# Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Diaries and Semi-Structured Interviews in a Case Study Examining a Thai ESL Student's Perceptions on British Culture

**Singhanat Nomnian**
*Centre for English and Applied Linguistics*
*Mahidol University, Kanchanaburi campus*

**Abstract**
The paper addresses some advantages and disadvantages of using a diary and a semi-structured interview in a case study which examined the perceptions of British culture of a Thai ESL learner called 'Shirley'. Shirley's diary entries enabled the researcher to discover her existing cultural perceptions and see gradual changes in her attitudes towards learning about the target language culture over time. The semi-structured interview offered the researcher insights and information on certain issues, which might be far beyond what her diary entries could provide. Some drawbacks to diary data were noted: redundancy, irrelevance and inconsistency in the subject's writing; drawbacks to the interview data were researcher bias, the 'real-time' nature of the interview and the time-consuming nature of processing and analysing the interview data. Nevertheless, the advantages of the research methods employed appear to outweigh their inherent limitations. This paper could potentially benefit researchers in the field of applied linguistics and TESOL who plan to use diary studies and semi-structured interviews as research tools.

## Introduction

The objective of this paper is to discuss critically some advantages and disadvantages of a diary and a semi-structured interview that were employed as the research tools in Nomnian's (2008) case study. The case study aimed to examine the role of English language teachers on a Thai student's perceptions of the target language culture at a British university. However, in order to illustrate the extent to which methodological triangulation could potentially strengthen both validity and reliability to confirm the emerging findings of the case study, this paper focuses particularly on these two research tools (i.e. diaries and semi-structured interviews).

Methodological triangulation is not just about using as many different methods or sources of data collection as possible. The individual strengths and weaknesses of various methods must, first, be known and, secondly, applied in such a way that they counterbalance each other (Arksey & Knight, 1999). It is, therefore, important to try to blend and integrate the use of a diary and a semi-structured interview by not simply designing a study that comprises distinct, mutually exclusive approaches.

Diaries of research participants are used as a tool to provide researchers with insights into first-person accounts of situations (Burgess, 1984, as reported in Bell et al., 1984). Nunan (1992) notes that they are considered an important introspective tool of first-person observations that are recorded over a period of time. However, Nunan notes that diarists need to make careful records of the situations in which they are involved because these records will be used to explore and explain the social world of schools,

classrooms, teachers and pupils. Cohen (1998) also mentions the term 'dialog journal' by having the reader responding to the learner's writing.

As for interviews, Arksey & Knight (1999) emphasise three major approaches: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A structured interview has a fixed set of questions which could promptly produce simple descriptive data while an unstructured interview encourages interviewees to be open and spontaneous, and to speak about the issue in question using language and ideas of their own rather than having these imposed on them by the researcher.

In the following section, the paper explains the background to this case study with regard to its research setting and participant; it provides a rationale for the research design; and then it details the procedures observed with the two instruments and data collection and analysis. Following these methodological issues, the major part of the paper consists of discussion, with illustrative data extracts, of some of the advantages and disadvantages of using diaries and semi-structured interviews as research tools. The interview-diary as a research method will then be addressed. With reference to the undertaken case study, the paper draws conclusions on the utilisation of a diary together with a semi-structured interview as research tools; there are also suggestions for future research and recommendations.

## Background to the case study
### Research setting
The study was undertaken at the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) of a British university. The ELTU has offered a wide range of English courses to international students coming to study degree courses since 1995. In this case study, the Thai student, Shirley, was enrolled on course C (upper-intermediate level) from April to June 2004. The course consists of three sub-courses: general language, academic skills and options. General language focuses on the development of the English language for everyday use while academic skills emphasise reading, listening, speaking, writing for academic work and general knowledge about Britain. For the optional course, students can choose to develop areas such as pronunciation, computer literacy, listening to the news and media, extensive listening, reading literature, discussion skills, grammar and computer-aided language learning.

### Participant
At the time of data collection, Shirley was twenty-three years old. She had been studying English for thirteen years and had obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication from a Thai university. She had been living in England for more than a year in order to take language courses for her masters. After completing her language courses, she planned to enrol on a Master's degree in Marketing at a British university because she is interested in marketing communication, which could potentially help in her future career in marketing in an international firm in Thailand. She strongly believes that studying at a British university and living in England can improve her English and help her future career in the international business arena.

### Rationale for research design
Case study was appropriate for the original study (Nomnian, 2008) because it could allow the researcher to identify complex issues emerging from Shirley regarding her perceptions of British culture. Cohen et al. (2000) view a case study as an observation

of characteristics of an individual unit, which can be a person, a class or a community. Yin (1993) defines case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The researcher could aim at quite detailed understanding of her perceptions in her educational context. The findings of this study did not aim to generalise her perceptions of British culture but rather to explore the concept of ESL learners' cultural perceptions by employing the Thai student as a case for investigation.

### *Procedures, instruments, data collection and analysis*
Prior to the data collection of this study, the researcher initially approached Shirley and asked her if she would be interested in participating in the study since she was the only Thai student studying a language course at this particular British university. She was at first reluctant to agree since she had never participated in any research before and did not know what she would experience. The researcher assured her that her rights and information would be protected throughout the study based on research ethics. Becoming more confident in the researcher, she also realised the importance of the study, which could tentatively contribute to new knowledge regarding cultural perceptions of Thai students who study in educational institutions in Britain. A week later, she agreed to join the project. Shirley was then given an informed consent form. Once informed consent had been granted, the researcher could proceed with data collection and analysis.

Shirley agreed to write a diary after she finished her class every week for two months and send it to the researcher via e-mail. In order to avoid any intervention in Shirley's original thoughts and feelings, the researcher did not make any comments on her diary. The diary was written in Thai because it could convey her thoughts better; it was translated and sent back to the participant for verification.

The aim of the semi-structured interview was to find out how Shirley perceived British culture based on her experience of living and studying in Britain, her teachers, and passages and illustrations selected from two units in Jordan's (1999) textbook, *Academic Writing*: 'The United Kingdom' and 'State Schools in England and Wales'. A pilot interview was undertaken with another Thai student to find out whether the questions were answerable and to ensure they were not ambiguous. Some of the interview questions, however, derived from Shirley's diary; in other words, in the interview, the researcher was able to address issues from the diary that needed further clarification. The diary entries could thus inform the design of the interview schedule and, consequently, the interview could represent the participant's perceptions of particular aspects of British culture in depth.

The interview was conducted in Shirley's room three weeks after her course started, in other words after the third week of her diary writing. This timing was observed so that Shirley could reflect on some cultural issues and the researcher could tentatively understand how Shirley perceived British culture from what she had written in her diary. Immediately before the interview, Shirley was reminded to express herself freely based on her initial thoughts. The interview lasted for one hour, was conducted in Thai, tape-recorded, translated and transcribed and then returned to Shirley for verification. Among the interview questions were: *'How do you define culture?'*, *'What aspects of British culture do you learn from the class?'*, *'What are the similarities and differences between British culture and Thai culture?'* and *'How do you perceive their similarities*

*and differences with regard to the Thai context?'*. Probing questions, such as *'Can you tell me more about what your teacher mentioned about British culture?'* and *'Why did you say that?'*, were also added to explore her different perspectives in depth during the interview.

Shirley's diary entries and interview transcripts were analysed by examining the emerging and salient issues regarding Shirley's perceptions of British culture.

Before proceeding to the main part of this paper, the following short section provides a summary of the findings of the original study (Nomnian, 2008).

**Findings of the original case study**
Shirley's diary entries and interview transcripts potentially acknowledge the value of background cultural knowledge for her language course. Here is an example of Shirley's diary entries illustrating her interest in learning about the British education system in her writing class:

*Diary entry, 7th June 2004*
> *The British education system was the topic of my lesson today. I think it's really good because I have learned the differences between the system here and the one in Thailand.*

From the interview data, she pointed out the importance of learning about cultural differences, which would allow her, to a certain extent, to write more informed contrastive essays:

*Interview data*
> *Cultural knowledge helps me in my writing class because Thai culture is different from the British culture here so, when I refer to Thai culture, my British teacher could get confused. For example, the teacher would give us an article about the education system and ask for an opinion whether I agree or not. If I know the educational system here and I can compare it with the Thai system, I will choose some interesting points about the education system here to write about or refer to and I can refer to some interesting points about Thai education.*

Shirley became to appreciate the complex relationship between language and culture as her course progressed, which was evidently pointed out in her diary entries and interview data. The following sections consider the advantages and disadvantages for researchers of using, respectively, diaries and semi-structured interviews.

**Advantages and disadvantages of diaries**
*Advantages of diaries*
*Diaries as a tool of self-reflection*
Diary writing may be beneficial to learners themselves because regular writing can help them become more aware of their cultural perceptions. Peck (1996, as reported in Bailey & Nunan, 1996) also uses diaries with adult learners of Spanish to increase students' cultural sensitivity, and students' learning diaries inform teachers about how and the extent to which students are becoming more sensitive to the target culture. Shirley used a diary as an opportunity to reflect upon her learning of the English

language and British culture. Shirley's diary writing could help her to see the importance of learning about cultures in a language class, which could potentially better her understanding in her academic study. As is evident from the following diary entry, Shirley realised that her listening difficulty was not solely because of her listening skills but also due to her lack of British cultural knowledge, which hindered her comprehension for a listening task.

### *Diary entry, 29ᵗʰ April 2004*
> *I learnt about the culture from the cassette tape that was fast and difficult to catch because I do not have knowledge about British culture.*

This example could be applicable to other language tasks where Shirley's cultural knowledge is required.

Since diaries are learner-generated and usually unstructured, the entries may cover a wide range of themes and issues. Shirley's entries, for example, included classroom activities, interactions with teachers and peers, assignments, exam anxiety and encounters with British people. These entries illustrated retrospective self-report or self-observation; for instance, after reading Jordan's (1999) passage 'The United Kingdom' (mentioned above), she began to compare the size of population in Britain and Thailand, as her diary entry revealed:

### *Diary entry, 27ᵗʰ April 2004*
> *By the way, after reading, I have just realised that the UK population is the same as in Thailand.*

Chamot et al. (1999) suggest that students should be encouraged to write their diaries in the target language because of the language practice involved. In this study, however, entries in the native language (Thai) were accepted because Shirley was not confident in writing in the target language (English) and she felt more comfortable about expressing her feelings in Thai. Since the goal of the study was for Shirley to reflect upon her perceptions of British culture learned in class, it was considered appropriate for her to use her mother tongue.

*Convenience*
Another advantage of the diary is that learners can keep their diaries anywhere they like and have the option of writing for even several months before giving them to a researcher for analysis (Chamot et al., 1999). Shirley agreed to return her diary entries via e-mail every week during the eight-week period of data collection and analysis. This helped the researcher to keep up with her progress consistently and see the tendency of her changes in cultural perceptions.

Nevertheless, tempering this advantage somewhat, Shirley confessed that, during the study, she was sometimes bored from keeping up with writing a diary. The researcher suggested to her that she should reflect only on her cultural perceptions and write on the day that she felt her cultural learning took place. She agreed and felt more comfortable to continue writing. The researcher realises that this potential issue could arise in future studies where diaries are utilized. It is, therefore, important for the researcher to give participants clear instructions on what they should record in their diaries and allow them a reasonable period of time of diary writing that would not discourage them to

keep up with their diary; otherwise, participants will be bored and may not keep up with their writing, which could affect the results of the study.

### *Disadvantages of diaries*
*Redundancy and irrelevance of data*
Shirley's diary covered various topics. Some of the entries were redundant and contained irrelevant information. Shirley's first diary entry, for instance, did not mention much about her cultural perceptions but had more about her interest in academic writing:

### *Diary entry, 23$^{rd}$ April 2004*
> *Today, we had a writing and seminar class that are important for this course. I do not think the seminar will be interesting for me but it is still important for masters. I am quite interested in writing and I will have a tutorial with my tutor. I think I will improve my writing skills. I hope to get the best mark I can.*

Cohen (1998) suggests that researchers could, in response to the entries, ask diarists to provide more detail retrospectively. The researcher immediately informed Shirley after reading the first entry that she should focus more on her perceptions of British culture. Once this objective had been clarified, Shirley narrowed her report to focus on more specific cultural issues in her later entries:

### *Diary entry, 28$^{th}$ April 2004*
> *My classmates and I talked about our country's history. After that, we learned about British history and listened to the tape. It was difficult because I do not have knowledge about it and the speed was fast.*

It should, however, be noted that, though there were redundant and irrelevant issues, such as Shirley's writing course and homework in the first few entries mentioned above, these issues perhaps suggested that Shirley's main focus was accomplishing her academic writing course with little attention to cultural issues since she did not initially perceive the importance of learning culture in a language class. Shirley's later entries illustrated that she began to realise the significance of learning about British culture for her listening task.

*Inconsistency of diary writing*
The researcher found that, during the first week of diary keeping, Shirley's diary entries showed her perceptions of cultural learning and classroom participation. The entries, however, gradually declined over the following weeks. This may be because Shirley became less conscientious than when she first started the diary. Corti (1993) suggests that the period over which a diary is to be kept needs to be long enough to capture the behaviour or events of interest without interfering with successful completion. The researcher, therefore, consistently encouraged Shirley to keep writing the diary but had to accept the fact that, for some periods, she had to prepare for her mid-term and final examinations, which prevented her from writing her diary. During those periods, the researcher had an informal conversation with her and she agreed to continue writing after her examination was over.

This paper now turns to the second instrument under investigation, semi-structured interviews.

**Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews**
*Advantages of semi-structured interviews*
*Depth of information*
A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have a specific agenda to follow and select relevant topics and themes to pursue in advance. Since semi-structured interviews are relatively unstructured, they allow the researcher and the Thai ESL learner to pursue topics of interest which may not have been foreseen when the questions were originally drawn up (Cohen, 1998); furthermore, these topics may be treated in relative depth. The example below illustrates how the researcher was able to use follow-up questions to explore meanings and more specifically address Shirley's perceptions regarding British culture and people:

*Interview data*
Interviewer:    *When talking about British culture, what do you think of?*
Shirley:        *I would think of foods in different occasions and their eating manners.*

*Interview data (follow-up question to initial response on a more specific topic)*
Interviewer:    *How about British people?*
Shirley:        *I think British people are so gentle and concerned about eating manner that I'm afraid of doing something wrong unintentionally or improperly. Also, the cultures of greeting, people here easily greet each other. But in my case, I wouldn't be so easy to greet the strangers. Sometimes, when I was waiting at the shop, some people came and talked to me in a friendly manner. They would also begin by asking about the weather though I never knew them.*

The researcher, however, was also aware of Shirley's reluctance towards expressing her feelings, which may be related to her cultural background. Holmes & Tangtongtavy (1995, as reported in Adamson, 2002), for example, refer to *krengjai*; that is, in order to show their politeness, Thais are reluctant to express direct feedback to their seniors. The researcher, therefore, had to remind Shirley that she should not feel hesitant to say what she wanted to say as her openness could contribute to the findings of the study; Shirley agreed and freely responded to the interview questions.

*Flexibility*
Drever (1995) suggests that the semi-structured interview allows researchers to adapt the main questions to suit interviewees' complementary roles in order to explore their different perspectives in depth. Keats (2000) points out that additional information can be obtained by probing the initial responses, which gives richness to the data by revealing interviewees' opinions and reasoning. For example, based on the aforementioned reading passage, 'The United Kingdom' (Jordan, 1999), the probing questions could potentially yield more information about her classroom instruction. As illustrated below, the researcher was able to improvise follow-up questions and to explore meanings and areas of interest that emerged.

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***Interview data***

Interviewer:   *After reading the passage, what do you think?*

Shirley:   *I learn about its neighbouring countries, the continent it's situated on, the size of the population, the distance from here to France and other countries, the capital of the UK, and among its neighbouring countries,* [London] *is the biggest one!*

***Interview data (follow-up from the initial response)***

Interviewer:   *Since you have been here, have you noticed any differences about the UK from what you previously believed?*

Shirley:   *In Thailand, the books I have read talk only about famous cities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester. My teacher told me that there are other big cities in England that are different from what I have studied.*

***Interview data (follow-up from the previous response to gain further information)***

Interviewer:   *What else did your teacher mention about the UK?*

Shirley:   *My teacher suggested that we visit Derby because it's close to Leicester. Like this spring season, she suggested that we visit the Lake District, which is very beautiful. She also drew a map indicating where Leicester and the Lake District are. She also mentioned visiting the seaside, which is full of stone, instead of sand. She also told us about festivals, like Bonfire Night, that we should go and visit.*

Shirley could answer the questions in terms of what she perceives as important. There was also scope for her to choose what to say about Britain's geography based on Shirley's previous knowledge and the probing questions could elicit more detailed responses from Shirley concerning the role of her teacher as a cultural informant.

*Specificity*

The researcher could address specific points or issues such as Shirley's perceptions of the particular textbook illustrations. The researcher expected that a semi-structured interview could specify and reveal her perceptions of illustrations better than her diary entries as she might not know what to write about. The interview data potentially revealed her thoughts on British culture and Britain's educational system to certain extent. For instance, based on the three photographs which are used to illustrate the text *'State Schools in England and Wales'*, she could compare between the classroom in the picture and ones in Thailand:

***Interview data***

Interviewer:   *Let's take a look at the first picture[1], what do you think? Does it accurately represent an actual class?*

Shirley:   *I think the picture and the reality are not different. I think when the teacher asks students to sit in groups on the floor in order to allow them to participate and teach them how to socialise.*

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[1] The picture illustrates a class in a primary school catering for children aged 5-6. While the teacher is teaching, students pay attention and some students raise their hands to ask questions.

***Interview data (follow-up question to the initial question)***

Interviewer:   *What are the differences between the classroom in the picture and the one in Thailand?*

Shirley:   *In Thailand, students are asked to sit at the table and it is very boring. The atmosphere in class is very stressful and students do not want to participate. I think sitting on the floor encourages students to participate with the teacher.*

A semi-structured interview could potentially supplement a diary by providing an additional source of information in order to address the specific objective of the study. This example illustrates that the semi-structured interview could help the researcher specify certain points that Shirley might not have thought about before. It is interesting for the researcher to understand what Shirley thought about the British educational system as she was studying in a UK institution, which she was likely to find different from the ones in Thailand.

***Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews***
*Researcher bias*
Keats (2000) mentions that interviewees' responses may be based on the emotional impact or the perceived purpose of interviewers. Interviewers' values can enter the interview and interviewers might not realise the extent to which they are dominating or controlling their interviewees' responses. Interviewees can thus either tell interviewers what they think their interviewers want to know or they may consider issues in terms of what they truly think (Walker, 1989, as reported in Hammersley, 1989). Likewise, the current researcher as an interviewer might have imposed opinions in his questions that could have affected the interviewee's responses, as illustrated below.

***Interview data***

Interviewer:   *It sounds like your teacher helps you learn more about British culture besides learning from the text, right?*

Shirley:   *Yes, I would think so. She gives more details besides what it says in the book.*

This example could potentially illustrate that the researcher's opinion entered in this closed question posed to the interviewee in order to gain an expected response, which could assure the researcher's previous knowledge regarding the role of teacher as a cultural informant. The researcher, therefore, needs to be more aware of avoiding the imposition of this type of question when conducting future interviews. The researcher could instead ask probing questions like *'Can you tell me more about what your teacher mentioned about British culture?'*, which could allow the interviewee to give more additional information.

*'Real-time' nature of the interview*
Being a novice, this researcher experienced pressures from a semi-structured interview as he had to 'think on his feet' since the nature of the interview was conducted in real time, which the researcher found quite difficult. The researcher as an interviewer had to make decisions quickly whether probing questions should be asked because responses from the interviewee at that time of interview seemed so sound that the researcher did not realise that more probing questions should have been asked during an interview. For example, the researcher should have probed and elicited 'richer' data such as the

issue of the complex relationship between language and culture, which the interviewee did not clearly point out.

The researcher felt that relevant follow-up questions were relatively organised to some extent as they were tested and modified through a pilot study; however, more probing questions should have been added in order to gain in-depth information, which could potentially contribute to better findings of the study. Due to the time constraint of the study and the busy schedule of the participant, the researcher could conduct only one interview. In a future study, the researcher could seek to overcome this issue by having a series of interviews and return to an interviewee to ask more relevant questions that the researcher may have failed to investigate during the initial interview.

*Time consumption*
Interviewing allows people to express their views on a wide range of issues, and to wait for such information to be generated in naturally occurring situations would be very time-consuming (Walford, 2001). Interviewing in this study took a considerable amount of time and energy, not only the duration of the interview itself but also piloting the interview schedule, travelling to the interviewee's place, transcribing, translating, validating, typing, and analysing data, the latter of which took the researcher over seven hours for the hour-long interview. It should be noted that the researcher and the participant share the same native language, Thai, which was used in the interview in this study because the participant felt more comfortable about expressing her opinions in Thai**.** Keats (2000) suggests that the research interview should be conducted in the respondent's preferred language. The interview data were transcribed and translated verbatim from Thai to English for data analysis. The transcript, however, could enhance and demonstrate the soundness of the study because the transcript could be repeatedly checked during the analysis.

**Juxtaposing diary and interview data**
In this section, the diary-interview research method will be critically addressed as the combination of these two research tools potentially allowed the researcher to gain results relevant to the study. Corti (1993) claims that, for events which are difficult to recall accurately or are easily forgotten, diaries can be a more reliable research tool than interviews and that they can help to overcome potential problems with sensitive information being collected by personal interview. Diaries can also be used to supplement interview data to provide a rich source of information on respondents' behaviour and daily experiences. The semi-structured interview in this study helped the researcher check on the completeness of Shirley's recorded entries. For example, when she mentioned the topic of 'atheism' in her diary, the researcher was able to ask Shirley for more information during the interview regarding the topic, as follows:

*Diary entry, 28th April 2004*
> *Today my topic was whether atheism should be taught in British schools. I have not got any ideas about it.*

***Interview data (for clarification from the diary entry)***
Interviewer:   *Before your teacher began the topic about atheism, what did he do?*
Shirley:   *He introduced it to us by asking whether our school taught religion, how many religions there are in the world, and how*

> *often British people went to church. Then he gave us a definition of atheism. After that, he asked our opinions on whether it's good or bad to teach religion in school, and, supposing that we were parents, asked us what we think about it. So I think it's good that the teacher gave us some background about a cultural topic that we didn't have knowledge about before.*

The diary, in this instance, was used as a data resource which the researcher could exploit to raise a series of questions that potentially provided further data to be elaborated upon, discussed, illustrated, and explored in the semi-structured interview. Also, once Shirley elaborated upon this topic, the more detailed data elicited was useful and relevant to the focus of the research.

Keats (2000) claims that the experience of an interaction in an interview can be sufficient enough to change a respondent's views and subsequent behaviours because it can reveal aspects of topics which the respondent has not previously considered. Some of Shirley's perceptions on learning about the target culture did not appear to be fully developed in the diary entries but were actually thought out during the interview, and this potentially helped to encourage the formulation of 'new' perceptions in the interview setting itself, as illustrated below:

*Interview data*

*Interviewer:* *What are your reasons for studying in England?*

Shirley:    *The reason I chose to study in England is because England is the native country of the English language. I realise that studying in England also gives me a chance to be exposed to other cultures, which I think is very valuable for me because I would like to be friends with people from other countries so that I can understand them better. Also, if I want to work in international business, I have to communicate with other businesspersons from different nationalities.*

Employing a semi-structured interview after the diary entries had been collected and analysed was certainly worthwhile. The results provided the researcher with valuable information and insights. The semi-structured interview was most suitable because it yielded the researcher with an opportunity to explore in-depth, and with a degree of detail, aspects such as the motivation governing the behaviours of the interviewee that may be beyond the scope of the diary entries.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This paper aimed to discuss some advantages and disadvantages of utilising a diary and a semi-structured interview with reference to a case study on a Thai student's perspectives on British culture. The combination of a diary and a semi-structured interview was employed in order to yield more valid and reliable results of the undertaken case study. The advantages of using both a diary and a semi-structured interview could potentially overcome their inherent drawbacks due to ways these two research tools can add validity to each other.

The diary, on the one hand, gave information on a Thai ESL learner's perceptions of British culture. Having the participant, Shirley, report on her cultural perceptions

through diary entries enabled the researcher to discover her existing cultural perspectives and see her changing attitudes. Shirley was encouraged to write regularly about how she coped with situations where she had an opportunity to speak with British people and how classroom teaching influenced her perceptions of learning language and culture.

The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, offered the researcher better insights and information. It also yielded the researcher with an opportunity to explore in-depth aspects of Shirley's behaviour, such as her attitudes and motivation towards language learning and changes in attitude of learning about the target culture in the language class that might be far beyond the scope of diary entries. The combined use of the diary and the semi-structured interview seemed to enhance the researcher's investigation of Shirley's perceptions of British culture.

Every research tool offers unique advantages as well as disadvantages. The challenge for researchers is to choose an appropriate method that will provide the desired type of information for the given study. It is hoped that this paper can contribute to other researchers who may attempt to employ these research tools in future studies and raise their awareness of relevant issues regarding a diary-interview research tool to examine learners' cultural perceptions in the fields of applied linguistics and TESOL.

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*Singhanat Nomnian has recently earned his Ed.D in TESOL and Applied Linguistics from the University of Leicester, UK. He is now Head of Centre for English and Applied Linguistics and a lecturer in English at Mahidol University, Kanchanaburi campus. His research interests include course design material development in EAP/ESP, EIL, sociolinguistics, bi- and multilingualism, and minority language students. He can be reached at snomnian@hotmail.com.*

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