

Summary Report on the Seminar on “Differences between Thai and English Languages: Notations for Teachers of English,” NULC, Naresuan University, 1 August 2017

A half-day training on “Differences between Thai and English Languages: Notations for Teachers of English” was hosted by the Director of NULC, Dr. Pornchulee Achava-Amrung. Its main aim was to help the lecturers keep abreast of the different linguistic considerations that may either be detrimental or beneficial to Thai learners.

There were twelve attendees that included the international lecturers of Naresuan University Language Center namely: Andy Cubalit, Kenje Gunda, Amilya Warusawitharane, Delano Chantengco, Dulshani Muthunayekege, Joan Sareno, Paul Freund, Prospero Igupen, Vimani Madugalle, James Grace, Vinthiya Balachandran and Thomas Elliot.

The short course was organized around the following three main points:

● **Eastern Thinking vs Western Thinking**

Western thinking is guided by the philosophy of Aristotelianism that everything is all or none, black or white. They believe that there is only one best decision, thus Westerners are very precise. There is what is called a horizontal relationship, following a linear pattern and the interval range is fixed. It is not compromising and this is completely the opposite for the Eastern thinking. Eastern thinking is mainly influenced by Taoism philosophy. This philosophy being relative in nature made Thai people tactful in their dealings. Everything depends on the context, whereas, the Western world depends on the content. In the East, nothing is precise hence, approximation is used most of the time. Thais commonly use different terms, body movements and they defer to seniority. These are manifested on how they think about the implications of every actions they make. The predominant religion, Buddhism teaches them to live in the now as oppose to the Western Thinking that has the concept of the Past, Future and Present. This is the kind of mentality that is engraved into the language. There is no verb conjugation in the Thai language, it’s nebulous and you can’t pin anything down. They take consideration of the body language and the context. You have to interpret the Thai language, be it spoken or written based on the context while the Western language is mostly literal in meaning so it is mainly based on content.

● **Attributes of Language**

Language can be verbal or nonverbal. Mathematics, music, pictures and even the way you dress convey meaning and send message, therefore, are also forms of language. It has three attributes and the first one is Semantics. Thai language is a very rich language that a word can have several meanings, can be used depending on context, various situations and according to one’s status or social class. It is hierarchical in nature and class oriented but not so blatant. A word can have different meaning depending on the tones. On the other hand, the English language is more focused on the expressed content and the words’ meaning and examples can easily be found in the dictionary. The second attribute is Syntax, which is the ordering of words and concepts. In Thai language, a sentence without either a subject or a verb can be understood and the modifiers follow the modified however, in the English language a subject and a verb

are mandatory and the modifiers precede the modified. Clustering the third attribute is the way words are put together. In Thai language clustering is done from a reader's or speaker's interpretation, no space between words in phrase or a sentence while in English there are spaces between all words and punctuations are always present.

- **Attributes found in English but do not exist in Thai language**

Thai language has different tones, can be redundant and applies agreement by concept while English language omit redundancy, and there is an agreement by structure where a subject must be always present in a sentence and has to agree with the verb. Articles are very important in English but are not used in Thai language. Furthermore, the Thai language doesn't have the concept of time specific verbs but for the Westerners it is important to be precise. Temporals such as as soon as, before, after etc. as well as punctuations are not present in Thai language which nonetheless are commonly used in English language.

Conclusion

Sharing of insights immediately followed the discussion. The participants made a thorough analysis of the sample letter written in English to identify the components and parts that are unfamiliar or unknown to Thai learners. It was an engaging activity, a collaborative work on the part of the participants in culling out the attributes of the English but in Thai language are nonexistent. In conclusion, the participants are expected to have a clearer understanding of the difficulties and challenges that Thai English learners normally faced. With this in mind, participants will be able to effectively teach their students through addressing the important points that may hinder learning.