

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

English is considered one of the most important languages used internationally in the modern world. Over 800 million people speak English, with 400 of English native speakers and another four hundred million adopt it as their second language (Charles Barber, 1993, p. 236). Due to the huge number of English language speakers in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and some Asian countries e.g. India, Singapore, Philippines, and Hong Kong that adopt English as their second language, English has gained more popularity and has become an official language used internationally in global business communication.

The diffusion of English language started when the British began trading with other countries as well as the conquest over its colonization in Asia, Caribbean, and South Africa. During the period of seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, the British settlement in the land presently known as America made English even more worldwide because of the significant increment of population and a massive immigration to that country (Charles Barber, 1993, p. 236). Nowadays, besides Chinese and Hindi, English is the language that is spoken the most in the world (Wikipedia, 2002). This includes the way it is spoken or written in newspapers, academic publications, online resources and broadcasting.

In Thailand, though the country doesn't officially consider English a second language, English is taught as a compulsory subject for young students starting from the first year in primary school according to the Eighth National Educational Development Plan (1997 – 2001). In addition, the use of English has been implemented widely in the country's business section either in government organizations itself as well as international organizations.

The British Council is an international educational and cultural organization from the United Kingdom which provides support people in 218 partner countries through education opportunity. In Thailand, British Council was established in 1938 and was first located in the British Embassy. Later in 1952, the head office was relocated to its new location in Siam Square and another 2 English Language Centre in Bangkok, Lad Phrao and Pinklao and a rural office in Chiang Mai were established. For many years, British Council has taken part in a number of educational activities e.g. English Language Teaching centre for Thai students and Thai English teachers, Education UK activities, Scholarship, science project and competition, people networking and the United Kingdom tourist information.

Though British Council is managed by expatriates, there is also a demand for Thais with English language communication skills working as locally appointed staff in different sections of the organization e.g. Education UK department, Science project department and Customer Service department to support English Language Centre (ELC). The main responsibility of local appointed staff is to support expatriates in different circumstances and situations depending on the policy of the organization. The workplace, the use of English language is compulsory when writing reports, sending emails, and participating meetings.

This study aimed to reveal the attitude of Thai Customer Relations officers, Customer Service department towards the use of English language at workplace. Customer Service department is one of the crucial parts of English Language Centre, the main services of which are:

- (1) To provide efficient information of English Language Centre to customers, either face to face or phone service
- (2) To provide efficient information about Education in the UK e.g. university profiles, courses, and other necessary details to customers

- (3) Work with English teachers to provide support in classrooms and produce teaching materials
- (4) To provide support and satisfactory service to customers at British Council annual events

Customer Relations officers use both Thai and English language with customers as British Council customers come from different backgrounds. However, the printed publication and online resources containing related information are all written in English. As a result, the ability to understand English for Thai customer relations officers is important and affects their individual working standard.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Based on the British Council customer service standard in providing satisfactory service and support efficient information to customers, Customer Relations officers are expected to have a strong English language ability when communicate with non Thai customers and native English teachers.

Though English language testing is a compulsory element in the recruitment process, miscommunication due to the ability in using English occurs when facing complex situations. Within four English language competencies, writing, reading, listening and speaking, customer relations officers could evaluate which are their strong skills and take action to improve their weaker skills themselves as part of self improvement.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1.3.1 To investigate attitudes towards the use of English language at the workplace of Customer Relations officers, the British Council (Thailand, Bangkok)

1.3.2 To use the result to encourage Customer Relations officers to improve their English language skills e.g. apply for supplementary courses at English Language centres or personal training

1.3.3 The result would be of interest of the English Language Centre as a reference when creating new professional courses for business communication

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions of terms in this study are as follows:

Customer Relations Officer refers to Thai Customer Relations Officer working at three centers of the British Council, Bangkok, Thailand.

Attitude refers to self-evaluation of each customer relations officer towards the use of English language at work.

Communicative competencies refer to the abilities to communicate ideas or message concerned both spoken and written language.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focused on attitudes towards the use of English language at the workplace of 30 Customer Relations Officers of the British Council, Bangkok, in three centres, Siam Square, Lad Phrao and Pinklao. A Questionnaire on English language competencies, based on attitudinal scale, Likert scale, was used to reveal Customer Relations officers' attitudes.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 The study showed Customer Relations Officers' attitude of the use of English language at workplace and also the skills that they think might be improved

1.6.2 The results will be one of the 'job plans' in their performance evaluation which draw attentions to individual self-improvement

1.6.3 The results of the study might be helpful in increasing the standard of the Customer Service department and increase of customer satisfaction

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One focuses on background of English language, statement of problem, objectives of the study, definitions of terms, and significance of the study.

Chapter Two consists of relevant of literature.

Chapter Three comprises a description of methodology, subjects of the study, and data collection process.

Chapter Four describes the findings of the study

Chapter Five presents the conclusion and discussion of the study