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*Telex Language in Thailand : Its Importance,  
Its Teaching and the Materials Required*

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**Background**

Due to the advances in technology in the last decade, telecommunications have begun to play an increasingly important part in the business world. A telex is a form of written communication that is in extensive use today as it can replace any kind of letter in an effective and more efficient manner. A telex message is a simultaneous form of communication, being picked up by the recipient at the same time as it is sent. This serves the needs of businessmen who compete for business across countries or even continents. Unlike the telegram, it is convenient for both the sender and the recipient, especially since most business companies own a teleprinter or telexmachine. Moreover, a telex is accepted as a legal document in the same way as a letter.

According to a survey of 160 companies on Business English used in Thai Business Community conducted in 1982-1983 by Bang-Orn Savangvarorose, the telex is used in this country to a considerable degree, in fact more than any other form of written communication. Nowadays telex writing is included in the curricula of Business English writing courses in Thai Universities because its popularity and importance in the business world is well recognized.

**The Role of Telexes in Thailand.**

A teleprinter was first installed in Thailand 20 years ago, in 1965, at the Post and Telegraph Department. The telex has gained increasing popularity since the Thai government decided to encourage both foreign investment in Thailand and the export of Thai merchandise in the Fifth Development Plan beginning in 1981.

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The followings are the results of a survey, conducted in January 1985, of telexes in Thailand. The presentation will be divided into 3 parts :

1. The use of telexes in 100 of the biggest Thai companies.
2. The study of authentic telexes from 100 companies in Thailand.
3. The study of telexes taught at Thai Universities including the instructors' and students' points of view.

#### I. THE USE OF TELEXES IN 100 OF THE BIGGEST THAI COMPANIES.

One hundred companies were randomly selected from a piece of research entitled "600 Biggest Companies in Thailand" conducted by a group of lecturers from the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy at Thammasart University from 1977-1980.

A Questionnaire was sent to 100 companies and the findings arranged in tabular form are as follows.

Table 1. Companies Possessing a Teleprinter Machine(s)

Number of Tele- printers	Frequency (Number of companies)	Percentage
1	63	63
2	21	21
3	8	8
4	4	4
6	3	3
21	1	1
Total	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

From Table 1, it can be seen that 63 companies out of 100 own one teleprinter each, 21 companies own 2, and 8 companies own 4 or more than 4. Bangkok Bank Limited owns 21 teleprinters.

Table 2. The Number of Telexes sent & Received per Day.

Number of Telexes per day	Number of companies	Percentage
1- 5	21	21
6-10	25	25
11-20	18	18
21-30	7	7
31-40	9	9
41-50	10	10
51-60	2	2
61-70	-	-
71-80	-	-

Table 2. Continued

Number of Telexes per day	Number of companies	Percentage
81-90	1	1
91-100	2	2
101-200	3	3
201-300	1	1
500	1	1

From Table 2, it can be seen that 90 companies out of 100 send and receive between 1 and 50 telexes a day. This indicates the importance of telexes for the Thai business community.

Table 3. Different Purposes in Writing Telexes for Business Communications

	$\bar{X}$	S.D	V
*1. Requests and Inquiries	3.51	1.40	39.78
2. Replies to Requests and Inquiries	2.97	1.34	45.26
3. Orders	3.52	1.40	39.66
4. Replies to Orders	2.75	1.40	50.74
5. Claims	1.99	1.15	57.80
6. Adjustments	1.45	0.78	54.02
7. Requests for Credit	2.63	1.45	55.29
8. Replies to Requests for Credit	2.22	1.28	57.83
9. Requests for Credit Information	1.82	1.16	63.63
10. Replies to Request for Credit Information	2.01	1.25	62.25
11. Collections	1.80	1.08	60.14
12. Thanks	2.71	1.13	41.73
13. Congratulations	2.35	1.10	47.00
14. Condolences	2.07	0.91	44.10
15. Making Appointments	2.83	1.12	39.56
16. Giving Information	3.41	1.26	37.07
17. Quotations	3.03	1.43	47.25
18. Others	1.83	1.50	82.22

From Table 3, it can be seen that now the telex serves a function parallel to that of a business letter. They are used to a considerable degree for orders, requests and inquiries. They are used only moderately for giving information, quotations and replies to requests and inquiries, making appointments, replies to orders and thanks. It can thus be concluded that telexes assume the role of business letters.

\*The above list was drawn up as a parallel to the main functions of business letters as laid out in a variety of Business English textbooks.

### Sources of Knowledge

From the survey, it was found that 35.25% of telex writers learned how to write telexes at educational institutes while 49.58% learned from their colleagues and 15.15% from text books. Seventy-eight percent of businessmen think that personnel in business companies should have a fundamental knowledge of writing telexes; 20% however, think that this is not an essential skill. Eighty-eight percent of businessmen think that telex writing should be taught at educational institutes, whereas 12% think this is not necessary.

## II. THE STUDY OF AUTHENTIC TELEXES FROM 100 COMPANIES IN THAILAND

A total of 89 authentic telexes were received from as many as 100 companies: the remaining 11 companies merely sent a few sample sentences and gave a few examples of the kind of abbreviations used.

One outstanding characteristic of the telex is that every word is written in capital letters. The other findings are as follows.

### 1. *The Heading and the Closing of Telexes*

1.1 From the study of 89 telexes from 89 companies, the heading read as follows.

Table 4. Word (s) Used to Head Telexes

Word (s) used	Frequency	Percentage
1. ATTENTION	45	50.56
2. TO	10	11.24
3. TO FROM	8	8.99
4. FROM	2	2.25
5. TO FOR	2	2.25
6. FOR	1	1.12
7. TO FROM DATE	2	2.25
8. FROM TO SUBJECT	1	1.12
9. -	16	17.98
10. DEAR SIR,	1	1.12
11. DEAR + NAME	1	1.12
Total	<u>89</u>	<u>100</u>

From Table 4, it can be seen that 50.56% of telexes in Thailand begin with an "ATTENTION" line, 8.99% begin with "TO", 17.98% do not address the recipient, and only a few percent use a salutation as one would in a letter.

## 1.2 The Closing of Telexes

Table 5. Word (s) Used to Close Telexes

Word (s) used	Frequency	Percentage
1. REGARDS	42	47.19
2. BEST REGARDS	20	22.47
3. THANKS AND REGARDS	6	6.74
4. THANKS	3	3.37
5. -	17	19.10
6. SINCERELY	<u>1</u>	<u>1.12</u>
Total	<u>89</u>	<u>100</u>

From Table 5, it can be seen that 47.19% of telexes in Thailand end with "REGARDS", 22.47% end with "BEST REGARDS" 19.10% have no closing, and only 1.12% use "SINCERELY" as a complimentary close. It can be assumed that "REGARDS" is the most common form of complimentary close used in telexes.

## 2. Characteristics of Telex Messages Studied from 100 Business Companies.

### 2.1 Lexical Characteristics

2.1.1 Words used in telexes are simple, short, familiar and conversational and are often the same as are used in business letters. For example, words that show courtesy are "please" or "thanks", while the word "favor" is not found at all, and "appreciate" is rarely found.

2.1.2 Abbreviations are common in telexes. Brevity is important as the cost of sending a telex has to be borne in mind. Most of the telexes studied contain a range of abbreviations, but at least the abbreviation of the phrase "referring to your telex" (RYT) and abbreviations for the words "thanks" (TKS), please, (PLS), "regards" (RGDS), "and" (N), and "your" (YR) are used in almost all telexes.

Eighty-two companies out of a hundred have their own lists of abbreviations.

Out of 318 abbreviations given by a hundred companies, those that occur with a frequency higher than 10 are as follows:

1. ADV	(advise)	20
2. CFM	(confirm)	32
3. DD	(dated)	11
4. HV	(have)	15
5. L	(letter)	13
6. N	(and)	14
7. PLS	(Please)	62

8. RCVD	(received)	10
9. RE	(referring to)	11
10. RGDS	(regards)	39
11. TKS	(thanks)	31
12. TLX	(Telex)	34
13. U	(you)	27
14. V	(we)	12
15. YR	(your)	33

Any other words occur with a frequency less than 10. It can be assumed that these 14 abbreviations at least are in common use in the Thai Business Community.

2.1.3 In writing figures, there is one outstanding characteristic, that of writing the number zero, which is written with a slash through it ( $\phi$ ).

## 2.2 Grammatical Characteristics

The majority of telexes which were studied were concerned primarily with brevity. Short words, abbreviations were employed and the number of words used kept to a minimum. As regards the reduction in the number of words, it was found that certain structural words that are not necessary to the content are often omitted.

2.2.1 If the subject of a sentence is the first person personal pronoun "I" or "We", these are often omitted. For example.

(We are) PLS TO MEET AND DISCUSS WITH YOU IN BANGKOK OFFICE

2.2.2 Articles which will not cause any misunderstanding when omitted are left out. For example :

PLS ENSURE (that a) COPY (of the) DOCUMENTS ARE SENT WITH (the) CONSIGNMENT

2.2.3 Prepositions which are not important to the content are omitted. For example :

PLS PHONE ME (at) 5854632 (on) TUESDAY 32 BKK TIME (between) 7:00-8:00.

2.2.4 Punctuation marks are not considered very important in telex writing and consequently are not used to a very great degree.

2.2.5 The verb "to be" in the passive voice is often omitted. Moreover, the passive voice is found to be reduced to the past participle if it is used in a subordinate clause. For example :

TLX US FLIGHT DETAILS WHEN (they are) SHIPPED

## 2.3 Discourse Pattern

2.3.1 Telex Language is concise and contains no repetitions or irrelevant information, which is also an essential characteristic of a good business

letter. Moreover, the language used is straight-forward. Introductory phrases such as, "I would like to inform you that....." or "This is to advise you that.....," are not used in telex language.

2.3.2 Transitional words are not used much in telexes. If a telex message is long, it is divided into short paragraphs to avoid confusion and at the same time to facilitate understanding. Simple transitional words like "and" or "because" are by far the most commonly used. From the study of 89 telexes from as many companies, it was found that "and" was used to express addition, "because" was used to express cause and result.

#### 2.4 The Paragraph

Telex messages are always short. If they are long, they are divided into short paragraphs of about 1-3 sentences. Moreover, some companies number the paragraph (1, 2, 3 .....), whereas some list each paragraph alphabetically (AAA, BBB, CCC .....). This will help the reader's comprehension.

### III. THE TEACHING OF TELEXES IN THAILAND AND THE MATERIALS USED.

In Thailand there are 9 state universities and 4 private universities. Four of the state universities offer courses in Business English, but of these courses, one is for teachers of Business Communications only, while yet another is a very short introductory course which follows the Bell Crest Series of Great Britain. It can thus be said that only two state universities offer truly comprehensive Business English courses. The curricula of these two state universities allows for instruction in telex writing. Private universities, which are in close touch with the business community, most certainly include telex writing in their Business English writing courses.

#### The Materials Used on Teaching Telex Writing

Since there are only a few text-books which mention telexes at all instructors have to depend primarily on authentic telexes from business companies.

As for the material used at Chulalongkorn University, we collect authentic telexes from business companies and select only those which are well-written, that is, those which are brief and concise, contain suitable examples of common abbreviations, and the reduction of words in which the text has been reduced in some way, and the language used is straightforward and simple. Then we try to set up a number of rules or guidelines from the study of those telexes.

As at Chulalongkorn University, the 3 private universities likewise depend primarily on authentic telexes.

Given the lack of suitable materials in Thailand we need to import text-books from overseas which deal at length with the subject of telex writing in a practical fashion.

### Telex Teaching

At Chulalongkorn University, the aim of teaching telex writing is to present authentic well-written messages as examples. Instructors explain to the students what a telex is, and what the important points in telex writing are, namely that the message must be clear, concise and easily understood, not just brief. Then, students practise decoding and encoding telexes.

Another method is to utilize precis because a telex involves brevity. Students practise drafting telexes from business letters. Guidelines to writing together with some common abbreviations are taught through text analysis. The teaching of telexes takes only two hours out of a total of 42 hours taken up by the whole business writing course. However, students have an opportunity for self-study and practice through the exercises provided.

Telexes are taught after students have mastered different forms of business letters since these forms are the basis of business communication. Moreover, students should first possess the necessary writing skills, since for the sake of brevity, they should know how to reduce clauses and shorten sentences into phrases without losing the correct meaning.

As for other universities, the teaching is almost the same, that is students learn by means of authentic telexes and practice. Students have to expand and reduce messages along with learning some abbreviations, although not too much emphasis is placed on the latter.

From a survey of 20 instructors of Business English and 143 students of 5 institutes, namely: Chulalongkorn, the Graduate Institute of Business Administration of Chulalongkorn, The University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thammasart and Durakitbandit, it was found that all instructors agree that telex-writing should be included in Business English Writing courses since it is becoming increasingly essential to the business community. Moreover, some instructors even think that it should be an optional advanced course for business students in the near future.

As for the 143 students, it was found that 85.31% felt they needed telex teaching while 14.69% did not think it was necessary to teach it at university. Those who wanted to study telexes thought that if they knew how to write telexes correctly and precisely, they would work more efficiently, and it would help them conduct their business more effectively. Those who did not want to study telexes thought that they could learn by themselves while working and if they could write business letters, then they could also write telexes.



## **The Problems in Telex Teaching**

### **Introducers**

1. Since there is no international text available, this leads to uncertainty as to which style is the most acceptable and instructors have to rely upon authentic messages, which vary widely in style. Consequently, this may lessen their confidence in teaching the subject. It is, however, possible to provide teachers with a number of guidelines to follow as laid down in Part II, item 2 of this analysis. (cf. pp. 9-12)

2. As one instructor has to be responsible for about 30 students per group, it is difficult for him or her to correct students' paper more than once a week.

### **Students**

1. The majority of students are not proficient in writing. They have hardly even mastered the basics of the language. It is a great problem for them to practise the reduction of clauses or phrases because this may have an adverse effect on their writing skills.

2. Students do not have sufficient opportunity to develop their telex-writing skill, mainly due to the time constraints of the curriculum. Students have but a limited time to study the many different forms of business communications.

### **Conclusions**

As was revealed in the surveys, telex language plays an essential part in the Thai business community. Both instructors and students of Business English also realize its importance, since a telex can be an appropriate substitute for any kind of business letter in the competitive business world.

Telex writing is included in intensive business writing courses in universities in Thailand. Since there are only a few text books available on telexes, the instructors of each university prepare their own materials which are based primarily on the study of authentic telexes. However, we still need more text-books from overseas to use as reference materials.

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