Intercultural Transformation Stages by Thai EFL Tertiary Learners in

Facebook Comments

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ABSTRACT

Students encounter with the influence of Thai culture in English communication. Through their studies of English, the students have been exposed to Western-learned culture affected by their Thai innate culture. This EFL learning condition shapes intercultural transformation occurred in intercultural communication in Thai context. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore intercultural transformation stages made by the Thai students in Facebook comment boxes posted to a Thai lecturer teaching English reading. Data was qualitatively collected from the students' Facebook comments which was required as a participation during learning of Analytical and Critical Reading course posted to the lecturer. The obtained results indicated that the most significant stage of intercultural communication made by the student participants was stage 1 "poor psychological health", followed by stage 2 "functional fitness", stage 3 "fit psychological health" and stage 4 "intercultural identity". For the cultural transformation, collectivism affected the students' intercultural shifts in posting the FB comments to communicate in English with the lecturer.

Keywords: *Intercultural transformation stages, intercultural communication, Facebook comments*

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication provides the communicators to encounter with innate knowledge which is local culture (Kim, 1988; De Vos, 1990; Baraldi, 2006; Koo, 2006; Etae, 2007; Piller, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2016) and learned knowledge which relates to English-speaking culture. This intercultural confrontation allows communicators to interact culturally as a result of linguistic cultural transformation.

Intercultural transformation leads to understanding of language phenomenon of intercultural learners influenced by one's particular culture in multiculturalism society. The local and global knowledge of Thai EFL learners challenge the students to manage with cultural selectivity using English language as a medium of instruction with a Thai lecturer. Facebook is introduced as a classroom learning tool for an additional platform of English language learning due to its rapid feedback and borderless features of online technology to promote education to serve informational and life-long learning (Commission on Higher Education, 2008).

The study of intercultural communication involves four areas which are the analysis of communicative process, the role of language in intercultural communication, the cognitive system of the communication process and the development of interpersonal relations (Lomas, Osoro & Tuson, 1993). This study focuses on the cognitive system of the speakers' communication process. It describes the stage of intercultural transformation and its cultural linguistic features used by the Thai EFL students using Kim (2001)'s theory of Intercultural transformation. The study also finds out how intercultural transformation, which is cultural adaptation in language use, represented in Thai EFL online context

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural transformation has been studied in relation to anthology, Leontovich's study (2003) involved personality of intercultural transformation in people's communication. She indicated that intercultural interlocutors encounter cultural confusion due to their different cultural knowledge and national backgrounds.

In intercultural setting, the speakers express cultural identity in communication in order to remain one's culture (Lambert, 1972; Armitage & Hoffman, 1989). The intercultural communication is as a platform for cultural transformation among cultural differences. Various cultural communications are mixed, hybridized and transformed to each other in intercultural setting (Nehru, 1941; Stepanov, 1997). Factors influencing intercultural transformation are speakers' language proficiency and their cultural understanding (Wilson, 1993).

The interaction among people of different cultures allow cultural transforming occurred in intercultural setting (Liu & Morris, 2014). Ingroup and outgroup identities are primary concerns in cross-cultural communication. They assert that cultural transmission between the speakers provide a platform for cultural exchanges in intercultural interaction. The process of cultural maintenance and cultural transmission is emphasized in Liu and Morris' study. They indicated that intercultural transformation tend to occur gradually due to the need of globalization, international cooperation.

Bruch et al., Jehangir, Lundell, Higbee and Miksch (2005) conducted a research on communicating across differences about politics of institutional practices. They revealed that two discursive forces influenced the interaction are location and ideology, shaping the speakers' discursive differences. They relate "location" with the individual's role, taking part in a community. "Ideology" connects with the speakers' background knowledge to interpret cultural messages. They pointed out "interrelatedness" as a multicultural approach in intercultural interaction in order to have a mutual understanding.

Intercultural transformation has been studied to investigate language socialization process in Shi (2006)'s study. The research emphasizes the process of trans-cultural adaptation in terms of cultural selectivity in second language interaction. The study focuses on cultural similarities and differences across cultures and communicative adaptation of the speakers in cross-cultural setting. The stages of cultural transformation were discussed in relation to individual social constructs and cognitive complexity to perceive L2 language learner competence.

In order to perceive cultural differences, a study on using online social media to promote cross-cultural understanding has been conducted to explore American and Turkish students' cultural knowledge to understand the cultural differences (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). The interaction took place in an online social media. Using a digital media to encourage the students to express their cultural perception towards Turkish and American cultures, the finding reveals that the students' communication showed the most US culture.

THE STUDY

The study adopts qualitative research. It lasts one semester in which the students share opinions in Facebook comment boxes to a Thai lecturer teaching Analytical and Critical English Reading course. The students are required to discuss questions on the topics relating to the lesson plan of the course via Facebook. All students and the lecturer had participated in a classroom setting and discussed reading passages before posting in Facebook comment boxes, which serves as a platform for the students to practice analytical and critical discussions.

The participants were 2nd year undergraduates majoring in English major at a public university in southern Thailand. The participants were Thais with different religious backgrounds. They took a reading course for a semester or 16 weeks. The course requirement was to participate in Facebook comment boxes by sharing opinions on the videos uploaded by the lecturer. The contents of the videos related with the topics discussed in the classroom. The participants are motivated to share their ideas, opinions, point of views and attitudes on the specific topics. The platform for discussions was created as a closed-group page in Facebook for the course members. The lecturer explained the details of the online tasks and marks allocated for the tasks in the classroom. The questions for the discussion were posted in different period of study weeks. The first and the second questions were assigned to the students on the week of fourteenth. The third and the fourth questions were posted on the week of fifteenth. The fifth post was asked on the week of sixteenth. All questions were posted at the end of the semester due to the practice for classroom discussions during the semester of the students to be exposed. The questions posted are in Table 1.

Table 1 Topics posted in Facebook discussions

	Topics	Number of comment boxes
1	In your opinion, does texting really kill the language?	25
2	How could you learn other cultures from books?	25
3	Do you agree that introverts are capable of great achievement?	24
4	What will you do to overcome the fear you might face?	25
5	In your opinion, what is an amazing ability of Bonobos, a smart creature that you learn from the reading and the video?	23

The data collected from Facebook comments of the student participants will be explored in terms of intercultural transformation of language use using intercultural transformation of Kim (2001)'s theories as a main research framework, focusing on the stages of intercultural transformation. The secondary conceptual framework is Hofstede's (2001) Individualism index, differentiating between Thai and Western cultural values in Thai students' English communication.

The data presented and discussed in the Facebook comment boxes reveals the stages of intercultural transformation by Thai students in Facebook comments.

The data presented and discussed in the Facebook comment boxes reveals the stage of intercultural transformation in the students' language use which are formed and influenced by intercultural encounters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The stages of intercultural transformation found in FB comment boxes used by Thai students to the lecturer of English reading course. The most frequent stages were stage 1 (S1) "poor psychological health" (75.4%), followed by stage 2 (S2) "functional fitness" (11.4%), stage 3 (S3) "fit psychological health" (9.8%) and stage 4 (S4) "intercultural identity" (3.2%). The data from the FB comment boxes revealed "poor psychological health" was the most notable cultural transformation in the context of intercultural communication made by Thai students. There were two Thai cultural values and three Western cultural values founded in the FB comment boxes based on Hofstede 's (2001) IDV index. However, there were numerous respondents presented both Thai and Western cultural values in a single FB comment box in this study.

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In terms of analyzing the stages of intercultural transformation based on Kim's (2001) theory, the cultural selection of Thai or Western cultural values were used to differentiate the stages of the students' intercultural transformation. For the stage 1 (S1) "poor psychological health", Thai cultural values presented in communication are "we identity", "high-context communication" and hybrid cultures, expressing both Thai and Western cultural values in communication. The FB comment boxes with the hybrid cultures were referred to three intercultural contexts composed of "we identity" versus "I identity", "high-context communication" versus "I identity" and "we identity" versus "low-context communication".

The stage 2 (S2) "functional fitness was the second stage of intercultural transformation found in the Thai students' FB comment boxes. S2 was expressed in the comment boxes in terms of 2 contexts which were in the context of "low-context communication" and "I identity". The stage 3 (S3) "fit psychological health" was the third ranked intercultural transformation stage found in the FB comment boxes. It consisted of "I identity" and "low-context communication". The stage 4 (S4) "intercultural identity" was the least stage of intercultural transformation made by the students. There were "low-context communication" and "I identity" showed in the FB comment boxes. The findings of this study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Intercultural transformation stages by Thai students in Facebook comments, adapted from Kim's (2001) theory

Q	No. of FB comments	Intercultural transformation stages							
		S 1 Poor psychological health		S 2 Functional fitness		S 3Fit Psychological health	%	S 4 Intercultural identity	%
1	25	21 (We identity)	4			1 (I identity)	4		
		3 (Hybrid cultures)	2						
2	25	0 (We identity)	0	1 (I identity)					
		14 (Hybrid cultures)	6						
3	24	4 (We identity)	6	1 (I identity)		6 (I identity)	24		
		1 (High-context communication)							
		12 (Hybrid cultures)	8						
4	25	2 (We identity)		1 (Low-context communication)		1 (I identity)	4	1(Individualism)	4
		1 (High-context communication)							
		15 (Hybrid cultures)	0	4 (I identity)					
5	23	4 (We identity)	6	6 (Low-context communication)	4	4 (Low-context communication)	16	3 (Low-context communication)	12
		2 (High-context communication)		1 (I identity)					
		3 (Hybrid cultures)	2						
	122	92	5.4	14	1.4	12	9.8	4	3.2

Key: Q= Question   S = Intercultural transformation stage FB = Facebook

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DISCUSSION

The results of the study reveal that S1 of intercultural transformation was mostly presented in the students' FB comments. In terms of intercultural communication to discuss the topics in English reading course, Thai and Western cultural values were expressed in communication. The speakers involved Thai cultures in communication in English discussions.

S1 "poor psychological health" in the context of Thai online communication conveyed Thai collectivism and Western individualism. "We identity", "high-context communication", "I identity"," and "low-context communication" indicate that the speakers mainly concern with Thai cultures when exposed in English communication. Hence, the stage of intercultural transformation mostly found in the study shows that the speakers were not able to balance between Thai and Western cultural values. They emphasized both cultures in communication.

S2 "functional fitness" in the context of this study was the expressions of Western individualism. S2 relates with the students' ability to shift the communication to the target culture which is English-speaking culture. "Low-context communication" and "I identity" were expressed in the students' FB comments.

S3 "fit psychological health" was also shown in the context of Western individualism. S3 focuses on well cultural adaptation skill of the speakers to fit the target culture which is English-speaking culture. The students showed Western individualism in FB comments using "I identity" and "low-context communication".

S4 "intercultural identity" was presented in the context of Western individualism with the highest stage of intercultural transformation. A few students are skilful speakers in intercultural communication. "Low-context communication" and "I identity" were Western cultural values found in FB comments.

The results of the study show that the students' choices to shift the cultures in communication was to include both Thai and Western cultural values. For the FB comments, collectivism takes part in the students' cultural shifts. S1, which was the highest percentage of intercultural transformation stage in the study, was generally found in the students' FB comments presenting Thai cultural values of "we identity" and "high-context communication". The distinct numbers of Thai cultural values in S1 was "we identity". The hybrid cultures were ranked as the second option to assure the existence of Thai cultures in English interaction. The third raking cultural value in S1 was "high-context communication" revealed a few number of the students using in intercultural transformation stage. The use of "we identity" and "high-context communication" in FB comments reflects Thai collectivism value, referring to a society highly concerned with social ties of in-group members. The students established the Thai value in English communication to represent their group perception. In case of Thai students' FB comments, it clearly presents that English language interacted by Thai students was culturally adapt with the local context of Thai cultures.

S2, S3 and S4 of the intercultural transformation stages appeared in order. In each stage, few students were able to shift to Western cultures in order to communicate in English with the lecturer. The Western cultural values of "I identity" and "low-context communication" were presented in FB comments. The use of these Western cultural values involved the primary choice in the students' communication.

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CONCLUSIONS

The process of intercultural transformation in Thai online context of the university students was influenced by Thai cultural values, Thai collectivism. The cultural transition in English communication was made to present Thai culture. Significantly, for Thai students exposing English language, intercultural transformation proceeds slowly referring to 75.4% of the participants preferred to express communication using Thai cultural values instead of the transition to Western culture. The communication within them involves three categorizations which composed of (1) hybrid cultural values, the use of Thai and Western values, (2) the Thai value of "we identity" and (3) the Thai value of "high-context communication". Groupness is important for Thai collectivism.

This study of intercultural transformation contributes to the understanding of intercultural communication ability of Thai students in EFL context. The findings reveal that language use in online setting by the Thai students interacted in English communication with the Thai lecturer associated with cultural values in Thai context. It is obvious that the use of Thai collectivism affected the speakers' abilities for intercultural transformation stages. The students find difficulties in communicating as skillful speakers of English language. This study raised awareness of Thai EFL communication in online environment.

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