

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL IMPACTS ON INTEGRATIVE MOTIVATION IN THAILAND

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Abstract

Thailand has been grappling with the challenge of improving English language proficiency levels among its students for several decades, through various educational reforms, investments, and projects aimed at enhancing teaching practices and teaching skills. This article proposes a cultural perspective to this problem and identifies motivation as a significant factor that contributes to the underachievement of Thai students in English.

Drawing from two motivational theories, Gardner and Lambert's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-System, this article discusses the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation. These motivational theories are then contextualized within Norton (2013) adaptation of Anderson's notion of "imagined communities". Subsequently, the article provides a historical overview of the emergence of foundational conceptions about Thailand and its relationship to the West, which still strongly influence attitudes in the country and exert a negative influence on integrative motivation.

Furthermore, the article explores how Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework describes national culture and attitudes toward motivation in language learning. Based on Thailand's scores on Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, the author argues that contrary to popular belief, integrative motivation may be well-suited to Thai student learning styles.

Finally, the article proposes policy and educational strategies that could potentially help increase levels of integrative motivation among Thai students.

Keywords: Integrative Motivation, Cultural Dimensions Theory, English as a Second Language, Identity

Introduction

English proficiency levels in Thailand are among the lowest in the world. In 2022 Thailand ranked 97th out of 111 countries in the Education First Global Proficiency Index, which rates countries according to citizens' English abilities. Thailand's characterization as "very low proficiency" EF English Proficiency Index is difficult to square with a country that is both a major tourism hub (from 2014 to 2018 Bangkok topped the Mastercard Global Destinations Cities Index, which ranks cities by the number of foreign visitors), and a major electronics, food and automobile exporter (CIA Factbook).

The country's own evaluation of its students' English level paints an equally dire picture. Results from Thailand's national mandatory examination, the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) showed that the average English language test score for year 12 students in 2020 was 29.9 percent (Durongkiat, 2022).

The question of English proficiency levels took on a heightened urgency with the launch of a major drive to modernize the economy in 2016 the Thailand 4.0 economic model. The aim of Thailand 4.0 is to "transform the Thai economy towards a value-based economy with innovation as the key driver of sustainable growth in the industrial and

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manufacturing sectors” (Uttama, 2017: 2). The centrality of education to the success of Thailand 4.0 is underscored by the minister’s call for “a concerted effort of the public-private-education partnership”. (The Achievement in Implementation of the Government Policy and Industrial Strategy) Fiscal Year 2016.

However, according to Somchai Jitsuchon, the research director for inclusive development at the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), “Thailand...needs to tackle the major obstacles, including education reform, to create a new generation workforce in line with the 4.0 era (Bangkok Post). This sentiment was echoed on the British Council website, “Thailand’s 4.0 strategy aims to internationalize, develop skills, nurture creativity and innovation to develop a high-value economy and greater social equality. English is an important foundation for this strategy, yet 75 percent of teachers of English in Thailand have a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level of English at only A2 or below” (British Council Thailand, 1932).

The fact that English was adopted as the working language of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) after the establishment of the ASEAN community in 2009 (Kirkpatrick & Wang, 2021) compounded the demands on English language proficiency posed by Thailand 4.0.

The gap between Thailand’s performance in terms of English language proficiency and the level required for Thailand to successfully transition to a knowledge-based economy and to participate fully in the ASEAN regional association have given rise to a series of government initiatives aimed at boosting proficiency levels. These include an unpopular proposal to make English the country’s official second language in 2010 (Darasarawang & Todd, 2012), the Minister of Education’s (Nataphol Teepsuwan) plan to recruit 10,000 native English language teachers in 2020 (Bangkok Post), and the establishment in 2016 of the Regional English Training Centres (RETC) by the British Council in concert with the Ministry of Education. (British

Council Thailand, 1932). The latter has the goal of raising the English level of Thai teachers and developing communicative teaching skills.

These policies and initiatives, which represent a focus on native English speakers and the adoption of Western teaching practices, stand in stark contrast to the National Education Act of 1999, in which policymakers sought to reassess Thailand’s relationship with globalization in favor of more traditional Thai values, following the economic and political crises of the 1990s (Backer & Wisut, 2017). Tellingly, there is no mention of the English language in the document.

These seemingly contradictory policies are emblematic of a tension between the desire to improve English language skills as a means to achieving stated economic goals, and the view of English as being representative of Western values and culture, which are viewed as undesirable, dangerous, and un-Thai.

Factors Influencing Language Acquisition

Considering its centrality to every aspect of human existence, it stands to reason that the factors that generally contribute to the acquisition of language will be varied and complex. In the case of second or foreign language acquisition (while L1 and L2 acquisition share some aspects they are fundamentally different in many ways). Rod Ellis identifies 5 influencing factors: personality, motivation, learning style, aptitude, and age (Ellis, 1985). This should not lead to the misconception that understanding SLA acquisition is straightforward. These factors have proven problematic to identify and classify and are best understood as clusters of behavior. “Each factor is not a unitary construct but a complex of features which are manifest in a range of overlapping behaviors” (Ellis, 1985). This makes isolating and understanding the impact of one individual factor extremely challenging.

As this article seeks to understand how national culture influences second language acquisition, we will focus primarily on motivation and attitude. This is not to say that anxiety and

cognitive style are not influenced by the social context in which SLA takes place.

Different cognitive styles, which refer to the way people perceive, conceptualize, organize, and recall information (Ellis, 1985), have been closely associated with different societies. Thai students prefer auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile learning. Indicating a preference for active and physical learning (Gentner, 2015).

Psychologists have also identified anxiety as a culturally influenced phenomenon (Hofstede et al, 2010). This culturally motivated anxiety is particularly common among highly collectivist East Asian and South East Asian societies, in which loyalty to an in-group is paramount. In collectivist societies, anxiety is closely related to the fear of losing face, which entails a feeling of shame in front of one's in-group.

However, it is learner motivation that best determines whether a student will acquire a second language, "Motivation is one of the two key learner characteristics that determine the rate and the success of foreign language (L2) learning (the other being aptitude)...".

Motivation and Attitude

Most scholars of motivation will trace the beginning of modern research on the subject to Gardner and Lambert's seminal 1959 paper, "Motivational Variables in Second-Language Acquisition", which introduced the highly influential notions of "integrativeness" and "instrumentality". The authors followed a social psychological approach that focused on the social influences and relations between the language learners and the target language community.

A fundamental aspect of the paper was to underline the qualitative difference between the study of a second language (L2) and other academic subjects; in that the learning of another language involves the development of an L2 identity, meaning that there is also a social and affective dimension to L2 motivation (Claro, 2020).

According to Lambert and Gardner, learners are considered to have integrative motivation if they possess a desire to identify with the target language group and have the desire to become similar to members of that community. On the other hand, students are instrumentally motivated if they are learning the language for a particular purpose, such as studying abroad or passing an exam. It should be kept in mind that Lambert and Gardner's study was conducted in Canada on high-school learners of French: one of Canada's two official languages. This environment was particularly well suited to the emergence of the concept of integrative motivation because of the existence of a clearly identifiable L2 community.

However, the emergence of Global English has led to a reevaluation of the integrative dimension:

"The static characterization of language communities presented by Gardner's socio-educational model appears incompatible with the dynamic, fluid reality of the global English-speaking community of which many young people from all over the world believe themselves to be an integral part. The concept of integrativeness is predicated on a clearly identifiable and available L2 community, but for vast numbers of learners around the world not only are notions of contact with an English-speaking community dissimilar to those envisaged by Gardner, but the concept of that community itself is an altogether more vague, abstract entity" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009: 124).

This change in the referent gave rise to Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-System which evolved directly from a rethinking of Gardner's concept of integrative motivation (Dörnyei, 2020). In Dörnyei the term does not refer to "any actual or metaphorical integration into an L2 community as to some more basic identification process within the individual's self-concept.

Dörnyei's Motivational Self-System draws on the theory of possible selves, which represents "future imagined self-states, including hoped for and dreaded outcomes" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), and is made up of three components:

1) Ideal L2 Self, which is the L2-specific facet of one's 'ideal self': if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the 'ideal L2 self' is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Traditional integrative and internalized instrumental motives would typically belong to this component.

2) Ought-to L2 Self, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and avoid possible negative outcomes. This dimension corresponds to Higgins's ought self and thus to the more extrinsic (i.e. less internalized) types of instrumental motives.

3) L2 Learning Experience, which concerns situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success). This component is conceptualised at a different level from the two self-guides and future research will hopefully elaborate on the self aspects of this bottom-up process (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009: 29).

The most significant aspect of the motivational self-system is Dörnyei's replacement of integrativeness with the ideal L2 self. According to Fischer and others, although integrativeness correlates significantly with the ideal L2 self, the two terms cannot be equated. (Claro, 2020). The distinction is one of perspective. "Basically, Gardner focused on identification with an external referent and Dörnyei focused on identification with an internal referent" and these two conceptual schemes rather than being exclusive are complementary (Claro, 2020: 247).

So essentially integrativeness is conceived of both by Gardner and Dörnyei as representing the initial phase of a process in which one identifies

with an external model, which subsequently leads to the construction of an internal ideal model on the basis of that interaction, extending to some extent Gardner's concept of identification in L1 acquisition. In *identification*, the L1 learner identifies with members of his or her own in-group. In infancy this is represented by the family, but "over the course of a lifetime, we identify with various individuals, and also with the groups of people we belong to, including our families, our classmates, and peers, our communities; socialization involves the internalization of much of the behavior and beliefs of these role models and reference groups into our ongoing project of self-construction. We also identify with groups of people that we want to belong to" (Claro, 2020: 248).

In Dörnyei's reformulation of integrative motivation, it is the discrepancy between one's actual self and one's ideal self that introduces the element of motivation, as the initial phase in a distinct process of identity development. "When the process of internalization of desirable attributes relates to language learning, they become part of our ideal L2 self". The L2 Motivational Self-System model also introduced a more active role for the language learner, who engages in "an active process of deconstructing externally-encountered meaning and reconstructing it internally" (Claro, 2020: 250).

These two models have been further elaborated to better describe the complexity of a person in context. That is to say, a real person situated in a specific context and whose motivation to learn a language evolves through interaction with that context (Ryan, 2013).

Although Lambert and Gardner's notion of integrativeness has evolved to more accurately represent the real-world complexity of motivation, the underlying concept that learning another language involves an element of identification with an external community (whether real or imagined) still holds true.

It seems clear that for this to happen, the values, symbols, and culture of the L2 have to

be accepted. That the learner has to be able to identify desirable attributes in the L2 community that will bring the learner closer to his or her ideal L2 self.

Defining the Second Language Community

The global spread of English has rendered the concept of a target L2 community uncertain. Researchers such as Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009 argue that because of its global nature, English is no longer associated with an identifiable language community. In fact, non-native “users of English in the “outer circle” and “expanding circles” outnumber those (native speakers) in the inner circle by a ratio of more than two to one” (Savignon, 2005).

In Thailand, people are more likely to use their English with non-native English speakers (Pornapit & Todd, 2012), and despite belonging to a regional association (ASEAN), whose official language is English, Thai students and teachers still have an overwhelming preference for native English accents (Methitham, 2009; Boonsuk & Ambele 2013; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013). In addition, Todd (2006) shows that “generally in society, and perhaps especially in Thailand, NS (native speaker) teachers are perceived as being somehow ‘better’” (Pornapit & Todd, 2012). According to Holliday (2005), this aligns with the “belief that “native-speaker” teachers represent a “Western culture” from which spring the ideals of both of the English language and of the English language methodology”.

The view that learners in non-native-speaking countries culturally associate English either entirely or not at all with a Western linguistic source is obviously not satisfying. To overcome this limitation we adopt the term “imagined communities” coined by Anderson and expanded by Norton (2013), who argues that “in any language classrooms, the target language community may be, to some extent, a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relations, but also a community of the imagination, a desired community that offers possibilities for an

enhanced range of identity options in the future”. Norton contends that “an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner’s investment in the target language can be understood within this context” (Norton 2013: 3). The term investment here refers to the complex relationship between the language learner’s identity and their commitment to learning the language (Norton, 2013).

This perspective allows for the construction of a more pluralist imagined L2 community that can accommodate nativist, global, and local influences contemporaneously. According to Savignon (2005), the factors that influence learner interpretation of a second culture are dominant social and political factors, factors of socialization, and individual factors. The first of these factors can have a powerful effect on learners’ reactions to learning an L2 for communication. Savignon describes the case of how in “Spanish-speaking Puerto Rico, for example, a long-standing general resentment of U.S. domination exerts a powerful influence on English language instruction. Not only learners but also teachers may consciously or sub-consciously equate communicative English language learning with disloyalty to the history and culture of the island”. According to Savignon (2005), “these kinds of feelings constitute “a strong deterrent to second or foreign language use, even after 10 or more years of instruction”.

The employment of the notions of “imagined communities” and investment also allows for an integration of our motivational models. The introduction of an “imagined L2 community” reintroduces the concept of integrativeness, while also positioning Dörnyei’s Ideal L2 Self within a context in which both the identity and the L2 community are constructs of the learner.

Early Encounters with Western Colonialism

Whether or not a learner identifies desirable traits or behaviors in another L2 community, will in part depend on the extent to which they are compatible with the learner’s underlying cultural values.

Hofstede identifies two components of culture: values and practices. Values represent “the core of culture...and are broad tendencies to prefer one state of affairs over another”. (Hofstede, Hofsted, & Minkov, 2010). These are acquired in childhood and deal with preferences such as individuality vs collectivity and masculinity vs femininity. Values are the deepest manifestation of culture and are very slow to change.

Practices on the other hand are the superficial expression of culture and are made up of rituals, heroes, and symbols. Although they are visible to outsiders, their meaning is dependent on the way they are interpreted by cultural insiders.

The values that underlie cultural practices are forged by the history and institutions of society over long periods of time. To better understand the nature of Thailand’s relationship with an external L2 referent it is therefore necessary to understand the culture of the L1 and its relationship with the perceived L2 community. To this end, we will investigate the creation of a common national identity and the history of Thailand’s relationship with the English language and in more general terms the West. In the case of Thailand and many other non-European countries, these have their roots in the period of Western colonialism.

The study of English was first introduced to Thailand during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851), as a means for establishing diplomatic relations with a powerful new Western threat. This adoption by the ruling class of English for pragmatic and political purposes continued rather famously into the Reign of King Rama IV, King Mongkut (1851-1868), known in the West for his appointment of Anna Leonowens as court English teacher, whose experiences at the Thai court would inspire Margaret London’s novel, the King and I. During this period and well into the reign of Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, the main preoccupation of the Thai court was to manage threats to its sovereignty, by imperial Western powers.

As Streckfuss explains. France used the

fact that the Kingdom of Siam was an ethnically diverse polity, to de-legitimize Siamese rule by using ethnic criteria for determining sovereignty, and by granting a status of Protégé (protected by France) to ethnic Lao and many Cambodians within its borders, a substantial proportion of the population (Streckfuss, 1993).

The Siamese response to the French challenge to its defacto sovereignty is considered the foundational moment in the development of the modern Thai state. In 1892 King Chulalongkorn initiated a series of reforms that consolidated and centralized power, and most importantly fabricated a racial homogeneity within Thailand, “by subtly manipulating racial categories, the entire population of the country became “Thai”. All people living in Thailand became Thai “citizen-subjects” or of Thai nationality” (Streckfuss, 1993).

The creation of the Thai people and the Chakri dynasty’s ability to formally resist colonialization by Western powers set the tone for the establishment of the modern Thai state. In particular, its uniqueness as Southeast Asia’s only un-colonized state, and a newfound ethnic unity made possible nationalist discourses centered around the concept of “Thainess”.

The ruling elite also exploited their connection to Western nations and their ability to integrate Western, products and practices into Thai society as a form of both internal (with Thai subjects) and external legitimization. By so doing “Siam could stake a claim to social, cultural and technological parity with the West” (Harrison & Jackson, 2010: 17), and appear as agents of modernity at home.

The royal consumption of Western material goods inspired ordinary Thais to also “value farang (western) material culture and commodities... consuming farang goods aroused a sense of cosmopolitan pleasure...and which confirmed social status” (Kitiarsa, 2010).

This exaltation of Western material goods, however, was also accompanied by calls for a reframing of the relationship with the West. In 1867, Thiphakorawong, a high ranking noble in the court King Monogkut “wrote a book entitled Nangseu sadaeng kitjanukit

(a book explaining various things)...(which) disavowed claims to know the truth of material worldly matters, and in this field embraced Western science with open arms (see Alabaster 1870 and 1871). Yet at the same time, it secured and strengthened Buddhism's claim over the spiritual and religious realm" (Thongchai, 2010).

Thongchai (2010) refers to this as a "bifurcation of materiality versus spirituality". The preeminence of the West in this conception is linked to the material or "outer" world, while Thailand holds a preeminent position in terms of the spiritual or "inner" world, which informs constructions of identity... Western culture is seen in instrumental terms, while Thai culture is understood in terms of ultimate goals".

This bifurcation guides Thai attitudes and feelings towards the West and influences what level of engagement one would want to have with this imagined community.

Value Dimensions of Thai Culture

In his 1991 seminal text on cultural differences between countries, Gert Hofstede defines culture as the software of the mind: "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede et al., 2010). The definition is satisfying as it conveys the idea of an invisible set of instructions of which its members are unaware.

In the text, Hofstede defined the Thai culture as being characterized by moderately high power distance, very low individualism, low masculinity, average uncertainty avoidance, low long-term orientation, and an indeterminate (average) preference for indulgence (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Power Distance

The cultural dimension of power distance refers to the degree to which people in a society accept and expect unequal distributions of power and authority. In Thailand, power distance, with an index score of 64 (Hofstede et al., 2010: 58) is relatively high in general terms, but average to low when compared to other Asian countries.

This dimension is indicative of an emphasis on hierarchical relationships and deference to those in positions of authority.

In terms of second language acquisition (SLA), this dimension particularly affects the classroom environment. "In the large-power-distance situation, the parent-child inequality is perpetuated by a teacher-student inequality that caters to the need for dependence well established in the student's mind" (Hofstede et al., 2010: 69). This is more conducive to a traditional teacher-centered approach, in which students receive the wisdom imparted by teachers and only participate in response to teachers' questions. This characteristic is obviously not well suited to the communicative approach to teaching, which relies on the learning and teaching styles suited to small-power-distance contexts.

Individualism

The cultural dimension of individualism refers to the degree to which people in a society value and prioritize independence, autonomy, and individual rights over collective interests and social or group harmony. In collectivist societies, people belong to 'groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty. With an index score of 20 Thailand is a highly collectivist country (Hofstede et al., 2010).

The high propensity for collectivism in Thailand can influence the acquisition of English language skills in a variety of ways. As with the aforementioned power-distance relationship-power distance and individualism are negatively correlated (Hofstede et al., 2010: 1-2). This dimension can affect the dynamics of the classroom environment. As individual self-expression in this context may be perceived as impinging on group harmony, students are less inclined to take risks or speak up. "For the student who conceives of him or herself as part of a group, it is illogical to speak up without being sanctioned by the group to do so" (Hofstede et al., 2010: 117). According to Hofstede, this is increasingly true in larger classes, such as those prevalent in the Thai education system, where class sizes of around 50 students are the norm.

Masculinity

Thailand has the lowest cultural dimension of masculinity in Asia (Thailand scores 34 in this dimension), making it an interesting dimension for comparison of SLA acquisition in the region. A low masculinity dimension characterizes cultures that value caring, relationships, and cooperation over assertiveness and competition. A highly masculine society will create distinct gender roles “Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success... a society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 140).

This definition of masculinity is interesting because the above-described masculine traits are closely related to the qualities needed to succeed in SLA in a predominantly instrumentally motivated context. The preoccupation with excelling in education is typical of masculine society, whereas feminine societies are more concerned with fitting in with the norm rather than excellence as “in feminine countries, assertive behavior and attempts at excelling are easily ridiculed” (Hofstede, 2010: 160).

The high femininity dimension also throws up some interesting connotations for classroom management and teaching style. Feminine societies differ in their view of what constitutes a good teacher or student. Rather than favoring “teachers’ brilliance and academic reputation and students’ academic performance... feminine societies (value) teachers’ friendliness and social skills and students’ social adaptation” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 162).

This aspect should be kept in mind and set the tone for the classroom environment in Thailand.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which individuals in a culture feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. In cultures with a low dimension of uncertainty avoidance, individuals are more likely to tolerate ambiguity and take risks,

while in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, individuals are more likely to seek stability and predictability.

Thailand scores just shy of an intermediate 64 on uncertainty avoidance. High uncertainty avoidance in educational contexts is often associated with anxiety, however, considering its near indeterminate index score, this emotion in the Thai context is more influenced by collectivism and power distance.

It is also interesting to note that high uncertainty avoidance combined with a high masculinity dimension is characteristic of a xenophobic society. However, the low masculinity and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of Thailand are indicative of a country that is not culturally prone to xenophobia.

Long Term Orientation

With an index score of 32 Thailand is shown as having the second-lowest long-term orientation score in Asia after the Philippines. Long-term refers to the degree to which a culture emphasizes long-term planning, persistence, and perseverance in the achievement of goals, as opposed to short-term gratification and immediate results. Hofstede contrasts the short term orientation in which “efforts should produce quick results (with) perseverance, sustained efforts toward slow results” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 243). This is similar to the concept of delayed gratification and, as with the masculinity dimension, is of fundamental importance for students who are instrumentally motivated.

Long-term orientation also relates to the way in which societies maintain links with their past while navigating new challenges that face society. Societies that maintain traditions and norms and are less open to change are defined as normative and have a low long-term orientation.

Indulgence

The final dimension of indulgence pertains to the extent to which people control their impulses and desires. Thailand scored a rather ambivalent intermediate score of 45 on this dimension.

Indulgence is concerned with the extent to which a society allows and encourages the gratification of human desires and impulses.

While Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory had the purpose of understanding cultural differences between countries, in Psychology of the Thai People Suntaree Komin aims to provide detailed analysis of the culture and psychology of Thai society, without the Western bias which in her view characterized Hofstede's framework of analysis (Komin, 1991). The value orientations described by Komin can be used to integrate and better understand the representation of Thai culture through Hofstede's model.

In 1978 Komin adapted Rokeach's conceptual framework to identify a series of 9 value clusters listed according to their position in the Thai cognitive system. In order of importance, these are Ego orientation, grateful relationship orientation, smooth interpersonal relationship orientation, flexibility and adjustment orientation, religion-psychical orientation, education and competence orientation, interdependence orientation, fun-pleasure orientation, and achievement task orientation. This article will focus on the first 3 and most important and universally shared traits in this list as well as the education and competence model, as it relates directly to the topic at hand.

The Ego Orientation

The most important value cluster in Thai social psychology is the "ego", which Komin's framework identifies as being both big and fragile. Despite the calm exterior that the Thai people present to the world and one another, "they cannot tolerate any violation of the "ego" self...and can be easily provoked to strong emotional reactions, if the "self" or anybody closes the "self" like one's mother or father, is insulted" (Komin, (1991: 133). According to Komin, "ego" orientation is at the root of many key Thai values, such as the saving face value (linked to the avoidance of conflict), the "criticism-avoidance" value (in which attacks on ideas and opinions are considered attacks on the person who holds those ideas), and the

Kreng Jai value (being considerate of others). This vulnerable ego is responsible for the focus on maintaining relationships and avoiding conflict.

The Grateful Relationship Orientation refers to what Komin calls *Bunghun* (roughly definable as a positive relationship of gratitude and indebtedness) and describes it as the root of any meaningful relationship in Thailand, as "*Bunghun* must be returned, often on a continuous basis and in a variety of ways" (Komin, 1991:139).

Smooth Interpersonal Relationship Orientation

A non-assertive, humble, and polite demeanor, together with relaxed and pleasant social interactions characterize this orientation. Komin has labeled all the above orientations "social smoothing" values and has found that they show little variation across groups and time (Komin, 1991: 144).

In the context of social smoothing, "a successful personality in the Thai cultural context, is often one of competence and substance, but most importantly of all, has to have a soft and polite appearance, presentation and approach" (Komin, 1991: 146). However, the traits of aggressiveness, superiority, and overt self-confidence, which are generally valued in the West, would be greeted in Thailand with a negative perception of *man sai*, which the author translates as a mixture of jealousy and disgust (Komin, 1991).

Education and Competence Orientation

Knowledge does not represent a goal in and of itself in Thailand but rather constitutes a form of social currency. Higher levels of education are seen more as a means to achieve a higher standing in society. Komin describes this again in terms of propping up the "ego" self by identifying the educated person as a respected member of the community.

This conception of education as a means to social advancement would imply a more instrumental approach to study.

Komin's study laid bare the centrality of the role played by the "ego" self and the central psychological and social preoccupation of its protection and describes this as the "core cognition behind the behavioral pattern of every day of social interactions of the Thai" (Komin, 1991: 148).

Conclusion

This paper explained how English proficiency levels in Thailand have remained stubbornly low despite a series of projects, collaborations with foreign institutions, huge expenditures, and educational reforms. After determining the factors that influence second language acquisition, the paper focused on motivation as the most important cultural factor. Within motivation, we focused on the notions of instrumentality and integrativeness as envisioned by Gardner and Lambert first and later integrated by Dörnyei. These were subsequently contextualized within the concept of "imagined communities".

A brief historical overview of Thailand's relationship with the English language and the West was presented, which explained how the modern Thai state emerged through conflict with and resistance against colonial Western states and that a fundamental aspect of this resistance was the pragmatic fabrication of a supposed ethnically, linguistically, and culturally homogenous state. What's more, the state embraced Western know-how and symbols of Western modernity as a means of legitimization. This eventually led to what Thongchai refers to as a bifurcation of the material and spiritual world. The spiritual represents Thailand and its moral superiority and the material is an expression of an unspiritual and material West.

Subsequently, an overview of comparative cultures was made from which were determined relationships between cultural dimensions and their connotations for language acquisition.

We will now view how these various factors have worked together to help determine English proficiency outcomes.

Firstly, it is important to underline that integrative and instrumental motivation coexist and are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for a student to have both a high integrative and instrumental motivation. A series of studies have shown that Thai students are prevalently instrumentally motivated (Choosri & Intharaksa, 2011; Getmanee, 2005) and this has generally resulted in the suggestion that because of this, instrumental motivation is the most suited to the Thai context. Often a parallel is drawn between Thai learners and other Asian students, particularly from China and other countries with strong Chinese cultural influences, such as Taiwan (Wei: 2007; Wang, 2007; Yu & Downing, 2012), because of a similarity in the index scores of particular cultural dimensions: notably individualism and power distance. However, it is a fallacy to believe that because countries may share two similar scores, albeit, on important dimensions, this necessarily leads to the same outcomes with regard to language acquisition. One must pay attention to all dimensions as these act upon the individual as clusters. In the case of both China and Thailand, the motivation for learning English is principally instrumental. This does not however point to an equivalency between the two countries with regard to motivation, as a further two dimensions, long-term orientation and masculinity, have to be adequately considered. In China, the value of masculinity is very high and determines a preoccupation for excellence in education, while the long-term orientation is linked to delayed gratification and is a key component to the success of instrumental orientation. In the Thai context, the situation is reversed, a low masculinity index score means that students are not striving for excellence but for the norm and low long-term orientation can lead to a lack of the self-discipline required for instrumental learning (Hofstede et al., 2010).

It is clear that instrumental learning is well suited to Chinese students, however, Thailand's scores on the dimensions of masculinity and long-term orientation point to the fact that Thai learners might in fact benefit more and be better suited to integrative motivation.

We argue that Thailand's ambivalent relationship with the West may hold the key to understanding why Thai students show a preference for instrumental learning.

It is important to remember that in a very real sense, Thai modern culture emerges from a cold conflict with the West. To remain independent Thailand adopted asymmetric and pragmatic strategies to outmaneuver Western imperialists. Although these were ultimately successful for the ruling elite they created antagonistic views of the West and Thailand. The West was seen as morally dangerous and antithetical to the Thai state, while contemporaneously being admired for its material superiority. It seems clear that if integrative motivation relies on identification with desirable traits of the L2 context, then a history rooted in opposition to this context and a view of the cultural other as morally inferior will make that all the more difficult. According to Thongchai, the bifurcation of the material and the spiritual world has been an almost constant refrain among Thais from across the political spectrum, from its inception during the reign of King Chulalongkorn to today (Thongchai, 2010) and this perspective appears to distinguish Thailand's relationship with globalization as well, "the view that global capitalism is dangerous has become increasingly widespread in Thailand... This view was in fact advocated long before the crisis by several academics and prominent social critics, such as the lay Buddhist thinkers Sulak Sivaraksa, Prawet Wasi, Saneh Chamarik, and others. These critics saw the financial crisis as confirming the warnings, and in the aftermath of 1997 may not be desirable at all if the costs in the realm of values, morality, and spirituality were too steep" (Thongchai, 2010).

Suggestions

Thailand's plans for its future economic development are entangled with globalization and its participation in the ASEAN economic community. As mentioned above, English will

play an important role in Thailand's meeting its economic and educational goals. As such, it may be time for a rethink of the spiritual and material schism and a realignment of these two dimensions in the Thai psyche.

On a more practical level, we join the chorus of voices that are calling for a focus on ASEAN in the instruction of English. English is no longer just a language for communicating with native English speakers. It has acquired a global dimension, and it is time for a nativist-centric approach to be abandoned in favor of more regional or global varieties.

In the classroom, this could be facilitated with the publication of more ASEAN-centric textbooks for English learning. Currently, most of these textbooks are business related, such as *Business Plus*, by Margret Helliwell, which introduces mainly Asian, but also a limited amount of Western characters and accents, and the business situations take place in an ASEAN context. The publication of more general English textbooks for schools with an ASEAN perspective would be welcome and would help Thais to engage their integrative motivation. To aid in this, dialogues and content should be more culturally in line with the student's background and more in tune with the student's aspirations. The content and situations described in many Western textbooks used in Thailand can be difficult for Thai students to relate to, and may even cause some uneasiness.

In addition, the current focus on natively-like pronunciation should be abandoned in favor of comprehensibility and exposure to more local regional accents.

Finally, initiatives to create a common ASEAN identity and link this with the official ASEAN language would help to shift learners' "imagined communities", so that they are more relatable to their self-image. This could be achieved through the production of ASEAN-specific cultural content, such as ASEAN TV series, international song competitions, reality TV, and other cultural products and events that use English as the official language.

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