

The address given by Professor Kasem Suwanagul
Minister of the Office of University Affairs
at the opening of the National Conference on English for Academic Purposes
held at the Chulalongkorn Information Centre, April 24-26, 1978

The Representative of the British Council, English-teaching colleagues, ladies and gentlemen :

It is a great pleasure to have the honour of welcoming you all to this Conference in my capacity as Minister of the Office of University Affairs. It is regrettable that our numbers had to be limited, but gratifying to know so many people wanted to attend that this had to be the case. The fact that numbers had to be restricted reflects the healthy attitude towards the teaching of English which has developed recently, and the desire to cooperate in this field which was so manifestly obvious in the Seminar held in Chiangmai in May, 1974.

The Conference in Chiangmai was held because it was clear that attitudes towards the teaching of English were changing radically, and it was felt there should be some discussion between institutions at the tertiary level concerning this. The aims were fairly modest and concerned teacher training, policy regarding the teaching of English with respect to other subjects, the administration of departments involved in the teaching of English, the methodology involved in teaching the language, and the standards attained.

Since the seminar in Chiangmai 4 years ago, the aspects of education which were presented and discussed have been reconsidered, and in many instances, suggestions which were made there have been implemented. As a result of the seminar, many institutions have been reorganized structurally, while others have developed new programs and courses of study, many of these in the field of English for Academic Purposes.

It is felt, therefore, that the moment is opportune for all of us who are concerned with the teaching of English for Academic Purposes to get together, review the present situation and what progress has been made, and put matters in perspective if it is found necessary - both inside and outside the Conference Hall.

I was thus extremely pleased to learn that The British Council was willing to host this Conference along with Chulalongkorn University; without their invaluable support, the Conference might not have taken place.

The sponsors of this Conference hope we will have a chance to discuss together how best to teach English to students who need the language to pursue their major course of study. This, for example, may be one of the sciences, business, law, or medicine. In each of these fields the English used tends to be subject-specific at the professional level. Or is it? This may be one point worth considering. But whether it is or not, the techniques involved in teaching reading and communication have to be discussed as these skills are of paramount importance.

However, more generally, we hope that after this conference, just as after the 1974 seminar in Chiangmai, discussion and cooperation between us all will increase, and ideas will be exchanged. Perhaps this conference will be a catalyst, resulting in follow-up workshops which enable teachers in the same field, but from different institutions, together in small groups in order to discuss material preparation and exchange ideas.

I would like to add, however, that the British Council is not the only organization interested in promoting the teaching of English, nor is Chulalongkorn University the only institution in this country devoting its utmost to this field. Cooperation between us all is essential - not only in the form of an exchange of academic ideas, but in the form of a real desire to work together. Let this Conference on English for Academic Purposes be the start of a joint effort to this end, to be followed by many others in the future.

Again, I'm very happy to welcome you all. Thank you.