

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

English plays a significant role in Thai society. It is a major foreign language in Thailand, and it has been taught in educational institutes for many decades. Arunee Wiriyachitra (2001) discussed issues of EFL teaching in Thailand and pointed out the roles of English in Thailand: with adoption of new technology and internet that influences the transitions of business, education, science, and technology progress, and the association between foreign and Thai business companies, proficiency in English is demanded for communication purposes.

However, it seems that Thai learners still have not achieved highly in learning English because they have encountered many difficulties. One major source of difficulties comes from the particular features of English that Thai does not possess. Smyth (2000) pinpointed major differences between Thai and English such as the phonological systems, orthography and punctuation and grammar.

Matawan Supanakorn (2005) claimed on the domain of English grammar one major difficulty Thai learners have encountered is of English subject-verb agreement, an important feature of English grammar. In English sentences, the main verbs and auxiliaries carry tenses and/or agreement of number and person being accordant with the subjects. On the other hand, Thai is a non-inflected language; the base forms are only string linearly without any inflections (Pinthip Tuaychareon, 2002). Owing to not having the agreement markers in Thai, subject-verb agreement is not familiar to Thai learners, so that it is a difficult aspect for them (Pornsiri Singhapreecha as cited in Matawan Supanakorn, 2005, p. 1). So it is indicated that many Thai learners use unmarked form of the verbs for English have been the way they do in their own language (Smyth, 2000).

Many studies have been carried out to investigate Thai learners' problems with English subject-verb agreement. Matawan Supanakorn (2005) found the most common of errors of Thai learners in present simple sentence is that they mostly 'mismatch [of] do

and does,' using incorrect subject-verb agreement forms. Sieng Chadesiripong (1989) identified that in forming present simple yes/no questions and negatives, Thai learners commonly use 'does' with plural verb forms. This type of error is not only made by Thai learners, the second language learners, but it is also made by young English speaking children in their developmental stages (Hattori, 2003). These type of errors are called 'doubling errors.'

Then we review Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis: CAH can explain the cause of the errors made by Thai learners in present simple yes/no question and negative. In this view, the learners will have difficulty if there are differences between their first language and the target language, and errors result from transference of the first language to the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Nevertheless, the interpretations of CAH by researchers have been rejected because CAH could not predict all errors made by second language learners, and due to the fact that behaviorist views of language acquisition were rejected, the contrastive analysis that is closely related to this view was rejected as a result (p. 85). Then another view that can be elucidated suggesting the cause of the errors is interlanguage which Selinker defined as 'learners' developing second language knowledge.' Many researchers claim that second language learners also pass through particular developmental sequences, and the first language can affect the developmental sequence for question and negation of second language learners (pp. 76-79). Thus, errors can occur in the stage of development.

This study was conducted to prove if the Chomskian technique for teaching the present yes/no question and negative by applying syntactic knowledge is effective in improving students' comprehension and production compared to the conventional technique and to find which technique can be best help to reduce the common errors made in forming present yes/no questions and negatives in a greater amount.

In the Chomskian technique, the syntactic knowledge is applied in teaching and in learning. Transformation rules: Do-Insertion and "Subject-Auxiliary Inversion (SAI)" were held in the operation. Using the Chomskian teaching technique aimed to make the students realize the correct subject-agreement form of 'do' by having them see the

processes of insertion of verb 'do' and inversion of subject and operation. Thus, it would help Thai students overcome language difficulties on subject-verb agreement. On the other hand, in the conventional technique, Thai learners are exposed to the use of 'do-support' and 'infinitive verb'. Some research suggests this technique would not be effective enough to help improve Thai learners' comprehension and production in this area so that Thai learners would still make errors. This study was aimed to prove this also.

Furthermore, this study was also conducted to examine the acquisitions of English subject-verb agreement used in present simple yes/no questions and negatives. The acquisitions were examined by being addressed on the domain of comprehension and production to seek for patterns of relationship between language comprehension and production since it is a controversial and inconclusive issue among many researchers and practitioners of second language.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Yes/No questions and negatives in English are very important structures for ESL/ EFL students. They are used to request specific facts and to reject or deny information. Since these structures are used in real communication, Thai students as the ESL/ EFL learners need to have sound knowledge of these structures. Consequently, they could then transfer it to the real situation. If Thai students still use the incorrect form of English subject-verb agreement, effective communication might be hindered, resulting in misunderstanding. However, even if the listeners comprehend the information being sent, using the wrong form of subject-verb agreement sounds foreign to English speakers.

Accordingly, this study was aimed to help Thai students overcome difficulties with English-verb agreement, even though the area of the study was focused only on the form of 'do' in present simple yes/no questions and negatives. The research questions are examined as follows:

1.2.1 Is the Chomskian technique for teaching present simple yes/no questions and negatives effective in improving students' comprehension and production?

1.2.2 Can the Chomskian technique be utilised to reduce the common errors found in present simple yes/no questions and negatives?

1.2.3 What are the relationships between the students' comprehension and production of subject-verb agreement used in present simple yes/no questions and negatives?

1.3 PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

This study consists of three main objectives as follows:

1.3.1 To investigate whether the Chomskian technique is effective for improving the experimental group's comprehension and production used in present simple yes/no questions and negatives by determining the performances of the control group, who were taught by the conventional technique and the experiment group, who were taught by the Chomskian technique, measured by pretest, posttest and delayed posttest.

1.3.2 To examine the common errors made by the control group and the experimental group subjects and to investigate if the Chomskian technique or the conventional technique can help to reduce two common errors: 'mismatch of do and does' and 'doubling errors' in a greater amount.

1.3.3 To determine whether there is a significant difference between students' comprehension and production of the subject-verb agreement used in present simple yes/no questions and negatives and to determine patterns of relationship of the language acquisition in the domain of comprehension and production.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study might be useful for teaching Thai students in the area of the subject-verb agreement used in present simple tense. If it is found that the Chomskian technique brings significantly higher comprehension and production in the experimental group subjects and helps to reduce the errors in 'mismatch of do and does' and 'doubling errors,' in a greater amount, it might be introduced in teaching present simple yes/no questions and negatives in the future. Besides, if different patterns of language

comprehension and language production are discovered, this can be used to affirm the view that the relationship between comprehension and production are varied and they constantly change during a developmental course.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 This study was done with approximately 70 M.1 Students from Samutsakhonburana School on the 3rd, 4th, 8th, 18th and 22nd of January, 2008.

1.5.2 This study was aimed to compare the effectiveness of the Chomskian technique compared with the conventional technique for teaching present simple yes/no questions and negatives, to examine the subjects' common errors in tense, and the reduction of the errors after the subjects are taught by the different techniques, and to investigate the patterns of relationship of language acquisition in the tenses comprehension and production.

1.6 BASIC ASSUMPTION

1.6.1 This study assumes that the expected outcomes of the English instruction the subjects have had are not significantly different.

1.6.2 This study assumes that some factors such as sex, interest, attitude and motivation of the two groups of subjects learning by the two methods, and of the English teachers, affect the students' comprehension and production more or less the same.

1.7 HYPOTHESES

1.7.1 The pretest scores of the control group and the experimental group are not significantly different.

1.7.2 The posttest scores of the experimental group and the control group are significantly different from their pretest scores and the posttest score of the experimental group is significantly different from the posttest score of the control group.

1.7.3 The posttest and the delayed posttest scores of the experimental group is more or less the same while those of the control group are significantly different.

1.7.4 Two common errors; ‘mismatch of do and does’ and ‘doubling errors’ are found and after the two groups were taught, the experimental group, learning through the Chomskian technique make the errors less than the control group learning through the conventional technique.

1.7.5 Varied patterns of relationship of production and comprehension are found; thus, on the pretest, posttest and delayed posttest, the subjects’ comprehension scores and production scores are significantly different and/or their comprehension and production scores are more or less the same.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The definitions of terms of the study are the following:

Comprehension refers to the students’ performance or competence on the subject-verb agreement measured by comprehension tests.

Production refers to the students’ performance or competence on the subject-verb agreement measured by the production tests.

Students refers to M.1/1 and 1/2 students from Samutsaknonburana School who in the academic year of 2008 participated in the study.

Control Group refers to 33 M. 1/1 students from Samutsaknonburana School.

Experimental Group refers to 37 M. 1/2 students from Samutsaknonburana School.

Conventional Technique refers to a present technique used to teach present simple yes/no questions and negatives. The students are taught to consider the form of auxiliary ‘do’ that is accordant to the number and person, and to use infinitive form.

Chomskian Technique refers to a technique of teaching present simple yes/no questions and negatives by applying syntactic knowledge. Transformational rules: ‘Do-Support’ and ‘Subject-Auxiliary Inversion (SAI)’ were held in the operation.

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 contains the introduction, statement of the problem, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, basic assumptions, hypotheses, and definition of terms.

Chapter 2 deals with a review of literature related to developmental sequences for question and negation formation of first and second language learners, common errors made by Thai learners and of English speaking children in present simple yes/no questions and negatives, conventional teaching technique and the Chomskian teaching technique for present simple yes/no questions and negatives and the sources of errors, and relationships between comprehension and production and relevant research.

Chapter 3 provides information about the subjects, materials, procedures and data analysis.

Chapter 4 analyses the results through evaluation of test scores.

Chapter 5 presents a summary, discussion of the findings and the conclusions of the study, including recommendations for further research.