

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In the globalization era, most people communicate internationally through one common code or language, English. People communicate with the intention of sharing thoughts, ideas and feelings. They select an appropriate channel of communication to deliver their message through their consideration on several factors; importance, feedback, record keeping, cost, formality and the message receiver. Business professionals have to look into ways of enhancing their communication skills in order to ensure career success while employers eagerly look for employees with strong communicative qualities (Hamilton & Parker, 1997).

Business writing plays a vital role in the present business environment as it serves as one channel to convey information from the sender to the receiver. In general business writing ranging from letters, reports to memorandums needs responses from its readers. It expects that the readers will take action as indicated in writing after finishing reading it (Stockard, 1999).

Despite the prevalence of new channels in business communication, computer and email, people still use letters. Business letters offer several advantages over other modes of communication. One of the most apparent is that letters are permanent written records and can serve as legal evidence. Besides, letters allow writers an opportunity to relay complex or difficult idea effectively. The writers can plan, organize, analyze, draft and review the message objectively and critically. Written messages help writers to avoid immediate interaction from the readers, minimize the distortion that can accompany oral messages and de-emphasize any negative emotional components in communication. Furthermore, well-crafted business letters can project positive images and impressions of the writers or the organizations (Bovée & Thill, 2005; Dobson, 2000; Harris, 1993).

The production of business correspondences by Thai business professionals may point out another concern as English is not their first language. They generally apply all the resources of knowledge available to them efficiently, clearly, and with minimum effort. The constraint of a second language, however, can pose a threat and

they must seek to communicate while lacking the requisite linguistic knowledge. Communication strategies will generally be adopted to facilitate the attempt to reach the common communication goals (Ellis, 1985).

Numerous studies have been carried out on the second language acquisition. Factors such as internal, external, instructional, and so forth have been looked into for the language acquisition purposes. These studies, however, specifically justify the educational development field, while very few have been carried out to justify the business development field. Nuntaporn Hutyamanivudhi (2001) conducted a case study of error analysis of business correspondences related to construction field and identified weaknesses of business writings among professionals in the engineering environment and Sivaporn Keowsangk (2001) compared the degree of differences in awareness of the importance of English used in business between businesspersons and business students.

Several other studies have been done on communication strategies. Supanya Chomjinda (ສູພັນຍາ ຂມຈິນດາ, 2538) studied English communication strategies adopted by street vendors on Khao Sarn Road. Her purpose was to study the attempt to reach communication goals (the sale and the purchase of products) of the street vendors and their foreign customers. Niphaporn Laothienchai (ນິພາພຣ ເລ່າເທິ່ນໄຊຍ, 2547) conducted similar study on street vendors in Patpong area. Chatsarut Malayamonton (ຈັດສຽດ ມາລຍມັນຫລ, 2541), Napaporn Ngamwilaipong (2003) and Maneenun Rhurakvit (ນານີນັນທ ຮູຮັກວິທຍ, 2547) studied the communication strategies in English writing among students.

Wanna Charoenchang (1991), Siriporn Nimtiparat (1993), Inthira Namaungraks (ອິນທີຣາ ນາມເມືອງຮັກຊ, 2544), Kwanhathai Chirdchoo (ຂວັງທ້າຍ ເຊີດຊູ້, 2545), Amornrat Luangsaengthong (ອມຮັດນ ເຫລືອງແສງທອງ, 2545), La-ortip Weerarak (2003), Jidanan Lertsuwan (2007), Amarawadee Onnual (2007), Anchalee Wannarak (ອັນຈະລື ວະຮະນັກຊ, 2544), and Daranee Suwanwaree (ດາຣະນີ ສຸວະຮະວາຮີ, 2550) studied communication strategies adopted by students of different levels in their attempt to communicate orally. However, all of them looked into the communication strategies adopted by students. None has explored different groups of the population to determine if they, too, resorted to communication strategies in order to achieve or abandon their communication goals.

Though these following studies did not directly emphasize on communication strategies, they have also related the use of English in occupational or professional context. Chanthanee Rakthamying (จันทณี รักธรรมยิ่ง, 2538) observed the language used by physicians in regards to code-mixing between Thai and English. Suthira Wongpanichcharoen (สุทธิรา วงศ์พาณิชย์เจริญ, 2540) studied the mixing of English with Thai by FM radio announcers in Bangkok. Pattaraporn Hiranpat (ภัทรพร Hiranyaporn, 2547) studied the English language learning and the use of English by female employees of entertainment establishments in Patpong.

These numerous studies reiterate the fact that such studies directed to writers in the professional workforce should be carried out. The professional workforce continues seeking further studies in order to enhance their work performance. As studies directed to the communication strategies of those in the professional workforce are limited, this study aims to determine the factors affecting the communication strategies among the professional workforce.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the communication strategies adopted in the production of negative messages.
2. To investigate if there are factors affecting the communication strategies in the production of business messages.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What communication strategies are adopted in the production of negative messages?
2. What internal factors (personal differences and aptitude) and external factors (environment and practice) affect the communication strategies in the production of negative messages?

1.4 HYPOTHESES

Both internal and external factors affect the communication strategies differently on the production of business messages.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1. This study will be limited to students currently enrolled in or having graduated from the Master of Arts (English for Careers) Program at the Language Institute, Thammasat University. Students and graduates of the Master of Arts (English for Careers) Programs are objective representatives for Thai professionals because they represent members of the workforce from the private sectors, government offices, and state enterprises.

2. The study aims to determine the internal (personal differences and aptitude) and external (environment and practice) factors affecting the communication strategies in the production of negative messages.

3. The questionnaire will be used to collect information regarding factors affecting the production of negative messages and the communication strategies adopted. A situational writing task will be given for the investigation of the communication strategies in the production of negative messages. The study will not analyze the authentic writing but a situational writing task given to the correspondents.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1. The study will provide a general view of factors affecting the communication strategies in the production of business correspondence.

2. Communication strategies adopted will reflect the area of communication in English perceived as problematic by the Thai professionals. The related or responsible agencies will be able to plan or provide appropriate English skill development so that these professionals can effectively cope with communication problems.

3. Language institutes, colleges and universities offering courses in business writing skills can better prepare their students with their English skills and communication strategies in the areas identified as needing improvement.

4. The results can also provide an overview of effectiveness and plausibility of formal instructions for the Thai professionals.

5. The study can be useful for further studies on business English communication skills in other areas.

1.7 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Due to the sample group selected, this study will only reflect and represent the communication strategies adopted by students or graduates of the Master of Arts (English for Careers) Program at the Language Institute of Thammasat University. As the majority of the students or the graduates belong to the professional workforce from various sectors, their responses might represent trends in communication strategies adopted by Thai professionals in general. There might also be a bias related to the sample group because they have taken business writing classes. The communication strategies adopted by this sample group might not represent the overall professional workforce who might not have taken formal instructions in English writing. The sample group was selected due to the time constraint for the completion of this study.

1.8 BASIC ASSUMPTION

This study assumes that the respondents complete the writing task as they normally do in a real life situation and that they provide responses to the questionnaire objectively.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1. “**Negative message**” refers to a business letter intended to deliver negative news to its reader.
2. “**Communication strategies**” refers to strategies (e.g. transfer, overgeneralization, overelaboration, avoidance, etc.) adopted by writers in their attempt to communicate or avoid to communicate their message due to their English competence.
3. “**Sender**” refers to the writer of business message.
4. “**Receiver**” refers to the reader of the business message.
5. “**Thai professionals**” refers to those professionals who are now the graduates and the graduate students of the Master of Arts (English for Careers) Program of the Language Institute, Thammasat University.

6. “**Internal factors**” refers to personal differences (gender, age, and occupation) and aptitude (TU-GET score, and English language educational background).
7. “**External factors**” refers to English environment (hours the Thai professionals spend per day communicating in English) and practice (hours the Thai professionals spend each day writing English business correspondence).