

Language Performance of Bilingual Learners: A Focus on Interactions

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Abstract

Interactions are vitally important in making conversation possible and serve as a platform for a speaker to use language forms and functions for communication. This paper reports interactions in language performance of bilingual learners at the levels of Primary 6 (P 6) and Secondary 3 (S 3) at Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University. The purpose was to find out the extent to which learners at these levels were able to use their interactions in carrying on conversation when communicating their ideas about themselves and their school life.

The subjects were 52 bilingual learners: 34 Primary 6 students and 18 Secondary 3 students. All subjects were individually interviewed by two bilingual researchers of Thai and English—one Thai and one American. A set of ten questions was used in a 15-minute interview in English to secure from each subject interactions in oral discourse. Interactions were assessed via communication skills at five levels shown in conversational turns regarding appropriateness of verbal or nonverbal interactions: Level 1 [Fully appropriate], Level 2 [Functionally appropriate], Level 3 [Moderately appropriate], Level 4 [Sufficiently appropriate], and Level 5 [Marginally appropriate]. Interactions data were gathered by two bilingual researchers of Thai and English for verbal and nonverbal interactions shown in the subjects' conversational turns with the interviewers.

The results revealed that the P 6 and S 3 subjects at Level 1 showed fully appropriate verbal and non-verbal interactions to keep the conversation continued naturally. The P 6 and S 3 subjects at the other levels—Levels 2-

5–showed relatively less appropriate interactions in variation. The lowest end of interactions is broken English or responses in one or two words. Inappropriateness in the use of L1 devices in conversation and voice control was also apparent in those less proficient subjects' spontaneous speech data.

Keywords: language performance, interactions, conversational turns, language appropriateness, oral discourse, bilingual learners

ความสามารถในการใช้ภาษาของผู้ที่เรียนรู้ทวิภาษา: การเน้นปฏิสัมพันธ์

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บทคัดย่อ

ปฏิสัมพันธ์มีความสำคัญในการทำให้การสนทนาเป็นไปได้ และเป็นฐานความคิดของผู้พูดในการใช้รูปแบบและสื่อความหมายให้ได้ดังที่ตั้งใจไว้เมื่อทำการสื่อสาร บทความนี้รายงานปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่สร้างความสามารถในการใช้ภาษาของผู้เรียนรู้ทวิภาษาในระดับชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 และชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 ที่โรงเรียนสาธิตแห่งมหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต จุดประสงค์เพื่อจะหาข้อบ่งชี้ที่ผู้เรียนในระดับดังกล่าวสามารถใช้ปฏิสัมพันธ์ในการดำเนินการสนทนาเพื่อสื่อสารข้อคิดที่เกี่ยวกับตนเองและชีวิตในโรงเรียน

ผู้เรียนรู้ทวิภาษาที่ถูกศึกษาในงานวิจัยนี้มี 52 คน เป็นนักเรียนระดับประถมศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 6 จำนวน 34 คน และเป็นนักเรียนระดับมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 จำนวน 18 คน นักเรียนทั้งหมดถูกสัมภาษณ์โดยนักวิจัยทวิภาษาไทย-อังกฤษ 2 คน เป็นชาวไทย 1 คน และเป็นชาวอเมริกัน 1 คน มีการใช้คำถาม 1 ชุด คือ 10 คำถาม ในการสัมภาษณ์เป็นภาษาอังกฤษในเวลา 15 นาที เพื่อเป็นการเก็บข้อมูลในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่ใช้ในการพูดสื่อสาร ปฏิสัมพันธ์ถูกประเมินโดยกำหนดเป็นระดับทักษะในการสื่อสาร 5 ระดับ ที่เห็นได้จากการผลัดกันพูดที่แสดงความเหมาะสมของปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่อยู่ในลักษณะที่เป็นวจนภาษาและอวจนภาษา ทักษะการสื่อสาร 5 ระดับ ได้แก่ (1) ระดับ 1 เหมาะสมมาก (2) ระดับ 2 เหมาะสมตามจุดประสงค์ของการสื่อสาร (3) ระดับ 3 เหมาะสมปานกลาง (4) ระดับ 4 เหมาะสมอย่างเพียงพอ และ (5) ระดับ 5 เหมาะสมน้อย ข้อมูลปฏิสัมพันธ์ถูกเก็บโดยนักวิจัยทวิภาษาไทย-อังกฤษ อีก 2 คน ที่ทำการบันทึกทั้งปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่เป็นวจนภาษาและอวจนภาษา ที่ปรากฏในภาษาที่ใช้ในการผลัดการสนทนากับผู้ที่ดำเนินการสัมภาษณ์

ผลของการวิจัยพบว่านักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 และชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 ที่ระดับ 1 แสดงการใช้ปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่เป็นวจนภาษาและอวจนภาษาได้อย่างเหมาะสมมาก โดยที่การสนทนามีลักษณะเป็นธรรมชาติ ส่วนนักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 และชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 ที่ระดับอื่น คือ ระดับ 2-5 แสดงปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่เหมาะสมน้อยกว่า ซึ่งมีความผันแปรในแต่ละระดับ ในระดับปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่ต่ำสุดแสดงให้เห็นการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษที่ไม่เป็นวลีหรือประโยคแต่เป็นคำสนทนาเพียง 1 หรือ 2 คำ ความไม่เหมาะสมของปฏิสัมพันธ์ยังปรากฏให้เห็นในลักษณะที่ผู้ใช้ภาษาในระดับความสามารถที่แสดงความไม่เหมาะสม เช่น ใช้สำนวน

ภาษาไทยแทรกในการสนทนา และมีการควบคุมการใช้น้ำเสียงที่ไม่ปกติ เช่น ใช้เสียงที่เบาเกินไป หรือ ไม่ชัด ความไม่เหมาะสมทั้งหมดนี้ปรากฏอยู่ในข้อมูลในการใช้ภาษาของผู้ที่มีความสามารถใช้ภาษาที่มีปฏิสัมพันธ์ในระดับต่ำ

คำสำคัญ: ความสามารถในการใช้ภาษา ปฏิสัมพันธ์ การผลัดกันสนทนา ความเหมาะสมของภาษา การดำเนินการพูดเพื่อการสื่อสาร ผู้เรียนทวิภาษา

Rationale of the Study

The significance of English communication skills has been emphasized in the core curriculum of Thailand's Basic Education since 2009. The goal of The Ministry of Education has prompted quite a large number of Thai schools to teach major subjects strands in English; these four subjects are mathematics, science, social studies and English. Some schools have opted for dual instruction of Thai and English in mathematics and science, while quite a few schools have chosen a bilingual program with partial or full immersion.

It should be noted that language performance can be acquired naturally by learners via a full immersion. In such a context, staffing English native-speaking (NS) teachers could pose a problem to bilingual schools in terms of recruitment and payment. Qualified NS teachers are to ensure model language inputs to be acquired by learners via the process of interactions both in and outside the classroom. Native inputs naturally helps learners acquire lexis (words), syntax (sentence structures) and discourse (conversational turns), interactions and communication strategies in their communication.

It is vitally important to study interactions in language performance to enable speakers to communicate orally. Through interactions, the speakers can have ample opportunities to use words, structures and expressions or idioms in their conversational turns which constitute an oral discourse. An awareness of the importance of interactions will help language practitioners design language activities in support of interactions so that desirable language forms and functions can be used in communication tasks as intended. Interactions can serve as a tool for bilingual learners to develop their proficiency at a higher level or remedy flawed interactions as needed.

In this paper, the researcher examined interactions as shown in conversational turns in oral discourse. Interactions serve as verbal and nonverbal devices to keep conversation to continue until the intended meaning from the speaker is achieved or successfully conveyed. Appropriateness of verbal and nonverbal interactions helps determine success of each conversation. In this regard, the researcher looked at interactions in conversational turns in oral

discourse that were assessed at five communication levels: Fully appropriate [Level 1], Functionally appropriate [Level 2], Moderately appropriate [Level 3], Sufficiently appropriate [Level 4], and Marginally appropriate [Level 5].

Background of the Study

The background of this study deals with English language education in Thailand, a brief profile of Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS) and literature review on local and international research as pertinent to the study.

English language education in Thailand

English communication skills have always been a concern for the Office of National Education Commission in its policy on Thailand Education Reform over the past decade. The goal is on learners' competence in the mother tongue as well as English which is a language of wider communication in business, science and technology (Office of National Education Commission, 2009, 2011). As a result, quite a few schools have accepted English Programs known as Eps and developed their own school-based bilingual curriculum (Ourairat, 2011). The main purpose is to support Thai students to become competent in English communication skills in response to the far-from-satisfactory O-Net scores in English on the national test. In 2011, 2013, and 2015, the O-Net English scores of Primary 6 were 38.37 (SD 17.77), 33.82 (SD 15.20), and 40.31 (SD 18.76), respectively. It should be noted that the O-Net Scores of Secondary 3 in 2011, 2013, and 2015 did not show improvement: 30.09 (SD 10.79), 30.49 (SD 10.79), 30.62 (SD 11.92), respectively (Office of National Assessment, 2011-2015).

There has been evidence of relevancy and success of bilingual school operations in enhancing English language performance of students who have gone through the language acquisition process for a number of years (Pholsward, 2006a, 2006b, 2014). Language assessment was an issue in quite a few local studies (Sukket, 2007, Panti 2007, Kittitherawat, 2008). It is important for language practitioners to assess language mastery of students

after a period of three years' language exposure, especially at specific levels: Primary 3/6 and Secondary 3/6 (Pholsward, 2014). This is to ensure that students' language performance be at the target level of functional competency and to enable the school to remedy language limitations of those learners identified as in need of remedial language practices.

A profile of Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University

Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS) is a co-ed school of Kindergarten 1- Grade 12, with an enrolment of over 900 students. One of its academic policies is on educational research in bilingual education. The purpose is to investigate the extent to which learners can attain target English language skills, academic achievements in mathematics, and bilingual-bicultural mastery in the target time frame of approximately three years after English language exposure.

In conducting research in bilingual education, the Faculty of Education Rangsit University has assisted SBS in five projects: (1) Language acquisition of Kindergarten students in 2006, (2) English Language Proficiency of Secondary 3 students in 2006, (3) Assessment of Analytical Thinking Skills via problem-solving tasks in mathematics in 2006-2007, (4) A Study of Thai Writing Skills of Primary 1- Secondary 3 Students in 2008-2010, followed by (5) Teaching Methods Used by Social Studies Teachers in 2011 and (6) Assessment of English Communication skills of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 Students (Pholsward 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2009; Pholsward et al. 2010, 2011; Pholsward, 2014). The results of these studies are for SBS to understand the nature of bilingual education practices and learning achievements to be disseminated to staff members for pedagogic implications as well as to parents for good understanding of their children's academic and language developments.

Literature Review

The study reports selected literature as background of the study in five areas: (1) Communication skills and ICT literacy, (2) Bilingual education, (3)

Language acquisition, and (4) Language performance assessment and (5) major aspects of communicative competence.

Communication skills and ICT literacy

The Ministry of Education Thailand and Office of National Education Commission put emphasis on Information Communication Technology (ICT) and English communication skills to acquire new knowledge via information search and transfer in support of lifelong learning (Ministry of Education 2008, Office of National Education Commission 2009, 2011). All schools at the primary and secondary levels in Thailand have attentively followed the guideline of the Ministry of Education in integrating ICT and English communication skills into their school-based curriculum.

Bilingual education

The Ministry of Education Thailand has developed the English Program policy for communication-based education since 2009. A good number of schools have responded with development of English programs (EP) or bilingual programs with partial or full immersion. There has been concern over the quality of educational practices in these schools as monitored by the Office of Educational Quality Assurance. The issue on language proportion of Thai and English in bilingual programs has emerged as a matter of preference. Some schools alternate instruction in Thai and English in science and mathematics while others turn to full immersion. One example of full immersion is Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University; the school has adopted the core curriculum of the Thai Ministry of Education and modified it with major components of international curricula [Ourairat 2011]. In addition to the issues on curriculum development and implementation, quite a few earlier researchers studied culture in language use for natural performance of learners (Levine & Adelman 1993, Ziesing 2001, Tan, 2006).

Language acquisition

Language acquisition is an area that attracts a large number of researchers to explore its various aspects. There have been many studies in

second language acquisition especially in the theoretical aspects and practices of second language acquisition (Babakzai, 2006; Pholsward, 2006a, Ellis, 2008; Schwartz, 2013; Booth, 2014), followed by the use of language activities and model instruction to support development of speaking skills (Sangamuang, 2002; Boonsue, 2003; Boonsompan, 2008). Other important issues in second language acquisition include the age factor (Fougere, 2011), students' achievements and second language acquisition proficiency (Huda 1998; Dean, 2006), vocabulary acquisition (Sukket, 2007; Asbeck, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Gross et al. 2014), to name but a few.

Language performance assessment

Language performance assessment is of prime importance to bilingual Schools to identify levels of language mastery after a specific period of language exposure or immersion. There have been some studies dealing with the use of language activities to develop and assess vocabulary knowledge and speaking ability (Wrenshall, 2005; Pholsward, 2006b; Sukket, 2007; Panti, 2007; Kittitharawat, 2008). Other researchers worked on assessment of knowledge and skills (Roberts, 2008), students' language achievements (Evans, 2009), language performance with the approach of second language acquisition (Yanyan, 2009), communication strategies for educational assessment (Chamberlain, 2013) to name but a few. Selected literature reveals a good number of researchers who have found assessment a challenge in finding ways to assess learners' language performance authentically and effectively.

Communicative competence and language interactions

International Literature

To understand the importance of language interactions, we need to get into the area of strategic competence as part of communicative competence. Strategic competence has its long history dated back to 1980 with the work of Canale and Swain on theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. Both researchers explained strategic

competence as “mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that can be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (Canale & Swain, 1980:30). Strategic competence is viewed as part of ‘communicative competence’ in addition to ‘linguistic competence’ put forward by Chomsky in the 1960s; these two types make a complete picture of competence required of language learners for proficiency or mastery.

Other researchers after Canale and Swain have elaborated communicative competence into a commonly known term ‘communication strategies’. Tarone (1980) asserted that ‘communication strategies’ include all attempts at meaning-negotiation. Faerch and Kasper (1984) further exemplified ‘communication strategies’ as cases in which a speaker attempts to overcome difficulties due to a lack of linguistic resources. In a year earlier, both researchers classified communication strategies as anticipation, directed attention, clarification, cooperation, management of emotions, code-switching, mime, imitation, and asking for assistance. Of these nine strategy-categories, anticipation, directed attention, and clarification are treated as part of the monitoring process; cooperation, and management of emotions as socio-affective strategies; code-switching as interlingual strategies; and mime, imitation, asking for assistance as non-linguistic strategies (Faerch & Kasper, 1983). Cook (1993) emphasized that a speaker will turn to communication strategies when encountered language limitations in a communication context. All these communication strategies evolve out of interactions between the speaker and conversational partner.

Littlemore and Low (2006) explained two types of approaches to strategic competence as *the psycholinguistic approach* in which a speaker is able to use strategies to keep conversation going, and *the interactional approach* in which two speakers or interlocutors are able to negotiate for their intended meaning. The researchers also put these two approaches under *metaphoric competence* which refers to a speaker’s knowledge and ability to use metaphors; for example, mouth of a river, the eye of a needle, the head of

the company. Metaphoric competence determines other dimensions of the competence domain—be it grammatical, contextual, illocutionary, sociolinguistic, or strategic.

Other researcher-practitioners gave importance to language interactions in training or teaching specific communication strategies. Wenden (1986) examined language learners being assisted to think about their learning or communication strategies. Alibakhshi and Padiz, (2011) claimed the lasting effect of explicit teaching of some of communicative strategies on language performance of Iranian language learners of English. Tian (2011) studied and reported interactions of second language learners at the university level in communication strategy training. It should be noted that such training was not supported by some researchers; for example, Bialystok (1990) and Lam (2005) who argued that communication strategies are part of cognitive processes in selecting strategies, thus unlikely to be teachable.

In 2014, three more researchers studied interactions as a platform to develop communicative strategies. Burch (2014) explored interactional perspective of communication strategies by focusing on L2 users' competence and communicative success, not their limitations. It is noted that learners' concern in making interactions possible is normally done by planning and compensation. The researcher asserted that communication strategies "need not be viewed in terms of speakers' linguistic deficiencies, but in terms of their ability to work through interactional ability and make themselves understood." (Burch, 2014: 675). The other two researchers Yarahmadzehi and Samani (2014) reported most frequently used strategies in oral performance of 15 Iranian EFL learners at the pre-intermedia. The reported strategies reflected devices used in interactions like *fillers* [uh, emm.], *hesitation devices*, *code switching*, *appeal for help*, and *self-repetition*. The least frequently used strategies included *word coinage* (Cook, 2001), *foreignzing* (Brown, 2000), and *comprehension check* before moving on in the conversation.

Other developments in ‘communicative strategies’ or ‘communicative competence’ are various. Liu (2004) and Nisbet et al. (2005) reported that more proficient language learners used a wider range of language learning strategies. Le Pichon et al (2010) studied impact of the context of learning a language on the strategic competence of 101 children (mean age = 6.7 years with SD = 1.9; females 47%). They found language learning experience children used more and various strategies than those without language learning experience. Talebi (2015) investigated linguistic and/ or strategic competence used by university students; the researcher claimed that proficiency and reading strategies determine successful reading performance.

One more issue on the far end of development in communicative competence rests upon ‘*global competence*’ in the work of Semaan and Yamazaki (2015). The term “global competence” was initiated by Hunter, White, and Godbey in 2006. To them, ‘global competence’ includes knowledge of cultural differences and ability of a speaker to use both linguistic and cultural skills to communicate effectively. Semaan and Yamazaki (2015) empirically studied relationship between ‘global competence’ and language learning motivation in critical language classrooms. They found a positive relationship between the two variables under study.

Local literature

Local literature in the area ‘communicative strategies’ or ‘strategic competence’ reveals interest in various issues. Chanawong (2010) studied communication strategies used by 38 university students as *interlingual* (literal translation, and code-switching) and *intralingual* (self-repair, circumlocution, approximation, appeal for assistance). Kongsuriya et al (2012) examined *strategic competence* in communication used by eight wives of foreigners by in-depth unstructured interviews, observations, and field notes. They identified 13 strategic competence categories: using dictionary, attending classes, telephoning, self-directed learning, using questions and memorization, repetition

and imitation, mime and gestures, note-taking, risk-taking, subconscious listening, chatting online, writing, and drawing.

As for learning strategies, Athonthurasuk (2014) studied *learning strategies* used by 135 Japanese-major university students; six strategies were identified as memory strategies, cognitive strategies, communication strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. The researcher noted that ‘*communication strategies*’ were most frequently used, followed by ‘metacognitive strategies’. Kaikaew and Lornklang (2015) studied task-based writing performed by grade ten learners. The researchers suggested that Thai cultural contents could help students built schema, understand the process of writing and develop strategies in

Focus on interactions

As seen in the macro perspective of communicative competence, interactions represent an important domain of verbal and nonverbal strategies. It is generally known that language learners need all dimensions of communicative competence to attain their language mastery. In this study, the researcher focused on the language environment that supports the use of ‘communicative competence’ and strategic competence to acquire needed language skills. Interactions will reveal how the speaker can compensate for breakdowns in communication due to language limitations. It is interesting to see how young bilingual learners after three years of language exposure use verbal and non-verbal strategies in interactions.

Research Objectives

The study used Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University as a case to investigate interactions in oral discourse regarding appropriateness of verbal and nonverbal strategies in conversational turns performed by bilingual students at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3.

The study had two objectives:

1. To examine the extent to which Primary 6 and Secondary 3 bilingual learners use appropriate interactions in oral discourse about themselves and school life

2. To identify characteristics of verbal and nonverbal strategies used in interactions in oral discourse about themselves and school life

It was expected that the obtained data on interactions can shed light on what to be done to improve verbal and nonverbal strategies in oral discourse. Such improvement can help learners to communicate effectively and in turn increase their language proficiency. It is also possible for language practitioners or trainers to explicate appropriate and inappropriate interactions for language learners to use for effective communication.

Research Methodology

This section describes the subjects and the research instruments used in the study.

Subjects

The subjects were 52 bilingual students from Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University, participating in the study on a voluntary basis with consent from their parents or guardians. The subjects were 34 in Primary 6 and 18 in Secondary 3. These subjects had at least three years of English language exposure in the school context.

Research instruments

Two tools were constructed by the researcher and validated for content relevancy by four language specialists to assess learners' English communication skills with specific criteria as follows:

Communication Skills Assessment

Instrument 1: A List of Guiding Questions for a 15-minute oral interview:

- Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

- How did you or your parents find about the school?
- What is the best part of the school you enjoy most?
- What is the part of the school you would like to suggest improvement?
- What are your favorite subjects?
- What are interesting school activities?
- What do you think about your teachers?
- What do you think about your friends/ your good friends?
- What is your plan for the future?
- Is there any question you would like to ask us?

Instrument 2: Assessment Criteria of English Communication Skills

Each subject was assigned to a fifteen-minute timeslot for an oral interview with two interviewers--one bilingual Thai speaker and one native speaker of English. Each interviewee's language performance at the lexical, syntactical, and discoursal, together with *interactions*, strategic competence were holistically evaluated by two interviewers on a five-point scale from 1 (high) to 5 (low) with the following meanings: 1 = Proficient, 2 = Highly functional, 3 = Functional, 4 = Sufficient, and 5 = Marginal. In addition, two observer-researchers--two bilingual Thai speakers--were present at the interviews to observe *interactions* and collect spontaneous speech data in five areas: (1) lexis, (2) syntax, (3) discourse, (4) *interactions*, and (5) strategic competence.

Specifications of Criteria

Lexical Use

- Level 1 Full control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 2 Functional control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 3 Moderate control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 4 Sufficient control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 5 Marginal control of the use of vocabulary

Syntactical Use

- Level 1 Full control of the use of structures
- Level 2 Functional control of the use of structures
- Level 3 Moderate control of the use of structures
- Level 4 Sufficient control of the use of structures
- Level 5 Marginal control of the use of structures

Discoursal Use

- Level 1 Full control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)
- Level 2 Functional control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)
- Level 3 Moderate control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)
- Level 4 Sufficient control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)
- Level 5 Marginal control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)

Interactions

- Level 1 Fully appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions
- Level 2 Functionally appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions
- Level 3 Moderately appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions
- Level 4 Sufficiently appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions
- Level 5 Marginally appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions

Strategic competence

- Level 1 Fully competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies
- Level 2 Functionally competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies
- Level 3 Moderately competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies
- Level 4 Sufficiently competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies
- Level 5 Marginally competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies

All these criteria were to guide bilingual interviewers to assess holistically English communication skills of the subjects by taking into

consideration classified language features as well as verbal/ non-verbal interactions/ strategies. In this paper, the researcher reported only data on interactions by communication skill levels as described above.

Data Collection

Data Collection by oral interview of 52 subjects was completed in August 2013. Each oral interview took fifteen minutes and communication skill levels were holistically evaluated by one bilingual Thai speaker and one native speaker of English. Each interviewee's language performance was classified into lexis, syntax, and discourse, together with interactions and strategic competence. These features were put on a five-point scale from 1 (high) to 5 (low) with the following meanings: 1 = Proficient, 2 = Highly functional, 3 = Functional, 4 = Sufficient, and 5 = Marginal. Two more bilingual observer-researchers also evaluated the subjects' communication skills and collected data on interactions and strategic competence. It should be noted that evaluation among four evaluators appeared consistent.

All oral interviews were recorded with consent of the subjects and transcribed later by a research assistant. Transcribed data were meant to countercheck accuracy of spontaneous speech products collected by two observer-researchers.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed in frequency to establish communication skills at five levels: 1 = Proficient, 2 = Highly functional, 3 = Functional, 4 = Sufficient, and 5 = Marginal. All language features in the lexical domain were analyzed in frequency and listed alphabetically. Those in the domains of syntax and discourse were analyzed in occurrence at specific communication skills with typical examples for illustration. The other two domains—*interactions* and strategic competence--were analyzed in terms of *patterns of occurrence* and their *typical examples*.

In this paper, only communication skill levels and interactions in oral discourse regarding appropriateness or inappropriateness of verbal and nonverbal strategies are reported as the results of the study.

Results of the Study

This section reports the subjects' communication skill levels and interactions by level.

8.1 Communication Skill Levels

Communication skill levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 are reported in tables 1-2 as shown below.

Table 1: Communication Skill Levels of Primary 6 Students (N=34)

Level 1: Proficient= 4 of 34 (11.77%)
Level 2: Highly functional= 16 of 34 (47.06%)
Level 3: Functional= 11 of 34 (29.41)
Level 4: Sufficient= 3 of 34 (8.82)
Level 5: Marginal= 1 of 34 (2.94)

Table 2: Communication Skill Levels of Secondary 3 Students (N=18)

Level 1: Proficient= 9 of 18 (50.00%)
Level 2: Highly functional= 8 of 18 (44.44%)
Level 3: Functional= 1 of 18 (5.56)
Level 4: Sufficient= NIL
Level 5: Marginal= NIL

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, the Primary 6 subjects were dominantly at level 2 of communication skills, whereas the Secondary 3 subjects were dominant at levels 1 and 2 of communication skills.

Interactions

Interactions in fact are part of oral discourse in that they reveal how speeches of the speaker's and the speech flow in interaction emerge in conversational turns. Interactions can be examined in terms of verbal and non-verbal devices that support speech flows between two conversational partners—each party taking turn to be the speaker and the hearer or respondent.

From the obtained data detected from oral discourse, the P 6 and S 3 subjects at Level 1 showed fully appropriate verbal and non-verbal interactions. The subjects used “ya,” “yeah” and expressions in response to the interviewer to keep the conversation continued naturally. The P 6 and S 3 subjects at the other levels—Level 2 [Functionally appropriate], Level 3 [Moderately appropriate], Level 4 [Sufficiently appropriate], Level 5 [Marginally appropriate]—interacted with the two interviewers with relatively less appropriate in varied interactions. The lowest end of verbal variation is broken English or responses in one or two words.

One type of verbal interactions that reflects cultural inappropriateness should deserve attention regarding language development. One subject when prompted with Question 10 [Is there any question you would like to ask us?] asked “How old are you?” Such a response first shows less relevancy in conversational turn; it in fact reveals a cultural impact on the speech product in that Thai culture allows a speaker to ask personal information whereas English does not particularly in the first social encounter.

It was observed that non-verbal interactions took the form of voice control as soft and mumbling—somewhat difficult to hear or guess the meaning. Such soft voice or mumbling usually prompted the interviewer to repeat a guessed word with YES or NO from the interviewed subject. Those at less appropriate levels also uttered hesitant speech in responding to the interviewers' questions.

Elected examples of verbal and non-verbal interactions of P 6 and S 3 are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Interactions of Primary 6 Students at Five Levels of Communication Skills

P 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 1

VERBAL:

use “yeah” “ya”/

NON-VERBAL:

[okay—nodding]

[waving hand].. see you later

P 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 2

VERBAL:

I want to ask about the fashion designer learning ... is it hard? [PROMPTING RESPONSE]

NON-VERBAL:

...like when we use medicine for vitamin C /vi-ta-min/.. [soft voice] [THAI PRONUNCIATION]

P 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 3

OBSERVED: Rather brief answers in one or two words without elaboration. The interviewer had to interpret for full meaning.

VERBAL:

Thai.. / [ONE WORD--should have more elaboration]

[use full YES, not “ya” or “yeah”/

Want to be a doctor ...it will make you feel a good people in Thailand have a good doctor like this [use running speech products]

Design ../ building../ [tend to have word or two-word answers]/ yes.. [laugh] / ..

Thammasat [when asked about the university she may want to go to] [NOTE: The interviewer had to interpret for full meaning, like a career as a designer]

NON-VERBAL:

[soft voice]

[soft voice] [the interviewer asked ..] .. food / [one word answer—no elaboration]

[English] Teacher [English name].. [student tends to swirl his chair left and right ..]

Music .../ I like to play guitar.../ Pop .../ [when answering often followed by a slight trace of laugh]/ guitar [with Thai pronunciation—flat one]

No [swiping face meaning No]

Moving face from left to right—signaling NO

I like to play guitar.../ Pop .../ [when answering, often followed by a slight trace of laugh]/

P 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 4

VERBAL:

[no favorite teacher] Teacher [English name]... tall... [broken English]

Showing BROKEN ENGLISH as communication goes on/ answering with single word mainly/ no phrase used

NON-VERBAL:

[Spoke softly]

everybody like to study .../ [soft voice]

[soft voice] [asked about holiday] No .../

[mumbling with soft voice/ incomprehensible]

Nickname [nickname given] .. [sitting hunching a bit]../

[swiping face as NO] [non-verbal]

Not good [at math]/ [using a lot of hand gestures when communicating]

P 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 5

P 6 interactions at level 5 were back to basic: Simplification only [not able to collect speech data] [asked different parts of the body] [go to the wall and point the level of height of Teacher (name)]. The subject appeared to understand but still was not able to produce the language. Such reaction was typical of early language acquisition: listening precedes language production in speaking.

VERBAL: No speech data

NON-VERBAL:

[scratching head and forehead] [first year at Satit] [hunching over, followed by scratching head and forehead]

Table 4: Interactions of Secondary 3 Students at Five Levels of Communication Skills

S 3 Interactions Communication Skill Level 1

VERBAL:

Buildings a little bit old ... yah...

NON-VERBAL:

Eye contact, responsive facial expression, nodding, hand gestures

S 3 Interactions Communication Skill Level 2

VERBAL:

Question 10: Is there any question would you like to ask us?

Response: How old are you [asked the interviewer]; How many years do you work at the ... [school—this word is not recorded at the time of data collection]? [QUESTION CONTENT--CULTURALLY INAPPROPRIATE]

NON-VERBAL:

Eye contact, responsive facial expression, nodding, hand gestures

More activities..... cooking club [CULTURAL: very Thai in behavior—smiling and laughing in a Thai way] [asked the mother to be with her... showing lack of confidence] ... hang out with friends ...

hesitant speech

S 3 Interactions Communication Skill Level 3

VERBAL:

/suay/ [THAI WORD for “beautiful”] [CODE SWITCHING]

Teacher good. [BROKEN ENGLISH] [THAI STRUCTURE]

NON-VERBAL: Silence [NO RESPONSE]

Discussion of Major Findings

Interactions in conversational turns are vitally important in improving oral discourse or speaking performance. As seen in the results reported in Tables 3 and 4, those subjects who were at communication skill level 1 handled interactions well both verbally and nonverbally. It should be noted that the length of language exposure played an important role for learners in acquiring the target features like verbal and nonverbal strategies in keeping conversation alive for the intended meaning to be successfully conveyed to the conversational partner (Burch, 2014; Pholswards, 2014). In this regard, quite a few researchers suggested that the use of language activities and model instruction should be used to support development of interactions in speaking.

(Sangamuang 2002, Boonsue 2003, and Boonsompan 2008). As seen in this study, data on interactions in conversational turns should deserve a close examination regarding the subjects' ability in handling verbal and nonverbal strategies in communication.

It was found that those proficient subjects were able to use idiomatic expressions in responding to the interviewers' questions, like "*nothing special,*" "*no idea,*" "*pretty fun,*" "*figure out hard about words,*" "*I'm not sure whether it is good or bad.*" On the contrary, those who were less proficient responded to the interviewers' questions with language limitations. As recorded in the interview data, the interviewers resorted to speech simplification or prompting for YES or NO to continue conversation. With such limitations, some subjects resorted to verbal responses like repeating word(s) heard from the interviewer, code switching, fillers (uh, emm) or even silence. The researcher noted that competence in handling interactions in conversational turns can be refined through practices in speaking skills as emphasized by earlier researchers like Huda (1998), Boonsue (2003), Wrenhall (2005), Panti (2007), Kittitherawat (2008), and Yarahmadzahi and Samani (2014), to name but a few.

Cultural appropriateness in verbal and nonverbal interactions has been generally known to account for natural speech products. Continuous language inputs can help learners to acquire such cultural features as idiomatic expressions in conversational turns instead of using long sentences or full sentence structures, and nonverbal features like eye contact, facial expression, nodding, gestures, physical approximation and body language for comfortable communication. Interactional opportunities provide learners with correct perception of social and cultural appropriateness required in carrying on conversation in a relevant and acceptable manner. Cultural relevancy was emphasized in the work by Levine and Adelman (1993), Ziesing (2001), Tan (2006), and Pholsward (2014).

Conclusion and Pedagogic Implications of the Study

This paper reports only major findings on interactions in conversational turns. As seen in the results of the study, those more proficient subjects [levels 1 and 2] at the Primary 6 and Secondary 3 levels were able to handle appropriate interactions competently. Those who were less proficient [levels 3-5] showed limitations in their interactions both verbally and nonverbally; they responded with limitations like code switching, the use of one word or words, Thai structure, uncomfortable body language, and silence. Their limited and flawed interactions point to specific verbal and nonverbal features that should deserve attention from language practitioners or language trainers in bilingual education or language education.

As for pedagogic implications of the study, the obtained and exemplified data presented in the results and discussion sections can help language practitioners plan for verbal and nonverbal features to be trained to enhance or remedy interactions in learners as needed. It is important to assess bilingual students' communication skills in the area of interactions to ensure acquisition of linguistically and culturally appropriate interactions for complete language mastery. Language practitioners and curriculum developers need to identify limitations in interactions as performed by their learners as contents for an enhancement program to accelerate language mastery or acquisition in weaker students. In addition, the instrument constructed with specifications for interactions could also serve as a platform for language interactions assessment as seen appropriate in particular language education contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Sum-up Points of Language Features in Communication Skills of P 6 and S 3 Students

Lexis: Variety of words used to convey meanings with varied conceptual complexity

A mix of Thai words in the data of less proficient subjects

Syntax: The use of three structures: Simple, Compound, Complex
The use of each structure determined by conceptual complexity of the intended meanings conveyed by the subjects

Evidence of broken English in less proficient subjects

Evidence of transferred structure from the first language in less proficient subjects

Discourse: Conversational turns appear natural in the data of proficient and functional subjects

Conversational turns reflect irrelevancy and inappropriateness in less proficient subjects

Interactions Verbal and non-verbal interactions appear appropriate in the data of proficient and functional subjects

Verbal and non-verbal interactions appear limited and inappropriate in the data of less proficient subjects

Evidence of cultural impact from the first language on verbal and non-verbal interactions in the data of less proficient subjects

Strategic Competence

Competency in the use of verbal and non-verbal strategies in the data of proficient and functional subjects

Competency in the use of verbal and non-verbal strategies limited or missing in the data of less proficient subjects

Appendix B:

Interactions data of Primary 3 and Secondary 3: Examples of Communications Levels 1 and 3

Secondary 3 Interactions Communication Skill Level 1

Question 1: Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

Interactions okay

Question 2: How did you or your parents find about the school?

Interactions okay

Question 3: What is the best part of the school you enjoy most?

Interactions okay

Question 4: What is the part of the school you would like to suggest improvement?

Respondent: Everything is okay Buildings a little bit old ... *yah...* experiments [want more].. ; science class very old the stuff we used in science class[rather old ... same old thing]

Question 5: What are your favorite subjects?

Interactions okay

Question 6: What are interesting school activities?

Respondent: *Nothing special* ... I like to draw ... [by himself] [EXPRESSION]

Respondent: I don't like science [*sai-an*] very much [THAI PRONUNCIATION]

Question 7: What do you think about your teachers?

Respondent: *He's been* my homeroom teacher He care about teaching ... he make sure that the students are learning ... he teach economics [name].. likes this teacher Teacher [name]? From Africa] ..

Respondent: Teacher [name] English teacher *Pretty fun* He usually give us time To watch movies He talks and makes funny jokes...; [teacher he remembers] Teacher Lee in ICT ... he taught ... I like him because he is very kind ... his [ICT] class is very interesting ...[sometimes has to *figure hard about words* he wants to say]..; I like Art ... I like to draw ...; right now I don't like ICT [in Secondary 4] because ... change teacher [Teacher Lee in Secondary 1 and 2] [EXPRESSION]

Question 8: What do you think about your friends/ your good friends?

Interactions okay

Question 9: What is your plan for the future?

Respondent: *I'm not sure whether it is good or bad* [mature EXPRESSION]....

Study in Japan ... My dad wants me to study architecture in Japan but I don't want to study in Japan because I don't want to learn Japanese Been to Hong Kong, Japan,

Question 10: Is there any question you would like to ask us?

Respondent: It's quite difficult ... I have to check

Primary 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 1

Question 1: Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

Respondent: [looks confident] [good listening skills; can handle interactions from the interviewer well] /at SBS since k 1, in year 1947/“yeah” in class of Teacher [name]../ “ya” school in that year [1947] was very big.

Question 2: How did you or your parents find about the school?.....

Respondent: *No idea*

Question 4: What is the part of the school you would like to suggest improvement?

Respondent: [okay—*nodding*] [VERBAL AND NONVERBAL together]

Question 5: What are your favorite subjects?

Respondent: Art/ Teacher [name] has many thing [no “s] to do/ like math../ Bicycle../ Teacher [name]../ I like Thai [teacher] because I can learn better../ [RESPONSES in WORD/ WORDS]

Question 6: What are some interesting school activities?

Interactions okay

Question 7: What do you think about your teachers?

Interactions okay

Question 8: What do you think about your friends/ your good friends?

Interactions okay

Question 9: What is your plan for the future?

Respondent: Leave school after M 6../ I think .. *Mor-Rangsit* [after M 6]../ [chosen area my father sell .. I will do like ... [him].../ [CODE SWITCHING]

Question 10: Is there any question you would like to ask us?

Respondent: I think I don’t have any ../ [waving hand].. see you later.

Secondary 3 Interactions Communication Skill Level 3

Question 1: Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

Respondent: *I know English little.* [THAI STRUCTURE] American football. *Football..I like* [THAI STRUCTURE] .. Barcelona.

Question 2: How did you or your parents find about the school?

Respondent: ... [SILENCE] [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Question 3: What is the best part of the school you enjoy most?

Respondent: *Teacher good.* [BROKEN ENGLISH]

Question 4: What is the part of the school you would like to suggest improvement?

Respondent: ... [SILENCE] [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Question 5: What are your favorite subjects?

Respondent: ... [SILENCE] [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Question 6: What are interesting school activities?

Respondent: *Sports, play football* [RESPONSE in WORD/ WORDS]

Question 7: What do you think about your teachers?

Respondent: Teacher [Thai name]..., Teacher [Thai name]... Teacher [Thai name] is my favorite teacher. *She help me English.* [THAI STRUCTURE]

Question 8: What do you think about your friends/ your good friends?

Respondent: [SILENCE] [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Question 9: What is your plan for the future?

Respondent: World Champion. I like good job. /suay/ [THAI WORD for “beautiful”] (Working with beautiful things) [CODE SWITCHING]

Question 10: Is there any question you would like to ask us

Respondent: [SILENCE] [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Primary 6 Interactions Communication Skill Level 3

Question 1: Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

Respondent: *Can you say that again?* / five year [s not heard]/ Teacher ... Teacher Chuck.. Teacher Dew, Teacher Josh/ [now] Teacher Kaew and Teacher Victor.../

Respondent: *Again..* [when hearing a question from the interviewer]/ I like to play computer/ I like to program.. game..

Question 2: How did you or your parents find about the school?

Respondent: [soft voice]/ Friend ... Internet [rather incomplete answer –in one or two words]

Respondent: drive a car .. [incomplete answer—have to guess full meaning]

Question 3: What is the best part of the school you enjoy most?

Respondent: [SILENCE]

Question 4: What is the part of the school you would like to suggest improvement?

Respondent: [soft voice] .. food / [RESPONSE in ONE WORD—no elaboration]

Respondent: *Eat food in the class* [NOT RELEVANT] / ... *no change* [happy now] .. [rather incomplete answer—RESPONSE in WORD/ WORDS]

Question 5: What are your favorite subjects?

Respondent: [English] Teacher [English name] .. [*student tends to swirl his chair left and right ..*] [NONVERBALLY INAPPROPRIATE]

Respondent: English../ social and Career../ house clean../ Science [*sai-an*] with Thai pronunciation, e.g paper] finish [no ending sound]/ three forty five../ [THAI PRONUNCIATION]

Respondent: Thai.. / [ONE WORD--no elaboration]

Question 6: What are interesting school activities?

Respondent: *Maak Horse..* [CODE SWITCHING] / the same as *Maak Rook* in Thailand [CODE SWITCHING] [*with hand gestures on the table*]/ [use full YES, not “ya” or “yeah”/ I go to play in Muangthong../ [being asked about computer] I want to build... [something like FIREWALL] [USE of GESTURES]

Respondent: *Music .../ I like to play guitar.../ Pop .../* [when answering often followed by a slight trace of laugh]/ guitar [with Thai pronunciation—flat one] / *I think Yamaha ..*/ I think about five or six year [no s]/ [ONE WORD—no elaboration] [THAI STRUCTURE]

Question 7: What do you think about your teachers?

Respondent: [The interviewer asked about K 3 teacher].. Teacher [Thai name] and Teacher [English name] / Teacher [Thai name] teach [no “s”] *social and Thai/ she.. fun/* [RESPONSE in WORD]

Question 8: What do you think about your friends/ your good friends?

Respondent: *My friend* [rising voice] .. / [Thai name] .../ Kao Pun [GO CART champion] *is play .../* I know [Thai name] in P 3 [tense]/ [RESPONSE in WORD/ WORDS]

Question 9: What is your plan for the future?

Respondent: [*leaning forward saying ‘hah’ for clarification*]... *computer programming Animation...* [no idea the place to study animation yet] ... / don’t know yet [whether to stay at SBS ...] [RESPONSE in WORD/ WORDS] [NONVERBALLY INAPPROPRIATE]

Respondent: [still with slight grammatical errors] [answer speech not elaborated—mostly in single word, hardly a phrase] / *help people..*/ Respondent: Want to be a doctor ...*it will make you feel a good people in Thailand have a good doctor like this* [RUNNING SPEECH PRODUCTS] [THAI STRUCTURE]

Respondent: *Design ../ building..* [the interviewer need to interpret for full meaning, like a career as a designer] / [tend to have word or two-word answers]/ *yes.. [laugh] / .. Thammasat* [when asked about the university she may want to go to] [RESPONSE in ONE WORD]

Respondent: *Thai food/ [nodding as meaning YES]* [RESPONSE in WORDS]

Question 10: Is there any question you would like to ask us?

Respondent: *No* [*swiping face* meaning No] [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Respondent: *Moving face from left to right*—signaling NO [NONVERBAL RESPONSE]

Respondent: [asked the interviewer] *What thing you would like to do?* [REPETITION]

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