

Integrating Cultural values for Communicative AEC Reading Materials

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Abstract

This paper is based on an experiment research study made by Sinhaneti and Kachendecha in 2012 on engaging Thai learners to English language Learning by using culturally themed lessons using 151 9th grade students from schools in Bangkok. The paper echoes Peter Streven's call to a shift to teaching language as communication skills in the 21st century, that is English language needs to be taught in such a way to enhance the employability and cultural understanding and cultural values of their own, their regional partners as well as their global partners in particular the upcoming AEC where ASEAN value needs to be uphold. With this concept, new 30 model reading lesson units based on Thai culture, folklores, beliefs, arts, games, and festivals are written to serve as a springboard and insight into Thailand. Samples of the units will be shown so as to apply to any other reading materials for AEC countries. This new proposed material firmly supports the idea to balance the integration of some indigenous culture in the textbook that leads to education for a true international understanding in the 21st century.

1. Introduction

To Margaret Mead (1937:17) culture means “human culture, the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation.” Shulman (2009:v) asserted that “cultures are dynamic. They undergo growth, development, and change, which makes an analysis of cultural behavior and values challenging. Also there is a great diversity of values, beliefs, and traditions within anyone culture.” There is no doubt that English in the 21st century has become the world popular language of communication among the non-native speakers of the language. Recently the English language has spread to different parts of the world and at present it is placed as a global language. Along the same line, Peter Strevens (1992) stressed that English language needs to be taught in such a way to enhance the employability and cultural understanding and cultural values of their own, their regional partners as well as their global partners in particular the upcoming AEC where ASEAN value needs to be uphold. Alptekin (1993) also asserted that it is equally important to learn about the culture in which you are living as well.

2. Language and Culture

There are a lot of scholars who support such an idea. Kramsch (1993) said that the teaching of culture is a fifth skill for language learners that enhance students overall learning experience. Neff and Rucynski, jr (2013) also reiterated that it is not enough to inculcate linguistic competence, sociocultural rules (specific cultural references from

geography, occupations, pastimes, historical events and personalities appear in language need to be recognized. The use of English as an international language involves crossing borders literally and figuratively. More importantly, the idea of including culture in language learning can be motivating as well as gaining insight into students own culture. Culture is in fact embedded in the language itself especially in the semantics of the language as Brown (2007) pointed that a language is a part of a culture and culture is a part of language. Every language will reflect the values, beliefs and assumptions of the culture it came from. Learning another foreign language involves learning its culture (Halliday 1979). Alptekin(1993), Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (cited in Nation and Macalister 2009) carried out their research on non-native students of English and found that students have some difficulties in learning English through western cultures and they are more motivated to learn English when their local culture is included. Davud Kuhl and Masumeh Rahimivand (2014:96) echoed the same idea when saying “Consideration of diversity in participants’ backgrounds and technologically infused education in the academic discourse community might expand our knowledge of students’ writer identities in multicultural and multi-faced learning environments.” Neff and Rucynski Jr (2013:13) also see the benefit of the communication with cultural knowledge as the background when they say that “ the more we know about one another’s world, the more smoothly we can communicate, whatever the language we are speaking”. Kantatip Sinhaneti and Warinthorn Kachendedecha (2012:168) reported that other research studies showed positive result towards the use of students own culture materials as the following:

“Fredricks (2007) has carried out a research with her Tajik students. She discovered that her students give positive attitude towards learning English if the pedagogical material presented to them is close to their culture. Shafaei and Nejati (2008) emphasize that it is important to include learners’ culture in any language teaching practice. Exclusion of local culture will lead to ineffective teaching and may have negative influence on language learning.”

Andy Kirkpatrick (2007:3) stressed that the cultures of the language learners should be embedded in the curriculum as English learners worldwide learn English to communicate with other non-native speakers.

“As many learners of English worldwide are learning English to communicate with fellow non-native speakers, the appropriateness of native speaker models and the cultures associated with them needs to be questioned. In certain contexts, it may be that the local or lingua franca model should be used as a classroom model and regional cultures—at least the cultures of the learners—should constitute the curriculum. In short, the curriculum should comprise the cultures of the people using the language for cross-cultural communication rather than Anglo-American cultures ”.

3. Advantages of Using Culture-based Content

Using this local culture-based content is a great advantage to both teachers and learners. Learners have already familiar background knowledge. In other words they have the content schema already in their mind. This can be their self-esteem booster when they are confident in what they will be producing. The topics and the content may be interesting to them because they are relevant in their daily life. Also students may recognize how important it is to use English to express their thought. As Sandra McKay (2002: 90) has stated “ clearly such a context provides the students with an opportunity to learn more

about their own culture and to learn the language needed to explain these cultural elements in English”. In addition, knowing their own culture and being able to express it out can be a good identity builder for them.

For teachers, teaching the cultural content that they are familiar with are certainly a confidence booster and a comfort zone builder with their students. On pedagogical purpose, it is easy to engage students with lessons, tasks and activities from the familiar context. As Sandra (2002:90) asserted that “ the teacher could exploit the material by asking individual students to describe what specific aspects of their culture mean to them as a way of demonstrating the variance that exists within one culture and promoting a view of culture as difference. The teacher could also use material relating to the source culture in ways that encourage students to consider how they would explain elements of their own culture to others”. Furthermore, local culture content does not give local teachers difficulties in teaching somebody else’s culture in the English classroom especially when the teachers themselves have never been exposed to the real environment where native speakers are living their every day life, as Sandra pointed (2002:92) “when both the students and the teacher come from a culture not represented in the text, as could occur in both contexts, that is with a teacher from the source culture and with an expatriate teacher, many of the same problems could occur. Students may be uninterested or puzzled by the information in the text, and the teachers may not have access to additional information needed to explain some of the cultural references. This may result in no one in the class being able to comment on the culture presented; hence the degree of understanding both teachers and students can gain about the culture presented in the text will be limited ”. It is indeed a reinforcement of Thai culture and establish a sphere of inter-culturality in the classroom according to Sandra (2002: 91) “ source culture texts can also be used in contexts where the students come from the source culture but the teacher is from another culture. In such a situation, the teacher, if not familiar with some of the cultural topics, can become an interested listener, creating an ideal context for establishing a sphere of inter-culturality. The teacher might pose questions to the students, asking them to explain what meaning a particular cultural element has or her reaction to the cultural information and behavior presented in the text”. More importantly, this is a good preparation for the AEC implementation in 2015 when all ASEAN cultures need to be shared.

Thus an experiment research study was made by Sinhaneti and Kachendecha in 2012 on engaging Thai learners to English language learning by using culturally themed lesson using 151 ninth grade students from four different types of schools in Bangkok. A model reading lesson unit was constructed and tried out to these students followed by the questionnaire and interview from both teachers and students. The result is very positive because students prefer their reading texts to have some contents related to Thai culture, something within their schemata storage. Students are able to link the lessons with their background knowledge. They are able to picture the scene and to link English vocabulary in the lessons to Thai vocabulary using their background knowledge. Out of 5 scales 4.71, 4.91,4.50 are the score students gave when asked about their preference to have cultural content on specific local culture, special festival of each part of Thailand, national culture national festivals of the country and folktales and legends of Thailand in respective order. Sinhaneti and Kachendecha (2012) reported in the findings that Thai teachers feel more confident to teach the subject which is familiar to his knowledge and find it easier to engage students to actively participate in a familiar context. They say culturally themed

lessons are a great tool to reinforce Thai culture for students in order to prepare themselves for the forthcoming AEC.

Some of the positive teachers' responses from Sinhaneti and Kachendecha (2012:174) are as follows:

“ I think if we can assign students to read and to learn about something not far from their lives, for example, Thai culture, they would be more enthusiastic to learn English than they are these days. ”

“ One of the advantages I found from using the culturally themed lessons teaching English to students is they can guess meanings of some English vocabulary by linking the word to their knowledge in Thai.”

“I think I' ll be more confident holding this course book in my hands teaching English to students. Teaching English with the course books from USA or UK sometimes I come across culture burden which I do not know how to answer my students. It decreased my self-confidence in teaching.”

“It is good for students to learn about Thai culture through English. They should be armed with Thai culture knowledge and be able to present it in English since in the near future there will be lots of tourists from ASEAN member countries coming to Thailand .We need our Thai students as presenters of the country.”

As for the students, Sinhaneti and Kachendecha summed up the students' opinion on this as follows: (2012: P 175)

“They felt highly satisfied towards the idea of some contents in the English course books related to Thai culture. Moreover, they had a high level of satisfaction towards the idea of learning English through ASEAN culture, they think learning about ASEAN culture is necessary to them in preparing themselves for the establishment of the ASEAN community in 2015”.

4. Proposed Reading Materials with Integrating Cultural Values

Myra Shulman (2009: iii-iv) from Georgetown University produced a textbook “Cultures in Contrast” through the University of Michigan Press with the goal to increase linguistic competence as well as to improve intercultural communication skills writing in the preface of the book that “ as students examine their own cultures and compare them with others, culture shock and cultural conflict may be lessened, and enjoyment of cultural differences may be strengthened”. Curriculum Corporation and the University of Melbourne's Asialink Center by Anthony Bott et al (1998:backcover page) came up with the textbook under ASEAN context to “stimulate greater appreciation of the cultures and peoples in the Asian region”. A book on Thai Journey has been developed to “support the study of aspects of the people, culture, geography, history, economics and environment of Thailand”. The forward of the book written by Rosalie Triolo and Robert Lewis (1998:iii) claimed that “the book will make a significant contribution to developing teacher and student understanding of the complexity and importance of Thailand. Improved knowledge of the similarities, differences and interdependence between Australia and countries of the Asian region will contribute to unity, empathy and economic growth throughout the region”.

With the same expectation as the Australian Access Asia series for Thailand(1998:iii) to showcase a cultural display of Thailand which in turn will “increase awareness in the wider school community of Thai people, culture, geography, history, economics and environment”, a compilation of reading materials in 25 units at the start was thus made as a springboard in teaching reading with a focus to Thai students own culture. Each unit includes the PPP sequence (presentation, practice and production) with the focus on reading skills and reading strategies with other skills as an expansion activity. Each unit portrays one aspect of Thai culture through folklores, traditions, beliefs, arts, games, festivals and general culture. Under the theme “Thai culture in general”, there are units on rice, Thai desserts, Thai language, English for ASEAN, transport, Thai Buddhism and Monks, Thai wedding, Traditional Music and Instrument, funeral tradition, and paying respect by “wai”. Under the theme “Games” there are units on Sepak Takraw, Thai Boxing, Thai kites flying, Traditional Games for Children. Under the theme “Arts and Beliefs” there are units on Thai tattoo, Shadow play, Khon, Thai literature, Likay, Thai superstitions and beliefs, ghosts. Under the theme “Festival”, there are units on Phra Pradaeng Songkran Festival, Khao Phansa Candle Festival, Festival of Lights(Illuminated Boat procession, Loy Krathong, Yee Peng). Thai students or foreign students will be able to gain some insights of Thailand culture with the exposure of these newly written units. Each unit is written under the following guidelines (patterns):

- 1) Find material with specific- culture target
- 2) Develop it into a reading unit
- 3) Design icebreaking or warming up activity (presentation)
- 4) Design a series of reading activities with vocabulary exercises and reading strategies to enhance reading skills(practice)
- 5) Engage students in different communicative tasks (production)
- 6) Add expansion activities

4. Samples of Materials

4.1 Sample Unit: Traditional Games for Children

1. Structure of unit:
2. Introduction
 - (presentation) Pre-reading, work in pair, look at photos and discuss, look at photos and guess the name of each game
 - 2.1 Text reading Guess the vocabulary meaning and read the text
 - 2.2 Text reading and put proper vocabulary in the blank
 - 2.3 Understanding what you read (choose the game being described)
 - 2.4 Sequencing
 - 2.5 Playing the game
3. Wrap up/expansion
 - 3.1 Write about the games students have played
 - 3.2 Write down 5 new vocabulary students have learned
 - 3.3 Crossword puzzle

4.2 Sample Unit: Wellness Spa in Thailand

1. Pair work Look at the advertisement of the spa and work with your partners.
 - 1) Discuss what are the differences between these massages
 - 2) Do you think the spa can relax our mind or not? Why?

2.TEXT 1 (Excerpt only)

In recent years, Thailand has emerged as the region's most active spa destination, breaking a new frontier as the hub of all things holistic. With new spa treatments migrating to Asia's spa capital from regions near and far, Thailand has come to be known as Spa Capital of Asia- a traditional folk technique to cutting-edge technology.

Nevertheless, spa aficionados and holistic wellness seekers who travel to Thailand are equally keen to experience the home-grown, native Thai spa therapies and treatments unique to Thailand that they would not find so easily elsewhere...

The most famous and popular spa therapy is traditional Thai massage. Also known as massage for healing, it is an age-old healing art that originated as a spiritual practice taken from the teachings of the Lord Buddha.

1) Vocabulary. Look at the underlined words in the text. Think about the meaning of these words. Try to guess the word meaning from the text.

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| 1 frontier..... | a | a person who gets something |
| 2 holistic..... | b | relating to a person's spirit |
| 3 aficionado..... | c | somewhat ill or prone to illness |
| 4 ingredients..... | d | provide with nourishment |
| 5 healing | e | in the beginning |
| 6 spiritual | f | to make someone healthy or well again |
| 7 originally..... | g | a component of a mixture or compound |
| 8 invisible | h | the limits of knowledge in a particular field |
| 9 ailments..... | I | bearing in mind, attentive to |
| 10 recipient... | j | a fan of something |
| 11 meditative..... | k | nearly impossible to see |
| 12 mindful | l | the whole things |
| 13 ailing..... | m | not very serious illness |
| 14 nourishes..... | n | involving or allowing deep thought |

2) Use the correct form of the words in 1) to complete the following sentences.

- 1, the word had a very different meaning from the current meaning
- 2 The pharmacist can assist you with the treatment of common.....
- 3 If you mail a homemade food gift, be sure to let theknow.
- 4 In Zen, you have to train to find.....calmness and you have to train to find a groove.
- 5 For us, the study of the mind and conscious defines the of biology.

3) Understand the text. Read the text and answer the following questions:

- 1 What type of the spa is NOT mentioned in Thai traditional spa?
A Thai massage
B Thai herbal steam

- C Thai herbal compress
 - D Hot stone spa
- 2) Where can we learn Thai massage?
- A Wat Pho and Wat Pra Kaew
 - B Wat Phra, Wat Pra Kaew
 - C Wat Pho and Wat Phra
 - D Wat Phra Kaew
- 3) What does “this” in paragraph 9 refer to?
- A Thai massage
 - B True massage therapies
 - C The healing process
 - D The therapy of Thai spa
- 4) Write True, False or No Information for each statement.
- A Thailand is one of the spa capitals in Asian.
 - B Thai-style spa treatments are considered as a healing therapy.
 - C Traditional Thai massage is not that famous now.
 - D Thai massage techniques are different from other Asian spas.
 - E Thai massage can also help people cure ailing parts of the body and thus live longer.
- 5) Look at the text below and choose the best title for the text.
- A Thai Traditional Spa
 - B The History of Thai Spa
 - C Learning Spa in Thailand
 - D People love Thai Spa

These kinds of spas have grown in popularity in Thailand, especially in locations where urban lifestyles can sometimes require a touch of rejuvenation and inner cleansing. The aim to remove unwanted toxins from your body using a programmed of therapy treatments, diet, and exercises. These treatments are particularly helpful for those who have endured problems with drug and/or alcohol abuse.

Text 2 Match the text with the title.

- A Holistic and medical spa
- B Club spas
- C Day spa
- D Detoxification Spas

Text 2

Spas can be found in the major cities of Thailand, in particular in Bangkok. While spa resorts are mainly aimed at the tourist market, day spas also cater to office workers and travelling business persons. This spa is a kind of inner-city haven with the majority of treatments being focused on stress relief and relaxation.

Text 3 Question: Scan the passage and answer the following questions

Text 4 Question: With a partner, write down 2 questions from the text, then ask your questions to your classmates.

Reading 3

Give 5 short texts then ask students to skim the text and fill in the blanks.

Galangal	Benefit to the therapies	1.....	cure skin diseases	2.....
Kaffir lime		1.....	2 give hair a silky shine	
Lemongrass		1	skin irritation	2.....
Prai		1.....	2 natural moisturizer	
Turmeric		1	2 Thai herbal treatment ingredient	

Leading universities in Thailand such as Chulalongkorn University, Thammasatra University are well aware of the upcoming AEC and thus have moved forward to establish some mechanism to show the capacity of Thailand as a member of Asean to raise awareness on the issue and play an active role in strengthening relations with its members such as Asean Studies Center (Chula) or Centre for Asean studies(Thammasatra). In addition, the speech of the past ASEAN Secretariat, Mr Surin Pitsuwan in Daily news (2012:7) clearly urged Thailand to strengthen the English ability in communicating with our neighboring countries by arguing that if Thai people have increased their English ability for 25%, this will boost up the ability of Thailand to compete with other Asean countries for 50%. The proposed compilation of reading materials portraying some aspects of Thai living style, traditions and beliefs will be relevant and meaningful to the needs of the Thai students or Asean students alike. Such Ideas to balance the integration of some localized culture in the textbook leads to education for a true international understanding in this 21st century. Most importantly, such reading materials are align with the pedagogical approach in the framework of learning which is education for international understanding. SEAMEO APCEIU 2013 Project Telling Tales from South East Asian and Korea also confirmed the use of local culture in education especially in the language classroom. Culture teaching in ELT curricula needs to include both Local culture and international culture in order to help students using the language for both cross-cultural encounters and sharing insights about their own cultures with others as Sinhaneti and Kachendecha (2013:175) reflect the following:

“Not only Thailand should design and produce culturally-themed lessons, but also each country in Asia should make its own version of culturally-themed lessons for their English learners as well especially ASEAN member countries. It would benefit our learners greatly if we could cooperate to design and create the culturally themed course books together. Students in ASEAN member countries can learn about ASEAN cultures through learning English which supports one of the ASEAN Declaration, the aims and purposes to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields”.

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