INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS OF FOREIGN TEACHERS WITH THAI TEACHERS AT SAINT GABRIEL’S COLLEGE

Sornchai Yolai¹
Raveevan Wanchid²

Abstract

The purposes of this study were 1) To find out communication problems foreign teachers faced when communicating with Thai teachers. 2) To investigate communication problems Thai teachers faced when communicating with foreign teachers. 3) To compare the differences between foreign teachers and Thai teachers of communication problems. This survey research employed questionnaires and interviews. The samples consisted of 40 foreign teachers and 40 Thai teachers teaching in the Intensive English at Saint Gabriel’s College in the second semester of academic year 2016. The statistical procedures employed to analyze the data were percentage, mean, standard deviation and Independent Sample t-test through SPSS program. The results showed that: 1) The foreign teachers revealed that the dominant problem in communicating with Thai teachers was language problem. 2) The Thai teachers revealed that the main communication problem in communicating with foreign teachers was high anxiety and stress. 3) To compare the differences between foreign teachers and Thai teachers of communication problems in the classroom, the results revealed that language problem and high anxiety and stress were significantly different at the level of 0.05.

Keywords: Communication Problems; Intercultural Communication; Communication Strategies

¹ Student in Master of Arts, English for Business and Industry Communication Program, King Mongkut’s of University Technology North Bangkok, Thailand, E-mail: namo.sorn@gmail.com
² Assistant Professor, Ph.D, Department of Languages, King Mongkut’s of University Technology North Bangkok, Thailand, E-mail: rwanchid@hotmail.com
Background of the Study

According to Scott (2002), to exchange information, we need an effective use of language for communication because we were born in the society that shares somewhat a similar view of the world today to other people who perceive the world differently from us. According to Mbugua (2007:40), people from different places have a set of various backgrounds and attitudes. Learning and understanding people from other cultures play the most important role for human beings in the present time. While people from different bring beliefs and cultures at the same time, they have to their own culture from their own surrounding cultures, experiences, and religions that they believe or face in their birthplace where they are similar to. Intercultural communication plays an important role in connecting with other people in order to exchange culture of each other. At the end, communication will be enjoyable and beneficial to all. The importance of effective intercultural communication is to learn and understand other cultures and backgrounds to make a relationship between us and the speaker whom we are talking with or conversing to. It is necessary to understand human reality. Saint Gabriel's College, founded by the Brothers of Saint Gabriel in 1920, is a private Catholic boy school located in Bangkok and provides education for students from grade 1 through grade 12 (K–12). The school is known for its Intensive English Program which is widely accepted throughout the country. Foreign teachers are sought after as teachers in English program. Therefore, the number of foreign teachers at Saint Gabriel's College has increased steadily over the past few years as reported by academic statistics on February 3rd, 2014. The foreign teachers are from a lot of countries and speak different languages with Thai teachers and it will cause problems. In other words, communication problems can occur in the classroom with Thai teachers. When the foreign teachers try to clarify some things in the classroom, Thai teachers will just ignore them. One of the communication problems of foreign teachers is that they feel anxious in communicating with Thai teachers when they ignore to answer the questions in a real situation in the classroom. Hopefully, the results of the study will help the foreign teachers overcome and handle with communication problems in the classroom at Saint Gabriel's College.
Objectives

The objectives of the present research were:

1. To find out communication problems foreign teachers faced when communicating with Thai teachers in the classroom.
2. To investigate communication problems Thai teachers faced when communicating with foreign teachers in the classroom.
3. To compare the differences between foreign teachers and Thai teachers in terms of communication problems in the classroom.

Research Questions

1. What communication problems do foreign teachers experience when communicating with Thai teachers in the classroom?
2. What communication problems do Thai teachers experience when communicating with foreign teachers in the classroom?
3. Are there any differences between foreign teachers and Thai teachers in terms of communication problems in the classroom?

Literature Review

Communication problems take place between the communication processes and have the potential to create misunderstanding and confusion. In communication problems, people are from two different countries with different cultures, custom, thoughts and languages. This would make a communication more difficult to achieve. A’ayid (2004) concluded that the most severe obstacles which precluded the efficiency of administrative communication were the weak communication channels among the colleges and external parties; adoption of vertical communicative process rather than the horizontal one. The study recommended the conduction of development courses for the chiefs. According to Solomon and Lou (2005), there are differences in perception and viewpoint such as hearing problems or speech difficulties as physical barriers to non-verbal communication and general body language can make communication less effective such as language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping. People often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions and cultural differences.
Research Hypothesis

Communication problems between foreign teachers and Thai teachers are significantly different at the level of 0.05.

Scope of the Study

1. Participants

The population consisted of 50 foreign teachers and 50 Thai teachers teaching in the Intensive English at Saint Gabriel’s College in the second semester academic year 2016. The samples were chosen by using random sampling technique of 40 foreign teachers and 40 Thai teachers.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Method

This study used a combination of depth interview and a survey research. Questionnaires and interview questions were used as research tools to collect data. Interview questions were one on one.

2.2 Measurement

The questionnaires were check-list and rating scale adapted from the research paper of Yossinee Tontanavetchakul. The interview questions were 1) When you are faced with communication problems, what do you solve these problems? 2) When you encounter cultural barrier, how do you cope with it? 3) When you experience language barriers, how do you handle these problems? 4) When you are confronted with misinterpretations of non-verbal communication, how do you face these problems? 5) When you feel anxious and stressed, how do you deal with it? The list of questions for foreign teachers was their communication problems with the Thai teachers at Saint Gabriel’s. The similar set of questions was also used for the Thai teachers. College and open-ended questions also based on the variety of previous related researches and journals. Intercultural communication problems of foreign teacher covered four aspects including cultural problems, language problems, misinterpretations of non-verbal communication and high anxiety and stress.

The 5-point Likert scales ranging from strong agree to strongly disagree were used. Answers were interpreted as followings.

Mean 4.21 - 5.00 strongly agree
Mean 3.41 - 4.20 agree
Mean 2.61 - 3.40 neutral
Mean 1.81 - 2.60 disagree
Mean 1.00 - 1.80 strongly disagree
2.3 Data Collection

The data was collected from November 1, 2016 to January 31, 2017. A survey was taken place in the I.E. classroom at Saint Gabriel's College. Participants were interviewed and collected in the classroom and outside the classroom.

2.4 Data Analyses

The data from the first and the second question were analyzed by percentage, mean and standard deviation. The data from the third question were analyzed by percentage, mean and standard deviation and Independent Sample t-test. The interview questions were interpreted by content analysis.

Results of the research

The results of the first question of the research indicated that language problems were the first problem of foreign teachers with Thai teachers.

The findings of the first question of the research revealed that the dominant problem of Thai teachers was high anxiety and stress.

The results of the first question of the research revealed that language problem and high anxiety and Stress were significantly different at the level of 0.05.

Table 1 Results of Communication Problems Faced by Foreign Teachers in terms of Four Aspects of Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Problems</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Level of Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Problems</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Problems</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinterpretations of Non-Verbal</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Anxiety and Stress</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the first research objective, the results from the questionnaire were reported by four main communication problems as illustrated in Table 1. The data analyses reveal that the main problem foreign teachers faced when communicating with Thai teachers was language problem. The mean was 3.48 and S.D. was at 0.54.
Table 2 Results of Communication Problems Faced by Thai Teachers in terms of Four Aspects of Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Problems</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Level of Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Problems</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Problems</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinterpretations of Non-Verbal</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Anxiety and Stress</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the second research objective, the results from the questionnaire were reported by four main communication problems as illustrated in Table 2. The data analyses reveal that the dominant problem of Thai teachers in communicating with foreign teachers was high anxiety and stress. The mean was 3.73 and S.D. was at 0.69.

Table 3 Comparison of Communication Problems between Foreign Teachers and Thai Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Communication Problems</th>
<th>N=40 (FTs)1</th>
<th>Level of Opinion</th>
<th>N=40 (TTs)2</th>
<th>Level of Opinion</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cultural Problem</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Language Problem</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Misinterpretations of Non-Verbal</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High Anxiety and Stress</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the third research objective, the results from the questionnaire were reported by four main communication problems as illustrated in Table 3. Language problems and high anxiety and stress were significantly different at the level of .05.

Discussion of the results

1. Communication Problems Faced by the Foreign Teachers When Communicating with the Thai Teachers

The results indicated that language problem was the first problem of foreign teachers faced when communicating with Thai teachers. As it was mentioned by Imberti (2007), language is the key to a person's self-identity. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories, and convey complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest mediator that allows us to relate and understand each other. It can be defined as a system of conceptual symbols that allows us to communicate. It also provides us with a significant frame of reference and a relational context that sustains our identities. The social identity theory focuses on the understanding of psychological processes driving intergroup discrimination. This finding is similar to Anna S. Mattila (2005), the issue of language barriers is particularly critical during intercultural service encounters for ESL (English as a Second Language) customers. Customers may struggle to communicate what they want or even get necessary information regarding products or services. Through a qualitative study, based on a grounded theory approach, this study identifies issues that concern ESL customers in intercultural service encounters. The findings suggest that the language barrier generates negative emotional and cognitive responses, and prevents ESL customers from taking certain actions such as seeking necessary information or complaining about service failures.

2. Communication Problems Faced by the Thai Teachers When Communicating with the Foreign Teachers

The findings revealed that the dominant problem that they commonly encountered as communication problems with the Thai teachers was high anxiety and stress when communicating with foreign teachers. This finding was supported by the study of Sriring (2005) explained that there were varieties of significant problems as follows. Lack of assertiveness of Thai people when dealing with western colleagues was the main problem of the study. Thai people were not assertive, especially when wishing to oppose the ideas of their western colleagues. In spite of being able to express themselves, they never expressed their viewpoints.Moreover, inefficient English language skill is the second major problem. Though Thai people had English proficiency, they were still not confident that their western counterparts could understand what they had spoken in English. This finding was supported by the study of Plawong (2003: 30) that when people are anxious because of not knowing what they are expected to do, it is only natural to focus on that feeling and not be totally present in the communication transaction.
3. Comparison of Communication Problems between the Foreign and the Thai Teachers

This finding was supported by the study of Shippey (2005), language barriers are the most common communication barriers which cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people. Most of the people in the world do not speak English or, even if they use, it is their second or third language. If the speaker and receiver do not use same language and words, there is no meaning to the communication. Not using the words that other person understands makes the communication ineffective and prevents message from being conveyed. It is notable that the finding mentioned above was similar to Sripywan (2006) showed that as a result of having a high average score on the English proficiency test, as well as self-rating as professional during work in terms of English language usage, the majority of the respondents strongly agree that they have no confidence in communicating with people from other countries, they do not avoid interacting with them, as well as not withdrawing themselves from communicating to them.

Limitations

The participants of foreign teachers and Thai teachers will be selected by random sampling technique. Therefore, the results of the study may not be generalizable beyond this group

Implications and Suggestions

The findings from the present study will be useful to organize a plan for developing communication skills for foreign teachers at Saint Gabriel’s College.

1. The results can be useful in helping foreign teachers to be trained through a course about culture, language and style of communications.

2. The outcome can be helpful for everyone who wants to find a source of information about communication problems for future business.

On the basis of these findings, we recommend that future research could be conducted with emphasis on more participants from different resources in order to find out more evidence on the study purpose.

1. The future research could be conducted on comparison of communication problems of foreign teachers with Thai teachers with different schools on a larger sample size.

2. All of the participants of the research are only at Saint Gabriel’s College. Therefore, all of the participants should be different schools.

3. The future study should conduct the research about communication problems of foreign teachers in public schools in Bangkok.
References