

# **The Multi-Cultural and Language Studies: Fundamental Data in The Thai Language Learning and Teaching as a Foreign Language, and The Knowledge of which Direction of Thinking and the Case Study of Thai-Korean Culture, Pusan University of Foreign Studies**

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**Abstract:** The first objective of the research on multi-cultural and language studies: Fundamental data in the Thai language learning and teaching as a foreign language, and the knowledge of which direction of thinking and the case study of Thai-Korean culture, Pusan University of Foreign Studies, was to study how people were thinking about Thai and Korean culture between the Korean students whose major subject was the Thai language at the Pusan University of Foreign Studies and the Thai exchange students who were majoring the Korean language. The sampling group consisted of 25 sophomore Korean students who majored in the Thai language and 10 Thai students whose major subject was the Korean language of the first semester and the second semester, academic year 1979. The method of Specific Type was applied. The following tools applied in the research were the experiment to measure the success in perceiving the Thai culture and Thailand, the questionnaire to test the knowledge and the path of perception in Thai and Korean cultures of the Korean students whose major subject was the Thai language, and the survey of the understanding pertaining to Korean culture and Korea of the Thai students who majored in the Korean language, and the interviewing report resulted from interviewing the Thai students who majored in the Korean language. The researcher utilized the obtained data in the analyzing process by using the descriptive statistics method, and presented in the way of the descriptive narration. The researcher had found that: (1) The initial data of learning-teaching the Thai language as a foreign language-case study: Thai department, Pusan University of Foreign Studies disclosed the significant information or key factors in learning-teaching the Thai language as a foreign language. They are personal data of students, curriculum, instruction management, project and activities, and existing problems/obstacles in general in learning the Thai language at the Pusan University of Foreign Studies, Thai department. These were included the points of view and suggestions of the instructors and students. (2) The knowledge and path of thinking of the Korean student who learned the Thai language as a foreign language at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, and the Thai exchange students who majored in Korean language as a foreign language disclosed interesting factors such as the level of Korean students' understanding in the Thai language learning-teaching, integrated knowledge and how the Korean students thought about the Thai customs and traditions beside the result of surveying how well the Thai exchange

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students understood the Korean culture and Korea. These were also included various points of view and suggestions pertaining to the Korean language and the Thai language learning-teaching management and the path of thinking about Thai culture related with the Korean culture and traditions.

**Key words:** the multi-cultural; Thai language study; Thai language learning; Thai-Korean culture

## **1. Background and Problem Significance**

Language is the significant national culture reflecting the civilization of a country. People use the language as an important tool for communicating and understanding each other; particularly it is used in the international contact in the fields of political, military, economic, and social affairs, business, education and tourism. Language is the significant device for the above-mentioned activities. So, it is very important and necessary for the Thai society to learn language.

Language has taken part significantly in all kinds of human's activities as it relates to human's behaviorism psychologically, sociologically, and humanitarian. Language is like a road for the culture, customs and traditions, civilizations of one generation to another. All those knowledge derived from their ancestors to their today's community is done via the language. A language is so significant to the community of its own, and a language of one society should be different from another community. It depends on the system of a language. Conclusively we could say that the culture and the language cannot separate from each other while language is a part of a culture. Some sociologist believed that a culture cannot survive without a language. Language helps us to understand the culture, and it formed up itself from culture. Both language and culture entwined each other steadily. They cannot separate. Foreign language learners must learn the culture of the language's owner at the same time too. One who learns the Thai language will not be good at it if he or she does not understand the Thai culture. To learn the culture of the language owner is a part of how to learn a language in order to help the learning go smoothly, correctly and appropriately.

In the world of globalization new knowledge occurs all the time. To know only one language is not enough in the study or searching for new knowledge. So, it is necessary to learn another language to get access to the other fields of knowledge, to study and understand the other way of life, customs and traditions or for other purposes. Today, the need of the world's community is looking for an opportunity to learn more than one language. The human communities in the world have realized of this significance. This is based on Amara Phrasitrathasin (1999, p 14) who said that it is very difficult to make the world a monolingual society. The reason is that people from one society are easily able to get into another society because the transportation and communication are no longer problems so they have a chance to learn the language and culture from outside their own society.

The Thai language is, today, more acceptable worldwide even though it is not an international one. More and more foreigners are interested in studying the Thai as their second language. Several reasons related to politics, socio-economics, trade, education and so on. The teaching of the Thai as a foreign language abroad is increasingly demanded, even inside Thailand itself. As said, by Em-on Chitasophon (1993, p 122), the number of foreigners who want to learn the Thai language as a foreign language are increasing because they want to create a better communication for several purposes. We could see that some foreigners are beginners and some of them had studies the Thai before but all want to understand the Thai better for their job.

Thailand and Korea have had a diplomatic relationship for a long period of time. Friendship between us is

excellent and leading to bilateral cooperation in, such as, economics, politics, social affair, education and culture. As the time goes by, the friendship keeps growing. For this reason, both countries have signified in learning language from one another and use them in communication and education (Wilailak Bunkhluap, 2005, p 3). Today, South Korean has two universities teaching Thai language. Han Kook University, Language and Foreign Affairs Department, Seoul (Capital), and another one is Pusan University of Foreign Studies which is in the south of the country. Each university teaches several foreign languages, and the Thai language is one of those. Han Kook University started teaching Thai as a major subject in 1965. Then, in 1982, Pusan University started teaching the Thai language as a major subject. For a reason that Thailand is one of the countries that has established a firm diplomatic relationship with Korea. Pusan University admitted about 40 students majoring the Thai language each year and it included the teaching of Thai culture, and emphasized of the effective usage of the Thai language in real life. So, the Thai is the second language of the Korean students (Jong Bok Jae, 2000, p 3). However, the user of language in communicating with the language's owner effective and correctly must know the language and culture, and the way of thinking of the language's owner thoroughly in order that the correct understanding between the speaker and the listener must be created. We could say that we cannot overlook the cultural and social factors, also the suitable format of the language that fits for the people involved because (if not so) it might become an obstacle of using the language effectively. The language relates to the culture and the language is a device transferring the knowledge to the learners to understand the life style and how the people in such society think about something in order that the learners could learn and adjust or adapt themselves with the society of the language's owner appropriately. The researcher had a chance to teach Thai classes at Pusan University of Foreign Studies. The researcher has paid much attention for "The fundamental data in the Thai language learning and teaching as a foreign language, and the knowledge of which direction of thinking and the case study of Thai-Korean culture, Pusan University." The research would yield a great benefit to the researcher as a Thai instructor teaching foreigners the Thai language, and it would also be useful to other Thai instructors teaching the Thai language and culture to the foreigners.

## **2. Objectives of the Research**

(1) To study the fundamental data in the Thai language learning and teaching as a foreign language, Thai section, the case study, Pusan University of Foreign Studies.

(2) To study the knowledge of which direction of thinking and the case study between the Korean students majoring the Thai language, Pusan University of Foreign Studies and the Thai exchange students whose major is the Korean language.

## **3. Procedure of Research**

This research is to study the fundamental data in the Thai language learning and teaching as a foreign language, the case study, Thai language section, Pusan University of Foreign Studies and to study the total knowledge of which direction of thinking and the Thai and Korean culture, the case study between the Korean students majoring the Thai language, Pusan University of Foreign Studies and the Thai exchange students whose major is the Korean language.

### **3.1 Population and Sampling Group**

#### **3.1.1 Population**

They are all students, Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea and the foreign students of the exchange program studying at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea.

#### **3.1.2 Sampling group**

The specific method was applied to the sampling group of this research is 25 Korean students of the junior class, majoring the Thai language Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea and a group of 10 Thai exchange students from Srinakharinwirot University, Prasanmit, who studies the Korean language at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea. Those Thai students are under the exchange student program between Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea, and Srinakharinwirot University, Prasanmit, Thailand in the first and the second semesters, academic year 2009.

### **3.2 Tool of Research**

The following items are the tools used in this research:

- (1) A test of the Thai culture and Thailand for the Korean students majoring Thai.
- (2) A test of total knowledge of which direction of thinking and the Thai and Korean culture for the Korean students majoring Thai.
- (3) A questionnaire for the Korean students majoring Thai.
- (4) A survey of understanding of the Korean culture and Korea for the Thai exchange students majoring Korean.
- (5) A questionnaire of knowledge of which direction of thinking and the Thai and Korean culture for the Thai exchange students majoring Korean.
- (6) An interview applied to the Thai exchange students majoring Korean.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

(1) The researcher had conducted the 1-academic year data collection during the first and the second semesters, academic year 2009. The collection and analysis were done through following steps:

The researcher used six tools in compiling and analyzing data by herself. The quality test was conducted and verified. The target of information collection is the 25 junior-class Korean students majoring the Thai language at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea, and a group of 10 Thai exchange students from Srinakharinwirot University, Prasanmit, Thailand who studies the Korean language at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea who had come through a student exchange program between Pusan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea and Srinakharinwirot University, Prasanmit, Thailand.

(2) The descriptive statistics was applied in the analysis process. The narration is used in the research presentation.

### **3.4 Summary of the Research**

(1) The analysis yielded the following results:

Foreign language, case study, Thai Department, Pusan University of Foreign Studies. It consists of the key element of the data relating to the teaching and learning the Thai language as a foreign language including with the biological background, personnel, students, curriculum, the learning and teaching formats, projects and activities of the department, total of problems and obstructers in learning the Thai of the students in the Thai

Department, Pusan University of Foreign Studies. It also includes the points of view and suggestions from both teachers and students on the learning and teaching. The fundamental knowledge on the teaching and learning the Thai language as a foreign language.

(2) The total knowledge of which direction of thinking and the Thai and Korean culture of the Korean students majoring Thai at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, case study, Thai Department and of the Thai exchange students majoring Korean. It found several kinds of interesting data, for example, the levels of Korean students' knowledge and understanding the Thai culture and the points of view of the Korean students towards the Thai culture and traditions. It also discovered the survey result towards the Korean culture and Korea of the Thai exchange students majoring the Korean language. This is included with the ideas of instruction managements of both languages, and the total of which direction of thinking towards the Thai and Korean culture.

#### **4. Debate on the Research Result**

According to the result obtained, the debate can be discussed on the following details:

Firstly, the topic pertaining to the widespread of the learning and teaching the Thai language as a foreign language while the Thai is becoming another Asian language that the foreigners would like to learn. This situation might be derived from tourism, trade, business, investment and economics. Particularly there was high number of Korean students demanding to have the Thai language as their major subject each year at Pusan University of Foreign Studies. From the study, it found that those Korean students required the Thai as the second language because in the future they would apply for a job at the police department, customs department, or would become air hostages, hotel personnel, tour guides, and translators. This includes a number of Korean citizens who wanted to work with the Korean firms in Thailand. That is why they wanted to learn Thai. On the other hand, the Thai students learning Korean as the second language because the pro-Korean fever is widely accepted in Thailand so, there was high number of the Thais visiting Korea as a tour or to study the Korean culture and language.

Secondly, to be successful in learning the second language; not only applied for the Korean students or the Thai students, the learning and teaching of other lessons that were not included in the basic academic textbooks is very important to manage. It is necessary for teachers to possess a clear understanding the main point of a culture and traditions as it is a powerful tool to encourage the learners to learn. The students would pay more attention and anxiously to follow up the stories about culture and traditions, the way of thinking, belief of the society that might be the same or different from their own. The instructors could manage the learning-teaching process in various ways in order to make the learners to thoroughly realize the culture in total. There might be some kinds of songs, movies, or other activities that make people to understand the language, people, society, thinking, belief via the cultural values of the language's owner. For that the culture means everything relating to the way of life of the people in a society or community derived from one generation to another.

Somsri Chanwangsa said "A language is a part of a culture and we may count it as a social segment because it is the communication gear linking people in a society. A language might be a mental culture as it could relay a feeling or emotion. The most important is that, a language is an intelligent culture because it is the important tool in thinking, transferring, recording and maintaining the culture. The correlation of a language and culture, as said, in learning a second language or to learn first language of his own must learn the culture too. On the contrary, if one wants to learn the culture wholly, one must learn the language side by side with the culture."

As based on the research result and the researcher's experience, there was a keen difference between the Thai-class Korean students who had never been to Thailand and the ones who had visited Thailand. Apparently the ones who had never been to Thailand would have a limit communicative skillfulness and knowledge about Thailand while the ones who used to visit Thailand would have better sense of the Thai language, better understanding about the Thai way, accept the Thai life style, values, belief, custom and traditions whether they are the same or different from the Korean society. They also have brought along the experiences obtained from Thailand in blending the two cultures together appropriately. As having a Thai friend, one would know how the Thais act and not to act in a particular situation, what is acceptable and unacceptable. Therefore, to study the Thai or the Korean as the second language effectively, the outside-classroom learning is very important and be very useful to better understanding the language and the culture of the owner. To gain the experience outside the classroom does not solely depend on the textbook. Today, we could say that the better cultural perception and understanding is-the better teaching-learning a language will be. A learner who understood the culture would be able to behave or choose a suitable word in a particular event or situation. So, we also say that a study of a culture is totally relating to a language.

Finally, it is the intercultural communication. People in the same country and speak the same language sometimes having language problem of understanding own language in the communication. So, there is no doubt for multi-cultural people of different races, and languages would have a problem. This is more serious and complicated factor and it is very difficult to solve or get away from it. From the research, it found that some Korean who had studied Thai and Korean people in general still misunderstood about the characteristics of the Thais, and Thai culture. For example, some people still believed that Thailand is still using an elephant for transportation, the people of Thailand would have dark complexion, body contact between male and female is applicable, or Thailand is a free-sex country, etc. In the same way, some Thai exchange students and the Thais in general still misunderstood about Korean society and culture. For example, the sound of sipping soup from the bowl while having meal, being hot tempered, impolite, unmerciful, etc.

In such case, if the learner did not study and try to understand it would have caused misunderstanding about a society, way of thinking, life style, culture and traditions. It might have caused a conflict, bias, and misunderstanding. It is necessary for learners to study and pay attention on the differences of way of thinking of the language's owner and the second language learners so that the better understanding would lead us to logical explanation to support the behavior of the language's owner. As said by Phonphimon Senawong (1998), p 127, the communication problem might occur because of the different cultural and backgrounds and the language that is not the mother tongue of the speaker. The intercultural communication is so significant and dedicated. If not so, communicators would not be able to understand each other and cause a misunderstanding among people in that society and might lead to disunity countrywide. The people of multi-cultural community must learn, understand, and be patient. Particularly the different cultural format must be accepted in order to avoid any kind of conflicts, misunderstanding and subjectivity that may occur. A second language learner should be open-minded to accept the accurate knowledge on the basis of fact and correct the misunderstanding or ignorance that might have been learned from hear-and-say in the past.

In summary, a philosopher's slogan "Know Them-Know Us" would warn us in learning and understanding our own language, values, thinking, beliefs, customs and traditions and of the people from other countries that we have relationship with.

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