

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Kabagarama (1996) cited the definitions of 'communication' from different sources and perspectives of the scholars as followed:

- Miller and Steinberg view communication as a process of conveying meaning deliberately in order to modify behavior. Thus, people do their utmost to select and organize words in an attempt to impact others' behavior.
- Ruesch and Bateson, however, stress the importance of an unintended message that can also influence behavior. Always that the meaning attaches to the message we do not intend to deliver. Therefore, communication can occur whenever the meaning is attached to the messages.
- Samour and Porter aim communication at attributing meanings to behavior or its residue due to past experiences and particular cultures.

Kabagarama suggests that the definition is not crucial; rather the awareness and recognition of its importance in addition to the knowledge of how to communicate effectively should be taken into account.

Carr (1979) denotes communication as essential to human survival, like breathing. He asserts that human beings, as social animals, live together in order to share meaning and know the world. People, therefore, cannot *not* communicate since communication creates meaning. We share information by interacting with each other. Carr adds that even though communication is a vital part of human's lives, we found it is difficult to communicate (perfectly), especially in intercultural communication which is the interaction between strangers. Conflict Research Consortium of University of Colorado mentions that communication problems, or misunderstanding, is a vital cause and effect of conflict. It reaffirms that poor communication skills lead to misunderstanding and conflict. When relationships are strained, people, consequently, communicate not as openly or accurately as they usually do in normal situations.

Communication problems can arise from a variety of factors: the sender, the message, the channel, the environment, or the receiver. Communicating through

one's first language is difficult enough to make it effective. Imagine communicating by speaking a language that is not one's mother tongue. The distinction of culture and language, either verbal or nonverbal, are the additional factors to cause communication problems and conflict.

Thai Airways International, as a passenger carrier airline, is now flying to destinations in 34 countries, equating to 60 cities all over the world. Its passengers are definitely varied in speaking language and culture. From the observation of its in-flight conversations between the cabin attendants and English speaking passengers, there are frequent conflicts that occur as a result of miscommunication. Also the report from the department of In-flight Services and Cabin Crew Development reveals that in 2005, about 5 percent of passenger complaints related to communication. This study, as a result, is conducted in order to find out the reasons behind the conflicts in a hope that the findings of the study will be useful to the department of Language Teaching and Training of THAI.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research Questions

1.2.1 What is the most common communication problem found between in-flight managers of Thai Airways International and English speaking passengers?

1.2.2 What is the most common communication problem found between air pursers of Thai Airways International and English speaking passengers?

1.2.3 Is there any relationship between their experience of exposure in English and their communication problems?

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to find the most common communication problems found between the subjects, who are THAI's in-flight managers (IM) and air pursers (AP), and English speaking passengers. It also focuses on investigating the relationship between their experience of English exposure and their problems in communicating with English speaking passengers.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study was done with the samples chosen from the in-flight managers and air pursers of Thai Airways International (THAI) who are currently flying on European routes which are long range flights. The subjects were randomly selected. The total number of the subjects was 40 consisting of 20 in-flight managers and 20 air pursers.

This study sought to find out the most common communication problems found between those two categories of cabin attendants with English speaking passengers. It also intended to figure out whether there is any relationship between the subjects' experience in using English and their type of problems in communicating in English.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In-flight manager refers to the category of cabin attendants who are responsible for all cabin attendants and take care of all passengers, especially in First and Business class, on each flight.

Air purser refers to a category of cabin attendants who acts as a chief and is responsible for the cabin attendants and takes care of the passengers in the Economy class on each flight.

English speaking passengers refers to the passengers who are able to communicate in English fluently regardless of the nationality.

English exposure refers to five kinds of experiences in being exposed to English which are; taking at least one additional English course, staying in an English speaking country, having a family member who speaks English as a first language, having an English speaking person staying in the same place, and staying with an English speaking family.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

If the result of the study shows the most common problems in communication of the in-flight managers and air pursers with the passengers, the English teaching department of THAI, then, will be able to design the syllabuses of the English courses for in-flight managers and air pursers to provide them with the knowledge they lack

and to prevent those problems happening.

If it is found out that there is a positive correlation between the subjects' experience of English exposure and their English communication skills, the English teaching department of THAI will provide their staff with courses which emphasize more on giving them the opportunity to be exposed to English and encourage them to be exposed to English as much as possible.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The contents of this study are presented in the following sequences.

Chapter one contains the background, statement of problems, objectives and the scope of the study, definitions of terms, significance of the study, and organization of the study. Chapter two reviews the related foreign literature and research work done in Thailand. Chapter three gives information about the subjects, the instruments used in the study, the procedure and data analysis. Chapter four presents the results of the study. Finally, chapter five summarizes the study, discusses the results, draws conclusions and makes recommendations for further study.