

A STUDY OF VERBAL CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS AMONG
WESTERN EXPATRIATES AND THAI STAFF IN THAILAND

A MASTER'S PROJECT
BY
MISS POTCHANALAK EKWANNANG

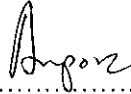
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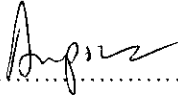
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Project Advisor



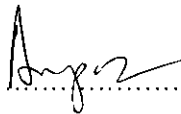
.....
(Assistant Professor Dr. Amporn Srisermbhok)

Chair of Business English for International Communication Program

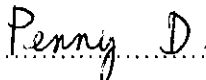


.....
(Assistant Professor Dr. Amporn Srisermbhok)

Oral Defense Committee



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




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



..... Committee
(Mr. Robert George Rees)

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.



.....
(Associate Professor Supha Panjaroen)

Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

March 13, 2004

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Today, international environment corporations and organizations work across national, ethnic, religious, and functional borders. Competitive trans-national activity continues to profoundly have an impact on multi-national organizations. As a result, multi-cultural contexts are becoming the norm. In addition, multinational expatriates, people who live and work in a country that is not their own (Oxford Advance Electronic Dictionary), constantly face a variety of cultural challenges such as cultural communication barriers.

To operate effectively and successfully in the global marketplace, expatriates increasingly require tools and skills which help them to be "inter-culturally professional" (David. 1993 : 3), to integrate divergent cultural attitudes, beliefs and behavior, and eventually, to forge a powerful, effective international team. Gudykunst (1998 : 44) mentions that "cross cultural communication is effective when the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it without our own internal perspective".

Hall and Reed (1990) indicate that one's ethnic culture has a more significant influence on one's way of thinking and acting than the organizational culture. Cohen

(2001 : B1) points out "no matter how well an expatriate tries to adapt to an organization culture, he or she will still be driven primarily by his or her national culture". According to Cohen (2001 : B1), while working with "geographically dispersed teams", expatriates must deal with many new challenges in communication. It is important for them to be aware of these cultural differences and to take special care to minimize, and perhaps avoid, the potential risks associated with them.

For clearer understanding of the meanings of intercultural communication and cross cultural communication, in this study, intercultural communication and cross cultural communication are used interchangeably. Lewis and Slade (1994 : 127) indicate that "cross cultural communication takes place at a number of different levels". They also point out "where intercultural communication involves interpersonal exchange between people from different cultural backgrounds in the same nation, cross cultural communication is international unmediated communication between representatives of business, government and professional groups". In conclusion, cross cultural communication means any verbal and non-verbal communication between persons from western and Thai cultures in Thailand. Nevertheless, this study will focus on verbal cross cultural communication between western expatriates and Thai workers. For additional definitions, the discussion will be in Chapter 2.

In addition, DuPraw and Axner (1997) state that the way people communicate varies widely between, and even within, cultures. One aspect of communication style is

language usage. Another major aspect of communication style is the degree of importance given to non-verbal communication. However, this study will focus on only verbal communication barriers. Besides, DuPraw and Axner (1997) also acknowledge that different norms regarding the appropriate degree of assertiveness in communicating can add to cultural misunderstanding and cross cultural miscommunication. David (1993) finds that miscommunication across cultural lines is usually the most important cause of cross cultural barriers in multi-national organizations. Miscommunication can take place because of differences in body language or gestures, different meanings for the same word and different assumptions made in the same situation.

Thailand, like several other East and Southeast Asian countries, has developed very rapidly in recent years, attracting substantial foreign enterprises and investments. Just about all foreign organizations setting up in Bangkok feel the need to appoint at least one expatriate. Unfortunately, they often fail to equip their expatriate with the linguistic and cultural knowledge, which would help him to do his job in a strange country. When communicating with Thai staff, cultures become one of the obstacles for most expatriates. Verbal cross cultural communication is then one of the problems every expatriate has to face and run into in many situations. Verbal cross cultural communication barriers cannot be avoided especially when expatriates with limited knowledge of Thai cultures communicate with Thai staff to get the work done. Metta

(1993 : 1) discovers that "for Thais' weak points perceived by most expatriates are "not conveying intended message", "no trust and openness", "high sensitivity toward some nonverbal cues", and "different perception". Metta (1993 : 1) also finds out that "the type and size of a company, training content, length of residence, and previous experience in Thailand, intention to work, and frequency of jointly meeting and discussing work between western expatriates and Thais are the variables affecting the degree of communication problems of western expatriates". According to her study, language and attitude are the most common problems that affect work performance of western expatriates when they communicate with Thai staff.

In conclusion, these verbal cross communication barriers potentially hinder the ability of western expatriates to reach the organization's objectives. In addition, multinational organizations hire these western expatriates because they believe in their exceptional ability. These organizations do not recognize verbal cross cultural communication barriers of their expatriates. Western expatriates' lacking cultural knowledge and proper preparation in living and working abroad have to be studied in order to prevent premature return, transference or relocation to other countries which results in inefficient work performance of expatriates and higher expenses for organizations.

Objectives of the Study

Since there are numerous barriers to verbal cross cultural communications that must be overcome to ensure a successful outcome, this study is aimed at determining verbal cross cultural communication barriers and effect of verbal cross communication barriers that western expatriates have faced while they are working in Thailand.

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To find out verbal cross cultural communication barriers that western expatriates, who have worked in Thailand for more than 1 year, run into in the work place.
2. To explore problems that verbal cross cultural communication barriers cause when these western expatriates communicate with Thai staff in the work place.
3. To find out the ways western expatriates get through these verbal cross cultural communication barriers in the work place.

Significance of the Study

Obviously, it is imperative to dissolve or minimize verbal cross cultural communication barriers to achieve efficiency and improve morale. Additionally, effective cross cultural communications can actually encourage innovative thinking among western expatriates and Thai staff in a multi-cultural organization to resolve potential

verbal cross cultural communication barriers, creating ideas and generating alternatives. This is well worth the effort.

Grosse (2000 : 329) reports that "in multi-cultural organizations, such challenges in communication increase exponentially, and further barriers begin to manifest themselves because of cultural differences". These barriers are real and cannot be ignored. It is natural for western expatriates to have diverse assumptions about the same phenomena, causing dissonance in perceptions. This can result in decreased work performance. Therefore, the study of the problems and the ways to get through these problems can facilitate western expatriates to work in Thailand effectively and successfully.

Scope of the Study

The study covers the areas of problems that create verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western expatriates in Thailand, what these verbal cross cultural communication barriers cause and the ways western expatriates get through these barriers. The study focuses on the effects of these barriers on expatriates' work performance when they communicate with Thai staff in the work place.

The study consists of five chapters. Chapter One includes the introduction, objectives, statement of the problem, significance, scope, methodology, definition of terms, expected findings of the study, discussions and recommendations. Chapter Two

contains reviews of literature that are relevant to the study. Methodology of the study is discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four discusses the findings in terms of the verbal cross cultural communication barriers that western expatriates run into, what these barriers cause and the formula to success of western expatriates in Thailand. Chapter five, the final chapter, presents conclusions, discussions and recommendations.

Definition of Terms

Terminologies in this study are defined as follows:

1. **Cross Cultural Communication** is the process of understanding and sharing meaning among individuals from various cultures. (Pearson, *An Introduction to Human Communication: Understanding and Sharing*, 1997 : 38)

In this study, the term "cross cultural communication" will be used to mean the process of understanding and sharing meaning verbally between Western expatriates and Thai staff.

2. **Verbal Communication** is defined as spoken communication, in other words, language, including the use of words and intonation to convey meaning. In this study, verbal communication is referred as English language that western expatriates and Thai staff use to communicate with each other.

3. **Non-Verbal Communication** is "silent" communication, including the use of gestures, postures, position, eye contact, facial expressions, and conversational

distance. In this study, non-verbal communication is also referred as one aspect of Western and Thai cultures.

4. A Western Expatriate is a person who comes from Western countries such as England, United States of America, Australia, Canada etc., and has consecutively lived and worked in Thailand for more than 1 year.

5. A Thai Staff is a Thai subordinate or a Thai colleague who has worked consecutively under or with western expatriates for more than 1 year.

Expected Outcomes of the Study

This study could be helpful for western expatriates who are aware of verbal cross cultural communication barriers to improve their verbal communication with Thai staff. Moreover, this study could also be useful for multi-national organizations in Thailand that would like to improve verbal cross cultural communication between their western expatriates and their Thai staff, and also to enhance their knowledge of Thai culture and cross cultural communication as tips for their incoming expatriates before they move to work in Thailand.

Discussions and Recommendations

The discussions of the study include the limitations and obstacles experienced while the research was undertaken. The recommendation's for further studies will be

used as guidelines for those who would like to conduct a further study on verbal cross cultural communication barriers or related issues for western expatriates in Thailand.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter discusses related secondary data from previous research on cross cultural communication, and textbooks, and from the Internet and the discussion is divided into four sections: 1) Additional definitions of cross cultural communication, 2) Cross cultural communication theories, 3) Cross cultural communication barriers theories, 4) Cross cultural communication competence.

I. Additional Definitions of Cross Cultural Communication

Cross cultural communication is about how people from different cultures communicate. According to Samovar and Porter (1985 : 15) "cross cultural communication occurs whenever a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another culture". Jandt (1995 : 30) indicates "cross cultural communication generally refers to face-to-face interactions among people of diverse cultures. Imagine how difficult communication can be if the source or the message producer and the receiver are in different contexts and shared symbols".

According to Lusting and Koester (1999 : 52) "whereas intercultural communication involves interactions among people from different cultures, cross cultural

communication involves a comparison of interactions among people from the same culture to those from another culture".

II. Cross Cultural Communication Theories

Communication and culture

The link between culture and communication is crucial to understand cross cultural communication because it is through the influence of culture that people learn to communicate. People view their world through categories, concepts, and labels that are the products of their culture.

Samovar and Porter (1985 : 19) claim that "cultural similarity in perception makes the sharing of meaning possible and the ways in which we communicate, the circumstances of our communication, the language and language style we use, and our nonverbal behaviors are all primarily a response to a function of our culture". That is to say that communication is cultural. In addition, as cultures differ from one another, the communication practices and behaviors of the individuals raised in those cultures will also vary.

Numerous aspects of culture help to determine communicative behavior. Besides, the cultural elements are the basic parts of cross cultural communication. According to Samovar and Porter (1985 : 19) "we combine cultures and communication when we communicate. They are like the components of a stereo system-each one

relates to and needs the other. In actuality, however, they do not exist in isolation nor do they function alone". They all form a complex matrix of interacting elements that operate together to comprise the complex phenomenon called cross cultural communication.

Cultural variability

Distinctions can be made regarding cultural variability: Individualism-Collectivism and Low and High Context Communication. Gudykunst (1998) has interestingly defined such cultural variability as the following:

1. Individualism-Collectivism

In Individualistic cultures, people are expected to act as individuals and try to stand out from others. On the other hand, in collectivistic cultures, individuals are expected to fit into the group and, at the same time, they are allowed or expected to try to stand out in the group".

2. Low and High Context Communication

Individualism-collectivism defines broad differences between cultures, the low and high-context scheme focuses upon cultural differences in communication processes.

Low-context communication people are direct, precise and clear, on the other hand, high-context communication people are indirect and ambiguous. According to Gudykunst (1998 : 57), people raised in cultures in which low-context communication

predominates (e.g. the United States) tend to assume that high-context communication is always ineffective.

Verbal and non verbal communication

In order to understand and extend the knowledge of cross cultural communication, it is essential to explore the verbal and nonverbal communication.

1. Verbal communication

There is a set of circumstances involving communication with people from other cultural backgrounds in which awareness of language becomes paramount. Thus, verbal cross cultural communication usually means an interaction between people who speak different languages.

My concern in this study is principally with the spoken verbal codes that are used face-to-face in a cross cultural communication context. In order to understand verbal cross cultural communication, verbal codes are essential factors for consideration in this study. They are phonology, semantics, syntactic and pragmatics.

Phonology tells us how the sounds of our language are combined to form words. Gudykunst (1998 : 170) marks that "semantics tell us the relationship between words and the things to which they refer". According to Lusting and Koester (1999 : 209), "the most convenient and thorough source of information about the semantics of a language is the dictionary, which defines what a word means in a particular language". To learn other languages, one must learn the rules: phonology, syntax, and pragmatics.

Pragmatics tells us how to interpret the meaning of utterance. Additionally, Lusting and Koester (1999 : 212) explain that "the study of pragmatics focuses on how language is usually used. A pragmatic analysis considers how users of a particular language are able to understand the meanings of specific utterances in particular contexts".

2. Nonverbal communication

Dodd (1991) defines nonverbal communication as communication without words. It involves body movements, use of space and time, and even nonlexical vocal utterances, such as sighs and laughs. There are many aspects of nonverbal communication that vary across cultures.

III. Verbal Cross Cultural Communication Barriers

An efficient approach to verbal cross cultural communication barriers is to examine on a general level the barriers to cross cultural communication. Jandt (1995 : 40) discusses six barriers to cross cultural communication in which people should be made aware of these barriers, i.e. anxiety, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudices, and language. For western expatriates who have to face verbal cross cultural communication barriers everyday while residing in Thailand and may not be immune to these barriers, it is important to assist them in dealing with such barriers which will be discussed in details. According to Jandt (1995) cross cultural communication barriers can be categorized as the following:

Anxiety

The first barrier is high anxiety. Jandt (1995 : 30) marks that "when people are anxious because of not knowing what they are expected to do, it is only natural to focus on that feeling and not be totally present in the communication transaction". For example, you may have experienced anxiety on your very first day on a new college campus or in a new job. You may be so conscious of being new and out of place and focus so much of your attention on that feeling that you make common mistakes and appear awkward to others".

Ambiguity

When interacting with someone whose culture is different, the messages received from that person are often unclear, yet decisions have to be made and appropriate behavior produced. According to Cushner (1999 : 72) "Most people, when faced with an ambiguous situation, try to resolve it by applying culturally familiar criteria". People who have effective cross cultural communication skills are known to have a high tolerance for ambiguity. That is, when they do not have a clear understanding of what is going on, they are able to ask appropriate questions and modify their behavior accordingly.

Ethnocentrism

According to Gudykunst (1998 : 106) "ethnocentrism can be defined as negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's own culture".

Jandt (1995 : 41) also states that "to be ethnocentric is to believe in the superiority of one's own culture". It can be said that we can think about ethnocentrism as the tendency to interpret and evaluate others' behaviors using our own standards. This tendency is natural and unavoidable. Everyone can be ethnocentric to some degree. Ethnocentrism leads us to view our ways of doing things as natural and right.

Stereotypes

As stated by Jandt (1995 : 53) "The term stereotype is the broader term commonly used to refer to negative or positive judgement made about individuals based on any observable group membership". Stereotyping impedes communication when it leads us to assume the stereotype is true of the group and of the individual and to explain an individual's behavior on the basis of the stereotype. "For example, if a group is stereotyped as dishonest that does not mean that any one individual in that group is dishonest.", stated by Gudykunst (1998 :126). In addition, stereotypes, in and of themselves, do not lead to miscommunication and/or communication breakdowns. If, however, inaccurate or negative stereotypes are held rigidly, they lead to inaccurate predictors of strangers' behaviors and misunderstanding.

Prejudices

Prejudice involves in making a prejudgement based on membership in a social category. According to Jandt (1995 : 56) "Prejudice refers to the irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race and religion, or sexual orientation." Everyone engages

in prejudiced talk to some degree. Dodd (1991 : 3) remarks that it is inevitable when we communicate on automatic pilot. People can, however, reduce the degree to which they engage in prejudiced talk if they are mindful when they communicate. Gudykunst (1998 : 110) explains that "If we are moderately or highly prejudiced, we need to manage our prejudice thoughtfully when we interact with strangers if we want to communicate with them effectively".

Language as a barrier

Language is probably the most common barrier to effective communication.

Among the problems in the use of language for communication are differences in interpretation of statements. According to Samovar and Porter (1985 : 27) "Language can be a barrier when the use of a particular language is forced on other people by those with more control or power". In addition, the problem of language barriers is a real one but they may be less of a barrier in the long term than other obstacles. And yet language obstacles are not impassable. Language can be learned and taught. For expatriates, their degrees of competence in a new language will vary, but in time can be improved.

Moreover, as stated by Sigband and Bell (1994 : 18) "Language uses words to convey ideas, facts, and feelings. Sometimes semantics problems arise in the interpretation of words because the meanings are not in words but in the minds of the

people who receive them". Especially, when people from different cultures communicate, misinterpretation will increase more and more.

Also, the lack of knowledge of vocabulary is another barrier. When people attempt to express their ideas but their vocabulary is out of stock, their ability to communicate will be limited. Besides, errors should be avoided in speaking and writing. Sigband and Bell (1994 : 19) marks that "Whether the error is in spelling, diction, grammar, or pronunciation, it immediately forces the reader or listener to focus on the mistake. One more language barrier is the proper level of language. To speak or write above the heads of the audience or down to them intentionally is to invite misinterpretation.

IV. Cross Cultural Communication Competence

Cross cultural communication competence is the ability to negotiate shared interpersonal meanings in cross cultural contexts. According to Gudykunst (1998 : 208) "There are three components of cross cultural communication competence: motivation, knowledge, and skills. Motivation refers to our desire to communicate appropriately and effectively with strangers. Knowledge refers to our awareness or understanding of what needs to be done in order to communicate appropriately and effectively. Skills are our ability to engage in the behaviors necessary to communicate appropriately and effectively".

However, Byram, Nichols, and Stevens (2001 : 4) remarks that "The components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complimented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups, values which are part of one's belonging to a given society".

In addition, Lewis and Slade (1994 : 138) mentions that "...when expatriates engage in interpersonal perception and attribution processes in a cross cultural setting, expatriates need to do more perception checking than usual, to provide clear and accurate feedback more frequently, and be prepared to have a high tolerance of ambiguity". Therefore, effective interpersonal contact in an intercultural or cross cultural context between people from different cultures usually requires more patience, tolerance of ambiguity and regular perception checking.

According to many researches and textbooks on cross cultural and intercultural communication, strategies to develop and perform better in cross cultural contexts are introduced.

Cultural differences create source of miscommunication between western expatriates and their Thai workers. Even though diversity has been a frequent topic of corporate training seminars in multinational organizations nowadays, there is still a big gulf between awareness of differences and appreciation of differences. Perhaps the following strategies will add more skills in building cross cultural relationships for western expatriates to cope with their Thai workers and colleagues.

1. Work to emphasize areas of similarity with others.

2. Try to accept differing opinions. In this way, you can remain open and receptive. Gudykunst (1998 :211) marks that "Dogmatism has a way of blocking cross cultural communication".

3. Make your verbal messages consistent with your nonverbal messages. Listen to yourself and try to see yourself talk. "Discrepancies between the verbal and nonverbal send a mixed message that in the long run discredits you." expressed by Dodd (1991 : 281).

4. Avoid dominating conversation. Listen to how much time you spend communicating while in a group. You may be dominating others in the group, and it may not be long before they find you a bore. Lewis and Slade (1994 : 139) suggests that "Listening to others, inviting their explanations, and showing genuine interest are communication suggestions".

5. Avoid being submissive in conversation. Although domination can prove to be harmful, if you are overly submissive, people may decide that you have nothing to contribute, "a condition that leads to cross cultural relationship demise" (Dodd, 1991 :317).

6. Be an affirmer. You do not have to act obsequiously to be confirming in your communication behavior. Sigband and Bell (1994 : 88) mention that "Your cross cultural

counterparts will appreciate your attempts at being understanding rather than critical during cross cultural contexts”.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach and analysis were used in the study. Both primary and secondary data were analyzed. The primary data came from in-depth interviews and questionnaires with western expatriates. Secondary data were collected from previous research, cross cultural communication textbooks, and the Internet.

Primary Data

Survey Research

An in-depth face-to-face interview with a sample questionnaire was conducted. There were 20 interviewees. Data collected from this interview were reviewed and analyzed qualitatively and descriptively according to what cross cultural communication barriers western expatriates ran into, and what problems were caused by verbal cross cultural communication with the solutions of these barriers.

Interviewee

There were totally 20 interviewees in this study. Western expatriates were the focus groups of this study. The interviewees were western expatriates from England, The United States of America, Australia, and Canada, who have consecutively lived and worked in Thailand for more than 1 year.

They were interviewed and their problems and the way they adapt themselves and overcome verbal cross cultural communication barriers were carefully examined. They, as assumed in this study, have communicated cross culturally and have already run into verbal cross cultural communication barriers in the work place.

Research tools

Tools employed in this research included sample questionnaires focusing on western expatriates' verbal cross cultural communication barriers, their effects and the ways they got through these barriers.

Data collection

Data were collected from the in-depth interviews and sample questionnaires with western expatriates at either interviewer' or interviewees' office.

Secondary data

Secondary data came from theories related verbal cross cultural communication in cross cultural communication journals, articles and textbooks. The theories concerning verbal cross cultural communication barriers, effects of these barriers, and the solutions to these problems were elaborated. Cross cultural communication theories were cited as suggestions for western expatriates for effective and successful verbal cross cultural communication.

Data Analysis

Primary Data

Data from in-depth interview were analyzed and categorized as the following:

1. Verbal cross cultural communication barriers Western expatriates ran into for 1 year.
2. The problems caused by verbal cross cultural communication barriers when western expatriates communicated with Thai staff.
3. Western expatriates' solutions for their verbal cross cultural communication barriers.
4. Suggestions for effective cross cultural communication.

Secondary Data

Secondary data from Chapter 2 were used as tools to analyze and summarize the primary data. Also, the answers to the questionnaires analyzed as evidence whether they were the same barriers as the most western expatriates ran into according to verbal cross cultural communication barriers theories. Additionally, the feasible solutions to these barriers and effective verbal cross cultural communication earlier studied were referred as guidelines for discussions and recommendations in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter is the findings of the study in which the summaries and interpretations of the data gathered will be presented descriptively and qualitatively.

The findings were divided into 2 parts: 1) Personal information data of the interviewees, 2) Verbal cross cultural communication data of the interviewees.

Additionally, the data from the in depth face-to-face interview and questionnaires were analyzed according to the objectives of the study described in Chapter One.

The summaries and interpretations were presented and discussed according to the information gathered from the questionnaires.

I. Personal Information of Interviewees

This part provides personal information of the interviewees. In this study, it was assumed that the interviewees already had communicated verbally and cross culturally with Thai staff and had run into verbal cross cultural communication barriers in the work place.

Table 1 Countries of origins of the expatriates

Country	Number of western expatriates	Percentage
USA	8	40.00
UK	3	15.00
Canada	2	10.00
France	2	10.00
Netherlands	1	5.00
Spain	1	5.00
Switzerland	1	5.00
Sweden	1	5.00
Norway	1	5.00
Total	20	100.00

From Table 1, the total of 20 interviewees from western countries amounted to 40% of the interviewees were from the United States of America. 15% of the interviewees were from the United Kingdom. 10% of other interviewees were from Canada and France respectively. The rest of the interviewees from Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden and Norway was counted for 5%.

Table 2 Length of stay in Thailand of western expatriates

Period of working	Number of western expatriates	Percentage
More than 10 years	3	15.00
More than 5 years	9	45.00
Less than 5 years	8	40.00
Total	20	100.00

Table 2 demonstrates that 45% of western expatriates have been working in Thailand for more than 5 years. 40% of them have been working in Thailand less than 5 years but more than 1 year. Another 15% of them have been working in Thailand for more than 10 years.

Table 3 The frequency of verbal cross cultural communication between western expatriates and Thai workers in particular situations

Situation	Frequency of verbal cross cultural communication									
	Always	Percentage	Often	Percentage	Occasionally	Percentage	Rarely	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Oral communication in a group setting	8	40.00	4	20.00	6	30.00	2	10.00	20	100.00
One on one communication	16	80.00	2	10.00	1	5.00	1	5.00	20	100.00
On telephone	3	15.00	5	25.00	10	50.00	2	10.00	20	100.00

II. Verbal Cross Cultural Communication of Interviewees

From Table 3, apparently 80% of western expatriates always communicated verbally with Thai staff face to face. Also, 50% of them occasionally communicated verbally with Thai staff on the telephone. Additionally, 40% of western expatriates always communicated verbally in a group setting with Thai staff.

Verbal cross cultural communication barriers that western expatriates run into

The data gathered from the interviewees described the verbal cross cultural communication barriers that they ran into while working in Thailand. According to the interview, verbal cross cultural communication barriers are as the following:

1. Misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents

Misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents were the most significant verbal cross cultural communication barriers that western expatriates ran into when they communicated with Thai staff. Also, it can be said that these barriers can cause miscommunication because of wrong meanings. One of the possible explanations for the misinterpretation of contexts was the lack of knowledge of vocabulary of the Thai staff.

2. English accents

The data from the interview showed that English accents were one of verbal cross cultural communication barriers. In the interview, it was noted that the interviewees were not only from English speaking countries but also from French, German, Dutch,

Spanish and Norwegian speaking countries. However, all interviewees communicated verbally with Thai staff in English. For that reason, Thai staff may have problems understanding the interviewees' English accent.

3. Level of language

Another significant finding was the levels of language used due to different cultural backgrounds and education. Besides, Thai staff did not understand idioms and slang that were used by western expatriates for instructions or explanations. As a result, western expatriates had to speak slowly and explain in details which could be time-consuming and slow down the working progress.

4. The common characteristics of the Thais

Another major verbal cross cultural communication barrier found in the interview was the common characteristics of the Thais. They always said "Yes, I understand.", when they did not really understand at all. In many cases, "Yes" meant they only acknowledged the question. It did not mean they understood the question or instruction. In other word, the most common characteristics of the Thais especially in the work place were conflict avoidance and lack of assertiveness. This proved that cultural differences created verbal cross cultural communication barriers.

Western expatriates' responses to verbal cross cultural communication barriers

The interview results showed that western expatriates always described clearly what they were trying to communicate when miscommunication took place. Also, they

tried to speak more slowly, and either repeat or rephrase the sentences or the questions. Moreover, when Thai staff tried to speak and respond to them, they always tried to guess by the context of the conversation and non-verbal clues given by their Thai colleagues in order to understand what they were trying to say.

Cultural differences between western expatriates and Thai staff communicating

According to the interview, there were three main cultural differences between western and Thai cultures. Firstly, western expatriates thought that the Thais were too respectful and the word 'kreng jai' was always used to describe the Thai characteristic. Secondly, some interviewees indicated that Thai staff always avoided speaking directly especially when they disagreed with the superiors, and the situation would get worse when their superiors were foreigners. On the other hand, western expatriates agreed or disagreed immediately and got straight to the point. Thirdly, Thai staff tended to be more collectivists. They always tied themselves in groups. As stated by Gudykunst (1998 : 48-49) in Chapter 2, "In collectivistic cultures, individuals are expected to fit into the group." Finally, lack of accountability was also one of the Thai characteristics indicated by western expatriates. Unlike Thai staff, western expatriates were more individualistic. They can look after themselves and work independently.

The effects of verbal cross cultural communication barriers on western expatriates' work performance

According to the interview, 50% of the interviewees said that verbal cross cultural communication barriers did not affect their work performance at all. On the other hand, the rest of the interviewees stated that verbal cross cultural communication affect their work performance.

Therefore, the three main disadvantages of verbal cross cultural communication barriers pointed out in the interviews were 1) no progress of the jobs, 2) more time consuming and 3) confusion.

1. No progress of the jobs

One of the interviewees complained that such barriers delayed the work progress as the Thai staff could not follow instructions. Additionally, misunderstanding of the instructions could cause the wrong output of the job. Consequently, more time was needed for correction or revision resulting in the decrease of work performance.

2. More time consuming

Another significant finding in the interviews was more time consuming. Time consuming in this study meant that western expatriates and Thai staff took a long time to understand each other and to get the jobs done. One major reason was that the Thais did not know the vocabulary that helped them to express themselves the way they wanted to and helped them to understand what the western expatriates tried to communicate. As a result, western expatriates had to explain to their Thai staff more than twice. They had to send their Thai staff memo or email to give them written

confirmation of their explanations and instructions. Unfortunately, although western expatriates spent a lot of time on their verbal and written explanations, their flamboyant Thai staff still did not get the jobs done correctly.

3. Confusion

Another remarkable finding was confusion. According to the interviews, confusion affected western expatriates' work performance in some degrees. As pointed out by one of the interviewees, the confusion was from the Thai staff who were not efficient in speaking English but always tried to speak English by themselves, even during the time that the deadline must be met. Additionally, their accent and pronunciation augmented western expatriates' confusion. In many cases, translators were used to interpret what the Thais said which increased the process of getting the jobs done.

The ways to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western expatriates

According to the interview, there were many solutions to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western expatriates as the following:

1. Confirmation

The first solution was the confirmation of what they had just said. One of the western expatriates marked that listening carefully, asking a lot of questions, and getting a lot of input and advice in order to make sure mutual understanding between them and

the Thais were very useful devices to get through the barriers. The confirmation by written forms was also practical.

2. Patience

Another significant finding in the interview was patience. "I would also add that I'm very persistent - keep asking the same question, by phone or in person, to different people if needed, until I find an answer. This takes time so time and patience is essential" said by one of the interviewees. According to the interview, one western expatriate noted that patience, persistence, and asking staff to repeat back to you what you have asked them to do were always good ways to check whether instructions had been understood not only because there might be language or culture problems but also to make jobs done perfectly. Take it easy, don't get frustrated and be cool were also suggested by the interviewees.

3. Sensitivity to cultural differences

Sensitivity to cultural differences was one of the major findings. "Finding other things that one has in common with the person one is talking to is very helpful." suggested by one of the interviewees. Non-verbal clues were also observant for western expatriates to run through verbal cross cultural communication barriers. Adaptation of behavior and attitude of western expatriates was also noteworthy. Moreover, try to be clear, use simple words, speak slowly, and use Thai words were also suggested to avoid cross cultural miscommunication.

4. Simplicity

Simplicity was also a remarkable solution to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers. "Always try to communicate as simple and friendly as possible." said, one western expatriate in the interviews.

5. Level of language

Level of language being said was also important. In case the Thai staff did not understand technical words or idioms being used, western expatriates always rephrased them with simple words and gave them examples with illustrations which were very helpful to prevent verbal cross cultural communication barriers.

Factors that facilitate effective verbal cross cultural communication

According to the interview, there were some key factors that facilitate effective verbal cross cultural communication as the following:

1. Written confirmation

One of the factors was written forms such as a memo and an email to confirm an explanation and instruction and get assurances with feedbacks in written forms.

"Follow up the verbal communication with written communication by using a memo or an email to clarify the instructions. It's easier to write things down, have a minute of meeting, have someone repeat back, request to make sure that we communicate properly, that they understand what they are expected.", mentioned by one of western

expatriates. A memo or an email both in English and Thai was also suggested for mutual understanding among western expatriates and Thai staff.

2. Face to face communication

Face to face communication was also one of the significant factors. When western expatriates communicated face to face with Thai staff, they could observe non-verbal clues such as facial expressions and postures of the Thai staff in order to understand their reactions to questions and explanations which helped a lot to reach effective cross cultural communication. Also, having a strong sensory acuity to what the person is feeling or thinking would be very helpful during conversation.

3. A sense of humor

Additionally, a sense of humor was pointed out by many western expatriates in the interview. In case that the situation got more confusing and miscommunication tended to increase, in order to reduce the stress, a sense of humor and smile were very essential in such a situation. However, the degree of humor and situation must be considered.

4. Learning the Thai language

Learning the Thai language was very helpful for western expatriates to communicate verbally with Thai staff more easily. However, according to the interviews, learning simple Thai words and basic sentences was useful enough to communicate

with Thai staff. Additionally, when western expatriates tried to speak Thai with their colleagues, who would feel acquainted with them.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the conclusions of the summaries and interpretations of the data gathered according to the objectives of the study as described in Chapter One will be presented. The discussions on limitations and obstacles of this study and recommendations for future research will be also presented respectively.

Conclusions

The conclusions of the study are described according to the purposes of the study that aimed to find out the following:

1. Verbal cross cultural communication barriers that western expatriates, who have worked in Thailand for more than 1 year, run into in the work place.

The summaries of the findings showed that misinterpretation of the contexts and contents because of the lack of vocabulary of Thai staff was a verbal cross cultural communication barrier. Also, the English accent of western expatriates who are non native English speakers such as Spanish or French expatriates could cause difficulties for Thai staff to understand their explanations or instructions. Different levels of language were also indicated as one of the barriers. One possible explanation for this barrier was different levels of education and experiences of Thai staff. Additionally, the common

characteristics of the Thais such as conflict avoidance and lack of assertiveness was also the major verbal cross cultural communication barriers that western expatriates in Thailand ran into.

2. Problems that verbal cross cultural communication barriers cause when western expatriates communicate with Thai staff in the work place.

This study explained the problems caused by verbal cross cultural communication barriers when these western expatriates communicate with Thai staff which effected on western expatriates' work performance.

The result showed that the impact of such barriers created no progress of the jobs, time-consuming and confusion. In addition, miscommunication between western expatriates and Thai staff caused many revisions of the jobs which obstructed the progress of the jobs. Moreover, many repetitions of explanations were very time-consuming for western expatriates to get the jobs done. Also, broken English of Thai staff caused a lot of confusion for western expatriates especially when they received feedbacks from their Thai colleagues. As a result, work performance of western expatriates was decreased due to verbal cross cultural communication barriers.

3. The ways western expatriates got through verbal cross cultural communication barriers in the work place.

The result indicated that the verbal and written confirmation of information given was the best way to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western

expatriates. Patience, persistence and asking for feedbacks were also very practical to reduce the barriers. Additionally, sensitivity to cultural differences especially non-verbal clues, adaptation of behavior and attitude and simplicity were also significant solutions to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western expatriates in the work place.

Discussions

This study was aimed to find out the verbal cross cultural communication barriers among western expatriates in Thailand. However, during conducting the interview with western expatriates, surprisingly most of the interviewees stated that they did not have any serious problems or not yet have found any cross cultural communication barriers when they communicated verbally with their Thai staff. However, they tried to indicate the barriers that they ran into when they communicated verbally with those staff. Yet, those barriers were considered too small and did not affect their lives or their work. However, some significant verbal cross cultural communication barriers that had been overlooked were found and the solutions to these barriers were revealed.

According to the results, verbal cross cultural communication barriers were not considered the big problems for western expatriates but cultural differences, for example, Thai staff's characteristic were the major barriers among western expatriates

and Thai staff in the work place. Although, this study was limited to the study of verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western expatriates in the work place, the researcher found that barriers that affected western expatriates' work performance were not from cross cultural miscommunication but from questions of competence, experiences, skills and characteristics of the people who worked among western expatriates in Thailand. In addition, misinterpretations of the contexts due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge of Thai staff, wrong English translation, misunderstanding of English accents and different levels of language were still found as verbal cross cultural communication barriers. One possible explanation of the cause of these barriers was the lack of knowledge and skills of Thai staff in English which can be concluded as major barriers that western expatriates faced while working in Thailand.

In addition, the ways to get through these barriers among western expatriates were remarkable. The researcher discovered that western expatriates dealt with the verbal cross cultural communication barriers positively and effectively. Sensitivity to cultural differences, patience, tolerance of ambiguity and regular perception checking were already acquired by western expatriates in Thailand in order to communicate with Thai colleagues more effectively. These can be the reasons why none major verbal cross cultural communication barriers were found during the interviews and the work performance of western expatriates still reached their organization's objectives.

Moreover, the researcher found that western expatriates in Thailand were already equipped with three components of cross cultural communication competence as stated in Chapter 2 which are motivation, knowledge and skills. This is to say that western expatriates had the motivation or desire to communicate with the Thai staff appropriately and effectively. Also, they had some knowledge or awareness of what needed to be done in order to communicate effectively. Furthermore, skills to engage in the behaviors and attitude to communicate appropriately with Thai workers were naturally utilized by western expatriates to facilitate effective cross cultural communication.

In conclusion, although, the study was limited and some obstacles were found, the three objectives of the study were reached successfully.

Recommendations

1. This study was limited to the study of verbal cross cultural communication barriers among western expatriates and Thai staff. However, the serious problems between them were not from cross cultural communication barriers but from cultural differences especially the common characteristics of Thai staff which should be studied further.

2. There should be a comparative study of verbal cross cultural communication barriers between western expatriates and Thai staff at different level in which the data

should be collected from western expatriates and the Thais who both face verbal cross cultural communication barriers.

3. There should be a further research on written communication to confirm verbal communication such as an email which indicated in this study as one of the factors that facilitates effective verbal cross cultural communication.

4. There should be a further study in greater depth on areas of problems that create verbal cross cultural communication barriers between western expatriates and Thai staff such as a study of Thai staff's level of vocabulary knowledge.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

A Study of Verbal Cross Cultural Communication Barriers

Among Western Expatriates and Thai Staff in Thailand

This questionnaire is designed to explore verbal cross cultural communication barriers among western expatriates and Thai staff in Thailand in order to eliminate such barriers to make communication more effective.

Your cooperation in responding to the following questions will be highly appreciated.

Part 1: Personal Information

1. Name of the company _____ located in
Thailand (city) _____
2. What country are you from? _____
3. How long have you been working in Thailand? ____ years

Part 2: Verbal Cross-Cultural Communication

4. How often do you communicate verbally with Thai workers in the following situations?

a) Oral communication in a group setting

always often occasionally rarely

b) One on one communication

always often occasionally rarely

c) On telephone

always often occasionally rarely

5. What are the verbal cross-cultural communication barriers do you run into? (Please give examples)

6. How do you respond to these barriers?

Avoid communication

Describe clearly what you are trying to communicate

Others (please specify) _____

7. Please specify three culture differences between your own culture and Thai culture when you communicate verbally with Thai workers.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

8. Do verbal cross-cultural communication barriers affect your work performance?

Yes

No

9. If yes, please specify three effects of verbal cross cultural communication barriers on your daily work and performance.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

10. Please specify the ways to get through the verbal cross cultural communication barriers.

11. Please specify three main factors that facilitate effective verbal cross cultural communication between you and Thai workers in order to enhance your work performance.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

APPENDIX B

Verbal Cross Cultural Communication Data

Table 4 Verbal cross cultural communication barriers of western expatriates

Barriers	Number of western expatriates	Percentage
Misinterpretation of the contexts and the contents	6	30.00
English accents	5	25.00
Level of language	4	20.00
The common characteristics of the Thais	3	15.00
Not specify	2	10.00
Total	20	100.00

Table 5 The effects of verbal cross cultural communication barriers on western expatriates' work performance

The effects of verbal cross cultural communication barriers	Number of western expatriates	Percentage
No progress of the jobs	5	25.00
More time consuming	4	20.00
Confusion	1	5.00
Not specify	10	50.00
Total	20	100.00

Table 6 The ways to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers

The ways to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers	Number of western expatriates	Percentage
Confirmation	7	35.00
Patience	5	25.00
Sensitivity to cultural differences	4	20.00
Simplicity	2	10.00
Level of language	1	5.00
Not specify	1	5.00
Total	20	100.00

Table 7 Factors that facilitate effective verbal cross cultural communication

Factors that facilitate effective verbal cross cultural communication	Number of western expatriates	Percentage
Written confirmation	9	45.00
Face to face communication	5	25.00
A sense of humor	4	20.00
Learning the Thai language	1	5.00
Not specify	1	5.00
Total	20	100.00

VISTA

VISTA

Name: Miss Potchanalak Ekwannang

Date of Birth: July 16, 1979

Place of Birth: Sriracha, Chonburi

Address: 657 Soi Ladproa 107, Ladproa Road, Kwang
Klongchan, Khet Bangkokapi, Bangkok 10240

Present Position: Secretary to Managing Director

Office: Mitsiam Motors Co., Ltd. / Asoke Office

Educational Background:

2003	Master of Arts (Business English for International Communication) Srinakharinwirot University
2001	Bachelor of Arts (Business English) Rajabhat Institute Chandrakasem

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C.3

A STUDY OF VERBAL CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS AMONG
WESTERN EXPATRIATES AND THAI STAFF IN THAILAND

AN ABSTRACT

BY

MISS POTCHANALAK EKWANNANG

28 W.A. 257

S 109188

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Potchanalak Ekwannang. (2004). *A Study of Verbal Cross Cultural Communication*

Barriers Among Western Expatriates and Thai Staff in Thailand. Master's

Project, M.A. (Business English for International Communication). Bangkok :

Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Project Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr.

Ampom Srisermbhok.

The purpose of this study was to explore verbal cross cultural communication barriers among western expatriates and Thai staff in Thailand. The study focused on verbal cross cultural communication barriers, in other words, language barriers among them in the work place. The study covered verbal cross cultural communication barriers western expatriates ran into, what the problems these barriers caused and the ways to get through such barriers. An in-depth face to face interview and questionnaires with 20 western expatriates were administered and analyzed qualitatively and descriptively according to the objectives of the study.

The result of the study revealed that misinterpretation of context and contents of statement because of Thai staff's lack of vocabulary, level of language, pronunciation, and accent, was the major verbal cross cultural communication barriers found among western expatriates when they communicated with Thai staff in the work place. Also the finding of the study surprisingly showed that 50% of the interviewees indicated that

verbal cross cultural communication barriers did not cause any serious problems on their work performance. Nevertheless, the rest of the interviewees indicated that no progress of the job, more time-consuming and confusion were the problems caused by verbal cross cultural communication barriers. Confirmation of statement, patience, sensitivity to cultural differences were effective ways to get through verbal cross cultural communication barriers among western expatriates and Thai staff in Thailand.

In addition, there were some factors that facilitated effective verbal cross cultural communication found in this study. Written confirmation such as an email or a memo especially both in English and Thai versions, face to face communication, a sense of humor and knowledge of Thai language were effective factors for successful verbal cross cultural communication.

การศึกษาปัญหาการสื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่างวัฒนธรรมในหมู่ชาวตะวันตก
ที่ทำงานในประเทศไทยและพนักงานชาวไทย

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

นางสาวพจนลักษณ์ เอกวรรณัง

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ
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เสริมโภค.

การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจปัญหาการสื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่าง
วัฒนธรรมในหมู่ชาวตะวันตกที่ทำงานในประเทศไทยและพนักงานชาวไทย โดยการศึกษาครั้งนี้
เน้นถึงปัญหาการสื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่างวัฒนธรรม หรือเรียกอีกอย่างหนึ่งว่าปัญหาด้าน
ภาษาในหมู่ชาวตะวันตกและพนักงานชาวไทยในสถานที่ทำงาน ผลกระทบของปัญหา และ
วิธีแก้ไขปัญหา โดยใช้แบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์แบบเจาะลึกตัวต่อตัวกับชาวตะวันตกที่
ทำงานในประเทศไทยรวมทั้งสิ้น 20 ราย ข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ได้รับการวิเคราะห์ในเชิง
คุณภาพและเชิงพรรณนาตามจุดประสงค์ของการศึกษาครั้งนี้

ผลของการวิจัยพบว่าการตีความหมายของถ้อยคำและเนื้อหาผิดเนื่องจากความไม่รู้
คำศัพท์ของพนักงานชาวไทย ระดับของภาษา และสำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษเป็นปัญหาใหญ่ในการ
สื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่างวัฒนธรรมในหมู่ชาวตะวันตกที่ทำงานในประเทศไทยเมื่อสื่อสารกับ
พนักงานชาวไทยในสถานที่ทำงาน การวิจัยพบว่า 50% ของผู้ให้สัมภาษณ์ชี้ว่าปัญหาการ
สื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่างวัฒนธรรมไม่ได้ก่อให้เกิดปัญหาร้ายแรงต่อการทำงาน อย่างไรก็ตาม
ผู้ให้สัมภาษณ์ที่เหลือชี้ว่าปัญหาการสื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่างวัฒนธรรมทำให้งานไม่คืบหน้า
สิ้นเปลืองเวลา และก่อให้เกิดความสับสน วิธีการแก้ไขปัญหาการสื่อสารจนะภาษาระหว่าง
วัฒนธรรมที่มีประสิทธิภาพในหมู่ชาวตะวันตกและพนักงานชาวไทยคือการยืนยันคำพูด ความ
อดทน และความสำนึกในความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม

นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าการยืนยันคำพูดเป็นลายลักษณ์อักษร เช่น อีเมลล์ หรือจดหมาย
เวียน โดยเฉพาะที่แปลเป็นภาษาอังกฤษและภาษาไทย การสื่อสารตัวต่อตัว อารมณ์ขัน และ
ความรู้ภาษาไทยเป็นปัจจัยที่มีประสิทธิภาพที่ทำให้การสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมประสบ
ความสำเร็จ