

# LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EUROPE AND THAILAND AS A PARADIGM OF CULTURAL TRANSITION

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## Introduction: A Lesson from the Revolution of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932

“I am determined to give my absolute power to *all* of my people in the Kingdom of Siam, but I do not intend to give this supreme authority to *any single person* or to *any groups of men* for his or their own advantage.”

These above words, spoken by King Rama VII before he abdicated in March 1935, constitute the Majesty's response to Siam's transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy, a very dramatic political event which was fostered by groups of civilians and military officers of the Siamese Army. All of the military officers and civilians were Western-trained. Many of the military officers had received training in Germany and France; while all of the civilians had been educated in France or England.

The group, the so-called *People's Party*, which carried out the Revolution of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932, believed that the abolition of the absolute monarchy would bring,

simultaneously, both *instant democracy* and *prosperity* to Siam. But as we now know, the Revolution did not lead to any basic structural changes in Thai society.

The *People's Party's* understanding of democracy suggests that their political consciousness had its roots in the westernization of the Siamese educational system, which took place in the reign of King Rama V (r.1868-1910). The core of the *People's Party*, especially those who had been trained in Europe, were convinced that so long as Siam remained an absolute monarchy, the country was unwesternized, and therefore, undeveloped. To elevate Siam to western standard demanded that the old political system be replaced with a new, democratic one. In the opinion of the *People's Party*, this change would make the people of Siam democratic and civilized.

*Democracy* in this sense emphasizes the democratic *form* of the state rather than its actual *content*. This idea of democracy as a *ready-made product* can be explained as an aftermath of the westernization of the educational system in the reign of King Rama V, when the traditional Siamese concepts of knowledge and how to gain knowledge were completely transformed.

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*Knowledge* in the traditional Thai way of thinking referred to knowledge of Buddhist precepts. Education, therefore, served a religious purpose. With educational reform, the idea of knowledge as religious content was replaced by the concept of knowledge as worldly content which existed in the West. This change was decisive as it consequently transformed the traditional concept of gaining knowledge. More emphasis was placed on the acquisition of worldly knowledge such as mathematics, geography, science, political science etc, which could be obtained from books rather than from experience. Accordingly, the concept of *importing western civilization and democracy*, which culminated in the political change of 1932, represents the concept of Thai way of thinking that most of the Thais *principally* are not interested in reaching a real understanding of the genesis of and philosophy behind western culture and technology. It was, and it is still more convenient for a Thai to *adopt* western knowledge as a *ready-made product*, which deprives one's own initiative.

This main idea of the paper will be illustrated in the *concept of learning foreign languages in Europe and Thailand as a paradigm of cultural transition*, which also encompasses in the next example from Thai history.

### **“Knowledge as Power” and Foreign Language as a “Bridge to Gain Power: An Experience from the Delegation of John Crawford”**

In the year 1822, an English delegation led by John Crawford arrived in Siam. It was noted that:

“The negotiation was extremely difficult, as it could not be carried on without several interpreters. John Crawford spoke in English to his Malay interpreter. Then the conversation was translated into Thai by another interpreter. The translation process of the answer from Siamese ministers took place in the same manner. This negotiation did not bring about any treaty.”<sup>2</sup>

The negotiation made Siam conscious of the importance of English as a means of communication. King Rama III (r. 1824-1851), who was then in charge of foreign affairs, was also very impressed by the discipline and uniforms of the Indian soldiers who accompanied British-trained Crawford's delegation. King Rama III directed that his own guard be trained in the western way.<sup>3</sup> Further, His Majesty had a textbook on cannon firing translated into the Thai language and ordered many cannons and much ammunition for his army. His successor Rama IV (r. 1851-1868), ordered gunboats directly from England. His Majesty also arranged for the formation and training of troops following the western military model.

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<sup>2</sup> My translation. *The History of the Ministry of Education 1892-1964*, published on the occasion of 72 years of the Ministry of Education. Bangkok: Kurusapa 1964, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *The History of the Armed Forces during the Rattanakosin Period*, published in a book given at the funeral of Colonel Phraya Damgoeng-ronnapob at Thepsirin Temple 1967, pp. 23-27.



This is the origin of the present-day Royal Thai Army.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Burma, for centuries a traditional enemy of Siam, became a colony of Britain in 1886 during the reign of King Rama V, and the arrival of a few French gunboats at the mouth of the Chao-Phraya River in 1894 made Siam aware of the threat the West posed to the political independence of the Kingdom.

The *People's Party* was also seduced by the power of western technology. During the Revolution of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 it practiced its own version of gunboat diplomacy warning one of the leading princes, Prince Boripat, that gunboats would be used to prevent his escape from the capital.<sup>5</sup>

It was the world political situation that induced King Rama V, or King Chulalongkorn, (r. 1868-1910), to undertake extensive educational reforms. Already King Rama IV had been aware of the realities of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism, the contributions of the christian missionaries, particularly in the field of medicine, and the superiority of western technology. His Majesty was convinced that English was indispensable as an access to western knowledge, technology and power. Thus, the study of English became an important

means of attaining western ideas and thinking.<sup>6</sup>

"Knowledge is power" as Francis Bacon said about 400 years ago reflecting the process of intellectual enlightenment in Europe at that time. In the meantime, the intellectuals in Europe gradually changed from monks to laymen. It can be said that Siam, a hundred years ago, also went through a fairly similar experience. The only difference being perhaps that western technology was born within its own culture and society, whereas science in Thai society was *imported* from abroad.

The educational reforms of King Rama V involved both the sending of members of the Royal Family and some civilians to study in Europe and the evolution of the idea of gaining knowledge from overseas and bringing it back to Siam. A prince who took part in the reforms expressed his views thus:

"As western technology was *not made in Siam*, it had to be transferred into our country. A foreign language (in this case English) does not have any value by itself, but should be considered as a *device* or a *bridge*, and the *teacher* as a *means* of importing western knowledge."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bertha Blount. *McFarland of Siam*. New York: Vantage Press Inc. 1958, p. 45. In: Supannie Kanchanathiti: *The Role of Missionaries in Thailand from King Rama III -King Rama V.*, M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University 1964, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Wit Witsatavet. *The Philosophy of Thai Education 1868-1932*. Bangkok: Funny Publishers 1983, pp. 66.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> See: Satuean Suppasophon. *The Life and Struggle of Phraya Songsuradet*, published by the Sub-Committee for the Book Production of the Project 60 Years of Democracy. Bangkok: Creative Publishing, 1992, p. 98.



The fact that Thailand could not produce its own technology but had to import it from the west, emphasized the idea of acquiring western knowledge and technology as *instant knowledge*. This idea led to what I call a *consumer mentality of learning*, whereby Thais believed they could import, consume, and instantly absorb Western knowledge without any consideration of the origin or goals of the imported knowledge or its compatibility with Thailand's own cultural background. Efforts by King Rama VI (1910-1925) and some government officers to modify western knowledge and technology based on Thai traditions were in vain.

We can justifiably speak here of the goal of importing knowledge from the western world as a hope for *instant knowledge*. This is the idea which was in evidence some 60 years later, during the Revolution of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932, when revolutionary leaders aspired to bring *instant democracy* to Thailand.

Let us cast a look back at the traditional Thai way of gaining knowledge or learning foreign languages and compare it to the education reform initiated by King Rama V. In traditional Thai culture, education was conducted in monasteries by Buddhist monks. While this kind of learning aimed at giving literacy to Thai males, its main purpose was to create "good Buddhists." On the whole, a "good Buddhist" believed in the "principle of Karma", understood that life was nothing but suffering and was taught the way to relieve this suffering. The aims of monastery education were, therefore, essentially ethical and religious, with *Pali* as a linguistic vehicle for attaining this peaceful religious life.

It could be said that western languages did not play a significant role in the history of language learning in old Siam. The *Novice School*, founded by the French Catholics in the year 1668 in the reign of King Narai the Great during the Ayutthaya period, was the only western language school worthy of mention in old Siam. Although not popular among the Thais, the Novice School was supported by King Narai for reasons of diplomacy and politics. The first boarding school in Siam, it was based on a French model where foreign languages, Latin, French, and lessons on Christianity were systematically taught.<sup>8</sup>

This school did not last long as the political and military influences of the French Catholics brought them into conflict with the Siamese authorities at the end of the reign of King Narai. These conflicts, which served to discredit and reduce the power of the French in Siam, also decreased roles of French and Latin as foreign languages.<sup>9</sup>

As previously mentioned, Thai society in the old days ideally aimed at creating men with religious precepts. Here, the educational concept corresponded with the religious concepts of Buddhism. Such practices and beliefs were not unknown in Europe in former times, where the

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<sup>8</sup> See: Pornsan Watananguhn. Foreign Language Learning in Thailand - Concept-Method - Theory, Part I: A Historical Backward (1656-1908), in *Festschrift, Chulalongkorn University-30 Years German Section*. Bangkok: Duang Kamon, 1987, pp. 120-127. (in German)

<sup>9</sup> Kachon Sukapanit. Documents in the Reign of King Narai. In: *The Facts from the Past*. Bangkok: Klet-Thai, 1975.



subordination of the mind and intellect to the spirit of Christianity was praised. Although the monasteries and the Catholic priests represented the religious world in the same way that Buddhist monks did in Siam, the roles of European churchmen and the Latin language were very different. Buddhist monks and Pali did not serve as absolute symbols of the classical Indian world, whereas Latin, as the cultural and scholarly vehicle for European thinking reflected the hegemony of Christianity and represented an inroad into the ancient classical world. Unlike European scholars who could attain "learned scholar status" by studying classical literary works in the original languages of Greek and Latin, Thai people never engaged in the study of Pali as a means to access the cultural supremacy of India. The gradual phasing out of Vulgar Latin, i.e. Latin at the end of the Ancient Roman Empire, which began around the year 600, and the political independence of new states in Europe led to the emergence of different nations in Europe. In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries there already existed, besides Latin, various Romance languages such as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and French. In the high Middle Ages, Latin possessed a new social status. On the one hand, it was still a means of communication within the Catholic Church and among scholars, civil servants and representatives of the higher classes. On the other hand, for the common people in Europe, Latin had to be acquired. Thereby, Latin gradually lost its function as the language of communication and was considered as the *language of scholarly*

*communication*.<sup>10</sup> In India, the land of Lord Buddha, Buddhism was reabsorbed by Hinduism after Buddha's death about 2500 years ago. Because Pali and Latin were not spoken in everyday life, both languages had to be *systematically taught as foreign languages*.

This fact is vitally important, for it implies the new social status of both Indo-germanic languages as so-called *dead languages*, and above all, it implies the dominance of the *deductive* teaching method for Pali and Latin lessons, based on the model of traditional grammar and translation. In Europe in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, *Donatus'* language learning method of mastering the grammatical rules of Latin was supported by the idea of the Scholastics that Latin grammar was logical. As a result, the study of language meant the study of logical thinking.<sup>11</sup> In Siam, Pali or Sanskrit was learned as a means to understand the Buddhist Holy Scripture, just as Greek and Hebrew were taught in Theological Colleges in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The teaching of scripture implied recitation and memorization. To master Latin and Pali meant not only to master the grammatical rules of the respective languages in terms of *Metallanguage*, but also to be adept in translation. The

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<sup>10</sup> Szulc, Aleksander. *Die Fremdsprachendidaktik - Konzeptionen - Methoden - Theorien*. Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1976, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> The idea that all languages principally have the same logical structure led to the emergence of the theory of universal grammar in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. See also Szulc A., *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Watson, K. *Education Development in Thailand*. Hong Kong: Dah Hua Printing Co., first published 1980, S. 71.



method of *rote learning* was used both in Europe and traditional Siam to teach these skills.

During the Middle Ages in Europe, the concept of foreign language learning was based on the model of traditional grammar, whereas the teaching method was absolutely intuitive. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this teaching model for Latin based on the model of traditional grammar still persisted.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that this kind of language teaching model has totally governed the teaching of foreign languages up to the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We can conclude from this that the acquisition of Latin and French, as they were taught by the French Catholics in the *Novice school*, was certainly influenced by the methods of teaching Latin and followed the model of traditional grammar.

Another interesting note on the study of Pali and Latin is that the objectives for acquiring these languages were very different. Pali became a language studied mainly for religious objectives while Latin became indispensable for anyone who wished to call himself a *scholar*. Education in this western sense was necessary for the acquisition of *political power*. Pali and Sanskrit were learned as a means to attain *literacy*.<sup>14</sup>

## The Genesis of Foreign Language Learning in Thailand in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

As mentioned earlier, the history of language learning in Europe is similar to that in Thailand in its aims, philosophical concepts and the focus on rote learning and translation based on traditional grammar. The start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, represents a point of transition that merits a comparative consideration. In Europe, there emerged a *modern linguistics* based on the linguistic theories of *Ferdinand de Saussure*, and resulting in the birth of Structuralism and the revival of inductive language learning. On the whole, it can be said that these linguistic contributions have been decisive stimuli for the recognition of the functional use of language in real communication. But the introduction of modern education based on a European model has not totally modernized language learning in Thailand, where traditional methods remain influential. As a result of this legacy, a conflict has arisen between the facile adoption of the *natural* methods of second language learning endorsed by the *communicative approach* for foreign language teaching in the 1970s and remnants of the old modes of learning originally connected with Pali. Traditional learning and the older method of deductive learning have complemented each other, while the traditional method of rote learning based on traditional grammar still persists.

The interrelation between the Thai learning tradition and older imported learning and teaching concepts is reflected in many textbooks on the Thai language. The famous classical Thai grammar of *Phraya*

<sup>13</sup> Szulc, A., *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Wyatt, D.K. *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969, pp. 16-17.



*Uppakit Silapasarn* (1918) and *Kamchai Thonglor* (1925), which combine the grammars of Pali and English, are among the best examples.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the focus of these texts is on the teaching and learning of grammar, as was the foreign language learning tradition in Europe until the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There is no doubt that the root of the pedagogical concept of all foreign languages taught in Thailand, including German, is based on that of English. Generally accepted as the most important foreign language, English has played an important role in Thailand since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is due to socio-cultural and political reasons resulting from western colonialism at that time.

In Thailand, foreign languages have been taught by *native speakers* from the very beginning, not only during the reign of King Narai the Great around 1668, but also at schools founded by missionaries in the reign of King Rama IV (r. 1851-1868). Thus, the influence of foreign teachers has been felt since the beginning of foreign language education in Thailand. Not only was it more effective to learn a foreign language with native speakers, but foreign teachers were also simply indispensable as Thais had not mastered any western foreign languages. Nor did they have any experience in how to teach those languages.

Ladies from upper-class families who had learned English at Siam's first boarding school, *Wanglang School*, founded in the reign of King Rama IV and now called the *Wattana Wittaya Academy*, were appointed to give an enthusiastic reception to diplomats from Europe. The learning of English was still confined to certain social groups, and the language was usually taught in Protestant or Catholic schools by native speakers.

Before the Second World War, women of well-to-do families were often sent to acquire English in Penang. Men either went to Europe or America, or they studied English or French at private Protestant or Catholic schools in Bangkok. It was not until the 1960s that English began to be taught officially from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade as the first foreign language in Thailand.

The communicative approach to teaching English, first officially introduced in Thailand by the Ministry of Education in 1976, was rather controversial,<sup>16</sup> not only because of the *incongruity of the pedagogical concept and the teaching methods*, but also because of the contrast between the *selected textbooks* and the *qualifications of the teachers*. Most Thai teachers teaching English continued to focus on grammar and writing skills. The Ministry of Education also implemented similar curricula and a similar approach for all foreign languages taught in Thai schools. The curriculum of 1990 declares

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<sup>15</sup> Compare: Benchawan Suntrarakul. *The Development of Textbook for Thai*. Ramkamhaeng University Press 1975, and Uppakit Silapasarn, Phraya. *The Thai Language*. Bangkok: Thonburi Rung Wattana Publisher 1971, p. 7.

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<sup>16</sup> Sam-ang Hiranburana. *Evaluation of the Project to Develop English Learning in the Secondary School 1981-1983*. A research project for the Ministry of Education, Bangkok 1985, p. 146. (in Thai)



*communicative competence*<sup>17</sup> the number two learning objective: "The target of foreign language learning for beginners is to develop and practise the four skills. Pupils should be able to use the target language for communication appropriately, and knowledge of the country in which the language is used should also be taken into consideration. These four skills should provide a foundation for learning the foreign language at an advanced level." (curriculum 1990, in Thai).

### **"Communicative or Non - Communicative" Lessons? - A Critical Remark about German Lessons at the Goethe - Institute, Bangkok**

My practical experience with the *communicative approach* came from my involvement as a German teacher at the Goethe Institute in Bangkok during the years 1985-1992. According to the policy of the Goethe Institute at that time, the objective of German lessons was to develop *communicative competence*. This meant that the lessons were to be conducted only in German and in such a way that they helped students practice or reinforced oral communication skills. Errors were to be ignored as long as the learner's utterances could be understood. This depended on the judgement of the teachers. The

effectiveness of this approach is quite questionable, because some teachers persisted in using grammar oriented lessons, while some tried to follow the instructions of the Goethe Institute, and others opted for a middle path, using mixed methods.

I learned a tremendous amount from my experiences at the Goethe Institute. The different teaching methods used by the Thai teachers of German at the Institute show the different interpretations of the communicative approach in Thailand. It is clear that Thai interpretations of communicative competence are conditioned by the specific language learning needs of Thai students in Thailand. The theoretical concept of *communicative competence*<sup>18</sup> was first developed from language philosophy and pragmatics by the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. It has been widely discussed, especially in the field of psycholinguistics. The concept has also been adapted for practical use in foreign language teaching, both in Europe and elsewhere. *The communicative competence* as a learning method is interpreted differently by different foreign language teachers. *The English Language Institute of Chulalongkorn University* views it as a mixture of four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, what this method means at Thai universities offering German courses is still unclear. The dominance of the *communicative approach* in foreign language learning in

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<sup>17</sup> The main objective of the current curriculum of 1996 by the Ministry of Education is functional cognitive. (Information from the conversation with Assist. Prof. Dr. Sudaporn Laksanieyanavin from the Department of Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University, who worked with the Ministry of Education and was responsible for this curriculum.)

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<sup>18</sup> See, Jürgen Habermas. *Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz*. In: Habermas, J./Luhmann, N. *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie*. Frankfurt 1971, pp. 101-141.



Thailand in the last few years can perhaps be explained as a lack of awareness of the origin of this linguistic theory. As far as studies in psycholinguistics in Europe are concerned, research on the *communicative approach* has dealt with *second language acquisition of adult immigrant workers*.<sup>19</sup> Concretely speaking, the *communicative approach* was originally related to *second language acquisition* in the environment of the country of the target language.

As previously mentioned, the methodologies involved in the teaching of English and German in secondary schools have been governed by concepts of learning introduced by the Ministry of Education, especially after 1976, when *communicative competence* was declared an official learning objective. But learning German as a second language in Thailand is not only determined by the policy of Ministry of Education. More decisive has been the close involvement of the *Goethe Institute* in Bangkok since early 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Schools where German is taught have adopted various textbooks and teaching methods used by the Goethe-Institute: the *translation - grammar* oriented lessons of *Schulz-Griesbach* during the 1960s, the *audio-lingual teaching methods* of *Braun Nieder Schmoe* in the 1970s,

and finally the "*communicative approach*" since 1989, reflected in the regional textbooks *Viel Spaß mit Deutsch* (3 volumes). The latter were developed jointly by Thai German teachers and the Goethe-Institute in Munich and are based on cultural comparisons between Thai and German. Another textbook in this joint - venture project - *Lesen macht Spaß* - focuses on reading techniques.

An overview of German lessons at the university level in Thailand presents a heterogeneous picture. This, in my opinion, is the result of two main variables in mutual relation: the university concept of education regarding German and the structure of the science, on the one hand, and the essential academic requirements of teaching and research in the field of psycholinguistics and the teaching of German at Thai universities, on the other.

However, speaking will *never* become indispensable for the acquisition of German and *Germanistik-studies* in Thailand for the following reasons. First, at the university level the study of German comprises much more than learning the practical use of the language, it comprises literary, cultural and linguistic components.

Second, since research on language-learning psychology based on the learning and teaching situation in Thailand is still at the beginning phase, it may be appropriate to ask whether Thais should have foreign language teaching methods based on their own philosophical concepts.

Today, native speakers still play a significant role in the teaching and learning of the German language. We owe special thanks to the Goethe-Institute for providing

<sup>19</sup> Example of empirical projects in Europe concerning the communicative concept in the second language acquisition include: *Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch"* (1975); *Second Language Acquisition by Adult Immigrants. A Field Manual*. The European Science Foundation 1982.

<sup>20</sup> The Goethe-Institute Bangkok was established in the year 1960 with the help of two DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Lectors. See: *25 Jahre Goethe-Institut Bangkok 1960-1985*.



training and teaching-learning materials for school teachers. However, this assistance has one disadvantage: it deprives Thai teachers of the incentive to develop their own teaching methods. In addition, the trend in foreign language learning at Thai universities is towards *language for special purposes*, emphasizing specific skills such as *English for Business* or *German for Hotels*. As a result, cultural content in foreign language learning has declined.<sup>21</sup>

The current emphasis on the acquisition of certain specific skills disregards the authentic learning situation and reflects a *lack of interest in reaching a real understanding of the genesis of and concepts behind western culture and technology. This attitude, in my opinion, could create a lack of awareness of the value of one's own culture*, as shown in various examples from Thai history.

## Findings and Outcome

In the rest of this paper I propose to present a comprehensive view of the teaching and learning of German in Thailand under conditional circumstances. Then, I will conclude by offering an overall judgement of the concept of pedagogic strategies used in teaching German in Thailand.

In spite of the heterogeneity of the various factors in the acquisition of German in

Thailand, there are still some basic requirements of the learning situation here.

(i) We must particularly bear in mind that the acquisition of German in Thailand occurs in a *country in South-East Asia*; properly speaking, it takes place outside the country of the target language, where *direct, everyday contact with the language and social contact with native speakers are seldom possible*. This limited access to authentic language has an effect not only on the *learning process*, but also on the *learner's communicative needs, attitudes, motivation* and therefore, *learning success*.

(ii) The acquisition of German in Thailand is principally the acquisition of adult learners over 16 years of age, and not of children, as German is a *second foreign language* taught in secondary schools in Thailand. Here, I would like to emphasize that *communicative competence* as a cognitive ability for a *discourse analysis* is out of the question for the reason that this ability is already available in the course of the acquisition of the *mother tongue* (L 1).<sup>22</sup>

(iii) There are several models of language acquisition. In our case, the acquisition of German as a second foreign language occurs mainly in a formal school setting, where the basic psychological precondition should be considered: the effect of the *mother tongue* (L 1) and *first foreign*

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<sup>21</sup> Pornsan Watananguhn. Germanistik in Thailand - Einige Aspekte aus thailändischer Sicht. In: *Deutsch als Fremdsprache - Situation eines Faches*, hg. von Lutz Götze Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Dürr 1987, S. 20-33. (in German)

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<sup>22</sup> Compare: Pornsan Tmangraksat. *Der Erwerb der deutschen Tempusflexion bei thailändischen Erwachsenen*, Europäische Hochschulschriften Reihe XXI Linguistik, Vol. 42., Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York: Lang Verlag 1985. (in German)



language, *English*, on the second foreign language, *German*. This model of *classroom learning* complement with the spontaneous acquisition of *German* through informal learning outside the classroom and/or through private enterprises, which require different learning groups and have different objectives. Hence, these heterogeneous backgrounds are determining factors that suggest distinctive learning concepts as well as methods.

For reasons of space it is not possible to give a more detailed discussion of the determining factors. Studies consisting of general and crucial factors that determine the exact course of language acquisition/learning are familiar to most psycholinguists and foreign language teachers. Theories of foreign language learning are *widely discussed in literature* but they are *rarely considered* in terms of their *practical application*.

## Conclusion

In our case, the complexity and heterogeneity of *German* language acquisition in Thailand justify the assumption that the aim of learning *German* *should not be generalized* as a *common goal for all types of learning and for all target groups*.

Ideally, authorities from the Ministry of Education, curriculum planners, textbook writers, as well as school and university *German* teachers should work together to formulate the objective of foreign language learning.

Moreover, formal and informal study of *German* must be considered separately as distinct learning types and properly designed. A pupil who aims to study

*Germanistik* at university certainly has a different *academic objective* from a Thai tourist in *Germany*.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the communicative approach was originally intended for second language learners living in the environment of the target language means, therefore, that it is more appropriate as a technique for the acquisition of foreign language used in natural, everyday life or for the acquisition of foreign language from childhood.<sup>24</sup> Past experience has shown that adults, whose learning psychology is totally different from that of children, require a clear explanation of *German* grammatical structure. Thai English teachers have also had the same experience.<sup>25</sup> Grammar-oriented lessons should not be totally rejected for this kind of instruction conforms with the traditional Thai learning attitude. It is about time to pay attention to our own language learning problems and to develop an independent learning concept. Among the teaching and learning methods imported from the West, the benefits of linguistic competence are often underestimated or ignored.

<sup>23</sup> Also see: Chetana Nagavajara. Literary Study and Higher Education. ASAIHL Lecture of the Year 1982. In : *The Teaching of Literature in ASAIHL Universities*. Published by the University of Hong Kong 1983, S.xiii. (in English)

<sup>24</sup> Jean Piaget. *Le développement de la notion de temps chez l'enfant*, Paris: PUF, 1946. Also see: Wolfgang Klein, *Zweitspracherwerb, Eine Einführung*, 2. Auflage, Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987, pp. 16-26.

<sup>25</sup> This information is quoted from the conversation with Associate Prof. Dr. Sam-ang Hiranburana on the 21.4.1990.



For this reason future academic of research at the *national and international* levels must be based on the authentic learning environment of the country in which the language is being taught. This means that traditional teaching and learning modes should not be totally disregarded. The consequences of a certain methodology differ and depend on learning variables (compare Chastain/ Woerdehoff 1968)<sup>26</sup> which should be guided by learning success (compare R. Dietrich 1980, 3).<sup>27</sup>

The teaching method for German in Thailand must be conceived and evaluated in accordance with *empirical* strategies and teaching methods that have been shown to achieve the maximum learning success.

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