

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Reflecting on my own teaching experience, I have found that there is a strong tendency for my students to provide single-word answers or remain silent after my questions. This observation is consistent with the finding of Mountford (1986) that not many Thai students were willing to interact in the language classroom; they rarely responded to teachers' questions and if they did, their responses were usually very short. Studies conducted by Pojaman Som-in (1998) and Kanokporn Dulyarak (2002) also revealed that Thai students rarely participated in classroom interaction. It is believed that little verbal interaction between the teacher and students in the classroom leads to little comprehensible input which further results in little or no acquisition (Allwright, 1983; Long and Sato, 1983; Pica and Long, 1986; Thomas, 1987; McCarthy, 1991; Van Lier, 1996; Gass, 1997 and Ellis, 1999).

Verbal interaction in the classroom has an important role in second language acquisition. It provides essential support for language comprehension, that is, it can make input — the target language samples which students have to work on in the process of interlanguage construction — comprehensible. In addition, verbal interaction provides students with opportunities to practise using the target language in the classroom. This helps develop students' language ability, thinking and interactive skills. When students interact, their thinking and skills to construct the target language in order to convey information as intended are enhanced. Chaudron (1988) and Ulichny (1996) propose that learners who initiate interaction are

better able to turn comprehensible input into intake and they can use the target language more correctly and appropriately.

It can then be seen that verbal interaction in the classroom is essential in promoting students' language acquisition and preparing students to communicate in the target language spontaneously, correctly and appropriately both in and outside the classroom. If there is little verbal interaction in the classroom, students will lack opportunities to practise using the target language and to develop their language ability and interactive skills. Therefore, to promote language acquisition, it is essential that teachers provide students with more opportunities to be involved in classroom interaction by getting them to speak more.

Teachers' use of questions as a way to get students involved in classroom interaction has received quite a lot of attention in the field of language teaching. Teachers ask a lot of questions and use many questioning strategies in the classroom to make students interactive. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Mehan (1979) and Byrne (1989) propose that questioning leads to a sequence of acts, namely an initiation act, a response act and an evaluation act (IRE) which is considered a very essential process in enhancing students' ability to use the target language. As questions are crucial in the process of language teaching and learning and in developing students' language ability and interactive skills, it is worthwhile investigating teachers' use of questions, questioning strategies and also the extent that each type of question and questioning strategy elicits students' responses in the language classroom. This will help provide teachers with better understanding of the use of questions and questioning strategies for developing students' language ability and interactive skills.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' use of questions, questioning strategies and students' responses in the English classroom in a Thai setting. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What types of questions and questioning strategies do teachers employ in the English classroom?
2. To what extent do questions and questioning strategies elicit students' responses?
3. What factors affect the absence of students' responses to teachers' questions?

1.3 Definition of Terms

1. **Questions** can be defined as utterances addressed by teachers to elicit verbal responses from students. These utterances may be in the forms of interrogative, imperative or declarative sentences.

2. **Questioning strategies** refer to utterances which follow initial questions and which teachers use to elicit verbal responses from students after the students do not respond to those initial questions. Questioning strategies may occur in two circumstances under which a difference in the teachers' use of wait-time can be noticed. Firstly, they may be used immediately after an initial question. This occurs when teachers consider that their students cannot respond to their initial question. In this case, teachers use a questioning strategy without giving students wait-time for responding to the initial question. Secondly, questioning strategies may be used after teachers give students wait-time for responding to their initial question but still do not get responses.

3. **Students' responses** are defined as utterances immediately following teachers' questions and questioning strategies. Once the teacher speaks again or another students speak, the response is considered to have ended.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study is to investigate teachers' use of questions, questioning strategies and students' responses in the English classroom in the Thai context. Only the teachers' questions and questioning strategies, and the students' responses in English are taken into account.

Because of the qualitative nature of data analysis, this study was conducted with only four classes of students (123 students). Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all Thai students who are studying at the same educational level at other universities throughout Thailand.

1.5 Expected Results

It is expected that this study will reveal types of questions and questioning strategies employed by teachers, the extent that each type of them elicits responses from students and factors which affect the absence of students' responses to teachers' questions. It is hoped that this study will raise teachers' awareness of the role of verbal interaction in language learning and teaching as well as provide them with useful implications for the use of questions and questioning strategies in the classroom to develop students' language ability and interactive skills.