



**A STUDY OF CULTURAL AWARENESS OF ENGLISH  
TEACHERS AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN THE  
MUNICIPAL AREA OF SRISAKET PROVINCE**

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**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
MAJOR IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

**FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS  
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**INDEPENDENT STUDY APPROVAL**  
**UBON RAJATHANEE UNIVERSITY**  
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## บทคัดย่อ

ชื่อเรื่อง : การตระหนักถึงการสอนวัฒนธรรมของครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษระดับประถมศึกษา  
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ในระดับประถมศึกษา

จุดมุ่งหมายของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้เพื่อเป็นการสำรวจความรู้ทางด้านวัฒนธรรมของครู  
ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษระดับประถมศึกษาปีที่ 4-5-6 ในเขตเทศบาลจังหวัดศรีสะเกษ ด้วยการทดสอบ  
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กลุ่มประชากรศึกษาในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ได้จากการเลือกแบบสุ่มแบบการเจาะจงใน  
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จำนวน 30 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาครั้งนี้คือ แบบทดสอบแบบเลือกตอบ โดยนำข้อมูลที่ได้  
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ผลการศึกษาพบว่าครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในระดับประถมศึกษาส่วนมากยังขาดความรู้  
เกี่ยวกับคำศัพท์ที่มีความหมายเกี่ยวข้องกับวัฒนธรรมของเจ้าของภาษา นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าหนังสือ  
เรียนซึ่งมีข้อจำกัดเกี่ยวกับการให้ข้อมูลทางวัฒนธรรม มีผลต่อการขาดความรู้ทางด้านวัฒนธรรม  
ของครูอีกด้วย

## ABSTRACT

TITLE : A STUDY OF CULTURAL AWARENESS OF ENGLISH  
TEACHERS AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN THE  
MUNICIPAL AREA OF SRISAKET PROVINCE

BY : RACHAN KHURANA

DEGREE : MASTER OF ARTS

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PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Teachers' awareness of culture has been believed to influence students' increased interest in the target language (Flewelling, 1994). It also helps develop learners' communicative aspect of the language being learnt. This view towards foreign language instruction, nonetheless, has not been evident in a language classroom in primary schools of Srisaket province. It was observed that a number of Thai English language teachers in the municipal area express concern about their uncertainty when encountering vocabulary items which carry cultural connotation (e.g. Christmas carol, popcorn, daisy).

To this base, the present study was conducted to mainly investigate whether or not primary school English teachers in the municipal area of Srisaket province have cultural awareness when dealing with culture-bound vocabulary presented in Phathommsuksa (a primary level) 4-5-6 English textbooks. Subjects of this study were 30 primary school English teachers from private and public schools in the municipal area of Srisaket province. They were required to take a multiple-choice test which focuses on an understanding of cultural specific lexical items found in the textbooks used in their own classrooms.

Results obtained from this study revealed that Thai English teachers were likely to lack cultural awareness of the target language. This may, in turn, cause misunderstanding among learners. Moreover, it was found that the obvious lack of

cultural resources as seen in limited cultural information in classroom textbooks makes it hard for teachers to become aware of the culture of the target language.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
THAI ABSTRACT	II
ENGLISH ABSTRACT	III
CONTENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURE	VIII
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Rationale	1
1.2 Purpose of Study	3
1.3 Research Questions	3
1.4 Significance of the study	3
1.5 Definition of key Terms	4
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Culture and English as a Foreign Language Study	5
2.2 The Role of Language Teachers in Incorporating a Cultural Component into a Language Classroom	6
2.3 Related Studies in the Thai Context	7
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.1 Subjects	9
3.2 Research Instruments and Procedures	11
3.3 Data Analysis	11
4 FINDINGS	
4.1 Research Question 1	13
4.2 Research Question 2	17

**CONTENTS (CONTINUE)**

	<b>PAGE</b>
5 DISCUSSION	
5.1 Research Question 1	21
5.1.1 Summary of the Results	21
5.1.2 Discussion	21
5.2 Research Question 2	24
5.2.1 Summary of the Results	24
5.2.2 Discussion	24
6 CONCLUSION AND CLASSROOM IMPLICATION	
6.1 Conclusions	27
6.2 Implications	27
6.3 Limitations of the Study	27
REFERENCES	29
APPENDIX	
A The culture-bond Vocabulary test	34
VIATE	41



LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1	Participants' Educational Background, their English Teaching Experiences, and School Types	10
2	Distribution of Scores on the Vocabulary Test of Thai English Language Teachers in the Municipal Area of Srisaket Province	13
3	Distribution of Correctness and Incorrectness of each Vocabulary item on the Vocabulary Test of Thai English language Teachers in the Municipal Area of Srisaket Province	16
4	The Analysis of how Each Vocabulary Items were presented in the Textbooks	18

**LIST OF FIGURE****FIGURE****PAGE**

- 1      Comparison of subjects with the scores lower and  
higher than 50%

15

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the rationale, research question, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms.

#### **1.1 Rationale**

Language is a means of transferring human's thought, feeling and knowledge of various topics. It is considered as one of the most important parts of today's society and used in every aspect of human's lives. In particular, the use of language has been witnessed during different courses of life action, including birth, marriage and death. Hence, one cannot deny that knowing or learning a language means knowing or learning ways of life, which also include one's own culture. This is to say language and culture seem to be closely interwoven and neither one should be ignored when the focus is on language study.

As suggested, language has long been an integral component of every culture. It is a powerful tool in communication and thus being utilized in many areas of study such as commerce, tourism and education. More importantly, when people with various language and cultural backgrounds come into contact, there are probably only few languages that play a role in achieving the communication purposes of those interlocutors. Examples include English, Arabic and Chinese. Among these languages, English seems to receive most attention since it has long been recognized as an international language (Pulverse, 1995), the language that people whose first language is not English use to communicate with others from different cultures.

In such situation, this so-called international language needs to be learned either as a second or a foreign language. Whilst learning English as a Second Language (ESL) occurs in a country in which her native language is English, learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) happens in a place where the citizen of that country does not speak English (Judd, 1987). Take for example, any non-native speakers of English who study English in England or America should be labeled as

ESL students whereas the same group of learners will immediately be called EFL students if they study English in Japan or Korea.

Thailand is among many developing countries in Asia that employ English as a foreign language. Thai people consider learning English as a way to meet the demand of changing world. As the world becomes globalized, Thais need the English language for successful communication when having contact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, learning English as a foreign language implies an immersion of Thai people into both language and its culture and since learning always comes hand in hand with teaching, neither one should be discussed in isolation. This is consistent with Willems (cited in Bryan et al. 1992) who stated “teaching foreign language should include its culture” (p.67). It also aims to increase learners’ awareness of cultural differences so that s/he can understand western values, attitudes and beliefs. As a result of this, learning and teaching English should not only involve learning and teaching linguistic features of the language, but also its culture.

Based on my own experience as an English teacher at a primary school in Srisaket, it is observed that some of my co- English teachers do not understand the meaning of some cultural-related vocabulary that are presented in their own English textbooks. For example, they found it was difficult to fully understand the word “Christmas Eve,” thus fail to give students a clear explanation of this word. The difficulty faced by these English teachers at my school may be traced back to their lack of awareness of the target language’s culture as well as knowledge of subject matters. The two factors just mentioned, of course, are responsible for teachers’ uncertainty and a low degree of self-confidence when dealing with culture-bound vocabulary. However, it should be acknowledged here that many of these teachers did not graduate with a degree in English or neither had they taken any training course in teaching English as a foreign language.

As a researcher and an English primary school teacher, it is believed that without the knowledge of culture, foreign language instruction will never be accurate and complete. In particular, teachers’ failure to explain cultural-related vocabulary found in their own classroom textbooks will hinder learners from realistically understanding the language itself. For foreign language students, language study

seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak it or the country in which it is spoken. The knowledge of different cultures also helps students in getting to know different people, which is a necessary act for understanding and respecting other people and their ways of life. It also helps to broaden students' perspective on the similarities and differences in the life of various cultural groups and prevent them from making premature and inappropriate value judgments.

## **1.2 Purpose of Study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not elementary school English teachers in the municipal area of Srisaket Province have cultural awareness when dealing with cultural-related vocabulary presented in Phathommasuksa (a primary level) 4,5 and 6 English textbooks.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1.3.1. Do elementary school English teachers have cultural awareness when dealing with culture – based vocabulary presented in Phathommasuksa 4,5 and 6 textbooks?

1.3.2. How can the findings of this study be applied to teacher training and EFL material preparation in Thailand?

## **1.4 Significance of the study**

Results obtained from this study will hopefully reveal whether or not elementary school English teachers have cultural awareness when dealing with cultural-specific contents presented in Phathommasuksa 4, 5, and 6 English textbooks. Teachers' awareness of culture plays a significant role in helping students to communicate fully in a target language. In other words, teachers' knowledge of culture will aid students, to some extent, in using a target language in a more communicative and meaningful way. The findings will also prove useful for EFL material preparation and foreign language instruction in Thailand.

### 1.5 Definition of key Terms

The followings are important terms found in this research

1. Culture: people's way of life, values, attitudes and beliefs.
2. Cultural-related vocabulary: a vocabulary list containing culture-bound contents (e.g. Christmas carol, Apple pie and Bagel)
3. Primary school English teachers: Phathommasuksa 4, 5, and 6 teachers from private and public primary schools in Srisaket Province.
4. EFL: English as a Foreign Language.
5. ESL: English as a Second Language.

The topics and research in relation to the study will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The main purpose of this chapter is to offer a review of the literature on important issues related to this research. It is intended to outline the theoretical framework essential to an understanding of the present study, including culture and foreign language study, the role of language teachers in incorporating a cultural component into a language classroom, and related studies in the Thai context.

#### **2.1 Culture and English as a Foreign Language Study**

A foreign language study comprises several components: grammatical, communicative and cultural competence (Straub, 1999). While, grammatical competence refers to the knowledge of the grammatical system of the target language, communicative competence refers to how knowledge of the language can be used in various situations. Also important for language learners is the knowledge of culture, known as cultural competence. This competence can be defined as the knowledge of conventions, customs, belief and system of meaning of another country (Straub). Since cultural competence is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, language teachers should incorporate the teaching of culture into their own classrooms (Damen, 2005).

To this base, teaching culture should aim to add an understanding of the cultural norms of the target language community and increase awareness of one's own culture in relation to others. This is to say that teaching culture to ESL or EFL learners inevitably involves the teaching of human behaviors, thoughts, communications, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of ethnic, religious and social groups. Of importance is Krasner (1990) who emphasizes that in order for communication to be successful, language must be related to culture of that language because it is a means through which understanding of culture can be promoted. Supported by Sysovey and Donelson (2002), studying a foreign language or a second language is a process of trying to figure out the nature of culture.

## **2.2 The Role of Language Teachers in Incorporating a Cultural Component into a Language Classroom**

The responsibility falls on language teachers to express cultural experiences. In doing so, they need to modify their perspective on the world and their own culture so as to possess sound cultural knowledge of the target language to effectively teach (Kramsch, 1983). To raise students' awareness of the cultural aspects, teachers should make those cultural aspects an explicit topic of discussion in accordance with linguistic features. As Byan and Morgan et al. (1994) recommended, foreign language teachers should have an ability to experience and investigate both of their own language and target cultures. That is, culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistically and pedagogically. As far as the pedagogy is of a major concern, culture will have an effect on the selected materials for a classroom. In other words, any classroom textbooks will serve as a source for cultural materials.

At this stage, it is important to point out that language and culture are not separable from one another and the profession seems to be recognizing the importance of the cultural dimension of language learning. This claim is verified by Kramsch (2000), who advocates that people involved in language teaching should gain an understanding of the intertwined relation between language and culture. Without the study of culture, teaching foreign language / second language will not be accurately complete for foreign language or second language learners (Peck, 2006). In other words, language seems senseless if a foreign or a second language learner know nothing about people who speak that target language or the country in which the target language has been spoken.

Ned Seelye (1998) then adds that learners will gain lots of benefits from recognizing a prominent role of a target language's culture in the classroom. For instance, they will be likely to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class and place of residence may influence the ways people speak and behave. Moreover, they will be aware of the cultural connotations of words, phrases, or sentences used in the target language. Also important is the fact that knowing culture of the language being studied will help stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture and encourage understanding towards others.



Since there has been the recognition of the importance of culture in a language classroom, many scholars turn their attention to this issue. For example, Robert Politzer, in the Georgetown University Report of the fifth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistic and Language Training back in 1959, maintains that “if we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning...” (p. 100). Consequently, culture should not be regarded as the fifth skill attached to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Rather, it is always in the background or embodied in the language (Kramsch, 1993 cited in Plastina, 1999). Language teachers should develop awareness of the importance of contextualizing language by referring to its cultural connotations.

### **2.3 Related Studies in the Thai Context**

The importance of culture in language classrooms has been advocated in the Thai English education for some times. Suktakul (1982) is among scholars who suggest that English teachers sometimes need a humanistic approach when teaching cultural awareness of the target language communities. To elaborate her view, Suktakul provides an example of the word “breakfast”, when stressing an importance of giving a concrete example with an attempt to compare and contrast similarities and differences between cultures. This view towards language will in turn help learners become aware of other cultures in relation to their own.

For instance, teachers may compare and contrast different kinds of breakfast in different cultures. Take for an example, whereas American “breakfast” includes toast, fried egg, ham, pancake which comes with honey, butter, or syrup, European breakfast may probably contain cereal mixed with fresh milk or adding favor fruits. In addition, Rakwadee (1970s) study interestingly shows that most Thai students during the 1970s had less understanding of the western culture due partly to their lack of cultural knowledge and the differences between Thai and western cultures. Rakwadee, then, mentions that when teaching a foreign/ second language, teachers should teach learners not only the linguistic aspects, but also the cultural aspects of that target language.

Indisputably, it is thus important for language teachers to incorporate a cultural component into their own language classrooms. In so doing, Thai English language teachers should first become knowledgeable of the target language's culture. They will also have to be aware of the concepts of cultural competence and cultural authenticity proposed by Kramersch (2000). While cultural competence refers to "behaving in accordance with the social conventions of a given speech community" (p. 181) cultural authenticity is the type of resources used in the classroom (e.g. a restaurant menu in the target language) and whether these resources are used in a manner that helps the students to develop cultural knowledge. Once these goals are achieved, Thai English language teachers will be less likely to cause misunderstanding among their own students. In short, since culture plays a significant role in language classrooms, it is a challenge for any teachers to make cultural and cross-cultural awareness a central issue in teaching at the same time as developing students' linguistic competence.

In order to explain how the study is conducted, the methodology will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This Chapter explains how the present study was conducted. It consists of 3 parts:

3.1 Subjects

3.2 Research Instruments and Procedures.

3.3 Data Collection and analysis.

#### **3.1 Subjects**

The subjects of this study were randomly selected from Thai English teachers from the municipal areas of Srisaket Province. The total numbers of teachers participating in this study was 30. They all had different educational background. For example, 3 out of 30 graduated with a bachelor degree in Physical Education, while 20 out of 30 had a bachelor degree in different fields, including Thai language, Math, Catering, Science, Social study and Agriculture. Only 7 teachers in this study hold a degree in English. Overall, their English teaching experience in Sisaket province ranged from 2 to 16 years. The following table concludes the participants' educational background, their English teaching experiences and school types:

**Table 1** Participants' Educational Background, their English Teaching Experiences, and School Types

No.	Educational Background	Teaching Experiences/years	School Types
1	Primary Edu.	10	Government
2	Eng.	8	Government
3	Thai	6	Government
4	Agriculture	5	Government
5	Health	16 / Bilingual class	Government
6	Social study	5 / Bilingual class	Government
7	PE	2	Government
8	Primary edu.	6	Government
9	English	8	Government
10	Thai	8	Private
11	Catering	5	Private
12	Primary	7	Government
13	Primary	5	Government
14	Math	2	Government
15	Primary	4	Government
16	Primary	4	Government
17	PE.	2	Government
18	English	8	Private/Catholic
19	English	10	Private/Catholic
20	Primary	5	Private/Catholic
21	English	6	Private/Catholic
22	English	10	Private/Catholic
23	Primary	5	Private/Catholic
24	Science	5	Government
25	Computer	7	Government
26	Primary	14	Government

**Table 1** Participants’ Educational Background, their English Teaching Experiences, and School Types (continue)

No.	Educational Background	Teaching Experiences/years	School Types
27	English	10 * Sarakham	Government
28	Agriculture	6	Government
29	Thai	4	Private
30	Management	5	Private

**3.2 Research Instruments and Procedures**

A multiple choice test which focused on an understanding of culture- bound vocabulary was distributed to all participants to examine if they understood the cultural connotation attached to these vocabulary items. The test contained 25 vocabulary items selected from the English textbooks of Phatomsuksa (a primary level) 4, 5 and 6 used in the subjects’ schools. These books were Say Hello, Aha English, Gogo Loves English, Smart kids, English for the Starter and Smart English. The test was written in Thai so that it would help facilitate an understanding of the test items among the test takers who had limited English educational background. The data was collected during the first semester of the academic year 2006. Each subject took the test at the different time because they worked in different schools and had different free time. Each participant was requested to complete the test within 30 minutes. A follow-up informal discussion with participants was also set up so as to gain some additional information, which may help explain the tendencies found in this research.

**3.3 Data Analysis**

The scores of the test were calculated after the subjects finished the test. Firstly, the raw scores were converted into percentage and classified into 2 major groups. One group composed of the subjects with the scores lower than 50 % whereas another group consisted of those with the scores higher than 50%. In this research, the former group was assumed to have limited or lack cultural awareness of the

vocabulary items presented in the English textbooks since the test takers failed the test. In contrast, the latter with the scores of more than 50 % was assumed to demonstrate cultural awareness of the same vocabulary test. The base line of 50% scores was chosen to comply with a primary school standard testing criteria which state: any student taking a school examination will pass the test only when s/he receives a score higher than 50% while those who got a score lower than 50% are labeled as “failing the exam”.

The next chapter will discuss the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the results of the present study in relation to Research Question 1 and 2

4.1 Research Question 1


The first research question was: Do elementary school English teachers have culture awareness when dealing with cultural-related vocabulary presented in Phathommasukka 4, 5 and 6 English textbooks? The best way to answer this question would be by describing the scores on the vocabulary test of all participants:


**Table 2** Distribution of Scores on the Vocabulary Test of Thai English Language Teachers in the Municipal Area of Sisaket Province.

Number of subjects	Raw Data	Percentages	Educational Background
1	13	52	Primary Edu.
2	15	60	English
3	8	32	Thai
4	10	40	Agriculture
5	16	64	Health
6	15	60	Social study
7	4	16	PE
8	11	44	Primary Edu.
9	18	72	English
10	13	52	Thai
11	11	44	Catering
12	8	32	Primary
13	10	40	Primary

**Table 2** Distribution of Scores on the Vocabulary Test of Thai English Language Teachers in the Municipal Area of Sisaket Province (continue)

Number of subjects	Raw Data	Percentages	Educational Background
14	11	44	Math
15	12	48	Primary
16	12	48	Primary
17	9	36	PE.
18	14	56	English
19	14	56	English
20	11	44	Primary
21	15	60	English
22	15	60	English
23	14	56	Primary
24	11	44	Science
25	14	56	Computer
26	11	44	Primary
27	19	76	English
28	12	48	Agriculture
29	8	32	Thai
30	12	48	Management

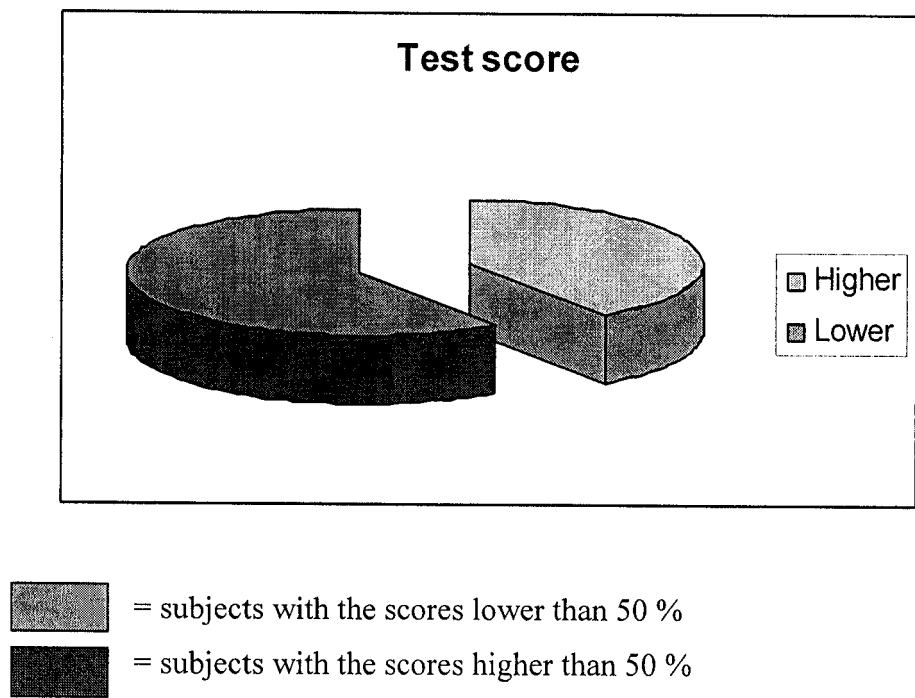
 = Higher than 50 %

 = Lower than 50 %



Findings

The first researcher question sought to determine if Thai English teachers participating in this study had cultural awareness of the vocabulary items presented in their English textbooks. As Table 2 shows, more than half of participants failed the test. That is, 17 out of 30 had scores lower than 50% whereas 13 out of 30 participants scored higher than 50%. These findings might be a good indication that less than half of Thai English teachers demonstrated cultural awareness of the vocabulary items found in their own textbooks. Interestingly, it was also found that all of teachers with a degree in English passed the test. This may indicate that an educational background does play its part in the participants' scores on the cultural awareness test. And as far as the type of school is concerned, about 67% of teachers from the public schools failed the test whereas only around 17% of teachers from the catholic schools failed (number 18-23). The following pie graph illustrates the number of participants who scored lower and higher than 50% on the vocabulary test.



**Figure 1** Comparison of subjects with the scores lower and higher than 50%.

**Table 3** Distribution of Correctness and Incorrectness of each Vocabulary item  
on the Vocabulary Test of Thai English Language Teachers in the Municipal  
Area of Sisaket Province.

Items	Percentages of correctness (%)	Percentages of incorrectness (%)
1. Barbecue	53	47
2. Dude Ranch	50	50
3. Fish and chip	60	40
4. Croissant	43	57
5. Christmas carols	50	50
6. Daisy	46	54
7. Cheesecake	46	54
8. Chrysanthemum	30	70
9. Ostrich	43	57
10. Pizza	86	14
11. Popcorn	80	20
12. Ounce	46	54
13. Earmuffs	76	24
14. Thanksgiving day	46	54
15. Christmas pudding	40	60
16. Father Christmas	53	47
17. Cheese	56	44
18. Jack -o- Lantern	70	30
19. Trick or treat	36	64
20. Scrambled egg	33	67
21. Snowboard	93	7
22. Bacon	66	34
23. La sage	63	37
24. Shuttle bus	46	54
25. Frisbee	36	64

### Findings

As table 3 illustrates, the three items: snowboard, pizza and popcorn seemed to pose fewer difficulties than others for the test takers. In other words, these items received higher percentages of correctness than others (93%, 86%, 80% consecutively). In contrast, chrysanthemums, scrambled egg and trick or treat were likely to cause lots of difficulties for the Thai English teachers participating in this research. As found in the above table, the percentages of incorrectness of these items were considerably high if compared to other items on the vocabulary list (64%, 67%, 70%). Of a major concern here, however, is scrambled egg, which received the highest scores of incorrectness among different types of food in this study. As found in Table 2, while scrambled egg received the score of 67% of incorrectness, other types of food such as bacon or la sage received a much lower score (34% and 37% of incorrectness respectively).

### 4.2 Research Question 2

The second research question was: how can the findings of this study be applied to EFL materials preparation in Thailand? The best way to answer this question would be by describing how each vocabulary items were presented in the English textbooks of Phathommasukka 4,5 and 6

**Table 4** The Analysis of how Each Vocabulary Items were presented in the Textbooks.

Items	The presentation of each vocabulary item
1. Barbecue	Presented in a list of vocabulary with an English definition at the end of the textbook.
2. Dude Ranch	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition
3. Fish and chip	Presented in a list of vocabulary with an English definition at the end of the textbook.
4. Croissant	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
5. Christmas carols	Presented in the sentence without any explanations.
6. Daisy	Presented with only a picture of it.
7. Cheesecake	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
8. Chrysanthemum	Presented with only a picture of it.
9. Ostrich	Presented with only a picture of it.
10. Pizza	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.

**Table 4** The Analysis of how Each Vocabulary Items were presented in the Textbooks. (continue)

<b>Items</b>	<b>The presentation of each vocabulary item</b>
11. Popcorn	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
12. Ounce	Presented in the footprint of the textbook with a Thai definition.
13. Earmuffs	Presented with only a picture of it.
14. Thanksgiving day	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
15. Christmas pudding	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
16. Father Christmas	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
17. Cheese	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
18. Jack -o- Lantern	Presented with only a picture of it.
19. Trick or treat	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
20. Scrambled egg	Presented with only a picture of it.
21. Snowboard	Presented in the footprint of the textbook with a Thai definition.

**Table 4** The Analysis of how Each Vocabulary Items were presented in the Textbooks. (continue)

Items	The presentation of each vocabulary item
22. Bacon	Presented with only a picture of it.
23. La sage	Presented with only a picture of it.
24. Shuttle bus	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.
25. Frisbee	Presented in a list of vocabulary at the end of the textbook without any definition.

Findings

As shown by Table 4, it was discovered that most of the vocabulary selected for this research’s test was presented in a list of word without a definition at the end of the book. No explanation in relation to culture was provided. For instance, the “Say Hello” textbook only presented a list of vocabulary in an alphabetical order at the end of the textbook without any definition. Moreover, it was evident that many vocabulary items were shown with their pictures. Examples included the word “daisy” shown as the flowers of the month and the word “ostrich” presented as the picture of animal in the zoo at the end of the textbooks without any explanation.

On the contrary, there were some textbooks such as “Gogo Loves English” which put the vocabulary in an alphabetical order at the end of the textbook with some cultural-related information. Particularly, if some words were related to the target language’s culture, there would be a bracket with a small letter “c” inside at the end of that vocabulary For example, “pizza (c)” was intended to suggest that this word was cultural-bound, but no explanation in relation to culture was identified. Finally, there were some of the textbooks that gave the meanings of vocabulary’s meaning in Thai in the footprint such as the word “snowboard.”

The next chapter will focus on the discussion of the results.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter is concerned with the discussion of the findings in Chapter 4. First, a summary of each research question's results is introduced. Then, possible theoretical implications of the findings are explained, which are useful for the understanding of any possible tendencies in this work.

#### **5.1 Research Question 1**

##### **5.1.1 Summary of the Results**

Results in Chapter 4 indicate that more than half of Thai English teachers who participated in this study were likely to lack cultural awareness when dealing with the vocabulary items introduced in their teaching context. In particular, 17 out of 30 Thai English teachers in the municipal area of Sisaket province who taught English in Phathommasuksa 4-5-6 received scores lower than 50% on the cultural-related vocabulary test. In addition, it was found that while some of the vocabulary items posed fewer difficulties than others for the test takers (e.g. snowboard, pizza, popcorn), some items caused lots of confusion among them (e.g. chrysanthemum, scrambled egg, trick or treat).

##### **5.1.2 Discussion**

The first finding seems to be in accordance with Rakwadee (1970) 's study which suggests that most Thai students during the 1970s have less understanding of the western culture due partly to their lack of cultural knowledge and the differences found between Thai and western cultures. Rakwadee interestingly explains these tendencies by saying that the problems faced by Thai students in her study are caused by the lack of cultural awareness of their Thai English language teachers. When teaching a foreign/second language, Thai teachers tended to focus only on the linguistic aspects, but not the cultural perspectives of the target language. This is inconsistent with Kramsh (1993), who states that since language has its own culture, vocabulary, which is part of the language should represent, to some extent,

the culture of the target language being studied. Therefore, language teachers should develop awareness of the importance of contextualizing language by referring to its cultural connotations.

Furthermore, since most of the teachers in this study did not graduate with a bachelor degree in English, it is not surprising that they scored lower than 50% on the culture-bound vocabulary test. Limited knowledge of the subject matter (English) may possibly explain why these teachers failed. This circumstance is, indeed, confirmed by the fact that any language teacher who is not proficient in the area of their teaching both linguistically and culturally might hinder learners' ability to acquire the target language. As Seelye (1998) points out, language learners will gain lots of benefits from recognizing a prominent role of a target language's culture in the classroom. For instance, they will be likely to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class and place of residence may influence the ways people speak and behave. Moreover, they will be aware of the cultural connotations of words, phrases, or sentences used in the target language and ultimately knowing culture of the language being studied will help stimulate language learners' intellectual curiosity about the target culture and encourage a better understanding towards others.

As far as the school type is of interest, there seems to be a difference in terms of cultural knowledge between teachers from public and catholic schools. As one might say from the findings a lot more teachers from the public schools failed the culture-bound vocabulary test if compared with those from the catholic schools. This tendency may be linked to a lack of support from the Thai government, especially the Ministry of Education. In other words, primary school English language teachers need to be provided with more opportunities to have both experiential and academic training. A workshop or short course training on the cultural issues should be organized to help public school English teachers become confident and competent in the area of cultural components of the target language being taught. This workshop or training may also emphasize how classroom materials should be selected to meet students' as well as teachers' demand for the incorporation of culture into a language classroom.



As already suggested, there was some culture-bound vocabulary, which tended to cause fewer difficulties than others for the test takers in this research. Examples are snowboard, pizza and popcorn. This tendency can be explained by looking at the test takers' familiarity of the items themselves. According to an informal interview with the test takers, many of them identified the familiarity with the items in their daily life as a major factor which helps facilitate their understanding of the cultural related vocabulary presented in the test. More specifically, whereas pizza and popcorn are easily available either in a Thai restaurant, a pizza franchise or a movie theater in every part of Thailand, a snowboard now becomes popular sport among Thai teenagers, including students at school and children at home. However, it should be pointed out here that the answer for the "snowboard" item carries clues for the test takers. That is, the first distracter, A, contains two important key words, winter and board, which may help teachers easily arrive at the meaning of this lexical item (see number 21 on Appendix).

In contrast, a large number of subjects in this study were likely to have problems with some vocabulary items more than others. For instance, many of them failed to provide the correct answers for the questions on 'chrysanthemum, scrambled egg and trick or treat'. Again, an informal interview with some subjects revealed that familiarity with the test items does play a role in their decision-making. Some teachers mentioned that they had never seen the word 'chrysanthemum' before even though it has been presented in a classroom textbook for a couple times. Additionally, some even put blame on the textbook itself, acknowledging that too limited or no explanation of the cultural-specific vocabulary is provided at the end of the textbooks or in the teacher's manuals, all of which are responsible for their lack of cultural awareness. However, herein lies the fact that anyone who wishes to join the English teaching professional may need to prepare to deal with culture and cultural contrasts as they arise in English teaching (Oxford and Anderson, 1995).

As already mentioned in chapter 4, of a major concern here is the word scrambled egg, which posed the most difficulty for participants when compared with other types of food items such as bacon or la sage in this research. A closer look at these three vocabulary also reveals that all were presented with only pictures in the textbooks. Thus, one question remains: what makes scrambled egg the most difficult

of all? To understand this tendency, an inquiry with native speakers may be needed, including a quick survey of two or three restaurant menus in the target language. It is interesting to find that two native speakers living in Thailand for more than five years mentioned the scarce availability of the scrambled egg in Thailand. They acknowledged that even though scrambled egg, bacon, and la sage are frequently shown on restaurant menus back in their own country, scrambled egg is not normally served as breakfast in a western restaurant in Srisaket, Thailand. But, anyone can easily order bacon or la sage in almost every western restaurant in this country.

## 5.2 Research Question 2

### 5.2.1 Summary of the Results

Results in Chapter 4 indicate that most of the vocabulary selected for the present study's test was presented in a list of word without any definition at the end of the book. Moreover, some lexical items were introduced only with pictures and no explanation in relation to culture was given at all.

### 5.2.2 Discussion

As data analyzed for this research question show, the findings seem not to conform to what has been suggested by Byan and Morgan et al. (1994). These two scholars emphasize that culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistically and pedagogically. And as far as the pedagogy is of a major concern, culture will have an effect on the selected materials for a classroom. In other words, any classroom textbook will serve as a source for cultural materials. Nonetheless, the commercial textbooks used in the municipal area of Srisaket province tended not to do their job. All textbooks seem to devalue the importance of incorporating the cultural elements into second/foreign language teaching and learning by not giving explanations of the culture-bound vocabulary, except showing the pictures of some lexical items or providing the Thai meaning of the vocabulary.

More importantly, an informal discussion with the test takers reveals a new piece of evidence on how these teachers approach classroom textbooks. Some teachers acknowledged that they had avoided discussing the cultural connotation attached to some lexical items since the linguistic aspects of the language were the focus of most of the teaching materials they used. They then added that the textbooks

used in class did contain some cultural input. An example can be seen in the form of footprint in different chapters of the book. However, the information presented there was too limited, and this did not enable students to read more about the culture of the target language. In this way, teachers could not rely on the textbooks to present any cultural input to the students. The obvious lack of cultural resources available for use in the classroom makes it hard to develop a curriculum for the cultural component of the class (Simpson 1997; Stern 1992). It also contributes to the lack of cultural awareness of Thai English teachers in this study.

Carr (1999) argues that language teachers have no real tools for teaching culture, and this is because of the lack of a workable model to understand the nature of culture and its relation to language. Searching for tools, some teachers who participated in this research acknowledged their attempt to incorporate other different cultural input resources such as pictures and photos, music, as well as videos into the class as time permitted to enhance their students' and their own understanding of the target language culture. Although the importance of this cultural input seems to be recognized by some teachers, many of them also believe that students need to learn about the linguistic aspects of English and that these sometimes took a lot longer to teach, meaning that there is little time for any other cultural materials to be used.

By way of conclusion, the lack of cultural awareness of Thai English teachers in this research may be caused by their lack of both experiential and academic training. In addition, the lack of cultural resources as seen in limited cultural information in the textbooks also contribute to the low level of primary school teachers' cultural awareness in the present study.

The next chapter will provide the conclusion and implication of the study.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION AND CLASSROOM IMPLICATION**

#### **6.1 Conclusions**

The premise of the present study should be reiterate: the teaching of culture should become an integral part of foreign language instruction. To achieve this goal effectively, language teachers should receive both experiential and academic training, with the aim of becoming ‘mediators in culture teaching’ (Singhal, 1998). Once becoming knowledgeable and gaining competence of the target language linguistically and culturally, teachers should be able to present a true picture or representation of another culture and language. This is to say that EFL teachers should be foreign culture teachers at the same time, having the ability to experience and analyze the home and target culture. They should also be able to convey cultural meaning and expose students into a learning environment where students themselves can modify their perspective on the world and their own cultural identity. This ability should later allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people ways’ of life, values, attitudes and beliefs.

#### **6.2 Implications**

Since the cultural input available to students in an EFL teaching environment comes from two major sources: teachers and textbooks. Language teachers should be well equipped with knowledge of the target culture. Once achieved, they will be able to make comparisons between the target culture and their own. These comparisons will encourage their experience towards cultural diversity and “this diversity should then be understood and respected, and never...over (sic) or underestimated” (Tavares & Cavalcanti, 1996, p19). More specifically, it is important for all language teachers to recognize that cultural awareness helps enrich communicative competence (Thanasoulas, 2001). By communicative competence, it is intended to refer to verbal as well as non-verbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions and so forth.

In other words, the kind of communicative competence is one which can account for the appropriateness of language as well as behavior.

As mentioned earlier, textbooks are another source for the cultural input made available to students in an EFL context. Therefore, it is necessary to point out that textbook writers or publishers have to incorporate several cultural elements that may exist in different countries into their commercial EFL/ESL materials. In doing so, textbook publishers may introduce a short section about the target language's culture in most chapters of the book. This will help enable students to read about other cultures, including people and their lives. In addition, textbooks should include a wide range of culture-bound topics, which will allow rooms for students to discuss the values, expectations, traditions, customs and rituals they take part in. To this end, learners will be ready to reflect upon the values, expectations, traditions of others 'with a higher degree of intellectual objectivity' (Straub, 1999).

Finally, publishers may consider the role of literature in material or textbook development since literature will serve as a medium to transmit the culture of people who speak the language in which it is written. One should keep in mind that literary texts are a resource of authentic language, thus exposure to literary works can help learners to expand their language awareness and develop their language competence. Moreover, trying to interpret the values, assumptions, and beliefs in the literary texts of the target culture is "instrumental in defining and redefining those obtaining in the home culture" (Gantidou, personal communication cited in Thanasoulas, 2001, p. 21).

### **6.3 Limitations of the Study**

It should be noted here that some limitations of this study are worth mentioning. First, some of the vocabulary items collected from the primary school textbooks seem to be too difficult for primary school students or even for Thai English language teachers. Examples include trick or treat, Jack-o-lantern and Christmas pudding. In the researcher's opinion, this vocabulary can be introduced later in a more advanced level such as secondary or high school since primary school students may need to grasp a fundamental concept of Halloween or Christmas in general first. Second, the test itself had not been undergone a validity check by the testing expert. Therefore, some items seem to require too deep cultural information

from the test takers. What should be enough for primary school Thai English teachers, however, still remains questionable. Finally, since the main focus of this research is on teachers' cultural awareness, the obtained results may be insufficient for an understanding of the role of culture in second language study as a whole. Thus, future studies should probably look specifically at how the lack of cultural knowledge of language teachers affects learners, especially primary school students or young learners.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A

### The culture-bound vocabulary test

**Instructions:** choose the most appropriate meaning for each vocabulary item.

1. Barbecue

- a. food such as sausages or burgers boiled on a barbecue out of doors.
- b. food such as sausages or burgers grilled on a barbecue out of doors.
- c. food such as sausages or burgers fried on a barbecue out of doors.
- d. food such as sausages or burgers stir fried on a barbecue out of doors.

2. Dude ranch

- a. a place where you can stay on the farm.
- b. a place where you can deposit your money.
- c. a place where you can prey for wealth.
- d. a place where you can go for a drink .

3. Fish and Chip

- a. western food combined with fried potato and fresh fish.
- b. western food combined with fried potato and fried fish.
- c. western food combined with stir-fried potato and stir-fried fish.
- d. western food combined with stir-fried sweet potato and grilled fish.

4. Croissant

- a. English bread usually eaten with tea or coffee as breakfast.
- b. American bread usually eaten with tea or coffee as breakfast.
- c. French bread usually eaten with tea or coffee as breakfast.
- d. Italian bread usually eaten with tea or coffee as breakfast.

5. Christmas Carols

- a. A Christmas poem.
- b. A Christmas wish.
- c. A Christmas present.
- d. A Christmas song.

## 6. Daisy

- a. a small wild flower with a yellow center and white pedals, commonly known as the cure for eye infection.
- b. a small wild flower with a red center and white pedals, commonly known as the cure for throat infection.
- c. a small wild flower with a yellow center and white pedals, commonly known as the cure for nose infection.
- d. a small wild flower with a read center and white pedals, commonly known as the cure for ear infection.

## 7. Cheesecake

- a. a kind of dessert made from yoghurt.
- b. a kind of dessert made from chocolate.
- c. a kind of dessert made from cream.
- d. a kind of dessert made from milk.

## 8. Chrysanthemum

- a. a round shaped flower which can be used as food ingredients.
- b. a round shaped flower which can be added into a soft drink.
- c. a round shaped flower which can be used as food seasoning.
- d. a round shaped flower which can be taken as medication.

## 9. Ostrich

- a. An African bird with a long neck and leg, which can run fast, but cannot fly.
- b. An American bird with a long neck and leg, which can run fast, but cannot fly.
- c. An Australian bird with a long neck and leg, which can run fast, but cannot fly.
- d. An English bird with a long neck and leg, which can run fast, but cannot fly.

## 10. Pizza

- a. An American flat, round piece of dough covered with tomatoes, cheese, and meat.
- b. A French flat, round piece of dough covered with tomatoes, cheese, and meat.
- c. An Italian flat, round piece of dough covered with tomatoes, cheese, and meat.
- d. A German flat, round piece of dough covered with tomatoes, cheese, and meat.

## 11. Popcorn

- a. a snack which consists of grains of maize that have been heated until they have burst and become large and light.
- b. a snack which consists of grains of maize that have been boiled until they have burst and become large and light.
- c. a snack which consists of grains of maize that have been fried until they have burst and become large and light.
- d. a snack which consists of grains of maize that have been stir-fried until they have burst and become large and light.

## 12. Ounce

- a. a measuring unit which is equal 28.35 gram.
- b. a measuring unit which is equal 38.35 gram.
- c. a measuring unit which is equal 48.35 gram.
- d. a measuring unit which is equal 58.35 gram.

## 13. Earmuffs

- a. two thick soft pieces of cloth joined by a band which people wear over their ears to protect them from the cold.
- b. two thick soft pieces of cloth joined by a band which people wear over their ears to protect them from the germ.
- c. two thick soft pieces of cloth joined by a band which people wear over their ears to protect them from the heat.
- d. two thick soft pieces of cloth joined by a band which people wear over their ears to protect them from the dust.

## 14. Thank Giving Day

- a. a holiday held on the fourth of November, and people cerebrate this day as the day to thank God for guiding Columbus to discover America.
- b. a holiday held on the fourth of November, and people cerebrate this day as the day to thank God for giving rain to its right season.
- c. a holiday held on the fourth of November, and people cerebrate this day as the day to thank God for increasing the harvest.
- d. a holiday held on the fourth of November, and people cerebrate this day as the day to thank God for protecting all Americans.

## 15. Christmas pudding

- a. a traditional English dessert eaten on a Christmas day, this pudding is made from dried grape.
- b. a traditional English dessert eaten on a Christmas day, this pudding is made from date.
- c. a traditional English dessert eaten on a Christmas day, this pudding is made from cherry.
- d. a traditional English dessert eaten on a Christmas day, this pudding is made from pine.

## 16. Father Christmas

- a. Jesus Christ.
- b. Prince William.
- c. Santa Clause.
- d. King Arthur.

## 17. Cheese

- a. a solid food made from milk, it is usually white or yellow.
- b. a liquid food made from milk, it is usually white or yellow.
- c. a solid food made from milk, it is usually green or black.
- d. a liquid food made from milk, it is usually green or black.

## 18. Jack-O-Lantern

- a. a carving turnip craved in the shape of ghosts or monsters, found in the celebration of Halloween.
- b. a carving carrot craved in the shape of ghosts or monsters, found in the celebration of Halloween.
- c. a carving pumpkin craved in the shape of ghosts or monsters, found in the celebration of Halloween.
- d. a carving melon craved in the shape of ghosts or monsters, found in the celebration of Halloween.

## 19. Trick or Treat

- a. The way of asking for candies of children on the Halloween night, if the owners of the house give them candies, the children will sing a song for them. If not, they will play a trick on them.
- b. The way of asking for candies of children on the Halloween night, if the owners of the house give them candies, the children will give house owners a flower. If not, they will throw rubbish to the house owners.
- c. The way of asking for candies of children on the Halloween night, If the owners of the house give them candies, the children will sing a song for them. If not, they will throw rubbish to the house owners.
- d. The way of asking for candies of children on the Halloween night, If the owners of the house give them candies, the children will give the house owners a flower. If not, they will play a trick on them.

## 20. Scrambled egg

- a. a kind of breakfast cooked by mixing the whites and yolks of the eggs, then boil the mixture and heat it in the pan.
- b. a kind of breakfast cooked by mixing the whites and yolks of the eggs, then stir the mixture and heat it in the pan.
- c. a kind of breakfast cooked by mixing the yolks of the eggs and milk, then boil the mixture and heat it in the pan.
- d. a kind of breakfast cooked by mixing the yolks of the eggs and milk, then stir the mixture and heat it in the pan.



## 21. Snowboard

- a. a winter sport in which someone stands on a board to slide down snow slopes.
- b. a winter sport in which someone stands on a skate to slide down snow slopes.
- c. a summer sport in which someone stands on a board to slide down the hill.
- d. a summer sport in which someone stands on a skate to slide down the hill.

## 22. Bacon

- a. salted or smoked meat which comes from the back or sides of a pig.
- b. sweetened or grilled meat which comes from the back or sides of a pig.
- c. salted or smoked meat which comes from the back or sides of a cow.
- d. sweetened or grilled meat which comes from the back or sides of a cow.

## 23. La sagne

- a. a French meal made from flour, usually with finely chop meat, and it can be served as the main course.
- b. a French meal made from flour, usually with finely chop meat, and it can be served as the appetizer.
- c. an Italian meal made from flour, usually with finely chop meat, and it can be served as the main course.
- d. an Italian meal made from flour, usually with finely chop meat, and it can be served as the appetizer.

## 24. Shuttle bus

- a. a bus carrying passengers and making frequent journeys between two places.
- b. a bus carrying passengers and making frequent journeys among three places.
- c. a bus carrying passengers and making frequent journeys among four places.
- d. a bus carrying passengers and making frequent journeys among five places.

## 25. Frisbee

- a. a light plastic disk that one person throws to another as a game.
- b. a heavy plastic disk that one person throws to another as a game.
- c. a light wooden disk that one person throws to another as a game.
- d. a heavy wooden disk that one person throws to another as a game.

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