An Exploration of the Interrelationship Between Language and Identity in Thai and English: An Ethnographic Study of Native Thai English Teachers

การสำรวจความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษาและอัตลักษณ์ในบริบทของภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษ: การศึกษาภาคสนามเชิงชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาในกลุ่มครูชาวไทยผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ

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Abstract

This study explores the interrelationship between language and identity among native Thai English teachers who use both Thai and English. While extensive research exists on Thai and English pedagogy in Thailand, little is known about how language and identity interact. To address this gap, the study employed an ethnographic approach with an emic perspective and purposive sampling to examine the communicative behaviors and identities of three Thai English teachers. Grounded in identity theory and social identity theory, field observations were conducted at a Bangkok public secondary school, where Thai is the primary language and English is used as a second language within the language department. Each participant was observed for seven working days to understand their language use, behaviors, and identity shifts in daily interactions. Findings revealed that all participants skillfully adjusted their language and communication styles depending on context and interlocutors. They shared the ability to shift between Thai and English to express different

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identities, prioritizing team spirit over nationality. However, they differed in adaptability and communication style. Some participants seamlessly alternated languages, while others maintained more structured usage. Additionally, their identity expression varied, with some emphasizing professional roles and others blending personal and professional identities. These variations highlight the fluid connection between language and identity.

Keywords: Language, Identity, Interrelationship, Ethnographic Study

บทคัดย่อ

        การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษาและอัตลักษณ์ของครู ชาวไทยที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษและใช้ทั้งภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษ แม้ว่าจะมีงานวิจัยจำนวน มากที่เกี่ยวกับการสอนภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย แต่งานวิจัยเกี่ยวกับ ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษาและอัตลักษณ์ยังมีจำนวนจำกัด เพื่อศึกษาเพิ่มเติมในประเด็นนี้ การศึกษานี้ใช้แนวทางชาติพันธุ์วรรณนา (ethnographic approach) จากมุมมองของสมาชิก ในชุมชน (emic perspective) และการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง (purposive sampling) เพื่อวิเคราะห์พฤติกรรมทางภาษาและอัตลักษณ์ของครูชาวไทยที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน สามคน การศึกษานี้อ้างอิงทฤษฎีอัตลักษณ์ (identity theory) และทฤษฎีอัตลักษณ์ทาง สังคม (social identity theory) โดยทำการสังเกตการณ์ภาคสนามในโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษา ของรัฐแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพฯ ซึ่งใช้ภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาหลักในการสื่อสาร และภาษาอังกฤษถูก ใช้เป็นภาษาที่สองภายในแผนกวิชาภาษา ผู้วิจัยได้ทำการสังเกตการณ์ผู้เข้าร่วมแต่ละท่านเป็น เวลาเจ็ดวันทำการเพื่อศึกษาการใช้ภาษา พฤติกรรม และการเปลี่ยนแปลงอัตลักษณ์ในการ สื่อสารประจำวัน

        ผลการศึกษาพบว่าผู้เข้าร่วมทั้งหมดมีทักษะในการปรับเปลี่ยนภาษาหรือรูปแบบการ สื่อสารตามบริบทและกลุ่มผู้สนทนา ทุกคนสามารถสลับระหว่างภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษ เพื่อแสดงอัตลักษณ์ที่แตกต่างกัน โดยให้ความสำคัญกับความเป็นทีมมากกว่าชาติกำเนิด อย่างไรก็ตาม ระดับความยืดหยุ่นและรูปแบบการสื่อสารของแต่ละคนมีความแตกต่างกัน บางคนสามารถเปลี่ยนภาษาระหว่างบทสนทนาได้อย่างลื่นไหล ขณะที่บางคนยังคงใช้ภาษา ตามโครงสร้างมากกว่า นอกจากนี้ การแสดงออกของอัตลักษณ์ก็แตกต่างกันไป โดยบางคน เน้นบทบาทในวิชาชีพเป็นหลัก ในขณะที่บางคนผสมผสานอัตลักษณ์ส่วนตัวและวิชาชีพเข้า ด้วยกัน ความแตกต่างเหล่านี้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความลื่นไหลระหว่างการใช้ภาษาและการ แสดงอัตลักษณ์

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Introduction

Language serves as a potent symbol that individuals strategically employ to test or maintain boundaries between groups (Meyerhoff, 2006), reflecting both our identities and the culture of our society. Extensive research has explored the intricate relationship between language and identity, highlighting how language can showcase the identities (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Jenkins, 2007)**.** Scholars such as Joseph (2004) and Edwards (2009) have highlighted the close connection between language, thought, and behavior, suggesting that individuals may exhibit different behaviors when using different languages.

Thai and English are rooted in distinct cultural contexts, each with differing rhetorical styles and communication norms (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Trakulkasemsuk, 2012). The connection between language and national identity is particularly strong, with language serving as a marker of cultural belonging (Byram, 2006). Despite the emphasis on English learning in Thailand and the wealth of research on English teaching and learning, there is a notable gap in research on how language and identity intersect for Thai speakers using both languages through ethnographic study. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the interrelationship between language and identity among native Thai English teachers when communicating in Thai and English. In other words, the study aims to provide answers to two main research questions: (1) what are the identities and communication performances of the native Thai English teachers when they speak Thai? (2) what are the identities and communication performances of the native Thai English teachers when they speak English?

An ethnographic study revealed valuable insights into the interplay between language and speakers' identities. By observing participants in a Thai-dominant context using both Thai and English, the study demonstrated how individuals navigate different languages with diverse interlocutors, including those from various nationalities. This research highlights the role of language in shaping and expressing the speakers' identities across various communicative scenarios, as well as how communicative performances are used to present diverse identities.

Literature Review

Effective intercultural communication relies on linguistic nuances, social norms, and identity formation. This review examines Thai and English

communication differences, identity theory, and existing research, identifying knowledge gaps and areas for further study.

1. Communication and Cultural Differences between Thai and English

Thai people primarily use Thai in daily life but generally view English positively due to its international status (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021). The Thai language, shaped by a collectivist, high-context, and indirect cultural background, contrasts significantly with English, which originates from an individualist, low-context, and direct cultural context (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021). These cultural foundations influence the distinct rhetorical styles and communication norms of both languages (Mahayussnan, 2021).

Cultural values and beliefs shape communication styles. Individualist and collectivist cultures promote different ways of thinking and behaving, influencing communication norms (Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). People communicate based on their cultural understanding of meanings, norms, and values (Phillipsen, 1997; Phillipsen et al., 2005). Culture shapes behavior and interpretations, often learned unconsciously from family and community (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

The Thai language reflects its cultural heritage, embodying wisdom passed through generations and emphasizing social harmony (Naksakul et al., 2011; Phanvanich, 2007; Tiewcharoenkij et al., 2022). Its rich variety of personal pronouns and titles aligns with social norms, underscoring the importance of social hierarchy in Thai society (Knutson et al., 2003; Smalley, 1994). Factors such as age, gender, family lineage, social status, and occupation significantly influence language use in Thailand.

Although English is not a native language, it plays a crucial role in Thailand as the dominant foreign language used in trade, tourism, and elite discourse (McArthur, 2003). While English is spoken predominantly by the urban middle and upper classes, English has had a presence in Thailand for over two centuries, influencing media, tourism, education, entertainment, and international relations (Hayes, 2010; Kosonen, 2008; Trakulkasemsuk, 2018). Since communication styles often reflect deep cultural differences, understanding these variations is key when examining how language shapes both individual and group identity, as emphasized in identity theory.

2. Identity Theory

The self is a center of awareness, an executive agency, and a locus of control over oneself and others. Identity is defined by one's concept of the 'self', shaped by self-perception and how others perceive them. This self-awareness forms one's identities, which are both social and psychological in nature (Layder, 1994).

Goffman (1963) identifies three types of identities: personal, social, and ego. This study focuses on personal and social identities, exploring their relationship with language. Ego identity, often unclear or unstable during certain life periods, is challenging to analyze. Personal identity reflects an individual's unique traits and personality, defining their distinctiveness (Edwards, 2009; Matthews et al., 2009).

Social identity, constructed through social interactions, is fluid and influenced by various social factors (Ashmore et al., 2001; Hogg et al., 2017). This framework explains intergroup relations and highlights language as a powerful symbol to test or maintain group boundaries (Gumperz, 2009; Meyerhoff, 2006). Language is chosen based on context to convey identities and social affiliations accurately, helping individuals integrate into communities and foster intergroup connections.

According to Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity Theory, group belongingness arises through categorization and the affective components of group membership. Identifying with a group provides comfort and often leads to positive interactions, such as agreement and information sharing (Levine & Moreland, 1998). Understanding social identity helps navigate real-world issues like peer pressure, flawed decision-making, and intergroup animosity (Jackson & Smith, 1999).

As social beings, humans adapt to fit into various social groups. However, changing group membership, and thus social identity, may not always be feasible. Individuals may adjust their perceptions of their in-group's characteristics or engage in social action to effect change (Hansen & Liu, 2018). Therefore, social identity is context-dependent, communicated through verbal and non-verbal cues to distinguish between in-groups and out-groups.

The study applies Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory to explore how language functions as both a marker and constructor of personal and social identities among native Thai speakers. Using the concept of personal identity (Edwards, 2009; Matthews et al., 2009), it investigates how individual characteristics are reflected in language use, specifically how the choice of Thai or English signals different aspects of identity.

The study also examines social identity, as theorized by Goffman (1963) and Meyerhoff (2006) elaborated in Social Identity Theory. It explores how language use (Thai or English) is shaped by, and in turn shapes, participants' membership in different social groups. Language is seen as a social tool used by native Thai English teachers to assert group membership or differentiate between groups.

In summary, the study demonstrates that language both reflects and shapes personal and social identities, with Thai and English acting as markers of personal traits and social affiliations. It shows how language helps to navigate group boundaries, integrate into various social contexts, and adapt identities in response to social interactions.

3. Relation to Existing Studies and Identification of Research Gaps

Research on the intersection of language and identity among Thai and English speakers remains limited, though a few relevant studies provide valuable insights. While direct studies on this specific topic are scarce, several studies have explored the broader relationship between language and identity, as well as communication patterns of Thai and English speakers, offering useful information for the current research.

Mazak's (2012) study illustrated the complex relationship between language, professional identity, and perceptions of being "educated." Conducted over four months with ten participants using an ethnographic case study approach, the research revealed diverse perspectives on who should speak English and in what contexts, alongside varied emotional responses to the language. The participants expressed that English influenced their multiple, evolving identities. For example, young Puerto Ricans did not perceive speaking English or engaging with English media as a threat to their Puerto Rican identity. Mazak (2012) emphasized that language curricula and classroom teaching should account for the intricate relationship between language, identity, and power within sociocultural contexts, underscoring the deep connection between language and identity.

Ethnographic methods, especially observation, play a foundational role in qualitative research. As Ary (2010) pointed out, observation involves a systematic process of data collection that becomes more focused over time. Anthropologist Spradley (1980) likened this process to a "funnel," where the researcher gradually narrows attention to key aspects of the setting, identified as crucial either empirically or theoretically. Ethnographic studies often employ participant observation, where the researcher actively engages in the daily

activities of participants to learn through direct interaction (Schensul et al., 1999).

Linguistic Ethnography (LE), as defined by Pérez-Milans (2015), combines ethnographic and linguistic approaches to explore language use in social contexts. Drawing from interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982) and micro-ethnography (Erickson, 1992; Goffman, 1964), LE focuses on the detailed study of communication within its social environment. This interdisciplinary approach allows researchers to examine how language functions in social interactions, providing deeper insights into identity and culture.

In the exploration of linguistic practices, Pérez-Milans (2015) stressed the importance of analyzing both verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions. These include aspects such as turn-taking, word choice, and the spatial dynamics of interaction (e.g., proxemics and kinesics). Through this detailed analysis, researchers uncover how language is used to build social relationships and coordinate actions within everyday activities, while also interacting with the surrounding material environment.

Smutkupt (1976) noted that Thais learn non-verbal communication norms early, which become ingrained and guide behavior subconsciously. Trakulkasemsuk (2012) highlighted that using "kinship term + name" (e.g., Aunt Nipa) is polite, while using a name alone is impolite, with "Khun" maintaining politeness. Burnarda and Naiyapatana (2004) described Thai communication as quiet, with limited eye contact and indirect conversation to avoid confrontation. Sirikanchana (2018) emphasized the role of Buddhism in passing down Thai cultural identity, social duties, and collective responsibility. Rattanapian (2017) found that language choice—English, code-mixed, or Thai—was influenced by education and profession, with more educated individuals favoring English and code-mixed language, while less educated individuals used predominantly Thai.

In summary, existing studies suggest that the identities of native Thai English teachers are intricately linked to national identity, social hierarchy, education, and social responsibilities. Additionally, communication styles between Thai and English speakers show significant differences, warranting further investigation.

Research Design

This qualitative ethnographic study explored the identity expression and language use of Thai English teachers across three different settings from an emic perspective. Conducted over eight months (January–August 2023), including a pilot study and data collection, it used purposive sampling to select participants.

1. Participants and Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method ensured both participants and the field researcher belonged to the same community, aligning with the ethnographic approach. The study focused on native Thai English teachers fluent in Thai and English, working in the foreign language department of a Thai government secondary school with about 3,000 students, 100 teachers, 15 Thai English teachers and 10 non-Thai language teachers. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before data collection, along with informed consent from all participants. Four teachers initially expressed interest, with a pilot study conducted with one to refine research instruments. Three female teachers (ages 29-35) were selected for in-depth data collection, as the only male teacher worked in a different office. This small sample allowed detailed exploration of identity expression and language use. Two participants (P1 and P3) had nearly three years of experience with the field researcher, while P2 had nearly six. P1 and P2 taught upper secondary students (Matthayom 4-6), and P3 taught lower secondary students (Matthayom1-3), each handling approximately 20 periods per week.

2. Research Context

In ethnographic research, selecting an observation site is essential for understanding participants' language use and identity within their community. This study was conducted at a Thai government secondary school, where the field researcher worked alongside the participants as a foreign language teacher. Observations were conducted in three settings—formal (school compound), semi-formal (teachers' office), and informal (restaurants)—to explore participants' identity expression through language in diverse contexts.

2.1 The School Compound

The school compound encompasses buildings and outdoor spaces for teaching, learning, sports, and extracurricular activities.

Figure 1

Layout of the School Compound
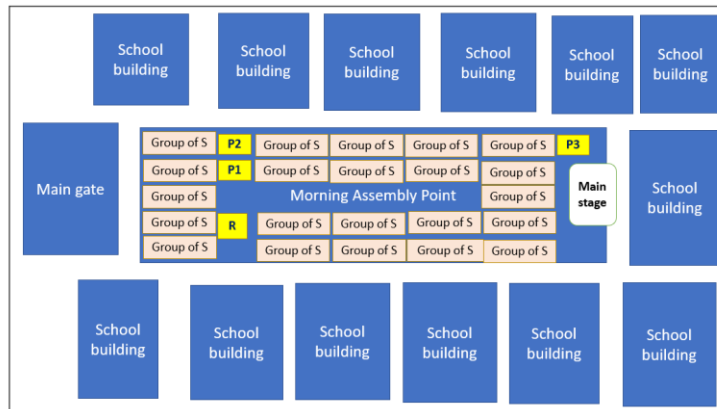
The assembly point, located in the center of the school building (Figure 1), is where students and teachers gather daily for the national anthem, religious chanting, and school events. This study observed these morning activities.

2.2 The Teacher's Office

The teacher's office in this study is a shared workspace for the participants and their colleagues in the foreign language department.
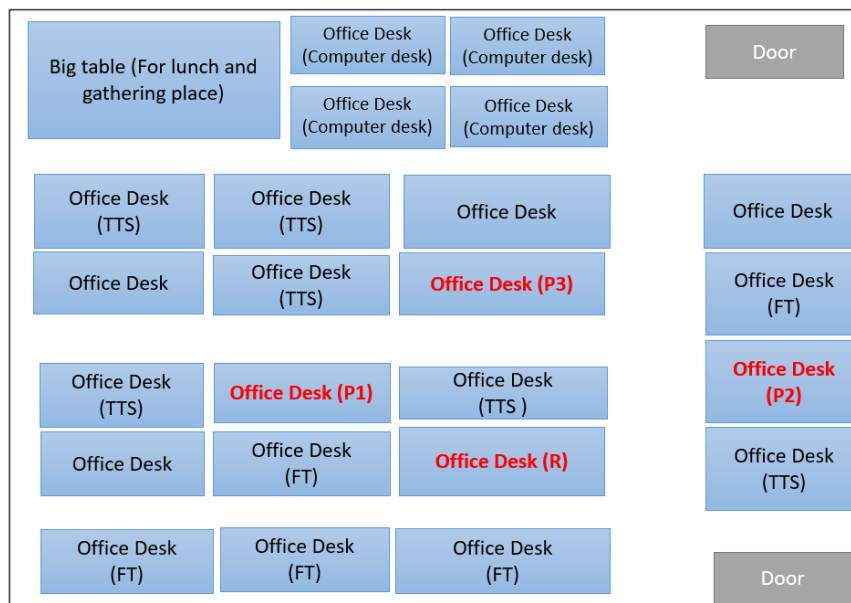
Figure 2

The Teacher's Office

Figure 2 shows the layout of the teacher's office. Each teacher has an assigned desk and a large table is provided for meetings or lunch. The office is accessible to teachers from other departments and students.

2.3 The Restaurant

During the observation period, the participants, researcher, and Thai teachers had lunch together on different days, conversing in English about personal lives, students, food, and work in a relaxed setting. Three restaurant outings were held with different participants on separate dates.

(1) Restaurant 1

At Restaurant 1, Participant 1 (P1) and R had lunch together, joined by a group of Thai teachers from different departments (TTD).

Figure 3
Layout of Restaurant 1 (P1 and R)
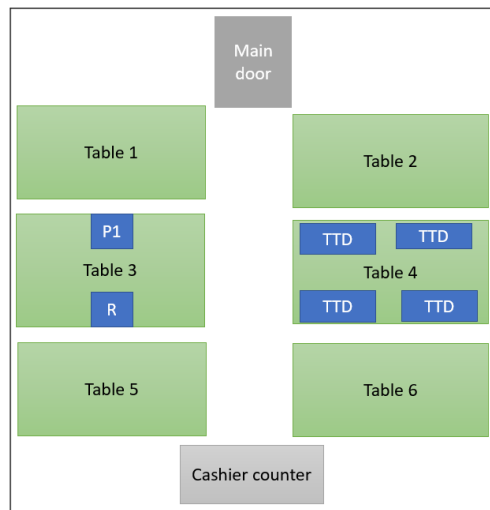
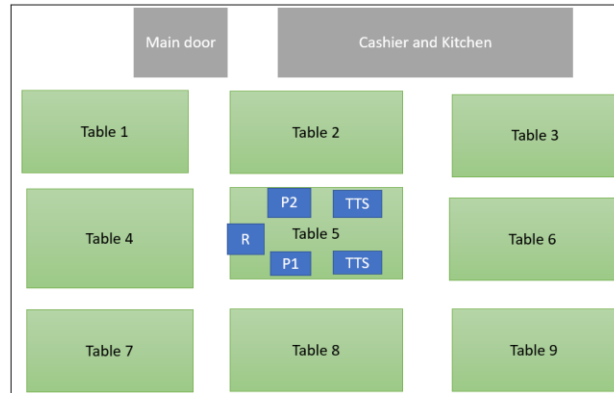(2) Restaurant 2

In Restaurant 2, Participant 2 (P2) who are Thai teachers from the same department (TTS), along with the field researcher (R), shared a dinner.

Figure 4

Layout of Restaurant 2 (P2, P1, TTS, and R)

As shown in Figure 4, R sat near P1 and P2. Both Thai and English were used during dinner, reflecting informal communication.

(3) Restaurant 3

In Restaurant 3, Participant 3 (P3) and the researcher (R) had lunch together. P3 primarily used English while conversing with R.

Figure 5

Layout of Restaurant 3 (P3 and R)
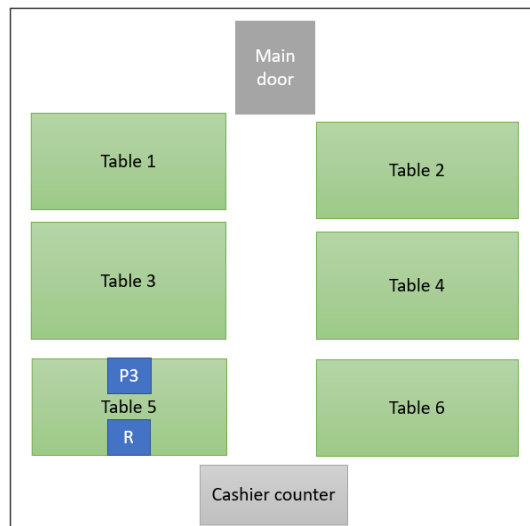
As shown in Figure 5, the restaurant was empty except for P3 and R due to the late lunch hour. The conversation was informal and relaxed.

3. The Role of the Field Researcher

The field researcher, who had been integrated into the community for nearly six years, was accepted as a member of the school community. While the field researcher is Burmese and understands Thai but cannot write it, this linguistic proficiency supported the study's focus on spoken communication. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to ensure participant confidentiality. A pilot study refined the field setup, participant engagement, observation protocols, and note-taking methods.

4. Instruments and Analysis

The primary instruments used were observation and field notes. To protect confidentiality, codes and pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and non-participants, as shown in Table 1. Ensuring confidentiality and adhering to research ethics are essential in human research.

Table 1

Participants and Non-participants Code and Pseudonym

Participants and Non-participants Code and Pseudonym
P1: Participant 1
P2: Participant 2
P3: Participant 3
S: Students
TTS: Thai teachers from the same department
TTD: Thai teachers from the different departments
FT: Foreign teachers
R: Field researcher

4.1 Observation

The observations offered a detailed account of the participants' daily lives within the school context, conducted in familiar settings. Using Hymes' (1979) model, they took place in three primary settings: the school compound (formal), the teacher's office (semi-formal), and nearby restaurants (informal). Participants were observed during routine interactions and specific speech events, including verbal and nonverbal communication. If participants were

sick or on personal leave, the observation period was extended to ensure a full seven days.

Table 2

Summary of Observation Duration (January–August 2023)

Participants	Setting	Daily Duration	Total Days Observed
P1, P2, P3	The school compound (a formal setting)	20-25 minutes	7 business days
	The teacher's office (a semi-formal setting)	2-3 hours	7 business days
	The restaurants (an informal setting)	1- 2 hours per participant	1 day

Field notes were meticulously organized for each setting. After each observation, R transferred them into a daily Microsoft Word journal, documenting participants' verbal and nonverbal interactions in detail. Setting aside preconceptions, R aimed to capture observations thoroughly. Careful attention to proxemics and kinesics provided valuable insights into participants' unspoken communication within the school context.

4.2 Data Analysis

The data collected for each participant over seven days was extensive, as detailed information was gathered during observations. Therefore, categorizing and organizing the data was essential to present findings aligned with the research questions. Categories were then refined to break down narrative descriptions and identify key themes. Notes from each participant were organized using Hymes' (1962) framework to address the two research questions: (1) what are the identities and communication performances of the native Thai English teachers when they speak Thai? (2) what are the identities and communication performances of the native Thai English teachers when they speak English?

The analysis examined how each participant communicated with four types of interlocutors: (1) students (S), (2) Thai teachers from different departments (TTD), (3) Thai teachers from the same department (TTS), and (4) foreign teachers (FT). R was included as one of the FT.

In addressing the first research question, the study explored participants' communication patterns and identities across different interlocutors in varying contexts, focusing on their use of Thai. Data analysis highlighted how each participant spoke Thai with these interlocutors, revealing distinct identities and communication styles within each group.

Figure 6

Participants when Speaking Thai with Different Interlocutors
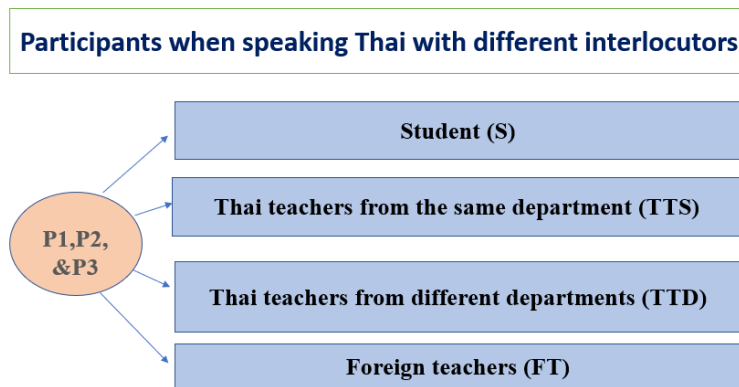
For the second research question, the analysis shifted to participants' English usage with different interlocutors. While P2 spoke English with students without mixing in Thai, P1 and P3 did not speak English with students at all. This led to varied English-speaking patterns among the three participants, providing insights into their unique identities and communication strategies.

Figure 7

Participants when Speaking English with Different Interlocutors
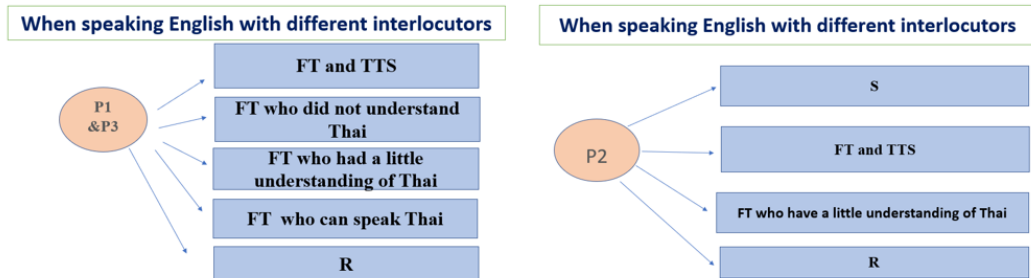
The study applied Personal Identity Theory (Edwards, 2009; Goffman, 1963; Mathews et al., 2009) and Social Identity Theory (Brădățan et al., 2010; Meyerhoff, 2006; Tajfel, 1978) to analyze participants' identities through their communicative performances. Identity categories—personal, Thai teacher, professional, and social—offered a comprehensive understanding of their roles and self-perceptions across different contexts.

As shown in Table 3, the pilot study conducted between January and February 2023 helped categorize participants' identities within the school context across three settings, providing a systematic explanation aligned with the research questions.

Table 3

Summary of Identity Categories and Communicative Contexts

Participants	Identity categories	Different contexts	Communicative performances
P1, P2, P3	Personal, Thai Teacher, Professional, and Social	The school compound, the teacher's office, and restaurants	Verbal and nonverbal communication

Findings

To explore how identity manifests in communication, it is essential to examine the interaction patterns in Thai and English across different settings. The participants expressed their identities differently by using distinct communication patterns with different interlocutors.

1. Identity and Communication Patterns in Thai vs. English

Participants (P1, P2, P3) displayed varying identities, language choices, and conversational patterns depending on their interlocutors, with the degree of these expressions adjusted based on context.

Table 4

Identity Expressions, Language Preferences, and Communication Patterns

Participants	Identity expressions	Language Usage	Communication Patterns	Interlocutors
P1, P2, P3	Personal, teacher, professional	Mainly Thai except for P2	Formal	S

Participants	Identity expressions	Language Usage	Communication Patterns	Interlocutors
P1, P2, P3	Personal, teacher, professional, social	Thai and English	Formal and informal	TTD, TTS
	Personal, teacher, professional, social	Mainly English, occasionally mixed with Thai and English	Informal	FT

As shown in Table 4, the participants expressed their different identities through Thai and formal communication. When using English, they revealed different identities in an informal pattern. Although participants adjusted their language use to express different identities, they still followed distinct communication rules for Thai and English.

Table 5

Comparison of Communication in Thai and English

Participants	Thai	English
P1, P2, P3	Conforms to social norms and social hierarchy	Unconfirm to social norms and social hierarchy
	Uses various personal pronouns depending on the interlocutor	Avoid using different personal pronouns based on interlocutors
	Formal	Informal
	Uses many polite particles at the end of sentences and various titles	Avoid using many polite particles and various titles
	Greetings must be accompanied by polite action	Greetings do not need to be accompanied by polite actions

In the situations shown in Table 5, Thai personal pronouns for *"I"* change based on context and interlocutor, reflecting social hierarchy and politeness. Unlike English, Thai emphasizes respect through polite particles and actions, especially with senior teachers. Examining Thai and English communication highlights linguistic and cultural differences, while analyzing identity across contexts offers deeper insights into self-expression.

2. Exploring Identity Expression Across Three Distinct Contexts

Participants used both verbal and nonverbal communication strategically to present and shape their identities within these contexts.

2.1 The Formal Context

During the assembly, Thai was the primary language used, and participants followed communication norms rooted in Thai language and social hierarchy when interacting with students, Thai teachers from different departments, and those from the same department. Table 6 summarizes how P1, P2, and P3 presented their identities in this formal setting, revealing both their personal and professional selves as Thai teachers. While performing homeroom duties, they demonstrated the qualities expected of Thai educators—gentleness,

politeness, humility, professionalism, patience, and teamwork—through verbal and nonverbal communication.

Summary of Communication in Formal Context

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P1	S, TTS, TTD	Thai	Personal, Thai Teacher, Professional	Gentle, polite, humble, professional, patient, quiet, and collaborative
				Language usage and communication patterns conformed to Thai social norms and social status.

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P1	S, TTS, TTD	Thai	Personal, Thai Teacher, Professional	Communicated differently between in-group members and out-group members
P2	S, TTS, TTD	Thai	Personal, Thai Teacher, Professional, and Social	Gentle, polite, humble, patient, professional, cheerful, friendly, collaborative.

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P2	S, TTS, TTD	Thai	Personal, Thai Teacher, Professional, and Social	Language usage and communication patterns conformed to Thai social norms and social status.
				Communicated differently between in-group members and out-group members
P3	S, TTS, TTD	Thai	Personal, Thai Teacher, Professional, and Social	Gentle, polite, friendly, shy, patient, professional and collaborative.
				Language usage and communication patterns conformed to Thai social norms and social status.
				Communicated differently between in-group members and out-group members

As shown in Table 6, their communication was formal, focusing on daily tasks and attendance as Thai teachers. They spoke to students in a soft, polite tone, using formal Thai with a slow pace and complete sentences, adhering to traditional norms, and recognizing students' social status.

P1, P2, and P3 showed respect and politeness when interacting with teachers from all departments. They greeted TTS and TTD with the "*Wai*"

gesture and used casual language with peers, smiling and laughing more with TTS than TTD. The participants' politeness and humility varied based on the interlocutor's age and status, adapting their communication style accordingly. In Thai culture, younger people are expected to show respect to older individuals, reflecting social norms and an awareness of age and hierarchical position.

While all three participants adhered to Thai teacher norms in shared spaces, their individual identities emerged more in smaller groups with homeroom students. P1 and P3 maintained formality by standing while addressing students, reinforcing authority, while P2 took a more sociable approach, sitting with her students each morning to foster an informal, friendly atmosphere filled with laughter and smiles.

2.2 The Semi-Formal Context

In the teacher's office, English and Thai were used to discuss topics like daily life, religion, family, holidays, teaching, and work. These conversations revealed shared and distinct identities among students (S), Thai teachers from different departments (TTD), same-department Thai teachers (TTS), and foreign teachers (FT), as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary of Communication in Semi-Formal Context

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P1	S	Thai	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Professional, patient, quiet, and collaborative

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P1	S	Thai	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
	TTD	Thai		Professional, quiet, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
	TTS	Thai and English		Professional, quiet, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P1	FT	Thai and English	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Professional, quiet, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
P2	S	Thai and English	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Strict, cheerful, friendly, professional, and collaborative
				Semi-formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
				Semi- formal communication pattern

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P2	S	Thai and English	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
	TTS	Thai and English		Cheerful, friendly, professional, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
	FD	Thai and English		Cheerful, friendly, professional, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P3	S	Thai	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Strict, friendly, professional, patient, and collaborative
				Semi-formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
	TTD	Thai		Polite, friendly, shy, professional, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P3	TTS	Thai and English	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Polite, friendly, shy, professional, and collaborative
				Semi- formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
	FD	Thai and English		Friendly, shy, professional, and collaborative
				Semi-formal communication pattern
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members

According to Table 7, P1, P2, and P3 expressed their personal, professional, and social identities through their language choices, adapting to their interlocutor's linguistic abilities: English for non-Thai speakers, Thai for non-English speakers, and a mix for bilinguals. Their daily communication with students focused on textbooks, grades, assignments, and teacher inquiries. While P1 and P3 spoke only Thai with students, P2 occasionally used English, assisting with grammar and pronunciation. Forms of address varied by familiarity, using nicknames for homeroom students and "*Nuu (kid)*" or "*Nakreyan (student)*" for others, along with polite Thai particles. Physical closeness with homeroom students reflected in-group dynamics.

In Thai culture, using honorific titles is crucial for showing respect to elders, and not adhering to this is seen as disrespecting social norms. The participants followed these conventions when interacting with teachers from different (TTD) and the same departments (TTS). With TTS, discussions were more relaxed, covering personal topics like food, shopping, holidays, and vacations. These conversations were flexible and often accompanied by smiles and laughter. Despite the varying topics and length of interactions between TTD and TTS, the participants consistently used the same personal pronouns and titles in Thai.

Different Use of Personal Pronouns '*I*'

P1, P2, and P3 used '*Chan*' with TTD and TTS who were the same age,

'*Nuu*' with those older than them, and "Phi" with those younger than them.

The personal pronoun *'I'* in Thai varies based on age and social position, with examples like *'Chan*,' *'Nuu*,' and '*Phi*.'

Different Use of the Titles based on Social Status and Seniority

For those significantly older and in higher positions, P1, P2 and P3 used '*Khru*' or '*Ajarn*' (both meaning teacher).

For those slightly older (by three to five years), P1, P2, and P3 used 'Phi' (meaning older sister or brother).

For those younger, P1, P2, and P3 used nicknames.

The participants primarily spoke English with FT, but they switched to Thai when FT was fluent in Thai. P1, P2, and P3 shared various topics and laughed frequently with FT, indicating that they saw FT as part of their ingroup, unlike TTD.

Regardless of their friendly and professional collaboration with FT, P2's communication style differed from that of P1 and P3. P2 consistently used English without mixing Thai words or particles, speaking with a higher, clearer, and stronger voice compared to when speaking Thai. P2 exclusively used the personal pronouns '*I*' and '*you'* when addressing all FT, without using any titles, opting instead for nicknames, despite their elder status.

Conversation between P2 and FT1

P2 replied to FT1: *"(FT1's nickname) I mean… I will use this book with students."*

P2 explained the textbook and publisher to FT1.

After P2 asked FT1: *"(FT1's nickname) do you understand?"*

P1 and P3 incorporated Thai particles and interspersed Thai words while conversing in English with FT. They respectfully addressed FT as 'teacher,' regardless of age, using personal pronouns such as '*I*' and '*you*.' They discussed a wide range of topics with FT, much like they did with TTS, often sharing laughter and smiles during their conversations.

Conversation between P1 and FT1

FT1: "*Goodbye everyone, see you tomorrow*."

P1: "*Goodbye Kha Teacher FT1, see you tomorrow kha*."

Conversation between P3 and FT2

FT2 asked P3, "*Are you OK*?"

P3 replied to FT 2: "*Yes, sleepy. Sleep Dai mai*?" (Sleep Dai mai means "*Is it OK to sleep?"*)

P1 and P3 avoided using Thai words when speaking to the FT, who does not understand Thai, but they mixed in many Thai words when communicating with FT, who does understand Thai.

While the participants shared similar language use and communication styles, their unique personalities emerged in the teacher's office. P1 was quiet and cooperative, P2 was cheerful and friendly, and P3 was shy, avoiding eye contact. They spent more time with in-group members (TTS and FT) than with TTD, often laughing and sharing stories. Proximity and haptic behaviors also differed between in-group and out-group members.

2.3 The Informal Context

The participants expressed their identities differently through communication patterns and behaviors in informal settings based on their interlocutors.

Table 8

Summary of Communication in Informal Context

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P1	R, TTD	English and Thai	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Professional, and collaborative Informal communication patterns Used Thai particles, titles, and mixed Thai when speaking English Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members
P2	R, TTS	English and Thai	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Cheerful, friendly, professional, and collaborative
				Informal communication patterns
				Did not use the Thai particles, titles and mix Thai when speaking English
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members

Participants	Interlocutors	Language	Identities	Communication performances
P3	R	English and Thai	Personal, Professional, and social identities	Friendly, shy, professional, and collaborative.
				Informal communication patterns
				Used Thai particles, titles, and mixed Thai when speaking English
				Communicated differently between in-group and out-group members

As shown in Table 8, the three participants displayed distinct linguistic behaviors and expressions of identity during restaurant interactions with the researcher. Participant 1 greeted the Thai teacher dining at a different table in Thai but switched to English after identifying as an English teacher and a member of the foreign language department, maintaining a professional demeanor with the researcher while occasionally using Thai particles. Participant 2 acted as a translator, converting advanced Thai conversations into English for the researcher. Participant 3, initially shy and avoiding eye contact, became more communicative and shared personal stories after a few minutes.

At the restaurant, participants used casual language, short phrases, and omitted formal Thai greetings, unlike their respectful behavior at the assembly point and teacher's office. They used both Thai and English with the researcher, sharing personal and family stories despite nationality differences. Participant 2's English usage stood out by avoiding Thai particles, titles, and mixing Thai words.

Discussion

The study highlights that context and interlocutors play a crucial role in shaping language choices and identity representation. Participants exhibited similar language use and identity presentation due to their shared professional environment. However, communication also serves to express individual identity traits. For example, P2 used distinct language forms and avoided formal titles in English, differing from P1 and P3. Despite their shared nationality and profession, participants displayed subtle variations in language use, reflecting their unique identities. Layder (1994) and Edwards (2009) support this notion, emphasizing that identity is inherently individual and cannot be generalized.

Identity is fluid, shaped by both personal agency and contextual influences, challenging broader cultural norms. Participants' personal approaches to social hierarchies illustrate this dynamic nature. Their communication patterns show that language and identity evolve through social interactions and cultural expectations. In professional settings, workplace and social identities often take precedence over personal ones as individuals fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Luft and Ingham (1955), Layder (1994), and Vignoles (2017) highlight the interplay between individual agency and contextual factors in identity formation.

The ethnographic method provided detailed insights into participants' language use and behaviors, underscoring the connection between language and identity. This study demonstrates that communication serves not only as a means of delivering content but also as a reflection of relational dynamics. Professional teachers adapt their language and identity based on context and interlocutors, revealing the complexity of their roles. Watzlawick et al. (1967) emphasize the role of communication in shaping interpersonal relationships and identity.

Cultural context and communication patterns influence language use, affecting both native and non-native speakers of Thai and English. This study confirms previous research showing that Thai and English differ significantly in communication norms, making it challenging for speakers to navigate both languages. However, participants, as experienced teachers, successfully adapted to these linguistic differences. Hall (1976), Hofstede (1980), Hayes (2010), Kosonen (2008), and Trakulkasemsuk (2018) support the view that understanding cultural contexts enhances effective communication and identity negotiation.

Context significantly influences language use and identity, with participants adjusting their language based on formality. Formal settings prompted standardized language, semiformal contexts allowed flexibility, and informal interactions featured authentic language. Shared professional roles shaped in-group and out-group identities more than nationality, highlighting team cohesion over cultural differences.

Language, communication patterns, and identity are deeply interconnected. Linguistic backgrounds in Thai and English shape speakers' identities and influence language choices. Communication styles also distinguish in-group from out-group members, as those within the same group often share specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors, reinforcing group identity and cohesion.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Future research should explore speech acts between participants and non-participants, conduct a more detailed conversation analysis, and incorporate a larger sample. The study's focus on workplace identity and ethical constraints limited an in-depth examination of personal lives and broader social interactions. Nonetheless, it underscores the importance of recognizing diverse identities expressed through language. In professional settings, adapting communication to cultural norms is essential, enabling individuals to navigate and express their identities effectively across various contexts.

Implication

Adapting to context and interlocutors enhances communication and allows the expression of diverse identities in social and professional settings. Recognizing both one's own identities and those of others improves communication effectiveness. Choosing appropriate language and communication patterns conveys identity professionally. Learners of Thai and English should understand the norms of both languages, aligning with collectivist values in Thai contexts and individualistic values when speaking English. This fosters empathy, intercultural competence, and collaboration, while avoiding stereotypes, especially in collectivist cultures where social identity shapes language use. Understanding these dynamics helps navigate cross-cultural interactions in language learning, work, and daily life.

Conclusion

This study reveals that participants express their identities through strategic language choices, adapting to both Thai and English communication norms based on context and interlocutor. P2's use of English differed from P1 and P3, as P2 refrained from using Thai particles, titles, and code-switching.

The findings offer valuable insights into how native Thai native English teachers navigate their identities in a bilingual school environment, shaped by shifting

roles, contexts, and interaction dynamics. Despite limitations, the ethnographic approach successfully uncovered subtle aspects of communication and identity expression.

The research underscores the significant impact of both physical context and interlocutor on language use and identity presentation. Two key takeaways are: effective communication requires adaptability to context and communication norms, and developing professional communication skills hinges on understanding social norms and the complex interplay of language and identity.

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