Abstract

Since the 20th century, English had spread through many countries used as an international language which is frequently used for a wide range purpose in public and personal needs. This case study aimed to identify the use of language(s) for communication between staff and student and to assess possible solutions to help staff improve their English communication skills as the use of English for oral transactional communication, a case study of financial office personnel, Assumption University, Thailand during the academic year 2015-2016. The conversation transcriptions were collected as the data for analyzing; these conversations were analyzed by adapting from CANCODE corpus model focusing on spoken discourse analysis. The main issue was on the use of language for both L1 and L2 in the process of conducting service. By analyzing each transcription in details, it revealed the movement of conversation as an interaction between speaker and listener and it represented how staff used English and Thai for communication in term of translanguaging. The use of translanguaging seems to help the officers overcome certain difficulties in communication when faced with the transactional interaction required in their job. However, the lack of ability to explain financial technical term to the students lead to misunderstandings in the conversation.

Keywords: transactional oral communication; translanguaging; Thailand; staff students

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Introduction

Assumption University was the first international university in Thailand, administered by a council who members were appointed jointly by the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand and the Brother’s of St. Gabriel. Given the priority to its educational program as an international institution that uses Foundation English as the language for teaching, Assumption University is not only depending on employing staff that are able to use local language, but it is also crucial to have staff or management that is multilingual, specifically that can use English fluently both oral and written. To provide better services and to accomplish its goal, all staff must avoid the tendency to use their native language when interacting with stakeholders.

As the frontline of university management that is linked directly to the academic activity, the Financial Management Office holds the important role of keeping the continuous and direct information of administration and management to support both internal and external university activity. The Financial Management Office is comprised of three departments; Finance, Accounting, and Budgeting, that work under direct supervision of the Office of the Rector since 2008 and since then has been run by Vice President of Financial Affairs.

To communicate and deliver its objectives effectively between each department, offices and academicians, English has been implemented as the main intermediary language used for oral communication and writing within the university. English language also is being used as the medium of instruction for learning and teaching in every course. The use of English as the basic language of the academicians and office environment activity, affect positively the flow of information exchange and academic activity between the parties concerned, given the diversity of native language is quite large in the university community. The utilization of English is meant to assist and convey the function of the university.

Improving English skills among the management and staff is necessary for a better service. Some language policy and planning suggestions can help to develop the staff skills in using
English. Communication errors may occur while the staff is engaged in daily service with direct interactions with the stakeholders. The findings of some minor or even major problems from the application of English as oral communication used in the Financial Management Office will help officers to comprehend their problems, which might help them to improve their English communication skills used in their services.

**Literature Review**

In this research, spoken discourse analysis has been used for analyzing the conversation between the staff and students in the Financial Office. The CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) corpus is the model for this research; the project was established in the Department of English for English studies.

According to Carter and McCarthy,

The CANCODE project has from the beginning attempted to obtain data in a range of different genres so that a wide range of contextual features can be seen to influence the talk, and research can therefore pinpoint differences between different form of language and the types of conversation conducted. (Carter and McCarthy 1997: 9)

A study of informal spoken English by recording real conversation is meant to assess the real reflection of language use in daily conversation within society such as shops, restaurants, offices, schools or house. To assess reflection of language, audio transcript from spoken language into a written form is needed to support and analyze the content of the conversation. It included the accession of contextual features that apply to determine the interaction between speaker and listener in perspective of individual relationship, communication channel and communication purpose.

Language is very important for communication for both speaking and writing especially English that has become the main second language used for communication around the world. Therefore, it is not only language that human are exchanging but also the culture behind those messages using English language as lingua Franca (ELF), “a lingua franca is a contact language used among people who do not share a first
language, and is commonly understood to mean a second (or subsequent) language of its speakers.” (Jenkins 2007:1).

Moreover, not only English language is used as a spoken language, but mother tongue language can be mix and switching languages used while communicate with each other is called code-switching. “Code-switching is a form of linguistic communication where the speaker makes use of elements from two or more different codes.” (Foley J.A. 2013:84). Speaker has their choice for using and combining elements from two distinct codes to convey a message to the receiver as long as it can be understood and acceptable.

Nowadays, English is not used only in normal conversation but also in some specific circumstances for specific needs. “Business English implies the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kinds of communication in a specific context” (Ellis and Johnson 1994:3), English as specific purpose or ESP is to apply English into a specific field of career such as doctor, engineer, accountant, financial, etc.

Furthermore, language used for communication might be more complex than just code-switching as the speaker using both mother tongue and second language as their main language for communication is called translanguaging. “Translanguaging is a complex, dynamic process involving a mixture of different practices and may include what others denote as translation and code-switching.” (Beres 2015: 111). It means that mother tongue language and second language used by speaker changes from being parallel became straight line as he/she chose to use mother tongue language and second language as their main language for communication. It combined mother tongue language and second language together in each sentence or phrase involving in codes (languages) and modes (reading and writing, listening and speaking or a mix of these).

Feedback in conversation is the way that listeners present their attention on following the conversation from speakers in form of verbal and nonverbal communication such as agreement; say yes or an act of nodding the head and disagreement; say no or an act of head shaking. An inappropriate absent
feedback causes a breakdown of conversation. In conversation, feedback can come in verbal which do not have a definition in a dictionary but it does show the meaning in conversation.

According to Thornbury and Slade;

Gardner (1994) outlines seven different types of listener contributions that are common in casual conversation in English. There are:

1. Continuers: these signal the present speaker’s right to continue holding the floor, e.g. mmhmm, uh, huh;

2. Acknowledgments: these claim agreement or understanding of the previous turn e.g. mm, yeah;

3. Assessment: these are appreciative in some way of what has just been said e.g. how awful, shit, wonderful;

4. News markers: these mark the speaker’s turn as news e.g. really, is it;

5. Questions: these indicate interest by asking for further details, or they may be asked in order to repair some misunderstanding;

6. Collaborative completions: one participant finishes or repeats another’s utterance; and

7. Non-verbal vocalizations: e.g. laughter, sighs etc.

(Thornbury and Slade 2006: 132)

Research Questions

1. What languages in terms of oral transactional communication do the financial staff use while performing their daily service at the front desk?

2. What solutions may be possible for officers to develop their language skills in their use of transactional discourse?

Data and Methodology

The front desk staff is the major focus for observation and conversation recording during their service hours. There are five personnel out of twenty eight who work at the front desk, these five are from the Finance Department of two campuses where each staff member have different objectives to handle stakeholders and documents. The table below showed participants descriptions such as age, working durations and education background.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Working durations at ABAC (Years)</th>
<th>Education Background (Thai program)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Pim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Bachelor degree in accounting, Rattana Bundit College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bachelor degree in finance, Ramkhamhaeng University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mint</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Bachelor degree in business management, Ramkhamhaeng University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pang</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bachelor degree in Accounting and Master degree in Business management, Kasem Bundit University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Top</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bachelor degree in finance, Ramkhamhaeng University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: the description of participants as individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Transcription cases</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Transcription cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tuition payment requisition</td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Visa extension requisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Visa letter requisition</td>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Graduation fee requisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Official transcription requisition</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>ID card substitute requisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Opening bank account requisition</td>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Receipt copy requisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Recommendation requisition</td>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Checking deposit requisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Unofficial transcript requisition</td>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Receipt copy and unofficial transcript requisition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: The transcription cases
Based on the research questions, English conversation recording between staff and stakeholders determined the problems the staff encountered during working hours. Observation showed staff performance, reaction, and behavior through the problems such as assistant from other staff or other departments. The conversation record took one month from Monday to Friday within working hours, 8 am until 4 pm, from both HuaMak and Suvarnabhumi campuses. The data are the English conversation between Thai finance staff and foreign students who have different mother tongues and using English for communication. These foreign students such as Chinese, Burmese, French, and etc. were not native speakers but they are using English as their language for communication within the University.

The conversations were selected according to the requisition cases which are divided into 12 cases represented in the table below.

The data collected from the authentic conversation record were transcribed word by word from audio into written form. Thai from both student and staff was transcribed in English including nonverbal expression such as physical response, emotions and time limited that combines with the observation report. Data collected need to be transcribed into written form and some symbols be used to assist to identify the speakers, which can indicate pauses, unfinished word, etc.

From this data, an analysis showed the performance of officers through conversation starting from the movement of the conversation, general commentary, line-by-line commentary, and conclusion. During communication, external factors such as relationship, environment, rush hour, attitude, emotion, and physical condition including the lack of English speaking skills caused miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Collected conversation records were analyzed by using discourse analysis to distinguish their communication performance.

Findings and Discussion

Findings from the transcriptions

(1) Data collection; the conversation transcript covered twelve cases according to students’ requisition. With
different requisition, it gave opportunities to find similarity and different problems staff were facing with different cases each day. As some case had short conversation, without a complicated process requirement, staff had only a fairly simple conversation with student and staff did not use Thai to communicate with students.

(2) English as a specific purpose (ESP); the using of languages in terms of oral communication that financial staff faced while performing their daily service at the front desk was the lack of ability to explain technical term related to finance field which made it difficult for staff to provide information or to answer questions.

(3) The role of context; In situation context, speaker represented the context by their physic around them in order to make an explicit message transmitted to listener. In this case, the staff was using verbal and physical to communicate with the student by saying and pointing at the petition form in order to avoid a misunderstanding.

(4) Interactional features; using transactional discourse as the model for analysis data showed the movement of conversation on how the staff communicated with a student. In some cases, staff provided additional advices to student who had their first experience in requisition or answered some specific questions.

(5) Translanguaging; The combination between English and Thai is used by staff from the beginning of the conversation until the end as their the main language for communication with the students. The language used as two languages are parallel became one language because staff were using languaging without hesitating and it occurred naturally during communication. It was different from code-switching which had to switch from one to another language but staff used both languages as their main language for communication.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify the common problems that occur within the Financial Office while communicating with students. It also described the forms transactional discourse used by staff in discussion on financial matters with students. The data also gave some indications of the flow of transactional discourse involving the
process of translanguaging which used the linguistic resources available to the participants in dealing with their problems.

The first research question; ‘What languages in terms of oral transactional communication do the financial staff use while performing their daily service at the front desk?’

To answer this question, the study revealed the use of two languages to communicate between speaker and listener as translanguaging and the difficulty in explaining specific terms related to financial field.

Using Thai and English to communicate with students helps staff to achieve their goal on providing service to students. Even though, some sentences might not be in correct form of English grammar structure unless the message is still meaningful and understandable, it provided authentic information related to students needs. On the other hand, using Thai and English to student who did not understand Thai can create misunderstanding to the listener. Therefore, staff should be aware on using Thai in the conversation as it makes listener feels difficult to understand the information received from speaker and it can reduce the satisfaction on requesting service from the Financial Office. In addition, the difficulty in explaining specific terms related to financial field or giving information to students wasted the time.

The second research question; ‘What solutions may be possible for officers to develop their language skills in their use of transactional discourse?’

Using English to communicate with students to as day-to-day service, staff are facing the difficulty of satisfying student to needs. External factors such as noisy environment, interruption while talking and busy hour can create or bad environment. The loud noises from surrounding areas cause the disruption and lead to misunderstanding between communicators. The interruptions by other speakers caused problems during the transactional process, and within the rush hour, staff could not give information in detail to student. There affect the level of satisfaction of customers. Therefore, staff can use the words ‘pardon’, ‘sorry’ or ‘again please’ for requesting the student to repeat what they are saying when they cannot hear those words clearly.
In addition, the terms of politeness are related to the relationship between speaker-listener, it depends on audience expectation and feedback. Some interruption occurred while staff were involves with servicing the students. If the interruption involved other staff phrases such as “excuse me”, “I’m sorry” or “pardon” could be employed.

Wrong pronunciation and intonation can lead to a misunderstanding in conversation. In real time conversation, it can create mistake for pronouncing or using wrong words. Listeners should not assume the word they heard as same as speakers spoke but asking speakers to repeat for clarifying those sentences. As well as, speakers should be kindly to repeat the sentences for avoiding misunderstanding.

Finally, staff and students should accept that people who use English as a second language for communication had a different background on learning and using English. On the other hand, staff should understand the variety use of English from the students. Staff should prepare for unexpected situations such as specific questions from students that not related to payment requisition or different topics therefore being flexible in using English helps staff to answer the questions.

Recommendations

Long term data collection helps to review the varieties of service requisitions different from this dissertation that can show the movement of conversations clearly and also the use of English for oral communication. With long term data, it helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of staff. So, the university should give theme opportunity to create the lessons or materials to improve English communication skills in order to providing precise information engaging with students.

Limitations of the study

1.) Staff data; as the recruitment policy for staff to take English exam for apply as ABAC’s employee, it is show the English level of each person. In this case study, these staff had worked more than 5 years. At that time, ABAC did not have English test for these staff. Therefore, researcher could not use English test as the method to identify the level of English of each staff.
2.) Data collections; Researcher could not record any conversation during working hours in some day because of the time limited for collecting data with the university schedule especially examination days. Therefore, this time limit make researcher losing the opportunity to collect other transcription cases that might be more interesting on how staff are using their English for communication.

3.) External environment; in rush hour, staff had short time to communicate with students. Staff did not provide the information in details besides they guide students to contact the registration office. Therefore, data collection during rush hour is short and causing unclear movement on how staff using languages to communicate with students.

Bibliography


