

บทคัดย่อ

ผลกระทบทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีต่อความเต็มใจของผู้เรียน ในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษในบริบทวัฒนธรรมไทย

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ในการนำเสนออิทธิพลของวัฒนธรรมไทยที่มีผลต่อการเลือกตัดสินใจใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนในประเทศไทย โดยอาศัยกรอบแนวคิดของ แมคอินไทร์ และคณะ (1998) เรื่องความเต็มใจในการพูดในภาษาที่สอง เป็นพื้นฐานของการวิเคราะห์ อย่างไรก็ตาม กรอบแนวคิดดังกล่าวถูกสร้างขึ้นจากบริบททางวัฒนธรรมของประเทศแคนาดาซึ่งเป็นประเทศที่มีภาษาทางการสองภาษา ลักษณะดังกล่าวตรงข้ามกับบริบททางวัฒนธรรมในประเทศไทยที่มีภาษาทางการเพียงภาษาเดียว บทความนี้จึงมุ่งเน้นศึกษาเฉพาะปัจจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับสถานการณ์การใช้ภาษาในรูปแบบต่างๆ ที่พบในห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย รวมถึงศึกษาค่านิยมทางวัฒนธรรมของคนไทยที่มีผลต่อทัศนคติในการสื่อสารด้วยภาษาอังกฤษ ผลการศึกษาสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงอิทธิพลของกลุ่มชนซึ่งเป็นตัวแปรทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีผลต่อการตัดสินใจเลือกพูดภาษาอังกฤษของคนไทย

Abstract

Cultural impact on learners' willingness to communicate in English in Thai cultural context

This paper discusses the Thai cultural influences underlying one's choice of speaking English in EFL classrooms in Thailand. A conceptualization of the decision to speak in a second language, which was called "Willingness to Communicate in a Second Language" by MacIntyre et al. (1998), was chosen as the foundation of the analysis. The MacIntyre model was principally developed in the bilingual context in Canada, where language resources are abundant, while the reverse is true for Thailand. Given the differences in contextual factors, this paper focuses on relevant components that come in play in different communication situations in Thai EFL classes from Thai cultural perspectives. Traditional Thai values that form one's attitudes in interacting with others were examined. The analysis of principles behind Thai social interaction behaviors reveals the power of "others" over oneself when making the choice to speak in English.

Cultural impact on learners' willingness to communicate in English in Thai cultural context**

กำไลทิพย์ ปัตตะพงค์*

Kamlaitip Pattapong

มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

Silpakorn University

Introduction

It is clearly seen in English language classrooms in Thailand that students are mostly quiet and reluctant to use English to speak. This is also a common occurrence seen in other classes where Thai is used. These typical behaviors are noted in Thai old sayings like, "Speech is silver, silence is golden" (พูดไปสองไพเบี้ย นิ่งเสียตำลึงทอง). Although this characteristic might be favored by most Thais, it can be considered a practical hazard that would obstruct a language learner to become a competent speaker. For language learners to acquire the language skills, frequency in practice using English to communicate is essential. This principle is in line with the concept aimed at understanding the process behind individuals' decision-making before speaking a second language given chances, which is called "Willingness To Communicate in a Second Language" (WTC in L2) (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément & Noels, 1998).

* อาจารย์ ดร.กำไลทิพย์ ปัตตะพงค์ อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ภาควิชาภาษาตะวันตก มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

** บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของวิทยานิพนธ์ระดับปริญญาเอก

The WTC concept has been widely studied in both ESL and EFL contexts. However, the EFL context in Thailand has still remained under-explored (Pattapong, 2010). In order to understand the reasons why Thais are reluctant to use English to speak in English speaking classrooms, we need to analyze the values and philosophy related to communication behaviors in Thai society, because implicit theories of culture have great influence on how the members of a society choose to behave in different situations (Gudykunst, 1998). This paper will firstly explore the Thai philosophy and values that shape the general character of Thai social interaction. Then, it will examine the WTC literature in regards to the Thai EFL context. Finally, it will outline the Thai cultural factors that are likely to influence the Thai EFL learners' willingness to use English to speak in class.

Overall characterization of Thai culture

Thai culture has been explored by both Western and Asian social scientists. According to Triandis (1995), culture may be categorized into the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism, based on several characteristics. A survey of cross-cultural differences by Hofstede (2001) showed that Thailand was ranked high in collectivism. Collectivist characteristics, according to Triandis' (1995) classification of cultures, are:

Collectivism may be initially defined as a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the

goals of these collectivists over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives. (Triandis, 1995)

Triandis' (1995) characterization of a collectivist culture emphasized the high level of interdependence of people in the society. This feature of a collectivist culture has been used to describe the customary nature of Thai society by many social scientists (e.g., Wichaijarote, 1973; Sensenig, 1975; Holmes, 1995; Mulder, 1996). One of them is an affiliative society theory proposed by Wichaijarote (1973). In his theory, Thailand is an affiliative society, where the establishment of a personal network is emphasized, because it serves as an affiliative path that individuals can use to gain access to the authority from whom they can ask for benefit. In an affiliative society, a desire to establish a network of personal relationships is a fundamental motive underlying interpersonal relationships (Wichaijarote, 1973).

The Role of Other Persons Over Self

Because personal relationships are important in the Thai culture, when interacting with other people, Thai people need to know who the persons are in order that they can interact with them properly. Thai people distinguish people with whom they have interpersonal relationships into groups of intimates and non-intimates. Also, they assign a hierarchical level to both intimates and non-intimates, according to social status and age. Intimates or near persons involve home, family, and community; non-intimates or distant persons involve strangers, power, and suspicion (Mulder, 1979; 1996).

To interact with intimates, people can express their thoughts and feelings, because they do not have to fear power. They are likely to enjoy themselves in a friendly atmosphere where they are relaxed and uninhibited with their intimate friends. The relaxation characteristic, sometimes called “sanuk”, is an important component in Thai social interaction. To the non-intimates, people need to remain silent in order to protect themselves from outside forces. This self-protection mechanism from the outside power relates to the concept of face-protection. Thais are enormously concerned about their “face”, which was placed as the top ranked value in a survey of Thai national values (Komin, 1990). Moreover, Thais are cautious when talking to people of higher status or authority figures. The authority figures have control power over any inferiors through a means of rewards or punishment. The inferiors are supposed to do what they are told and not to pursue intellectual inquiry, as superiors will view it as an offence which will sabotage their established relationship (Wichaijarote, 1986). Hence, it is common to see the inferiors keep quiet when they communicate with superiors. These characteristics of social interaction in Thai culture can be seen as two cornerstones that capture variations of social interactions within Thai society. They are building strong relationships and maintaining hierarchy (Holmes, 1995).

To establish a pleasant relationship in their interactions, Thai people need to know with whom they are talking. To interact with the ‘right’ persons, one adopts the Kreng-jai attitude to smooth and pleasant interaction (e.g., Wichaijarote, 1973, 1986; Komin, 1990). Kreng-jai is a critical communication tool for any interpersonal relationship behavior in Thai society, because Kreng-jai is displayed

in many interaction types, ranging from distal relationships to intimate ones, although the differences appear by degree. The practice of *Kreng-jai* has been widely analyzed by both Thai and Western social scientists. The most comprehensive definition of *Kreng-jai* is that of Komin (1990), who stated that the concept is “to be considerate, to feel reluctant to impose upon another person, to take another person’s feeling (an ego) into account, or to take every measure not to cause discomfort or inconvenience for another person” (Komin, 1990, p. 164). A usage of the *kreng-jai* value is illustrated by the excerpt below (Senawong, 1999):

Q: Why did you go out with him?

A: He picked me up so I didn’t want to disappoint him.

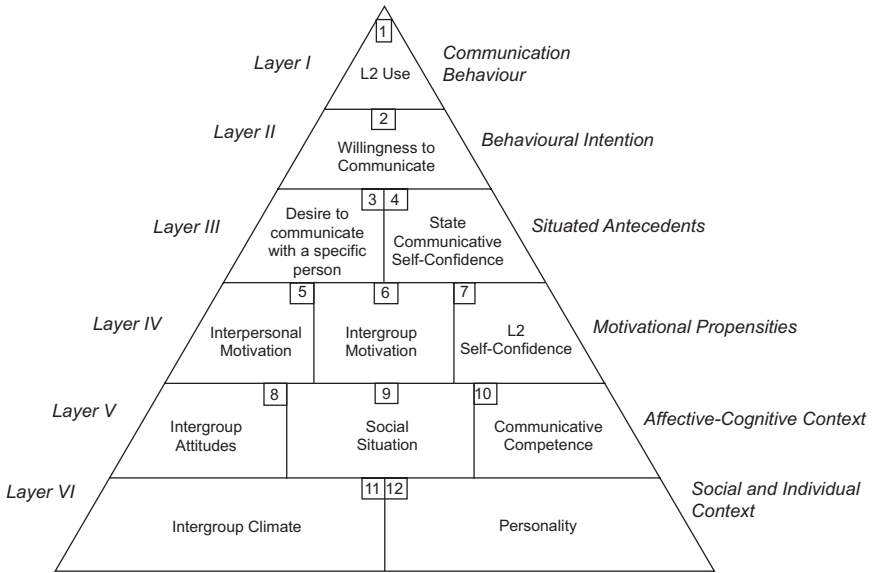
This excerpt shows the practice of *Kreng-jai* value that inhibits one from speaking one’s mind. Having this value in mind, when Thai people converse with one another, there is an inhibition to express one’s feelings and thoughts in order to avoid conflict. As can be seen, others have a significant influence on ones’ mind which results in their patterns of interaction behaviors. The power of others on self, resulting from Thai cultural values, does not only inhibit the Thais from speaking their minds in Thai, but it also impacts upon the choices of using English to speak. Willingness to Communicate, the theory that explains the process underlying one’s mind before making the choice to communicate in a second language will be examined and served as a guideline to study the cultural variables contributing to the WTC in a second language of Thai EFL students in classrooms.

WTC in Thai EFL Classrooms

The concept of WTC emerged from the work on communication in a native language in the late 1950s and early 60s (McCroskey, 1997) in North America, where interpersonal communication is strongly valued (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). The WTC was developed to denote a consistent tendency of communication behaviors in a given native language (L1) across interpersonal communication situations, determined by an individual's personality (trait-like variable). This original concept of WTC was put forward to cover the area of communication situation in a second language (L2) by MacIntyre and associates. MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model in a pyramid shape (See Figure 1) illustrates a range of variables, including linguistic, communicative, and social psychological, further grouped into situational (Layer I-III) and individual (Layer IV-VI) levels as WTC determinates. The WTC in L2 is conceptualized as an inclination to use L2 to speak, influenced by situational and trait-like variables. In this model, the WTC in L2, located at the summit of the pyramid, explicitly spelled out its situation-specific focus as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Although the focus is on situational variables more than those at the trait level, variables situated at the trait level are viewed as fundamental variables and form the basis of layers at the situational level arranged above them.

The two most significant variables of the WTC model are "Desire to Communicate with a Specific Person" and "State Communicative Self-Confidence" (Layer III). Both are located adjacent to the WTC. The Desire to Communicate with a Specific

Figure 1. The L2 WTC Model



Note: From "Willingness to Communicate in the Second Language: Understanding the Decision to Speak as a Volitional Process." by P.D., MacIntyre, 2007, *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, p. 568.

Person involves two types of motives: affiliation and control. Affiliation often occurs with persons with whom one is familiar and similar to in various ways, whereas control concerns any task-related situation where interlocutors have specific purposes to communicate to each other (e.g., asking for cooperation, assistance). The use of L2 is expected to take place more often in affiliation situations than control situations. This perspective seems to be true for Thai EFL learners, because Thais are more relaxed and less inhibited with whom they are familiar with (i.e., their intimates), so they should be able to speak their minds without any fears.

Another WTC immediate factor, the State Communicative Self-Confidence, comprises state perceived competence and state anxiety; both vary across situations. Perceived competence refers to “the self-evaluation of one’s ability to communicate appropriately in a given situation” (MacIntyre et al., 2003, p. 591). Communication apprehension refers to “the anxiety that people experience in association with real or anticipated communication and in L2 is also known as language anxiety” (MacIntyre et al., 2003, p. 591). Communication apprehension or language anxiety was found to be negatively related to self-perceived competence (MacIntyre et al., 1997). In a study of WTC predictors for immersion and non-immersion students, communicative apprehension was found to be related to WTC for immersion students, while perceived competence was important for non-immersion students (MacIntyre et al., 2003). The differences in WTC factors between immersion and non-immersion students can be attributed to the significance of context. It is likely that the case of non-immersion students should be similar to Thai EFL learners, so the influence of context on Thai EFL learners’ WTC warrants further investigation.

Most WTC studies have been conducted in an English as a second language (ESL) context, especially a Western context. Very few studies were carried out in a context where English is regarded as a foreign language (EFL), as in Asian countries. Recently, however, Peng (2007) examined WTC factors in an EFL classroom in China *via* the use of a qualitative technique. She classified the WTC variables into two groups: individual context and social context. The individual context was subdivided into communicative competence, language anxiety, risk-taking, and learners’ beliefs. The social context

was subdivided into classroom climate, group cohesiveness, teacher support, and classroom organization. Cultural interpretation was used to explain the emergence of eight factors underlying L2 WTC. Given its significance in WTC, the cultural aspect was included in the WTC construct. Peng (2007) argued that L2 WTC should comprise L2 learners' linguistic, cognitive, affective and cultural readiness. Cultural readiness refers to "EFL learners' consciousness of minimizing the impact of their mother culture which is incompatible with their language learning, and being open-minded toward the target language and culture" (Peng, 2007, p. 261). Cultural impact to L2 WTC, then, needs to be further examined.

The Role of Cultural Context in WTC

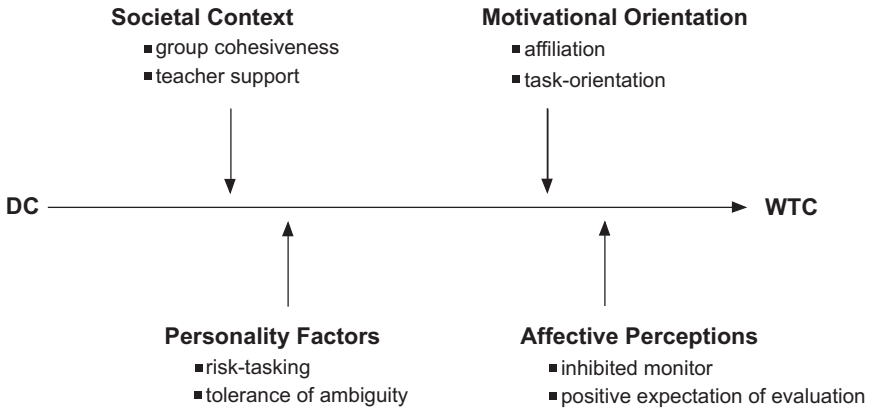
The cultural orientation to WTC in L2 in a Chinese EFL context was highlighted in a conceptual work by Wen and Clément (2003) and an empirical research study by Peng (2007). This perspective was not explicitly addressed in MacIntyre's (1998) model, which was based on a bilingual Canadian context. Both studies will be examined to see how cultural orientation affected the students' WTC.

Wen and Clément (2003) analyzed the Chinese culture and argued that culture is the key factor that influenced WTC in L2 for Chinese EFL learners. They proposed the conceptualization of WTC in L2 for Chinese EFL learners, based on two main factors through which the students' WTC was restrained. These factors were "Other-directed self" and "Submissive way of learning". The value of other-directed self refers to an evaluation by significant others of one's self. This perception is characterized by a value of Face-saving (i.e., face

protection) and a sense of group relatedness (i.e., insider effect). When the students are overwhelmed with how others will evaluate them in class, they may not want to get involved in the class participation. The other factor of WTC is Submissive way of learning which is based on the traditional Confucian philosophy that favored the silent way of learning, where knowledge was transmitted from teachers. This may result in the preference of learning English through emphasis on grammatical rules, rather than on communicative competence.

Based on the influence of culture, as indicated by the abovementioned two main concepts, Wen and Clément (2003) argued that the WTC is a psychological process that operates along a continuum (See Figure 2), beginning from students' Desire to Communicate (DC) that may or may not result in WTC, depending on four culture-oriented factors. Wen and Clément distinguished between the DC and the WTC: "Desire refers to a deliberate choice or preference, while willingness emphasizes the readiness to act" (2003, p. 25). It is conceptualized that every student may have a DC, but they may not end up speaking in class, because their DC is restrained by culturally-oriented factors. These factors are unified around the concept of face-protection and insider effect. These factors are Societal context, Personality, Motivational orientation and Affective perception. Wen and Clément (2003) claimed that the DC will result in WTC when the four factors are promoted by the teacher, because the increase in the four factors will result in a positive communication environment.

Figure 2. Wen and Clément's (2003) model of WTC for EFL students in China



Note: From "A Chinese conceptualisation of willingness to communicate in ESL," by W.P. Wen and R. Clément, 2003, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 16, p. 25.

Corresponding to Wen and Clément's contribution of cultural influences on L2 WTC for Chinese EFL learners, Peng (2007) found culturally-oriented factors to WTC in L2 in her study that explored the factors that contribute to the L2 WTC among Chinese university students. The findings from interviews and learners' diaries suggested eight main factors of WTC in L2 that were categorized into two main contexts: Individual and Social Contexts. In the individual context, there were four factors involved: communicative competence, language anxiety, risk-taking and learners' beliefs. In the social context, the factors were group cohesiveness, teacher support, classroom climate and classroom organization. Most of these variables seem to be consistent with the earlier findings of MacIntyre (1994) and Wen and Clément (2003), except learners' beliefs, classroom climate, and classroom organization that seem to be newly

emerging variables. The learners' beliefs include doubts about the usefulness of language achievement in L2 classroom and learners' concerns of classroom domination, as evidenced by some students' showing off. Classroom climate refers to the atmosphere in the foreign language classroom, which influences how learners produce the language. In a quiet classroom, more silence and less willingness to communicate are detected. Classroom organization refers to the effect of collaboration in a small learning group, which increases students' confidence in expressing their ideas in English to the group in a low-risk environment. Both the conceptual work by Wen and Clément (2003) and the empirical research by Peng (2007) emphasized the cultural perspectives of WTC in L2 in a Chinese EFL context, which was not explicitly included in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model of WTC. The next section presents the importance of culture on L2 WTC for Thai EFL learners.

Cultural factors influencing L2 WTC for Thai EFL learners

As for the related literature of the focal issue of this article, cultural factors seem to play an important role in the process of decision-making to use English to speak for Thai EFL learners. The analysis of Thai values on social interaction patterns suggested that an evaluation of others on self has a great effect on ones' choice of speaking. This corresponds to the importance of specific persons in MacIntyre's WTC model. This section elaborates the influence of others on the choice of speaking English for Thai EFL learners in classrooms within the WTC model. MacIntyre's WTC model has emphasized the role of specific persons that one communicates with that influences the two types of motives, either control or affiliative. In

class, the students are involved in situations where they could communicate with either their classmates or their teachers. The influence of teachers and classmates on L2 WTC for Thai EFL learners will be discussed within the two motivational orientations.

Role of teachers

When communicating with teachers, the level of hierarchy applies to Thai EFL learners. The students will see themselves as inferior and teachers as superior. Students feel obliged to obey and respect their teachers, because they appreciate teachers' benevolence in passing on their knowledge. This grateful relationship is called "bunkhun". In a bunkhun relationship, students are bound by the essential values towards their teachers which include gratitude and obligation, honesty, sincerity and responsibility (Komin, 1985).

With these values in mind, students' patterns of interaction with their teachers will be submissive, because motivation that drives communication is controlled or task-related. In the most common situation in class where students are asked to respond to the questions, they may not want to speak much because they do not want to make mistakes. In the unlikely situation where the students have different views to the teachers, it is unlikely that they will debate with teachers, because they do not want to challenge them. They may consider challenging the teachers to be inappropriate, because it might be seen as a threat for the teacher which would result in the risk to their relationship.

Role of classmates

Classmates may be considered either as intimates or non-intimates, depending on how close they feel towards each other. Communications between intimates usually are driven by affiliative motivation, while task-orientation or controlled motivation works for non-intimates. With intimates, students are likely to express themselves and enjoy interaction, because they are not afraid of making mistakes. However, for non-intimates, students may be inhibited, because they may think that they may embarrass themselves and “lose face”. Fear of losing face can be hazardous to those who want to practice speaking English. Some students may choose to stay quiet instead of asking questions, because they do not want to appear stupid to their peers. They might think that they will lose face if they do so. Moreover, for some who are very fluent in English, they may think that they would appear to be showing off if they speak too much to their unfamiliar classmates. These characteristics of classroom communication situations in the Thai cultural condition may be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of classroom situation-oriented of L2 WTC based on cultural implications

Classroom Contexts	Motivational Orientations	WTC/Communication Behaviors
Formal situation: • Non-intimate classmates and teachers	Task-orientation/Control	Low WTC/Inhibited
Informal situation: • Intimate classmates and teachers	Affiliation	High WTC/Relaxed

As shown in Table 1, there are two types of classroom situations, formal and informal, where different motivations drive communications, depending on whom the persons communicate with. The formal situation refers to communications between non-intimate classmates and communications between students and teachers. In formal situations, students are required to communicate with task-orientation or controlled motivation. For example, students speak English less when they are asked to work in groups with whom they are unfamiliar. In informal situations, students are affiliated with those to whom they speak, so that they are more relaxed and comfortable to use English to speak. Hence, it can be argued that Thai EFL learners are willing to communicate in classroom situations where they feel relaxed and when presented with interlocutors to whom they are affiliated. In contrast, if presented with unequal-status/unfamiliar interlocutors in controlled situations, they may feel reluctant to utter a word or exhibit low willingness to communicate.

Conclusion and research implications

L2 WTC is interpreted as a decision-making process to use L2 to speak in a specific situation with specific persons. "Persons" to whom one will speak take on an important role, because they are associated with different types of motivation, either affiliation or controlled. Affiliation seems to result in more WTC than controlled motivation for Thai EFL context. This theoretically-based argument needs to be empirically tested. Research into WTC for Thais should examine the differences in the means of WTC in different communication situations that are driven by different motivation. Moreover, this article focuses only on the view of the cultural impact

on L2 WTC, which is very specific. It is suggested that research should look into the issues affecting L2 WTC from a wider perspective, by taking into account all relevant factors. Nevertheless, it should be considered that WTC is subject to change according to specific situations (Kang, 2005; Cao & Philp, 2006). Hence, WTC should be investigated within its immediate environment and qualitative methods which allow the contextually-dependent meanings (Ushioda, 2009) to emerge should then be employed (MacIntyre, 2007).

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