

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the relationship between tense choices and the three main persuasive modes suggested by Aristotle in CEO letters taken from the annual reports of some of the world top-ranked multinationals. This chapter contains rationale and background, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, definitions of terms, and significance of the study.

1. Rationale and Background

When it comes to modern communication, English has become an international language (Holt, 2001). The role of English in Thailand is quite important, as it is in many other developing countries (Wiriyachitra, 2011). It has been taught in Thailand for some time, and when trading became international, there was a demand for business English courses as a tool to survive in economic competition with other countries (Wiriyachitra, 2006). It is the medium for communication among nations. The global and regional economy and investment are discussed in a large number of international economic organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the European Union (EU) and the ASEAN free trade Area (AFTA) (Chakorn, 2008). However, according to the TOEFL score data summary reported by Educational Testing Service, 2009, Thais still have low English proficiency compared to many other Asian countries such as China, Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia. This has led to studies on Thai students' English proficiency.

While evaluating English proficiency of Thai students, Tawilapakul (2003) found that verb tenses are difficult for Thai students. To illustrate, even though the tenses were introduced to Thai students at the beginning of their English education, they seem to have repeated difficulties using tenses (Baker, 2002). In addition, many Thai researchers conducted error analyses of the compositions and translations

produced by Thai learners and found that *tense misuse* is the top-ranked error. The subjects of those studies often used other tenses instead of the most appropriate tenses (Chownahe, 2000; Boonyavanich, 2002; Ayurawatana, 2002; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007).

According to some of those error analyses, the main factor of the difficulty is the language transfer in terms of time marking. To illustrate, whereas time marking in English is overt and clearly reflected by verb groups, time marking in Thai is optional (Kanchanawan, 1978; Chaiyaratana, 1961). However, there is not always correlation between time and tense because tense does not only indicate time but also is related to other purposes (Jespersen, 1931 quoted in Noochoochai, 1978).

Realizing the relationship between tenses and purposes, the researcher has studied *Tense Usage in Academic Writing in the Humanities*, a research study by Taylor (2001). In the part of contextual analysis, Taylor aimed to identify factors that affect tense choice. He concluded that the tense choices were associated with the rhetorical functions. Similarly, in the study on *Tense Occurrence in Economic and Business Journalistic Articles Compared to General-Topic Ones*, Martinez (2010) suggests that rhetorical function influences the choice. However, both of them warn that it is incorrect to state that a piece of written discourse can be identified with a specific rhetorical function (Taylor, 2001; Martinez, 2010).

To succeed in any language learning, learners must learn grammar along with improving skills because grammar can be regarded as the skeleton of a language; it is the basis of the four skills (Sugiharto, 2010; Uchibori, Chujo, & Hasegawa, 2006). Formal grammar instruction has been considered essential to writing skill improvement as a writer transfers his or her ideas and feeling only through the words. Grammatical errors lead to the reader's misinterpretation and negative image of the writer. For example, grammatical errors in a report written by a company executive can make English-speaking managers and investors unimpressed and affect their opinions of the executive. To sum up, with grammatical errors, a writer cannot effectively and precisely convey the message, their opinions and their intentions through the writing (Earle & Zimmermann, 2003; Hudson, 2001; Chandrasegaran & Schaetzel, 2004).

In terms of business English, there are many types of written texts such as business letters, memos, business plans, and annual reports (Robinson, 1991 cited in Veerachaisantikul, 2007). An annual report is considered one of marketing tools since the document presents organization's identity. Through an annual report, a company illustrates its performance and publishes a perspective on its future performance. Shareholders and investors review it to assess the company's progress and to discover the company's profitability, standards and the management team performance. One of the purposes of reading annual reports is to make decisions on investment. However, it is suggested that investors not only consider the content, but also the attitudes and intentions of chief executive officers (Brown, 1999). The attitudes and intentions are usually presented in CEO letters. That is to say, CEO letters are a crucial element of annual reports which should be more closely examined (Amernic, Craig & Tourish, 2010).

The CEO letter is usually presented at the beginning of annual reports. It is written, authorized and signed to show the legal responsibility by Senior leaders, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), President or Chairman of the Board of Directors, or staff members who participate pro-actively in their composition on the main purpose to help the readers make decision to invest or keep on investing in the company. Undoubtedly, because of the main purpose to persuade readers to invest in the company, the art of persuasion is clearly found in CEO letters (Chakorn, 2008; Hyland, 1998; Zhu, 2000).

Realizing the importance of persuasion in business context, some researchers have studied persuasive discourse by using the Greek framework of western rhetoric; the Concept of Persuasive Rhetoric as structured by Aristotle: *Ethos* (convincing by moral competence); *Logos* (argument from reason) and; *Pathos* (emotional appeals) (Hyland, 1998; Zhu, 2000). Following the Aristotelian Concept of Persuasive Rhetoric, Chakorn (2008) analyzed these three modes of persuasion in 54 Thai CEO letters. Her study shows that Aristotle's rhetoric is an important part of CEO letters.

However, those studies do not investigate any relationship between the three persuasive modes and any grammatical structures. Therefore, the researcher feels there should be more rhetorical grammatical analyses on the relationship between the

three modes of persuasion and grammatical structures. This idea can be supported by the advantages of rhetorical grammar approach presented below.

In rhetorical grammar approach, the communicators' need of language use is focused on. The students are led to consider what they truly are trying to express (Pecora, 2011). In addition, the rhetorical grammar approach offers a more meaningful way to address grammar issues with students; the students tend to realize the true usefulness of those grammar issues (Pecora, 2011). In support of this idea, Vavra, (cited in Pecora 2011) suggested that as students grasp the principles of how the mind processes language and connects these principles to the grammatical constructions in their own writing, they will understand the benefits of applying grammatical principles in writing and feel motivated to produce grammatically correct writing.

Realizing the serious problem of improper tense choice in Thai learners (Chownahe, 2000; Boonyavanich, 2002; Ayurawatana, 2002; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007), and the advantage of rhetorical grammatical analyses and rhetorical grammar teaching (Pecora, 2011; Vavra: cited in Pecora 2011), the researcher believes that the analysis of grammatical points, especially tense choice, is necessary in relation to the rhetorical functions, with the hope that the result might lead to more meaningful tense teaching and learning. Therefore, the learners will be able to make tense choice meaningfully and with more confidence knowing exactly what they are going to use the tenses for. To illustrate, when knowing exactly what they are going to use the tenses for in terms of persuasion, learners may make tense choice purposively; therefore, they make tense choice more confidently and meaningfully. Consequently, they will be able to use tense not only correctly but also appropriately. Besides focusing on time reference and tense choice, the relationship between rhetorical functions and tense choice can not be neglected because of the importance of rhetorical grammatical approach mentioned above. Moreover, rhetorical grammar can help students attain learning outcome goals, such as developing critical thinking skills, and rhetorical skills (Pecora, 2011).

To sum up, considering the influence of readers' emotion on success of business persuasion, the important role of CEO letters to maintain stockholders' and investor's confidence in a company (Jameson, 2000), the obvious persuasive rhetoric

in CEO letters according to Chakorn (2008), the relevance of grammar and rhetorical function in persuasive writing (Chandrasegaran & Schaetzel, 2004), the benefits of rhetorical grammatical approach especially in terms of writing according to Pecora (2011), the dependence of tense choice on rhetorical function (Taylor, 2001; Martinez, 2010), and the serious problem of tense use in Thai learners (Chownahe, 2000; Boonyavanich, 2002; Ayurawatana, 2002; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007), the researcher assumes that the use of tenses in relation to the rhetorical functions in CEO letters deserves more consideration.

With this interest, the researcher has explored the previous studies in the area, especially the analysis by Chakorn, 2008. Noticing the content of CEO letters, which has already been categorized into the three modes of persuasion by Aristotle (*Logos* - argument from reason; *Ethos* - convincing by moral competence; and *Pathos* - emotional appeals), the researcher has found the distinction of frequency of specific tenses in each mode. For instance, it can be seen that past simple tense is likely to exist in *Logos*, present perfect tense in *Ethos*, and future aspect with the modal *will* in *Pathos*. However, Chakorn's study doesn't focus on the grammatical analysis. The unproved finding of tense distinction in each mode leads to the question of whether the three modes of persuasion exactly influence tense choices. If so, how the phenomenon is explained.

2. Objectives of the Study

- 2.1 To identify the tenses used in the persuasive modes, *Ethos*, *Logos* and *Pathos*
- 2.2 To investigate the relationship between the persuasive modes and tense choices, and to explain the phenomenon.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1 What are the tense choices for the persuasive modes: *Ethos*, *Logos* and *Pathos*?
- 3.2 How do the basic meanings and uses of tense as defined in general English support the persuasive modes?

4. Scope of the Study

4.1 The data of this study are CEO letters in annual reports of the year 2009 of the world's top-ranked multinationals according to the list in Appendix D.

4.2 The study focuses on the tense use in terms of only persuasive rhetoric (*Ethos, Pathos* and *Logos*).

4.3 In the contextual analysis, the researcher will only describe the occurrence of tense choice in *Ethos, Pathos, and Logos*, and offer interpretations, answering the questions how the conventional use of tenses in general English support the rhetorical functions in CEO letters.

5. Definitions of Terms

5.1 Aristotle's rhetoric: the art of persuasion, which includes three main modes, *Ethos, Logos* and *Pathos*, as introduced by Aristotle in ancient Greece

5.2 *Ethos*: the way of persuasion by the credibility of the writer

5.3 *Logos*: the way of persuasion by the use of reasoning, fact, statistics and values

5.4 *Pathos*: the way of persuasion by arousing the readers' emotion

5.5 CEO letters: the letters written by senior leaders, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), presidents or Chairmen of the Board of Directors, or staff members who participate pro-actively in their composition to shareholders, investors and employees with the main purpose of persuading the readers

6. Significance of the Study

As mentioned earlier, Thai students have a problem of tense misuse (Chownahe, 2000; Boonyavanich, 2002; Ayurawatana, 2002; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007). This reflects on the insufficiency of the effectiveness of tense teaching and learning. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the tense teaching.

Because of the fact that the rhetorical grammar approach offers a more meaningful way to grammar teaching in which the students are able to realize the truly usefulness of those grammatical points, they are learning and feel more motivated to produce grammatically correct structures (Pecora, 2011; Vavra, cited in Pecora, 2011), the goal of this study is to give recommendations on tense teaching

and learning based on the rhetorical grammar approach, in addition to conventional tense teaching and learning. Hopefully, the results of this study and its recommendations will be used to come up with a way to solve the problems of tense usage in Thai learners.

The results will be new findings, which could be useful to teachers or course designers when they design a course to meet the needs of learners in terms of using language for persuasion. In other words, teachers could use these results in order to improve their teaching of tense use in the classroom.

Moreover, the recommendations will encourage English grammar text producers to focus more on tense teaching and learning in relation to persuasive functions.

