Report on a Classroom Project to Investigate Problems and Characteristics of English Language as Used by Thai Taxi Drivers

(Classroom Research)

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to investigate the salient characteristics of the English language communicated by Thai taxi drivers as well as the problems they experience, as a result of their limitations in English. The setting and scope of the study were limited to a single course and conducted during a single academic year. The data were collected from 42 Thai taxi drivers by 85 Thai undergraduates from Dhurakij Pundit University during the first semester of the academic year 2013. All of the students involved in the study were those who were undertaking a course on cross-cultural communication (EN 238) which was offered as a major subject of the English Major Program. The interviews took place within Bangkok and Nonthaburi.

The students were instructed to work in pairs and to interview a taxi cab driver. The students asked cross-cultural communication questions, communication barriers, and attitudinal questions. After the interview process, they transcribed and translated the audio files. They then analyzed the verbal data using the skills and knowledge from the course. The findings reported here are the results of the teacher's research analysis of those many reports submitted by the students.

The teacher asked the students permission to further analyze their reports and they granted their permission. The teacher analyzed the interview scripts using simple content analysis to identify the common characteristics of the English language used by the taxi cab

drivers as well as their problems, attitudes, and how they have reportedly dealt with the challenges and the greater demands upon them to have and use English skills and abilities.

The results showed that all of the taxi drivers faced two challenges: language and cultural barriers. The majority of the drivers relied on simple words, short sentences, and Thai-style pronunciation. It is noted that the English they used exhibits salient elements of organic grammar.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of this study and states the research aims, provides the definitions of the key terms, the benefits, and acknowledges the limitations.

1.1 Background

English, as one of the global languages, is crucial for Thailand's Asean and global integration. As we know, Thailand is moving towards the Asean community by the end of 2015, an ever growing quantity of foreigners visit the country from near and afar alike. When these foreigners come to visit or work in Thailand, they often rely on English, as it is a global language. Indeed, when they are in Thailand, like most tourists, they need to take public transportation such as trains, buses and of course taxis. What they have to manage is using English with Thai service providers, including the taxi drivers. The obvious problem is communication, as English is still very much a foreign language in Thailand and therefore not many taxi cab drivers are well-equipped with English.

Considering the fact that the taxi cab drivers are, perhaps, working at the frontier of this globalization process, their lack of English skills may affect the tourists' experience and impression of Thailand. Indeed, they lack necessary English language skills which can hinder Thailand's ambition to be the Asean transport hub[1]. This shortcoming is already being recognized by public organizations and authorities.

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[1]http://www.thairath.co.th/content/eco/364633[5 Oct 2013]

Several organizations and state agencies have come up with workshops, training measures and learning materials to help improve Thai taxi drivers' English ability[2]. Among these efforts, the Department of Land Transport has allocated some budget to improve their English. Traffic Radio Society FM 99.5[3] also organized a training program to enhance their language skills. Meanwhile, the Office of the Education Council organized a training program to upgrade Thai cab drivers' English skills[4].

It can be noted that as Thailand is integrating into the Asean community the demand for English instruction for taxi drivers is on the rise, however, the supply side of the equation is far from adequate with the instruction approach and the content often lacking the true understanding of the ways taxi cab drivers use English. Furthermore, their unique backgrounds and needs are often overlooked. This research aimed in earnest to filling this gap of understanding with some insightful findings that would reveal the problems and characteristics of their use of English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As mentioned earlier, despite those and many more efforts the majority of some 100,000 Thai cab drivers in Thailand are still in need of English language training, predominately

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[2] "ศิลปะศาสตร์อบรมภาษาอังกฤษให้กับพนักงานกรมการขนส่งทางบก"
http://www.rmutk.ac.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1809:-creative-business-drive-creative-country&catid=21:2009-11-19-07-07-19 [25 September 2014]

[3] http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/303761/taxi-drivers-get-crash-course-in-english [6 October 2014]

[4] สกศ ร่วมมือกับกรมขนส่งทางบก พัฒนาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับแท็กซี่ .

http://www.onec.go.th/onec_web/page.php?mod=Newseducation&file=view&itemId=572 [25 September 2014]

basic English. In a contradiction to such great and urgent needs, research on their language use and characteristics of their English are rare. This study attempts to fill in parts of this missing jigsaw by looking into the characteristics of the English language used by the taxi drivers, in addition to analyzing their problems and challenges which arise from their requirement to use English in a real setting.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it is likely the first study investigating the characteristics of the English language as used by Thai taxi cab drivers. Secondly, this study attempts to explain those language phenomena from the analysis of theoretical and empirical evidences. Lastly, this study recognizes the urgent need to help prepare the Thai taxi cab drivers for what is now demanded of them more regularly.

1.4 Purposes and Research questions

The study aimed to investigate the taxi cab drivers' English use and problems arising from their limited knowledge and skills of English. It also aimed to investigate the benefits reported by the students taking part in the project. The collected data were in the form of texts reported by the students participating in the taxi project. The students were taking a course on cross-cultural communication (EN 238) at the English Department, Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand.

Following from the aim, this study asked four basic questions, namely:

1. What was the overall English language ability of the taxi drivers?

2. What were the salient characteristics of the English language as used by those taxi drivers?

3. What were the possible reasons behind those language phenomena? What theories or principles would explain such linguistic phenomena?

4. What benefits would the students get from participating in the project?

1.5 Expected Benefits

The expected benefits are:

1. The results revealing the characteristics of the English language used would be useful for any attempt to help develop English lessons for the taxi cab drivers. In this case, the findings would be used to design basic English lessons for Thai taxi drivers.

2. The results would be useful for researchers exploring the natural language development of L2 adult learners, especially the notion of organic grammar and the need to recognize their position in the literature.

3. The results revealing the communication problems faced by most Thai taxi drivers would serve as a catalyst to relevant agencies and organizations to take action in helping them.

1.6 Definitions of Key Terms

Attitudes refer to one's feelings about someone or something. A person may have positive, neutral, and negative attitudes towards something or someone. In this study, the taxi drivers' attitudes are derived from the taxi drivers' verbal reports in response to the interview questions.

Content words are words that carry meanings. They are nouns, verbs, adjectives, and sometimes adverbs. The other type is the function words, which are those words we use to make our sentences grammatically correct. Pronouns, determiners, and prepositions, and auxiliary verbs are examples of function words.

Prescriptive Grammar refers to a set of rules about language based on how some people think language should be used as well as conventions. In a prescriptive grammar tradition, there is right and wrong language use. Such the grammar is what most students have learned in schools or through formal training.

L1 Transfer refers to interference of Thai with the use of English. L1 transfer occurs when taxi drivers apply knowledge from Thai to English. L1 transfer can be positive and negative.

Organic grammar refers to the theory positing that grammar or language rule is hard-wired in humans' brains. As a result, grammar is a natural development of the brain's language structure. Discourses on organic grammar is under the theory called the theory of Organic Grammar (OG) which holds that morpho-syntactic development is primarily driven by innate linguistic mechanisms (Young-Scholten, and Vainikka, 2011).

OCLL refers any learning that occurs outside of the classroom. This intervention is an acronym of 'out of class language learning' It has been found to help develop the students' language learning (Doyle and Parrish, 2012). In this study, the students interviewed taxi drivers as a part of their OCLL.

Taxi drivers refer to the taxi drivers interviewed by the 85 students during semester 1 of the academic year 2013.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study was a classroom study, so it was limited by several factors. Firstly, it only investigated the taxi cab drivers' English use reported by the students taking a course on cross-cultural communication (EN 238). The results may not adequately represent or correlate to the whole population of the Thai taxi cab drivers. We did not use any tests to determine their English ability; we only relied on the self-report and the observation by the student researchers.

1.8 Structure of the Report

This report has five chapters:

Chapte1, *Introduction*, started with the study's background, followed by the statement of the problem and the significance of the study. It explained why this investigation was worth doing. It then provided definitions of the terms and abbreviations used. It stated the purpose of the study.

Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, begins with the introduction and the description of the research participants. It describes the sampled schools as a learning community and the procedures of the research. This chapter ends with the conclusion.

Chapter 3, *Method*, presents the scope of the analysis, entailing the analysis of the national policy, the school-level policy, perceptions of the school administrators and teachers, and actual classroom practice.

Chapter 4, *Finding and Discussion*, presents the research findings in four categories: (1) overall results, (2) general discussions, (3) taxi drivers' English abilities and their attitudes, and (4) the students' reflections on their project participation.

Chapter 5, *Conclusion and Recommendations*, concludes the report's findings and the recommendations for future research will be offered.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature related to Thai taxi drivers and their work, language use and grammar, language, communication, and culture. It also reviews the related research studies.

2.1 Thai Taxi Drivers and Their Work

In the Thai discourse community, the term 'taxi driver' is a loaded word. When one hears the word 'taxi driver', almost instantly one often attaches some qualities into that signifier. Such attitudes vary, some positive, some negative, depending on one's personal experience and background. It must be admitted that Thai taxi drivers are among the most neglected people in Thai society. Little research has been done to look closely into their lives, challenges, and opportunities. The Department of Land Transport and other authorities do not require that English proficiency be one of the criteria for certifying the taxi driving licenses. Nevertheless, there are more and more taxi drivers to serve the growth of the Thai economy and the globalization process.

Taxis are widely available in Bangkok. Most are equipped with meters which calculate distance and time. The starting meter of a taxi in Thailand is 35 Baht. For chartering or renting to nearby provinces like Pattaya or Ayudhaya, prices charged would depend on the agreement between the driver and the passenger.

Taxi cabs are not only found in Bangkok. There are also taxi cabs in other major cities such as Phuket, Chiang Mai, Samui, Nakhon Ratchasima, Rayong, and Pattaya. They offer similar cars and services as in Bangkok. In Bangkok there are also airport-taxis known as AOT limousine which use various types of silver cars including Toyota, Nissan, Mercedes or BMW. The service is pre-paid at the airport to travel from the airport into Bangkok and nearby towns. As a VIP service, the passenger can also call for a service from downtown to the airport. However, the fare is also a VIP one.

Thai taxi cab drivers are a part of Thailand's social fabric. They are often neglected however by Thai society when it comes to work conditions and opportunities in lives, including education, despite the country's strong need to be internationalized. For this reason, they have communication and language problems, especially English. This has been recognized by many visitors and many websites recommend visitors to Thailand to learn to speak some Thai, partly, in order to speak to taxi drivers. This may show that Thai taxi cab drivers have problems communicating in English. For example, http://www.into-asia.com/bangkok/taxi/problems.php (last accessed 3 December 2014) suggests people to learn some Thai: "The best way to avoid any problems is to speak some Thai. This may seem difficult, but the level required for taking a taxi is quite simple."

Taxi drivers are not always perceived positively as many people complain that some drivers reject their requests and some are particular when it comes to destinations. For example, if where the passenger wants to go is too far or in a traffic jammed area some taxis decline to provide the service. Many visitors get upset when they are declined by the

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taxicab drivers. One website[5], for example, claims that The Bangkok Post has conducted research on reasons or rather excuses for not picking up passengers. Among the cited reasons included the need to return the car to the garage or the car needs refueling. Some taxi drivers prefer accepting only foreign passengers, and these types of taxis are found near tourist areas, where drivers often do not turn on their meters, ending them to charge an excessive fare.

Indeed, taxi drivers have received many complaints. The Department of Land Transport reported that there were almost 6000 complaints within the first three months of the year 2012 and of that number over 3000 taxi cab drivers were fined or disciplined[6].

It must be noted that some of the reasons given by the drivers are genuine and one should be sympathetic with their limitations. Most taxi drivers have humble education and income and often rent the vehicles, which means that they may have to return them at the end of their shift on time. Hence, it is not fair if the clients insist that they go the wrong direction near the end of their shift. With the policy of allowing more and more taxi cabs on the road the competition for passengers is getting tougher, not to mention the growing number of

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[5]http://www.richardbarrow.com/2012/09/how-to-report-a-taxi-in-bangkok/ [12 March 2014]

[6]ข่าวกรมการขนส่งทางบก DLT News No. 83 May 3rd, 2012. Available at www.dlt.go.th

personal cars, motorcycle taxis and taxi vans. They also have to be efficient as gas prices keep soaring.

To make ends meet, many taxi drivers work long hours to pay for their rent and to make ends meet. Many taxi drivers carry with them ID cards that do not actually belong to them, they belong to a different person entirely, usually the actual owner of the cars. This indicates that the drivers do not own the cars and they must rent them and pay a lot of money for the rent each day or week. The rent can range from 500 Baht to 1000 Baht per day7. One can imagine just how tough their long hours each day must be while working in the tough traffic condition of the Bangkok metropolitan area and nearby provinces. Indeed, the average taxi driver in Thailand works long hours and with the ever soaring gas prices it is harder for them to earn their living, let alone to make ends meet. Their plights are often overshadowed by the mishaps of a few taxi cab drivers.

There have been complaints on safety even though there are rules and regulations prescribed by the authorities, for example, the rules and the regulations from the Department of Land Transport8. However, it is not always the case that one will find a

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[7]บริการแท็กซี่ให้เช่า From http://xn--12csc0c1fvbs3gdy4bpel.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_6664.html [30เมษายน 2557]

[8]คู่มือการใช้และให้บริการรถแท็กซี่มิเตอร์ จาก http://www.dlt.go.th/th/sara/article/texi% 20meter_userguide.htm[30 เมษายน 2557]

driver with good characters and manners. Every now and then the public hears usual complaints on the taxi services, e.g. the driver behaved very immorally, the price was too high, some were driving carelessly all the time. Many of them need more training on not only in communication but safe driving. The authority and the public are aware of the problems but the truth is that it is not practical to train a large number of taxi drivers and it is not feasible to set high entry standards to screen only desirable taxi drivers. The reality is that any Thai citizen, male or female, can become a taxi driver with minimum educational requirements and a public vehicle driving license.

On the positive aspect, Thai taxis were rated among the best in the world[9]. Hotels.com revealed the website survey of taxi services worldwide and it indicated that taxis in Bangkok were among the best in the world in terms of values for money and services. Thailand was voted as one of the 10 best taxi services in the world. The surveys were conducted in more than 30 countries and 28 cities around the world. Bangkok ranked eighth in an annual survey and received an honorable mention as the city with the best value tariffs by taxis. The ranking was based on the travelers votes from seven special features include friendliness, knowledge, cleanliness, safety and quality of driving.

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[9]ผลสำรวจเผยแท็กซี่ไทยติดอันดับ8 แท็กซี่ชั้นนำของโลกในเรื่องการบริการจากhttp://news.springnewstv.tv/ [24 มีนาคม 2557]

News reporting good-hearted taxi drivers appears every now and then on Thai media. A recent report documented a taxi driver finding a wallet containing as much as 70,000 Baht. He returned the wallet to its Chinese owner in an act of goodwill.[10] Similar incidents have also been brought to the attention of the public by the media. This should illustrate that Thai taxi drivers have integrity and have earned the trust of society.

It is time to really regard taxi cabs as a safe form of public transport. It is time that we protect their basic rights in our society and one way to do that is to equip them with skills, knowledge, characters and of course, English skills.

In summary, Thai taxi drivers have important roles to play in Thai society. They are, however, facing several problems, and one of which is the language one.

2.2 Grammar and Language Use

Broadly speaking, there are two aspects of English language communication: grammar and the use of English. In a word, one's English should achieve both fluency and accuracy. Ferdinand de Saussure (1986), a renowned Swiss linguist, differentiates grammar from use. He refers to rules as 'langue' (language) and language use as 'parole' (speaking). It is common to hear a taxi driver speaking in English with broken grammar than a university

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[10]http://www.manager.co.th/crime/viewnews.aspx?NewsID=9570000041805 [21 April 2014]

student does. This is, as we know, due to the fact that grammar, in general, is what we have to learn or be taught. Yet, it's also conventional in the sense that one has acquired L1 grammar without having to undergo a schooling process. From this perspective, language rules are social constructs.

When one uses a language, one often does so though the use of grammar and vocabulary. Grammar is the rules of the language. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of grammar: prescriptive and organic grammar. The former refers to the rules and conventions handed down from generation to generation. Prescriptivism dictates how language should be used (Huddeston, 1984). It's the grammar or language rules we have learned from textbooks in school. It is often defined as the rules acquired through formal education.

'Organic grammar' or 'natural grammar' is the grammar acquired through experience of language use in the real life context, for example, adult second language acquisition of morpho-syntax and phonology. The notion of organic grammar is based on the theory of Organic Grammar (OG). It holds that morpho-syntactic development is primarily driven by the so-called 'innate linguistic mechanisms' (Young-Scholten, and Vainikka, 2011). The theory also posits that the route of language development is common across learners from different native language backgrounds, and proceeds in stages defined by both syntactic and morphological criteria. The first stage is known as the VP (verb phrase) stage, which is characterized by the use of uninflected verbs or words without grammatical elements. This stage is also known as the bare V-P stage. In English, beginners may not know how to use

inflected verbs, so they may say 'you go where?' instead of 'where are you going?' It is hypothesized that adults speaking another tongue must pass through this basic stage before moving on to the next stage, i.e. the IP-stage. The IP stage is characterized by the use of inflectional phrases, e.g. 'Bill went to Pattaya'. Finally, the AgrP stage is characterized by a mastery of sentence and discourse level competence.
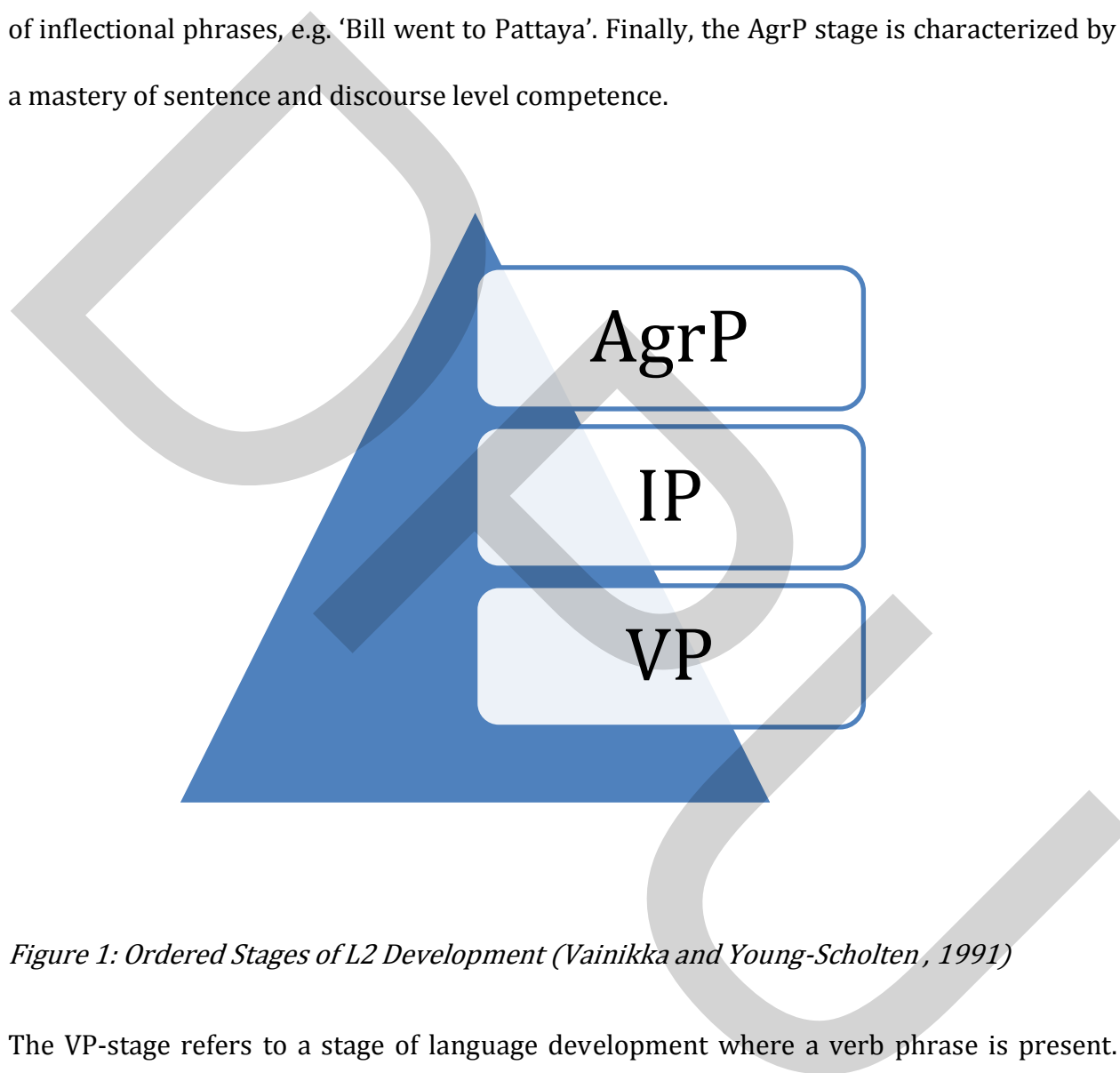
Figure 1: Ordered Stages of L2 Development (Vainikka and Young-Scholten , 1991)

The VP-stage refers to a stage of language development where a verb phrase is present. This is evidenced by the lack of functional architecture or grammatical items. As mentioned earlier, beginners may simply use words to convey meaning without considering their grammatical architecture. More time given and practice, L2 learners often move on to the IP-stage or the inflectional phrase (normally, a full-sentence stage). Here is where L2

learners apply auxiliary verbs and subjects to sentences, e.g., Jack has gone home. The last stage is called the AgrP-stage (Agreement Phrase, also known as the CP stage, is when children can apply subordinations and form complex sentences, e.g. using clauses and inflectional architecture. It is generally believed that when L2 adults learn another language, they follow the proposed stages.

Natural grammar is believed to occur naturally, with little or without formal schooling experience. In reality, there are a lot of people who do not have a formal education in, say, English grammar, but they can learn to speak it. Many Thais living along the Thai-Cambodian border can speak Khmer and can function well in oral communication without attending schools, though they may have some variation in how they phrase things or the terms they use. A lot of people also use slang terms or phrases that wouldn't be conventionally taught in a class. There are also a lot of times when people can be speaking to one another and don't even use complete sentences, but the communication still gets across. All of these things happen naturally while speaking, and though prescriptive grammar may have its influence on how one speaks in a more organized manner, it does not fully cover how a user can shift his/her language in a natural vernacular.

In summary, there are two kinds of grammar: schooled grammar and natural one. Most Thai taxi drivers have humble educational background, and it is hypothesized that most , if they have any English at all, do not pass the VP stage..

2.3 Language, Communication, and Culture

Language is the human capacity, Noam Chomsky argues. Humans have been using it for communication with other humans. In a broader sense language is a part of communication. Communication may or may not rely on text or verbal elements of language. For example, facial expressions can communicate feelings and emotions. Touching is another element of communication that requires no explicit language forms. Communication, verbal or non-verbal, is to a great extent influenced by culture.
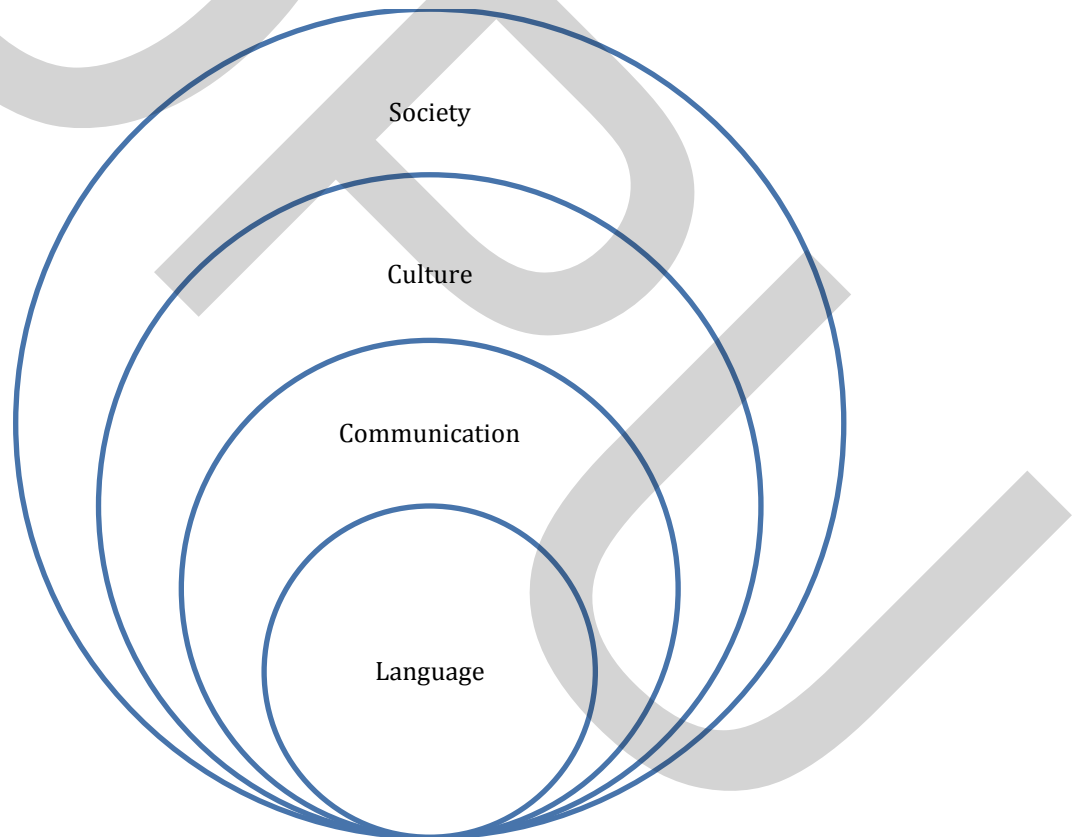

Figure 2: Language, Communication, and Culture

The above figure shows that language is part of communication, and two of them are a part of culture. There are many examples to show the influences of culture on language. In Thai, Vietnamese, and many other Asian languages, the kinship terms are often used to refer to other persons who are not their blood-related relatives. This shows that the societies have placed a great deal of value on harmony and togetherness. One would find the many terms referring to oneself and others in Thai language, compared with English. This also shows the hierarchical tendency of the Thai social structure.

It is It is important to note that many taxi drivers, when they use English, especially when they greet 'Farang' passengers, their verbal behavior may perceived to be rude if they are not aware of the cultural elements embedded in greetings. For example, they may say, 'hey, you, where you go?' to mean, 'Excuse me sir, where would you like to go?'

2.4 Relevant Studies

There is little research on Thai taxi drivers' English use and its characteristics however there have been several news reports on the training programs provided by various agencies to help Thai taxi drivers. This may indicate that they need better English skills.

The project titled '*Thai Taxis Go Inter*'[11] was a case in point as it aimed to develop basic communication skills in English so that taxi drivers can provide their service more effectively. The project involved personality development, etiquette, dress and the need to smile to welcome foreign visitors. Smiling and speaking English well would provide an impression of quality to the passenger and raise the professional standards of the taxi drivers. The focus of the program was also on the ethical dimension of the profession. It was part of the supporting the tourism for Thailand. This would mean the support of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Recently one of Thai PBS' programs called 'Lui Mai Roo Roi'[12] (Get Going Regardless of Age) embarked on a taxi project to help teach English to Thai taxi drivers. This should be another example of the Thai public awareness with regard to the taxi drivers. Surely, more public and private organizations would join an effort to develop the taxi drivers' skills and abilities.

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[11]http://news.voicetv.co.th/thailand/72292.html [22 January 2014]

[12]http://org.thaipbs.or.th/org_news/activities/article529619.ece [21 April 2014]

3. METHOD

This chapter presents the research method. First, it presents the research participants. Second, it explains the research procedures. Third, it presents the questionnaires. Fourthly, it explains how the data were analyzed. This chapter ends with a short summary.

3.1 Participants

There were two kinds of participants: students and taxi drivers. Student participants consisted of 85 undergraduate students who were taking a course called Introduction to Cross Cultural Communication (EN 238). There were 42 taxi-driver participants. The students worked in pairs or small groups and interviewed those taxi drivers. The project commenced in September 2013 and ended by the end of November 2013.

3.2 Procedures

The student participants were instructed to work in pairs or small groups. They chose their partners voluntarily then they were tasked to investigate the taxi drivers' language and cultural challenges. Their interview questions centered around the given framework and semi-structured interview questions. Each team took with them a letter issued by the researcher, informing the purposes of the study and asking permission to collect the data Eighty-five students interviewed altogether 42 taxi drivers. The interviews were in Thai and they were audio-recoded. The students transcribed the audio files. The Thai scripts were translated into English and they gave an oral presentation of their investigation. At the end of the project the students were asked to answer questionnaires on their learning experience.

3.3 The Interviews

The study relied on the interviews of 42 taxi drivers reported by 85 students. The interview took place in Bangkok and Nonthaburi. The students interviewed the taxi drivers in action. They worked in pairs and got into a taxi and asked permission to conduct an interview. They explained that the interview is part of a project on cross-cultural communication.

The interview questions are within the scope of cross-cultural communication.

- Experience
- English skills
- Attitudes
- Cultural Awareness

3.4 The Questionnaires

By the end of the project (late November. 2013) 32 students had answered the questionnaires on the experience they have gained from participating and conducting the interview. The questionnaire items were constructed based on the standards specified in the course syllabus.

The students were also asked to write down in more specific terms some examples of their learning.

3.5 Data Analysis

The text data were analyzed using simple content analysis. The taxi drivers' answers were categorized to identify their driving experience, attitudes towards foreign passengers, English ability and communication problems. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using percentage and means.

4. *FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS*

The goal of this chapter is to present the research findings and discuss them. It has five sections. First, it presents the overall results. Second, it discusses the findings on the taxi drivers' English competence and attitudes. Thirdly, it discusses the general findings. Fourthly, it discusses the students' reflections. This chapter ends with a short summary.

4.1 Overall Results

This section presents the overall results of the study. The findings are as follows:

In terms of gender, it was found that all of the taxi drivers (100%) in the study were male. This is not a surprise, as it is known in Thailand that driving taxis is generally a male job. On average, they have worked as a taxi cab drivers for 8.45 years. The maximum experience was 30 years, and the minimum was 1 year. Most of them drove rented vehicles.

All of them (100%) said they have experienced servicing non-Thai customers and those non Thai passengers were both native and non-native speakers of the English language. Most reported that they had experienced communication challenges and problems with their customers. The problems included the use of English with them admitting to having low English proficiency. The challenges, however, went beyond simple language problems. Some reported having problems understanding the behavior of some passengers, for example, their attitudes towards showing feet in the car.

As for their ways of dealing with those problems they reported that some foreign passengers could say some Thai words and that was helpful. Many passengers carried with them either maps

or name cards and this was helpful. The biggest problem arose when they had to solve the immediate problems.

Their limited language ability and the limited ability of the passengers who were also non-native were of particular importance when they had to deal with unforeseen problems such as explaining for the need to take a shortcut or the need to visit the toilet, among others. Similar situations include the need to ask for the right direction or the exact spot where the passengers have to get out.

With regards to the characteristics of English used by the taxi cab drivers it was found that:
1. Most relied on short sentences with the frequent use of 'content words' for example, where you go? Thank you, ok, yes, no.
2. The grammar seemed to reflect their lack of English education. They said their focus was on communication. Hence, while their grammar was weak, most of them to some level were successful in their communication.
3. They used content/key words for example, money tip, you high way, toll way. They don't use helping verbs for example, do, did, done. They will say 'where you go?' instead of 'would you like to go?

The most obvious problems were those related to language and it may be classified as the language barrier. Obviously, most taxi drivers had problems communicating in English, often finding it difficult to start a conversation or to respond to questions from the customers. They had to rely on habit and experience because their English was limited to basic function. Based on the data analysis it was also salient that some problems were beyond just language per se. In this study we regarded them as the cultural ones.

The less visible problem was the cultural problem. This is referred to commonly as the cultural barrier. Many of them were not aware of the cultural differences between Thai and Western culture. For example, when they greet passengers they may say, "hey! you where you go?", which is ok in Thailand but it may sound impolite to some westerners even though the communication was successful. It would be more perhaps be more successful if they said" hello!

Where to Sir?" or "where to Madam? ". Another example is when they collect the fare. Some drivers expected their foreign passengers to be more generous and give them tips. Some drivers made a comment that some foreign passengers were 'stingy' because they did not tip them at all and demanded the change to be exact. This may reflect the fact that some foreign passengers do not give tips in their respective countries and because of the cultural differences the drivers certainly form their own attitudes towards the foreign passengers. This is what classified as the attitudinal barrier.

For those attitudinal barriers, it must be noted that they are of two sides, the drivers and the passengers. Some taxi drivers expected extra money from foreign customers and were disappointed when they got nothing apart from the fair. Many taxi drivers had the positive attitudes toward "Farangs" (white-skinned Caucasian Westerners), reasoning that the tips from them were good. Some taxi drivers said that some foreign passengers were rude to them. In general, however, Thai taxi drivers had a positive attitude toward foreign passengers.

4.2 General Discussions

This section discusses the following findings:

Communication and Grammar: This study found that the English language used by the taxi drivers was limited to a basic level and they focused mainly on communication, not style or grammatical accuracy. The taxi drivers' English shows us that their focus was on communication. One characteristic of their English reveals the presence of L1 transfer, especially the use of pronoun 'You'. What is salient is also in the pronunciation, which is also another example of L1 transfer. On the issue of whether the language use would follow the stages prescribed by the OG theory or an extension of one's already acquired language. The data in this study is far from conclusive, nevertheless our examples reveal the possibility that the user may transfer his existing world knowledge. One example in particular. "You money highway" was given by one taxi driver. He said it worked well but his explanation gave us more insight into the rationale of his use. The user explained that the word 'you' was used to refer to his interlocutor, not him. The word money placed right after the word you means that it has to be the other party's

money. The word 'highway' is what is better known in Thailand than perhaps the word 'express way' or 'toll way.'

Culture and Attitude: Many taxi drivers expressed their personal opinion towards different groups of foreign passengers and one of the reasons behind the attitude seems to be the tips from the foreign passengers. This, if anything, should point to the relationship between cultural differences and their potentials to form or create certain attitudes. Some taxi cab drivers said they found the use of feet of some passengers unacceptable and rude. This reveals the significant difference between Thai and the general western cultures. In many western cultures the show of feet is not an offence and there is no offence in the use of feet, Most Thais however regard feet as something low and should not be shown in public.

Language & Cultural Barriers: As reported, the taxi drivers experienced communication difficulties when they provided services to foreign passengers. We also discovered that most Thai taxi drivers experienced not only language but cultural difficulties. The use of 'you' as a personal pronoun seems to be the most common expression to address a foreign passenger. They expression "You, you pay money highway" may be effective in many occasions. It can however create misunderstanding as some may regard it as being insensitive. From the understanding of the taxi drivers the word 'you' is polite as it means 'khun' in Thai. This indicates the link between language and culture.

Many taxi drivers also mentioned the behavior of some foreign passengers to be 'rude'. Those mentioned behaviors were: (1) putting up their feet in the car and (2) being stingy (not giving tips). Looking into these phenomena, we may be able to unravel the cultural underpinnings. As language is part of culture any effort to help develop the drivers English needs to address the issues related to culture, such as addressing terms, the culture of tips and time orientation. Foreigners, especially those from the West, may be judged by the Thais if they are not careful with the use of feet.

OCLL Project OCLL stands for "out-of-class language learning". OCLL has the potential to develop the students' cognitive, affective, ethical and moral skills at the same time if well-

designed and properly implemented. This is especially true for a subject matter that requires critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills. In this study, the students were asked to work on the assigned project inside and outside of the classroom.

4.3 English Ability and Attitudes

This section presents the data revealing the link between English ability and attitudes. Most of the taxi drivers were poor at English. Of the 42 taxi drivers surveyed, only 22% of them (9) said their English was sufficient or adequate to cope with the demand of English. The majority of them (78% or 33 taxi drivers) said that their English was poor or very poor. It is not a surprise that all of them said that they would like to improve their English. However, the kind of English language they preferred learning is for communication, not examination.

In term of their attitudes towards foreign passengers, it was found that most had positive attitudes (85%). Many of them were neutral neither positive nor negative (10). Only 7.69 percent had somewhat negative attitudes. It is interesting to note that despite their humble levels of English, they managed to maintain their positive outlook.

It is noted that those taxi drivers with poor English were more likely to have negative attitude toward foreign passengers. In our study there were five taxi drivers whose attitudes were negative and all of them were poor at English. For the taxi drivers whose English skills were fair they were mostly positive about serving foreign customers. We have however found that some taxi drivers were selective when they were asked about their attitudes towards foreign passengers. Most of them had positive attitudes towards 'Farangs'.
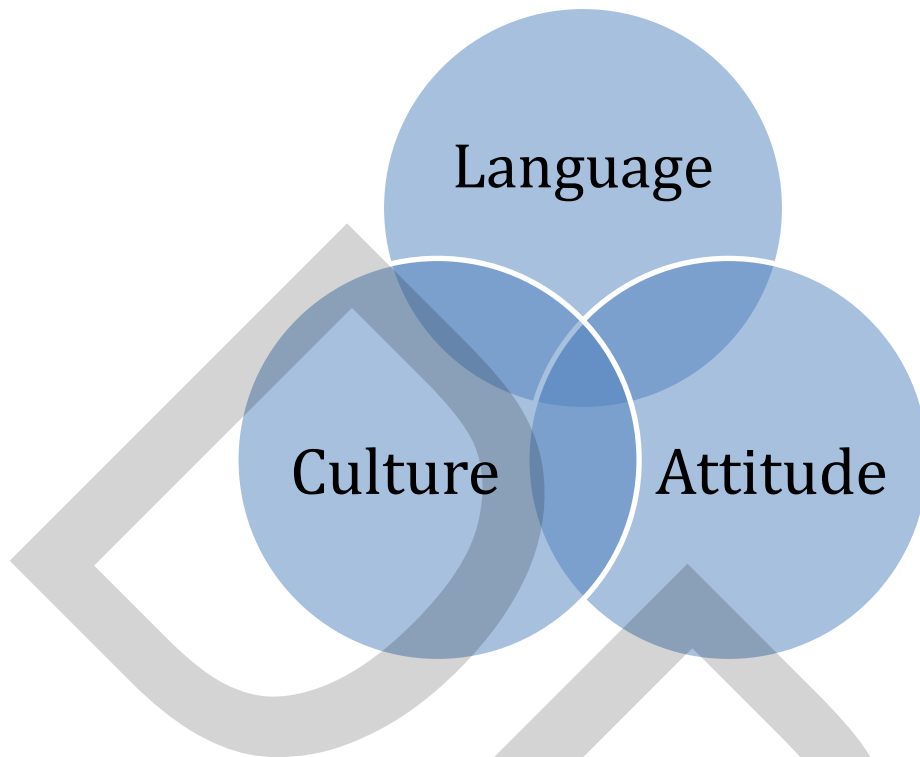
Figure 3: Three Communication Barriers

4.4 Non-Verbal Communication

As most taxi drivers were poor at English, they compensated that deficiency with non-verbal language. Non-verbal cues to help with the communication were found to be varied, including using maps or name cards. Hand gestures were found to be the single most resorted to measure to help them in their communication with foreigners. Other measures include calling their friends or the center for help.

Because most taxi drivers have a poor command of English, they often resort to non-verbal methods to communicate with the foreign customers. For example, maps, name cards,

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gesture. They mentioned that they had asked for help, too. It was found that the most common non-verbal language was the use of hand gestures. From the interviews, many foreign passengers have prepared themselves well, some were carrying maps and sometimes, iPads with them. Other communication strategies included asking for help (the bellboy, foreigner's wife, calling the traffic hot line no.1775).

4.5 Students' Reflections

Nineteen students answered the questionnaires at the end of the course. The results of the students' responses to the questions showed that the activity was useful for them in many respects. Their responses are reported below.

The majority of the students (18 out of 19) said that the project helped to develop their ethics and morality. They mentioned that they had to interview the taxi cab drivers themselves as the project required that they audio-record the interview to prove they did not make up the data.

With regards to knowledge most of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement on the merit of the project, they said that the project helped develop their understanding of culture, language and communication in general. Specifically they mentioned that the project granted them opportunities to exchange ideas and opinions with the taxi drivers and their classmates.

In terms of the cognitive/ intellectual skills most of the respondents (18 out of 19) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The project helps develop my cognitive skills and promotes my data analytical skills." Many mentioned that the project demanded that they designed the questions themselves and solved immediate problems. Some mentioned the fact that the project was complex and there were several variables they had to deal with.

As for the area of learning on interpersonal communication and responsibility the students said they agreed that the project helped develop their interpersonal skills and responsibility. They mentioned that they had to work as a team (the project requires that they worked in pairs). Some of them mentioned the fact they had to communicate with the taxi drivers.

However, with regards to the analytical, communication, and information technology, some students disagreed (2 out of 19) with the item "The project helps develop my analytical, communication, and IT skills." Four of them (21 %) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Nevertheless many respondents (13 respondents or 68 %) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; among those agreed they mentioned the fact that the project stipulated that they write up a report which demanded their analytical skills and the use of IT.

Lastly, it was also found that the majority of the students said that the project helped develop their cultural sensitivity and awareness. Only 4 of them were neutral about this statement. They mentioned that the project helped them to better understand the culture of the taxi drivers and recognized the diversity of cultures.
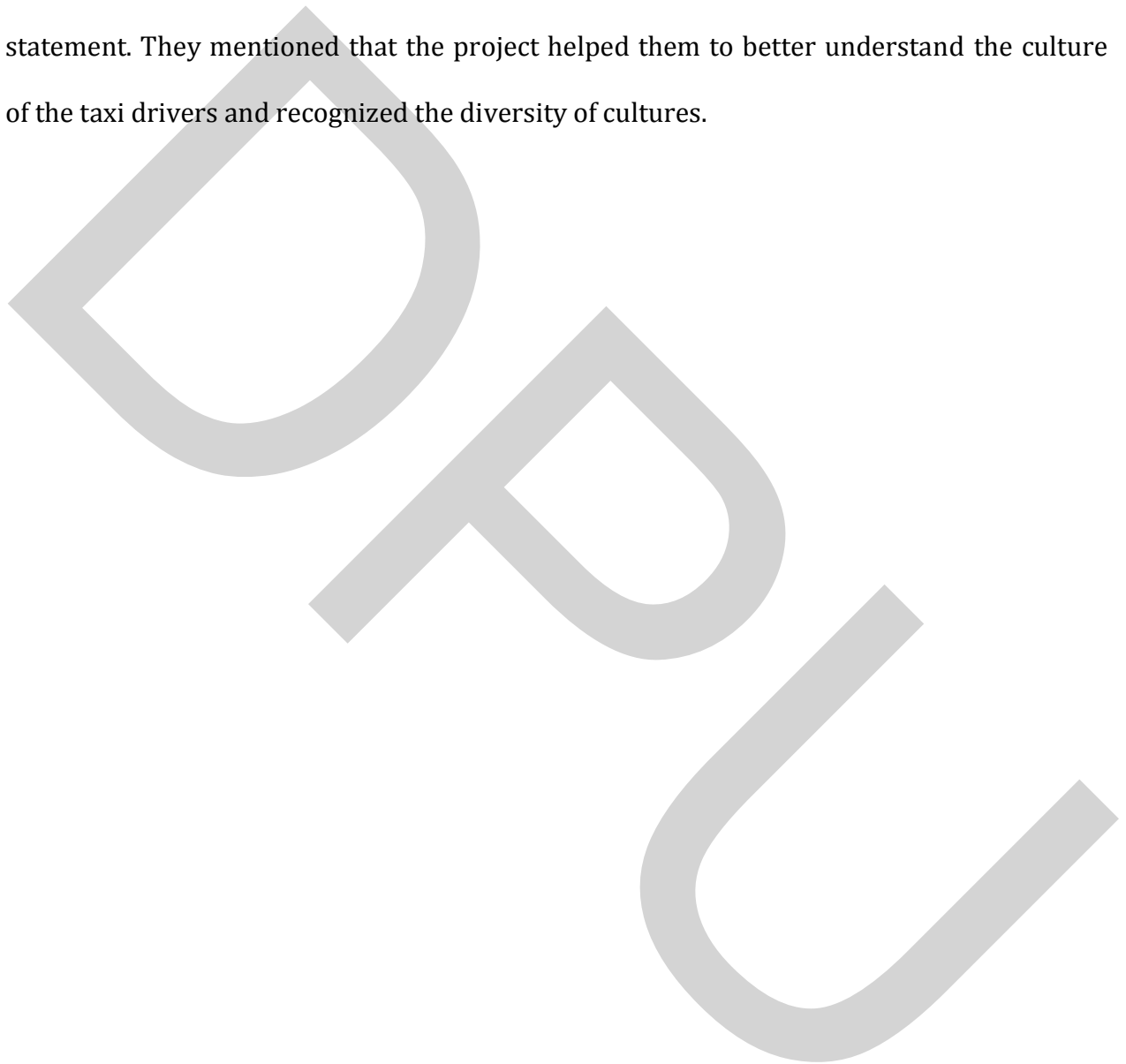
5. *CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

5.1 Conclusion

The aims of this study were (1) to describe the characteristics of the English language used by Thai taxi cab drivers and document their problems and challenges arising from the need to communicate in English, (2) to investigate the students' attitudes towards the taxi project and the reported benefits. Based on the data analysis, it was obvious that the taxi drivers under this study clearly had problems when they serviced foreign customers and the two major causes of those were their language and cultural knowledge and awareness.

What has been discovered are the characteristics of the language use of the taxi cab drivers. As reported, their vocabulary was limited in range and their grammar was far from perfect. It seems that their only wish was to take the passengers to their destinations, get the fare, and maybe some tips. We have noted the potential correlation between the poor language ability and the negative attitudes towards servicing foreign passengers. However, what seems to be a bigger problem lies beyond their language ability and skills but in their attitudes and cultural competency. It seems that with positive attitudes and readiness to open up to new things some taxi drivers have managed to overcome many communication challenges.

The study also confirms Thai people's belief about their taxi drivers and that is simply that they need to improve their English. They appear to have been overlooked by the authority and Thai governing agencies in the taxi cab business.

In conclusion, Thai taxi drivers have real needs to develop their professional standards, including their communication skills. Unfortunately they often lack free time to attend English classes. The solution is to offer them on-the-job learning opportunities. There should be various modes and channels of learning opportunities.

5.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings and its implications the recommendations for further study are made as follows:

This study reported that most taxi drivers under the study expressed their strong desires to undergo some form of training or intervention in order to develop their English skills. This desires alone should prompt Thai society to recognize their needs and provide the appropriate forms of training. Hence, when the authorities or relevant organizations design any training program they should take into consideration their background and needs.

It was also found that most taxi drivers preferred real-life communication to principles or grammar. This has implications for course designers and content providers to address their particular and urgent needs. Moreover, the contents, given the time constraints, should be relevant to their needs.

With the advent of new media and online technologies such as websites there is now a plethora of ways to make content and audio files available on various modes and platforms. One practical approach is perhaps to offer them learn-by-yourself CDs so that they can learn anytime on the job. In terms of the teaching we need to bear in mind that most taxi drivers lack background, they also want something direct to the point. Thai society needs to help them as they are usually the very first individuals to make an impression on visitors.

It is recommended that researchers investigate the actual language use of the taxi drivers in action in a greater scope, this would enable us to explore greater dimensions of language use and cross-cultural communication factors.

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APPENDICES

A: Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions based on your participation of the Taxi project experience.

Domains	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The taxi project helped me to develop my ethics and morality.					
The taxi project helped me to develop my knowledge of English and language use.					
The taxi project helped develop my cognitive and intellectual skills (thinking and problem-solving skills).					
The taxi project helped me to develop my interpersonal communication and responsibility.					
The project helps develop my analytical, communication, and IT skills.					

Others (Please specify) ……………………………………………………………………………………

………..

………..

B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview questions:

How long have you been a taxi driver?
Do you enjoy your work?
Have you ever serviced foreigners?
What kinds of problems or difficulties have you encountered?
How do you deal with those problems?
How would you rate your English language ability?
How often do foreigners give you tips?
Do you speak any other languages apart from English and Thai?
What do you often do when you don't know what to say in English?
 Could you please given us some examples of the English words or expressions that you often use?
What do you think about…..?

C: Samples of Taxi Drivers' English

Sample
Case2: Where are you go?   Listen the Keyword such as airport, airport
Case4: The foreigner ask, how much? You spend money to pay.
Case5: Hello
Case6: NNS: Airport Suwannapoom, Hotel
Air, how much?   Foriegner: Noway, I know mete three hundred   →Highway
Asking collector to tell them to pay for the toll way thank you farang don't talk much   because they know that we don't know
Traffic jam: Hey you how much?   : Hey you money go
How much….. forty-five   twenty-five
Ok ok ok,ok ok, stop
Thank you, you go
Forty-five, highway, tollway
(B.A.) Where you go?, guideline, expert, how much?, back pack, snake snake fish fish,   grammar
Where you go?

You pay forty-five.
Monment (Victory moniment)
Airport Suwannapoom
Tollway, ok, bellboy, put meter, no meter, one hudred
Airport airport, ok, where you go?
Ok,ok, you high way you high way, how much?,forty-five baht
Sorry, I don't know.
Where are you go?, go strength, turn left, turn right, how long you driver taxi?
You high way, ok, how much?, keep right
Where you go? Don't know.
Pay toll better way.
How much? Meter Where do you go? How many? One hundred-fifty
Hello, where you go? Khawsan,RCA,Grand palace, six five baht
You high way I don't know
Thank you, sorry sorry, bye bye

How much?
How much?, how many?, two hundred
Yes yes yes, no no no
Royal palace, King palace, sleep Buddha.
Where you go? You get way, high way ok How much? Twenty-five, no no no
Hey! You Suwannapoom airport you ok?
You high way very good
No high way, traffic very much everyday.
Highway, toll way
Where you go? Hello, how are you? Forty-five you high way Where you go? Toll way, fifty baht
High way, express way
Where you go?
You money 50 baht Toll way Your bag 100 baht

I don't know.
I don't understand you say.
Go strength, turn left, turn right
Hospital Krungtep, meter
Airport Suwannapoom, one two three four five six seven, no
Where are you come from?
Minggalaba, moopeena, mooseebye
Charge motor way
What, money money
This is quick
No quick
Terminal, sky
Yes, no, ok, money
Where you will go?
I don't know
Hundred baht, airport, how much?
You money high way
Where you go?
Hello, where do you go?
Map?
Where you go?
Where you go massage

You high way

One thousand and five hundred baht