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يَوْمَ تَبْرَأُ بَيْنِي وَأَبْنَاءَ بَنِي آدَمَ طَائِفَةٌ لَمْ يُغْنِيَا مِنْ مَلِيئَتِنَا

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING AUTHENTIC
MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH MODALS TO
THAI EFL STUDENTS

BY

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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

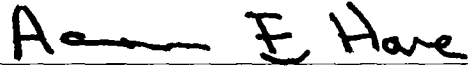
The present study sought to evaluate a pedagogical approach for an English language proficiency course. It sought to investigate an understanding of the semantics of the English modal system among a selected group of Thai EFL learners. It further evaluated whether the use of authentic materials is effective in teaching the English modal system. The research was conducted at Warakaminnuboon School, a secondary school in Bangkok, Thailand. There were 30 subjects who participated in this study. The study employed a time-series design. The subjects had pretests and posttests. The pretests, which were administered during the first two weeks, required the subjects to write essays on expository topics. All the subjects received the treatment (the use of authentic materials) after the pretest period. After the treatment, the subjects were required to write two further essays during the posttest period. A comparison of the means using SPSS paired t-test was performed to investigate research question. In dealing with this, the means of the occurrence of the coherent messages using English modals were compared between the pretests and posttests. The findings of the study were (1) The use of English modal system displayed by EFL students was at best sporadic. The subjects in the study seemed to send as many incoherent messages as coherent messages indicating that they did not have a real understanding of the English modal system. (2) The use of authentic materials had a significant effect in helping learners reduce the incorrect use of English modals as there was a significant difference in the means of using modals in the subjects' essays written before and after treatment. Findings were interpreted in terms of existing research on the use of authentic materials. Limitation and teaching implication are also highlighted.

ملخص البحث

يتناول هذا البحث أساليب تعليم المهارات لمادة اللغة الإنجليزية. ويستقصي البحث فهم الابعاد الدلالية للأفعال المساعدة في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى مجموعة مختارة من التايلنديين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (Thai EFL learners). وقد قامت الدراسة بتقويم فعالية المواد الأساسية في تدريس هذا الأسلوب في الإنجليزية. وقد أجري البحث على ثلاثين طالبا في مدرسة وركنبن (Warakaninnuboon)، وهي مدرسة ثانوية، في بانكوك، تايلند. استخدم البحث أسلوب المجموعات الزمنية (time-series design) وذلك بإجراء اختبارات قبلية (pretests) وبعديّة (posttests) على الطلاب. وتتطلب الاختبارات القبلية التي تمّ تقديمها لهم في الأسبوعين الأولين كتابةً موضوعات تفسيرية. ثم تمّ تعريض المساهمين للمواد الأصلية وبعد ذلك طلب منهم كتابة موضوعين إضافيين أثناء تطبيق الاختبارات البعدية. ثم أجرينا المقارنة بينهم لإبراز المتوسط النسبي (Means)، وذلك باستخدام اختبار SPSS paired t-test لاستكشافمدى التأثير. وذلك بمقارنة المتوسط النسبي لوقوع الانسجام بين الاختبارات القبلية والبعديّة في استخدامهم للأفعال المساعدة في اللغة الإنجليزية. وتتلخص نتائج البحث في (1) استخدام الأفعال المساعدة في الإنجليزية لدى دارسيها من غير الناطقين بها متقطع وغير مستمر، وهو ما يدل على عدم فهمهم للأفعال المساعدة في الإنجليزية. (2) يؤثّر استخدام المواد الأصلية تأثيرا ملحوظا في تقليل أخطاء الطلاب في استخدامهم للأفعال المساعدة، بدليل الفرق الشاسع في المتوسط النسبي بين استخدام المساهمين (الطلبة) للأفعال المساعدة في الإنشاء المكتوب قبل استعمال المواد الأصلية وبعده. وقد تمّ تحليل نتائج البحث استناداً على الأبحاث السابقة في استخدام المواد الأصلية. وقد انتهت الدراسة بتبيان آثار هذه الدراسة على أساليب التعليم.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is full adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Teaching English as a Second Language).




Adrian E. Hare
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is full adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Teaching English as a Second Language).



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledgement by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

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Date... *22 December 2005*

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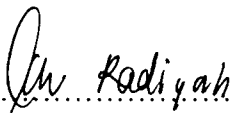
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Dedicated to

Special persons in my life

My father Nimae Nidehah

My mother Marian Nidehah

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Teaching materials are a key component in most language programs. Whether the teacher uses a textbook, institutionally prepared materials, or makes use of his or her own materials, instructional materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. Some teachers use published instructional materials as their primary teaching resource. This is because the materials provide the basis for the content of lessons, the balance of skills taught, and the kinds of language practice students take part in (Richards, 2002). In other situations, materials serve primarily to supplement the teacher's instruction. For learners, materials may provide the major source of contact they have with the language apart from the teacher. Hence, the role and uses of materials in a language program are significant aspect of language curriculum development.

Essentially, any work purporting to give an overview of resources for the classroom must refer to the wealth of materials produced regularly for and by teachers to enable them to do the job most effectively, and with the most suitable equipment for the courses as they are perceived at the time. Smalley & Morris (1993), in referring to the same idea, suggested that as philosophies of language learning evolve, so the teaching materials must respond to new classroom needs.

The general consensus indicates that the use of particular types of materials and resources is determined to some extent by methodological considerations. In other words, good teaching practice is characterized by a balanced and purposeful use of particular types of materials, and resources have the potential to enhance, support and structure learning. In fact, Nunan (1985) cited in (Pachler & Field 1997) outlined some characteristics that materials should have:

- Materials should be clearly linked to the curriculum they serve;
- Materials should be authentic in terms of text and task;
- Materials should stimulate interaction;
- Materials should allow learners to focus on formal aspects of the language;
- Materials should encourage learners to develop learning skills, and skills in learning-how-to-learn;
- Materials should encourage learners to apply their developing language skills to the world beyond the classroom.

It seems that the materials produced in the greatest numbers and those most familiar to teachers are textbooks (Dask, 1988). A foreign or second language textbook is designed to provide basic coursework and explanation about how the language works. Different textbooks reflect different approaches to language teaching and learning. As a rule, older textbooks emphasized grammar, reading, and translation. The textbooks of the 1950s and 1960s usually focused on listening and speaking. In the 1970s, textbooks became somewhat more eclectic, combining elements of several different approaches. Today, textbooks are generally written with the development of communicative competence in mind, that is, with an emphasis on the ability to use language in practical situations (Rubin & Thomson, 1982).

Whatever the textbook, it will not contain everything to be covered in a course; neither will all its explanations strictly coincide with those of the teacher. It is important to realize that our textbook is merely one printed source of information about the foreign language, albeit a very important one. Bowers & Brumfit (1991) contended that choosing materials for a course is always worrying. As more and more new books appear on the market, as more and more methods are recommended, our choice grows. Many teachers feel that their main problem is finding the right materials: if they only had a good book, how much better their teaching would be! Instead of participating in the day-to-day decisions that have to be made about what to teach and how to teach it, it is easy to just sit back and operate the system, secure in the belief that the wise and virtuous people who produced the textbook knew what was good for us. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. Even with the best teaching materials it is an inefficient approach - no course book contains exactly what is required for a particular individual or class. Taking note of such criticism, course books reflect the writer's own preferred methodology. Grammar, for example, can be presented inductively or deductively but there tends not to be a choice of methods within one course book. The readings in textbooks are frequently written by the authors merely to illustrate points of form, and frequently lack interest and grace, as well as authenticity (Dask 1988; Richards 2002). When students are locked in to examining uninteresting readings, and then have to do exercises and write an essay on an assigned topic, trying to do exactly what the teacher wants, then it is no wonder that there is not much engagement with language or with the urge to use language to communicate. And textbooks are sometimes a very long way indeed from reflecting the needs and interests of students. As approaches change, we expect our books to reflect and incorporate current theories.

Crawford (1994) cited in Richards (2002) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the use of commercial textbooks in teaching. Textbooks provide structure and a syllabus for a program; help standardize instruction; maintain quality; provide a variety of learning resources; are efficient; can provide effective language models and input; can train teachers; and they are visually appealing. However, there are also potential negative effects of commercial textbooks. Textbooks may contain inauthentic language (see Widdowson 1976); they may distort content; they may not reflect students' needs; and finally they can deskill teachers.

From many linguists' points of view, it seems that instructional materials should be authentic. This can be seen from what Crawford (1994) has also discussed. According to the author (Crawford, 1994), language in an instructional material should be functional and must be contextualized. Furthermore, the language development should require learner engagement in purposeful use of language, and the language should be realistic and authentic.

Thus, authenticity is an important element that needs to be considered in selecting and choosing materials. With the onset of the communicative movement a greater awareness of the need to develop students' skills for the real world has meant that teachers endeavour to simulate this world in the classroom. One way of doing this has been to use authentic materials, in the expectation that exposing students to the language of the real world will help them acquire an effective productive and receptive competence in the target language. In other words, the use of authentic texts, embracing both the written and spoken word, helps to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and student's capacity to participate in real world events.

Tomlinson (1998) defines an authentic text as one created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced. In other words, authentic materials refer to materials which are used in genuine communication in the real world, which are not specifically prepared for the teaching and learning of English (Macdonal & Badger, 2000).

There is now a consensus in language teaching that the use of authentic materials in the classroom is beneficial to the learning process. Thus, this idea initiates the objective of this study: that is, to demonstrate that the use of authentic materials with a group of students will help them to improve their fluency in written language. However, we are also prone to see the drawback of this approach as it is still being researched and that it needs a longitudinal study of its kind to see the desired result.

Background of the study

From 1913, when English was first introduced into the Thai public school curriculum, until 1977, when attempts were made to remove it, English was a required subject of instruction beginning in the fifth year of primary school. As the country's population expanded, and with it schools enrolment, so did the number of English learners. This increase, however, was not accompanied by a similar expansion of the pool of qualified teachers. As a result, English instruction suffered.

In Thailand, especially at the primary and secondary level, syllabus and text have been synonymous terms, since one Government-prescribed text has generally been used throughout the system and the language points therein have formed the basis for

syllabus descriptions and outlines, as well as examinations for evaluating knowledge of learners completing the curriculum.

In reference to English, English is the major foreign language taught in Thai secondary schools and success in the study of English to some degree affects opportunities for tertiary education. Although most tertiary education in Thailand is through the medium of the Thai language, entry to some universities and to some courses depends on learners' proficiency in English. Usually this proficiency is measured by a pre-university examination. In the Thai education system, in order to study in the government universities or even some private universities, learners need to pass the University Entrance Test. Learners with similar proficiency in other subjects but with high proficiency in English have more opportunity to enter the faculty of their choice. In the case of English, the areas needed to be integrated into the English language lessons are the four language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening), the three components in the language content (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation), as well as knowledge from other subjects and moral values.

However, in an EFL country like Thailand where English language is taught as a foreign language, the teaching of how to use English appropriately is still rarely exposed to students since they are usually exposed to forms. This can be seen from textbooks used in the curriculum. The general view of the text used in the primary and secondary schools is that it is well-written, nicely printed, linguistically and technically sound, and pedagogical dull. Its products, while "knowing" some English, are, for the most part, incapable of utilizing that knowledge. Pupils leaving the system after completing primary school generally left English behind as well; those going to

secondary level are usually in need of remedial instruction to reteach poorly-learned, taught-but-unlearned, or learned but-forgotten points. In sum, texts do not, to some extent, lead toward an effective program of English. Thai secondary schools, on the other hand, make use of a variety of recommended course books, which aim at developing the generally useful common core knowledge of English, that is the indispensable basis for further learning. The demands of university study however go further than this. The requirement for knowledge of the use of appropriate English generally occurs in two situations. Most immediately, it occurs in the English sections of the university entrance examinations, and (probably less importantly) it occurs in the additional reading in English that learners may be expected to do in their university courses (Klinmancee & Sopprasong, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

With the introduction of the Communicational Syllabus in Thai Upper Secondary schools some years back (1989) in which communicative competence (i.e. the ability to understand and use language appropriately in a given situation) is emphasized, developing students' communicative ability has become a difficult task. To some extent, in an EFL country like Thailand, the emphasis on grammar is still important for the most components of English language teaching. Teachers realize that the learning and teaching of grammar and vocabulary are among the most time-consuming and burdensome of all areas involved in the study of language. One of the most difficult grammatical systems is English modals (in Halliday's (1985) terms). The system of English modals has been a continuing source of interest to many researchers as it presents problems, which resist completely satisfying solutions. This is because they are one of the most difficult areas of English grammar (Palmer, 1990). The

problem lies not in the surface positioning of the modals nor in their wide range of meanings, but in associating the right modal with the right meaning. A modal can have more than one meaning and each meaning is a member of an inter-related system. ESL students are confused as to which modal to use in expressing their intended messages. This addresses the importance of meaning of English modals that most ESL/EFL students always overlook. The present study investigates whether the use of authentic materials helps EFL students in understanding language use: hence, in understanding the English modal system.

Most of the teaching has been increasingly dominated by the ubiquitous workbooks churned out regularly by commercial publishing houses and these provide exhaustive exercises in identifying functions and producing appropriate language forms in given situations to prepare students for the examination. The big question is, at the end of it all, are the students able to communicate appropriately? We are faced with the problem of the unreality of the exercises in the workbooks on the one hand, and the reality that what they have learned in the classroom will not be put to use outside as a result of the dominance of the national language as the language of everyday communication. The researcher believes that one way to improve the effectiveness in teaching English modals is through the use of authentic materials.

Significance of the Study

In the last two decades various new aspects of applied linguistics have appeared. Linguists have realized that language use means more than dealing with pure linguistic elements such as vocabulary and grammar. The psychological background and the social context of the message have become important for a real understanding

of language structure. Awareness of this development has found its way to many institutes that deal with foreign language teaching. Thus, this study suggests to teachers that if they paid particular attention to how and when certain language forms were used, they would be able to help their students to communicate competently in English language. Sometimes teachers feel something related to their teaching has gone wrong. This is not to say that teachers have given up. We still have the firm belief that students can be taught how to communicate provided that our teaching is informed by an understanding of how communication works.

Furthermore, it is expected that the findings of the study will enable teachers to gain an insight into how to teach one of the most difficult English grammatical systems, that is, the English modal system. It is also hoped that this will allow teachers to plan more efficient strategies for the teaching of English modals, as well as identify the areas to which greater attention needs to be paid.

The Purpose of the Study - Research Questions

The present study seeks to investigate how Thai students learn English modals. It will further seek to evaluate the effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching English modals. It will derive empirical evidence of how this knowledge affects the learners' understanding of the English modal system. The study is designed to investigate the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Thai students display an understanding of the semantics of the English modal system in written communication?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the appropriate use of English modals in written communication before and after the use of authentic texts?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent that Thai learners display their understanding the system of English modals. It will further illustrate the effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching this grammatical system. In finding out some results, there must be some concepts related to this field. This chapter is built up on citations from concepts related to the study and current research findings over the last decades. This broad evaluation of literature is organized into four categories: language form and function in language learning and teaching; the English modal system; defining authentic materials; and the use of authentic materials in language learning and teaching.

Language Form and Function in Language Learning and Teaching

In all languages form and meaning are closely related. Little, Devitt & Singleton (1991) pointed out that it is true that we often succeed in communicating our intended meanings despite formal inadequacies of one kind or another - this frequently happens to all of us not only in foreign languages but also in our first language. However, there is a point beyond which disregard of grammatical form virtually guarantees a breakdown in communication. In a very real sense communication depends on grammar.

Because meaning and form are closely related, a central part of the communicative purpose is to discover means of enabling learners to understand more acutely how the

forms of their target language are organized in the creation of meaning. In fact, the concept of language functions has been highly influential in language teaching and learning (Cook, 1985). A preliminary point that needs to be established is that language functions are in some way psychologically real to the second language learners.

Lay persons, language learners, and many teachers themselves would probably see the central pedagogical role of the language teacher as the teaching of grammar, and the correcting of learners' errors. However, the place of grammar in the language classroom is currently rather uncertain. This uncertainty has been brought about with the development of communicative approaches to language teaching, along with theoretical and empirical insights from second language acquisition research (Nunan, 1991)

McDonough & Shaw (1993) in referring to the same line, pointed out that particularly in the early days of enthusiasm for the new communicative movement, there was sometimes a tendency to regard the design of communicative materials as the only way forward, and to polarize "function versus grammar" as if they were somehow in apposition. A moment's thought will show that this is not a very balanced perspective, indeed one that is entirely incorrect. It is clearly not possible to engage in purposeful communication in a language without being able to formulate the structures of that language as well.

The authors made a further contribution by noting that it is possible for most teachers to think of classroom situations where grammar practice takes place with very little

reference to everyday reality, where learners rehearse patterns simply in order to get them right rather than to express meaning. We need, then, to be a little cautious here, because there is no reason in principle why grammar practice should not be placed in a communicative context, and functional practice take place only as a list of separate and decontextualized items. Taking note of this argument, language function and language form, then, are not an isolation operation but part of a network of interconnected factors. Both form and function need to be taken into account in materials which use communicative concepts as their design principle as well.

Rather than insisting on a clear distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical forms, Lock (1996) contended that the focus is usually on the appropriateness of a form for a particular communicative purpose in a particular context. He also suggested that the primary concern is with the functions of structures and their constituents and with their meanings in context. A grammarian interested in this kind of description is likely to use data from authentic texts in specific contexts.

Cadlin and Mercer (1996) point out that in textbooks, grammar is very often presented out of context. Learners are given isolated sentences, which they are expected to internalize through exercises involving repetition, manipulating, and grammatical transformation. These exercises are designed to provide learners with formal, declarative mastery, but unless they provide opportunities for learners to explore grammatical structures in context, they make the task of developing procedural skill - being able to use the language for communication - more difficult than it needs to be. This is because learners are denied the opportunity of seeing the systematic relationships that exist between form, meaning, and use.

Rao (1999) further illustrates that instead of teaching grammar as an end, and drilling patterns for their own sake, it is quite necessary to relate grammar teaching to meaning and use. In other words, language structure practice should be given in contexts which involve some basic principles of appropriateness. So it is fitting that English teaching should be done in such a way that it is at least partly communicatively oriented, so that the students can equip themselves with appropriate language use. In teaching grammar, for example, Rao (1999) suggests that it is important to make the language situations and language material as realistic as possible; and instances of artificiality and contrivance ought to be made as unobtrusive as possible. Immediately after supplying students with adequate explanation of grammar function, the teacher should provide them with suitable situations to practice the rules so that the students can ultimately use them in real life. For instance, modal auxiliaries is one of the knottiest problems. It is not sufficient to paraphrase the modals like “can” and “may” by “possible”; what should be made clear is that the two modals are not synonyms and there are contexts in which only one of them is appropriate.

As teachers, we need to help learners see that effective communication involves achieving harmony between functional interpretation and formal appropriacy (Halliday 1981) by giving them practice that dramatize the relationship between grammatical items and the contexts. In fact, the notion of “context” has always generated a great deal of excitement amongst language teachers who thought that if they paid particular attention to how and when certain language forms were used, they would be able to help their students to communicate competently in a foreign language. Instead, teachers have been confronted with lists of ‘functions’ categorized

under headings somewhat arbitrarily linked to imagined communicative situations. As a result of language being broken down into unintegrated parts, applied linguists have not helped teachers and failed to do what Widdowson (1979:59), cited in Wolf (1999), argued should be the goal of the applied linguist namely: 'To specify the nature of different communicative acts, the way they are realized, the way they combine in different varieties of language use.

If learners are not given opportunities to explore grammar in context, it will be difficult for them to see how and why certain forms are used to express different communicative meanings. We need to supplement form-focused exercises with an approach that dramatizes for learners the fact that different forms enable them to express different meanings. This means that grammar allows them to make meanings of increasingly sophisticated kinds in order to communicate their own attitude towards events and affairs (Cadlin and Mercer, 1996). Unfortunately, many courses fail to make clear the relationship between form and function. Learners are taught about the forms, but not how to use them to communicate meaning. If the communicative value of alternative grammatical forms is not made clear to learners, they come away from the classroom with the impression that the alternative forms exist merely to make things difficult for them.

The English Modal System

The system of English modals has been a continuing source of interest to many researchers as it presents problems which resist completely satisfying solutions. Many pages, chapters, even books, have been written about the modal auxiliary verbs in