

The Development of an English Learning Audio Book For Thai Massage Therapists with Visual Impairment

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Abstract

Thai massage therapists with visual impairment see the need to improve their English in order to be competent in a wider market as Thailand is officially joining the AEC in 2015. However, their access to learning resources is still very limited. The objectives of this research were therefore (1) to develop an audio book which would enable learners with visual impairment to study and practice the English necessary for their profession, and (2) to examine their feedback for further improvement. A syllabus was designed and the prototype audio book was developed in MP3 format. Participants included professional massage therapists, and massage apprentices, all with visual impairment. They were divided into two groups: those who self-studied the audiobook and those who studied the audio book with an instructor in a classroom environment. The pre/post-test results showed that the average scores of both groups were higher, but that the latter group scored significantly higher due to the better discipline and motivation obtained from a classroom atmosphere. The assessment questionnaires and interviews revealed that both groups were satisfied with the overall layout of the prototype audio book, but preferred to have tutorial assistance due to their limited background of English. Data collected through class observation, class discussion, informal interviews, and participation in the life of the group was used for the improvement of the content and the presentation style of the final version of the audio book. Finally it was made into MP3 CD format, a large print book, and was also translated into Braille. The MP3 CDs and the Braille books were then distributed to the participating organizations and were incorporated as part of their curricula and their annual language training.

Keywords: *English for Thai massage, learners with visual impairment, material design, audio book*

1. Introduction

With an increasing number of foreign customers, the government's aspirations to see the country become "The World Class Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine Destination", and the joining of the AEC in 2015, Thai massage has a huge potential to take off in a bigger arena (Department of Trade Negotiation, 2011; Department for Health Service Support, 2012). Thus being a Thai massage therapist is becoming an attractive career, and is considered one of the few occupations that people with visual impairment can rely on for a decent living. Compared to other possible professions such as lottery selling, street singing, woodworking and making handicrafts, Thai massage therapy poses fewer physical risks and generates a better income. However, to take a career opportunity into the wider market, therapists need to have an adequate command of English. Unfortunately, the availability of specific learning materials and language training that should prepare them for their career is almost non-existent. Although some general English learning texts have been translated into Braille, not every person with visual impairment can read with their fingers. Some massage therapists are adults who have lost their sight later in life, and learning how to read and write Braille already amounts to learning a whole new language. Audio materials are therefore preferable, provided that the learning content is designed to suit the learning process which relies solely on the sense of hearing. In addition, since having to travel to a learning centre or training venue is very difficult for learners with visual impairment, it would be of greater benefit if the content of the audio learning material is self-explanatory. The proposed research contends that a specially designed audio book in MP3 format should solve the problems for massage therapists who wish to learn the English needed for their job.

2. Research Procedures

2.1 Creating English for Thai Massage Therapists as an ESP Course

English for Thai Massage Therapists and other forms of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) are within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). What distinguishes ESP from General English (GE) and English Language Teaching (ELT) is that ESP is context-specific, thus there is no clear-cut answer as to which methodology is the best. The teacher needs to find out first why learners need to learn English and build up a course that prepares them for the world of work. Various theories and frameworks have been put forward for the creation of an ESP curriculum and course development, notably those of Munby (1978), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Swales (1985), Strevens (1988), and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). This proposed research looked primarily into Hutchinson and Waters' target situation analysis and learners' needs as its core framework which encouraged the teacher to address primary questions regarding the learners and their needs in order to come up with initial information needed for the course content and the design of the course syllabus.

Through onsite observation and interviews with massage therapists with visual impairment, it was found that speaking and listening skills were most required. Their visual limitations did not allow them to communicate through body language and gestures with foreign customers. Thus, verbal communication in English was pivotal. It is worth noting that Thai massage focuses on how to relieve the tension of muscles and tendons. A massage therapist may press or stretch certain parts of the customer's body. Lack of communication can cause severe injuries to the customer if the massage therapist fails to explain the procedure or if they fail to understand the customer's information on certain health conditions which require special attention like certain skin diseases, diabetes or high blood pressure. A case was reported where a blind massage therapist dislocated a customer's shoulder splint, not knowing that the customer had just had an operation. Ultimately, these massage therapists needed to learn not only general vocabulary and phrases for greetings and small talk, but also some technical terms related to body parts, body positions, diseases and Thai herbs used in massage-related products.

Richterich (1980) offered a way to conceptualize learners' needs, which was to distinguish between their subjective and objective needs. Graves (2001) elaborated further that in assessing objective needs, the teacher needs to look into the learners' backgrounds in order to estimate their level of English proficiency and how best to develop course content and approaches that suit the learners' learning nature and capabilities, whereas finding learners' subjective needs, e.g. their level of self-confidence and their expectations, can help the teacher find ways to increase learners' motivation. There were two groups of participants in the proposed research. Group One was comprised of teenaged massage apprentices who had enrolled at the Skills Development Centre for the Blind. They were asked to self-study the prototype audio book and be assessed by a pre/post-test under the supervision of their staff. Group Two was comprised of adults aged between 25 and 70 years old. These adults were active members of the Association for the Promotion of Thai Massage Therapists with Visual Impairment. A three-day-training session was organized for this group, using the prototype audio book as the core classroom material and for after-class practice. Test results and feedback from these two groups were then compared to find out how the audio book suited each learning style. On the surface, both groups shared the same objective, which was to be able to acquire the English skills necessary for their job. Nevertheless, the participants in Group One had the advantage of having been educated at school and were considerably younger, and hence had a better educational background and better learning speed. Most participants in Group Two were adults with some work experience, but with little knowledge of English.

Through on-site observation at several regular massage centres in Bangkok and personal interviews with massage therapists (both sighted and visually impaired) and their customers, it was clear that basic speaking and listening skills in English, with some technical job-related terms, were in demand. The pre-test results showed that

participants in both groups, especially those in Group Two, did not have a good enough background knowledge of English for their career. The interviews after the pre-test also revealed that they were not confident with their English. Both groups expressed a desire to better their English. An ESP course for Thai massage was ideal since it would be applicable directly to their job, required little background in English, and should take a much shorter time to learn than GE or EFL.

2.2 Designing the Course Syllabus and Course Content

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) illustrated a range of different criteria for the creation of an ESP course syllabus, and asserted that a syllabus should embrace a variety of aspects (e.g. structures, functions, contents or skills and strategies). If the syllabus is framed around only one aspect, it would “miss the opportunity to develop the unacknowledged elements effectively” (p.89).

The content for English for Massage Therapists with Visual Impairment was originally put together to be used by an instructor in a language training session in 2013. The proposed research revised the content using the data from the situation analysis and the learners’ needs in 2.1. After this preliminary revision, the proposed research came up with a prototype audio book which contained twelve units. Each unit was a combination of topical, structural, situational, and functional/task-based elements. The sequence was organized by topic. Each topic was divided into three to four sections: vocabulary, useful phrases/expressions, grammar, and end-of-unit exercises. A vocabulary list of general terms and technical terms was taken from online resources like weblogs created by a group of massage therapists working abroad and a printable booklet by Kaosalee, Raweearamwong and Pacharapolworapas (2012). Additional words and frequently used expressions were collected from on-site observation, authentic texts and personal interviews. As for grammar, it was found from on-site observation that most massage therapists used a ‘broken English’ structure, which was acceptable for simple sentences, but not for complex ones. It seemed therefore to be a good idea to add a grammar section since Larsen-Freeman (2003) noted that grammar provided “useful guidance about how a language is structured” (p.14). The proposed research assumed that recognizable patterned sequences should enable learners to develop accuracy and fluency better than learning traditional grammar, especially since the target learners had little English proficiency, only needed English for work, and did not have much time to spend on grammar rules. The grammar section was designed to accommodate the use of vocabulary and/or expressions in each unit. The syllabus for the prototype audiobook was as follows:

Unit/Topic	Content	Explanation
1. Greetings	1.1 Expressions: basic greetings and introduction 1.2 Vocabulary occupations 1.3 Grammar: verb “to be” 1.4 End-of-unit exercise	This unit introduces common greeting expressions. It then introduces a list of occupations which will then be incorporated with the usage of the verb “to be” e.g. “What your job is?”, “My name <u>is</u> Suwat.”, “I <u>am</u> a massage therapist”. After this unit, the learners should be able to introduce themselves and introduce other people using appropriate verb forms. A set of common occupations was collected from an interview with professional massage therapists from group two. As Thai massage is a physical treatment, a massage therapist may ask the customer about his/her job in order to diagnose the cause of his/her muscular pain and give proper treatment or advice.
2. Services offered	2.1 Vocabulary: types of massage 2.2 Useful question phrases: “Would you like...”, “Would you like to...”, and “What kind of...?” 2.3 Grammar: frequently asked questions 2.4 End-of-unit exercise	This unit provides the vocabulary of common massage types. It then introduces the question phrases “would you like (a Thai massage)?” and “would you like to (come in)?”, and asks the learners to practice the phrases using different words from the vocabulary section. The grammar section talks about frequently asked questions from foreign customers namely: “What is this?”, “What is it like?”, “How much?” and “How long?”
3. Small talk	3.1 Common useful phrases 3.2 Vocabulary: countries, nationalities and capital cities 3.3 Grammar: the question “What is it like?” and “How do you like it?” 3.4 End-of-unit exercise	The objective of this unit is to get the learners to do small talk with their foreign customers while waiting for the service or even during the service, focusing on the topic of countries and nationalities. The question “What is it like” (as in 2.3) is reintroduced, but is used to ask about the customers’ countries in general. The question “How do you like it” is often used in a small talk when asking about preferences.

4. Inside the massage centre	4.1 Vocabulary: parts of the massage centre 4.2 Grammar: giving directions using imperatives 4.3 Useful phrases: giving precautions and warnings 4.5 End-of-unit exercise	After this unit, learners should know parts of the massage centre in English and put them in proper sentences when giving directions. 4.3 deals with the phrases “Be careful” and “Mind your (step), which can be used when giving directions to customers.
5. Tools for Thai massage	5.1 Vocabulary: Objects associated with Thai massage 5.2 Grammar 5.2.1 revision of question words 5.2.2 making polite requests 5.3 End-of-unit exercise	This unit introduces a set of vocabulary associated with the service e.g. herbal ball, massage stick, and mattress. 5.2.1 reintroduces the question phrases in 2.3, and applies them to a different situation. 5.2.2 is a revision of imperative sentences in 4.2.
6. Questions before having the massage	6.1 Vocab: health conditions and diseases 6.2 Grammar: the verb “have/has” 6.3 Useful phrase: asking about health 6.4 End-of-unit exercise	6.1 introduces a list of physical conditions and diseases related to massage treatment which will then be incorporated with the usage of the verb “have/ has”. 6.2 introduces the question form “Do you have (any health problems)?” or “Do you have (disease)?”
7. Body parts	7.1 Vocab: body parts 7.2 Grammar: possessive adjective 7.3 Useful phrase: asking about lost items 7.4 End-of-unit exercise	This unit introduces a list of body parts, both external and internal, which will then be incorporated with the usage of the verb “have/has” as studied in 6.2. 7.2 introduces the possessive adjective along with the question “Whose” so that learners may apply the usage to either 7.1, or 8.2 in the following unit.
8. Suggestions before having a Thai massage	8.1 Grammar: making suggestions using should/ can/ don’t have to, and must not 8.2 Vocabulary: clothes and accessories 8.3 End-of-unit exercise	This unit explains the use of “should/ can/don’t have to, and must not” which will then be incorporated with 8.2 which talks about clothes, accessories and related verbs e.g. “You <u>should take off</u> your <u>earrings</u> .”
9. Conversation during the service (body positions and polite commands)	9.1 Grammar: asking for things during the service 9.2 Vocabulary: body positions 9.3 End-of-exercise	This unit deals with situations that often happen in the massage room: the customer asking for things and the massage therapist telling the customer to change their body positions. 9.1 reintroduces the question “Do you have...?” and introduces an interchangeable question “Have you got...?” This will then be incorporated with the vocabulary in 5.1 e.g. “Do you have a herbal ball?” 9.2 provides a list of common body positions for massage treatment which is incorporated with the imperative already studied in 4.2.

10. Conversation during the service (asking about customers' satisfaction)	10.1 Useful phrases: asking about customers' satisfaction 10.2 Vocabulary: physical pains 10.3 Grammar: using "too", and comparatives 10.4 End-of-unit exercise	This unit continues to deal with situations in the massage room. 10.1 provides patterned phrases like "How is it?" and "Is it good?" 10.2 provides a list of common physical pains. 10.3 introduces the adverb 'too' and a list of relevant adjectives in comparative forms e.g. "Too gentle?" and "Harder?"
11. Making an appointment	11.1 Vocabulary: days of the week, months, cardinal numbers and ordinal numbers 11.2 Useful phrases: telling/ asking about date and time 11.3 End-of-unit exercise	This unit does not contain a grammar section because there are already a lot of words to be memorized in the vocabulary section. Common questions like "What time?" and "When?" are included in the sample conversation (with translation).
12. Payment and saying good-bye	12.1 Useful phrases related to payment 12.2 Vocabulary: payment methods 12.3 Expressions: saying good-bye and invitation to come back 12.4 End-of-unit exercise	The question "How much?" in 2.3 is reintroduced. Learners then can practice cardinal numbers in 11.1 to say the price of the service. The word "Please" in 4.2 is also reintroduced e.g. "Please pay at the counter." 12.3 introduces common phrases used when the customer is leaving e.g. "Please come back again." And "Have a nice day".

2.3 Designing the Audio Presentation Style

As mentioned in the introduction, one big problem for learners with visual impairment was their limited access to learning materials and language training courses. The proposed research decided on producing the course content in audio format, and made available for all. Looking into the availability of accessible audio-material for learners with visual impairment, only one audio book recorded in NCC Daisy format and MP3 by Chatsomporn and Leucharitipan (2007) was found at the National Library for the Blind. The content was read from a text designed for learners with normal vision who were already equipped with some knowledge of English. The units were divided according to topics. Useful English expressions were read, followed by the translation in Thai without pause. This could make it hard for learners to keep up with. Vocabulary and expressions were given in abundance without context or adequate usage. Moreover, the fact that the recording was done by only one person made the overall tone monotonous, and could create confusion when it came to reading a dialogue.

There are limitations to both the learning styles of learners with visual impairment and teaching in an audio format. Naturally, people cannot remember what they listen to if the content is given in a very big chunk all at once. The audio learning content for learners

with visual limitations, therefore, should be broken into small units, allowing adequate pauses in between so that learners can digest the information before moving on to the next item. The prototype audio book solved the problems mentioned as follows:

Problems	Solutions for the Prototype Audio Book
Fast pace and lack of pause	The overall recording speed was done at a slower pace with adequate pauses after each phrase/ sentence. Each word in the vocabulary section was repeated twice with a longer pause so that the learners could repeat afterwards. Each sample conversation was repeated twice—the first time at normal speed and the second time at a slower speed followed by the translation.
Translation after a long sentence	Since the prototype audio book was practically for learners with a limited background of English, sentences were made short and simple. Translation came right after each sentence, making it easier to follow and digest.
Lack of context for the teaching of vocabulary and expressions	Each unit provides sample sentences and conversations for the grammar, vocabulary, and expressions.
Monotony and confusion that could occur when one person was doing two or more characters in a dialogue	Five different recording voices were used: (1) the female narrator who read the objectives of each unit, explained the grammar sections, and read the exercise sections, (2) the male foreigner customer, (3) the female foreign customer (4) the Thai masseur, and (5) the Thai masseuse. One dialogue comprised either the male customer talking to the masseuse, or vice versa so that learners could easily identify the two different speakers.
Lack of interactive activities	Short questions in the end-of-unit exercise section were repeated twice. Each question was followed by a five-second pause marked by the sound of the ticking of a clock before the answer was given after the sound of a ring.
Locating the content	A theme song, which is a piece of Thai classical music, was used to mark the end of each unit. A sub-theme song was used to mark the end of each section.

The prototype audio book was recorded in MP3 format and was tested as self-study material for participation Group One, and as core teaching material and after-class practice for Group Two.

3. Test Results, Learners' Feedback and Discussion

3.1 Learners' Satisfaction

After the prototype audio book was tested on both participating groups, feedback from discussions was used to improve the content and the audio presentation style. A 5-point Likert scale format questionnaire was also used to measure learners' satisfaction for the prototype audiobook. The results from both groups were as follows.

	G1	G2
1. The topics and content are interesting.	3.6	4.8
2. The content is applicable to your work.	4.1	4.6
3. The arrangement of content is easy to follow.	4.1	4.8
4. The length of each unit is appropriate.	4.1	4.4
5. The content in each unit is sufficient with appropriate detail.	3.9	4.5
6. The level of English is appropriate.	4.1	4.5
7. The characters speak with clear voices.	3.9	4.5
8. The characters' paces are appropriate.	3.8	4.37
9. The audio book can be self-studied	4.3	4.2
<i>Overall Average</i>	<i>3.99</i>	<i>4.52</i>

Participants in Group One were satisfied enough with the content, but did not give any relevant suggestions for improvement. On the contrary, participants in Group Two were very positive about the course content and offered suggestions which were invaluable for the improvement of the audio book. The key suggestion was to add more vocabulary to some units. More common jobs for regular massage customers like cleaner, hairdresser and driver were added to the list of occupations in unit 2. The list of diseases was expanded in unit 6. More vocabulary relating to body parts was added to unit 7. The number of units/topics and everything else remained the same.

In addition, Group Two mentioned that they particularly liked the end-of-unit exercises. The time limit for the answer of each question marked by the five-second clock ticking sound urged them to think quickly and compete with time. It made the practicing process exciting. Moreover, the use of different recording voices enabled them to recognize the characters as individually distinctive. After the training, they could remember all four character e.g. their names, where they came from, and what they talked about in each lesson.

3.2 Learners' Language Improvement

The results from both the pre- and post-tests were compared to find out how the audio book could accommodate different learning styles. The proposed research used the same pre/post-test for both groups to measure the participants' background of English. The test was comprised of fifteen multiple-choice items. Eight items tested general and job-related expressions and seven items tested job-related vocabulary. The comparison of pre/post-test results is shown in the table below.

Group	Average pre-test (per cent)	Average post-test (per cent)	Average increased Score (per cent)
1	52.13	66.00	13.87
2	39.33	70.93	31.53

Considering the different natures of these two participating groups, it was likely that Group One had the advantage of being educated in a school system and thus had better background knowledge of English, as was reflected in the higher pre-test results. However, Group Two showed a bigger improvement as they scored lower than Group One in the pre-test, but higher in the post-test. It could be said then that the audio book could improve learners' English proficiency at a certain level.

4. Discussion

Group One took three months to self-study the prototype audio book. From an interview with their facilitator, it seemed that they lacked the motivation to study, especially since they were enrolled at a centre and had to learn other subjects at the same time. Group Two had the opportunity to study the prototype audio book with an instructor during a three-day training course. Although Group Two started off with a lower average pre-test score, they did much better with the post-test. According to the interviews and personal observation, this was partly because most participants in Group Two were more motivated to learn English. First of all, they were already in the workforce. They were more eager to be financially independent and they knew how English could be of use for their job. Secondly and most importantly, the classroom environment provided them with learning discipline and social interaction. Exchange of ideas and experience led to discussion and participation. Group Two suggested that for learners with visual impairment, it was much better to have an instructor since they had little background of English, and accessibility to other learning resources for them was very limited. They also commented that the audio book could also be useful to them for after-class practice.

5. Conclusion

The finalized version of the audio book, which was created in CD MP3 format along with Braille and large print books, was distributed to several organizations including the two participating groups:

- The Skills Development Centre for the Blind (Bangkok)
- The Association for the Promotion of Thai Massage Therapists with Visual Impairment (Bangkok)
- Caufield Foundation for the Blind under Royal Patronage (Bangkok)
- The Northern School for the Blind under Patronage of the Queen (Chiang Mai)

In addition, the facilitator for participants in Group One, who was in charge of the English curriculum at The Skills Development Centre for the Blind, was gratified to have the products saying that the centre had been using commercial text books for learners without visual problem (GE and EFL). For a long time, it had struggled to find the right teaching material (ESP) for massage apprentices. The centre would certainly use the audio book as its core learning class material for the following academic year.

It can be concluded therefore that the final product of this research could improve the English skills needed for the learners' careers. It also added to the availability of learning resources for learners with visual impairment, but made clear that the material should have the support of an instructor.

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