

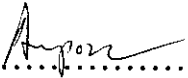
A STUDY OF LEARNING STYLES OF STUDENTS
ENROLLED IN ONE BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASS AT THE
UNIVERSITY LEVEL

A MASTER'S PROJECT
OF
MR. PAT WATANASIN

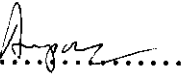
Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for
International Communication
at Srinakharinwirot University
November, 2004

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of Business English for International Communication Program and Oral Defense Committee have approved this Master's Project as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

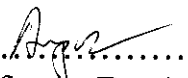
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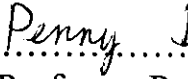
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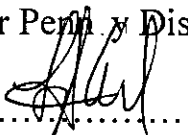
Chair of Business English for International Communication Program

.....
(Assistant Professor Dr. Amporn Srisermbhok)


Oral Defense Committee

.....
(Assistant Professor Dr. Amporn Srisermbhok) Chair

.....
(Assistant Professor Penny Diskaprakai) Committee

.....
(Mr. Lee Quick) Committee

This Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

.....
Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
(Associate Professor Supha Panjaroen)

October 15, 2004

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

It is widely known that students learn differently. Teachers and researchers in the field of second-language teaching generally agree that individual learner differences account for the rate and the degree of success of a second-language learner (Ellis, 1989). All students have individual styles relating to their learning processes. Some students, for instance, are very passive in the classrooms. They listen to the lectures and then take notes. For this reason, they may not prefer to be involved in activities or interact with their friends. That is, they learn best on their own. On the other hand, some prefer to join the activities organized by the teachers. They may ask questions once they don't understand some points. These students learn best by participating in classroom activities.

Learning style refers to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills (Reid, 1995). Ehrman and Oxford (1990) state that learning style can be defined as the inherent preferences of individuals as to how they engage in the learning process. In addition, learning style is learners' customary pre-dispositions towards processing information in certain manners (Skehan, 1991). Different learners, whether as a result of heredity, educational background, situational requirements, age, or other factors, understand and process information differently (Lawrence, 1993).

Thus, learning style focuses on how students prefer to learn. Defining learning style is internally based characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information (Reid, 1995). It is evident that people learn differently and at different paces because of their biological and psychological differences (Reiff, 1992).

As for **learning**, it is an active process of translating new knowledge, insights, and skill into behavior. Cawley et al, (1976) identifies three domains of learning: cognitive, relating to facts, theories, concepts, and problem-solving; affective, related to attitudes, feelings, values, and belief; and psychomotor, referring to new skills and new ways of making and doing things. All people have preferences for ways to learn, adapting these strategies to their environment in all three domains. These preferences are called an individual's learning style.

An essential component of learning styles theory is the belief that teachers can best help their students by understanding how they learn best, or knowing students' preferred learning styles (Ellis, 1989). Conversely, a serious mismatch between student learning styles and teacher instructional styles may have a decidedly negative impact on classroom learning (Oxford et al., 1991), with unfortunate potential consequences.

When teachers are not fully aware of their students' learning styles, it is very difficult for them to design activities that suit their students. Thus, some students who like doing activities in the classroom may be less motivated if the teachers only give lectures to the class. In addition, it seems problematic when the teachers adopt activities such as pair work but the

students may not want to do group work with their peers. They may believe that they can not learn anything from their friends because they think that the teachers are the persons who know best.

The notion that teachers can maximize students' learning by incorporating learning situations that employ students' preferred learning styles has a great intuitive appeal and has encouraged the popularity of learning styles in second language learning as well as in language testing. While extensive work has been done on learning across all ages, educational levels, and disciplines, the vast majority of the research has focused on native speakers, whether English or another tongue. Not as much has been done on non-native speakers and second language learning. This may be due to the difficulty of developing and establishing the reliability and validity of learning style instruments for non-native speakers of English and/or the realization that learning style preference changes over time (Dunn and Griggs, 1995).

Therefore, a knowledge of learning style preferences has been deemed by some English language educators as an important factor in meeting the learning needs of students. Hence, in order for teachers to effectively meet the learning needs of students, the researcher agrees with Grasha (1996) that teachers must know the learning styles of the students. Furthermore, when students understand their personal learning style preferences, they will

benefit greatly because this understanding can enable them to maximize their learning styles in their learning of English.

So far, learning style research has examined the effects of tailoring teaching to students' learning styles. It has shown that matching learning styles has a positive impact on students' achievements, interests and motivation (Smith and Renzulli, 1984). The results of several investigations of the interaction between learning styles and teaching approaches indicate that students' performances can be enhanced by adapting instructional methods to individual differences in learning styles in all levels of education. As a result, some educators have concluded that some instructional principles may optimize learning. They argued that identifying a student's learning style and providing appropriate instructional contribute to more effective learning (Sims and Sims, 1995).

Objectives of the Study

The overarching research questions of this study are as follows,

1. What were the learning styles of the students who were currently learning Business English?
2. Were the preferred learning styles correlated with their learning achievement in terms of oral skills?

Significance of the Study

This study may be of benefit as follows

1. Teachers and students are more aware of the learning style preferences in learning Business English.
2. Students can maximize their preferred learning styles.
3. Teachers can adopt their teaching styles, curriculum and materials to match students' preferred learning styles.

Scope of the Study

The researcher aimed to examine the learning styles of twenty students who were taking “Business English Oral Communication” course at Chulalongkorn University in the second semester of the academic year 2003. They were business majors in their second year or third year of studies. They were taking this course as a requirement for a B.A. in Business Degree. Thus, all of them came from one university and the study took place in one semester. In addition, they came from one faculty, namely, the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy. The selection of the students was based on their willingness to take part in this study and the ability to answer the questions in English.

Definition of Terms

The terminologies used in this study are explained to ensure mutual understanding in order to be of benefit to the readers.

1. **Learning styles** refer to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skill (Reid, 1995)
2. **Students** refer to those who were enrolled in the course "Business English Oral Communication" at Chulalongkorn University in the second semester in the academic year of 2003.
3. **An one-time diary** means that the students were required to reflect on their learning style preference one time at the end of the course based on the guided questions and wrote them down in the provided sheet.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter includes related literature. Firstly, learning styles, together with learning strategies are discussed in detail. Then, some instruments used to measure learning styles are illustrated. Finally, previous research on learning styles are cited.

Learning Styles versus Learning Strategies

Learning styles are often confused with learning strategies, yet they are quite different concepts. Learning strategies are the particular techniques or methods students use in learning situations to solve problems, approach an assignment, prepare for a test, or otherwise engage in classroom activities. These strategies can be learned, and students can consciously choose to apply one or another learning strategy to a given learning situation (Wenden, 1985; Oxford, 1990). Learning styles, on the other hand, are a part of an individual's makeup or personality. While an individual may prefer one type of learning style over another for different kinds of learning tasks, the fact remains that a learning style preference reflects an individual's own personal predilection (preference) for how to learn in a particular situation. As people's personalities change overtime, so too can their learning style preferences; such changes in preferences occur over time and generally as a result of exposure to different teaching and learning situations.

Learning Style Instruments

Numerous learning style instruments for native speakers of English have been developed in an attempt to ascertain preferred learning styles. Learning style instruments refer to a set of devices used to gather data concerning the students' learning style preferences. These include the Learning Style Inventory , the Grasha Riechmann Student Learning Style Scales , and Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory. For non-native Speakers of English, O'Brien's Learning Channel Preference Checklist, Oxford's Style Analysis Survey, and Reid's Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire have been developed (Reid, 1984).

Of the various learning style instruments, Reid's (1984) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) was the first designed for English as a Second Language (ESL) students at the university level. It attempts to elicit their self-reported perceptual learning style preferences. The PLSPQ consists of 30 randomly ordered statements, with five variously phrased statements for each of the six learning style preferences: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group learning, and individual learning. Survey participants mark their responses on the basis of a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The PLSPQ is a learning style instrument normed on both native and non-native speakers (Reid, 1998) with many teacher-researchers using it to identify their students' individual learning styles (Reid, 1995). A normed assessment instrument gives the researcher the opportunity to interpret a student's performance on an instrument compared to other students who took the assessment test (Gay and Airasian, 2000).

However, the great difficulty in measuring learning styles is to create learning style instruments that are theoretically sound and statistically reliable and valid. For the most part, learning style instruments are questionable in terms of construct validity (DeBello, 1990; Itzen, 1995; Rubles and Stout, 1990). These difficulties are much more when an instrument attempts to assess learning style preferences which are not in the native language of the students. Therefore, the above-mentioned instruments may not be an appropriate learning style instrument for non-native speakers.

Research in Learning Styles

Learning styles have been extensively discussed in the educational psychology literature (Schmeck, 1988) and specifically in the context of language learning by Oxford and her colleagues (Oxford and Ehrman, 1993). Many types of learning styles have been identified over the past 30 years (Dunn and Griggs, 2000). For over three decades, the professional literature has been filled with discussions about learner styles. Research on learning styles

focuses on personality differences that influence language learning. Specifically, earlier studies on learning styles are discussed as follows:

1. The first study, “ Exploring Learning Styles of Russian ESL Students” by Wintergerst & Decapua (1998) investigated the learning style preferences of 32 participants using Reid’s PLSPQ and oral interviews in addition to a background questionnaire. The study sought answers to three questions: (a) What learning styles emerged from Reid’s PLSPQ ? (b) How well did the PLSPQ findings correspond with the oral interview results ? (c) Did the learning style preferences reflect more individual preferences or more cultural traditions ?

Of the six learning style preferences, the results showed that kinesthetic was the preferred major learning style of the Russian-speaking ESL students, closely followed by auditory. Individual work was their preferred minor learning style. Individual preference outweighed cultural traditions. In the oral interview data gathered from a sub-sample of the 32 participants who completed the questionnaires, for example, there was no one major preferred learning style stated. Of the 13 participants, 4 preferred visual, 3 both visual and auditory, 2 auditory, 2 tactile, 1 both kinesthetic and visual, and 1 kinesthetic. Given that the participants in the study were previously educated in a rigid, traditional teacher-centered authoritarian system with little or no group work or student input into learning, if cultural traditions were more important than individual preference, the researchers would expect to see conformity in choice of preferred learning styles. Another explanation, however,

could be the small sample of 13 students. The results of the study indicated that there were discrepancies among the findings from the data elicitation instruments. The information provided by the participants during their oral interviews and their written responses on the PLSPQ contradicted each other on several occasions. Such discrepancies may have been due to English language difficulty, test-taking problems, statement design problems, culture-specific problems, influence of language proficiency on the validity of the validity and reliability of an instrument used for native and non-native speakers of English or self-reporting issues. However, the researchers attributed these discrepancies in large part to survey design problems in the PLSPQ.

2. The second study, “Investigating Methodological Issues in Using Survey Instruments” by Wintergerst, DeCapua & Itzen (2001) examined the difficulties of conceptualizing learning style modes and of developing assessments that actually measure what the researchers purport to measure. They examined the validity of the hypothesized factor structure of Reid’s PLSPQ through exploratory factor analysis on a sample of 100 ESL students representing four language groups: Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish. They assessed the internal consistency of these scales with the Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate and reviewed the results of both Varimax and Oblimin rotations. Subsequently, they explored alternative learning style scales: Group Orientation, Individual Activity Orientation, and Project Activity Orientation to provide a conceptually acceptable learning style framework and

estimated their internal reliability as $r = .85$, $r = .77$, and $r = .65$ respectively. These scales, consisting of 24 items with the highest reliability from Reid's PLSPQ, were used to form their newly developed Learning Styles Indicator.

The results of the study indicated that the Chinese and Russian students displayed a similar pattern in their learning styles preferences in that group and project activities scored higher than individual activities. Korean students expressed a slightly greater preference for individual activities and project activities for group learning, whereas the Spanish students were oriented more toward project activities and least toward group activities.

Therefore, these above-mentioned studies served as preliminary studies in order to establish learning style instruments that deemed suitable for the students learning Business English. Having considering the pros and cons of the previous data elicitation instruments, the researcher employed the interviews and an one-time diary to examine the learning style preferences of the students learning Business English to get more in-depth information under study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Procedures of the Study

Interviews were used as a data collection tool to explore students' learning styles to gather in-depth data. Students were interviewed personally one at a time. Prior to the interview, the research explained to the students what learning styles were and emphasized that there was no right or wrong learning styles. They should concentrate on what they actually found most effective in learning Business English. Moreover, the researcher encouraged them to express their views about their learning style preferences. The interviews took place during the second semester of the academic year 2003 at Chulalongkorn University. Each interview lasted for 15-30 minutes, and was tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Before every interview, the interview guideline was established. Both open-ended and closed-questions were formulated to elicit the information sought. (See appendix A). In addition, students were requested to keep an one-time diary. That is, at the end of the semester, they were asked to write reflections on their use of learning styles based on the given and guided statements. (See appendix B).

In order to find out whether their preferred learning styles affected students' learning achievement, two teachers who taught this course were interviewed at the end of the course.

They were asked if they felt that the students made any improvement in learning Business English Oral Communication skills

Subjects of the Study

Twenty students learning Business English participated in this study. They were purposefully chosen because (1) they were studying Business English during the second semester of the academic year 2003 (2) they expressed their willingness to take part in this study as a subject and (3) they could answer the questions and write a diary in English. They were informed of the purposes of the study and were assured that the results of this study were used for educational purposes only. More importantly, their identities were kept confidential.

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this present study, the research identified students' learning style preferences based on the concept of the following six learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group learning and individual learning. Briefly, educators such as Dunn, Dunn and Price (1975) and Reid (1987) define these preferred learning styles as follows :

1. Visual Learners like to see words or pictures, and often prefer to work alone, especially before discussion with others.

2. **Auditory Learners** like to hear the spoken word, and often prefer activities such as debates, individual conferences and small groups.
3. **Tactile Learners** like to touch, and often prefer hands-on activities such as building models and doing laboratory experiments.
4. **Kinesthetic Learners** like experiential learning, and often prefer physical activities such as field trips, role-plays, and drama.
5. **Individual Learners** like to work alone and often prefer self-directed study, independent reading, and computer work.
6. **Group Learners** like group interaction, and often prefer games, role-plays, and other social activities.

These perceptual learning styles used by students to learn Business English were explored. Specifically, the researcher figured out four sensory learning styles – visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic – and two social learning styles – individual and group.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The research findings gathered by the students' interviews, an one-time diary and teachers' interviews are presented below. First, their background information is shown, followed by their preferred learning styles which can be divided into social learning styles and sensory learning styles.

Background information

Of 20 participants in the study (100%), 5 were male (25%), 15 female (75%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, 19 years old on average. The students had studied Business English for approximately 2 years. 4 rated their English proficiency as good (20%). 10 rated it as fair (50%) and 6 as poor (30%).

Table 1 : Social learning styles

Social Learning Styles	Numbers	Percentages
Group	18	90%
Individual	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Table 1 reveals that, of 20 students. 18 were group learners, accounting for 90%. The remaining 2 students showed their preferences for individual learning (10%).

For those who preferred group learning style, here are some of their responses elicited by the interviews and a one-time diary:

- I will have new friends in this class and have more confidence.
- I like to talk with many people. I like to share knowledge, information. If I study with others, it can force me to speak English and improve my English skills.
- I think I can learn something from my classmates. If I work by my self, I will never know what my mistakes are.
- It gives me a chance to communicate to others, pronounce in the right way and get the new experience.
- I can share my opinion with other people. I enjoy studying more than working by myself. Maybe, make me find good friends.
- Learning Business English needs a participation in the class. I don't think that learning by my self is good. It is better when I do some activities in the class because I can improve speaking and listening skills.
- It helps myself to have more fun, learn easier and makes me to improve my leadership, practices myself to work in group because when we graduate and work, we have to face the real situation in group.
- We can share our opinions when we do the group works. When I don't understand something, I can ask them. Studying with others is a good chance to practice myself to be on time, patient, friendly and to have leadership and a lot of friends.
- I will get many opinions from the others.
- I can get views of other ideas and can help me to develop the thinking and knowledge.
- It is fun and can share experience with others.
- Study with others will make me enthusiastic and active to share the opinion and get the great idea to learn English more than learning by my self.
- Studying with others can improve many skills; speaking, thinking, reading etc.
- I can exchange knowledge among my friend in a group.

- Learning with others will help me improve my Business English more than working by myself.

- I think I'm not good enough. I need more practice and I don't have confidence about learning by myself.

- I think group work has more interaction.

- I can practice my English skill with others. So, it can improve my skill.

- We can share any idea together and have more idea, open my world and know other experience. I love to share my experience with others.

- I like to work with many people.

- There is a two-way communication.

- I like to share my idea with friends.

- I and my friends can help one another.

- I prefer to talk and communicate with people and the communication practice makes me better than reading the books by myself. I think it is very boring when you work alone.

- Work alone is more boring.

- Studying with other is better than study by my self.

- I want to share my knowledge and idea with others.

- It is not boring and everyone can participate in class.

- I think the others make me understand more easily than learning alone.

- We can get more ideas and we can help each other.

- I like working with my friends

- Studying with others is more interesting.

- Studying with others is more enjoyable and we can help each other to practice.

- Business English is about how to contact other people in business way. You can not learn how to contact others by yourself.

- I can communicate with others and also help each other to do things such as home work.

- Others can support me to understand Business English better.

Interestingly enough, only 2 out of 20 responded positively to individual learning, with comments such as:

- I can understand the content deeply.
- I know why I don't understand some things and I want to correct them by myself.

Table 2 : Sensory learning styles

Sensory Learning Styles	Numbers	Percentages
Visual	9	45%
Auditory	6	30%
Tactile & Kinesthetic	5	25%
Total	20	100%

Table 2 illustrates that, of 20 students, 9 indicated learning style preferences for visual learning (45%). 6 were auditory in their preferences (30%) and 5 had tactile & kinesthetic learning style preferences (25%). For the sake of data analysis, the tactile and kinesthetic learning style preferences are clustered into one category as they have something in common in terms of learning characteristics and behaviors.

As for their retrospections, those who showed the positive responses to visual learning explained that:

- I think I can understand that style more than other choices and I love reading more than participating in activities.

- When I see the text on the chalkboard or in textbooks, it makes me understand better than just only listen to the teachers. Maybe, the teacher's explanation is not clear or it is hard to get what he says. Anyway, I love to learn English very much.

- This style of learning helps me make less mistakes, such as spelling, grammar and so on.

- I can concentrate more on reading than doing something else in the class.

- I can understand it better than other choices.

- Reading after the class makes me understand more.

- Reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard or reading textbooks can make me remember the lesson English

9 subjects whose major learning style preferences were auditory gave responses like:

- I don't like reading books, so if I get the lessons in class, there is no need to read more.

- Listening to lectures makes me understand more than reading books. When I have some questions, I can ask the teacher immediately.

- My teacher explains the lesson very clearly and speaks clearly and suitably for our level. Some textbooks are very hard to understand and I must use a dictionary to understand the vocabulary.

- I think my teacher uses the language which is easy to understand.

- I think it is easy to understand.

- The teacher will explain something easily for you to understand English.

- Some textbooks use the difficult and unclear language. I want someone to explain it.

- I enjoy listening to the teacher especially if he or she is a native speaker of English.

- I am not good at reading English textbooks.

- I can ask the teacher when I don't understand.

- The teacher can teach me appropriately to make me understand a lot of things.

5 subjects tended to be more tactile & kinesthetic-oriented, with comments such as:

- It teaches me to think, to write and to communicate with other people and the important thing, it is more enjoyable than studying by only listening to the teachers.

- Just reading textbooks and listening to lectures are not interesting and it is not enough to use in the real-life working.

- I will have a lot of fun and understand better.

- When I do any activities, I can remember what happens and know the related situation which leads to the lesson.

- I may lose my attention if my teacher stands in front of the class and he or she is the only one speaking and it will be great if I can sometimes participate.

- When I participate in related activities, I will understand better than just listening to the teacher or read what the teacher writes on the chalkboard or read textbooks.

- It makes me understand the lesson.

- It makes me sure that I truly understand what I have learned.

- Practice is more helpful.

- Practice will make me understand better than reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard.

- I do it by myself, so I can understand what I have done.

- I can get other ideas and views from other persons. When we discuss in class, we can find the way to solve the problems.

- You have chances to practice.

- Activities can help me understand the content better.

- It is fun and easy to understand the lesson.

- The activities make me understand more easily.

- The activities lead me to think and we can learn without boredom.

- It is more interesting and I get more knowledge from activities.

- It is not boring. An activity makes my English natural and makes me understand English, not just only memorizing.

- It is more interesting and I get more knowledge from activities.
- It is not boring. An activity makes my English natural and makes me understand English, not just only memorizing.

As regards the teachers' interviews to determine whether the preferred learning styles affected the students' achievement, the teachers maintained that the students made a lot of progress in terms of their oral skills. Since role-plays, presentation and group work were used considerably in the class, the students could practice speaking and discussion. They also learned what language to use and formed better opinion in English. The teachers reported that they used an eclectic teaching style which meant that they used a mix of different teaching styles depending on the tasks and activities. They went on to say that they varied the in-class activities to address to the various needs of the students. However, they all agreed that they did not speak most of the time but, instead, urged the students to speak. They felt that the students gained more confidence and were more motivated. During the class, the students learned to do presentation through group work and the students liked to do group work because they enjoyed having a partner. The students also had a chance to speak, applying non-verbal communication such as eye contact, hand gesture and intonation in the negotiation of meaning at hand.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION

This present study aimed to identify the learning styles of 20 students who were taking “Business English Oral Communication” course at Chulalongkorn University in the second semester of the academic year 2003. The interviews with both the students and the teachers and an one-time diary reflected by the students were used to derive data. The sensory learning styles, including visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic, as well as social learning styles, that is, social and group learning were used as a framework for data collection and analysis. It was evident that the students varied significantly in their learning style preferences. They were perceived as having a combination of the four sensory learning styles and two social learning styles to some degree. The students were predominately group learners and were nearly major visual, auditory and tactile & kinesthetic learners. Moreover, their preferred learning styles favorably affected their learning achievement. That is, they made marked progress in terms of their oral skills in class. The findings confirm the belief that if the teacher wants to accommodate the students’ learning styles, they have to embrace a multi-style approach to teach by designing group work to maximize group learners’ learning potentials and by planning visual, auditory, tactile & kinesthetic activities to reach other students. Equipped with such implications, the teachers can help the students maximize their preferred learning styles to learning Business English effectively.

Discussion

After scrutinizing the students’ responses regarding their preferred learning styles, the researcher came to the analysis that a variety of learning styles was present in this

study. An overwhelming majority of the students liked group work. They preferred group work to individual learning. Some students said that they benefited from interactions. That is, they could share ideas and opinions. They had more chance for communication so that their self-confidence increased over time. Further, mutual assistance was reported once they had difficulties in the course of learning. Group work also enabled them to improve all 4 language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, writing. Enjoyment was mentioned by some students as group work provided a non-threatening atmosphere for learning. This finding that they were in favor of group work may be due to the fact that they had been exposed to group work in this course and had developed a liking for it since interactive and collaborative learning was the hallmark of the course under study.

Nevertheless, a few students appeared to have individual learning style preferences. They asserted that they were the one who knew best about themselves so they knew their weaknesses and they would correct the mistakes themselves. They also pointed out that they learned better by working on their own because they had more understanding of the lessons being learned. In terms of the result indicating the learning style preference for individual learning, there was no ready explanation for why this was the case. The researcher found the best explanation is that each individual student was unique and for some, they learned best once they worked alone or learned at their own pace.

With respect to the sensory learning styles, one of the findings emerging most clearly from this study was that almost half of the students (9 out of 20) were visual learners.

They enjoyed information being presented visually rather than in spoken forms. They reported that they remembered what they saw. They recalled information by remembering how it was set out on a page and often recognized words by sight. This produced 2 avenues of explanation for the researcher. The first avenue would be that, since English is a foreign language in Thailand, Thai students get most of the knowledge from textbooks. What is more, Thai teachers usually focus on the development of reading skill in classrooms. Therefore, their reading skills were far better than other skills. Reading also allowed them to be more concentrated. Put in another way, they had more control over the information at hand and they could reread it once they were in doubt. The second possibility would be that, traditionally, in English classrooms, they had to sit in lectures to view (visual) what were on the blackboard. Thus, they might be somewhat familiar to this mode of learning.

Regarding the auditory students (6 out of 20), they reported that they liked the teachers to provide verbal instructions. They understood information best when they heard it. They could remember oral instructions well. Besides, with the presence of the teacher, they could ask for clarification and correction. They also felt that spoken language was much easier and more understandable than written language. That is to say, their learning took place as a result of this comprehensible input. These responses seem to confirm that the students came from teacher-centered learning background in which the teachers did most of the talking in class. For this reason, the students were likely to learn English by

listening attentively to the teachers who, at the same time, transmitted knowledge and information to the students.

Last but not least, concerning tactile & kinesthetic learning, a number of students (5 out of 20) registered a major preference for tactile & kinesthetic learning. They learned best when they were involved or active. They liked projects and role-plays. They said that these activities made them understand more or remember better. They had a good time when they participated in projects or role-plays which, they reckoned, were more conducive to learning. The researcher reached the conclusion that they learned better because they had been exposed to the practical use of language.

To reiterate, the preferred learning styles, coupled with their solicited reasons are clearly presented as follows:

Table 3 : Synopsis of the preferred learning styles and underlying reasons

Learning styles	Reasons
Group learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - benefit from interaction - have more chance for communication - receive mutual assistance - improve four language skills - have enjoyment
Individual learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can correct their mistakes themselves - have more understanding of the lesson
Visual learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can remember and recall information well from what they see
Auditory learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can understand and remember information best when they hear - can ask for clarification and correction - feel that spoken language is much easier and more comprehensible than written language
Tactile & Kinesthetic learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can understand and remember information better - have a good time when participating in activities

Implication

This study had significant pedagogical implications for learning styles. The students need to prepare for their future working life in business. Likewise, the teachers are geared to address the needs of Business English students by improving their communicative ability in English as well as business performance skills, for instance, participating in meetings, presenting information and negotiating. For these reasons, the major component of Business English course should be on the development of oral skills, with a strong emphasis on real-life business situations. Undoubtedly, oral communication skills are central for business students if they are not to have any disadvantages in the workplace.

Group work proved to be suitable for this course. The increased amount of interaction in group work means more opportunities to speak and listen. This enhanced practice improves communication skills, motivation and enjoyment of learning Business English. It was obvious that the students enjoyed some camaraderie within the group. At the core of the group work was the belief that the students could learn from each other. The students needed to be equipped with collaborative skills so as to meet the rising demand for the ability to work effectively in any business transactions.

As for this present study, the students were clearly major group learners and they were also visual, auditory and tactile & kinesthetic learners. Therefore, the teachers should adopt a multi-style teaching approach in Business English class to enhance the students'

learning potential. In addition, teachers should not be rigid in their desired style of teaching. They should constantly adapt and develop classroom activities so as to cater to each student's different learning styles.

In a nutshell, the shift toward learner-centered education makes knowledge of learning styles particularly pertinent and crucial. Clearly, knowing students' learning style preferences is the first step in helping students to learn. Teachers should help students discover their own learning style preferences and provide constructive feedback about the advantages and disadvantages of various styles. Also, teachers should respect the students' present preferences and encourage their development, while at the same time, creating opportunities for students to experiment with different ways of learning Business English.

Finally, at its heart is the belief that student diversity makes teaching Business English both challenging and rewarding. Additionally, there is legitimacy in the idea of individual differences in the way students learn. This brought to light the fact that the process of learning Business English is an extremely complicated one which requires that careful consideration be given to a variety of factors, such as, learning style, contributing to successful Business English learning.

The results of this study give rise to an urgent need to know more about diverse Business English students in terms of their learning styles to enable teachers to develop new teaching techniques, curricula and lesson plans to accommodate these variables.

Business English teaching should begin with an understanding of the ways students learn and teachers should continue to promote this understanding through further well-designed studies.

Limitations of the Study

The factors that might jeopardize this study are the following:

- 1) Because of the small sample size (20 subjects) and the short period of data collection (1 semester), the results of this present study can not be generalized for the whole population of students who learn Business English at other universities.
- 2) In order to identify the learning styles of Business English students, there is an obvious need for the use of multiple measures for collecting data since this study used a one-time diary and interviews as research instruments. Moreover, other researchers might need to develop new instruments to measure learning styles.
- 3) Another limitation of this study relates to the effect of the language used in research instruments. It was found that the language used by the subjects interfered with the quality and quantity of retrospections because subjects produced a small volume of reporting which generally consisted of short statements, long pauses, ungrammatical and unfinished sentences.

- 4) Another concern of this study is that since the subjects were not trained linguists, through interviews and a one-time diary, they might not reflect upon their learning styles or might provide irrelevant information

Suggestions for further Studies

Since learning style is relatively unexplored, compared with other students' differences, for instance, learning strategies and motivation, further studies need to be carried out on the relationships among learner variables such as learning style and gender, learning style and language achievement and learning style and self-esteem, to name just a few. As for this present investigation, it was intended to generate empirical data that would serve as a foundation for further investigation, rather than findings which could be generalized per se. As this study focused on undergraduates, further study can emphasize on graduates who have diverse needs and various working experiences in business contexts. Although, the findings of this study did provide some insights into factors affecting student achievement in terms of oral skills, the researcher believes that they are not generalizable to the population at large. Learning style studies need to be replicated so that more consistent information becomes available across the population. In addition, further studies are needed to provide a more complete picture of individual differences which have been identified as variables influencing language learning outcome. This study lends further

support to the fact that, of the individual differences, learning style is one of the key factors affecting students achievement.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview Guideline

Objective: To identify learning styles of Business English students.

Questions:

(Prior to the interviews, the researcher explained what learning styles were and how learning styles were classified in terms of four sensory learning styles and two social learning styles)

1. What learning style did you find most effective in learning business English?
2. How did you feel about your learning style?
3. Why did you use this learning style in learning business English?
4. Did you learn better by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures?
5. Did you enjoy making something for a class project?
6. Did you understand better when you participated in role-playing?
7. Did you prefer working alone to working with others?
8. Did you remember better when you worked by yourself?
9. Did you learn more when you studied with a group?

Appendix B

An one-time Diary

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Years you studied Business English:

Rate your English language proficiency:

.... Excellent

....Good

.... Fair

....Poor

Directions

Circle your answer for each statement. Please select the statement based upon how you

learned Business English

Throughout the semester, (choose only one for each item)

1. a. I preferred to study with others.

b. I preferred to work by myself.

because_____

2. a. I learned by reading what the teacher wrote on the chalkboard or reading textbooks.

b. I understood better when I listened to the teacher.

c. I enjoyed making something for a class project.

d. I learned best in class when I participated in related activities.

because _____

Thank you for your cooperation.

VITAE

VITAE

Name :Mr. Pat Watanasin

Date of Birth :January 12,1972

Place of Birth :Chachoengsao

Home Address :59 /446 Phuttamonthon 4, Samparn District, Nakornpathom,
Thailand

Educational Background:

2004	M.A. (Business English for International Communication) Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand
2000	M.S. (Rehabilitation Counseling) California State University, Fresno, US
1995	B.S.W. 2 nd Class Hons (Social Work) Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand

A STUDY OF LEARNING STYLES OF STUDENTS
ENROLLED IN ONE BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASS AT THE
UNIVERSITY LEVEL

AN ABSTRACT
BY
MR. PAT WATANASIN

31 31.3. 2548

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for
International Communication
at Srinakharinwirot University
November, 2004

Pat Watanasin. (2004). *A Study of Learning Styles of Students Enrolled in One Business English*

Class at the University Level. Master's Project, M.A. (Business English for International Communication). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Armporn Srisermbhok.

This small-scale study purported to identify the learning style preferences of 20 students enrolled in one Business English course, entitled “Business English Oral Communication” at Chulalongkorn University in the second semester of the academic year 2003. Interviews and an one-time diary were used to derive in-depth data. The four sensory learning styles — visual, auditory, and tactile & kinesthetic — and two social learning styles — group and individual were used as a framework for data collection and analysis. It was markedly evident that the students varied significantly in terms of their learning style preferences. They were perceived as having a combination of these four sensory and two social learning styles. They were predominately group learners and close to being visual, auditory and tactile & kinesthetic learners. They were minor individual learners. In addition, in the teachers’ perspectives, the students made remarkable progress in terms of their oral communication skills at the end of the class. The emerging findings implied that in order to address the diverse learning styles of Business English students, the teachers need to embrace a multi-style approach to prepare lessons and materials for classes. That is, they have to vary the activities so as to reach a large number of the students. Finally, this study, notwithstanding, its limitations, provides empirical evidence in favor of group work to improve oral communication skills which are central for Business English students if they are not to be disadvantaged in a range of Business English Oral Communication settings. Put another way, the teachers should make a concerted effort to enhance oral communication skills of Business English students before they embark in Business careers.

การศึกษาการเรียนของนักศึกษาที่เรียนในวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจในระดับมหาวิทยาลัย

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

นาย พัฒน์ วัฒนสินธุ์

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตาม
หลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อศึกษานานาชาติ
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การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการเรียนของนักศึกษาจำนวน 20 คนที่เรียนในวิชา “Business English for International Communication” ณ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัยในภาคการศึกษาที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2546 การวิจัยนี้ใช้การสัมภาษณ์และการเขียนบันทึกเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บข้อมูล

จากผลการศึกษาพบว่า นักศึกษามีรูปแบบการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจที่หลากหลาย โดยที่พบว่า ส่วนใหญ่ชอบเรียนเป็นกลุ่มและชอบใช้สายตา หูฟังและมีส่วนร่วมในกิจกรรมต่างๆ ในห้องเรียน ดังนั้นผู้สอนควรที่จะใช้รูปแบบการสอนที่หลากหลายเช่นกัน เพื่อตอบสนองความต้องการของนักศึกษา นอกจากนี้งานวิจัยนี้ยังพบว่า การใช้การเรียนเป็นกลุ่ม เหมาะสำหรับการพัฒนาทักษะทางการพูดและการฟังของนักศึกษาที่เรียนในวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ เพื่อที่ว่าภายหลังจากที่นักศึกษาสำเร็จการศึกษาแล้วจะสามารถใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสื่อสาร โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งทักษะการพูดและการฟังในสถานการณ์ทางธุรกิจในอนาคตได้เป็นอย่างดี