

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The present study investigated Thai English teachers pragmatic competence in requests. This chapter presents background information of the study. It consists of four major parts: background of the study, problem statement, objective of the study and benefit of the study.

A. Background of the Study

English has played a role as a major medium for global communication. It has gained itself a status as an international language (Jenkins, 2003; McKay, 2002; Smith, 1988). According to Crystal (1997), English is used by people all over the world, categorized as the Inner Circle, where English serves as a second language such as India, Singapore and the Philippines, and even more in the Expanding Circle where English is studied as a foreign language such as China, Germany, Japan and Thailand (McKay, 2002). On a small scale, people whose first language is not English use it for various purposes: to access intellectual resources, to further study and to increase career opportunities. On a larger scale, English is considered a prominent language in a variety of fields, including international trade, banking, industry, diplomacy, science and technology, entertainment and education (Crystal, 1997; Smith, 1988). Given such worldwide importance, an individual's English ability needs to be at least at a comprehensible level.

To use English successfully in international communication, where people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact with each other, communicative competence is truly essential (Bachman, 1990; Canale and Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971).

Communicative competence is defined as the ability to use grammatically correct sentences in appropriate contexts (Hymes, 1971). In other words, communicative competence subsumes linguistic competence into two parts: pragmalinguistic competence, the ability to use grammar rules to form sentences correctly, and socio-pragmatic competence, the ability to communicate properly according to the social rules of a language. Lack of either of the mentioned competence may cause a mistake in cross-cultural communication, known as pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

Pragmatic failure, which is caused mainly by a lack of or inadequate pragmatic competence, was first defined by Thomas (1983) as the inability to use an appropriate language form to express a particular meaning in a particular context and to understand a speaker's intention when that person makes an utterance. Such failure is divided into two segments: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. The former mainly deals with the linguistic problems that occur when inappropriate language forms are used to perform actions. The latter, on the other hand, is caused by misunderstandings which arise from the different perceptions that affect linguistic choices during cross-cultural exchanges. Pragmatic failure is more serious than linguistic failure (Thomas, 1983). A person might sound rude or

disrespectful when he or she commits a pragmatic error, which could lead to breakdowns in communication.

As pragmatic competence plays an important role in cross-cultural communication, and EFL speakers have limited chance to acquire pragmatic competence from the existing context, the question is whether EFL speakers can be helped to overcome this restriction. Scholars (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Edwards & Csizer, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; kasper, 1997) have pointed out that EFL classroom may be a potential place for their pragmatic competence. Several research findings in the field of second language acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Edwards & Csizer, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; house, 1996; Wannaruk, 2005) confirm that explicit teaching of target language pragmatics in EFL classroom is necessary, provided that English teachers have good command of pragmatic competence. If teachers who teach English have poor command of pragmatic competence, it might cause students to also have poor pragmatic competence, which in turn can cause pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication and can lead to communication breakdown (Thomas, 1983).

However, the issue of teachers' pragmatic competence has not attracted the attention it deserves. Instead, the majority of studies have concentrated on investigating the pragmatic failure of EFL learners rather than on the supportive role that teachers can play in the pragmatic acquisition by learners. It is, thus, the purpose of the present study to investigate the pragmatic competence of this group of population. In particular, the present

study examines speech act of requests, the most frequently-occurred speech act in daily life (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Mei-Chen, 1996. Additionally, it is a face-threatening speech act speakers can hardly avoid, especially, when social variables of their counterpart are not taken into account (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The previous research, Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (in Wijayanto, 2011), reported that EFL learners were more aware of grammatical errors than pragmatic error. Niezgodna and Rover (in Wijayanto, 2011), also reported that EFL students judged grammatical and pragmatic errors more seriously than the ESL sample did. However low-proficiency learners in both EFL and ESL groups recognized more pragmatic than grammatical errors, whereas high proficiency learners showed the opposite tendency. Schauer (2006) reported that from the data (53 participants: 16 German students studying at a British University, 17 German students enrolled in a higher education institution in Germany, and 20 British English native-speaking control) show that the German EFL participants were less aware of pragmatics infelicities than the ESL group and that the ESL learners increased their pragmatic awareness significantly during their stay in Great Bitanian.

The present study examines request strategies. From those backgrounds, the researcher would like to conduct an analysis entitled “PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN REQUESTS: A CASE OF THAI ENGLISH TEACHERS.”

B. Problem Statement

The study was carried out to answer the three following problem statement.

1. What request strategies are used by Thai English teachers?
2. Does social status of the interlocutor influence the types of request strategies?
3. Does social distance of the interlocutor influence the types of request strategies?

C. Objective of the Study

The present study is aimed at the following three objectives.

1. To describe the request strategies used by Thai English teachers
2. To describe whether social status of the interlocutor influence the types of request strategies
3. To describe whether social distance of the interlocutor influence the types of request strategies

D. Benefit of the Study

The researcher expects that this research can give benefits as follows:

1. Theoretical Benefit the result of this research will provide the scenario of pragmatic competence of Thai English teachers in request. Beside, it will reveal whether two social variables: social status and social distance have any relationship with the teachers' utterances. It will also provide

information about factors contributing to the degree of pragmatic competence in request the teachers possess.

2. Practical Benefit

a. English Teachers

The result of this study may help raise English teachers' awareness of the importance of pragmatic knowledge and competence leading to their incorporation of this area into their classroom practice.

b. Future Researchers

The result of this study can be useful to add the reference for other researcher generally to analyze the other request strategies according to pragmatics study.