**Abstract**

Thailand’s Participation in the ASEAN community means that Thai learners of English are experiencing the varieties of English used by not only natives but also non-native English speakers. Since the ASEAN Charter article 34 stipulates that English shall be a working language which means it is also used as a lingua franca in this region, communicative competence alone is not enough to achieve successful cross-cultural communication and correspondence. The citizen of ASEAN countries demands a broader set of language competencies because there...
are people from different cultural backgrounds using English as a medium of communication. This paper presents a review on research studies related to the promotion of intercultural competence and strategies in non-native communication settings. Frameworks on intercultural and metacultural competence and strategies from different contexts are discussed to propose the key aspects of multicultural understanding and learning in English language classrooms. Regarding the increasing number of non-native English language speakers in the ASEAN region, it is crucial for English teachers and learners in Thailand to be aware of the importance of intercultural understanding and the differences between their own culture and other cultures of English speaking people, which is not restricted to native speaker's culture.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Competence, Metacultural Competence, Intercultural Strategies, Thai English, ASEAN English, Multicultural Activities, English as a lingua franca

1. Introduction

People from different backgrounds have different experiences, values, and perceptions towards the same information. How people perceive the environment is influenced by cultural heritage and experience-based repertoire. When speakers from two different cultures meet, some messages in the information can be interpreted in many different ways according to interlocutors’ backgrounds and cultural concepts. Nevertheless, cultural beliefs and behaviors are always shaped by new interactions, information, and experiences. Therefore, culture is fluid and dynamic which one cannot reach a complete understanding through a single experience. Rather, learning about one’s own and others’ cultures is a lifelong process—a journey with many destinations (Hanson and Lynch, 1998). To achieve the language communication goal in the cultural diversity, individuals need a myriad collection of exposures to cultural negotiations, exposures, adaptations, and adopting new attitudes that support them to establish good rapport to communicate effectively with others. So, it is not only being aware of sensitive issues in intercultural communications but to be able to explicate one's own cultural information and also respect and value different beliefs. This is suggesting that successful international language users should have specific information or knowledge about a particular group of beliefs and the structure in society. They are also required to develop communicative competence and strategies that support better understanding in international communications. These knowledge and strategies would be the background to generate a wide variety of verbal and nonverbal responses or to deliver and receive communication messages accurately and appropriately in the global context.

According to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Charter, the Article 34 states that “The working language of ASEAN shall be English”. This has tremendously affected the way English is used and learned in the region. Kirkpatrick (2012) addresses this increasingly important role of English in ASEAN; the promotion of English as the sole official language has affected changes in the language policies of
many ASEAN countries and English is no longer used as a foreign/second language but rather “a major medium of communication or lingua franca between countries” (p.6). Since ASEAN is moving towards the united community at the end of 2015, Thailand’s participation means that Thai English learners are going to experience varieties of English used by not only natives but also non-native speakers who come from diversities of language and cultural backgrounds. Thus, communicative competence alone is not enough to achieve successful international communication and correspondence within this socioeconomic community. The communication among ASEAN countries demand a broader set of language competencies. However, it is questionable whether Thai learners of English are prepared for the challenges of intercultural communication in which English is used as a lingua franca (ELF) - a means of communication between speakers from different cultural and language backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2005).

Regarding Kachru’s Three Circles of English (see Kachru, 1992), David Crystal (2004) points out that the number of non-native English speakers in the ‘outer circle’ (i.e. colonies of Britain) and ‘expanding circle’ (the regions that English is used as a foreign language) has outnumbered the native speakers or the ‘inner circle’. It was also found that 80 percent of the interactions done in English happened among non-native speakers of English; those interactions do not necessarily follow the native speakers’ way of language use (Carter, 2003: 97). In the ASEAN member countries, there are approximately 80 million non-native speakers of English and the number is gradually increasing which has outnumbered the native speakers in the ‘inner circle’ (Bolton, 2008). Therefore, the nature of English communication in the region become more multiculturally involved because of the linguistic and cultural diversities of English speakers. In this respect, Sharifian (2010) puts forward that if more than 80 percent of communication in English is now taking place between non-native speakers, instead of exploring phonological and syntactic dimensions of different varieties of English spoken globally, it is crucial to investigate the cultural schemata that these speakers draw on while negotiating their intercultural communication that underlie their semantic and pragmatic levels.

Hence, it would be beneficial for English language learners and teachers to learn how other English speaking people from different backgrounds use English to communicate in the globalized world. This paper presents a review on research studies related to the promotion of intercultural competence and strategies in non-native communication and classrooms. It also addresses the important aspects of intercultural competence in ELF contexts. Frameworks on intercultural and metacultural
competence and strategies from different contexts are discussed to propose the key aspects of multicultural understanding in the English language classrooms. Regarding the increasing number of non-native English language speakers in the ASEAN region, it is crucial for English language teachers and learners to recognize the importance of their own language culture and to be prepared to understand other cultures of English speaking people, which is not restricted to native speaker's culture.

2. Intercultural competence in English as a Lingua Franca context

According to the UNESCO, intercultural competence can be defined as “The ability to decipher other cultures in fair and meaningful ways is predicated not only on an open and pluralistic spirit but also on self-cultural awareness.” (UNESCO, 2013, p.4). In other words, it is the ability to understand other speakers from different cultural backgrounds enabling an individual to achieve the communication goal. In everyday communication, learners of English have more exposure to interaction with other speakers of English, both natives and non-natives. Nevertheless, the number of English conversation among non-native speakers is increasing and has outnumbered the native speakers’ conversation (Graddol, 2006). Since communications nowadays have become more intercultural and multicultural in nature, speakers, both native and nonnative, require more than traditional language skills to accomplish the communication goal.

Canagarajah (2006) stated that language proficiency becomes more complex especially when speakers of different cultures interact. They are required to negotiate the varieties of cultural interpretation; the competence that is required in multicultural settings is called “multidialectal competence” (p.233) or the ability to understand varieties of English. Generally, this competence is not explicitly expressed, but it can be promoted by frequent contact with people from different backgrounds and cultures. However, Kirkpatrick (2012) puts forward that English instruction in countries of the expanding circle is traditionally embedded with notions of the native speaker's culture concepts, understanding the structured patterns of standardized English which seldom addresses on the importance of language varieties in non-native contexts. This suggests that the way English is presented and taught in classrooms nowadays should be adjusted to the changing societies since students are expected to interact with both native and non-native speakers in real-life situations. Consequently, the paradigm shift in English language instruction and intercultural competency is essential to correspond with the nature of English varieties in the ASEAN region.
When English is used as a medium of communication between people from diverse backgrounds, it is often used to express cultural concepts and beliefs or to negotiate the cross-cultural differences. McKay (2002) argue that intercultural knowledge is vital for understanding the varieties of English since the localization of English is often found in daily conversations. English has been brought into local communities and added some cultural concepts and meaning that might be deviant from the original standard of English used by native speakers, which sometimes may cause misunderstanding among interlocutors.

Previous studies have found that individuals from different cultural background would select different knowledge and messages to communicate with people from other cultures. In a study by Leung, Lee, and Chiu (2013), an individual would deliberately select a typical message to communicate with a member of a certain culture by applying meta-knowledge of the culture. Therefore, unsuccessful cross-cultural communications may arise not only from the lack of motivation to take the perspective of individuals in a foreign culture, but also from inaccurate meta-knowledge of the foreign culture. Misunderstanding is possible when people from different backgrounds involved in an intercultural communication without shared or common cultural or linguistic schemas. For example, English speakers except speakers from Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia might not be familiar with the use of particles ‘la’ at the end of the sentence and may misunderstand the conversation in intercultural settings (see Kirkpatrick, 2012). Coming from different cultural backgrounds, individuals tend to behave in a way that is appropriate to their own cultural norms. Sharifian (2009) stresses that, in intercultural communications, speakers may use the same English words and sentences while indicating different cultural schemas, categories and metaphors. This phenomenon is likely to lead to cases of ‘hidden’ miscommunication. Therefore, he argues that EIL learners need ‘metacultural competence’ which is the ability to communicate and negotiate their cultural conceptualizations with other speakers from different cultural background in intercultural communication (Sharifian 2013: 11).

Nevertheless, metacultural competence can be achieved through exposure to a range of different World Englishes and opportunities to have familiarity with a variety of systems of cultural conceptualizations of English language learners. In this sense, learning English nowadays needs more attention to different kinds of cultural schemata used in the outer and expanding circle countries and non-verbal language should be promoted. This is due to the fact that overwhelmingly focus on the users and uses of English in the inner circle countries and not on those in the outer circle and expanding circle countries is less likely to prepare students to adequately use English in the future while interacting with other nonnative speakers of English (Matsuda, 2003; Sharifian,
Therefore, a more appropriate and practical competency to understand the spectrum of cultures in English conversation, also called Intercultural Competence, is highly needed.

3. Intercultural Competence, Skills, and Strategies

In order to achieve the goal of cross-cultural communication, Byram (1997) proposed the Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) which is defined as the ability of having the right attitudes, knowledge, and skills towards a different culture.

1. Attitudes: The value that one holds because of belonging to social group. This includes the curiosity, openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own willingness to mediate between one’s own culture and others’. It is an ability to decentralize one’s own belief and see the perspectives of values, beliefs, behaviors through others’ eyes. In this regard, there are some effective ways to promote the appropriate attitude in classrooms such as: using visual aids to encourage curiosity and interest in class and using text written by learners from different cultures that telling stories about their lives and beliefs. Interviews of learners from different cultures and intercultural activities such as exchanging emails or other encounter projects are encouraged: for examples, penpal project to learn about each other, sharing cultural similarities and differences.

2. Knowledge: The knowledge of how other people see their roles and identity in a particular social interaction. It includes the knowledge of one’s own stereotypes (autostereotypes) and a different culture stereotype (hetero-stereotypes). To promote the knowledge, it is recommended that students learn about facts and media from particular cultures. Studying cultural stereotypes, guest speaker lectures and exchange about cultural views can enhance students’ cross-cultural knowledge.

3. Skills of interpreting and relating: The ability to explain an event/evidence from another culture, explain and relate it to one own’s culture. Try to interpret a piece of evidence from the light of the other, which involves the skill of mediation. To enhance these skills, studying literary texts from different culture, interpretation of text, and studying learners’ experiences/ projects/simulations/or situations from different culture point of view are encouraged. A typical activity/situation at a particular time/place of a society can be a good source of skill development in this area.

4. Skills of discovery and interaction: It is the ability to acquire new knowledge of cultural practices and to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills of cultures in real-time communication and interaction. Students would learn through face to face projects
5. Skills of critical cultural awareness: The ability involves being able to evaluate critically on a particular cultural issues/event, dealing with speakers from other cultures, and the ability to exchange views on evaluation of cultural experiences or situations that involve beliefs or perspectives. It is the integration of all the other competencies including a critical perspective on one’s own culture. To promote this attribute, a discussion or comparison of real-life critical situation from the news presenting how different nationals deal with social issues should be organized.

The above skills are vital for speakers of English worldwide as we are facing the borderless communication and English is constantly used to communicate between cultures. Having the right attitude towards a different culture has become the most essential and challenging requirement of English speakers at this age. To address the critical competence of the globalized world, Sharifian (2013) proposed awareness and strategies that enable interlocutors to communicate and negotiate their cultural understandings in an interaction. The elements include: the conceptual variation awareness, the conceptual explication, and the conceptual negotiation strategies.

1. The conceptual variation awareness is a strategy used by speakers when they know how to express their own cultural conceptualization to others because they feel that there’s a gap between them and their conversation partner. They become more careful in choosing the most appropriate expression that is easy for others to understand what they mean. Also, they sometimes try to avoid sensitive issues about religious, political, and cultural beliefs. This might as well include the use of a more universal term to promote mutual understanding.

2. The conceptual explication is a strategy when interlocutors use English to clarify relevant conceptualization to other speakers. For this concept, I would like to exemplify my personal observation in a multicultural setting when Thai English speakers sometimes ask non-Thai friends “Have you eaten yet?” as a greeting not a conversation starter for dining out together. Asking about eating a common greetings among Thais but it may seem unfamiliar for others who are unfamiliar with Thai culture especially greetings. In this case Therefore, Thai English speakers may need to explain the reason behind this expression in intercultural communication. That is when they can apply the strategy to encode and express cultural conceptualization.

3. The conceptual negotiation strategies is used when interlocutors seek clarification when there might be some mismatches of concepts in the conversation or some embedded notions in the message. The speaker might spot the layers of meaning in particular expressions used by other and immediately asking for elaboration. This
strategy is applied when an individual would like to know more about a different culture for successful communication.

The strategies of metacultural competence are paramount in the development of the new language competency of the new generation English language speakers. Similar to other language competence, the cultural competence needs to be practiced and promoted in classroom as a critical competence for lifelong learning. Since the nature of intercultural competence is different from other linguistic competence that it never reaches a finite goal, Deardorff (2009) stated that language learning in intercultural interactions involves the process knowledge and comprehension, negotiation, and transformation that will always change throughout a learner’s’ lifetime experiences. What learners require is not only being aware of sensitive issues in international/intercultural communications but to be able to explicate their own cultural information and also respect and value different beliefs in daily cross-cultural interactions, which can be assessed through learners’ reflections (see Deardorff, 2013). Therefore, this is suggesting that successful international language users should have the ability to develop communicative competence and strategies that support better understanding in international communications. These knowledge and strategies would be the background to generate wide variety of verbal and nonverbal responses or to deliver and receive communication message accurately and appropriately in the global context.

4. Intercultural competence: classroom implications

To promote intercultural skills, language learners need more opportunities to participate in cultural variations. They require authentic experiences to negotiate and understand varieties of English in local and global contexts. In the past, English language learners were usually assigned typical communicative tasks to have conversations with native speakers from the ‘inner circle’ and try to understand the native accent or its varieties. This kind of activity might not be applicable for the current situation of English in the globalized world. Therefore, using cross-cultural tasks in English language classrooms can expand the horizon of learners and enable them to become more familiar with intercultural aspects and new perspectives that are often presented through conversations with people from other cultures.

In recent years, researchers and educators have been working on intercultural language project to coach cross-cultural competence and skills. In language institutions and tertiary education, hybrid programs that encourage cultural awareness and skills in participating multicultural setting are increasingly offered for international students where they can acquire communication skills and world-mindedness. In a cultural-based
language program, Campbell (2013) provided students with information or facts about the cultural issues of the target language with awareness of stereotype and prejudices. Students were also encouraged to adjust their roles when they talked to people from different cultures. The situations and the position or the individuality of the person who they talked with were discussed in language learning. The main goal was to make students know how to talk or behave differently depending on the situations they participate.

For cross-cultural communications, it is crucial for students to learn how to switch their roles in different situations, unlike the communication in their mother tongues. To be able to do so, metacultural process should be established. The basis for metacultural process competence is the awareness of the own cultural background, the own behavior (gesture, miming), and how to deliver the message appropriately to the other speaker from the different culture (Sharifian, 2013). It is important to distance oneself from the native language behavior and monolingual view of communication. In other words, it is important to distance from ethnocentrism, the own behavior and the own view of life, to achieve the goal of using English as lingua franca. However, there is not yet enough evidence of how to promote metacultural competence in language classrooms and still the problems of student language proficiency and the variety of English language in cross-cultural communications.

According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), language teachers are increasingly recognizing the necessity of intercultural competence. However, the way to implement intercultural competence in classroom teaching is still problematic. In this respect, Matsuo (2012) suggested that an interculturally competent learner who can communicate across cultures and use English to mediate between speakers of different cultures and languages should be regarded as a model or ideal student. Nevertheless, to create knowledge about one's culture and understanding of others’ cultures takes time and a tremendous effort to draw on individuals’ cultural exposure and experiences in multicultural settings.

For many language teachers, integrating cross-cultural experiences or multicultural tasks in foreign language learning is the key to enhance intercultural competence. Kourova and Modianos (2003) promote cultural learning in a Russian language class by designing a cross-cultural project to enhance American students' experiences in learning Russian language. The 2-years project called "Connecting Classroom Project" aimed to promote students' intercultural awareness and understanding of cultural differences. Video conferencing and information communication technology tools such as Skype and emails were used as a mean for communication between American and Russian students. The cultural learning activities
such as exchanging cultural artefacts, translation and writing of folktales, booklet drawing and making, comparing different cultural elements, festivals, and lifestyles of American and Russian were recommended to enrich cultural experience and increase the appreciation of their own cultures. The project also enables students to become autonomous learners in researching about the cultural issues using the communication technology tools to find cultural-related resources and people.

Ya-Chen (2008) adopted ethnographic interviews to develop Taiwan students' understanding of native English speakers and their cultures as well as to encourage self-awareness of both the target culture and their own. Students' ethnographic interviews were incorporated with oral and written reports and classroom observations. The results suggested that participation in the ethnographic interview project helped facilitate the development of cross-cultural awareness and communication skills by providing opportunities for students to gain insights into the values of target language countries, learn to view their own culture in new ways, increase their confidence in using English to communicate and view authentic communication as the goal of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. The majority of the participants saw the ethnographic interview project as an effective means of facilitating intercultural/interpersonal communication and understanding. Later, Cultural portfolio was incorporated in EFL college classes to enhance intercultural understanding and reducing stereotypes (see Ya-Chen, 2011).

Ho (2009) promoted intercultural learning in a Vietnamese EFL setting by raising learners’ cultural awareness by engaging them in intercultural comparisons and discussion to explore and reflect cultural similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture under the topics of ‘families’ and ‘food and drinks’. There are many ways to develop the cultural component in classroom such as exploring self, noticing/observation, cultural exploration, comparison and reflections, and mediation between cultures through the use of simulation, personal experiences, films, music, and literatures. Learners are encouraged to participate in problem-solving activities involving cultural dilemmas that they need to draw on knowledge of cultural differences, make decision based on comprehension, and mediate their own culture with the target culture to reach in interaction/communication goal.

Gómez (2012) conducted an action research in an advanced English as a foreign language classroom of the language program at a university in Bogotá, Colombia, in 2010. The study proposes the inclusion of authentic literary texts in the English as a foreign language classroom through the implementation of four constructivist approaches as a means to develop intercultural communicative competence. Data were collected to show how those approaches engaged learners to read authentic literary short
stories, to negotiate meaning, and to develop intercultural competence. It demonstrates that integrating language and literature in English as a foreign language not only constitutes a communicative reading practice, but the opportunity to construct cultural knowledge through social interaction.

Therefore, previous studies suggest that intercultural competence can be enhanced in classrooms through a variety of multicultural tasks using cultural artefacts, intercultural communication activities, personal reflections, storytelling, literary works, learners’ writing, and sharing experiences on how they learn other cultures of English language speakers and how to negotiate the differences of cultural interpretations. Moreover, Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) suggested that learners should develop appropriate ‘Intercultural Attitude’ (p.12) which means the openness or readiness to suspend disbelief about others’ cultures and being able to relate one’s own cultural beliefs to others’. Therefore, the most important characteristic of an ELF learner is one who possesses the appropriate knowledge and attitude and becomes successful in intercultural tasks. Although there are several methods to promote intercultural understanding in English language learning, teachers need to create their own pedagogical techniques to meet the need of their learners. The intercultural frameworks, competency, and strategies proposed by researchers (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009; Sharifian, 2013) can be used guidelines for curriculum design for various second and foreign language educational contexts. The above mentioned methods and strategies need to be adjusted to fit into particular learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Since learning foreign languages from textbooks is not enough, teachers may bring foreign language partners and cultural knowledge or artefacts into the classroom by communication technology tools almost without any cost. Nevertheless, it might be a big challenge for English language teachers to provide learners with exposure to English varieties and cultures while teachers themselves also need to change their perspectives in English language teaching. In other words, English teachers in the ASEAN should adopt the principles of teaching English as a lingua franca rather than English as a foreign language in order to keep up with the current situation of English language in this region.

5. Suggestion and Conclusion

At the end of 2015, the AEC will be officially launched to strengthen the Southeast Asian economic power at the global scale. For the past years, the government sections and business corporations have been looking for workers who are competent not only competent in professional skills or foreign language, but also the
working in the globalized contexts. Universities nowadays are required to produce more well-rounded graduates with versatility to work in multicultural environments. That is to say, university degree holders could not get their jobs by merely having high GPAs but no extracurricular knowledge of skills to work in a multicultural context. English language instruction in college and schools need to provide students with varieties of cultural knowledge and how to recognize the wide range of cultural perspectives rather than native speaker's point of view. Nevertheless, English instruction in Thailand has been traditionally embedded with notions of the native speaker’s culture concepts, understanding the structured patterns of standardized English which seldom address on the importance of language varieties in multicultural contexts. This suggests that the way English is presented and taught in classrooms nowadays should be adjusted to the changing societies since students are expected to interact with both native and non-native speakers in real-life situations. Hence, English teachers in the Thailand and AEC should add cultural diversities in classroom instruction and activities. Examples of useful cross-cultural activities have been given previously in this article. Giving learners knowledge of the native culture might not be enough for learners to achieve the global and local communicative goals. English lessons need to provide more content of different cultures of English language speakers that learners might encounter in real life situations.

Therefore, I would like to call for a shift in perspectives and practices of English language and culture instruction in Thai schools and universities. The pedagogical practice of culture in English language in this region needs to be adjusted to keep up with the rapid changing societies of multiculturalism in the ASEAN. Students are no longer learning English to communicate with English speakers from the inner circle. With the advent of Internet technology, students have already been learning and using English to communicate with their friends from the neighboring countries in both physical and virtual worlds. English should be taught in the way that learners can use the language to express their own cultural perspectives and vice versa to understand the local situations and world social phenomena. However, what teachers should be aware of is the relatedness among intercultural competence itself. The success of communication is derived from several elements or strategies used by individuals not just the ability to communicate and negotiate meanings. Nonverbal cultural competence is also another important element to be investigated. Teachers may have to take time in adapting their own ways to integrate theory into actions and develop their own discourse / interpretation in using cultural texts in their classroom teaching.

As the ASEAN community aims to integrate economically, politically, and socioculturally and English is being used as the medium of communication, English
language learners should learn deeper; the goal of English language learning should go beyond acquiring the conventional communicative competence. Intercultural competence is challenging but worth the effort, if achieved, it would be advantageous for learners to prepare for the globalized world, to thrive in the multicultural communities and competitive economic situation that the ASEAN would bring about. Finally, what I expect to see in our English language classrooms is that teachers and learners have openness and readiness to understand other speakers’ cultures and background through English conversations. At the same time, they also look for opportunities to practice clarifying their own cultural concepts and know how to negotiate and making an effort to understand different cultures of other English speakers through cross-cultural communication. However, in the Thai context, the exploration on learners’ intercultural awareness and competence is still in its infancy. Much more data are needed to construct the pedagogical practice to enhance and promote intercultural competence in English language instruction.

References


