Teaching English as a foreign language in the glocalized contexts of South East Asia and Thailand

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Numa Markee
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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THANKS

I would like to thank Dr. Pragasit Sitthikul, President of ThaiTESOL and organizer of the ThaiTESOL 2016 Conference for the invitation to give this opening plenary talk.

I would also like to thank the US Department of State and in particular RELO Joëlle Uzarski based at the US Embassy in Bangkok for funding and facilitating the consultancy that has enabled me to be here in Khon Kaen today.
Outline of the talk

Oxford English Dictionary definition of “glocalization”
What are some of the principal sub-disciplines of Applied Linguistics that I will invoke in this paper?
Some general statistics about the spread of English worldwide and related matters
Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: (Some comments)
Some disclaimers about my proposals
Some definitions of CLT, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data
Conclusions
Glocalization, n.
Frequency (in current use): • • • • • •
Orig. Business
The action, process or fact of making something both global and local; spec. the adaptation of global influences or business strategies in accordance with local conditions; global localization
What are the principal sub-disciplines of Applied Linguistics that I will invoke in this paper?

- Educational language planning
  (Management of curricular innovation)
- Communicative/task-based language teaching
- A very basic form of Conversation Analysis to analyze classroom interaction
Some general statistics about the spread of English worldwide and related matters

There are probably about **1.5 billion** speakers of English worldwide

About **500,000,000** of them are “Native Speakers”

Approximately **310,000,000** of these speakers live in the USA

There are approximately **390,000,000,000** learners/users of English (perhaps even more now?) in the People’s Republic of China
Some general statistics about the spread of English worldwide and related matters

References


Some general statistics about the spread of English worldwide and related matters

Here is Dr. Surin Pitsuwan

the noted “Thai politician and former Secretary-General of ... ASEAN, the preeminent political and economic organization for 10 countries in Southeast Asia, whose combined population tops more than 600 million people.”
Some general statistics about the spread of English worldwide and related matters

And here is a map of ASEAN countries
Now these are some of the things that Dr. Pitsuwan said about the importance of English in the context of ASEAN in his 2014 Plenary talk at TESOL 2014:

“English has become an integral part of life for billions of people around the globe.”

“We communicate in English, we negotiate in English, and we sing karaoke in English, ... citizens of the world strive to learn English, not only to conduct business, education and diplomacy, but enjoy culture and entertainment.”

“English is more than a commodity. It has the power to transform nations.”

“Increased English language education is required to improve the lives of billions of people, not only in Asia, but across the globe.”
Some general statistics about the spread of English worldwide and related matters

Reference

Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: Some comments

Now in the grand scheme of things, all of is this is true, of course.

But the real picture of English language use in Asia is actually much more complicated than these statements might imply.

For example, do all Asians really use English as the language of choice to: “sing karaoke ... and enjoy culture and entertainment?”

I personally don’t know the answer to this question which is, in any case, an empirical matter.

The broader point that I wish to make, however is that:

English in Asia (and indeed anywhere else) always exists within a broader ecology of other languages.
Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: Some comments

Let’s explore this idea a bit more

For example, Singapore (an ASEAN country) has four official languages Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English

But how good is the English of average Singaporeans in practice?

It’s actually pretty good. Here is a visual representation of the relative standings of 16 different Asian countries in terms of their citizens’ levels of proficiency in English.

Singapore (along with Malaysia, another ASEAN country) is located in the left hand (= best standard of English) circle.

Can you guess in which circle Thailand is located?

EF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY INDEX 2015 (p. 27): http://www.ef.edu/epi/
Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: Some comments

More specifically, we can extrapolate from this graphic that the standards of English in six of the 10 ASEAN countries shown in the last slide are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: Some comments

Now let’s look at the TOEFL iBT total score means published by ETS in 2014 for all ASEAN countries

1 Sing 98
2 Mal/ Phil 89
4 Ind 84
5 Viet 79
6 Bur 78
7 Thai 74
8 Cam 69
9 Brun NAv

VH VH Mod Mod Mod VL VL ?

Total possible score: 120
Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: Some comments

Let’s try to understand these statistics in another context:

The Graduate College at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign requires a score of 79-102/120 for limited status admission.

However, in order to be admitted to the university’s MATESL program, a minimum score of 100/120 is required.

And in order to be eligible to become a Teaching Assistant in the university’s ESL program, a score of 27/30 on the speaking part of the test is required.

This requirement is rigidly enforced.
Despite investment in English training throughout the region, most Asian countries, including the wealthiest ones, have not seen significant changes in their EF EPI scores from last year [2014]. Thailand is the only country that declined significantly, while . . . and Vietnam all showed significant improvements.

EF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY INDEX 2015 (p. 26): http://www.ef.edu/epi/
To summarize: it seems reasonable to suggest that:

FOR SOME REASON, THAILAND SEEMS TO BE IN TROUBLE IN TERMS OF HOW WELL MOST OF ITS CITIZENS CAN UNDERSTAND, SPEAK, READ AND WRITE ENGLISH.

There all sorts of complicated reasons for this (for example, the colonial histories of places like Malaysia and Singapore ironically give these countries a substantial linguistic advantage over Thailand, which was never occupied by foreign colonial powers)
Some general statistics about the spread of English in Asian/ASEAN countries: Some comments

NONETHESS, THAILAND STILL NEEDS TO IMPROVE ITS ABILITY TO TEACH ENGLISH AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS IF IT IS TO COMPETE SUCCESSFULLY WITH OTHER ASEAN COUNTRIES IN THE BROADER MARKET PLACE

BUT HOW???????
Some disclaimers about my proposals

All I am inviting you to do by presenting this paper is to **DREAM** and to think about how **YOU** might change your own teaching practices within the larger cultural and educational contexts of EFL teaching in Thailand.

The practical pedagogical ideas that I outline later in this paper should certainly **NOT** be thought of as the magic silver bullet that will automatically solve Thailand’s EFL Teaching problems!!!!!!

Indeed, improving the standards of English in Thailand will involve all kinds of complicated and still little understood interactions between regional/national — for example ASEAN/Thai — educational language policies, what universities and teacher training institutions do, and — in terms of what ends up actually happening in the classroom — what teachers **can**, **need** and/or **want** to do ...

... among many other issues
Some disclaimers about my proposals

Here are some suggested book length readings from the diffusion of innovations literature for those of you who are interested in following up on these issues:

The first reference is relatively old (1997), the second dates from 2001 and the third is relatively recent (2013):

See also:

Some disclaimers about my proposals

If you don’t want to read these book length publications, these article length references might be more accessible:


**Another important reference that specifically discusses these matters in the Asian context is:**

Some disclaimers about my proposals

I also want to clarify that these ideas will quite likely only be feasible in certain quite restricted contexts of EFL teaching in Thailand, such as:

- University level EFL programs?
- Private language schools?
- Other programs?
- If so, which ones?

Can such proposals work in Thai public schools?

I don’t know, I’ve never taught EFL in such schools:

That is something YOU will have to judge for yourselves
Some disclaimers about my proposals

Can such proposals work with beginners or only with very advanced learners?

Yes, I hope to demonstrate empirically that these ideas are **IN PRINCIPLE** usable with **ALL** learners;

In short:

Resist the automatic gut reaction and say “this stuff won’t work in Thailand”

When you’ve tried out these ideas several times, *then* make an informed judgement

But also don’t underestimate how difficult it is going to be to make such ideas actually work in your own classrooms
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

Here is a definition of tasks in task based language teaching:

“Any classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right” (p. 59).

Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

This definition has the advantage of being widely known, and — unlike some other definitions TBLT — does not necessarily imply the use of radically new EFL teaching practices by teachers.

For example, objectively speaking, the materials I will show you are actually only “communicative” in a very limited sense.

Essentially, the main innovation here is that instead of teaching the language that students “need” to know before they can communicate — as in traditional approaches to EFL (whatever that means) — the materials shown here ask the students to communicate as fluently as they can first, and then teaches them whatever they were not able to do accurately in the previous communication phase of the lesson.
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

Let us now take a look at the handout you have, which I assume you have had plenty of time to read by now!
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

The first page of this handout consists of a simple drawing which any artistically challenged teacher should be able to produce quite easily.

This page also specifies:
1. Picture description task 1: (focus on fluency; small group work)
   
   what the teacher should do to set up the task

   what the students in the small groups should do before and during the implementation of the picture description task

   what the student at the blackboard should do as s/he listens to the instructions from the students in small groups about how to draw the picture

   (NOTE: This is a “one way information gap task”)
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

The continuation of Task 1 on page 2 also specifies:

what standards of graphic accuracy must be achieved by Beginners, Intermediates or Native Speakers/Very Advanced speakers of English to judge whether the finished task has been successfully completed in the debriefing activity in Task 2

what the teacher’s role should be during the implementation of the picture description task and how to manage the classroom activity in a non-interventionist way

The language that this task can be expected to generate:

Imperatives; the language of spatial relationships; the language of description (present tense, present continuous); figurative language; repair (comprehension checks, clarification requests, circumlocution)
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

At the bottom of page 2 we find:

Task 2: Debriefing task (focus on accuracy; teacher fronted)
this section describes how the teacher should debrief the students

In the remaining tasks in the full version of this handout,
(not shown here; see http://numamarkee.com/publications)
one week’s worth of further “traditional” focus on accuracy activities are laid out

I will not discuss these activities here.
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

Here is the picture produced by native speakers/very advanced users of English enrolled in my advanced course on TBLT in the MATESL program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

To their chagrin, the students in this class were judged (by themselves!) NOT to have met the very rigorous performance criteria specified for Native speaker/Very Advanced students in Task 1.
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

Here is the picture produced by late beginners/early intermediate learners enrolled in an ESL class for members of the wider community living in the Champaign-Urbana area:

The students in this class were judged (by me) to have successfully met the more relaxed performance criteria specified for late beginners/early intermediates in Task 1.
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

Here is the picture produced by false beginners enrolled in an ESL class for members of the wider community:

C: what’s that,
I: you haven’t uh draw (driving) speech bubble gesture draw (0.5) (driving) one two three and -a(h)ll bubble gesture (1.0)
C: ((unintelligible))
?: yes
C: yes
LL: huh huh huh huh
C: that- this- this all,
?: a::ll
C: -> ((draws speech bubble))
LL: yeah::: huh huh huh
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

In ALL of these classes, this task generated not just opportunities to practice already known language but also the chance to learn new language

Here is a very simple example in which a student from Hong Kong in the Native Speaker/Very Advanced class learned something about differences in the British and American English pronunciations of the word “vase:”

...  
22 → J: there is a vase ((British pronunciation))  
23 → (. and flowers (. on the table  
24 → M: there is (. what? What is on the table?  
25 → J: a vase ((British pronunciation))  
26 → K? a vase ((American pronunciation))  
27 → SJB: a vase ((American pronunciation))  
28 → M: a vase. Thank you.  
29 → ?: and there’s three flowers in the vase
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

In conclusion, I would like to argue that:

These empirical data have shown how students at very different levels of English proficiency can be empowered to use and learn English in very sophisticated ways through the use of very simple materials that can be produced by any teacher anywhere in the world.

Potentially, these easily reproducible materials are a practical example of glocalization in action.

However, let us also remember some of the earlier caveats I mentioned:

The kinds of teaching materials and classroom methodology discussed in this paper should not be blindly copied and transplanted “as is” into the cultural and educational contexts of Thailand.

Great care must be taken to think through the larger implications of any imported educational innovations, including this one.
Some definitions, a sample communicative/task based lesson plan + some empirical data

IF this is done
there is the possibility that the use of
suitably adapted versions of these materials and methodologies may
—in certain quite restricted contexts of EFL teaching in Thailand—
help contribute to improving the standard of English teaching and learning
in Thailand as it begins to participate
in the great national experiment of full membership in ASEAN

So, to repeat a familiar slogan that has been around for a long time:

THINK GLOBALLY BUT ACT LOCALLY!
KHOB KHUN KRUB!

THANKS FOR LISTENING AND GOOD LUCK!

ANY QUESTIONS?

PLEASE COME TO THE FOLLOW UP SESSION
TOMORROW AT 08.20-09.25 IN ERAWAN 2

REMEMBER:

THE PRESENTATION + THE LONG AND SHORT VERSIONS
OF THE HANDOUT ARE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD FROM
THE PRESENTATIONS SECTION OF:

http://numamarkee.com/publications