

A STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF  
CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF acEnglish (Thailand)

A MASTER 'S PROJECT  
BY  
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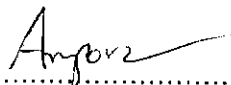
Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
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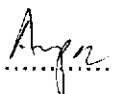
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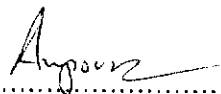
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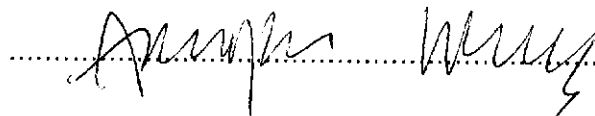
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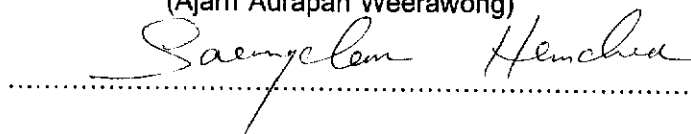
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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

In the post global era, communication technologies have transformed organizations all over the world. More and more organizations and business enterprises collaborate across geographic and cultural boundaries. Ohmae (Schermerhorn; et al 2001: 41; citing Ohmae 1998.) states that domestic self-sufficiency is no longer viable for any nation or business. Consequently, it has become the trend for half of the century that most of the western countries have been expanding their business in the third-world countries in order to gain access to higher quality resources, to lower the production cost, and to expand the productivity. Today, this trend still continues. Among regional countries, Thailand is viewed as the golden land for external investments because of its low labor cost, skilled workers, excellent infrastructure and stable political situation. Over the past decades, a number of foreign business enterprises opening subsidiary in Thailand have been increasing rapidly. "acEnglish" is one of those organizations running its business in Bangkok. It is the largest private English Language Training Organization in Australia. It was expanded into Thailand since April 2002. Half of the employees here are from Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand.

## Statement of Problem

When companies expand their operations abroad, it means balancing between prospects of growth and the risk associated with operating in unfamiliar markets. The success of organizations and their people depend on how well organizations understand the manifestations of the cultural diversity and its effects in the organizational and international business contexts (Gold. 2002 : online). Intercultural communication competence is concerned as one crucial factor to function business abroad successfully. But it is the fact that most western expatriates working in Thailand often fail to be equipped with the Thai Language and also the Thai culture which is totally different from theirs. It is typical for them to see themselves as unique (Reed. 1986: 1) and to be somewhat parochial, parochialism is not a good strategy for the future. According to Adler (1997: 10) "parochialism means viewing the world solely through one's own eyes and perspective". A person with a parochial perspective neither recognizes other people's different ways of living and working nor appreciates that such differences have serious consequences.

From the above rationale, intercultural communication problems arise when the western expatriates assume that everyone is "just like me" and they take for granted that there is no difference when interact, negotiate and compromise with Thai colleagues and staff. But the truth is that there is much discordance between Westerners and Thais in terms of language, culture, mannerism, working attitude and management style. As a result, they lastly face with culture shock and often experience difficulties in dealing with their Thai colleagues and staff.

While Thai colleagues and staff also struggle to communicate with them, since they do not completely understand both English Language and Western culture.

In general, people will not always feel completely comfortable as they attempt to communicate in another language or as they try to talk with individuals who are not proficient in theirs (Gudykunst. 1997 : 22). Hence, both groups may have communication difficulties resulting from limited knowledge of language and culture of their counterpart.

According to Ferraro (1994 : 41) effective communication among people from the same culture is often difficult enough. But when attempting to communicate with people who do not speak English –and who have different ideas, attitudes, assumptions, perceptions, and way of doing things-one's chances for miscommunication increase enormously.

Obviously, language is concerned as the most distinctive intercultural barrier. Since words are easily misunderstood in verbal communication, either because the receiver has a limited vocabulary or the sender's accent makes it difficult for the receiver to understand the sound. To overcome these problems, most people agree in common that learning language can eliminate the problem. But, it could not help that much since communication breakdown does not result only from language itself but also from cultural matter. Both, Westerners and Thais, often overlook the power of cultural differences. Culture plays a significant role in intercultural communication since it is viewed as a potential barrier to successful communication. Hall (1994: 34) points out that Culture is communication and communication is culture. It is the culture that teaches people in that culture how to think and what to think about

In addition, Jandt (1995: 22) adds that communication is an element of culture. It has often been said that communication and culture are inseparable.

Consequently, culture and language are intertwined and it is impossible to separate the two. Language is not merely grammatical rule but it involves cultures. Culture is learned value which provides people in the culture with ways of thinking—ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. In order to communicate well with people from various cultures, it is necessary to understand their culture. Ferraro (1994: 49) explains that every language is unique; the linguistic categories of one language will never be identical to the categories of any other. Therefore, speakers of any two languages will not perceive reality in exactly the same way. Even when the western expatriates and Thai colleagues are speaking the common language; however, the same words can mean very different things. If both groups select language without being aware of cultural implications or misinterpretation of the cultural signals, they may at best not communicate well and at worst send the wrong message. The result is conflict, confusion and misunderstanding.

Diversity in cultures nowadays has become a prominent influence in many foreign subsidiaries in Thailand because most people put the first degree on language training but are unaware of western culture literacy. It raises many communication problems which often lead to job dissatisfaction, staff turnover and transferring and decreasing organizational efficiency.

From the above rationale, intercultural competence is a necessity no matter what business you are in. (Bovee and Thill. 1998: 60; citing Tamanai 1990.) also support this idea by mentioning that having a broad cultural perspective is a necessary skill for businesspeople

today and it is needed to develop cultural awareness in order to be successful. Business success increasingly depends on the ability to display competent communication behaviors with individuals from other cultures.

The study of intercultural communication is not new. Many scholars and researchers have been undertaking this kind of research for so long. In this research, acIEnglish (Thailand) is investigated as a case study since it is a representative for intercultural organization in this study. This research will explore new aspects about cultural barriers for effective intercultural communication.

The findings of this study will benefit two groups of people: western expatriates and Thai colleagues working for overseas subsidiaries in Thailand. The study can enhance their understanding about the intercultural communication problems that usually occur when communicating with people from diverse cultures. Moreover, the result of this study also provides some cultural knowledge to minimize the intercultural communication barrier.

The following part consists of research questions, the objective for undertaking this research, scope of the study, significance of the study and definition of terms respectively.

## **Research Questions**

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are intercultural communication problems at acIEnglish?
2. How cultural differences can affect intercultural communication in acIEnglish?
3. How staffs in the company overcome intercultural communication problems?

## **Objectives of the Study**

Many foreign subsidiaries have been growing dramatically in Thailand. Consequently, the need for clear communication between people from different cultures becomes more and more important. In order to give vivid illustration about the cultural barrier to intercultural encounter, acIEnglish (Thailand) is selected as a case study. The main objectives of the study are:

1. To identify intercultural communication problems in acIEnglish (Thailand).
2. To examine the cultural differences that can affect intercultural communication in acIEnglish (Thailand)
3. To explore the way that people overcome intercultural communication problems in acIEnglish (Thailand)

## **Scope of the Study**

acIEnglish (Thailand) is chosen to be the case study of this research. The study will specifically examine cultural differences between western expatriates and Thai colleagues that can create intercultural communication barrier and the solutions that both groups of the workforces here use to surmount the problem in communication. This study also highlights on the effects of these barriers on work performance of both western and Thai staff when they have a face-to-face interaction in the company.

## **Significance of the study**

The results of this study will be beneficial not only for the personnel working for acIEnglish (Thailand) but also others working for other overseas subsidiaries in Thailand to create awareness and enhance understanding of cultural differences in order to reduce conflict and misunderstanding. Moreover, it also helps to increase intercultural competence for mutual sides to promote successful intercultural communication.

## **Definition of Terms**

Terminologies in this study are defined as follows:

1. Intercultural communication is the communication or interaction among people of diverse cultures.
2. Culture is a learned system of knowledge, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, values and norms that is shared by a group of people and also used by its members during daily living.
3. A Western Expatriate in this study is a person who comes from Western countries or in Thai slang called "Farang" and has been living consecutively in Bangkok and also working for acIEnglish in Thailand
4. A Thai Staff is a Thai subordinate or a Thai colleague who has been working for acIEnglish in Thailand

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter presents a discussion of related studies in the area of intercultural communication, which are from the previous researches, textbooks and online materials. The discussion is divided into four sections as follows:

1. Intercultural communication theories
2. Thai cultural values
3. Intercultural communication competence
4. Previous research

#### **1. Intercultural Communication Theories**

##### **A. Language and Culture**

In order to understand and extend the knowledge of intercultural communication, it is essential to understand the relationship between language and culture. Before discussing language and communication theory, the scholars and researchers' ideas are mentioned to provide vivid illustration of the relationship between language and culture.

Samovar and Porter (1991 : 21) describe the relationship between culture and language that in many respects the relationship between culture and communication is reciprocal-each affects and influences the other. What we talk about; how we talk about it; what we see,

attend to, or ignore; how we think; and what we think about are influenced by our culture.

Culture cannot exist without communication; one cannot change without causing change in the other. Moreover, Toomey (2004 : online) reconfirms the relationship between culture and communication that culture is the foundation of communication, and communication transmits culture. Cultural variables can affect the communication process by influencing a person's perceptions include attitudes, social organizations, thought patterns, roles, language, nonverbal language, and time

The most distinctive theory in this area is explained in the following part in order to clarify intercultural understanding.

### **The Sapir- Whorf Hypothesis**

In 1928, anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir published a paper in the journal "*Language*" that changed the face of the study of language and culture. Sapir's thesis was that the language of a particular culture directly influences how people think. Sapir wrote:

"....the network of cultural patterns of a civilization is indexed in the language which expresses that civilization....Language is a guide to "social reality"....Human beings do not live in the objective world alone....but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society."

In addition, he continued to argue that the way in which people perceive the world around them, including their natural and social environments, is essentially dictated by their language. Thus, the speakers of different languages see different worlds. Strongly influenced by Sapir

was one of his students, Benjamin Lee Whorf, who further developed this line of thought. In 1940, Whorf wrote:

“....the background linguistic system (in other words grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shapers of ideas....We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language.”

Both Sapir and Whorf suggested that language is more than a vehicle for communication; it actually establishes mental categories that predispose people to see things in a certain way. In addition, they also believed that people who speak different languages are directed to different types of perception and view of the world. Sapir and Whorf's ideas received a great deal of attention and have become well known as sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (2003 : 207) delineates two principles:

- (1) The principle of linguistic determinism, which says that the way one thinks, is determined by the language one speaks. A number of ethno linguists have attempted to test this hypothesis. One study by Ervin and Tripp (1964 : 96) concludes “ the very content of what is said by bilingual people varies according to which language is being spoken.” Working with bilingual Japanese American women in San Francisco, Susan Ervin- Tripp found that the responses to the same question given at different times by the same women varied significantly depending on the language used. To illustrate, when asked in English to finish the statement “Real friends should....,” the respondent answered, “Be very frank”; when asked the same question in Japanese at a different time, she answered “Help each other”. Or when asked, “When you have

conflict with your family.....," the response in English was "I do what I want"; but in Japanese, the response was, "It is a time of great unhappiness." In other words, when the question is asked in Japanese, the bilingual respondent is more likely to give a typical Japanese response, and when questioned in English, she is more likely to give a typical American response. This kind of evidence supported the validity of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis mentioned above.

- (2) The principle of linguistic relativity, which says that the difference among languages must therefore be reflected in the differences in the worldviews of their speakers. These principles raise some important issues for intercultural communication. If how we think is a reflection of the language we speak, then the speakers of two very different languages must think very differently.

For the above rationale, the link between culture and communication is vital to understand intercultural communication because it is through the influence of culture that people learn to communicate. The way that people view their world is based on their innate cultures. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand a culture without first understanding its language. In the same way, it would be equally impossible to understand a language outside its cultural context

## **B. Cultural Variability**

The work and related researches of famous anthropologist Edward T Hall, Sociologist Geert Hofstede and Communication expert Marcelle E. Dupraw are studied to analyze intercultural problems in this study.

**Edward Hall's Theory:** In a series of books (including *The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension*, *Beyond Culture*, and *Understanding Cultural Differences*), anthropologist Edward Hall contributed a great deal to our understanding of culture. He defined culture as a form of communication, governed by hidden rules, that involves both speech and actions. He terms culture "a vast unexplored region of human behavior that exists outside the range of people's conscious awareness". Culture affects everything—especially the relative importance of tasks and relationship. Hall's theories are discussed as the following:

### **1. High and low context communication**

Hall invented the terms "high context" and "low context" to describe the communication patterns and preferences of a culture. Neuliep (2003 : 48) describes that a high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or is internalized in the people who are a part of the interaction, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e.; the mass of information is vested in the explicit code.

In general, high context cultures place great importance on:

- Ambience
- Decorum

- The relative status of participants in a communication
- The manner of a message's delivery

On the other hand, low context cultures tend to want to ignore such things and emphasize the content of communication. In order to avoid culture shock, it is necessary to have a full understanding of communication context and how it varies culturally. It is important to bear in mind that cultural contexts are neither right nor wrong, better or worse; they are just different.

## **2. Time orientation**

Hall also coined the term "monochronic" and "polychronic" time orientation. Hall (2004 : 18) states that " Monochronic time patterns involve a linear view of time as a commodity to be saved, spent, or squandered. Polychronic time patterns are more circular and relaxed and reflect a view of time flowing around us". Hall recognized that time orientation helped to set a cultural patterns of communication.

**Geert Hofstede's Theory:** In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hofstede surveyed over 100,000 employees of a large multinational business organization in forty different countries to measure work-related values. From his study, he discovered four dimensions that provide an interesting way of analyzing and understanding cultures.

### **1. Individualism versus Collectivism**

For individualistic cultures, emphasis is placed on an individual's goals over group goals and it stresses on values that benefit the individual person. Moreover, social behavior is guided by personal goals. The self is promoted because each person is viewed as uniquely

endowed and possessing distinctive talent and potential. Individuals are encouraged to pursue and develop their abilities and aptitudes. In many individualistic cultures, people are taught to be creative, self-reliant, competitive and assertive.

In contrast, collectivistic cultures stress group cohesion and loyalty, placing greater emphasis on group rather than individual achievement. Unlike the individualist, the collectivist is emotionally connected to the in-group. The primary value in collectivist cultures is harmony with others. A person's behavior is guided more by shame than by personal guilt. A collectivist who stands out from the group disrupts the harmony and may be punished. Most collectivistic cultures value social reciprocity, obligation, dependence, and obedience.

## **2. Power distance**

Hofstede (2003 : 65) defined power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally." Hofstede categorizes cultures as possessing either large or small power distance. In culture with small power distance, members in the culture are generally treated as equal, and decision of its members are reached democratically. In contrast, people in larger power distance, inequalities among people are both expected and desired.

To conclude, high and low power distance culture may value different types of power. High power distance cultures tend to emphasize positional power. Positional power is based on formal authority ( e.g., family rank, social rank). People with positional power have control over rewards, punishments, and information. Low power distance cultures recognize and

respect earned power, which is based on an individual's accomplishments, hard work, and effort.

### **3. Uncertainty avoidance**

Gudykunst and Kim (2003 : 70) states "communicating with someone from an unknown culture can be uncomfortable because such situations are replete with uncertainty and unpredictability." When uncertainty is high, anxiety is usually high, and communication can be difficult and awkward. This may account for why some people avoid interacting with people from other cultures. Uncertainty avoidance is defined by Hofstede as "the degree to which the members of a particular culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations". Hofstede contents that this feeling is expressed through nervous stress. For better understanding, Hofstede categorizes cultures as possessing either weak or strong uncertainty avoidance orientation. Hofstede (2003 : 71) suggests " In cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance orientation, uncertainty is seen as a normal part of life, and each day is accepted as it comes". People are comfortable with ambiguity and are guided by a belief that what is different is curious.

On the other hand, cultures with a strong uncertainty avoidance orientation sense that uncertainty in life is a continuous threat that must be fought. Life can be stressful, and a sense of urgency and high anxiety are typical. People in strong uncertainty avoidance culture evade ambiguity in most situation and look for structure in their business organizations, home life, and relationships. On the job, there is generally a resistance to innovative ideas and workers are motivated by job security.

#### **4. Masculinity versus femininity**

Hofstede defines masculinity vs. femininity as "the extent to which people value achievement and assertiveness over the nurturing of relationships".

**Marcelle E. Dupraw's Theory:** Communication expert Dupraw (2004 : online) suggests that there are five fundamental patterns of cultural differences which determine intercultural communication patterns and reflects how cultures impact communication styles and how they might create problems.

##### **Five Fundamental patterns of cultural difference**

###### **1. Different Communication Styles**

The way people communicate varies widely between cultures. One aspect of communication style is language usage. Across culture, some words and phrases are used in different ways. Another major aspect of communication style is the degree of importance given to non-verbal communication. Some cultures pay more attention to non-verbal communication while the others do not.

###### **2. Different Attitudes Toward Conflict**

Some cultures view conflict as a positive thing, while others view it as something to be avoided. In western countries, conflict is not usually desirable; but people often are encouraged to deal directly with conflicts that do arise. In contrast, in many Eastern countries, open conflict is experienced as embarrassing or demeaning; as a rule, differences are best worked out quietly.

### 3. Different Approaches to Completing Tasks

From culture to culture, there are different ways that people move toward completing tasks. Asian culture tends to attach more value to develop relationships at the beginning of a shared project and task completion at the end resulting from the group collaboration whereas European-Americans tend to focus immediately on the task at hand, and let relationships develop at the end.

### 4. Different Decision-Making Styles

The roles individuals play in decision-making vary widely from culture to culture. In Western countries, decisions are frequently delegated—that is, people in management level assign responsibility for a particular matter to a subordinate. On the other hand, in many Asian countries, there is a strong value placed on holding decision-making responsibilities only for the authority people.

### 5. Different Attitude Toward Disclosure

In Asian culture, it is not appropriate to be frank about emotions, about the reasons behind a conflict or a misunderstanding, or about personal information. But, in western countries it is acceptable to reveal emotions and ideas

## 2. Thai Cultural Values

A general summary of Thai values can be made following Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1996 : 167) value orientation theory, a set of principles guiding the solution of common human problems. The theory includes four values orientations: man-nature, time, activity, and relational. The man-nature orientation is the extent to which people are seen as subjugated to, in harmony with, or having mastery over nature. The time orientation assesses whether people primarily view the life cycle as predominately past, present, or future. The orientation of activity indicates whether individuals are perceived as being, becoming, or doing. Finally, the relational orientation is the degree to which the culture sees interpersonal affiliations as linear, collateral, or individualistic.

Regarding the man-nature orientation, Thais see themselves as subjugated to nature. Their prevailing attitude toward the environment is one of passive acceptance; what will be, will be. The Thai phrase *mai pen rai*, translated literally as, "never mind, it doesn't matter," reflects the Buddhist notion of *karma*, a belief that destiny is fated by previous existences. In Buddhist teachings, one's time frame is this life and the next existence, a belief which gives rise to the frequently used phrase, "having to wait for the result until late in next existence" (Nakata & Dhiravegin. 1989: 166). This value contributes to a nonchalance displayed by Thais when facing seemingly insurmountable problems, is response that frequently strikes outsiders as unfounded self-confidence (Mulder : 1992). Kulick and Wilson (1992 : 1) observes, "the Thai accepts events more philosophically than the Westerner, he does not strive to methodically to control nature and bend it to his will". Moreover, Thais place greater emphasis on the present,

rather than the past or the future. Time is seen as a series of cycles with recurring phases, as opposed to the Western view of time as progress along a straight line. (Bhamarapavit. 1990: 241). Punctuality, a trait seen as highly desirable in the West, is often overlooked in Thailand. As Cooper and Cooper (1982 : 97) note, "the idea of a time and place for everything is very flexible applied in Thailand".

With respect to the activity orientation, Thais value "being" and see life as something to enjoy. Spontaneous expressions of enjoyable liveliness characterize Thai culture, and a Thai saying, "Doing whatever pleases one's mind," suggests this "being" orientation (Nakata & Dhiravegin. 1989:183). Furthermore, Nakata and Dhiravegin (1989 : 182) add, "Thais prefer to be left alone and to work by themselves". In a very real sense, the Thai epitomize the phrase, "I am what I am."

In their relational orientations, Thais place great value on deferential behavior and submissiveness. Thai society is arranged in a hierarchy such that almost every relationship is defined in terms of superiority or inferiority. Nakata and Dhiravegin (1989 : 169) write, "Thais are taught to obey and respect people with higher social status by birth, education, or knowledge and age". Social harmony is valued by Thais and overt expression of conflict is discouraged. Indeed, expression of emotion is discouraged and "one's feelings should be kept to oneself." (Mulder. 1992: 71) The Thai term, *kreng jai*, embodies the relationship orientation and refers to the desire to be "self-effacing, respectful, and extremely considerate as well as the wish to avoid embarrassing others or intruding or imposing upon them." (Fieg. 1989:43) Klausner (1993 : 258) views *kreng jai* as diffidence, deference and consideration merged with

respect". Kreng jai, probably unique to Thailand, characterizes the daily interpersonal relationships of Thai people.

In an exhaustive study of Thai values, the first systematic study ever conducted in Thailand, Komin (1991) followed the same criteria and procedures used by Rokeach (1973). Her research led to a grouping of nine value clusters based on instrumental values, the means for achieving certain goals. From these values grouping, Komin (1991 : 132-133) conclude that "Thai social system is first and foremost a hierarchically structured society where individualism and interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance." Table 1 presents the nine value clusters in rank order.

TABLE 1 THAI VALUE CLUSTERS ACCORDING TO IMPORTANCE

- 
1. Ego Orientation
  2. Grateful Relationship Orientation
  3. Smooth Interpersonal Relationship Orientation
  4. Flexibility and Adjustment Orientation
  5. Religio-Psychical Orientation
  6. Educations and Competence Orientation
  7. Interdependence Orientation
  8. Fun-Pleasure Orientation
  9. Achievement-Task Orientation
- 

Source: Komin, S. (1991). Psychology of the Thai people: Values and Behavioral Patterns.

Thai consistently rank self-esteem or ego orientation as the foremost value. Any violations of the "ego" self can result in strong emotional expressions, but the Thai have developed an intricate means of avoiding angry displays. Problems are addressed with the concern for the other person's "face" or the "ego". An old Thai proverb cited by Bhamorabutr (1983 : 7) best demonstrates this Thai value "Speech shows one's language, and manner shows one's breeding." The high ego-orientation of the Thai culture demands that no one should be placed in an embarrassing position or shame. Consequently, most Thai avoid criticizing the others and are afraid of being criticized. Nakata & Dhiravegin (1989 : 185) observe, "The Thais are keen to avoid conflict.....and adverse to criticizing others in their presence." The avoidance of criticism or social confrontation preserves social harmony and requires one to mask one's emotions, particularly socially destructive ones like anger, hatred, and annoyance. (Klausner. 1993 : 253)

Grateful relationship orientation, the second most important Thai social value, is expressed by *bunkhun*, or the reciprocity of goodness. Gratitude occupies a prominent place in Thai social interaction. Kindness must be recognized and appreciated as well as returned, and *bunkhun* is the foundation of strong relationships and friendship. Klausner (1973 : 275) notes, "To be *kantanyu*, or constantly aware and conscious of the benefit or favor another person has bestowed, is a highly valued character trait in Thai society. On the contrary, one of the most reprehensible sins in the Thai social context is to be *akatanyu*, or ungrateful." *Bunkhun* inspires close personal relationship, the key to the stability of Thai social life. (Suvanajata. 1976) Friendship, for the Thai, is a process of continual giving and receiving kindness,

Dispensing and obtaining favors, and recognizing that time and distance do not mitigate *bunkhun*. Komin (1991 : 139) concludes " Thais are brought up to value this process of gratefulness-the process of reciprocity of goodness done, and the ever-readiness to reciprocate"

Following "ego" and "grateful relationship," Thais place high value on smooth interpersonal relationships. Komin (1991) identifies that values displayed in Table 2 as indicative of the importance of smooth interpersonal relationships. The higher the rank, the more important are.

TABLE 2 VALUES ASSOCIATED WITH SMOOTH INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- 
1. Caring and Considerate
  2. Kind and Helpful
  3. Responsive to Situations and Opportunities
  4. Self-controlled, Tolerant, Restrained
  5. Polite and Humble
  6. Clams and Cautious
  7. Contented
  8. Social Relation
- 

Source: Komin, S. (1991). Psychology of the Thai people: Values and Behavioral Patterns.

The Thai desire for smooth interpersonal relationship can best be seen through the Thai expression, *jai yen*, literally meaning "cool heart." The opposite, *jai rohn*, or "hot heart," refers to overt displays of anger, impatience, and dissatisfaction. *Jai yen*, the talent of remaining calm and in control during difficult situations, is seen as the mark of a successful personality and much admired by the Thai. Komin (1991 : 148) notes, "Jai yen.....is the core cognition behind the behavioral pattern of the everyday life social interactions of the Thai. And it is this value of smooth and pleasant interpersonal interaction that gives Thai people the image of being very friendly people and Thailand, the Land of Smile." The soft-spoken Thai politeness, often attributed to the Buddhist influence, can be seen in such phrases as, *mai pen rai* (contented, never mind or it doesn't matter) and *arom dee* (always smiling, but without extreme emotional expression). In their social interactions, Thais place great importance on the comfort of the other through soothing and nurturing behavior. Indeed, the social harmony is considered as the norm that Thais must maintain. Thais will often accept invitations; even though they have no intention of attending in order to avoid the socially unacceptable abruptness of a refusal. Goffman (1995 : 167) refers to this Thai tendency as a "front" or a "presentation," while Phillips (1965 : 152) uses the term "social cosmetic." The most important aspect of a Thai relationship is the comfort and welfare of the people involved rather than objective truth. The Thai, then, prefer humble and nonassertive people who conduct themselves in a relaxed and friendly manner.

For Thais, the flexibility and adjustment orientation value emphasizes the situation and the immediate circumstances, not the ideology. The person and the situation are always given

preference over the system and principles. For the Thai, nothing is so important that it cannot be changed. A popular Thai phrase *klung wai korn pho sorn wai* (do whatever you can at the moment to survive), portrays the value Thais place on flexibility: everything can be adjusted. (Komin. 1991: 49)

The religio-psychical orientation of the Thai is strongly influenced by Buddhism, the religion of 95% of the population. Buddhism teaches harmony and the impermanence of all things. Buddhism, as practiced in Thailand, encourages followers to recognize that nothing is real and that everything is appearance. In addition to the practice of Buddhism, several superstitious behaviors characterize Thai life. Animism, fortune telling, supernatural beliefs, omens, and the magical qualities of amulets and charms are all part of Thai culture. Some Thais use this kind of thing as guideline for their life.

The value of education and competence is given a moderate level of importance. Form is almost always valued more than substance or content, and the Thais see education as a means of increasing social position, gaining increased prestige, or raising one's salary. In Thailand, knowledge is not important for knowledge sake. Komin (1991 : 186) suggests, "the concern with form, rather than content, can be seen in a number of Thai behaviors.....ranging from bribing to get good grades, to get degree and honorary degrees."

The interdependence orientation refers to the value of cooperation and collaboration, particularly in rural areas. Fieg (1989 :106) notes the importance of interdependence, trust, and cooperation by observing, "Rather than getting right down to business, the two parties will often have drinks or lunch together, search out their common interests, and perhaps meet later

to share a favorite pastime. As the social relationship develops, business will be blended in; and eventually the point being negotiated.....will be resolved." In general, the Thai people do help one another and cooperate with one another in such a way as to make these characteristics dominant values in Thai culture.

As noted earlier, Thailand is often stereotyped as "The land of Smile," no doubt a result of the value Thais place on fun and pleasure. The Thai term *sanuk*, meaning to have fun and enjoyment, actually supports the higher Thai value of interpersonal interaction and social harmony. The Thai place great value on fun; if something is not *sanuk*, including work, it is not worth doing. Komin (1991 : 191) goes so far as to remark that, " Thais are easily bored or *buua*, not because of having nothing to do like the Westerners, but because the repetitive activities they are doing are not *sanuk*." Mulder (1992 : 71) confirms the importance of fun and pleasure in Thai culture by observing,".....the Thais are masters of relaxation." The Thai genuinely enjoy relaxation and can make great pleasure in spontaneous displays of congeniality and neighborly hospitality. (Nakata & Dhiravegin. 1989: 184) *sanuk* has a very popular value; "no one engaging in *sanuk* would expect to be blamed or criticized. This is when the smile becomes genuine." (Kulick & Wilson. 1992: 69)

The Thai value represented by the achievement-task orientation. Thais perceive pleasant, amiable, social activities as more important than task-related, problem-solving, decision-making work. This is not to say that Thais do not work hard and strive to achieve. Rather, it is to say that mere hard work is insufficient. Furthermore, the words "achievement" and "ambition," when translated into Thai carry a negative connotation suggesting greediness or selfishness.

In all aspects of task activity, the higher values must be considered. In this sense, the Thai can be described as motivated more by social achievement than task completion. Fieg (1989 :64) sees this value as tempered by *karma* when he states, "Thai parents.....tend not to encourage their children to be ambitious or pressure them to achieve. If they are destined to arrive at some position-say to be prime minister-it will simply happen."

In summary, Komin's work and the comments of other scholars indicate that the primary characteristic of the Thai value system involves social harmony. Interpersonal relationship are seen by Thais as the most prominent quality of daily life. Indeed, task achievement is secondary to the maintenance of good interpersonal relationships. Komin (1990 :695) observes, "Good relations win all, not tasks"

### **3. Intercultural Communication Competence**

Neuliep (2003 : 365) defines intercultural communication competence as "the degree to which you effectively adapt your verbal and nonverbal messages to the appropriate cultural context". This process requires three components: motivation, knowledge, and skill. Motivation refers to our desire to communicate appropriately and effectively with strangers. Knowledge refers to our awareness or understanding of what needs to be done in order to communicate appropriately and effectively. Skills are our ability to engage in the behaviors necessary to communicate appropriately and effectively. (Gudykunst: 208; citing from Spitzberg& Cupach 1984).

Neuliep (2003 : 365) also adds "intercultural competent people successfully and effectively adapt their verbal and nonverbal messages to the appropriate cultural context. Most important, competence is something that is perceived about another person, rather than something an individual inherently possesses". In other words, an individual may appear competent to one person but not to another.

Verbal and nonverbal appropriateness and effectiveness are two important qualities of intercultural competence. According to Spitzberg (1984 : 245) "appropriate behaviors conform to the rules, norms, and expectancies of the cultural context". For example, "Wai" is the way Thai People greet each other. The rules associated with "wai" are determined by one's status (e.g., age, sex, occupation, education). The person of lower status is expected to "wai" the person with higher status. Spitzberg (1984 : 245) continues "effective behaviors are those that successfully perform and accomplish the rules and norms". To conclude, the appropriateness and effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal messages differs considerably across cultures. Behaviors considered appropriate in one culture may not be wholly appropriate in another culture.

In addition, Lewis and Slade (1994 :138) mentions that "....when expatriates engage in interpersonal perception and attribution processes in a cross cultural setting, expatriates need to do more perception checking than usual, to provide clear and accurate feedback more frequently, and be prepared to have a high tolerance of ambiguity....". Therefore, effective interpersonal contact in an intercultural or cross cultural context between people from different

cultures usually requires more patience, tolerance of ambiguity and regular perception checking.

#### **4. Previous Research**

The related previous researches are studied in order to gain the intercultural communication background.

H. O'Keefe and W. O'Keefe (1997) studied the Chinese and Western behavioral differences when establishing a joint venture in China. They compared communication practices and behavior pattern of both groups. They discovered that Western executives face the difficulties when trying to communicate with Chinese. The study showed that culture places a great influence on communication practices and behavior pattern of both sides. Moreover, this study also indicated that cultural differences can hinder effective communication among people from diverse culture.

Knutson; Hwang; & Metta vivatananukul (1995) did the research entitle A Comparison of Communication Apprehension Between Thai and USA Students sample: Identification of Different Cultural Norms Governing Interpersonal Communication Behaviors. They discovers that both Thai and USA students, their communication apprehension can be explained through an analysis of their innate culture. For example, they found out that a common behavior characteristic of Thai students is avoidance and withdrawal from communication because Thai culture value silence as a sign of respect for authority while USA people value silence as a

sigh of enemy. From this research, it can be showed that culture influences the way people communicate.

Potchanalak Ekwannang's research (2004) entitled A Study of Verbal Cross Cultural Communication Barriers among Western expatriates and Thai staff in Thailand, mostly focuses on language barrier while in this study the researcher furthers her study in the same field but specifically focuses on cultural differences that influence intercultural communication.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explains the research methodology, which is composed mainly of the following sections: subjects, instruments, procedures for data collection, analysis of data, and analysis presentation

#### **1. Subjects**

The subjects of this study were 30 personnel working for acEnglish(Thailand). They were divided into two groups: 15 Western expatriates and 15 Thai staff. Both groups were studied since they had been working together and also faced the difficulties dealing with each others. They consisted of different-ages both male and female. In addition, they were selected from every department in the organization. To qualify for this study, they had to meet one requirement set up by the researcher. That is, they must have at least one year of work experience in the organization in order that they might have an opportunity to experience intercultural communication problem.

## **2. Instruments**

The instrument in this research was two sets of questionnaires for conducting an in-depth face-to-face interview. One was for the western expatriates and another was for Thai colleagues. The questionnaire was designed as a measure to examine intercultural communication problem among Western expatriates and Thais. It was divided into three parts as following:

### **Part 1: Personal Information**

This section consists of questions asking the respondents to specify their personal information such as gender, age, length of work experience, etc. Subjects who have less than one year of work experience were asked to end their responses.

### **Part 2: Intercultural Communication Problem**

In this section, the respondents were questioned about intercultural communication problems in acEnglish, which they think it would obstruct their work performance. In addition, most of questions were related to the influence of different cultures creating intercultural communication problem.

### **Part 3: Solution for Intercultural Communication Problem**

In this section, the respondents were asked about their solution for bridging the different gap in intercultural communication and the way to overcome the intercultural communication barriers.

### **3. Procedures**

In this research, the questionnaire were used as an in depth face-to-face interview in order to interview 30 acIEnglish staff. They were both Thais and Westerners selected from every department and every job position. Data collected from this interview were reviewed and analyzed qualitatively and descriptively.

### **4. Data Analysis**

After the data had been collected, the respondents' attitudes and ideas were categorized and compared between two groups: Western staff and Thai staff. The receiving data were summed in order to classify problems between two groups and then the data were directly analyzed based on the intercultural communication theories presented in chapter 2. The researcher will analyze further how these problems could be solved.

### **5. Analysis Presentation**

The descriptive analysis approach was employed to present the finding of this study in chapter 4. It will be presented in the category of problems followed by the practical solution. And finally the conclusion will be drawn and some recommendations will be provided for further study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter will present the results of the analysis of data gathered for this research, including the conclusion and discussion of the results. The analysis is presented according to the three research questions described in Chapter one. The presentation is divided into three parts: demographic information analysis, intercultural communication problem and solution for intercultural communication.

#### **1. Demographic information analysis**

There were 30 returned questionnaires, three of which were invalid because of incomplete response. As a result, 27 (90%) questionnaires were used in this analysis.

The demographic characteristics of Thai Staff are presented in Table 1. Most of the Thai staff at acEnglish are female (75%), the rest (25%) are male. Most of their ages are in between 20-30 years old (50%), the rest are between 31-40 years old (33%) and over 40 years old (17%) respectively. 58.34% of the Thai staff working for acEnglish are in operation level, while 25% of them are in middle management level. The rest (8.33%) are in high position level and part time staff. Most of the Thai staff work less than three years (75%), the rest (25%) work more than three years.

TABLE 3 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THAI STAFF

| Characteristic                                     | Number of Responses | Percent of Responses |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Sex</b>                                         |                     |                      |
| Male                                               | 3                   | 25.00%               |
| Female                                             | 9                   | 75.00%               |
| <b>Age</b>                                         |                     |                      |
| Below 20                                           | 0                   | 00.00%               |
| 20-30 years                                        | 6                   | 50.00%               |
| 31-40 years                                        | 4                   | 33.00%               |
| Above 40 years                                     | 2                   | 17.00%               |
| <b>Position in Organization</b>                    |                     |                      |
| High Management Level                              | 1                   | 08.33%               |
| Middle Management Level                            | 3                   | 25.00%               |
| Operation Officer                                  | 7                   | 58.34%               |
| Part Time Employee                                 | 1                   | 08.33%               |
| <b>Length of Working for acIEnglish (Thailand)</b> |                     |                      |
| 0-3 years                                          | 9                   | 75.00%               |
| More than 3 years                                  | 3                   | 25.00%               |

The demographic characteristics of western expatriates are presented in Table 4. Most of western expatriates at acIEnglish are male (66.67%), the rest (33.34%) are female. Most of their ages are in between 31-40 years old (46.67%), the rest are above 40 years old (33.34%) and in between 20-30 years old (20%) respectively. 53.34% of western expatriates working at acIEnglish are British. 26.67% are Australian and the rest 20% are American. Most of them are part time employees (66.67%), while few people work in high management level (6.67%). The rest work in middle management level (26.67%). 46.67% of western expatriates work for acIEnglish (Thailand) have been working in Thailand about 3-5 years. 33.34% of them have been working in Thailand less than 3 years while the rest (20%) have been working in Thailand more than 5 years. All of them (100%) have been working for acIEnglish for less than 3 years.

TABLE 4 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF WESTERN EXPATRIATES

| Characteristic | Number of Responses | Percent of Responses |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Sex</b>     |                     |                      |
| Male           | 10                  | 66.67%               |
| Female         | 5                   | 33.34%               |
| <b>Age</b>     |                     |                      |
| Below 20       | 0                   | 00.00%               |
| 20-30 years    | 3                   | 20.00%               |
| 31-40 years    | 7                   | 46.67%               |

TABLE 4 (Continued)

| Characteristic                                     | Number of Responses | Percent of Responses |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Age</b>                                         |                     |                      |
| Above 40 years                                     | 5                   | 33.34%               |
| <b>Nationality</b>                                 |                     |                      |
| British                                            | 8                   | 53.34%               |
| Australian                                         | 4                   | 26.67%               |
| American                                           | 3                   | 20.00%               |
| <b>Position in Organization</b>                    |                     |                      |
| High Management Level                              | 1                   | 06.67%               |
| Middle Management Level                            | 4                   | 26.67%               |
| Operation Officer                                  | 0                   | 00.00%               |
| Part Time Employee                                 | 10                  | 66.67%               |
| <b>Length of work experience in Thailand</b>       |                     |                      |
| 0-3 years                                          | 5                   | 33.34%               |
| 3-5 years                                          | 7                   | 46.67%               |
| More than 5 years                                  | 3                   | 20.00%               |
| <b>Length of working for acIEnglish (Thailand)</b> |                     |                      |
| 0-3 years                                          | 15                  | 100.00%              |
| More than 3 years                                  | 0                   | 00.00%               |

## 2. Intercultural Communication problems

Most people working at acIEnglish were always communicating verbally as shown in Table 3. 70.37% of the staff always communicated with each other on the telephone. Also, 55.56% of them always communicated with face to face. Additionally, 48.15% of them always communicated in-group setting.

TABLE 5 THE FREQUENCY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN WESTERN EXPATRIATES AND THAI COLLEAGUES AT acIEnglish (THAILAND)

| FOIC         | Communication in Group | One on One Communication | On Telephone |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Always       | 13                     | 15                       | 19           |
| Percentage   | 48.15%                 | 55.56%                   | 70.37%       |
| Often        | 5                      | 9                        | 5            |
| Percentage   | 18.52%                 | 33.34%                   | 18.52%       |
| Occasionally | 7                      | 3                        | 3            |
| Percentage   | 25.93%                 | 11.12%                   | 11.12%       |
| Rarely       | 2                      | 0                        | 0            |
| Percentage   | 07.41%                 | 00.00%                   | 00.00%       |

The data gathered from the interview can answer the research questions as follows:

#### A. Research Question One

This research question wants to find out what are the intercultural communication problems at acEnglish. According to the interview, intercultural communication problems are as the following:

##### 1. Misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents

Both western expatriates and Thai staff agreed with each other that most distinctive communication problem was the misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents.

From the interview with Thai staff, most of them admitted that sometimes when communicate with western colleagues they did not caught up about what their colleagues said but they did not ask any questions to clarify conversation. They just guessed what the meaning should be. For doing that, the misinterpretation occurred and could lead to failure delivery of their job. After in depth interview with Thai staff, it revealed the main reason why they do not question about the unclear things was that they did not want to lose their face. Some of them thought that it was not polite to question people with the higher position so they kept silent or when the western expatriates asked them in order to check feedback, they always said "Yes, Yes or O.K, I understand" which would lead to communication breakdown due to misunderstanding of both sides.

Moreover, Thai staff also mentioned that one cause of the misinterpretation of the contexts was that some of them lack of knowledge of vocabulary. A good example of a lack of knowledge of vocabulary that lead to misinterpretation of the content is shown in Table 6

TABLE 6 AN EXAMPLE OF LACKING OF GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF VOCABULARY OF THAI STAFF.

---

The following conversation took place between a Thai accountant and British Human Resource Manager.

**Jim:** Suchat! Have you printed out the working record form for a new temporary staff yet? I need him to sign his name on that form after he finishes work everyday.

**Suchat:** I have already printed it out but need to check with you about his information.

**Jim:** You 're right, Well....Let me see. His name is Theeradet Somboon and he is a customer service staff in the night shift.

**Suchat:** Well, and how about his payment? Do we pay him monthly like our full time staff or weekly?

**Jim:** I think we should pay him every **fortnight** like we do in England. Well, I think you've got all that necessary information? Is there any question so far?

**Suchat:** No, I don't think so.

\*The name in this dialogue is not the real name of the person giving this information

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Source: Mr. Sutthipong Sriorathaikul. (2005, 10 May). Interviewed by Ms. Ornvimon Noreewong at aclEnglish (Thailand)

In fact, Suchat has never heard the word fortnight before but he decided not to ask the HR manager about the meaning of that word because he did not want his boss to think that he

was not professional accountant or even stupid. He assumed that he had to do the payment for the night staff every four days at nighttime before he came back home.

According to Komin (1991) Thai people are concerned for their "face" or even the other's face. Then, they avoid the situation that will make them lose face by not asking many questions. They pretend to understand things even if they do not understand them at all.

From Western's attitude, they were not happy with what Thai staff did because it would delay the delivery of the job or even made the mistake on the job.

## 2. English accent.

The data gathered from the interview indicated that English accent was one important factor of intercultural communication problems. From the interview with Thai staff, most of them mentioned that even the Western expatriates are all the first tongue English speakers from England, Australia and America but their accents vary upon the regions or states that they come from. And that can be a barrier for them to communicate with each other. For example, Scottish people always speak quite fast and the sound is in the throat of the speakers, which make it more difficult for Thai staff to understand.

On the other hand, some western expatriates stated that some Thai staff spoke English not clear enough for them to catch up the meaning. They pointed out that some Thai people did not make the right pronunciation so that sometimes it caused the misunderstanding or it took time to communicate with each other.

### 3. Level of Language

Another significant finding about intercultural communication problems was the level of language used when both sides communicate. Most of Thai staff admitted that they did not understand the idioms or formal words or even slang that were used by their western colleagues.

TABLE 7 AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN DUE TO THE USE OF IDIOM.

---

The following conversation took place between a Thai secretary and a British Office manager.

**Peter:** I saw in the resource booking spreadsheet this morning and I found out that you have booked the same venue at the same time for different events.

**Porntip:** Oh!! Really?

**Peter:** There might be a mistake with your own schedule so you have to sort things out and inform me your choice.

**Porntip:** O.K, Yes....???

\*The name in this dialogue is not the real name of the person giving this information

---

Source: Mr. Ian Brown. (2005, 19 May). Interview by Ms. Ornvimon Noreewong at  
aclEnglish (Thailand)

From this dialogue, Porntip said that she did not quite understand what Peter suggested her to do. To give a more vivid explanation, Porntip did not know what "sort out" means. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995 : 1369) the word "sort out" is

British English meaning to deal with problems. The researcher asked most of Thai staff at aclEnglish about the meaning of this idiom and found out that 70% of them did not know this idiom. One possible explanation for this cause is that most of Thai people are not familiar with the idioms because it is not widely used among Thais.

#### 4. Cultural barrier

Both Thai staff and western expatriates were in general agreement that the most important communication problem at aclEnglish (Thailand) was the cultural problem. As mentioned in the Chapter one that culture shapes people to think differently. Then people from different cultures have different way of thinking and different way of doing things.

From the interview, it was found that when discussed the important issue at a meeting Thais always reported only the successful job that a person did but rarely mentioned about any of his or her mistake during the meeting. If there was a slight mistake, Thais often overlooked but for a quite serious one they asked that person to meet and discuss in person. From the interview with the Western expatriates, they did not understand Thai culture so they judged that behavior as insincere behavior or even thought that the speaker wanted something from the listener.

On the other hand, western colleagues always reported both good and bad things at a meeting. Since the western communication style was direct and focused on successful task at hand rather than the smooth interpersonal relationship, they praised good performance with a successful task while blamed the failure. A western expatriate added, "In Western societies, the Westerners' reaction to failure was an attempt to improve performance". However, Thai

staff regarded that behavior as inappropriate behavior because Thai culture emphasizes smooth interpersonal relationship, group harmony and concern for saving face of each other. Then, from some Thais' point of view, they were not willing to attend the meeting to avoid the criticisms and to be afraid of losing face.

#### B. Research Question Two

The second research question sought to explain how cultural differences could affect intercultural communication in acEnglish (Thailand). The researcher analyzed all the data collected, which were from the interview of both Thai staff and western expatriates, based on Geert Hofstede's theory (1991) because his theory is the most relevant theory for this study. There are four dimensions of his study that has already been described in Chapter 2. but the result of this study would be explained with two dimensions.

##### 1. Individualism versus Collectivism

Thai national culture is characterized by collectivism so harmony in interpersonal relations appears to be an extremely important value. Then, Thai people try to "save face", avoid embarrassment, and maintain harmony in interpersonal relationship. In general, they will do their utmost to avoid any personal conflict in their contact with others. For example, western expatriates stated that when asked Thai staff to give the suggestion they seemed to agree with what their western colleagues suggested at the first time even they totally disagreed with that idea. They kept quiet and smiling but after the meeting ended they talked with each other that they did not agree with the western expatriates at all. For this situation, the

Westerners revealed that they felt uncomfortable while they asked Thai staff to give a suggestion and they always said that "Yes, I agreed with you or Yes, I think it was a very good idea". And then, the westerners totally felt upset when they found out later that Thai staff talked behind their back about this topic. This led to interpersonal problems such as personal resentment or avoidance of communicating with Thai staff.

From Thais' attitude, they believed that openly disagreeing or saying "No" was considered rude and damaging to social harmony (Komin. 1991: 35). Moreover, they also added that criticizing in public made people lose face and damaged their relationships with those who criticized. According to the reasons mentioned earlier, they did not want to give different ideas because they did not want to create any conflict and also wanted to show respect to their Western boss. In addition to this, when they wanted to give the ideas, which was different from their western boss or colleagues, they preferred not to speak directly. As a result, all these lead to misinterpretation of the contexts and contents. The researcher also found out from this study that Thai competent communicators were people who know how to avoid conflict with others; control their emotion; display respect, tactfulness, modesty and politeness; and use appropriate pronouns in addressing others.

Furthermore, Thai people believe in "Kreng Jai" (an extreme reluctance to impose on anyone or disturb another's personal equilibrium by refusing requests, accepting assistance, showing disagreement, giving direct criticism, challenging knowledge or authority, or confronting in a conflict situation) (Komin : 1991). Then, when Western expatriates asked them to help with

a job even they did not want to but they often accepted to help because of the "Kreng Jai" concept.

In contrast, when Thai staff asked the western colleagues to help and sometimes they refused, so Thai staff regarded them as lack of "Nam Jai". However, the western colleagues did not understand the concept "Nam Jai" as their culture values individualism that is focused on personal goal and personal satisfaction rather than group goal and social harmony.

## 2. Power Distance

Thai culture is also characterized by high power distance. Thus, status differences among citizens are often very large. From the interview, the researcher found out that most of Thai staff at ac!English (Thailand) place a value on hierarchy of society, obedience and loyalty to authority, feelings of duty, responsibility to their family, submission to the group and elders, desire to comply, and respectful conduct. Also, Thai staff adopt these beliefs to the workplace as can be seen that Thai subordinates do not assertively challenge the authority of their bosses or never question their bosses' order. At the same time, Thai supervisors generally are not interested in soliciting opinions from their subordinates since the traditional view has been that the one in authority is free to exercise power without consulting subordinates. (Sriussadaporn Charoenngam; & Jablin. 1999: 382). From the interview with Thai staff, they informed that most of them were used to that system and when the western bosses asked them to make a suggestion, they kept silence since they did not know what would be the right suggestions. If they suggested the wrong things, they were afraid of being blamed or even reduced the chance to be promoted to a higher position. For some Thais' attitude, they thought that their

silence was a positive sign of respect. From the difference attitude, most of the westerners perceived that shyness, or not speaking up were almost always considered a negative trait in western culture. Some Westerners interpreted that Thai silence as incompetence and not given any contribution to work. Furthermore, a Western expatriate suggested "Even the very smart and successful Thai person often expresses a lower opinion than is probably deserved of his or her own ability, knowledge, skill and successes". He also added that "Thai people are not happy when they are requested to give any critical opinion. Many Thai people would prefer not to say anything if their comments tend to lead to conflict or interpersonal resentment."

For example, some Thai staff mentioned that it is typical for them to come to work earlier and stay later than his or her bosses in order to show respect to the bosses and can be implied that they are hard working. However, from the eyes of western bosses this behavior was not the right behavior since they did not understand Thai culture. They just thought that if the work-time finished, they should go back or the bosses would think that their Thai employees were incompetent to complete the assigned tasks on time. The following example can give a vivid picture of Thai working style affected by the belief in power distance in Thai society.

TABLE 8 AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNICATION IN DIFFERENT WORKING STYLE  
AFFECTED BY DIFFERENT CULTURE.

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The following conversation took place between a Thai PR Manager and British Project Manager. They discussed about organizing a summer English Camp at the Riverside Resort in Kanchanaburi. They had to write invitation letters for the selected schools in Bangkok to ask them to send their students to attend the camp.

**Nattha:** I have talked to each school link coordinators and all agree that we should send the invitation letter to local education Authority (LEA) to inform about our English camp program and explain the benefit the school would gain after attending the program and ask them to pass the program to each school inviting them to join the English camp.

**Richard:** Oh, Nattha!! Why you have to make our life so complicated like this? Why don't we just write to those schools directly? I think that make things easier.

**Nattha:** I understand your point, Richard. But you have to understand Thai working style.

**Richard:** I just don't understand why we can't send the letter to those schools directly.

**Nattha:** If you do so, I bet that you won't get any reply.

**Richard:** Why?

**Nattha:** Since Thai organization is a vertical structural system in which there must be an unbroken upward flow of documents and approval. All documents that are report and request of various kinds have to be sequentially transmitted in writing until they arrive at

the ultimate superior. That is the reason why we have to send the letter to LEA and then ask a support from LEA to pass down the issue to those schools.

**Richard:** Even it take so long?

**Nattha:** Yes, we have to wait.

**Richard:** I just don't understand why Thai people have to make thing difficult.

**Nattha:** I don't know. That's way people do. I just follow them.

\*The name in this dialogue is not the real name of the person giving this information

Source: Ms. Sirayapa Sukwong (2005, 19 May). Interviewed by Ms. Ornvimon Noreewong at ac!English (Thailand)

From this dialogue, Richard felt upset about the delay of the work process caused by Thai working system. From the interview, he revealed that he was very angry about what Nattha mentioned but he has learned that it would create more personal conflict with Nattha if he showed his anger. To support his situation, Gardiner (1986 : 4) found that Thai students regarded "keeping calm" and "facial expressions" as the most acceptable expressions of anger.

Moreover, the result also pointed out that 70% of the staff at ac!English (Thailand) agreed that intercultural communication problems could affect their work performance or their working life in many ways as following:

1. No progress of the assigned work

The finding indicated that the intercultural communication problems could delay the work process since both sides were not willing to communicate with each other anymore

because their communication styles were different. And they did not understand each other much.

## 2. More time consuming to finish one task

If the situation forced them to communicate with each other, it would take time for both sides to understand each other. Moreover, the researcher found out that when Thai staff had problems with the detail of the work. They were not come to their western colleagues or bosses to clarify the problem. But they appointed the third party to speak for them and that situation seemed to get worse and worse.

## 3. Personal resentment

The finding also revealed that the differences in communication styles between Thai staff and western expatriates could lead to personal resentment. According to Roongrengsuke and Chansuthus (1998 : 207) explain that it has been taught among the Thais that "losing is winning" or in Thai proverb " Pae Pen Phra Chana Pen Mara" in many conflict situations. As a result of this value, Thai people who do not respond in conflicts may gain respect from the other group members or outsiders who observe the situations and thus win recognition from outsiders even though they may appear to lose in the conflicts. From this view, the western expatriates may interpret Thais' communication strategy in conflict resolution as defeating or not opening for engaging in a dialogue. And that made the western expatriates more frustrated.

#### 4. The increasing turnover's rate

Some Thai staff mentioned that intercultural communication problems could lead to the high turnover of staff. As mentioned earlier, Thais tend to avoid problems instead of finding the practical solutions. Then, when they faced the problems and were not comfortable to work with western expatriates, they often made the decision to quit the job in order to escape from unpleasant environment. As a Thai proverb said " Kab Ti Yu Dai Kub Jai Yu Yag" This Thai proverb has its roots in Thai belief, Thais have been taught to escape from unpleasant environment.

### 3. Solution for Intercultural Communication problems

#### C. Research Question Three

For the last research question, it attempted to explain how staffs in the company overcome intercultural communication problems. The answers for this question are from the interviews of both Thai staff and western expatriates. The followings are the ways both Thai staff and Western expatriates employed to facilitate communication at acEnglish (Thailand)

##### 1. Be aware

Both sides have to be aware when it comes to communicate with each other. Western expatriates should be aware that Thai staff are non-native English speakers so they are often unfamiliar with idioms or even English accent and confused by the shades of meaning of many English words. Then, the confirmation of what they just said in order to

ensure that Thai staff received the right message is quite important. On the other hand, Thai staff should ask question when they feel confused of what the western mentioned. Thai should bear in mind that pretending to understand when they don't can create the communication breakdown, which can hinder the successful job.

## 2. Choose words carefully

Words are powerful: they can hurt or support (Reynold; & Valentine. 2004: 63). Both Thai staff and Western expatriates agree that when they communicate with each other, both sides should avoid words that disrespect or belittle others. Moreover, they also avoid making joke to each other because they don't understand each other culture that much. And jokes can wound, especially the kind that make fun of people beliefs (Reynold; & Valentine. 2004: 64).

## 3. Select simple words to communicate

Thai staff recommended that western expatriates should select simple and specific as well as concrete words when communicating with Thai staff in order to avoid ambiguity. Also, the western expatriates should try to use common words, that is, words normally learned in the first two years of language study. Avoid uncommon words, such as "shift" for "change", "jocose" for "witty", "contingent" for "dependent" "efficacious" for "efficient", or "flux" for "continual change" "downright" for "completely bad or unpleasant" (Reynolds & Valentine, 2004). It is apparent that many words in English have multiple meanings. For example, the word "Get" can mean to "buy", "borrow", "steal", "rent", "receive", "obtain", "understand", "punish", "attack", "become" or "retrieve". Not surprisingly, most of Thai staff know only the first

or second most common meaning. Then, the western expatriates should be aware when they use this kind of words.

#### 4. Avoid idioms and slang

Thai staff mentioned that some western colleagues used idioms, slang, jargon, buzzwords and acronyms, which are seldom taught in Thai schools or in formal language courses, when communicating with them. These can lead to communication problem. Western expatriates should be aware that Thai staff are often unfamiliar with idioms and confused by the shades of meaning of many English words. Using phrases like "What's going down?" or "Was sup?" (To ask what is happening), "Hang in there!" or "Keep on truckin!" (To encourage perseverance), or the idiom such as "Raining cats and dogs" (It is raining very hard), "Shift your ground" (To change your opinion) can create misunderstanding when the western expatriates are unaware of using those phrases.

#### 5. Develop empathy and patience

Most of the interviewees agreed that developing empathy and patience while communicating with each other was one of the best solutions for intercultural communication problem. Most of Thai staff suggested that the western expatriates should understand that some Thai staff were not good at English, so when communicating with Thai staff, they should speak slowly, use simple sentence, restate what they say in different words in order to ensure that their Thai colleagues received the right message which is quite important to make successful communication.

#### 6. Accommodate: meet your communication partner halfway

From the interview, both sides suggested that trying to familiarize oneself with the accepted tone and reasoning style of the mutual culture can make them understand each other more. When the English accent and style differ, the message may be misunderstood or negatively perceived. As a result, both sides agree in common for being sensitive and making the necessary adjustment which can go a long way toward building goodwill.

#### 7. Use written communication modes.

80% of the interviewees suggested that one of the practical solutions was written summaries such as a memo or an email to ensure message clarity. "A usage of memo or email to confirm the work instructions and explanations are very practical. Moreover, it can reduce the misunderstanding.", mentioned by one of Thai Staff.

#### 8. Be sensitive with the cultural differences

According to Knutson (2003 : 67) , for example, silence or being shy to speak up is almost always considered a negative trait in Western culture but Thai silence is a positive sign of respect. To avoid the misinterpretation of the message, both parties should take roles as both learners and teachers. Thai staff can learn from expatriates about Western culture and how they can adapt to that culture. At the same time, the Western expatriate can learn about Thai culture and values. To do so, it can resolve the cultural conflict and also enhance mutual understanding.

## 9. Learning Thai language

Learning Thai language was very useful for Western expatriates to communicate with Thai staff more easily. However, according to the interviews, learning simple Thai words and basic sentences was useful enough to communicate with Thai staff because most of the Thai staff were willing to listen to them and also tried to understand their Thai.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents a conclusion of the study and the limitation. In addition, recommendations for future research are also provided.

#### **1. Conclusions**

Thailand has been gaining attention from the world as a popular tourist destination and a thriving business area in the Southeast Asia region. After the Asian economic crisis in 1997, Thailand encouraged foreign investment in the country in order to revive its economy. Because of the advancement of communication technology and transportation, it enables Thailand to conduct business transactions without geographical barriers. Over the past decades, many foreign subsidiaries have been growing dramatically in Thailand. Consequently, Thai people, once familiar with a homogeneous Thai population (Fieg :1989 ) and working only in the Thai way, must learn to adjust themselves to new working environments where they have to communicate with people from different cultures in multi-national companies.

The phenomenon of a multicultural environment in Thailand is a critical issue to study; especially, from a communication perspective. Effective adjustment in working with people from different cultures requires a profound understanding of their partners'

culture. Since cultures could be considered as a core of successful business across cultures. With a consideration of multi-cultural workforces increasing in Thailand, this study was undertaken to investigate the intercultural problems between Thai staff and Western expatriates and provide some insight into how cultural differences can affect the communication between them. In addition, this study also examined the practical solution for the problems. acEnglish (Thailand) was explored as a case study for this research. The subjects of this study were 30 personnel working for acEnglish (Thailand): 12 Thai staff and 15 Western expatriates.

The results indicated that the most distinctive communication problem at acEnglish (Thailand) was the misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents. While the rest were the communication breakdowns due to various English accents, the use of difficult idiom and slang and the cultural barriers.

Moreover, it was apparent that cultural differences could be an important barrier for successful communication because communication behaviors and styles of both Thai staff and western expatriates have been greatly shaped by their cultures. Therefore, both groups develop their distinctive communication styles, leading to various ways to communicate and interpret the meanings. When both groups had to communicate with each other, misunderstanding occurred because they perceived things in different ways. From the study, it appeared that there were two distinguish culture differences that could affect intercultural communication in acEnglish (Thailand) as follows:

a. Individualism versus Collectivism

b. Power Distance

According to these culture's patterns of communication, Thai culture is characterized by collectivism and high power distance while Western culture is characterized by individualism and low power distance. From the study, the result supported the theories mentioned above by indicating that 80% of Thai staff working for acIEnglish placed a great value on smooth interpersonal relationship with the others. Therefore, they would do their best to avoid any personal conflict while 90% of Western expatriates placed a great value on their personal goal and their personal satisfaction rather than group goal and social harmony. Since both sides held the different values, it would lead to communication problems as described in Chapter 4.

Moreover, intercultural communication research and training in business settings usually assume that Western expatriates hold superior and overlook the "knowledge, skill, and experience that the host country national brings to the relationship" (Fisher & Hartel, 2003). The finding supported the statement above that 70% of the Western expatriates working for acIEnglish failed to equip with Thai culture and Thai language which lead to misunderstanding due to misjudge of Thai communication pattern. In addition, the result showed that age and gender of people working in acIEnglish (Thailand) did not seem to have relationship with the intercultural communication problems. Both male and female at any age had faced the problems. However, in this study Western expatriates' length of work experience in Thailand showed the impact on intercultural communication problem. It could be reported that the longer

Western expatriates work in Thailand the more they understand Thai staff. On the other hand, it appeared that Thai staff's length of work experience with Western expatriates play no significant roles to better their understanding with Western culture. Thus, their length of work experience may not help them in this case to adjust themselves to intercultural competence because Thai staffs play an inactive role when communicating with the Westerner. From this study, it could support the statement above that most of the Thai staff just waited for command and order without questioning their boss's order or make any suggestion to their boss to make the job better. For the solution to the intercultural communication problems at acEnglish (Thailand), the result revealed that being aware when communicating with each other, developing empathy and being patient were the most influential ways to develop intercultural competent for both groups.

In summary, the study of intercultural communication is not new. Many scholars and researchers have been undertaking this kind of research for so long. But most of the literature in communication and business disciplines had paid extensive attention to intercultural communication in organizations from the expatriates' side. Issues such as effective personal selection for international assignments (Jordan & Cartwright, 1998; Kealey, 1996), how expatriates adjust themselves and work successfully in different cultural contexts (Jun, Gentry, & Hyun, 2001), and above all intercultural training for expatriates (Bennett, Aston, & Colquhoun, 2000; Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Landis & Bhagat, 1996) have been seriously investigated. However, studies that focus on expatriates are partially beneficial as they are based on the assumption of only Western expatriates' side. The researcher would say in order

to achieve intercultural communication effectiveness, both Western expatriates and Thai staff must play active roles in their interactions. In an ideal situation of intercultural interactions, both parties should adapt to one another in their interactions in order to create genuine collaboration. As a result, this study explored the intercultural communication problems from aspects, Thai staff and Western expatriates, in order to see the problems from both points of view.

The researcher hope that the result of this study will be beneficial not only to the aclEnglish (Thailand) staff but also to Thai people and to Western expatriates working for other international organizations in order to reduce conflict and misunderstanding due to the lack of culture knowledge.

## **2. Limitations of the Study**

1. Since this study is a case study of aclEnglish (Thailand), the result might not indicate all the intercultural problems occurring in other international organizations.
2. The study of intercultural communication problems in other international organizations, the findings might be different depending on the characteristics of the workforces in those organizations.

### 3. Recommendations for Further Studies

1. Kreng Jai is the most interesting topic, which is widely discussed by people who are interested in learning the Thai culture. The closest translation of Kreng Jai is to be considerate. However, Thai people appear to be Kreng Jai in many other occasions than what the Westerners do when they show their consideration. Kreng Jai is expected to be reciprocal in interactions among the Thais. That is, people are obliged to appear to be Kreng Jai if they receive Kreng jai treatments from others. If they do not behave to be Kreng Jai in return, they will be considered insensitive. For the future research, it is very interesting to compare the Kreng Jai concept with the western's consideration and also study how Thai employees adjust to Westerners who value being considerate in a Western sense, not Kreng Jai.
2. Another suggestion for future research is to make a comparative study of characteristics of British boss and American boss. Whether there is any difference between these two in the eye of Thai colleagues and subordinates. Since British people in Thai opinion is considered more polite and strict ,while American people is very easygoing. The result of this study can be beneficial for people who work with both American and British in order to adapt themselves to their working styles.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **COVER LETTER FOR RESPONDENTS**

## Cover Letter

January 20, 2005

Dear Respondents:

I am studying for a Master's Degree of Business English for International Communication Program, the Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot university. I would like you to participate in a study entitle "A Study of Intercultural Communication: A case Study of Cultural Influences of acEnglish(Thailand)" which is part of my master's project.

This study is a survey about how cultural differences can affect intercultural communication in acEnglish(Thailand). There is no right or wrong answers. I am interested in knowing how you feel about certain topics. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Please read each question and kindly give me your honest opinion.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely Yours,

Ornvimon Noreewong (Anna)

Marketing Assistance/ Counselor

วันที่ 20 มกราคม 2548

เรื่อง ขอความร่วมมือตอบแบบสอบถาม

เรียน ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามทุกท่าน

ดิฉันเป็นนักศึกษาปริญญาโท สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการติดต่อสื่อสารนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ ใครขอความร่วมมือจากท่านในการตอบแบบสอบถาม ซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของปริญญานิพนธ์

การวิจัยในครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาถึงอิทธิพลทางวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งอาจส่งผลกระทบต่อ การติดต่อสื่อสารระหว่างพนักงานไทย และพนักงานชาวต่างชาติซึ่งทำงานร่วมกัน โดยการศึกษาในครั้งนี้ได้นำเสนอผ่านการศึกษาของพนักงานที่ทำงานในบริษัท เอซีแอล (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด

ในฐานะที่ท่านเป็นพนักงานของบริษัทฯ ดังกล่าว ดิฉันต้องการทราบความคิดเห็นของท่าน ในแต่ละหัวข้อ คำตอบที่ได้จะไม่มีถูกหรือผิดโดยเฉพาะ และคำตอบของท่านจะถูกเก็บเป็น ความลับ ดังนั้นโปรดอ่านแต่ละคำถามอย่างละเอียด และตอบตรงตามความเป็นจริง

สุดท้ายนี้ขอขอบพระคุณในความร่วมมือของท่าน

ด้วยความนับถือ

อรวิมล โนริวงศ์

## **APPENDIX B**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WESTERN EXPATRIATES**

## Research Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to explore cultural influences on intercultural communication in this company in order to eliminate intercultural communication problems and to facilitate effective intercultural communication.

Your kind cooperation in filling out the following questions will be highly appreciated.

### Part1: Personal Information

Instructions:

Please fill in the correct information by making an x in front of the appropriate item or writing in the provided space.

1. Gender

.....Male

.....Female

2. Age

.....Below 20

.....20 – 30

.....31 – 40

.....Above 40

3. Nationality

.....British

.....Australian

.....American

.....New Zealander

.....Canadian

.....Other (please specify)

4. Position in organization

.....High Management Level

.....Middle Management Level

.....Operation Officer

.....Part Time Employee

5. Length of work experience in Thailand .....year(s) .....month(s)

6. Length of working for acEnglish (Thailand) .....year(s) .....month(s)

**Part 2: Intercultural Communication Problem**

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions in clear and concise statement with vivid example.

1. How often do you communicate verbally with Thai colleagues or Thai subordinates in the following situation?

a) Oral communication in a group setting

☐ Always      ☐ Often      ☐ Occasionally      ☐ rarely

b) One on one communication

☐ Always      ☐ Often      ☐ Occasionally      ☐ rarely

c) On telephone

☐ Always      ☐ Often      ☐ Occasionally      ☐ rarely

2. Have you ever experienced communication breakdown when dealing with Thai colleagues or Thai subordinates? (If yes, please give example)
3. How do you cope with these situation?
- ☐ Avoid communication
  - ☐ Try to describe clearly of what you are communicating
  - ☐ Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you think cultural differences can affect the communication between you and Thai Colleagues or Thai subordinate? (In what way, Please give vivid example)
5. "People from different culture can not communicate well with each other when they come to have a face to face interaction." How you feel after reading this sentence. Do you agree with this? (Please explain)



**Part 3: Solution for Intercultural Communication Problem**

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions in clear and concise statement with vivid example.

1. Please specify the practical solutions that you think they might diminish the intercultural communication problems between you and Thai colleagues in order to enhance mutual understanding.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THAI STAFF**

## Research Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to explore cultural influences on intercultural communication in this company in order to eliminate intercultural communication problems and to facilitate effective intercultural communication.

Your kind cooperation in filling out the following questions will be highly appreciated.

### Part1: Personal Information

Instructions:

Please fill in the correct information by making an x in front of the appropriate item or writing in the provided space.

1. Gender

.....Male

.....Female

2. Age

.....Below 20

.....20 – 30

.....31 – 40

.....Above 40

3. Position in organization

.....High Management Level

.....Middle Management Level

.....Operation Officer

.....Part Time Employee

4. Length of working for acIEnglish (Thailand)      .....year(s)      .....month(s)

## Part 2: Intercultural Communication Problems

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions in clear and concise statements with vivid examples.

1. How often do you communicate verbally with Western colleagues or Western employers in the following situation?

a) Oral communication in a group setting

☐ Always      ☐ Often      ☐ Occasionally      ☐ rarely

b) One on one communication

☐ Always      ☐ Often      ☐ Occasionally      ☐ rarely

c) On telephone

☐ Always      ☐ Often      ☐ Occasionally      ☐ rarely

2. Have you ever experienced communication breakdown when dealing with Western colleagues or Western employer? (If yes, please give vivid example)

3. How do you cope with this situation?

☐ Avoid communication

☐ Try to describe clearly of what you are communicating

☐ Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you think cultural differences can affect the communication between you and Western Colleagues? (In what way, Please give vivid example)

5. "People from different culture can not communicate well with each other when they come to have a face to face interaction." How you feel after reading this sentence. Do you agree with this? (Please explain)

6. Do you feel confident when approaching Western colleagues or superiors? (If yes, why. If not, why)

7. Please specify the Western cultures that might trouble you or make you feel uncomfortable when dealing with Western colleagues.

8. Do you think intercultural communication barriers can affect your work performance?

(If yes, in what way)

9. Please specify the effects of those intercultural communication problems on your daily work.

### **Part 3: Solution for Intercultural Communication Problems**

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions in clear and concise statement with vivid example.

1. Please specify the practical solutions that you think they might diminish the intercultural communication problems between you and Western colleagues in order to enhance mutual understanding.

## แบบสอบถาม

แบบสอบถามนี้จัดทำขึ้นเพื่อสำรวจอิทธิพลทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีผลต่อการติดต่อสื่อสารของพนักงานในบริษัท เพื่อให้รับทราบถึงปัญหาและเสนอแนะแนวทางแก้ไขปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นต่อไป ผู้วิจัยขอขอบคุณทุกท่านที่ให้ความร่วมมือในการตอบแบบสอบถามชุดนี้

### ส่วนที่ 1 : ข้อมูลส่วนตัว

โปรดใส่เครื่องหมาย x หรือเติมคำลงในข้อความที่ท่านเห็นว่าเหมาะสมกับท่านมากที่สุด

#### 1. เพศ

☐ ชาย

☐ หญิง

#### 2. อายุ

☐ น้อยกว่า 20 ปี

☐ 20-30 ปี

☐ 31-40 ปี

☐ 40 ปีขึ้นไป

#### 3. ตำแหน่งงานของท่าน

☐ ผู้บริหารระดับสูง

☐ ผู้บริหารระดับกลาง

☐ ระดับพนักงานปฏิบัติ

☐ พนักงานชั่วคราว

#### 4. อายุการทำงานที่บริษัท นี้ \_\_\_\_\_ ปี \_\_\_\_\_ เดือน

## ส่วนที่ 2 : ปัญหาในการติดต่อสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม

โปรดตอบคำถามโดยละเอียดพร้อมทั้งยกตัวอย่างประกอบ

1. ท่านคิดว่าท่านติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติบ่อยแค่ไหนในสถานการณ์ที่ถูกกำหนดไว้ดังต่อไปนี้

a) การติดต่อสื่อสารเป็นกลุ่ม

☐ บ่อยมาก      ☐ ค่อนข้างบ่อย      ☐ เป็นครั้งคราว      ☐ นาน ๆ ครั้ง

b) การติดต่อสื่อสารตัวต่อตัว

☐ บ่อยมาก      ☐ ค่อนข้างบ่อย      ☐ เป็นครั้งคราว      ☐ นาน ๆ ครั้ง

c) การติดต่อสื่อสารทางโทรศัพท์

☐ บ่อยมาก      ☐ ค่อนข้างบ่อย      ☐ เป็นครั้งคราว      ☐ นาน ๆ ครั้ง

2. ท่านเคยประสบปัญหากับการสื่อสารที่ไม่สัมฤทธิ์ผลเวลาท่านต้องติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติบ้างไหม? (ถ้าใช่, กรุณายกตัวอย่างประกอบคำอธิบาย)

3. เวลาที่ท่านประสบปัญหาดังที่กล่าวมาในข้อ 2 ท่านมีวิธีจัดการกับปัญหานั้นอย่างไร?

☐ หลีกเลี่ยงการติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ

☐ พยายามที่จะอธิบายสิ่งที่ท่านต้องการสื่อสารให้กับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติได้รับรู้

☐ อื่น ๆ (โปรดอธิบาย)

4. ท่านคิดว่าวัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างกันนั้นจะส่งผลต่อการติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติหรือไม่ (ในกรณีไหน โปรดอธิบายเพิ่มเติม)

5. ท่านรู้สึกอย่างไรกับข้อความดังกล่าวต่อไปนี้ที่ว่า "บุคคลที่มาจากต่างวัฒนธรรมกันนั้นเมื่อจำเป็นที่จะต้องมาติดต่อสื่อสารกัน จะไม่สามารถติดต่อสื่อสารกันได้ดี" ท่านรู้สึกเห็นด้วยหรือไม่ (โปรดอธิบาย)

6. ท่านรู้สึกมั่นใจหรือไม่เวลาที่จะต้องติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ (โปรดอธิบาย)

7. กรุณาเขียนความแตกต่างของวัฒนธรรมตะวันตกที่ท่านคิดว่าอาจส่งผลกระทบต่อท่านเวลาติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ

8. ท่านคิดว่าปัญหาที่เกิดจากการติดต่อสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาตินั้น ส่งผลกระทบต่อการทำงานของท่านหรือไม่ (โปรดอธิบาย)

9. กรุณาเขียนถึงผลกระทบที่เกิดจากปัญหาการติดต่อทางวัฒนธรรมที่ท่านคิดว่าอาจส่งผลกระทบต่อการทำงานในบริษัทฯ ของท่าน

ส่วนที่ 3 : แนวทางในการแก้ไขปัญหาที่เกิดจากการติดต่อสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม

กรุณาตอบคำถามโดยละเอียดพร้อมทั้งยกตัวอย่างประกอบ

1. มีวิธีใดบ้างที่ท่านคิดว่าจะสามารถช่วยลดปัญหาการติดต่อสื่อสารระหว่างพนักงานชาวไทยกับพนักงานชาวต่างชาติอื่นจะส่งผลให้เกิดความเข้าใจอันดีต่อกัน

VITAE

## **VITAE**

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### **Educational Background:**

|      |                                                                                                     |
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| 1996 | Certificate of Secondary school (English and French)<br>Khema Siri Memorial School                  |
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A STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF  
CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF acEnglish (Thailand)

AN ABSTRACT

BY

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Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication  
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March 2006

Ornvimon Noreewong. (2006). A Study of Intercultural Communication: A Case Study of Cultural Influences of aclEnglish(Thailand), Co; Ltd. Master's Project, M.A. (Business English for International Communication). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Project Advisor. Asst. Prof. Dr. Amporn Srisermbhok

The purpose of this study was to investigate the intercultural communication problems between Thai staff and Western expatriates and also provide some insight into how cultural differences can affect the communication between them. In addition, this study also examined the practical solution for the problems. aclEnglish (Thailand) was explored as a case study for this research. An in-depth face-to-face interview with questionnaires for 27 personnel working for aclEnglish (Thailand), 12 Thai staff and 15 Western expatriates, were administered and analyzed qualitatively and descriptively according to the research questions.

The results of the study revealed that the most distinctive communication problem at aclEnglish (Thailand) was the misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents. While the rest were the communication breakdowns due to various English accents, the use of difficult idiom and slang and the cultural barriers. Moreover, it was apparent that cultural differences could be an important barrier for successful communication at aclEnglish (Thailand). The result also pointed out that 70% of the staff at aclEnglish (Thailand) agreed that intercultural communication problems could affect their work performance or their working life in many ways as following:

1. No progress of the assigned work
2. More time consuming to finish one task
3. Personal resentment
4. The increasing turnover's rate

For the solution of the intercultural communication problems at acEnglish (Thailand), the result revealed that being aware when communicating with each other, developing empathy and patient were the most influence way to develop intercultural competent for both group.

การศึกษาการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม: กรณีศึกษาอิทธิพลทางวัฒนธรรมในบริษัท เอเชียแอล  
อิงลิช (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด

บทคัดย่อ  
ของ  
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มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ. อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาสารนิพนธ์: ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.

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การศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจปัญหาการติดต่อสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมระหว่างพนักงานชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศ ที่ทำงานในบริษัทต่างชาติซึ่งดำเนินกิจการในประเทศไทย โดยการศึกษาในครั้งนี้เน้นให้เห็นถึงปัญหาการติดต่อสื่อสารที่เกิดขึ้นเนื่องจากความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม รวมทั้งผลกระทบของปัญหาและวิธีการแก้ไขปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้น การศึกษาในครั้งนี้เป็นการศึกษาแบบเฉพาะกลุ่ม โดยนำเสนอผ่านกรณีศึกษาของบริษัท เอซีแอล อิงลิช (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด โดยการสัมภาษณ์แบบเจาะลึกตัวต่อตัวกับพนักงานที่ทำงานในบริษัทฯ นี้ รวมทั้งสิ้น 27 ราย โดยแบ่งเป็นพนักงานชาวไทยจำนวน 12 ราย และพนักงานชาวต่างประเทศจำนวน 15 ราย ข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ที่ได้รับถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์ ในเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงพรรณนา เพื่อตอบคำถามของการวิจัยในครั้งนี้

จากผลของการศึกษาวิจัยพบว่าปัญหาของการติดต่อสื่อสารระหว่างพนักงานชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศที่ทำงานในบริษัท เอซีแอล อิงลิช (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด ที่เห็นได้เด่นชัดที่สุดคือการตีความหมายของถ้อยคำและเนื้อหาผิด นอกจากนั้นก็เป็นปัญหาการติดต่อสื่อสารที่มีสาเหตุมาจากความหลากหลายของการใช้สำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษ การใช้สำนวนและคำสแลงที่ไม่คุ้นเคย และปัญหาความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งจากการศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าปัญหาความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมนั้น เป็นตัวแปรที่สำคัญที่สุดที่ก่อให้เกิดการสื่อสารที่ไม่สัมฤทธิ์ผลในบริษัท เอซีแอล

อิงลิช (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด นอกจากนั้น จากการศึกษาวิจัยยังพบว่า 70% ของผู้ให้สัมภาษณ์ชี้ว่า ปัญหาการติดต่อสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมระหว่างพนักงานชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศที่เกิดขึ้นนี้ ส่งผลกระทบต่อการทำงานดังเช่น

1. ทำให้งานที่ได้รับมอบหมายไม่คืบหน้า
2. สิ้นเปลืองเวลามากขึ้น ในการทำงานแต่ละชิ้นให้สำเร็จลุล่วง
3. เกิดปัญหาขัดแย้งระหว่างบุคคล อันเนื่องมาจากความไม่เข้าใจซึ่งกันและกัน
4. อัตราการโยกย้ายงานที่เพิ่มสูงขึ้น

จากการสำรวจพบว่าวิธีการแก้ไขปัญหาการติดต่อสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมระหว่างพนักงานชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศนั้นคือ การที่ทั้งสองฝ่ายตระหนักถึงปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นและต้องการให้การติดต่อสื่อสารระหว่างกันนั้นมีประสิทธิภาพและบรรลุจุดมุ่งหมายที่วางไว้ รวมทั้งพัฒนาความเข้าใจ ยอมรับในความแตกต่างของแต่ละฝ่าย อีกทั้งอดทนต่อปัญหาเล็ก ๆ น้อย ๆ ที่เกิดจากความเข้าใจผิด ที่กล่าวมาแล้วนั้นล้วนเป็นปัจจัยที่ส่งผลให้การสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมนั้นมีประสิทธิภาพและประสบผลสำเร็จ