japanese background. They read the same text, one unadapted and another one culturally adapted. This group of researchers included Chihara, Sakurai & Oller (1989) and Sasaki (2000).

Chihara, Sakurai & Oller (1989) hypothesized that simple things like nouns referring to persons and places carried subtle semantic and pragmatic information and that discrete or non-contextual elements of the text influenced reading comprehension. The text was adapted at lexical level only. Western names of persons and places which were assumed to be culturally unfamiliar to the Japanese participants were changed into Japanese while the content and syntactic complexity were held intact. Reading comprehension was assessed through the use of cloze tests. The participants were two groups of English major students. One group, seventy-nine participants read original text while the other, eighty participants read the culturally adapted one. The results of the study revealed that the participants who took the test based on the culturally familiar text performed significantly better than those who read culturally unfamiliar text.

Sasaki (2000) replicated Chihara et al.’s experiment (1989) but used verbal report instead of a cloze test to assess the effectiveness of the culturally familiar text. A total of sixty Japanese first-year university students majoring in English participated in the study. Participants’ performance was evaluated through verbal reports of their test-taking processes and recall of the passage. The results lent further support to Chihara et al.’s (1989) study; the participants who read the culturally familiar text performed significantly better than those who read culturally unfamiliar text.

Researchers from Turkey and Iran, including Alptekin (2006), Erten & Razi (2009) and Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh & Rezazadeh (2012) used the method employed by Chihara et al. (1989) and Sasaki (2000). However, they adapted western literary texts at deeper levels. Alptekin (2006) adapted a short story of a target-language culture to that of local culture at sociological, semantic and pragmatic levels, and investigated reading comprehension at both literal and inferential levels, believing that schema was

used particularly in the latter. The adaptation of cultural elements of a text is called by Alptekin (2006) as 'cultural nativization'. Linguistic and rhetorical patterns of two culturally different texts were held essentially intact. Ninety-eight Turkish university students who were the subjects were divided into two groups; one group read an original short story, while the other read a culturally adapted text. It was found that cultural nativization affected inferential comprehension items more significantly than literal comprehension. Turkish participants who read a culturally nativized text performed significantly better in inferential comprehension items than those who read the original text of American culture; however, there was no significant difference in scores obtained from literal comprehension items among the two groups of participants.

Erten & Razi (2009) investigated whether cultural nativization facilitated comprehension and whether reading activities compensated for cultural unfamiliarity of short stories. The reading activities included brainstorming, pre-questioning, scanning, skimming, clarifying, reciprocal teaching, inferring, thinking aloud and asking and answering questions. Forty-four Turkish university students participating in the study were divided into four groups. The first group was given the original text without any reading activities, while the second group read the original text and completed the reading activities. The third group read the nativized version without reading activities, and the fourth group was asked to read the nativized version and perform the reading activities. It was found that the third and the fourth group outperformed the first and the second group at a significant level. This illustrated that nativized texts, be it with or without reading activities, yielded better comprehension. The researcher concluded that cultural adaptation of the text had a greater effect on reading comprehension. With substantial cultural schema, the participants could comprehend culturally loaded texts autonomously.

Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh & Rezazadeh (2012) examined the effect of cultural nativization on sixty Iranian EFL students' reading comprehension and explored their perception on cultural nativization. An unadapted text was given to the control group and a nativized text was given to the experimental group. Both groups completed an attitude questionnaire on cultural nativization after the reading test. The control group performed significantly better in reading comprehension. Interestingly, the subjects in both groups showed dissatisfaction with cultural nativization due to its inauthenticity.

Most participants opposed culturally adapted texts and supported the original text as the latter was more tangible and unambiguous. Most specifically, they disagreed with changing western names of Characters, places, food, idioms into Persian. Most participants who favoured the original text stated that it helped them learn and familiarize themselves with a new culture. Tavakoli et al. (2012) recommended further research to use local literary texts to serve the teaching of English as International Language.

2.4.2 Studies on the effects of cultural familiarity on readers' perception on literary texts

There are quite limited number of studies on the effects of cultural familiarity on readers' perception on literary texts. Among these are Larsen & Laszlo (1990) who compared perception of participants from different cultural background on reading a short story. Forty-two Danish and forty Hungarian students were assigned to read a Hungarian short story and expressed their appreciation. The Hungarian participants found the story more enjoyable, imagery-provoking, far easier to understand and much more relevant to the issues they encountered in their daily life than did the Danish participants who understood the story at a more superficial level. It was concluded that the culturally proximate participants showed greater appreciation for the text than did the culturally distant participants.

Madeeyoh & Charumanee (2013) investigated readers' perception on reading an English textbook based on general contents and the other based on Islamic culture. Thirty-one participants in the control group read an English textbook of which contents were new to them while thirty-one participants in the experimental group read another English textbook based on Islamic culture which was familiar to them. Although there was no statistical difference in the participants' satisfaction with both texts, the participants in the control group were slightly more satisfied with the general-content textbook than the participants in the experimental group who read the Islamic culture-based English textbook. This was because the Islamic culture-based English textbook contained the content already known to them, hence considered dissatisfying.

It is evident that all the studies reviewed so far share the same findings, i.e. reader's cultural familiarity with the texts enhance their reading comprehension.

However, the findings of readers' perception on culturally familiar texts seem inconclusive. Thus, the present study aimed to provide more insight on the impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension and its relation to readers' perception.

Specifically, the present study aimed to investigate whether local literature in English could contribute to better reading comprehension by comparing reading comprehension of English literature written by a native speaker of English and a local author and to investigate learners' perception on reading a local text.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and Participants

The population was seventy third-year English major students of a university in the south of Thailand who took *Introduction to English Literature* course. The students were exposed to poetry, short stories, novels and dramas; hence they were familiarized with reading literary texts extensively. Thirty-five students, seven male and twenty-eight female were selected as participants based on volunteer sampling method. Twenty-nine of them had no experience living in English native-speaking countries (e.g. UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US) while six had an average of 1-month experience in those countries.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Two Short Stories

With its brevity, short stories are not as complicated as novels and suit any level of proficiency (Collie & Slater, 1987). Two short stories with varying levels of cultural familiarity were therefore chosen as reading instruments to examine the participants' reading comprehension and their perception. The criteria to select short stories are appropriate difficulty level, portrayal of culture, and acclaim.

Based on the list of Thai writers of English fictions in Pimyupa (2005), a Thai short story written in English entitled *A Monastery Boy* was chosen from *It is the people of Thailand and other countries* collection originally written in English by Pira Sudham in 2014, a Thai author who masters English language. Although his work is not widely recognized by Thai readers, it gains recognition among foreigners who are interested in Thailand topic (Watkhaolarm, 2005). He portrays the harshness of peasant life in the Northeast of Thailand where he was raised, Bangkok and other places. People in Northeast of Thailand suffer poverty and hardship in their drought-dominated land. His work is highly sophisticated in content but simple in language, thus comprehensible to students and is internationally acclaimed. His novel *Monsoon Country* was nominated for 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature. (See Appendix A)

Another short story was an American short story entitled *A Bunch of Blueness* chosen from *On a Darkling Plain* collection written by Betty Jean Tucker in 2014. Its theme is similar to that of *A Monastery Boy*. The story is set in the Great Depression.

Her stories are recognized by famous figures in American literature circle such as Martha Foley and William Carlos Williams. (See Appendix B)

There are several commonalities in both short stories. The main theme was poverty, and several common aspects include abandonment, trouble, hope, escape, loss, impression, religious concepts, agriculture, doubt, gain and clash of ideas between old and young age.

The two chosen short stories are comparable in terms of difficulty level which was measured through a web-based readability software, i.e. readable.com. The result of the measurement is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Difficulty level of the American and the Thai short stories

	A Monastery Boy	A Bunch of Blueness
Grade level		
Gunning Fog Index	9.4	9.4
Readability score		
Flesch Reading Ease	73.0	74.6
Linguistic complexity		
Word Count	4,191	4,342
Sentence Count	255	272
Average characters per word	4.2	4.3
Average words per sentence	16.4	16.0

It was found that both American and Thai short stories belonged to the same grade level (Gunning Fox Index of 9.4 and 9.4), readability score (Flesch Reading Ease of 73 and 74.6) and linguistic complexity (4,191 and 4,342 words, 255 and 272 sentences, average of 4.2 and 4.3 characters per word, and average of 16.4 and 16 words per sentence).

3.2.2 Reading comprehension tests

Two tests with open-ended questions based on the two different short stories requiring short answers were used to assess students' reading comprehension of the two short stories. Each test contained ten literal questions and ten inferential questions,

making up a total of twenty questions. Literal comprehension questions are explicit questions of which answers could be derived from the text literally while inferential comprehension questions are implicit questions that can be solved with background knowledge. Based on Pearson and Johnson (1978), two types of inferential questions, i.e. textually implicit questions and scriptally implicit questions were included in the test. Textually implicit questions required text knowledge and background knowledge for readers to draw connective inferences. In textually implicit questions, metaphor or symbol shown in the text was inquired about. Scriptally implicit questions could be solved with almost only background knowledge using elaborative inferences. Examples of scriptally implicit questions included were those asking about a protagonist's personality, a character's philosophy of life or a narrator's state of mind

Since the two short stories shared several commonalities, similar aspects in respective stories were used to construct reading comprehension questions in a parallel manner at both literal and inferential levels. An example is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Example of paralleled question for the two short stories

Comprehension level	Literal	Inferential	Inferential
Question type	Textually explicit	Textually implicit	Scriptally implicit
American short story	Why was she unhappy with her parents?	Why did the boy come into the old woman's life?	What is the philosophy of life that you learn from the story?
Thai short story	How did his parents make him unhappy?	Why did the farang come into the monastery boy's life?	What is the philosophy of life that you learn from the story?

The short-answer questions were scored based on the key ideas presented in each answer with no reference to grammatical accuracy. Following Chan (2009), the rubric was divided into five levels based on percentage of complete and clear answer, viz. 1, 0.75, 0.5, 0.25 and 0. An example is shown in Table 3. The scoring procedure was under the supervision of the research supervisor.

Table 3: Example of scoring based on Chan's (2009) rubric

Question	What losses did she experience while the boy was staying with her?
Answer	She lost her valuables, self-respect and well-being.
1.00 score	her self-respect, her money, the boy wrecked her car

0.75 score	Most importantly, she lost herself.
0.50 score	She lost freedom and peace in her life.
0.25 score	Her money
0.00 score	The boy not respect and he isn't her grandson.

3.2.3 Perception Questionnaire

A perception questionnaire was employed to explore the participants' perception on reading both short stories. The first part consisted of 23 items on the participants' perception on the two short stories in 12 different aspects, namely *authenticity, ease of comprehension, emotional reaction, enjoyment, identification with characters, imagery/vividness, interest, personal involvement, motivation, preference, relevance, and value*. These aspects are suggested as criteria for selecting literary texts for English classes (Belcher & Hirvela 2000; Bobkina, 2014; Erkaya, 2005; Ghosn, 2002; Hismanoglu, 2005; Mart, 2018; Paran, 2008; Shrestha, 2008). The questionnaire was of 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The results can be interpreted based on the following interval of mean scales (Pongvichai, 2008).

Interpretation	Perception	Mean range
Strongly disagree	Very positive	1.00-1.80
Disagree	Positive	1.81-2.60
Neutral	Neutral	2.61-3.40
Agree	Negative	3.41-4.20
Strongly agree	Very negative	4.21-5.00

The second part of the questionnaire was an open-ended item employed to further explore participants' perception on reading both English short stories. The participants were instructed to write about any of the 12 aspects, namely *authenticity, ease of comprehension, emotional reaction, enjoyment, identification with characters, imagery/vividness, interest, personal involvement, motivation, preference, relevance, value* and any other aspects. (See Appendix E)

The instruments were approved by the three experts and piloted with third-year English major students at another campus of Prince of Songkla University. These students also took *Introduction to English Literature* course.

3.3 Data Collection

The study was conducted in the first semester of academic year 2018. The data were collected in the following steps.

1. All participants were assigned to read both English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author in a week. The texts were given as an outside-class task and were not related to any courses.

2. The participants were instructed to spend one hour on each comprehension test. They were allowed to look at the texts to answer the questions. After the completion of the tests, they were asked to spend fifteen minutes on the questionnaire. They were allowed to complete the tests and the questionnaire in either English or their first language, i.e. Thai. All the participants completed the questionnaire but only twenty-three completed the open-ended part of the questionnaire.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data obtained from the reading comprehension tests and questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted to answer each research question. Descriptive and inferential statistics of the two reading comprehension tests and the questionnaire were generated. Means, standard deviation and significant difference were reported respectively. The data obtained from the reading comprehension tests and perception questionnaire for the American short story were compared with those for Thai short story using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Open-ended questionnaire item was qualitatively analyzed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section contains the results of the study, arranged based on the 2 research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent do the participants understand English literary texts with varying cultural familiarity at literal and inferential levels?

Wilcoxon sign rank tests were separately conducted on literal and inferential questions (10 items each), to find out whether there was a significant difference between reading comprehension of a culturally unfamiliar text, i.e. the American short story and a culturally familiar text, i.e. the Thai short story in English at literal and inferential levels. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Participants' performance on the two short stories

Comprehension level	American short story		Thai short story		Difference	Effect size
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD		
Literal comprehension (score=10)	4.82	1.22	5.46	1.29	0.64*	-0.51
Inferential comprehension (total score =10)	2.91	1.24	3.99	2.05	1.08**	-0.657
textually implicit questions (total score = 7)	2.15	0.95	2.67	1.38	0.52	-0.43
scriptally implicit questions (total score = 3)	0.75	0.57	1.32	0.92	0.57**	-0.74
Overall comprehension (score=20)	7.73	1.9	9.45	2.52	1.72**	-0.778

** significant at 0.01 level

* significant at 0.05 level

The result of the Wilcoxon sign rank tests shown in Table 4 reveals that the differences in the participants' score obtained from the two tests are statistically significant ($p < 0.1$). The participants obtained a significantly higher mean score from the Thai short story ($\bar{x} = 9.45$, $SD = 2.52$) compared to that from the American short story ($\bar{x} = 7.73$, $SD = 1.90$).

Detailed analysis shows interesting differences. The participants performed significantly better in reading comprehension of the Thai short story than the American short story at literal level ($\bar{x} = 5.46$, $SD = 1.29$, as compared to $\bar{x} = 4.82$, $SD = 1.22$) and at inferential level ($\bar{x} = 3.99$, $SD = 2.05$, as compared to $\bar{x} = 2.91$, $SD = 1.24$).

A closer look at two different types of inferential comprehension, i.e. that of textually implicit facts and scriptally implicit facts, shows that the participants' performance on textually implicit facts in the two texts was not significantly different ($\bar{x} = 2.67$, $SD = 1.38$, as compared to $\bar{x} = 2.15$, $SD = 0.95$, respectively). However, the participants' performance on scriptally implicit facts in Thai short story ($\bar{x} = 1.32$, $SD = 0.92$) was significantly higher than their performance in American short story ($\bar{x} = 0.75$, $SD = 0.57$). Similar results were also reported by Jalilifar & Assi (2008) and Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh (2012). Readers' cultural familiarity with a text enhanced their reading comprehension at both literal and inferential levels. These results could be supported by a number of reasons.

In terms of literal comprehension, this study found that the participants could comprehend contents from the Thai short story more accurately and clearly, and gained significantly higher scores from the Thai short story due to the fact that they were more familiar with Thai cultural aspects portrayed in the Thai short story. According to Steffensen, Joag-dev and Andersen (1979), cultural background influences their memory. This could be the reason why the participants who were familiar with the cultural background of the text could elaborate their answers more accurately in their recall protocols while those reading a culturally unfamiliar text comprehended it with difficulty.

For inferential comprehension, the result revealed that the participants performed significantly better in inferential comprehension of the Thai short story. A detailed analysis showed significant difference in reading comprehension of scriptally implicit facts only. Since scriptally implicit questions could be solved based on only background knowledge, the participants did not have to rely heavily on the texts to draw inferences. Therefore, they could answer without having to read culturally familiar story thoroughly. However, textually implicit questions require not only background knowledge but also text knowledge. As the participants were not assigned to read the texts as part of any course, they might not pay full attention to the minute details of the texts, or the texts might be difficult for them to understand. Therefore, their background knowledge of Thai culture did not contribute significantly to their comprehension of textually implicit facts in the Thai short story. However, overall inferential comprehension seemed to be influenced by cultural background knowledge. The

significance and meaningful purpose of the Thai short story were more clearly understood by the participants. This could be supported by what Jimenez proposed: the connection between culturally relevant texts and the participants' own backgrounds created opportunities for making better inferences (1997). Therefore, using local texts written in English could connect with the real world learners live in.

As a literary text depicts a series of events and arouses readers to predict what will happen next. Readers with no or little experience in a country may not be able to picture scenes in a story set in that country clearly. In this study, with the help of the context familiarity and sufficient prior knowledge about of Thai culture, participants might be able to predict comprehension clues available from stories previously unknown to them. According to Goodman, familiar actions of the characters, description of the settings, sequence of the events could facilitate their predictions to match the author's expression (1982). Therefore, cultural familiarity seemed to play a significant role in prediction about a story. It could be said that texts with familiar settings are appropriate because they are relevant to the students' world and are, thus, easier to read.

In addition, with literary texts usually containing unknown words, readers with limited vocabulary size may struggle with guessing those words. However, with the help of the context familiarity, readers should be able to guess unknown words more easily. That is why the participants obtained significantly higher scores from the Thai short story. This might be because its content is based on the participants' own culture while the American short story is of a less familiar, more distant culture. Familiarity with cultural context of the text may facilitate the participants to guess the meaning of unknown words more effectively. However, when reading the story with unfamiliar context, they might struggle with guessing the meanings of new words. Rumelhart (1985 cited in Alhaisoni, 2017) argued that readers' background knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. Readers who are equipped with relevant background knowledge should be able to predict the meanings of the unknown words that they encounter.

As far as cultural-religious matters are concerned, it was found in the present study that both Buddhist and Muslim participants understood Buddhist concept of 'karma' well but did not totally understand Christian concept of 'redemption' in

American short story. This may be because Buddhist culture is prevalently broadcast in Thai media. In addition, socio-geographically speaking, due to the participants' existing knowledge about Bangkok and Northeast of Thailand, where the Thai short story is set, the participants might be able to imagine scenes in the story more clearly. In contrast, with the lack of sufficient schema of American culture and landscape, especially that of southern part of the USA where American short story is set, the participants might struggle to picture scenes in their mind. In sum, the familiarity of cultural and geographical circumstances might help the participants imagine and understand the story more clearly.

Research Question 2: What are the participants' perception on reading English literary texts with varying cultural familiarity?

The attitude question consists of twenty-five 5-likert scale items and an open-ended item. It was analyzed in terms of descriptive statistics, i.e. mean and standard deviation to investigate the level of agreement and inferential statistics, i.e. Wilcoxon sign rank test to examine the significant difference.

Table 5: Participants' perception on reading the short stories

Criteria	American short story		Interpretation	Thai short story in English		Interpretation	p-value
	\bar{x}	SD		\bar{x}	SD		
1. Authenticity							
I found the story very real.	3.14	0.69	neutral	4.09	0.85	positive	0.000**
2. Ease of understanding							
The story helped me to learn English language.	4.26	0.7	very positive	4.2	0.76	positive	0.48
I could predict what is going to happen next almost correctly.	2.97	0.89	neutral	3.4	1.06	neutral	0.005**
I could guess meanings of difficult words without consulting a dictionary.	2.66	1.03	negative	3.06	0.87	neutral	0.021*
Average	3.3	0.58	neutral	3.55	0.57	positive	0.007**
3. Enjoyment							
I gained pleasure from reading the story.	3.43	0.65	positive	3.54	0.74	positive	0.206
I enjoyed reading the story.	3.17	0.86	neutral	3.51	0.92	positive	0.003**
Average	3.3	0.62	neutral	3.53	0.7	positive	0.004**
4. Imagery/vividness							

It was easy to picture the story in my head.	3.26	0.89	neutral	3.89	0.9	positive	0.001**
Scenes from the story were so clear that I knew their smell, their touch, and their “feel”.	3.11	0.8	neutral	3.57	0.81	positive	0.003**
Average	3.19	0.73	neutral	3.73	0.76	positive	0.000**
5. Personal involvement							
I was drawn into the story.	3.21	0.77	neutral	3.5	0.75	positive	0.004**
While reading, I was part of the story.	2.71	0.83	neutral	3	1.03	neutral	0.025*
Average	2.96	0.63	neutral	3.24	0.71	neutral	0.004**
6. Relevance							
What happened in the story was common in my society.	3.06	1.08	neutral	3.89	1.16	positive	0.002**
The story is relevant to my life.	2.29	1.2	negative	2.6	1.29	negative	0.069
Average	2.67	0.98	neutral	3.24	0.96	neutral	0.005**
7. Emotional reaction							
I was emotionally involved in the story.	3.43	0.65	positive	3.74	0.74	positive	0.033*
8. Value							
The story is worth reading.	3.71	0.99	positive	3.83	0.95	positive	0.331
I found the story important.	3.57	0.74	positive	3.74	0.74	positive	0.153
Average	3.64	0.74	positive	3.79	0.76	positive	0.166
9. Preference							
I liked this story a lot.	3.17	0.86	neutral	3.38	0.92	neutral	0.067
I wanted to read this kind of story more.	3.4	1.01	neutral	3.43	1.24	positive	0.813
Average	3.29	0.74	neutral	3.41	0.8	positive	0.249
10. Motivation							
The story motivated me to read more.	3.34	0.87	neutral	3.54	0.89	positive	0.07
When I finished reading the first part, I was enthusiastic to read the rest of the story.	3.14	0.91	neutral	3.23	0.88	neutral	0.439
Average	3.24	0.76	neutral	3.39	0.75	neutral	0.135
11. Interest							
I would like to read another short story in the same collection.	3.11	0.93	neutral	3.26	1.01	neutral	0.26
I think my classmates would be interested in this story.	3.4	0.88	neutral	3.49	0.89	positive	0.317
I would like to read stories similar to this one.	3.09	0.89	neutral	3.34	0.97	neutral	0.213
Average	3.2	0.71	neutral	3.36	0.76	neutral	0.095
12. Identification with character							

I felt close to the main character.	2.77	1	neutral	3.03	0.95	neutral	0.071
13. Overall perception	3.18	0.52	neutral	3.51	0.52	positive	0.000*

** significant at 0.01 level

* significant at 0.05 level

The mean in the table shows that the participants had *positive* overall perception on reading the Thai short story ($\bar{x} = 3.51$, $SD = 0.52$) and *neutral* perception on reading the American short story ($\bar{x} = 3.18$, $SD = 0.52$). Detailed data analysis shows interesting findings. The participants had *positive* perception on reading the Thai short story in terms of *authenticity*, *ease of understanding*, *enjoyment*, *imagery/vividness*, *emotional reaction*, *value* and *preference*. However, they had *neutral* perception on *personal involvement*, *relevance*, *motivation*, *interest* and *identification with character*. For the American short story, the participants showed *positive* attitude towards *emotional reaction* and *value* only while they had *neutral* perception on *authenticity*, *ease of understanding*, *enjoyment*, *imagery/vividness*, *personal involvement*, *relevance*, *preference*, *motivation*, *interest* and *identification with character*.

As to whether there was a significant difference in the participants' perception on reading both texts, the table shows that the participants had significantly better overall perception on reading the Thai short story ($\bar{x} = 3.51$, $SD = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). Detailed data analysis shows interesting differences. The participants had significantly better perception on reading the Thai short story in terms of *authenticity*, *ease of understanding*, *enjoyment*, *imagery*, *personal involvement*, *relevance* ($p < 0.1$) and they also reported significantly more *emotional reaction* ($p < 0.5$). However, there is no significant difference in *identification with characters*, *interest*, *motivation*, *preference* and *value*.

Among the seven aspects which showed that the participants had significantly better perception on reading the Thai short story is *authenticity*. The Thai short story was found to be significantly more authentic than the American short story. This shows that although literature is an authentic reading material in nature, readers may find culturally unfamiliar texts less authentic than culturally familiar ones.

In terms of *imagery/vividness*, it was also found that the Thai short story was significantly more imagery-provoking than the American short story. The familiarity

of setting, characters' behaviours and cultural circumstances of the Thai story might help the participants imagine the story more clearly.

Regarding *enjoyment*, the participants found that the Thai short story was significantly more enjoyable than the American short story. With local cultural elements in the Thai short story, the participants might feel more engaged with the context of the text; therefore, they enjoyed reading the Thai short story more.

For *personal involvement*, the participants were significantly more personally involved with the Thai short story. Culturally familiar text, such as the Thai short story might cause the participants to feel more personally involved because such text portrays persons, events, places, and sociocultural relations with which the participants can identify themselves.

In terms of *relevance*, the Thai short story was found to be significantly more common in the participants' life. The setting of the Thai short story *A Monastery Boy* taking place in countryside may not be relevant to some participants' life, but it is relevant to their society as a whole.

Another aspect of the participants' significantly more positive perception on reading the Thai short story was *ease of understanding*. The Thai short story was significantly easier to understand than the American short story. This might be because its content is based on the participants' own culture while the latter is of a less familiar, more distant culture. Familiarity with cultural context of the text may facilitate the participants to guess the meaning of unknown words more effectively.

As far as *emotional reaction* is concerned, the Thai short story seemed to arouse stronger feelings. This may be due to the sympathy towards familiar characters or events. The participants seemed to be more affected when reading a story that was related to their own national culture and were less emotional when the story was of a distant culture.

In sum, it appeared that cultural familiarity of the Thai short story helped the participants' reading at both cognitive level, i.e. ease of understanding and affective level, i.e. *authenticity, enjoyment, imagery, personal involvement, relevance* and *emotional reaction*. However, cultural familiarity did not seem to be related to *identification with characters, interest, motivation, preference* and *value*.

Data obtained from an open-ended item of the questionnaire revealed interesting findings. The participants touched upon the areas of *authenticity*, *ease of understanding* and *interest* primarily.

Regarding *authenticity*, although literature is authentic in nature, only two of the thirty-five participants who commented on this aspect reported that the Thai short story, the context of which was common in their life, was more real than the American short story. The Thai short story had the atmosphere that the participants could feel, and it sounded real to them. However, they were not certain that their imagination of American story was correct. As Nostrand (1989) stated, a text is authentic when its context evoked the mind of a person living in the culture. The text's message is inextricable from writer's context. Therefore, readers from a cultural context different from that of the text may not be able to extract the writer's essence.

In terms of *ease of understanding*, in spite of the fact that both short stories were of the same difficulty level, seven of the total participants who voiced their opinion on this aspect found that both stories used difficult vocabulary, which is the nature of literary language. However, the Thai short story was more accessible and easier for them to understand. For this reason, they could read more smoothly and could maintain attention while reading. One of the seven participants expressed that she could guess unknown words from the context of Thai short story and her own experiences. It might be possible to conclude that the more the readers know about the cultural context, the more easily and clearly they get the information from the text.

In contrast, five of the thirty-five participants who revealed their perception on reading the American short story reported that it took longer to comprehend the American story due to a lack of sufficient background knowledge about geography, society, religion and culture of America. One of them reported that she tried to use her limited cultural schema to understand American short story and was not certain of the cultural assumption. The participant might try to comprehend the text on the basis of her cultural background knowledge and might make culture-based errors. Two of them reported that they were confused and demotivated by the American short story. They found it difficult to understand cultural aspects depicted in the American story, especially the religious concept. This seems to be the common difficulty faced by readers from religions different from that presented in the text and this is in tandem

with other studies which showed that students often had difficulty interpreting events from perspectives not naturally their own (Pichert, 1979; Shantz, 1975 cited Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey & Anderson, 1982) and different from their cultural-religious group membership (Carrell, 1987).

However, two participants said that although the American short story was more difficult to understand, there was a reason to read it as it opened up possibilities to learn new things. This finding echoed that of Rodliyah's study (2014) in which the participants reported that it was worthwhile to learn culture of English native speakers, most of which were new to learners as it helped widen their knowledge and horizons.

In terms of *interest*, there seems to be a relation between text-reader connection and interest. One participant out of twenty-three who responded to this aspect expressed that the Thai short story was interesting since there was a connection between the text's context and the reader's context. Another participant reported that she was more engaged with Thai story and felt like she was a part of the story. As Allen (1975 cited in McKay, 1982) stated, an interaction with literary texts is influenced by readers' familiarity with cultural assumption that the text is based on.

Apart from *authenticity*, *ease of understanding* and *interest*, there was another aspect that many participants mentioned as a factor that helped them to comprehend the text – cultural familiarity. Three out of twenty-three participants who commented on this aspect expressed that they understood the writer's message as a whole as the story was common in Thai story. One of them voiced that although the Thai short story was familiar to her, it was still interesting. This may be because the writer portrayed some extraordinary aspects not commonly presented in the mass media. This finding is in line with what is suggested by Schraw, Flowerday & Lehman that familiarity should be at the moderate level (2001). Otherwise, no room is left for readers to process, predict and gain pleasure. In addition, Madeeyoh et al.'s (2013) finding on students' perception on culturally familiar non-literary text revealed that although the local text (in this case, Islamic text) was highly familiar and relevant to Muslim students, the participants found it unsatisfying to read Islamic texts in English. This is supported by one of Schraw et al.'s (2001) strategies to promote interest, i.e. texts whose content is familiar, but not too familiar.

It is interesting to note that one participant felt surprised to read a Thai short story written in English because she was never assigned to read one. This could mean that she might have read a few of them outside her class but never had a chance to read one in her English class. Another participant expressed positive perception on the quality of English written by Pira Sudham, the author of *A Monastery Boy*, which to her sounded like it was written by a native speaker.

With all the above-mentioned reasons, it is suggested that Thai teachers should integrate both English literature written by Thai authors into the existing literature classes because native-English literature broadens horizon and gives learners opportunity to learn the origin of the target language while Thai literature in English facilitates learner's reading comprehension. Thai short stories to be used should not be unadapted, thus authentic. Native-English literature should also be an integral part.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to examine the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension as well as to investigate Thai English-major students' perception on reading English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author. The findings of this study can be summarized based on the research questions.

1. The results clearly show that the participants performed better on the Thai short story written in English which was culturally familiar to the participants. They could recall the explicit information and infer implicit information from the Thai short story significantly more accurately than from the American short story.

2. This study also found that a culturally familiar content in the Thai short story provokes positive attitudes among readers who are familiar with the cultural context of the text. Also, the Thai short story in English used in this study was unadapted, thus authentic and suitable to be used in English class. Local literature in English meets many criteria for selecting good reading material for English literature class, namely *authenticity, ease of understanding, enjoyment, imagery, personal involvement, relevance* and *emotional reaction*.

The present study has important contributions to research on cultural familiarity and reading comprehension of literary texts. It has been one of the few attempts to investigate the impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension using a local literary text originally written in English. The Thai short story in English used in this study was un-adapted, thus authentic and suitable to be used in English class.

6. IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Given the robust research evidence, some pedagogical implications can be drawn. Local fictions in English should be embedded into reading course in general and English literature course for students at the introductory stage of literature class in particular. The exposure to local literature in English can help them learn English literature through their own culture and develop reading competence with relative ease. This is in tandem with Mahoney's (1991) belief that students' world knowledge they bring into contact with local literature would result in greater comprehension which would also prompt greater interest and enjoyment.

It seems that internationally recognized literary works of local authors with a good command of English may serve as a canon of local English literature for teaching and learning. Teacher and learners should seize the opportunity of this golden era of English as international language where local traditions could be fully celebrated.

Future research is recommended in different cultural contexts. Different themes of short stories may be investigated. More than one local text in English and native English text would help examine the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension more effectively. In addition, further studies may also need to look at readers' proficiency level to see its relationship to reading comprehension of culturally familiar and unfamiliar literary texts.

7. REFERENCES

- Abu-Rabia, S. (1999). Towards a second-language model of learning in problematic social contexts: The case of Arabs learning Hebrew in Israel. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2(1), 109-126.
- Alhaisoni, E. (2017). Prior knowledge in EFL reading comprehension: Native and nonnative EFL teachers' perceptions, classroom strategies and difficulties encountered. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 5(1), 30-41.
- Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials. *ELT Journal*, 47(2), 136-143.
- Alptekin, C. (1996). *Target-language culture in EFL materials*. In T. Hedge & N. Whitney (Eds.), *Power, Pedagogy and Practice* (pp. 53-61). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Alptekin, C. (2006). Cultural familiarity in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading. *System*, 34(4), 494-508.
- Alptekin, C. & Alptekin, M. (1984). The question of culture: EFL teaching in non-English-speaking countries. *ELT Journal*, 38(1), 14-20.
- Bartlett, F. C. & Burt, C. (1933). Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 3(2), 187-192.
- Belcher, D. & Hirvela, A. (2000). Literature and L2 composition: Revisiting the debate. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9(1), 21-39.
- Bobkina, J. & Dominguez, E. (2014). The use of literature and literary texts in the EFL classroom: Between consensus and controversy. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 3(2), 248-260.
- Boriboon, P. (2013). Concepts of culture in English language teaching: Problems of realization, development, and transcultural concepts for glocalised pedagogy of English. *Journal of Humanities Naresuan University*, 9(2), 1-22.

- Buripakdi, A. (2012). The marginalized positions of Thai professional writers on the global hegemony of English. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 22(1), 41-59.
- Carrell, P. L. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(4), 553-573.
- Carrell, P. L. (1984). Schema theory and ESL reading: Classroom implications and applications. *The Modern Language Journal*, 68(4), 332-343.
- Carrell, P. L. (1987). Content and formal schemata in ESL reading. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(3), 461-481.
- Chan, C. (n.d.). Assessment: short answer questions. Retrieved March 23, 2019 from, https://ar.cetl.hku.hk/am_saq.htm
- Chihara, T., Sakurai, T. & Oller, J. W. (1989). Background and culture as factors in EFL reading comprehension. *Language Testing*, 6(2), 143-149.
- Clark, M. S. & Fiske, S. T. (2014). Affect and Cognition: 17th Annual Carnegie Mellon Symposium on Cognition. Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.th/books?id=-ciYAgAAQBAJ>
- Collie, J. & Slater, S. (1987). *Literature in the language classroom*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Erkaya, O. R. (2005). Benefits of using short stories in the EFL Context. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8, 1-13.
- Erten, I. H., & Razi, S. (2009). The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 21(1), 60-77.
- Ghosn, I. K. (2002). Four good reasons to use literature in primary school ELT. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 172-179.
- Goodman, K. S. (1982). Revaluing readers and reading. *Topics in Learning and Learning Disabilities*, 1(4), 87-95.

- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next*. Retrieved from <https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/books-english-next.pdf>
- Hismanoglu, M. (2005). Teaching English through literature. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 1(1), 53-56.
- Jalilifar, A. R. & Assi, R. (2008). The role of cultural nativization in comprehension of short stories in EFL reading contexts. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*, 26, 62-79.
- Jayakaran, M. (1993). Teacher support materials in the treatment of cultural elements for the Malaysian class reader programme. *The English Teacher*, 22, 16-26.
- Jimenez, R. (1997). The strategic reading abilities and potential of five low-literacy Latino readers in middle school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 12(2), 224-243.
- Johnson, P. (1981). Effects on reading comprehension of language complexity and cultural background of a text. *TESOL Quarterly*, 15(2), 169-181.
- Ketchum, E. M. (2006). The cultural baggage of second language reading: An approach to understanding the practices and perspectives of a nonnative product. *Foreign Language Annals*, 39(1), 22-42.
- Khatib, M., Rezaei, S. & Derakhshan, A. (2011). Literature in EFL/ESL classroom. *English Language Teaching*, 4(1), 201-208.
- Larsen, S. F. & Laszlo, J. (1990). Cultural-historical knowledge and personal experience in appreciation of literature. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 20, 425-440.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1982). Thoughts on the relations between emotion and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 37(9), 1019-1024.
- Madeyoh, C. & Charumanee, N. (2013). The use of Islamic context texts to improve Muslim students' English reading skills. *Journal of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University*, 5(2), 47-58.

- Mahoney, D. (1991). Asian voices in English: Asian-English literature in the ESL curriculum. *Perspectives: Working Papers of the Department of English at City Polytechnic of Hong Kong*, 3(1), 79-88.
- Mart, C. T. (2018). Literature in the language classroom: A recipe to maximize learning. *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, 18, 1-25.
- Matsumoto, D. (2009). *The Cambridge dictionary of psychology*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, K. S. & Goldman, S. R. (2015). Comprehension of short stories: Effects of task instructions on literary interpretation. *Discourse Processes*, 52(7), 585-608.
- McKay, S. (1982). Literature in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16(4), 529-536.
- McKay, S. (2003). Teaching English as an international language: The Chilean context. *ELT Journal*, 57(2), 139-148.
- McKay, S. L. (2018). English as an international language: What it is and what it means for pedagogy. *RELC Journal*, 49(1), 9-23.
- Methitham, P. (2009). An exploration of culturally-based assumptions guiding ELT practice in Thailand, a non-colonized nation. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA.
- Nostrand, H. L. (1989). Authentic texts and cultural authenticity: An editorial. *The Modern Language Journal*, 73(1), 49-52.
- Paran, A. (2008). The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey. *Language Teaching*, 41(4), 465-496.
- Pearson, D. P. & Johnson, D. (1978). *Teaching Reading Comprehension*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Phillips, J. L. (1969). *The Origins of Intellect: Piaget's Theory*. San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman.
- Pongvichai, S. (2011). *Data analysis in statistics with computer: Emphasis on research*. Bangkok, Thailand: Chulalongkorn University.

- Reynolds, R. E., Taylor, M. A., Steffensen, M. S., Shirey, L. L. & Anderson, R. C. (1982). Cultural schemata and reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 17(3), 353-366.
- Rice, G. E. (1980). On cultural schemata. *American ethnologist*, 7(1), 152-171.
- Rodliyah, S. S., Imperiani, E. D. A. & Amalia, L. L. (2014). Indonesian tertiary students' attitudes towards the use of local culture vs target culture reading materials in English reading class. *Bahasa dan Sastra*, 14(1), 109-120.
- Sasaki, M. (2000). Effects of cultural schemata on students' test taking processes for cloze tests: A multiple data source approach. *Language Testing*, 17, 85-114.
- Schraw, G., Flowerday, T. & Lehman, S. (2001). Increasing situational interest in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(3), 211-224.
- Shrestha, P. N. (2008). *Using stories with young learners*. In M. Krzanowski (ed.), *Current developments in English for academic, specific and occupational purposes*. Reading, England: Garnet publishing.
- Snow, C. (2002). *Reading for understanding: toward a research and development program in reading comprehension*.
Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1465.html
- Steffensen, M. S., Joag-Dev, C. & Anderson, R. C. (1979). A cross-cultural perspective on reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 15(1), 10-29.
- Sudham, P. (2004). *It is the people of Thailand and other countries*. Bangkok, Thailand: Shire Books.
- Tavakoli, M., Shirinbakhsh, S. & Rezazadeh, M. (2013). Effect of cultural adaptation on EFL reading comprehension: The role of narrative nativization and foreign language attitude. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 21, 1587-1596.
- Teo, W. (1994). Singaporean secondary three students' perception of literature. *Guidelines*, 16(2), 137-153.

- Tevdovska, E. S. (2016). Literature in ELT setting: Students' attitudes and preferences towards literary texts. *Procedia*, 232, 161-169.
- Tucker, B. J. (2014). *On a Darkling Plain: Stories from the Great Depression*. Livingston, AL: Livingston Press.
- Watkhaolarm, P. (2005). Think in Thai, write in English: Thainess in Thai English literature. *World Englishes*, 24(2), 145-158.
- Weaver, C. (1994). Aspects of Literary Comprehension. *Language and Speech*, 37(3), 315-319.
- Zajonc, R. B. (1984). On the primacy of affect. *American Psychologist*, 39(2), 117-123.

APPENDIX A:
American Short Story

A Bunch of Blueness

ALL of her life she had fled from the pain of the past and yearned for the rainbow in her future. As the years went by, her husband died of a heart attack, her daughter deserted her for the streets of Chicago, and the days crawled by, empty and joyless.

But on Mother's Day one year, a telegram came, and she was dizzy at the prospect of having a child, her grandson, come into her life. A loving relationship with him would fill a void and make the little Victorian cottage echo with laughter. She would bake chocolate chip cookies, buy Spray and Wash to remove grass stains from his tee shirts, and stock the medicine cabinet with Band-Aids and cough drops. And she would have to remember to put her dentures out of sight at night, to make rules about wiping one's feet on the doormat, to be sweet to his friends, to get him a set of World Book Encyclopedias. And, of course, she would write to Lucy Baxley, Alabama's treasurer, for membership in the state's Prepaid College Tuition Plan. She was giddy over finally capturing the elusive future and the happiness it promised.

But moving the future into the present is a tricky business, she discovered. The vision of rainbows evaporated as the twelve-year-old boy stepped off the bus. The epitome of the dirty, ragged street urchins she had seen on television, he looked sullen and defiant, a barely suppressed anger lurking in cold gray eyes. He was burly for a twelve-year-old, with the craggy look of a Nordic Abraham Lincoln. "So blonde," she thought, "not at all like my people." It was hard to believe he came from her daughter, with her sweetness and dark features.

"Craig?" she asked tentatively.

"Yeah," he finally admitted, looking somewhere to the left of her.

"I'm your grandma, and I'm so glad you've come to live with me." She tried to sound sincere and suppress her dismay.

"Well, I ain't staying long — just till Mama gets well," he informed her, shifting his duffel bag to his right hand.

But he stayed. She had had eager hopes that he would be her salvation. Now, four years later, she felt damned. Consumed by God-knows-what resentments of his previous life or of the grandmother whose age and lifestyle baffled him, he dropped out of school on his sixteenth birthday and allied himself with a group of redneck scum in a nearby Alabama Black Belt town.

For her part she resented the pollution of her life by someone so worthless, resented the endless calls from the police, the refusal to work, the squalor of his room, and the thumping rap music that sounded obscene, careening off walls covered with wallpaper featuring pretty pink cabbage roses.

He pleased in heaping indignities and cruelties on her, and she grew increasingly intimidated. For years he had responded to every correction or reprimand with an explosion of anger. Often she was inert with fear, especially after that terrible confrontation about a car.

"I'm old enough to have a car now," he had informed her between slurps of Rice Krispies one morning.

She was caught off guard. "Well, are you old enough to pay for it?" she asked, unable to conceal her indignation.

"What the hell you mean by that?" His voice crawled with antagonism.

"I mean that since you've quit school, you should get a job and work to buy yourself a car. If you saved half of each paycheck, you could have enough in a year to make a down payment. Why don't you call Skeeter Jones down at the tire place? He would be glad to help you."

"I'll be damned if I ask one of your do-good buddies for anything. You want me to ask him to pray for me to get a car? I'll just do that and wait for a Camry to drop down in the front yard. I just bet there will be a note on it that says, 'In God We Trust'."

Not stopping to consider consequences, she pointed an accusing finger at him. "One day God will strike you dead for such disrespect."

He hurled his bowl across the room, shattering the window above the sink. "It ain't God that's gonna strike you dead old woman," he promised, wiping the milk from his mouth with the back of his hand.

She did not buy him a car. What she did was have a lock installed on her bedroom door, and she was never again without fear in her own house. In her life she had endured great hardships but never had she been the object of such hatred. She censored everything she said and tried not to provoke him. She endured daily verbal abuse and lost her self-respect because she dared not assert herself to change the situation.

The temptation of suicide snaked itself into her consciousness, and she began to wonder how many of her anti-depressant pills it would take to kill herself. She had once seen a movie in which a cancer patient had taken ten Mellaril tablets, and it was enough. But she didn't know what milligram the pills had been. Hers were only .25 mg, and she thought ten might not be enough. She dreamed of botching the attempt and living paralyzed and helpless, with her grandson wiping out her little savings and tormenting her with temper tantrums and threats.

His malevolence manifested itself in assorted cruel acts. Once a neighbor had delighted her with a gift of garden vegetables, and the purple hull peas reminded her of those her husband had grown when they were first married. In spite of the arthritic crippling of her hands, she set about shelling the peas in eager anticipation of the meal she would prepare. From the past came a recollection of opening the hulls, running her thumb down the row of peas to plunk them into a pan, always alert in case a worm lurked inside the hull. She could close her eyes and see the black pot on the old iron stove, its contents of peas, water and a thick slice of fatback sending forth a hunger-inducing aroma. How swift her fingers had been then. Now she endured grotesque pain, relying on her thumbs and one index finger to gingerly remove the peas one at a time. It took her three hours, and she was aware that her grandson watched her covertly while pretending to be absorbed in a television program. Hoping to engage his interest, she said, "I'll bet you've never shelled peas have you?"

"Don't talk crazy. What would I be doing shelling peas?"

"In my day, everybody shelled peas when it came canning time."

"That ain't nothing to me,"

"In the Depression, everybody worked if they wanted to eat. Nobody thought he was too good to work."

She knew she should hush, but it was galling to have to bite her tongue in fear of an obnoxious threatening teenager. She held her swollen, purple-stained hands in front of her and watched them tremble in terrible pain.

"Well, in my day, only stupid people work. Picking peas out of a hull one at a time. What kind of work is that?"

"It's work that puts food on the table, that's what. Mr. Trager, your grandfather, always loved purple hull peas, and I do too."

She was not prepared for his reaction. He leaped from his chair and strode to her, cheeks flaming. He leaned down, his face so close she could smell the sourness of his breath, and she noticed that he would be shaving soon.

"Well, let me give you some more work to do. You're gonna love this, grandma." His mouth curled into the habitual sneer he had perfected. Taking the pan from her loose hands, he opened the back door and hurled the precious peas in a wide arc over the yard. They glistened in the hot July sun, hovering, then falling in seemingly slow motion into the grass and sand.

On the television, a vinegar-voiced talk show host prattled about Jenna and Barbara Bush's attempt to buy liquor with a fake I.D. "They should be held to a higher standard because they're children of the President," shrilled an indignant guest, spittle erupting as she spoke. "It's just liquor and a lie," Estelle wanted to say. "It's not evil. I know evil. It is here with me, walking toward me, grinning, putting the pan so gently in my lap, patting my hand saying, 'There, there, Grandma.'"

She knew evil, and she knew that it could become heinous, that the little stubble of facial hair foretold a future of more fear and heartache. Over and over, she reviewed

her relationship with him and tried to analyze it for clues to explain his behavior. She had known that hurdles lay ahead the day of his arrival when he refused the cookies bubbling with melted chocolate. He did not drink milk. He wanted Coke. He didn't like cookies; he liked cigarettes. He liked "the weed" so much he stole a package of Winstons from Ed Burrough, a next-door neighbor, the first week he was in town. The usually mild-mannered Ed went straight to Estelle and accused the boy, telling her, "That kid needs an attitude adjustment. He should be taught a lesson."

She agreed, but all she knew to do for discipline was to use a paddle. When she tried that, he wrestled it from her and warned, "Leave me alone, you old bat." Before long the whole town was referring to "That Trager boy."

Was that it? Should she have tried to punish him? She had spanked his mother when she was a child, and Nadine had never seemed to resent it, had indeed remained remarkably sweet-tempered. But then Nadine had succumbed to alcohol and left the cocoon of her own provincial Southern life, never to return. Maybe she, too, had hated her mother but kept the festering sore hidden. Maybe she had filled her son with her own hostility, only sending him to Alabama out of desperation. "Maybe she's dying of AIDS, wandering in the ghettos of Chicago," she thought. "Did I do that? What might she have told the boy?"

Did she demonize me? Did she?"

If it was not the attempted punishment, what then? Was it wrong to make children go to worship services? She was appalled when he refused to go after one visit. He couldn't read well enough to participate in the doxology and, thinking Communion silly, he giggled and ate a handful of broken wafers when the minister said, "This do in remembrance of me."

She was mortified and tried to teach him morals and manners in the conventional Christian way. She insisted on saying grace before meals and urged him to memorize "God is great; God is good; let us thank him for our food."

"I got my own blessing," he told her, bowing his head and reciting, "Rub a dub dub; thank you for the grub."

She knew that she should teach him respect, but she failed at this too, and eventually her fantasy of seeing him baptized in a white robe under the cross dimmed and disappeared altogether. She realized finally that she could not persuade or coerce him into being God-fearing. Should she not have tried? If she hadn't, would the dog collar and chains and black clothes have come anyway? Did she give him to Satan?

Or was it really because she was old — a generation so far removed that he was repulsed by everything about her. Before he came, she had not thought that being seventy-five years old was onerous. But when she cataloged herself, she had to admit that the sum of the parts was not pretty. The mass of once vainglorious black hair had thinned so radically that the beautician now had to tease and manipulate it to cover the pink scalp underneath. For comfort and convenience, she kept it short and tried to buy clothes to compliment iron gray hair and to disguise the bulges that came with weight gain. Was he disgusted by her sagging breasts that no bra could adequately accommodate? By the spindly legs so out of proportion to her thick thighs and enormous stomach? By the roan-colored age spots that polka-dotted her hands and arms and by the spidery varicose veins of her legs? He had laughed hurtfully at first sight of her poor collapsed mouth without dentures. He had mocked her when inner ear trouble made her hold to the walls and furniture in order to stay upright and move. Once when she had forgotten to bag a soggy Depends, he came from the bathroom, holding it by the corner yelling, "Hey, have a little respect for the kid." She had spent fifteen thousand dollars to build a private bathroom for him. After all the years of solitude and privacy, she felt pinned under a microscope, with all of her physical flaws magnified and made gross. Was she gross in the eyes of a teenager? Had he respected his mother? His father? Who was his father anyway? A dope addict? Perhaps the hatred came from his father's genes, and it was not her fault at all. She clung to that.

She confided in her pastor, who advised her to pray and read the Bible. She prayed, but her pain only ballooned into a kind of mental gangrene. The Bible told her that the meek would inherit the earth, but she inherited only rue. Once, on a wild impulse, she told him that she loved him. But he rewarded her by stealing and wrecking her car. When she refused to pay bail for his release from jail, his bitterness swelled into a stream of

obscenities that offended even seasoned criminal inmates. He threatened to kill her when he got out.

He stayed in jail for thirty days and came home silent and sullen. They did not speak, and one morning when she awoke he was gone. She knew he would be back because nothing was missing from his room. She settled into her recliner to enjoy a mug of hot tea and fantasized about what her life would be without him. The peace and serenity would be more precious than winning the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes. As if walking inside the bubble of that fantasy, she finished her tea and dressed for town in her most becoming outfit, a beige jacket dress in the new longer length. She completed her ensemble with dangly earrings in a deep coral shade to match her tank top. She felt pleurably decadent, and her mood lifted when she looked into a mirror and knew she was not gross. She reached for her brown canvas purse on the dresser. It wasn't there. She searched for an hour, knowing that she wouldn't find it. He had stolen money from her before, but he had never taken her purse. Tired and shaken, she walked out to the porch and sat on the steps.

"Is this your purse, Miss Estelle?" It was Ed, calling to her from the sidewalk in front of her house. "It looks like it, Ed. I've been hunting it." Ed approached, holding it gingerly.

"Where did you find it?" she asked.

"It was in the street down there at the curve," he said, handing it over. "I thought it looked like yours."

It felt heavy and damp, and the foul smell it exuded filled her with foreboding. She thanked Ed and took the purse. Already suspecting what was inside, she wanted to seal the purse in a garbage bag and throw it away. But she had to retrieve her billfold and papers.

Setting it on the kitchen counter near the sink, she unzipped it and reeled from the stench of excrement and urine. Her hairbrush, Cover Girl makeup, Kleenex, and billfold sloshed in the wet mess. She retrieved her empty wallet, social security check, and visa card with the kitchen tongs. The card was plastic and thus unharmed. The only legible

thing on the check was "pay to the order of." When she thought "pay to the order of shit," she laughed out loud and realized she might be hysterical. Sickened by the smell, she mused, "This is your life. Just a purse full of feces." He had threatened to kill and she had lived in terror. But this last development was intolerable and she could never forgive him, blood or no blood.

The future had betrayed her, denied her its promise of rainbows. The present was a slough of despondency. Where could she go but to the past? She had thought she could not open that iron door, but she was wrong.

It opened, swung wide, on the day of the purse incident when the azaleas and the dogwoods were blooming in pink splendor in her front yard and a beautiful little neighbor girl with golden curls came to her porch with a bouquet of violets tied neatly with a white ribbon.

"I thought you might like them, Miss Estelle," she said timidly.

She took them, breathed deeply of the scent, and squeezed the child's hand. "Thank you, Love," she said and watched the curls bounce back down the walk. She sat down in the swing and it was 1931 again, the heart of the Depression. She was twelve years old, too big for the blue and pink flour-sack dress that stretched tightly over her budding breasts. She was on her knees in a grove of pine trees, her hands framing an icon of a tuft of wild violets. They were exquisite, too perfect to be touched. "A bunch of blueness," she thought, and the phrase lay like honey on her tongue. She carried the musical sounds of it with her, singing in her brain, as she left the little bower and hurried down the primitive dirt road that connected her home a mile away to the county road. The absence of trees along this stretch of road added to the July heat that scorched the soles of her bare feet. She hurried along, afraid now that she might have missed her weekly rendezvous with the rolling store.

Then she rounded the last curve, and her heart lifted at the sight of the vehicle, a big red Ford truck colorfully embellished and loaded with a wonderland of goods so precious that few in the crowd gathered there could buy. It was their mobile miniature store, traveling every Tuesday the twenty miles from the nearest town and carrying

almost everything necessary to surviving in a time of almost hopeless deprivations. It had been so long ago, but she could see the crowd that day as though it were yesterday.

Poor Will Bigby, his dirt-caked overalls drooping on his thin frame, had left his field to come trade a Rhode Island Red hen for a file with which to sharpen his hoe. Rose Ann, with her eight-month-old son straddling her hip, fingered the bolts of fabric and longed for a dotted Swiss dress. She sighed and settled for a new spool of white thread, resigned to using the flour sack material she had saved. Mrs. Childers was there with her basket of eggs to trade for sugar and flour. When Mr. Trager told her that she didn't have enough eggs for both, she reluctantly put the sugar back, her eyes downcast and smoldering with resentment.

Next to church, the rolling store gathering was the social event of every week, and on that day she stood, as always, on the fringe, separated from the people of the farming hamlet by her shyness, the absence of a mother in her life, and the social alienation of a father who didn't know how to farm and spent his time making nets and fishing. Often hungry, she was drawn to the rolling store, although she never had anything with which to buy or barter.

On that eventful day, she drew close to the crowd, caught up in the excitement of the children, all of whom it seemed were cashing in on a money-making venture which she had known nothing about. For weeks, they had scoured the woods, scraping resin from sweet-gum trees into syrup buckets for a glue manufacturing company. Parents had confiscated most of the children's money, leaving them only a small amount for candy. They were giddy with happiness, jostling for a good view as Mr. Trager opened the candy display. There were red and white peppermint sticks, pink gummy slices, and orange peanut shaped candy. And then she saw the bars of coconut candy with their white, yellow, and red stripes. A wave of gustatory desire swept over her, reminding her of the time Jamie had given her a small pinch of his coconut candy bar. The children made their choices, and the hubbub quieted as they solemnly, slowly enjoyed the rare pleasure. She had watched, mesmerized, as Jamie nibbled at his coconut bar, and she felt dizzy from desire. When he turned to take a lick off his sister's peppermint stick, a little corner of his candy fell off into the dirt. And she had impulsively picked it up,

brushed it off, and eaten it. Barely had she swallowed it when she looked up to see Mr. Trager watching her. Overcome by shame and her need and her weakness, she fled.

Her little bower welcomed her, offered her the violets as a substitute for the forbidden fruit of candy. But she could not forget the taste of the candy, even with grains of dirt, which had left the bitter taste of shame lying like gall on her heart. She lay on the grass, face towards the violets, and fantasized that the bunch of blueness had been left on her pillow by a beautiful young boy with angelic blonde curls. She closed her eyes and willed herself into an escapist sleep, seeking closure to the desperate hollowness of a life tortured by cruel need.

When she roused later, she was not looking at the violets but into the remarkable blueness of Edgar Trager's eyes as he squatted beside her. She was not alarmed, sensing that she was in the presence of kindness. "Look," she said, pointing to the flowers, "They're like your eyes."

And with that, she walked out of the Depression and into Edgar Trager's heart. The economy continued to be miserable, but they sustained each other. Born with a bone deficiency, he had limped through life, bracing himself through a lonely childhood of bullying and ridicule. Twice as old as Estelle, he forgot his clumsiness with his social peers and pleased in her respect and admiration. From that first encounter, when his compassion made him bring her the coconut candy, their relationship grew from friendship into the romance of clandestine courtship, and when she turned thirteen, he could wait no longer and asked her for sex. The little bower shielded them, under a canopy of green, from the judgmental eyes of the Primitive Baptist community, and Mother Nature looked on, not confused about the relevance of sex to love. They had fumbled through the sexual experience, the first one for both, to discover a passion that was to buoy them through the rest of the Depression.

Revisiting those years now, Estelle had to re-evaluate the deep psychological scars of that time which had crusted on her soul like leper's sores. From a new perspective, the past horror of hunger and the colossal deprivation dimmed and disappeared into images of beauty in the bloom of violets and warm blue eyes, of sweetness in the tenderness of masculine arms cradling her in lovemaking, of the wrenching empathy of her husband's

tears at her childbirth agony, of the pure sheen of a delicate little ring presented to her on their fifth anniversary. But most striking of all was a comforting absence — the absence of fear and hatred. She had not been subjected to that during the worst of times; she resolved not to endure it any longer in her old age.

She set the swing in motion, liberated by embracing her past and eager to reclaim the serenity of her old age. She would put her grandson out of her house and life with the courage and strength forged within her by the toughness of her past. As it turned out, she didn't have to do anything. Sheriff Baker walked onto her porch, sat down and removed his sweat-stained, wide-brim straw hat. He told her then that he had taken the boy in for questioning and that the Chicago police would be there the next day to claim him. A young enterprising police detective had cracked a cold case with unassailable proof that Craig had killed her daughter. She took the news with battling emotions — sadness that her child was dead but relief that the sadistic menace had been reduced to zero in her life. Then quickly assaulted by guilt that she had betrayed Edgar's bloodline by turning her back on their grandson, she gave a low moan of grief, "My child, my grandchild."

The sheriff rose. "No ma'am," he said. "Not your grandson, Miss Estelle. Your daughter had no children. He was just a smart-mouth punk with a killer instinct, prowling the streets and conning people like your daughter. He killed her — you don't want to know how ma'am — got her papers and showed up here pretending to be your grandson. Don't waste no pity on him. He's just pure-dee evil, a bad seed if I ever saw one."

And the law officer was mercifully gone. She watched him pull into the street and disappear. Moments later, she too left, parking at a fresh produce stand uptown. She was on a redemptive mission, which involved a big sack of purple hull peas.

APPENDIX B:
Thai Short Story

A Monastery Boy

While scrubbing my chest and arms with a rag, Mother tried to drum into my head:

“Be obedient. Behave well, and do good deeds so that you will receive good results in return, if not in this life then in the next.”

Tears welled up in my eyes. A 12-year old boy should not weep at a time of parting. But I could not stop the tears.

By scouring me with a cloth, she hoped that her baby of the family, who had been soiled while foraging for food in the soggy paddy-fields, would be cleansed and hence suitable as a gift to a holy man.

An Isan-born monk, a resident of a Bangkok Buddhist monastery, was visiting our district, staying at Nokarian Monastery. The touring priest had also made it known that he required a boy to serve him in the capital city.

To disown one's children either for adoption or for sale was a common practice among the poor people in our area. To donate one's child to a monk was merit-making, a pious deed which would bring good fortune to the donors, if not in this life, at least in the next.

In my case, the gift might make amends for my parents, having sold all of my siblings into slavery and prostitution.

Actually, I was the last of their children to be disowned.

Then Mother handed me a set of clean clothes. All the while she talked of the certainty of being bogged down by poverty in this infertile land. Should I stay, I would surely become just another boor -- a poor, coarse and illiterate peasant. But, to go away to find water from the next well, so she said, might be the best option to forge a better life.

Hundreds of times I had I taken our buffaloes out of the hamlet to graze in the open country. I had so often slid down the scarps to bathe in the creeks, not knowing that one day I would be taken away from home, from the herd of buffaloes and from the paddy-fields.

“This is the boy,” my father said to the monk, having performed a namaskara gesture to the holy one.

Glancing at me, the priest tacitly accepted the gift and then resumed the conversation with other monks congregated in the sala.

It seemed he had a lot to tell.

His wordless acceptance of me seemed as if the present was not worth even a paltry remark. On the other hand, his acquiescence raised a hope in my mind that he might reject the offer, after taking a closer look at me, a malnourished and unkempt urchin.

Soon my parents left without bidding me farewell.

I shivered, fearing the future among strangers in the capital. Perhaps I could crawl stealthily away. But then my parents would bring me back to Nokarian Monastery and order me to adhere to the monk to whom I was given until the day the priest would set me free from bondage.

When the venerable brother was ready to depart, he beckoned me to follow. Outside the monastery, a woman lay in wait.

That mournful morning, the woman who, a moment ago, was my mother, asked me to squat on the sandy soil opposite her.

I obeyed.

She scooped up a handful of sand, raised her fist and let go the content on my head, supplicating:

“May the mother earth protect this little boy.”

Each of the words was being blown about in the breeze.

I could see clearly each grain of sand at my feet, wishing to die, to remain in the village, a spirit without a body.

In that state no one could take me away.

Hold fast now, I pleaded silently and directed that plea to Mother Earth.

I never want to leave you, so protect me always for the sake of goodness and innocence.

Already, years in Nokarian and life on the Korat Plateau had become the past. Memories shattered into fragments -- jagged fragments of a reckless and deprived childhood -- some simple joys, hard times, disease and the struggle to stay alive.

The man, who was a while ago my father, was nowhere in sight.

A jalopy moaned awfully while negotiating potholes along the bumpy road, haling me away. Against this immense loss, I tried desperately to cling to images of home, recalling faces of my brothers and sisters. I thought of the sound of monsoon rain, Isan songs, the family's herd of buffaloes and the poetry of the dying earth .

There was no knowing how far Nokarian Village was from the Heavenly City. Nonetheless I yearned for a divine power that could return me to Nokarian.

It might seem childish to long for the unexpected, which might come by way of a stranger, who would say: I will take you out of the big city, and bring you back to where you belong and make the man and the woman, who have become strangers to you, your parents once more.

The puerile longing turned out to be futile.

For now I had become a mere body of a young servant.

Apart from washing and cleaning and sweeping, my prime duty was to carry a six-tiered food carrier and follow the monk on the food collecting route.

On Buddhist sacred days, some donors offered lotus flowers, incense sticks and candles. Hence, we dekwats carried buckets to take extra food and votive offerings when the monks' begging bowls were full to the brim.

Beyond the protective walls of the monastery, one came into contact with the crowd. People went about their daily lives while trucks, cars, buses, taxis, and motorcycles belched out toxic fumes and deafening noises.

In the midst of all the throngs and the traffic congestion, I might meet my brothers or sisters if they could sneak out of the sweatshops or whorehouses.

But I hoped in vain.

In time I learned that along certain avenues that the priest and I passed daily, thousands of pro-democracy activists and protesters had been massacred in 1973 and 1976 and 1992 and 2010. The killing might take place again at these locations, I feared. Such was life in the hazardous streets of Bangkok where a longing for clean air and solitude of rural Isan became paramount.

How many years must I endure in this so-called Heavenly City of Angels? How long could my lungs last, inhaling every second, in great quantity, dust and fungus spores and carbon dioxide?

I coped as best I could with the confinement in a dark, narrow cell with an old rush mat to lie on.

There was a domineering sense of duty, a bond of having been offered to a priest by one's parents. They aimed to gain much merit from such a pious deed.

Fortunately the priest permitted me to attend a school within the monastery precinct.

Though I was eager to learn English, and speak it with foreign tourists, my duties due to the monk were not lax. Tea was served twice a day. The room was kept clean and tidy. The floors were meticulously scrubbed, the alms-collecting utensils, dishes, forks and spoons were washed and dried and neatly put away in their proper places.

Then every evening the monk required a massage.

This service somehow transformed the relationship between priest and boy to that of man and boy. It came as an alarming surprise to have discovered puberty and experienced the loss of innocence.

How susceptible one could be even to a slight indication of affection or friendliness in others. When a fair-haired, blue-eyed tourist asked me to pose for photos, it seemed that the world beyond the protective walls of the monastery beckoned to me with a

certain promise. What would that friendly foreigner do with a photograph of a dekwat in school uniform? Could he be the unexpected stranger, who might reach out to me with a helping hand to save me, saying: "I'll take you out of here?"

I had read in a popular newspaper, at a noodle shop near the monastery, about Thai girls and boys plucked out of poverty and orphanages by foreigners. Could I be so lucky as to be hauled out of this predicament by a rich and kind farang?

With help from such a person, it would be possible for me to make my way back to Nokarian one day.

That big farang man reappeared at the monastery to give me a photo he took of me the other day. It was a delight to see myself in photographic form for the first time as well as being invited to dinner at the hotel where he stayed. I did not dare to ask the priest for permission to leave the monastery for fear that he would reject the request. Hence, it had to be on the sly.

Having performed the daily rite of relieving the monk's muscular tensions and gratifying him into a state of deep slumber, I sneaked out.

On my return, the monk was waiting for me. Having had a whiff redolent of a savoury foreign dish, a lay pleasure, he managed to prise the truth out of me.

The fact that I spent a good part of the evening in a hotel with a foreigner upset him. He caned me several times and told me never venture beyond the walls on such an assignation ever again.

"It's for your own good," said he. "Some farangs prey on boys and suck life's juice out of them, leaving them limp and drained."

I obeyed absolutely.

As a result, the helping hand from across the sea for which I hoped did not reach me.

During my time at that monastery, there were 30 boys serving the monks. Most of us were from rural areas. Could some of them be gifts, as I was? Were they very much homesick too? I did not have the courage to ask them. Nonetheless, there was a solace

to be had from fellow Isan boys when we could snatch brief moments from our spare time to meet and talk in Lao. There were some Isan boys who would not speak Lao with me. Their years in the capital had changed them perhaps, or they were ashamed of their Lao tongue and ignoble origins, being from Isan, known for being the poorest region of the kingdom.

As for me I stuck to the Lao language.

I had been aware that the monastery was not only a home for monks and for male servants, but also a temporary sanctuary for poverty-stricken peasants and wanderers who were mostly from Isan. Many of them had been forced out of their farms to make way for huge hydro-electric dams and for eucalyptus planting. Taking refuge in the monastery, they went out to look for work or to beg during the day and came back to sleep at night, curling up on the bare earth.

I shared the monk's leftovers with some of these homeless people and purposefully sat for a while with them, listening to their woeful tales. At first I dared not ask them about their villages and their plight for fear of being told that they too had to sell or give their children to others.

Later, having cultivated an old man from Wapipatoom, a district in Mahasarakam Province, I begged him to take me when it was possible for him to return to his village. From Wapipatoom, it would not be too difficult for me to make my way back to Nokarian.

"I won't go back to Wapipatoom," he said. "I have nothing left there now. The paddy-fields have become salty from brackish water discharged from the influential people's open salt farms. Nothing can grow on the damaged land and aqua life cannot survive in Namsiaw River since its water has become brackish. We rely so much on Namsiaw, not only for water but also for food. It used to be rich with fish, eels and shrimps. My wife died and my children came here to look for work, and I followed, looking for them. It is hopeless now. Now I do not know what to do. Perhaps I shall wander till I die, looking for a place to end my life."

Then one day the police arrested the homeless people who sought a roof over their heads in the monastery. Perhaps the authorities were ashamed of an awful truth exposed to overseas visitors. Perhaps it had been made illegal for beggars and vagabonds to take refuge in monasteries and under bridges and in public places. Had my parents migrated to Bangkok now, after successive years of drought brought famine, they could not seek refuge at any Buddhist holy place. Therefore, I lost hope of finding them.

I searched for the name of Nokarian on a map taken from the monk's bookshelf. The vast Korat Plateau did not have it. Perhaps the village was not big and significant enough to be included.

It was tempting to escape, to make my way back to my birthplace.

Eventually the monk gave up priesthood for marriage.

Before going into the world, he shaved my head and gave me his saffron robes and a begging bowl.

"As a novice, you must strictly observe 10 tenets," he declared. "When you reach the age of 21, you will be ordained as a priest. You should attend a Buddhist college and move up in rank, and learn to cultivate followers, a coterie of influential laymen."

Such was a parting gift from a man who considered that he had set a fine example of how to get on in the world. He finally found a wealthy wife who endowed him with a bank account, a car and a modern home in a suburb.

Later I visited him.

Sitting in their living room, I allowed some worldly words of pleasantries to pass, and then unfolded a map in front of the husband.

It was my turn then to use the tonsure and monkish garb to gain respect and obedience. Even as a tiny novice, I could command him to indicate where Nokarian was on the map and a place where I could catch a bus that would take me back to Isan.

I listened attentively and made a mental note.

That little cross the man made on the map became a bold and burning cross in my heart. I committed to memory the names of towns and villages en route.

Korat-Taladkae-Pratay-Putthaisong-Payak-Satuk.

Satuk was closest to the little cross and I must not forget it.

I did not stay long in that splendid house. In my mind the journey back to Nokarian had already begun.

A day later I gave up my abode and bade goodbye to the monastery. With a calm composure, I glanced at the piercing spire of the pagoda for the last time.

Forgive me for I would neither climb the rungs of monastic ranks, nor would I care to cultivate a coterie of rich and powerful people. I would rather go back to that unmapped, unknown hamlet to make the poor man and that wretched woman my parents once more. It was not important to me to have a job and a house and a car in the metropolis.

Without my people, though penurious and downtrodden, I would be nothing.

Farther from Korat the landscape looked more Isan-like. The desiccated Plain of Samrit spread endlessly, home of tussocks and gnarled trees and roaming cattle. On this arid land, armies had traversed and clashed. Here, women taken away from Korat by an army from Lao, defeated their captors by ravishing the soldiers with the potency of worldly pleasures. In the dead of night the raped women rose in revolt and killed a lot of Laotian soldiers.

The tale included a sacrifice made by a young girl named Boonlua. She was blown to bits in an attempt to set fire to a wagonload of gunpowder.

From Satuk a rusty and grudging bus dropped me at a place nearest to Nokarian. From there I walked along a well-remembered track for some 10 kilometres and then home.

The exact spot, where a woman had let go a handful of earth on my head, looked almost the same. Its sandy soil remained barren. Each word of supplication: *May Mother Earth protect the little one who has been given as a gift to serve the holy* still littered the landscape, perpetuating the contour of my mind.

Sharp pangs from jagged fragments of memories pierced my heart... puberty alarmingly discovered...the loss of innocence...the lost hope of being rescued by a stranger from a far country -- that golden-haired, blue-eyed foreigner gone forever...

At home an old woman was lost in concentration over a hot earthen stove, drawing silk yarn from cocoons at the brim of a steamy pot, under the stilted and decrepit hut.

Standing still, not wishing to surprise her, I observed the layers of the years on her. Trembling, she looked up at last, with an absorbing stare. I, too, trembled, speechless. The tonsure and saffron robe and my monkish demeanour compelled her to leave the stool. Lowering herself on to the bare earth, she made a namaskara gesture, raising her cupped hands to her forehead in supplication, facing the ground.

Then she lifted her face once more to search mine for a clue. Still she did not recognize me. I had to say:

“Mother, it’s me, Lek.”

During those years of absence, Father had died.

Before his death, he willed it that the corpse could only be cremated on my return to Nokarian. The baby of the family should be the one to light the pyre and inherit the paddy-fields and the land on which the shack stood. He was sure that I would eventually make my way back to Nokarian. For I, unlike my siblings, was not sold into the sordid trade. Hence, I could hardly harbour bitterness in my heart.

Respecting his wish, the coffin was stored under a roof at Nokarian Monastery.

In the presence of the abbot and my mother and several village elders, two men lifted the lid from the coffin. I stood still, facing the remains of the man who had turned me into a give-away.

The sockets, which once were his eyes, held me spellbound.

My heart cried out: O, father, old father. Can you see me? I have come back.

I knelt and scooped a handful of dust and walked towards the family's rice fields. There, I relaxed the grip and let go the content, vowing to cherish my birthplace, the land of my father and forefathers. No one can take me away again.

Then I disrobed, praying to a mental image of Lord Buddha: May I return to the world, and all men regard me as a man.

In memory of my father, I toil unabatedly on our paddy-fields. Though the sandy topsoil becomes more infertile as years go by, I manage to eke out a living from such exhausted earth, and endure silently the harsh Isan life. Though our farm is such a small holding that it might not yield enough rice to feed us all should my brothers and sisters come back to live in Nokarian, there is hope that they would return and make their broken lives whole again.

The clean air and the placidity of the plain should mend them, I am sure.

As for me, my years in the polluted and congested capital make me content with fresh, clean air and the rural life here in a far-flung Isan village.

I am my own master now, and my priority is to take good care of my mother, a duty that I uphold wholeheartedly.

I have a wish, however. I long for a wife, despite an anxiety that our children, when we have them, would one day leave us for cities and some foreign countries in search of jobs and opportunities.

Should it be possible to stop them from leaving? I dread the thought that my own flesh and blood would have to barter their bodies for survival in some sordid places.

Due to the rising cost of living, it has become a necessity that young and able men and women go away in search of employment elsewhere. These days a baht is worthless. A child would not accept it should you give it away. Worse still, the price of petrol keeps rising. They say there is a war on in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. Prices of commodities keep soaring but the price of farm produce remains suppressed. For several years now a kilogramme of rice remains at the suppressed price of 7.50 baht but

when it has been milled and polished, the rice traders sell the so-called white rice at 35 baht per kilogramme.

There is nothing one can do to raise the paddy price. Farmers have never had bargaining power, having to succumb to the price suppression and to ruthlessness and arrogance of the suppressors. But, despite the low price, we have to sell our produce to earn cash. There is no other way for me to make money, except to sell my vote at election time.

During the last election, a vote canvasser gave me 300 baht as opposed to his opponent who paid 200 baht to all eligible voters in a family. The highest buyer won, of course. I accepted the money since I was having a hard time raising cash to pay the annual property tax.

But I refused an offer of 1,000 baht to go to Bangkok with hundreds of peasants, paid to make a counter demonstration of support, extolling the virtues of the current Prime Minister who was facing tens of thousands of protesters, thronging the main avenues of Bangkok, calling for his resignation. It was said that the Prime Minister, who had become astronomically rich in a very short time, was most corrupt, using his unlimited power and supreme position to enrich himself and his family and business even more rapaciously than any political leader the Thai people had ever known.

Why, we thought he was a good Prime Minister. It was he who issued a policy, giving one million baht to every village. No Prime Minister in the past had ever had a 'one million baht per village' policy before. Yet some people say it is a way of using tax-payers' money to buy votes or legalized vote-buying, using tax-payers' money. Whatever you see it, we have had the cash. Yes, one million baht per village. No more and no less.

As for us poor villagers in Isan, we vote for his party out of gratitude, as well as to ensure that he and his party stay in power and keep up the 'one million baht per village' tactic.

Several coaches came to Nokarian to pick up the villagers. They went off in high spirit, believing that they would show their gratitude to the supreme Prime Minister for the

money they received. Some of these grateful wayfarers made use of the free transport and the cash. Then they looked for work while the money in their pockets lasted.

I will not go back to Bangkok, neither to show support for some fell men or highly corrupt politicians, nor to look for work and leave my ageing mother to fend for herself. But I will not condemn those who leave their home in search of jobs and better living, putting the young in the care of parents or grandparents or relatives, before setting out in search of a better future.

Most Isan villages have been turned into communities of the old and the very young as a result.

In the past few years there were three female returnees to my village. They returned to Nokarian with foreigners, their husbands, who gave them plenty of money and jewelry and built big houses for them to live in luxury in our midst. Such were the fortunate ones rescued by white men. These foreigners remind me of the chance that I lost while being a servant in that monastery in Bangkok — the foreigner's helping hand versus the suppressing hand of those who would rather keep us low and needy. We remain deep in the bogs, and accept work at the lowest pay or become slaves in sealed sweatshops, or sex workers in bars, nightclubs, beer gardens and brothels.

As far as I am concerned, there is not a single nubile female in sight.

To marry, I shall have to wait for one of our absent, unwedded women to pass the sell by date and make a retreat from Bangkok or Pattaya or Phuket. I pray that she would not be HIV positive or too used up to bear me a child.

Though time passes and life moves on, that hope is still high.

APPENDIX C:
Reading Comprehension Test from American Short Story

Reading comprehension questions

Name.....

No.	A Bunch of Blueness (Part 1)
1	Why did the old woman live alone?
2	How did the boy trouble her life?
3	What did the old woman expect from the boy before he showed his bad behavior?
4	While she was young, how did she escape from the shame about the candy?
5	Why was she unhappy with her parents?
6	What losses did she experience while the boy was staying with her?
7	How did she feel when she found out the truth about the boy at the end?
8	What was her impression about the small girl?
9	Did praying and reading Bible help reduce the hardship of life during the Depression? Why?
10	How did she get the food while her husband was still alive?

No.	A Bunch of Blueness (Part 2)
1	Why did the boy come into the old woman's life?
2	What did she get back at the end?
3	<p>What is the metaphor of 'Iron door' in this statement?</p> <p><i>The future had betrayed her, denied her its promise of rainbows. The present was a slough of despondency. Where could she go but to the past? She had thought she could not open that iron door, but she was wrong.</i></p> <p><i>It opened, swung wide, on the day of the purse incident when the azaleas and the dogwoods were blooming in pink splendor in her front yard and a beautiful little neighbor girl with 195 golden curls came to her porch with a bouquet of violets tied neatly with a white ribbon.</i></p>
4	What does the writer really mean by "She was on a redemptive mission, which involved a big sack of purple hull peas"?
5	What kind of person is the old woman?
6	What is the philosophy of life that you learn from the story?
7	What is the old woman's state of mind throughout the story?
8	<p>From the following statement, can you explain her hope in your own words?</p> <p><i>She had had eager hopes that he would be her salvation.</i></p>

9	<p>What do you understand about the difference between old generation and young generation from this statement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>In the Depression, everybody worked if they wanted to eat. Nobody thought he was too good to work."</i>- <i>"Well, in my day, only stupid people work. Picking peas out of a hull one at a time. What kind of work is that?"</i>
10	<p>Although she was poor, how did she enjoy her life during the economic downturn?</p>

APPENDIX D:**Reading Comprehension Test from Thai Short Story**

Reading comprehension questions

No.	A Monastery Boy (Part 1)
1	Why was the monastery boy abandoned?
2	What difficulty did he face in Bangkok?
3	What was his hope about the white man?
4	How did the monastery boy escape from Bangkok?
5	How did his parents make him unhappy?
6	What losses did he experience in Bangkok?
7	How did he feel about having a wife and children?
8	What was his impression about the white man?
9	Did the monk and temple reduce the hardship of life of Isan people? How?
10	How did he get the food at home in Isan?

No.	A Monastery Boy (Part 2)
1	Why did the <i>farang</i> come into the monastery boy's life?
2	What did he get back at the end?

3	<p>What feeling does the ‘piercing spire’ represent in the following statement?</p> <p><i>A day later I gave up my abode and bade goodbye to the monastery. With a calm composure, I glanced at the piercing spire of the pagoda for the last time.</i></p> <p><i>Forgive me for I would neither climb the rungs of monastic ranks, nor would I care to cultivate a coterie of rich and powerful people.</i></p>
4	<p>What does this sentence want to convey?</p> <p><i>"Then every evening the monk required a massage.</i></p> <p><i>This service somehow transformed the relationship between priest and boy to that of man and boy. It came as an alarming surprise to have discovered puberty and experienced the loss of innocence."</i></p>
5	<p>What kind of person is the monastery boy?</p>
6	<p>What is the philosophy of life that you learn from the story?</p>
7	<p>What is the monastery boy’s state of mind throughout the story?</p>
8	<p>What does ‘make amends’ in this context mean?</p> <p><i>To disown one’s children either for adoption or for sale was a common practice among the poor people in our area. To donate one’s child to a monk was merit-making, a pious deed which would bring good fortune to the donors, if not in this life, at least in the next.</i></p> <p><i>In my case, the gift might make amends for my parents, having sold all of my siblings into slavery and prostitution.</i></p>

9	<p>What do you understand about the difference between old generation and young generation from this statement?</p> <p><i>My wife died and my children came here to look for work, and I followed, looking for them.</i></p>
10	<p>Although the monastery boy was poor, how did he enjoy his life?</p>

APPENDIX E:
Perception Questionnaire

Perception Questionnaire

Name.....Mobile no.....Age.....

Gender.....Religion.....Academic year.....

Latest GPA.....Accumulated GPA.....

Have you ever been to any English native speakers' countries? yes no

If yes, where and how many months/years did you stay there?.....

Following are a number of statements with which some people agree and others disagree. We would like you to express your opinion about each statement by putting a “√” in the box that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree

Items		A Bunch of Blueness					A Monastery Boy				
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1	The story helped me to learn English language.										
2	I am emotionally involved in the story.										
3	I gained pleasure from reading the story.										
4	I was drawn into the story.										
5	The story motivated me to read more.										
6	I could predict what is going to happen next almost correctly.										
7	I liked this story a lot.										
8	The story is relevant to my life.										
9	I would like to read another short story in the same collection.										
10	The story is worth reading.										
11	I find the story important.										

12	Scenes from the story were so clear that I knew their smell, their touch, and their “feel”.																		
13	I think my classmates would be interested in this story.																		
14	While reading, I was part of the story.																		
15	I find the story very real.																		
16	I could guess meanings of difficult words without consulting a dictionary.																		
17	I enjoyed reading the story.																		
18	It was easy to picture the story in my head.																		
19	I felt close to the main character.																		
20	When I finished reading the first part, I was enthusiastic to read the rest of the story.																		
21	The story kept me anticipating what was going to happen next.																		
22	What happened in the story was common in my society.																		
23	I do not want to read this kind of story anymore.																		
24	I would recommend the story to others.																		
25	I would like to read stories similar to this one.																		

Please tell us more about your perception on reading *A Bunch of Blueness*, a story written by an American author and *A Monastery Boy*, a story written by a Thai author.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

We appreciate your cooperation.

ทัศนคติของนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ
ต่อการอ่านเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนักเขียนเจ้าของภาษาและนักเขียนไทย

English Major Students' Attitudes
towards Reading English Short Stories Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai
Author

ประสิทธิ์ เพชรหนูเสด¹ และธัญภา พลานุกุลวงศ์²

Prasit Petnoosed¹ and Thanyapa Palanukulwong²

¹Master of Arts Program in Teaching English as an International Language;
Faculty of Liberal Arts; Prince of Songkla University; e-mail: louisprasiddhi@gmail.com

²Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts;
Prince of Songkla University; e-mail: thanyapa.c@psu.ac.th

Abstract

Literature is an integral part of language learning. Literary works written by native speakers are the sole reading materials for English-major students in Thai universities, while Thai literature written in English is often overlooked. This study aimed to explore Thai English-major students' attitudes towards reading English short stories written by a native speaker and a local author in various aspects. Participants of this study were 35 English-major students taking English literature courses at Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University. The instruments were (1) two short stories with comparable theme, linguistic complexity and length but in different cultural contexts – one written by an American and the other by a Thai author; (2) a questionnaire on the participants' attitudes towards the two stories. The findings shows that the participants had significantly better attitudes towards reading the Thai short story in terms of *authenticity, ease of understanding, enjoyment, imagery, personal involvement, relevance* ($p < 0.1$) and they also reported significantly more emotional reaction ($p < 0.5$). However, there was no significant difference in *identification with characters, interest, motivation, preference* and *value*. Implications for selecting reading materials for English literature class are discussed.

Background of the study

Not until the past two decades, literature resurged in English class after having lost its significance in the audio-lingual era. Valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement are the main reasons for incorporating literature in English class (Collie & Slater, 1990). Nowadays, most of the literary texts used in English class are “native” English literature (Talib, 1992) in order to encourage students to know the origin of the language and its cultural aspects (McKay, 2003). However, the status of English in many countries has been

shifted to global language (Graddol, 2006), it is not necessary for students to study the culture of the native speakers of English (McKay, 2004).

Pedagogically speaking, culture is an important factor in selecting materials for English class. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), three types of cultural information that can be used in language textbooks and materials comprise *target* culture, *source* culture and *international* culture. *Target* culture is the culture of a country where English is spoken as a first language. *Source* culture is the culture of the learners. *International* culture is a great variety of cultures in English-and non-English-speaking countries around the world. Materials based on *source* culture have been used and reported by a large number of studies that they facilitated reading comprehension due to cultural familiarity (Alptekin, 2006; Carrell, 1987; Erten & Razi, 2009; Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2012; Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979).

In addition, studies have been conducted to explore learner's attitudes towards *target* and *source* culture. Jabeen (2010) found that Pakistani students had negative attitudes towards teaching *target* culture while Rafieyan (2013) found that a wide range of Iranian students had overall positive attitudes towards learning *target* culture. Rodliyah (2014) and Abbasian (2016) found that Indonesian English-major students and Iranian students showed positive attitudes towards *target* culture and *source* culture.

Unlike the above-mentioned studies which employed textbooks, Rezazadeh (2012) used a literary text such as a short story and found that Iranian students had negative attitudes towards the short story written by a native speaker of English and adapted into the culture of Iranian learners, resulting in unauthenticity.

Rare research on student's attitudes to local literature in English has been conducted in Thailand where Thai readership of such texts almost does not exist because the emergent concept of local literature in English is unfamiliar to the majority of Thai teachers and learners (Watkhaolarm, 2005). More importantly, Thai teachers of English legitimize British and American English (Buripakdi, 2012) and prioritize those cultures (Boriboorn, 2013; Methitham, 2009).

Most of the above-mentioned studies examined attitudes towards culture in non-literary texts out of Thai context. The present study investigated learners' attitudes towards reading literary texts of both *target* and *source* cultures.

Objective

This study aimed to investigate students' attitudes towards reading a literary text of *target* culture (culturally unfamiliar) and the other one based on *source* culture (culturally familiar). In particular, the research question addressed was:

What were Thai English-major students' attitudes towards reading English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The population was seventy third-year English major students of Prince of Songkla University who had taken *Introduction to English Literature* course. The students were exposed to poetry, short stories, novels and dramas; hence they were familiarized with reading literary texts extensively. Thirty-five students were selected as participants based on volunteer sampling method. All participants were exposed to two treatments, namely English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author.

3.2 Instruments

The main data collection instruments include two short stories and an attitude questionnaire.

3.3.1 Short stories

With its brevity, short stories are not as complicated as novels and suit any level of proficiency (Collie & Slater, 1987). Short stories usually portray cultural elements; therefore, they were selected as an instrument in this study. A Thai short story entitled *A Monastery Boy* was chosen from *It is the people of Thailand and other countries* collection originally written in English by Pira Sudham (2014), a Thai author who masters English language and his work is internationally acclaimed. He portrays the harshness of peasant life in Thailand.

An American short story entitled *A Bunch of Blueness* was chosen from *On a Darkling Plain* collection written by Betty Jean Tucker (2014). Its theme is similar to that of *A Monastery Boy*. The story is set in the Great Depression. Her stories are recognized by famous figures in American literature circle such as Martha Foley and William Carlos Williams.

There are several commonalities in both short stories. The main theme is poverty and several common aspects include abandonment, trouble, hope, escape, loss, impression, religious concepts, agriculture, doubt, gain and clash of ideas between old and young age.

It was found that both American and Thai short stories belong to the same grade level (Gunning Fox Index of 9.4 and 9.4), readability score (Flesch Reading Ease of 73 and 74.6) and linguistic complexity (4,191 and 4,342 words, 255 and 272 sentences, average of 4.2 and 4.3 characters per word, and average of 16.4 and 16 words per sentence).

3.3.2 Attitude questionnaire

An attitude questionnaire was employed to explore the participants' attitudes towards reading both short stories. A 5-likert scale questionnaire, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), consists of 23 items on the participants' attitudes towards the two short stories in

different aspects, namely authenticity, ease of comprehension, emotional reaction, enjoyment, identification with characters, imagery/vividness, interest, personal involvement, motivation, preference, relevance and value. These aspects are suggested as criteria for selecting literary texts for English classes (Arens and Swaffar, 2000; Collie & Slater, 1990; Dupuy, 2000; Larsen and Laszlo, 1990; Maley, 1989; Schraw, Bruning, and Svoboda, 1995; and Swaffar, 1999).

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were obtained from the participants' attitudes towards reading the American and Thai short stories. Descriptive statistics was used to compare means and standard deviation. Wilcoxon signed-rank test was adopted to examine differences in the attitudes.

4. Result and discussion

After reading both short stories, the participants completed the attitude questionnaire.

Table 1: Participants' attitudes towards reading the short stories

Criteria	American short story		Thai short story in English		z	p - value
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD		
1. Authenticity						
I find the story very real.	3.14	0.69	4.09	0.85	-3.887a	0.000* *
2. Ease of understanding						
The story helped me to learn English language.	4.26	0.70	4.20	0.76	-1.707c	0.480
I could predict what is going to happen next almost correctly.	2.97	0.89	3.40	1.06	-2.777b	0.005* *
I could guess meanings of difficult words without consulting a dictionary.	2.66	1.03	3.06	0.87	-2.304b	0.021*
Average	3.30	0.58	3.55	0.57	-2.677a	0.007* *
3. Enjoyment						
I gained pleasure from reading the story.	3.43	0.65	3.54	0.74	-1.265b	0.206
I enjoyed reading the story.	3.17	0.86	3.51	0.92	-2.972b	0.003* *

Average	3.30	0.62	3.53	0.70	-2.858a	0.004*
4. Imagery/vividness						
It was easy to picture the story in my head.	3.26	0.89	3.89	0.90	-3.458b	0.001*
Scenes from the story were so clear that I knew their smell, their touch, and their “feel”.	3.11	0.80	3.57	0.81	-2.980b	0.003*
Average	3.19	0.73	3.73	0.76	-3.772a	0.000*
5. Personal involvement						
I was drawn into the story.	3.21	0.77	3.50	0.75	-2.887b	0.004*
While reading, I was part of the story.	2.71	0.83	3.00	1.03	-2.236b	0.025*
Average	2.96	0.63	3.24	0.71	-2.908a	0.004*
6. Relevance						
What happened in the story was common in my society.	3.06	1.08	3.89	1.16	-3.055b	0.002*
The story is relevant to my life.	2.29	1.20	2.60	1.29	-1.821b	0.069
Average	2.67	0.98	3.24	0.96	-2.821a	0.005*
7. Emotional reaction						
I am emotionally involved in the story.	3.43	0.65	3.74	0.74	-2.129b	0.033*
8. Value						
The story is worth reading.	3.71	0.99	3.83	0.95	-0.973b	0.331
I find the story important.	3.57	0.74	3.74	0.74	-1.428b	0.153
Average	3.64	0.74	3.79	0.76	-1.386a	0.166
9. Preference						
I liked this story a lot.	3.17	0.86	3.38	0.92	-1.830b	0.067
I want to read this kind of story more.	3.40	1.01	3.43	1.24	-0.237b	0.813
Average	3.29	0.74	3.41	0.80	-1.152a	0.249
10. Motivation						
The story motivated me to read more.	3.34	0.87	3.54	0.89	-1.811b	0.070
When I finished reading the first part, I was enthusiastic to read the rest of the story.	3.14	0.91	3.23	0.88	-0.775b	0.439

Average	3.24	0.76	3.39	0.75	-1.495a	0.135
11. Interest						
I would like to read another short story in the same collection.	3.11	0.93	3.26	1.01	-1.127b	0.260
I think my classmates would be interested in this story.	3.40	0.88	3.49	0.89	-1.000b	0.317
I would like to read stories similar to this one.	3.09	0.89	3.34	0.97	-1.245b	0.213
Average	3.20	0.71	3.36	0.76	-1.668a	0.095
12. Identification with character						
I felt close to the main character.	2.77	1.00	3.03	0.95	-1.806a	0.071
13. Overall attitude	3.18	0.52	3.51	0.52	-3.955b	0.000

** significant at 0.01

* significant at 0.05

The analysis shows that the participants had significantly better attitudes towards reading the Thai short story ($\bar{x} = 3.51$, $SD = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). Detailed analysis shows interesting differences. The table shows that the participants had significantly better attitudes towards reading the Thai short story in terms of *authenticity*, *ease of understanding*, *enjoyment*, *imagery*, *personal involvement*, *relevance* ($p < 0.1$) and they also report significantly more *emotional reaction* ($p < 0.5$). However, there is no significant difference in *identification with characters*, *interest*, *motivation*, *preference* and *value*.

Among the six aspects which the participants had significantly better attitudes when reading the Thai short story is *authenticity*. The Thai short story is found to be significantly more authentic than the American short story. This shows that, although literature is an authentic reading material in nature, readers may find culturally unfamiliar texts less authentic than culturally familiar ones.

Another aspect is *ease of understanding*. The Thai short story is significantly easier to understand than the American short story. This might be because its content is based on the participants' own culture while the latter is of a less familiar, more distant culture. Familiarity with cultural context of the text may facilitate the participants to guess the meaning of unknown words more effectively.

Regarding *enjoyment*, the participants found that the Thai short story was significantly more enjoyable than the American short story. With local cultural elements in the Thai short story, the participants might feel more engaged with the context of the text, therefore, they enjoyed more.

In terms of *imagery/vividness*, it was also found that the Thai short story was significantly more imagery-provoking than the American short story. The familiarity of setting, characters' behaviours and cultural circumstances of the Thai story might help the participants imagine the story more clearly.

For *personal involvement*, the participants were significantly more personally involved with the Thai short story. Culturally familiar text such as the Thai short story might cause the participants to feel more personally involved because such text portrays persons, events, places, and sociocultural relations with which the participants can identify themselves.

In terms of *relevance*, the Thai short story was found to be significantly more common in the participants' life. The setting of the Thai short story *A Monastery Boy* taking place in countryside may not be relevant to some participants' life, but it is relevant to their society as a whole.

As far as *emotional reaction* is concerned, the Thai short story seemed to arouse stronger feelings. This may be due to the sympathy towards familiar characters or events. The participants seemed to be more affected when reading a story that is related to their own national culture and were less emotional when the story is of a distant culture.

In sum, it appeared that cultural familiarity of the Thai short story helped the participants' reading at both cognitive level, i.e. ease of understanding and affective level, i.e. authenticity, enjoyment, imagery, personal involvement, relevance and emotional reaction. However, cultural familiarity did not seem to be related to *identification with characters, interest, motivation, preference* and *value*.

Conclusion

Based on the study's results, some pedagogical implications can be drawn. It was shown that local literature in English helped readers comprehend significantly better and gave more pleasure; hence it should be embedded into existing English literature class. Teachers should consider using culturally relevant texts to help students learn English literature and develop their reading competence with relative ease. This is in tandem with Mahoney's (1991) belief that students' world knowledge that students bring into contact with local literature would result in greater comprehension, which would also prompt greater interest and enjoyment.

Internationally recognized literary works of local authors who excel and write in English may serve as a canon of local English literature for teaching and learning. In this golden era of English as international language, in which *source* culture has an equally important role as *target* culture, teacher and learners should seize this opportunity to fully celebrate local traditions.

Future research is recommended and should look at different cultural contexts and different themes of short stories. The attitude questionnaire may include other areas of criteria for selecting literature for English class.

Reference

- Abbasian, G., Kouhpayehzadeh, M., Asgharpour, G. (2015). Iranian EFL Learners' Attitudes towards Target and Source Cultures. *Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice*, 8(16) 9-19.
- Alptekin, C. (2006). Cultural familiarity in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading. *System*, 34(4), 494–508.
- Boriboon, P. (2013). Concepts of culture in English Language teaching: problems of realization, development, and transcultural concepts for glocalized pedagogy of English. *Journal of Humanities Naresuan University*, 9(2) 1-22.
- Buripakdi, A. (2012). The marginalized positions of Thai professional writers on the global hegemony of English. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 22(1) 41–59.
- Carrell, P. L. (1987). Content and formal schemata in ESL reading. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(3), 461–481.
- Collie, J. & Slater, S. (1990). *Literature in the language classroom: a resource book of ideas and activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collie, J., & Slater, S. (1987). *Literature in the language classroom*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin L. (1999). Cultural mirrors: materials and methods in the EFL classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching* (pp. 196-219). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press."
- Erten, I. H., & Razi, S. (2009). The effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 21(1) 60–77.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next*. London, England: British Council.
- Jabeen, F., Shah, S.K. (2011). The role of culture in ELT: learners' attitude towards the teaching of target language culture. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 23(4) 604-613.
- Mahoney, D. (1991). Asian voices in English: Asian-English literature in the ESL curriculum. *Perspectives*, 3(1) 79–88.
- McKay, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Methitham, P. (2009). *An Exploration of Culturally-based Assumptions Guiding ELT Practice in Thailand, a Non-colonized Nation*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA.
- Rafieyan, V., Eng, L. S., & Mohamed, A. R. (2013). Language learners' attitudes towards the incorporation of target language culture into foreign language instructions. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(4) 169-177.

- Rodliyah, S. S., Imperiani, E. D. A., Amalia, L. L. (2014). Indonesian tertiary students' attitudes towards the use of local culture vs target culture reading materials in English reading class. *Bahasa & sastra*, 14(1) 109-120.
- Schraw, G., Bruning, R., & Svoboda, C. (1995). Sources of situational interest. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 27(1) 1-17.
- Steffensen, M. S., Joag-Dev, C., & Anderson, R. C. (1979). A cross-cultural perspective on reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 15(1) 10-29.
- Sudham, P. (2004). *It is the people of Thailand and other countries*. Bangkok: Shire Books.
- Talib, I. (1992). Why not teach non-native English literature? *ELT Journal*, 46(1), 51-55.
- Tavakoli, M., Shirinbakhsh, S., & Rezazadeh, M. (2013). Effect of cultural adaptation on EFL reading comprehension: the role of narrative nativization and foreign language attitude. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 21 1587-1596.
- Tucker, B. J. (2014). *On a Darkling Plain: Stories from the Great Depression*. Alabama: Livingston Press.
- Watkhaolarm, P. (2005). Think in Thai, write in English: Thainess in Thai English literature. *World Englishes*, 24(2) 145-158.

The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension and Attitudes Towards Reading English Short Stories Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai Author

อิทธิพลของความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรมต่อความเข้าใจในการอ่านและทัศนคติต่อเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนักเขียนเจ้าของภาษาและนักเขียนไทย

Prasit Petnoosed

Thanyapa Palanukulwong

บทคัดย่อ

วรรณกรรมถือเป็นส่วนหนึ่งที่สำคัญของการเรียนภาษา งานวรรณกรรมที่เขียนโดยเจ้าของภาษาเป็นสื่อการอ่านหลักของนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษในมหาวิทยาลัยไทย ขณะที่แทบจะไม่มี การนำเอาวรรณกรรมฉบับภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนักเขียนไทยมาใช้ งานวิจัยกึ่งทดลองชิ้นนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรมต่อความเข้าใจในการอ่าน และศึกษาทัศนคติในด้านต่างๆ ของนักศึกษาไทยวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษต่อการอ่านเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยเจ้าของภาษาและโดยนักเขียนไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคั้งนี้ คือ นักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 3 ที่เรียนนิพนธ์วรรณคดีอังกฤษ ณ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ จำนวน 35 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ คือ (1) เรื่องสั้นอเมริกันและเรื่องสั้นไทยที่เขียนเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ทั้งสองเรื่องมีอรรถาธิบายเหมือนกัน ระดับความยากง่ายทางภาษาเท่ากัน และความยาวใกล้เคียงกัน แต่มีบริบททางวัฒนธรรมต่างกัน (2) แบบทดสอบการอ่านทำความเข้าใจจากเรื่องสั้นทั้งสอง และ (3) แบบสอบถามทัศนคติของกลุ่มตัวอย่างต่อเรื่องสั้นทั้งสอง ผลการวิจัยพบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างเข้าใจเรื่องสั้นไทยที่เขียนเป็นภาษาอังกฤษได้ดีกว่าเรื่องสั้นอเมริกันอย่างมีนัยยะสำคัญ และมีทัศนคติที่ดีกว่าต่อการอ่านเรื่องสั้นภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนักเขียนไทย ในด้านความจริงแท้ ความง่ายต่อการเข้าใจ และความน่าสนใจ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้เสนอแนะแนวทางในการเลือกงานวรรณกรรมสำหรับชั้นเรียนวรรณคดีอังกฤษในระดับมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ: ความคุ้นเคยทางวัฒนธรรม โครงสร้างความรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม การอ่านทำความเข้าใจวรรณคดีอังกฤษ วรรณคดีท้องถิ่นในภาษาอังกฤษ

Abstract

Literature is an integral part of language learning. Literary works written by native speakers are the sole reading materials for English-major students in Thai universities while Thai literature written in English is often overlooked. This study reported on a quasi-experimental study assessing the impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. In addition, this study also aimed to explore Thai English-major students' attitudes towards reading English short stories. Participants of this study were thirty-five English-major students taking English literature courses at Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University. The instruments were (1) two short stories with comparable theme, linguistic complexity and length but in different cultural contexts – one in American and the other in Thai context, (2) a reading comprehension text from the two texts, and (3) a questionnaire on the participants' attitudes towards reading the two texts. The findings showed that the culturally familiar text resulted in significantly better literal, inferential and overall comprehension. In addition, the participants found that the Thai short story was better in terms of *authenticity*, *ease of understanding* and *interest*. Implications for selection of reading materials are discussed.

Keywords: cultural familiarity, cultural schema, reading comprehension, English literature, local literature in English

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. A reader extracts the essence of a text and constructs meaning by themselves because a text only provides direction. Reading comprehension involves three elements: the reader who comprehends, the text being comprehended and the activity in which comprehension is a part. This phenomenon occurs within a sociocultural context (Snow, 2002).

Reading comprehension is further divided into text-based and knowledge-based processing. Readers employ lexical and syntactic knowledge to understand texts at literal level. At this level, the processing is bounded with the text, hence driven by

data. Literal comprehension is dependent on linguistic competence. At higher cognitive level, readers draw inference to understand what the text is about, relying on their knowledge beyond the text. This process includes synthesizing, summarizing, generalizing, predicting; thus, it is driven by knowledge (Alptekin, 2006; Pearson and Johnson, 1978).

Comprehension of literary texts in particular does not only involve attention to literal aspects but also interpretation which builds on an understanding of plots, characters, and other elements of the literal story for greater meanings beyond the story (Mccarthy & Goldman, 2015; Weaver, 1994). Therefore, extensive experiences and deep cultural knowledge are required for the reader to understand literary texts at inferential level.

Cultural Familiarity

Background knowledge or schema helps the interaction between a text and a reader in the process of reading comprehension (Snow, 2002). Schema refers to an active organization or mental representation of past experiences or some part of general knowledge (Bartlett & Burt, 1933; Matsumoto, 2009), structural units, framework or abstracted pattern into or onto which information can fit and can be organized (Phillips, 1969; Elizabeth, 1980). Schema or background knowledge can be generally categorized into two types: formal schema and content schema. A formal schema is background knowledge relative to the formal, rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts while a content schema is background knowledge a reader brings to a text; it is relative to the content domain of the text (Carrell, 1987).

A content schema also includes cultural schema which is specific to a particular cultural context (Ketchum, 2006). Cultural schema is shared by population of a specific cultural group (Elizabeth, 1980). It involves cultural familiarity, helping readers reconstruct the story line of personally and culturally relevant texts and making interpretation with lessened workload. With cultural familiarity, readers are involved with authentic experience in one's own sociocultural context with which they can identify themselves and find some common ground (Erten & Razi, 2009). In fact, cultural schema and cultural familiarity are highly interrelated. Cultural familiarity is the interaction of culture in a text and readers' background knowledge which makes

the texts easier to read and understand (Steffensen, Joag-dev and Anderson, 1979; Johnson, 1981; and Carrell, 1987). In reading comprehension, culture plays a crucial role in arousing expectation and prediction about a story, it makes the text familiar to readers (Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2013). Texts with familiar settings are appropriate because they are relevant to the students' world and are, thus, easier to read (Paulston and Bruder, 1976 cited in Carrell, 1983).

Cultural familiarity and perception on literary texts

Cultural schema in relation to perception on literary texts was studied by many scholars. The term 'perception' is an umbrella term for *evaluation*, *appreciation* (Larsen & Laszlo, 1990), *affect* (Zajonc, 1980, 1984), *emotion* (Lazarus, 1982), *value/significance*, *enjoyment*, *liking* (Clarke & Fiske, 2014), *imagination* and *imagery* (Larsen & Laszlo, 1990; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, & Anderson, 1982), *interest* and *motivation* (Abu-Rabia, 1999).

Cultural background of familiarity exerts some influence on not only reading comprehension but also evaluation of the literary texts as such texts require readers' imagination. Readers' cultural background in general and personal experiences in particular come into contact with the reading process and play a role in appreciation of literary texts. Appreciation of literature is assumed to depend on readers' personal experiences accumulated within a cultural context. Individual's personal experiences under certain cultural circumstances provoke reminding of relevant past events and arouse imagery during the reading process (Larsen & Laszlo, 1990). Therefore, readers from different background would not have the same amount of experience with the setting, the same level of identification with characters, the same judgment of value, the same imagination of actions and scenes, the same emotional reactions and the same predictions of the story line (Reynolds et al, 1982).

Related Studies

Among the pioneers who investigated schema, Bartlett and Burt explained 'schema' as familiar form of association consisting of image, which is implicit, and words, which are explicit. Words are visual representation of image; they serve as a device for recall, depending on social condition, interest and attitude. In his experiment

of remembering, he used reproduction and distortion to examine successive modification from one person to another person in reconstruction of stimuli (1933). His method of reproduction and distortion was operationalized in successive studies.

The earlier group of researchers who studied cultural schema and reading comprehension assigned two groups of participants from different cultural backgrounds to read culturally different texts, some of which were syntactically adapted for ease of reading. This group of researchers included Steffensen, Joag-dev, and Anderson (1979), Johnson (1981) and Carrell (1987).

Steffensen, Joag-dev, and Anderson (1979) studied the effects of cultural schema on reading comprehension through recall and reconstruction of two culturally different texts. Both texts were held linguistically constant through readability measurement while the text contents were different in terms of culture. Both American and Indian participants were assigned to read texts about American and Indian weddings. The participants' comprehension of the texts was compared through recall. The methods used in measuring level of comprehension included reading time, amount of recall of overall text elements, amount of recall of important and unimportant elements, and appropriate and inappropriate modification of the passage. It was found that, with the culturally familiar text, participants spent less time reading, recalled more information and elaborated cultural elements more appropriately than with the culturally unfamiliar text.

In another study, Johnson (1981) examined the influence of both cultural schema and formal schema on Iranian and American students' reading comprehension of American and Iranian folklores. Linguistically, each text was of two variables: original and simplified. The finding was that cultural elements affected reading comprehension more greatly than linguistic difficulty. The participants relied more on cultural schema both in original and simplified texts.

Carrell (1987) investigated the effects of both content and formal schema on Muslim and Catholic ESL students' reading comprehension. Both groups read "Ali Affani", an Islamic text, and "Saint Catherine", a Catholic text. Half of each group read original well-structured version and the other half read rhetorically-altered version.

The finding was consistent with Johnson's study (1981); cultural schema had greater effect on the comprehension than did formal schema.

Another group of researchers, namely Chihara, Sakurai & Oller (1989) assigned two groups of participants from the same cultural background to read the same text, which was divided into two versions, namely unadapted version and culturally adapted version.

Chihara, Sakurai & Oller (1989) hypothesized that simple things like nouns referring to persons and places carried subtle semantic and pragmatic information and that discrete or non-contextual elements of the text influenced reading comprehension. The text was adapted at lexical level only. Western names of persons and places which were assumed to be culturally unfamiliar to the Japanese participants were changed into Japanese while the content and syntactic complexity were held intact. One group of participants read original text; the other read the culturally adapted one. The results of the study revealed that the participants who took the test based on the culturally familiar text performed significantly better than those who read culturally unfamiliar text.

Researchers from the Muslim World who opposed using western culture-based texts adapted western literary texts at deeper levels. Alptekin (2006) adapted a short story of a target-language culture to that of local culture at sociological, semantic and pragmatic levels, and investigated reading comprehension at both literal and inferential levels, believing that schema was used particularly in the latter. The adaptation of cultural elements of a text is called by Alptekin (2006) as 'cultural nativization'. Linguistic and rhetorical patterns of two culturally different texts were held essentially intact. Turkish subjects were divided into two groups; one group read an original short story, while the other read a culturally adapted text. It was found that cultural nativization affected inferential comprehension items more significantly than literal comprehension. Turkish participants who read a culturally nativized text performed significantly better in inferential comprehension items than those who read an original text of American culture; however, there was no significant difference in scores obtained from literal comprehension items among the two groups of participants.

Erten & Razi (2009) investigated whether cultural nativization facilitated comprehension and whether reading activities compensated for cultural unfamiliarity of short stories. The reading activities included brainstorming, pre-questioning, scanning, skimming, clarifying, reciprocal teaching, inferring, thinking aloud and asking and answering questions. It was found that culturally adapted story yielded better comprehension while reading activities did not. The researcher concluded that cultural adaptation of the text had a greater effect on reading comprehension. With substantial cultural schema, the participants could comprehend culturally loaded texts autonomously.

Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh & Rezazadeh (2012) examined the effect of cultural nativization on Iranian students' reading comprehension and explored their attitudes toward cultural nativization. An unadapted text was given to the control group and a nativized text was given to the experimental group. Both groups completed an attitude questionnaire on cultural nativization after the reading test. The control group performed significantly better in reading comprehension. Interestingly, the subjects in both groups showed dissatisfaction with cultural nativization due to its inauthenticity. Most participants opposed culturally adapted texts and supported the original text as the latter was more tangible and unambiguous. The researcher recommended further research to use local literary texts to serve the teaching of English as International Language.

Other studies that examined readers' perception on literary texts in relation to readers' cultural background include those of Larsen & Laszlo (1990) and Madeeyoh & Charumanee (2013).

Larsen & Laszlo (1990) compared perception of participants from different cultural background on reading a short story. Danish and Hungarian participants were assigned to read a Hungarian short story and expressed their appreciation. The Hungarian participants found the story more enjoyable, imagery-provoking, far easier to understand and much more relevant to the issues they encountered in their daily life than did the Danish participants who understood the story at a more superficial level. It was concluded that the culturally proximate participants showed greater appreciation for the text than did the culturally distant participants.

Madeeyoh & Charumanee (2013) investigated readers' attitudes towards reading an English textbook based on general contents and the other based on Islamic culture. The participants in the control group read an English textbook of which contents were new to them while the participants in the experimental group read another English textbook based on Islamic culture which was familiar to them. Although there was no statistical difference in the participants' satisfaction with both texts, the participants in the control group were slightly more satisfied with the general-content textbook than the participants in the experimental group who read the Islamic culture-based English textbook. This was because the Islamic culture-based English textbook contained the content already known to them, hence considered dissatisfying.

It is evidential that all the studies reviewed above shared the same finding, i.e. reader's cultural familiarity with the texts enhance their reading comprehension. However, the findings of students' attitudes towards culturally familiar texts seems inconclusive. The present study aimed to provide more insight on the impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension and its relation to readers' perception.

Objectives

This study aimed to compare students' reading comprehension of English short stories written by a native speaker and a local author and investigate their attitudes to reading culturally familiar and unfamiliar short stories.

Research questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions.

1. To what extent do the participants understand a culturally unfamiliar literary text and a culturally familiar literary text at literal, inferential and overall levels?
2. What are the participants' attitudes to reading a culturally unfamiliar literary text and a culturally familiar literary text?

Materials and Methods

1. Participants

The participants were third-year English major students of Prince of Songkla University who took *Introduction to English Literature* course. The students were

exposed to poetry, short stories, novels and dramas; hence they were familiarized with reading literary texts extensively. Thirty-five students were selected as participants based on volunteer sampling method. Twenty-nine of them had no experience living in English native-speaking countries while six had an average of 1-month experience in those countries.

2. Research Instruments

2.1 Short stories

A Thai short story entitled *A Monastery Boy* was chosen from *It is the people of Thailand and other countries* collection originally written in English by Pira Sudham (2014), a Thai author who mastered English language and his work is internationally acclaimed. He portrays the harshness of peasant life in Thailand.

An American short story entitled *A Bunch of Blueness* was chosen from *On a Darkling Plain* collection written by Betty Jean Tucker (2014). Its theme is similar to that of *A Monastery Boy*. The story is set in the Great Depression.

There are several commonalities in both short stories. The main theme was poverty, and several common aspects include abandonment, trouble, hope, escape, loss, impression, religious concepts, agriculture, doubt, gain and clash of ideas between old and young age.

It was found that both American and Thai short stories belonged to the same grade level (Gunning Fox Index of 9.4 and 9.4), readability score (Flesch Reading Ease of 73 and 74.6) and linguistic complexity (4,191 and 4,342 words, 255 and 272 sentences, average of 4.2 and 4.3 characters per word, and average of 16.4 and 16 words per sentence).

2.2 Reading comprehension tests

Two tests with open-ended questions requiring short answers were used to assess students' reading comprehension of the two short stories. Each test included ten literal questions and ten inferential questions. Literal comprehension questions were explicit questions of which answers could be derived from the text literally. Inferential questions require text knowledge and background knowledge for readers to draw connective and elaborative inferences.

The short-answer questions were scored based on the key ideas presented in each answer. Following Chan (2009), the rubric was divided into five levels based on percentage of complete and clear answer, viz. 1, 0.75, 0.5, 0.25 and 0.

2.3 Attitude Questionnaire

An open-ended attitude questionnaire was employed to explore participants' attitudes towards reading English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author based on criteria for selecting literary texts for English class, namely *authenticity, ease of comprehension, emotional reaction, enjoyment, identification with characters, imagery/vividness, interest, personal involvement, motivation, preference, relevance* and *value* proposed by Belcher & Hirvela (2000), Bobkina (2014), Erkaya (2005), Ghosn (2002), Hismanoglu (2005), Mart (2018), Paran (2008) and Shrestha (2008).

3. Data collection

The study was conducted in the first semester of academic year 2018. The data were collected in the following steps.

1. All participants were assigned to read both English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author in a week.
2. The participants were instructed to spend one hour on each comprehension test and fifteen minutes on the questionnaire. They were allowed to answer the questions and complete the questionnaire in either English or their first language, namely Thai. However, seventeen out of the thirty-five participants completed the questionnaire.

4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics of the two reading comprehension tests were generated using SPSS. Means, standard deviation and significant difference were reported accordingly. The data obtained from the reading comprehension tests for the American short story were compared with those for Thai short story using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The questionnaires were qualitatively analyzed.

Results

This section contains the results of the study, arranged based on the 2 research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent do the participants understand a culturally unfamiliar literary text and a culturally familiar literary text at literal, inferential and overall levels?

Wilcoxon sign rank tests were separately conducted on literal and inferential questions (10 items each), to find out whether there was a significant difference between reading comprehension of a culturally unfamiliar text, i.e. the American short story and a culturally familiar text, i.e. the Thai short story in English at literal, inferential and overall levels.

Table 1. *Participants' performance on the two short stories*

Comprehension level	American short story		Thai short story		Difference	Effect size
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD		
Literal comprehension (10 scores)	4.82	1.22	5.46	1.29	0.64*	-0.51
Inferential comprehension (10 scores)	2.91	1.24	3.99	2.05	1.08**	-0.657
Overall comprehension (20 scores)	7.73	1.90	9.45	2.52	1.72**	-0.778

** significant at 0.01

* significant at 0.05

The result of the Wilcoxon sign rank tests shown in Table 1 reveals that the differences in the participants' score obtained from the two tests are statistically significant ($p < 0.1$). The participants obtained a significantly higher mean score from the Thai short story ($\bar{x} = 9.45$, $SD = 2.52$) compared to that from the American short story ($\bar{x} = 7.73$, $SD = 1.90$).

Detailed analysis shows interesting differences. The table shows that the participants performed significantly better in both literal comprehension ($\bar{x} = 5.46 > 4.82$) and inferential comprehension ($3.99 > 2.91$) of the Thai short story over the American short story. The findings suggested that the participants understood the

literal and inferential messages of Thai short story better than those of American short story. As a result, it can be said that cultural familiarity facilitated the participants' reading comprehension.

In terms of literal comprehension, being familiar with cultural aspects portrayed in a text, the participants could comprehend contents from the Thai short story more accurately and clearly, and gained significantly higher scores from the Thai short story.

For inferential comprehension, the connection between culturally relevant texts and the participants' own backgrounds created opportunities for making better inferences; the significance and meaningful purpose of the Thai short story is clearly understood. Therefore, using local texts written in English could connect with the real world learners live in.

As a literary text depicts a series of events and arouses readers to predict what will happen next. Readers with no or little experience in a country may not be able to picture scenes in a story set in that country clearly. In this study, with the help of the context familiarity and sufficient prior knowledge about of Thai culture, participants might be able to predict comprehension clues available from stories previously unknown to them. Cultural familiarity seemed to play a significant role in prediction about a story.

In addition, with literary texts usually containing unknown words, readers with limited vocabulary size may struggle with guessing those words. However, with the help of the context familiarity, readers should be able to guess unknown words more easily. That is why the participants obtained significantly higher scores from the Thai short story. This might be because its content is based on the participants' own culture while the American short story is of a less familiar culture. Readers' background knowledge appeared to play an important role in reading comprehension. Participants who are equipped with relevant background knowledge should be able to predict the meanings of the unknown words that they encounter.

As far as socio-cultural matters are concerned, due to the participants' existing knowledge about Bangkok and Northeast of Thailand, where the Thai short story is set, the participants might be able to imagine scenes in the story more clearly. In contrast,

with the lack of sufficient schema of American culture and landscape, especially that of southern part of the USA where American short story is set, the participants might struggle to picture scenes in their mind. In sum, the familiarity of cultural and geographical circumstances might help the participants imagine and understand the story more clearly.

Similar results were also reported by Jalilifar & Assi (2008) and Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh (2012). Readers' cultural familiarity with a text enhanced their reading comprehension at both literal and inferential levels.

Research Question 2. What are the participants' attitudes to reading a culturally unfamiliar literary text and a culturally familiar literary text?

The attitude questionnaire was employed to elicit the participants' attitudes towards reading the two short stories. Seventeen out of the thirty-five participants completed the questionnaire. They touched upon the areas of *authenticity*, *ease of understanding* and *interest* primarily.

Regarding *authenticity*, although literature is authentic in nature, only two of the thirty-five participants who commented on this aspect reported that the Thai short story, the context of which was common in their life, was more real than the American short story. The Thai short story had the atmosphere that the participants could feel, and it sounded real to them. However, they were not certain that their imagination of American story was correct. As Nostrand (1989) states, a text is authentic when its context evoked the mind of a person living in the culture.

In terms of *ease of understanding*, seven of the total participants who voiced their opinion on this aspect found that the Thai short story was more accessible and easier for them to understand. They could read more smoothly and could maintain attention while reading. One of the seven participants expressed that she could guess unknown words from the context of Thai short story and her own experiences. It might be possible to conclude that the more the readers know about the cultural context, the more easily and clearly they get the information from the text.

In contrast, five of the thirty-five participants who revealed their attitudes towards reading the American short story reported that it took longer to comprehend

the American story due to a lack of sufficient background knowledge about geography, society, religion and culture of America. Two of them reported that they were confused and demotivated by the American short story. They found it difficult to understand cultural aspects depicted in the American story, especially the religious concept. This is in tandem with other studies which showed that students often had difficulty interpreting events from perspectives not naturally their own (Pichert, 1979; Shantz, 1975 cited Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey & Anderson, 1982) and different from the their cultural-religious group membership (Carrell, 1987).

However, two participants said that although the American short story was more difficult to understand, there was a reason to read it as it opened up possibilities to learn new things. This finding echoes that of Rodliyah's study (2014) in which the participants reported that it was worthwhile to learn culture of English native speakers, most of which were new to learners as it helped widen their knowledge and horizons.

In terms of *interest*, there seems to be a relation between text-reader connection and interest. One participant out of seventeen who responded to this aspect expressed that the Thai short story was interesting since there was a connection between the text's context and the reader's context. Another participant reported that she was more engaged with Thai story and felt like she was a part of the story. As Allen (1975) stated, an interaction with literary texts is influenced by readers' familiarity with cultural assumption that the text is based on.

With all the above-mentioned reasons, it is suggested that Thai teachers should integrate both English literature written by Thai authors into the existing literature classes because native-English literature broadens horizon and gives learners opportunity to learn the origin of the target language while Thai literature in English facilitates learner's reading comprehension.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension as well as to investigate Thai English-major students' attitudes towards reading English short stories written by a native speaker and a Thai author. The results clearly show that the participants performed better on the Thai short story written in English which was culturally familiar to them. They could recall the explicit

information and infer implicit information from the Thai short story significantly more accurately than from the American short story. Moreover, this study also found that a culturally familiar content in the Thai short story provoked positive attitudes among readers who are familiar with the cultural context of the text. Also, the Thai short story in English used in this study was unadapted, thus authentic and suitable to be used in English class. In addition, the present study found that local literature in English meets many criteria for selecting good reading material for English literature class, i.e. *authenticity, ease of understanding and interest*.

The present study has important contributions to research on cultural familiarity and reading comprehension of literary texts. It has been one of the few attempts to investigate the impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension using a local literary text originally written in English.

Given the robust research evidence, some pedagogical implications can be drawn. Local fictions in English should be embedded into English literature class for students at the introductory stage of literature class. The exposure to local literature in English can help them learn English literature through their own culture and develop reading competence with relative ease. This is in tandem with Mahoney's (1991) belief that students' world knowledge they bring into contact with local literature would result in greater comprehension which would also prompt greater interest and enjoyment.

It seems clear that internationally recognized literary works of local authors with a good command of English may serve as a canon of local English literature for teaching and learning. Teacher and learners should seize the opportunity of this golden era of English as an International Language where local traditions could be fully celebrated.

Future research is recommended in different cultural contexts. Different themes of short stories may be investigated. More than one local text in English and native English text would help examine the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension more effectively. The attitude questionnaire may also include other areas of criteria for selecting literary texts for English classes.

References

- Abu-Rabia, S. (1999). Towards a second-language model of learning in problematic social contexts: The case of Arabs learning Hebrew in Israel. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2(1), 109-126.
- Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials. *ELT Journal*, 47(2), 136-143.
- Alptekin, C. (1996). Target-language culture in EFL materials. In T. Hedge & N. Whitney (Eds.), *Power, Pedagogy and Practice* (pp. 53-61). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alptekin, C. (2006). Cultural familiarity in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading. *System*, 34(4), 494-508.
- Alptekin, C. & Alptekin, M. (1984). The question of culture: EFL teaching in non-English-speaking countries. *ELT Journal*, 38(1), 14-20.
- Bartlett, F. C., & Burt, C. (1933). Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 3(2), 187-192.
- Carrell, P. L. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(4), 553-573.
- Carrell, P. L. (1987). Content and formal schemata in ESL reading. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(3), 461-481.
- Chan, C. (n.d.). Assessment: short answer questions. Retrieved March 23, 2019 from, https://ar.cetl.hku.hk/am_saq.htm
- Chihara, T., Sakurai, T., & Oller, J. W. (1989). Background and culture as factors in EFL reading comprehension. *Language Testing*, 6(2), 143-149.
- Clark, M. S., & Fiske, S. T. (2014). *Affect and Cognition: 17th Annual Carnegie Mellon Symposium on Cognition*. Taylor & Francis.
Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.th/books?id=-ciYAgAAQBAJ>
- Elizabeth, R. G. (1980). On cultural schemata. *American ethnologist*, 7(1), 152-171.
- Erten, I. H., & Razi, S. (2009). The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 21(1), 60-77.
- Ghosn, I. K. (2002). Four good reasons to use literature in primary school ELT. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 172-179.
- Hismanoglu, M. (2005). Teaching English through literature. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 1(1), 53-56.
- Jalilifar, A. R., & Assi, R. (2008). The role of cultural nativization in comprehension of short

- stories in EFL reading contexts. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*, 26, 62-79.
- Johnson, P. (1981). Effects on reading comprehension of language complexity and cultural background of a text. *TESOL Quarterly*, 15(2), 169-181.
- McCarthy, K. S. & Goldman, S. R. (2015). Comprehension of short stories: Effects of task instructions on literary interpretation. *Discourse Processes*, 52(7), 585-608.
- Ketchum, E. M. (2006). The cultural baggage of second language reading: An approach to understanding the practices and perspectives of a nonnative product. *Foreign Language Annals*, 39(1), 22-42.
- Larsen, S. F. & Laszlo, J. (1990). Cultural-historical knowledge and personal experience in appreciation of literature. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 20, 425-440.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1982). Thoughts on the relations between emotion and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 37(9), 1019-1024.
- Madeeyoh, C. & Charumanee, N. (2013). The use of Islamic context texts to improve Muslim students' English reading skills. *Journal of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University*, 5(2), 47-58.
- Mahoney, D. (1991). Asian voices in English: Asian-English literature in the ESL curriculum. Perspectives: Working Papers of the Department of English at City Polytechnic of Hong Kong 3 (1), 79-88.
- Mart, C. T. (2018). Literature in the language classroom: A recipe to maximize learning. *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, 18, 1-25.
- Matsumoto, D. (2009). *The Cambridge dictionary of psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nostrand, H. L. (1989). Authentic texts and cultural authenticity: An editorial. *The Modern Language Journal*, 73(1), 49-52.
- Pearson, D. P., Johnson, D. (1978). *Teaching Reading Comprehension*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Phillips, J. L. (1969). *The Origins of Intellect: Piaget's Theory*. San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman.
- Reynolds, R. E., Taylor, M. A., Steffensen, M. S., Shirey, L. L. & Anderson, R. C. (1982). Cultural schemata and reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 17(3), 353-366.
- Shrestha, P. N. (2008). Using stories with young learners. In M. Krzanowski (ed.), *Current*

developments in English for academic, specific and occupational purposes. Reading, England: Garnet publishing.

Snow, C. (2002). *Reading for understanding: toward a research and development program in reading comprehension*.

Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1465.html

Steffensen, M. S., Joag-Dev, C., & Anderson, R. C. (1979). A cross-cultural perspective on reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly, 15*(1), 10-29.

Sudham, P. (2004). *It is the people of Thailand and other countries*. Bangkok, Thailand: Shire Books.

Tavakoli, M., Shirinbakhsh, S., & Rezazadeh, M. (2013). Effect of cultural adaptation on EFL reading comprehension: The role of narrative nativization and foreign language attitude. *World Applied Sciences Journal, 21*, 1587-1596.

Tucker, B. J. (2014). *On a Darkling Plain: Stories from the Great Depression*. Livingston, AL: Livingston Press.

Zajonc, R. B. (1984). On the primacy of affect. *American Psychologist, 39*(2), 117-123.

VITAE

Name Prasit Petnoosed

Student ID 6011121033

Educational Attainment

Degree	Name of Institution	Year of Graduation
Bachelor of Arts in English Literature	University of Pune	2010

List of Publication

Manuscript 1: English Major Students' Attitudes towards Reading English Short Stories Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai Author (*in press*).

Manuscript 2: The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension and Perception on Reading English Short Stories Written by a Native Speaker and a Thai Author (submitted).