Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC): An Effective Means of Increasing Thai Students' English Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the oral communication of Thai University students in the Business English program. To be successful on the global stage, Thai teachers need to improve their students' speaking skills both inside and outside the classroom. However, this study mainly aims to (1) analyse some examples of students' conversations in the classroom context which show how effective Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) method was instructed and affected the way of improving the student's speaking competence (2) investigate the strengths and weaknesses of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) in terms of preparing students in the Business English major into the real business workplace and (3) explore the essential components of Classroom Interactional Competence method which can increase the communication competence of university students in the tertiary level. This study herein is a qualitative research. The researcher used voice and video recordings as the main sources of data collection. For the population scope, the students participating in the research are Business English students taking a course of English for Tourism Industry I and a continuation of English for Tourism Industry II. Sixty-Eight were mainly selected as the sampling group based on some specific criteria during their $1^{st,}$ 2nd, and 3rd year of study. The findings of the study show that Thai Business English students can increase their accuracy and fluency when they were instructed by the CIC method focused on content. Moreover, the strong effects of CIC method towards Thai university students revealed that the students show progressive fluency when having addition and variable practice. The essential component in increasing the communication competence of students is having students work in the real environment by having them immerse in the English environment that would benefit them and lower their anxiety to perform good communication skill.

Keywords: Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), effective means, tourism industry

Introduction

In the context of globalization, English plays an important role in the world. The use of English is not limited to the native speakers; it is also used for communication among non-native speakers. English fluency is a requirement for effective competition in global business and industry. The global spread of the English language is a prominent aspect of global education, transportation, hospitality and tourism, and business and industry.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher explored Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) which is a relevant instructional method to increase students' speaking competence. But in what ways does this method create results? What stages of development occur? This study was significantly shown because its findings and conclusion may stimulate teachers in the university tertiary to improve their teaching

method by using the classroom interactional competence (CIC). To achieve the study objectives, the researcher shows efficacy for Thai University students and discourse analysis among the students' communication, classroom interaction, language learning strategies, student-teacher interaction and student personality in class participation. The researcher developed the method to enhance the students' communications competence in formal and informal situations.

Objectives
1) To investigate the oral communication of Thai University students in the Business English program.
2) To analyse some examples of students' conversations in the classroom context which show how effective Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) method was instructed and affected the way of improving the student's speaking competence
3) To investigate the strengths and weaknesses of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) in terms of preparing students in the Business English major into the real business workplace
4) To explore the essential components of Classroom Interactional Competence method which can increase the communication competence of university students in the tertiary level.

Research Questions
1) Is CIC enough to prepare students for the variety of tourists with which they will interact in the industry?
2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the method in preparing students for the tourism workplace?
3) What components of the CIC method should be employed to increase business English workplace communication? What does effective business communication look like? Is it about fluency and grammatical correctness? Or can other types of communication be equally as effective as fluent speaking?

Theory

Conceptualising Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC)
According to Walsh (2011), conceptualisation of classroom interactional competence (CIC) is a method that can be used to place interaction at the centre of language learning. It also considers the various practices which can be of help to both teachers and learners to enhance CIC and to produce classroom which are more dialogic, more engaged and more focused on participation. Using analytic informed methodology extracts space for learning is created and learner contribution "shaped". However, better understanding offers an alternative approach to enhancing learning opportunity (Walsh 2011). Much of the focus is centred on spoken interaction.

The researcher believes that applying the CIC method mainly centred to classroom discussion, conversation and interaction will contribute to speaking English language amongst students. The researcher's hypothesis will be tested at Chandrakasem Rajabhat University Hospitality and Tourisim students. Having preliminarily assessed Thai students as having low English speaking ability and apprehension committing spoken grammar errors, my study aims to show the relevance and effectiveness of CIC in correcting this and improving Thai students' English speaking ability.

Interactional Competence. Walsh (2007) shows in his research that speakers vary in different levels of competence and abilities when it comes to expressing their ideas.

This is true both in and outside the classrooms, of native and non-native speakers, regardless of their language proficiency. Some people appear better than others at communicating; some have difficulty in conveying the simplest statements. If we put this in the context of the second language classroom, the situation becomes both more complex and less understood.

Much of what happens in language classrooms is mainly concerned with individual performance rather than collective competence. Teachers tend to evaluate their learners' ability to produce correct utterances, rather than to negotiate meanings or clarify a point or idea. Speaking tests focus heavily on accuracy, fluency, grammatically, with good range of vocabulary and so on, but they rarely consider how effectively a candidate interacts or how well a candidate co-constructs meanings with another interlocutor.

According to Kramsch (1986), many researchers have struggled with the notion of international competence without really coming to a convincing and workable definition. Recent references emphasise the fact that interactional competence is context specific and concerned with the ways in which interactants construct meanings together, as opposed to looking at features of individual performance which lie at the heart of communicative competence.

McCarthy (2005) discusses confluence: the act of making spoken language fluent with another speaker. Spoken language is highly relevant to the present discussion since it highlights the way in which speakers attend to each other's contributions and focus on collective meaning—making. It is also a concept which lies at the heart of most classroom communication, where interactants are engaged in a constant process of trying to make sense of each other, negotiate meanings, assist, query, support, clarify and so on. For this reason, we might say that, both inside and outside the classroom, being confluent is more fundamental to effective communication than being fluent.

Based on the adapted theories and ideas stated above, it is then clear that the main focus is learners being the centre, and the goal being to develop language ability through the use of specified interactional methods of approach such as CIC. By means of conversation and discussion learning English language will be facilitated. Carrying out the said techniques requires good teachers who are also reactants and participants in interactional competence and individual performance according to Walsh (2007).

Methodology

The overall study is a qualitative analysis of three conversation events: (1) transcripts of student and teachers engaged in conversation using the communicative interactional competency (CIC) model; (2) unstructured student interviews; (3) and classroom conversations amongst students.

Literature

In the research context of this study, Chandrakasem Rajabhat University is a tertiary educational institution in the north of Bangkok that offers a Post Diploma Certificate, Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. degrees in several majors. Chandrakasem was founded in 1940 as Thailand's first training college for secondary school teachers. In 1991, Chandrakasem Teachers College was named an outstanding tertiary educational institute by the Ministry of Education.

Chandrakasem Rajabhat University has a strong philosophy; its mission is to confer on its students "Good Knowledge, Strong Virtue and Leader in Community Development." Moreover, the vision of the university is to be a centre of learning, upgrading intelligence to the international level. In addition, one of the missions of the university is to produce graduates with a knowledge base that can compete on an

international level. As a teacher in the Business English programme, the researcher found multiple problems when trying develop English learning proficiency among students and in creating effective teaching strategies.

Difficulties in conversational English meshing with English grammar further emerge when the Thai student enters the university English speaking classroom. These students face a communication problem in compulsory and major courses in English that require substantially more skill than just basic grammar and syntax even they are encouraged and supported to develop their potential and knowledge, particularly in the English language

Consequently, university teachers have a pressing mandate to quickly increase student English language proficiency, but they may not have the tools or have been given a realistic timeline to achieve this mandate.

The literature referred in this article is primarily concerned with Classroom interactional competence. As CIC has proven effective in increasing overall communication competency, bridging linguistic fluency challenges, and supporting cultural communication fluency, therefore, the researcher will examine language use within the classroom interaction of the students of English as a second language of instruction.

Findings

Why Classroom Interactional Competency (CIC) is an Effective and Appropriate Means to Increase Thai Students' English Proficiency and Preparedness for The Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Finding the most effective teaching techniques and delivery systems to substantially increase Thai student English speaking performance in the Travel and Tourism industry has been a top priority for the country since it began to receive unfavourable assessment results and opinions from the business sector of low communications competencies. Creating solutions to this problem is imperative if Thailand is to fully enter the global workplace. With travel and tourism being slated as a major avenue to increase economic performance in Thailand, preparing students to communicate successfully in this area is essential. CIC has proven that it can be effective if it is instructed to students in order to increase their communication competency, bridging linguistic fluency challenges, and supporting cultural communication fluency. This discussion will focus on challenges and triumphs of tourism in Thailand and how CIC instructed students can meet these challenges. Is CIC enough to prepare students for the variety of tourists with which they will interact in the industry? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the method in preparing students for the tourism workplace? What components of the CIC method should be employed to increase business English workplace communication? An examination of current research in CIC and in tourism in the ASEAN and other parts of Asia will provides answers to these questions.

What does effective business communication look like? Is it about fluency and grammatical correctness? Or can other types of communication be equally as effective as fluent speaking? Studies provide answers to these questions. Chambers (1997) begins her study by presenting a continuing problem in determining communication competency, the definition of fluency versus accuracy. Chambers' (1997) study examines quantitative and quantitative research to arrive at a definition of fluency. Speed and effortlessness are two characteristics associated with fluency, but only speed is easily measured while effortlessness is a qualitative judgement. Students and teachers assume that practice makes perfect but statistics don't bear this out. This study also suggests immersion is a powerful way to develop accuracy and effortlessness. Nothing in the study disputes this last

statement. But Chambers (1997) concludes that fluency and communications competency is separate skills with separate measures and instructional methods. Chambers' (1997) findings support the idea that CIC can increase communications competency, which it is designed to do, but the method does not provide for the level of accuracy and effortlessness that is still desired in the modern business world. But what Chambers (1997) does point out is that the pathway to accuracy and effortlessness is tied to the level of real world daily exposure and forced language practice—otherwise known as immersion. The implication for Thai language planners and ESL educators is that immersion must be built into the curriculum to add the component that has been shown to provide the accuracy and fluency desired in the business world.

Chambers (1997) emphasises teacher perceptions of communication fluency; Kormos and Denes (2004) follow up this point with a discussion of the how these perceptions are directly related to whether educators are native or non-native speakers instructing L2 learners. Kormos and Denes (2004) research connects to "The Effects Of The CIC Method On English Language Instruction and English Speaking Fluency" (2016) because it focuses on native and non-native educators, upon college L2 students in a classroom setting studying to improve their language in a specific subject. The students involved in the study were also low and high proficiency language users. The study concluded points relevant to an understanding of the different expectations and difference in educator assessment. Native speakers have higher expectations and often give lower overall assessments to student across the board than do non-native speakers. Educators uniformly examine "speech rate, the mean length of utterance, phonation time ratio and the number of stressed words produced per minute were the best predictors of fluency scores" (Kormos & Denes, 2004, p. 145).

Where the educators who rated student performance differed was in the importance they placed on "accuracy, lexical diversity and the mean length of pauses" (Kormos & Denes, 2004, p. 145). Accuracy versus fluency is a sort of battleground among language cultures of the world, in part because of a tradition of educational excellence and business innovation in their native language arenas and part because in L1 instruction, accuracy is required and assumed to be the mark of proficiency. And in some countries, a similar level of fluency and accuracy is expected and consider proficient in L2 instruction. This expectation is particularly so in the business world since so much is at stake when language inaccuracies occur. Nikolov and Krashen (1997) suggest that we do not need to sacrifice accuracy for fluency. In their study, they found that a communication/ content based approach, like CIC, could in fact generate more accuracy and fluency than a form-based traditional approach. Their findings suggest that Thai students can increase their accuracy and fluency with CIC methods that are focused on content. The researchers' findings support Chambers (1997) findings.

Kormos and Denes' (2004) findings suggest several pedagogical and policy changes that could bring about the changes that meet the goals of Thai government and education mandates. First, education policy-makers must strategically plan and fund more native English speaking teachers to instruct students through all school systems as these teachers are shown to be more likely to produce the kinds of fluency and accuracy that the business world desires. Second, educators themselves must devise and plan for ways to use variables and outliers in language instruction along with immersion to increase fluency.

The following example shows the interactional coaching of the student by helping him communicate about his academic major, which is a more difficult conversation to negotiate. The student showed how far they could improve their classroom speaking competence.

Example 1

1) T: So, And why do you choose Chandrakasem to study? Why do you want to study here?
2) S: ชั่ว ชั่ว from Hor Karn Ka.
3) T: Oh Really. You have the problem with your study?
4) S: problem with your study.
5) T: Why do you choose to study here?
6) S: Ur….I like finance.
7) T: You like Finance? You mean a Financial course or …
8) S: Yes. Major.
9) T: You must be very good at money.
10) S: Yes I think it's difficult I don't … but…

Analysis:

Lines 1-2: The teacher started the conversation with a personal question as to why, for which the student answer seemed a bit far from the expected answer.

Lines 3-4: The teacher repeated the seemingly incorrect answer just to keep the conversation going. The student imitates the answer, making the first step toward stimulated interaction.

Line 5: the teacher repeated the answer into the form of a question, mainly to guide the student's answer.

Lines 6-7: The student pause allowing him to think of an answer. Here, the student's answer seems far from what was supposed to be the correct answer. However, the work major in a way shows relation to study, so the teacher continued and indirectly used the same student's answer in the form of question in order to slowly guide the student's English CA/Cl word and sentence construction. "You like Finance? You mean a Financial course or …"

Line 8: Finally for a while the student understands the question and had given a correct guided answer.

Line 9: Here in some way thorough asking the student with guided question and repetitions slowly helped motivate question and answer. (You must be very good at money?).

Line 10: The student for the third time made the answer, yet it might appear to him that very good may be close to the meaning, may in some way relate to the topic being discussed. The student felt freely motivated to interact.

As shown in this example, the CIC method made interaction possible and elicited responses, despite inconsistency of incorrect answers. The teacher ignored the wrong answer and diverted the student's answer to a repeated guided question as an answer, giving the student the chance and space to think about his answer.

Example 2

1) T: Can you hear me? the sound o.k.?
2) S: What is what is your name?
3) T: Nitolaj.
4) S: Where are you come from?
5) T: I' m from Denmark.
6) S: Where did you travel in Thailand?
7) T: I've been to ur... Koh Chang and Bangkok.
8) S: O.K. When did you go there?
9) T: Umm... I came two weeks ago.

10) S: Are you here on business or vacation?
11) T: Vacation.
12) S: Oh! what kind of what kind of accommodation?
13) T: Umm... kind of hotel.
14) S: What kind of transportation?
15) T: Umm... airplane, boat, bus, motorcycle, taxi, taxi.
16) T2: O.K.
17) S: Have you ever taste Thai food? Taste Thai food.?
18) T: Yes. lots of Thai food? Do you like Thai food?
19) S: Yes. How how to prepare yourself before travel?
20) T: Umm... nothing really. I packed too much clothes.
21) S: What special need during your travel?
22) T: What is … Ur… I I have no special need.
23) S: But dream place to visit in Thailand dream place.
24) T2: Dream place.
25) T: I don't know.

Analysis:

Line 1: The teacher asks a sensory system type of question to force, stimulate response, "Can you hear me?" precede interaction and response.

Line 2: It is an overlapping line of questions with the wrong answers.

Line 3: The teacher ignored the wrong answer but continues to contribute correct answers.

Line 4-5: The teacher superseded erroneous questions in Line 4 (Where are you come from?) and went on with the correct data of information in L5

Line 6 -7: Smooth contributing answer dependent on the first question (where did you travel in Thailand); Ans: Pause and after thinking the student gave the Answer (L T7): I've been to ur... Koh Chang and Bangkok.

Line 9: The teacher paused for a while and formed an answer to contribute in L8.

Line 11: verifies correct information appropriate to L10 question.

Line 12-15: A continuous pausing to formulate ideas for hotel in Line 12 and airplane for Line 14. And a minimal answer for affirmation of the idea in Line16.

Line 17-18: overlapped words to verify needed information in L18 answer was dependent to the L17's repeated question and in turn also make a topic exchange.

Line19- 20: The teacher made a pause to think for an answer. The student suddenly changed the topic in Line 20 with regards to travel preparations.

Line 21-22: The teacher paused to think for an idea with reference to question by the student in Line 21.

Line 23–25: There's a sudden shift of topic to taking turns in guessing the teacher's dream. A continuous exchange of congruent ideas of interaction even though there are sudden changes of topics in some instances.

From the examples, one method of making language instruction specific to business English performance is to embed more of the specific demands of business disciplines, like Travel and Tourism, into the classroom experience. Educators must research and keep pace with the specific demands of the tourism industry especially as it relates to language and cultural exchanges. Aldohon (2014) showed the efficacy of this approach in his study on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The research examines this method for training people in the global tourist industry. A feature of ESP is to examine learners problems and needs for language development and to develop programs and curricula around it. This method is easily incorporated into CIC instruction because

educators can make lessons discipline specific. CA can also be embedded here to further augment CIC's effectiveness. An exceptionally relevant method of embedding could be created by recording the speech and conversations of discipline experts. For instance, a Thai travel agency with especially proficient English speakers could be employed to provide up to the minute real-world conversations that can be analysed and modelled.

In the business of tourism, not only are visitors reaching further into previously rarely visited areas, almost every country in the world is welcoming visitors who have varying expectations for their visit from observation of the locals to fuller engagement with them as opposed to just visiting areas prepared specifically for visitors (Wood, 1997). Thus, a mark of language fluency, though perhaps not accuracy, that can fulfill the tourists' desires is the ability of the Thai travel agent to communicate in a fashion that makes the tourist feel the agent is expert enough to understand the tourist's needs and desires and match those with what the country offers. Doing so is a hallmark of strong intercultural communications, a foundation for communications competency in the travel and tourism industry. Dai and Chen (2014) argue that globalisation raises the spectre of gaps in effective communications and opens the door for the exchange of negative communications such as prejudice and stereotypes. A (re) conceptualisation of intercultural communications is in order and can be achieved through embedding multiple approaches in traditional communication building classes (Dai and Chen, 2014). These should move from static to dynamic expressions.

Carbaugh and Lie (2014) support the dynamic nature of cultural communications competence by emphasising its interactional requirements. Cultural competence is socially grounded and co-constructed by participants. Competence itself is a communications practice intimately tied to social interactions (Carbaugh & Lie, 2014). As such building cultural competency necessary to effectively serve customers in the tourist industry fits easily into the framework of CIC proposed in this discussion. Students can prepare to recognise the characteristics of various cultures and can prepare to share their own through conversation analysis that examines specific cultural markers and their significance to the speakers.

Specific lessons in the transcripts of "The Effects Of the CIC Method On English Language Instruction and English Speaking Fluency" (2016) have been devoted to developing cultural and communication interactional fluency. Students show progressive fluency which can be augmented with additional variety and practice. Beyond this type of fluency of Thai travel agents is the need to recognise that the boundaries between business and tourist travel are dissolving (Wood, 1997). Thus, the successful communicator will be able to determine when and whether a business traveller has free time to enjoy tourist attractions. Language practice in this area should be increased. Barraja-Rohan (2011) has demonstrated that conversational analysis (CA) in teaching interactional competence can be used to increase students' ability to understand the subtle nuances of English conversation with business and leisure tourists. CA combined with CIC is especially useful for lower performing students because it can raise students' "awareness of both the mechanisms and norms of spoken interaction, and also eventually in helping them to become analysts of conversation and more effective conversationalists" (Barraja-Rohan, 2011, p. 479). CA combined with CIC that is devoted to cultural and languages nuances can help the Thai travel agent serve the business client and cause her or him to have greater appreciate for the communication competency shown by any agent who can do so.

Discussion

For educators, what are some additional barriers to developing the required level of fluency?

One of these is the anxiety levels of different Thai language learners. Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool and Ploisawaschai (2009) conducted a study to examine the source and effect of anxiety on Thai students learning English in the university. Interesting among the findings were the differences among Thai English students were that academic oriented versus vocational had different goals. Female students were more academically focused. Vocational students of all genders were more superiority, performance and achievement oriented; they also strive harder to emulate English spoken by foreigners because they recognise that doing so will advance their careers (Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool & Ploisawaschai, 2009). Vocational students, especially females, also have higher anxiety levels in speaking situations because they immediately associate their speaking competency with career success and advancement (Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool & Ploisawaschai, 2009). The implications of this study for CIC instruction are that more career-focused curricula focused on English acquisition and communication competence will spark stronger achievement in Thai students. Further augmenting the vocational aspects of university business English will have a similar affect. Ultimately, students' anxiety levels can be lowered by giving them more practice in the business communication of their discipline. Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool and Ploisawaschai (2009) mirrors the findings of Liu (2006) and Nikolov and Krashen (1997)

Liu (2006) conducted a study to examine the effects of anxiety on L2 speakers in a language classroom. This is important because high anxiety not only impedes students' language acquisition, it affects the results of qualitative analysis of student transcripts of speaking. Liu (2006) says that speaking anxiety in the language classroom is specific and unique to this activity: "Students in language classes may engage in negative self-talk, ruminating over a poor performance, which affects their ability to process information in foreign language contexts (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Some students with high levels of foreign language anxiety even have a mental block, similar to that experienced by students studying mathematics" (Liu, 2006, p. 301). Imagine the impact such anxiety speech has on the discipline specific speaker who may feel greater performance pressure. Anxiety levels are logically lower for higher performing students, but all students show anxiety when responding to the teacher. Students in the study "The Effects Of the CIC Method On English Language Instruction and English Speaking Fluency" (2016) demonstrated anxiety and were also low performers.

Limitation

This study affirms that exposure to and practice in discipline specific environments would lower students' anxiety levels. The discipline specific environment is a higher anxiety-producing experience for students because of its real-world nature. So, having students work with lessons for these environments, pairing up for practice and then eventually performing the language would lower student anxiety while it raises their performance levels and would fit with the benefits gained through immersion. However, there is less opportunity for students to have English conversation outside the classroom context as Thai is a native language of communication. It is quite rarely for them to have English environment.

Recommendations

1). Another method of alleviating student anxiety is through mediation, a typical CIC learning techniques that was expressed by several students in "The Effects Of The CIC Method On English Language Instruction and English Speaking Fluency" (2016). Mediation involves one student restating another students' turn in a co-participant dialogue (Hynninen, 2011).

2). If the principle goal of using CIC in the Thai classroom is to increase business English for the workplace, Hynninen (2011) shows that mediation as a key component of CIC teaching techniques is effective in increasing understanding of students who use it in their conversation practice. It is also a way to alleviate the stress and anxiety that occurs during L2 mastery.

3) Another powerful result of mediation is that it expands communications competency by co-construction of the multiple contexts and expressions of the speech being practiced. In the tourism discipline this has the effect of increasing communication competency through preparing students to recognising multiple meaning possibilities in the language exchange between themselves and their customers. Their customer service abilities will be expanded through their classroom mediation experiences because mediation organises discourse and manages interaction (Hynninen, 2011).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Thai students, educators and education administrators have an imperative to increase the communications competency of Thai students in the travel and tourism industry. Doing so has specific economic ramifications that are a part of the ASEAN strategic plan for economic development. Beyond this, educators want to produce successful, work-place ready students. And students have personal aspirations to obtain career and advancement opportunities.

As a consequence, the research presented in this discussion affirms that all parties can meet their goals by using the CIC teaching methods. These should be specifically focused on discipline specific language development, co-constructed and mediated teaching, and input for industry experts. Discipline specific expertise focuses curricula content on the specific requirements of travel and tourism including both cultural and communications interactional competency.

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