



An Exploration of English as a Lingua Franca Communication: A Case Study of How English is Used as a Lingua Franca among Non-native Speakers for Mutual Understanding in an International Golf Tournament Operation in Thailand

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Article information	Abstract
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Received: May 13, 2018	<i>To study the success of an international event handling in Thailand with a focus on the area of mutual communication, this paper aimed to shed light on how English is used as a lingua franca among the local Thai working team and the organizer team who are non-native speakers from different language backgrounds to achieve their mutual understanding and efficaciously execute works in the context of an international golf tournament operation staged in Thailand. Included in the study are lingua franca communication perceptions held by the interlocutors. Additionally, this study explored communication barriers in international interactions, and finally investigated strategies adopted and practiced throughout the event operation period. Using the framework of qualitative analysis research design, this study explored and described how the event working personnel used English as a lingua franca (ELF) to communicate with one another who do not share a first language (L1) background by conducting semi-structured interviews with the 10 participants. The data was then analyzed to see their perceptions, communication barriers and how they overcame non-understanding when there was a breakdown in mutual intelligibility. The findings suggested the organizer team's perceptions towards English communication were positive whereas lack of confidence was found among the local Thai working team when dealing with lingua franca interactions. The lingua franca encounter participants perceived that terminologies used in the working field, limited vocabulary and word choices, grammar points and various accents might disrupt their communication. In order to achieve mutual intelligibility of both parties, the participants applied various communication strategies such as simplifying word choices or sentences, repeating words or statements, cross-checking and using body language. Finally, this case study would give some indications and guidelines for further research in an area of English usage in international business settings, particularly in the Thai context.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

Today, globalization and a fenceless world encourage people to move around the globe with several purposes ranging from business, education, trades, tourism to sport management. Golf is one of the world's popular sports that can be used as a communication tool to reflect the existing products or brands in association with a positive and privileged image perceived by consumers. With regards to this substantial benefit, many international golf tournaments in cooperation with several products and brands have been organized in Thailand, aiming to promote a positive image of both the supporting sponsors and Thailand's tourism industry as a whole to the outside world via all communication channels.

International cooperation is commonly seen everywhere in the present day with various field expertise or knowhow required by particular individuals or agents. When international golf events are brought into Thailand, it is a common practice that the tournaments are normally introduced and organized by the international sports management companies since those companies (referred to in this paper as the "organizer team") are more experienced with success-proven working platforms, trustworthy and powerful. Inevitably, however, to successfully operate an event in Thailand, the local agents (referred to in this study as the "local Thai working team") are compulsorily included in order to support the organizer team in various areas such as dealing with local media, sponsors and suppliers.

In this study, both local and international agents worked as the same team and naturally English was used as the operationalizing communication language. This was due to the fact that the organizer team could not speak the local language. The local Thai working team, in the meantime, had no other choices but to use English as the working language with the organizer team in the period of managing the event – before and during the tournament. In sharing information among speakers who do not share the same first language, English is automatically chosen as the communicative tool at the work place, especially in Thailand where English has been widely perceived for many decades as the main international language to communicate with the outside world for various purposes, for instance, economic, political, academic and cultural contacts (Baker, 2012; Rappa & Wee, 2006). Meierkord (2000) views that speakers may not share each other's language but they can resort to a third language for communicative purposes. Consequently, in this situation, English was used as a lingua franca (ELF).

In the field of ELF, there have been many research attempts to investigate mutual intelligibility between ELF users in various areas such as phonetic, lexical and grammatical features (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2001; 2004; Jenkins, 2000; Kachru, 1996;) and successful ELF pragmatic features in institutional settings (e.g. House & Kasper, 2000; House, 1999). However, addressing ELF communication in the setting of sport event operations, particular in the Thai context, is still inadequate due to the fact that so little empirical research has actually been conducted.

Consequently, an exploration to see the communication phenomenon of how English was employed as the key medium in linking the two working teams from different backgrounds and spoken languages to work together efficiently was the main purpose of this study. Three research questions were raised.

1. What were the event staff's perceptions towards using English for communication throughout the tournament operating period?
2. What communication barriers were perceived during their interactions?
3. What communication strategies were reported as frequently used by the event staff to achieve mutual understanding?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), according to several scholars in the field (Firth 1996; Seidlhofer 2004; Sifakis 2007) is defined as a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language as a communication tool. This means that ELF mainly refers to 'spoken English' used in communication among the so-called 'non-native users' of the language.

Particularly in the business field, over the past few decades, the emergence of the new term Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) has come to dominate as the shared code used to "get work done" in international business (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). BELF plays a specific role in business handling communication. Varner and Beamer (2011) define the meaning of BELF as the language of organizations with no native speakers of English, that operates among users who negotiate meanings for words in the contexts they share. BELF and ELF, in my point of view, share similar features with various contexts. Therefore, in this study, I adopted the term "ELF" to explain interactions throughout this paper. Varner and Beamer (2011) further view that communication across cultures and languages is difficult and full of hurdles and pitfalls. Even if two people from different cultures can speak a common language, they may misinterpret the cultural signals, potentially leading to confusion and misunderstanding.

Supporting this idea, Acar (2009) asserts that in communication between the Inner Circle mainstream English speakers and other World Englishes speakers, the accommodation should be mutual with both parties exploring ways to establish effective communication. One of the proposed communication strategies by many scholars is body language and other non-verbal communications that can enhance verbal interactions (e.g. Andersen, 2012; Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002; Gudykunst, 2005).

With regard to English proficiency of the non-native speakers in this study, it was difficult to assess the degree of proficiency that they possessed. Canagarajah (2007) argues that since Lingua Franca English (LFE) is intersubjectively constructed in a situation- and participant-specific manner, it is difficult to elicit baseline data in order to assess the proficiency of LFE speakers. He claims further that LFE's forms and conventions vary for different speakers and contexts. The proficiency, intelligibility, and communicative success can be judged in terms of each context and its participants. More importantly, the meaning and significance of the English used from the participants' own perspective, without imposing the researcher's standards or criteria invoked from elsewhere, have to be interpreted. From his point of view, it is clear that each ELF interaction is unique in context, raising its own challenges for negotiation. It may not be the case that one communicative act contributes to another and so on, leading to a cumulative line of progression.

Concerning the English teaching and learning situation in the schooling system and academic world, particularly for the first language (L1) speaking countries, Standard English has been earnestly adopted (Crystal, 2003). In Thailand, English teaching and learning has seen a consistent increase with an emphasis on the significance of English as the language of development and globalization (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017). English adopted in the Thai classroom strictly follows the native-speaker norm of Standard English with a learning goal of being as close to native-like proficiency as possible (Phongsirikul, 2017). Consequently, Thai English language learners were overwhelmed with standard linguistic features and expectations.

Oxford English Dictionary defines Standard English as the form of the English language widely accepted as the usual correct form (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). However, in my view, this definition is too broad. Fairclough (2001) claims that Standard English was regarded as correct English, and other social dialects were stigmatized not only in terms of correctness but also treated as communication tools to indirectly reflect speakers' lifestyles, morality and so forth. The mentioned phenomenon could still be seen in Thailand where a speaker speaking English with a Thai accent or non-native accent was perceived as inferior (Phongsirikul, 2017).

However, in today's globalized world, there are many English varieties not limited to the UK, USA or other L1 speaking countries. They are called World Englishes. Kachru (1992) divides World Englishes into three broad groups: "Inner Circle", L1 speaking countries; "Outer Circle", second language (L2) speaking countries; and "Expanding Circle", countries where English is used as an international language for communication.

Many scholars advocate the notion of English varieties in communication. Park and Wee (2011) support their idea by claiming that the use of English in international contexts is purely for practical purposes and bleached of first language cultural norms. Speaking with the local accent or native-accented English should not be considered a barrier for mutual interactions as Crystal (2003) argues that English can be spoken in any way and no one can now claim sole ownership of English. Therefore, English can be localized as long as the message gets across and is understandable among the interlocutors. Besides, Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008) also report that those who have had greater exposure to non-native English varieties are likely to be more intelligible than those with less exposure. Added to this point, studies of Clarke (2000) and Hanamoto (2014) emphasize familiarity through education with English varieties or exposure in education to non-native varieties.

From the literature review, it was apparent that lingua franca communication required a lot of adaptations and context considerations to facilitate the interaction to become smooth and communicative. The mentioned frameworks from various scholars on lingua franca communication (Canagarajah, 2007; Sifakis 2007; Seidlhofer 2004; Firth, 1996), business lingua franca (Varner and Beamer, 2011; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010), World Englishes (Acar, 2009; Canagarajah, 2007; Cristal, 2003; Kachru, 1992) and communication strategies (Andersen, 2012; Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002; Gudykunst, 2005) were adopted as guidelines to explore communication characteristics of ELF produced by the local Thai working team and the organizer team while they were handling an international event in Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

This research originated from a case study to investigate the non-native English working personnel's perceptions towards using English for communication in an international event operation in Thailand as well as to explore communication barriers and the participants' communication strategies utilized to achieve their mutual understanding. In order to gain in-depth information reflected by the participants individually, a qualitative approach was consequently applied in this case study. This paper described perceptions of the Thai working team towards English communication with the organizer team and vice versa who did not share the same language background. The study also analyzed what communication barriers they encountered during their interactions and how they overcame non-understanding when there was a breakdown in mutual intelligibility.

Participants

Participants for this study were purposively selected from an international golf tournament work site in Thailand. The total participants of this study were 10 personnel. The criteria for selecting the number of participants were based on their relevance to the research topic, convenient onsite data collection, rapid turnaround in data collection and reaching saturation point data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Among the 10 staff, there were five personnel from the local Thai working team: three junior managerial level staff and two event officers. The other five participants were selected from the organizer team. The members of the organizer team comprised two event managers; one from India and the other from Germany, and event supervisors; two were from Singapore and one from Taiwan.

With regards to the participants' profile, in terms of educational level, all members of the local Thai working team finished their first degree in either business administration or mass communication while four members of the organizer team graduated with a degree in business administration and the remaining manager finished his postgraduate study in sports management. In terms of work experience, all participants had experience in running at least one international golf event (two Thai staff) while the rest of the participants possessed three and five to eight years of working experience.

Concerning working positions, the local Thai working team comprised one public relations manager, one assistant public relations manager, one production manager and two event officers. For the organizer team, there were two event managers and three event supervisors. For the responsibilities, the local Thai working team's jobs were media related assignments (public relations personnel) and all event production related works (production and event handling personnel). Working positions of event organizer team members, in the meantime, consisted of two event managers monitoring overall operations of the event, while the three supervisors ran daily event operations.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a set of open-ended questions designed as a guideline for a face-to-face interview in order to explore complex feelings and attitudes (Creswell, 2003) and to gain the required and expected information from the participants (Sommer & Sommer, 1997). This set of question guideline was prepared for both the local Thai working team in Thai language and the organizer team in English language. Both versions shared the exact same content. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants where additional questions and ideas from both the interviewer and interviewees were added during the 20-30 minute interview session.

With regards to the questions prepared for the interviewees, the questions were divided into two parts. The first part contained questions requiring the participants' general information such as educational level, working experience, working position and responsibilities. For the second part, five open-ended guideline questions were prepared for the interviewer to ask the participants. The five questions were grouped into three main themes. Questions 1 and 2 were designed to explore the participants' perceptions towards English communication during the period of event handling. In the meantime, questions 3 and 4 were created to investigate communication barriers perceived by the participants when they interacted. Finally, the last question was asked to the participants to disclose strategies they adopted and practiced in order to establish mutual intelligibility. The three themed questions were displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1
Objectives and designed questions for semi-structured interview

Objectives & Themes	Designed Questions
1. Exploring perceptions towards English communication	Are you comfortable with speaking English to your organizer team (for the local participants) or your local Thai working team (for the non-Thai participants) that you work with during the event handling - pre-event and tournament week?
	Do you think you need to speak perfect or standard English (in your perception) when talking to your colleagues?
2. Investigating communication barriers in interlocutors' interactions	Do you find it difficult to deliver your English messages to your colleagues?
	What are the barriers that you think obstruct your mutual understanding in communication during the event handling?
3. Discovering strategies adopted by interlocutors to achieve mutual intelligibility	What are your strategies adopted or practiced when you feel that the person you are speaking with seems not to understand the message you are trying to deliver?

Before commencing the interview, all participants were briefed on the purpose of the interview but not informed of expected answers. The interview was conducted one at a time for a period of around 20-30 minutes for each participant. The interview was conducted in an informal manner with questions and answers alongside additional ideas discussed throughout the session. Field note-taking and audio recording were applied to collect and record all the data from the participants.

Data analysis and procedures

The data collected from field note-taking were categorized while additional data from audio recordings were transcribed. The strategy of data analysis focused mainly on analyzing the emerging results drawn from the participants' answers. The results gained from the participants that were similar or displayed in the same manner were grouped into themes and then coded for further significant interpretations. In addition to the main data collection approach from the designed questions, during conducting the semi-structured interviews some points and additional ideas outside of the set questions were asked and the information of significance were also collected for the data analysis and interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the following findings:

1. Perceptions of the event staff towards using English for communication throughout the tournament operating period
2. Communication barriers perceived during interlocutors' interactions
3. Communication strategies adopted and practiced by interlocutors to achieve mutual intelligibility

1. Perceptions of the event workers towards using English for communication throughout the tournament operating period

The perceptions towards English communication of both the local Thai working team and the organizer team during the international golf tournament held in Thailand are reported in Table 2.

In this section, two questions were asked to investigate the perceptions of both working teams, Thai and organizer working personnel, towards their communication throughout the event period. Qualitative data analyses were conducted to see the significance of the findings. The results drawn from both working parties were integrated for interpretation as follows.

Table 2
Exploring the participants' perceptions towards English communication

Question 1	Working Teams	Themes
Are you comfortable with speaking English to your organizer team (for the local participants) or your local Thai working team (for the non-Thai participants) that you work with during the event handling — pre-event and tournament week?	Organizer Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't see any points for being uncomfortable. That's why we were delegated from the company to do the job in Thailand.
	Local Thai Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are confident in our English speaking skills. We are confident that we can communicate correctly. • But we will speak when necessary. • We are not confident with our English but we will speak whenever we are required to.
Question 2	Working Teams	Themes
Do you think you need to speak perfect or standard English (in your perception) when talking to your colleagues?	Organizer Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't know what Standard English is. • We just speak and communicate naturally.
	Local Thai Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't know what Standard English is. • We are not 100% confident when speaking English with the organizer team. • It would be best if the organizer team speak with a native-like accent. • The organizer team's speaking is okay. We can understand them and do as they assign us to do.

Regarding the question asked to the local Thai working team whether they were comfortable with speaking English to their co-workers, the organizer team or their local Thai working team, three Thai respondents disclosed that they were confident in dealing with their colleagues in English while one participant revealed that he or she would speak to their non-Thai colleagues only when necessary. Additionally, one participant reported that he or she was uncomfortable with his or her English and would speak English to the other party only in the situation that was required.

On the other hand, for the participants who were from Singapore, Germany, India and Taiwan, all their answers confirmed their confidence in speaking English to other interlocutors due to the fact that English was commonly practiced in the Outer Circle or frequently used in their home countries, in particular Singapore and India (Kachru, 1992). For Taiwan and Germany, though they are not included in the countries where English is used as a second language, English is widely spoken and used for various purposes. According to Germany's education standards jointly set by the Federal States, the goal of the system is to get students to have at least Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)'s B1 or B2 English proficiency. Therefore, 60-70% of German kids take English as their first language ("Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany", 2018). In Taiwan, in the meantime, the promotion of English learning and using has been driven largely by economic needs, explicitly urged by the government in order to boost efficiency in dealing with the competitiveness of the country in terms of commerce and technology (Huang, 2005). As a result, the organizer team members were familiar with English usage no matter what variety it was.

In Thailand, even though English is considered to be widely used among those who work for multinational corporations in the big cities, the number of English speakers is substantially limited among certain groups of people. A report from Thailand's Ministry of Education (2016) revealed that only 5 percent of Thai people possessed adequate proficiency of English. Socio-geographically, as English is not spoken or used as an everyday language in Thailand since Thai is considered the official language, the degree of English proficiency, both written and spoken, is considerably inadequate to moderate for general people. However, when it came to communication, especially in an international working environment, the two parties of interlocutors could practically get the communicative message across even though it might take a bit longer with their own English variety and individual accents.

To explain the result drawn from the Thai working team, it was revealed that the three participants who felt more comfortable in communicating with their interlocutors had more experience in international event operations. Consequently, they were more familiar with how to efficiently communicate in English in their encounters when compared with the other two juniors (Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008; Hanamoto, 2014; Clarke, 2000). They better adjusted themselves to the context and knew how to negotiate with their counterparts (Canagarajah, 2007), resulting in possessing more confidence in dealing with various encounters.

Unlike the local Thai working team living in Thailand where English was defined as an international language and used only in situations of international business contacts (Baker, 2012; Rappa and Wee, 2006), all members from the organizer team were positive in communicating without any hindrance. All of them had dealt with many events in different regions inclusive of both non-native and native speaking countries. This meant they had exposed themselves to a variety of English communication and they were able to gradually learn to deal with different forms of English communication. Added to that capability, the backgrounds they possessed including in their home countries, enhanced their skills in employing English in ELF interactions.

With regards to indicating an answer to the second question investigating their perceptions towards their English communication preference whether Standard English was important for them or not, all the members of both working teams did not understand the term 'Standard English', which was later explained to them as English spoken by native speakers with correct English form. Under this point, all the organizer team members were not bothered with either Standard English or English varieties. They simply communicated naturally as English was a part of their daily life communication.

On the contrary, all local Thai working team members were not confident in employing their English with their interlocutors. Some of them lacked confidence in producing English with their own Thai accent. They expected that it would be best if they could speak in a native-like style. Positively, however, from the final outcome, they all could get the assignments done. They were aware that without a native-like conversation, they still communicated successfully, as proposed by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) that lingua franca in business is the shared code used to get work done.

Concerning the emerged outcomes of Standard English or native-like English (perceived by the participant's perception) preference and lack of confidence in their own English communication of Thai staff, it can be explained and traced back to English learning policy and learning English in the Thai classroom. Baker and Jarunthawatchai (2017) state that although English has been taught in Thailand for many decades, the teaching and learning of English still prioritize the native-like English (Standard English) which is considered the privileged language that Thai students are framed to follow. A lot of Thai students have been suffering from this ideological English teaching and learning perception in Thailand (Phongsirikul, 2017). As a result, Thai graduates or Thais in general lack confidence when they utter their own English and when they perceive that their English is not up to the framed standard. Mackenzie (2014) views this point differently by claiming that when people use English to communicate as a lingua franca, adopting several strategies of speaking to enhance mutual intelligibility is more important than imitating the norms of the English native speakers.

With regards to the perception towards Standard English, both the local Thai working team and the organizer team were not aware of the existence of this term. However, unlike the local Thai working team's perspectives that tended to be attached to the native English norms implanted by the schooling system in the country (Phongsirikul, 2017), the organizer team argued that although they were unaware of what Standard English was, they just spoke or communicated naturally without any constraints. Besides, they were not worried about responses from their interlocutors. They could use all contexts produced by their partners to get the right meanings or messages as Pullin (2010) points out that communication involves considerable negotiation of meaning and perseverance.

To recap the answers to the first question, the findings suggested that the organizer team who were from the Outer Circle world perceived themselves positively in communicating in English as a lingua franca. Unlike their working partners, some of the local Thais still lacked confidence when dealing with lingua franca interactions.

The perceptions towards general English communication perceived by the local Thai working team and the organizer team were diverse in terms of their own confidence and English variety usage. In the next section, this paper investigated the communication barriers found in the interlocutors' interactions while both parties were working together onsite.

2. Communication barriers perceived during interlocutors' interactions

The investigation of communication barriers obtained from the interviews of the local Thai working team and the organizer team participants in the period of the event operation is reported in Table 3.

When asked whether the participants found it difficult to deliver English messages to their counterpart colleagues, all the organizer team members claimed that they interacted with their Thai colleagues comfortably and naturally. They asserted that it was due to the fact that they normally spoke their own English style at home and assumed that they had English proficiency without counting on native speakers' norms. However, their only concern was they

Table 3
Investigating communication barriers in interlocutors' interactions

Question 3	Working Teams	Themes	Problems Found
Do you find it difficult to deliver your English messages to your colleagues?	Organizer Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, we produce natural actions when dealing with local Thai team because we have experience and are confident of our English proficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No problem at all
	Local Thai Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, it is okay. We can handle it even though we can't get 100% message across to them. • Yes, we feel uncomfortable with a bit of worry whether the organizer team will understand our English or not. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident • Not sure about English proficiency
Question 4	Working Teams	Themes	
If yes, what are the barriers that you think obstruct your mutual understanding in communication during the event handling?	Organizer Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terminologies used in the field • Listening skills • Limited vocabulary 	
	Local Thai Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited vocabulary and word choices • Grammar • Various accents 	

had to be aware that they were talking to non-native English speaking colleagues. Consequently, they adjusted themselves in order to get along with the local interlocutors. Leyland (2011) adds in his viewpoint that standardized rules of English cannot apply and ELF as an interaction method is always dependent on the specific context and the specific people involved.

With regards to communication barriers, the organizer team found that their local Thai working team sometimes experienced confusion caused by the event's terminologies or technical terms used in the field. This occasionally disrupted or delayed the mutual intelligibility. Additionally, they perceived that their local Thai working team sometimes faced some problems with their accents and their natural speaking speed. However, the local Thai working team made them aware of their understanding hindrance by asking for repetition from them. Lastly, the organizer team participants claimed further that their local Thai working colleagues tended to employ only a certain amount of vocabulary to communicate throughout the working period. The organizer team assumed that the local Thai working team members might lack varieties of word choices. I quite disagreed with this assumption as an experienced English learner and teacher from Thailand. Learning English was compulsory in Thailand at all levels of education starting from the primary schooling system or earlier stage to bachelor or higher degrees. With that long period of learning, the learners might have had some vocabulary in their heads but in my view, they might only find it difficult to communicate in real interactions. This observation may be worth examining as a future research. The aforementioned point was supported by Baker and Jarunthawatchai (2017). They argue that there has been a consistent increase in emphasis on the English language education policy.

In Thailand, it is an underlying ideology that perceives English as the language of development and globalization. However, they further claim that there has also been persistent dissatisfaction with the perceived results of education practices with regards to the English proficiency level of Thai people.

Concerning getting the message across in communication, the perspective of the local Thai working team was quite similar to that of the organizer team. Four out of five of the Thai personnel were content in dealing with their colleagues in English, but they were not absolutely certain as to whether they could get complete messages across. One participant, for example, was slightly frustrated when speaking English to the team. He or she was afraid and unsure whether or not his or her interlocutors would fully understand his or her delivered messages. All Thai participants disclosed their concern when communicating in English. They perceived themselves that they had inadequate vocabulary, resulting in having limited word choices. Added to their concern, they admitted not knowing accurate grammar rules and only being able to speak English with their own Thai accent or non-native speaker accent. In my viewpoint, this self-perception potentially contributes to low confidence of the speakers when they encountered English speaking situations.

Canagarajah (2007) reflects on this issue by claiming that the lingua franca speaker does not have to worry about grammar. He notes, “Because there is no priori grammar, the variable language system has to be encountered in actual use.” This suggests that to achieve the successful outcome of getting the messages across among the staff, both parties had to naturally go through the process of actual adaptation within an actual context .

In conclusion, with regards to the second research question, the communication barriers perceived by both groups of participants during the lingua franca encounters were terminologies used in the working field, limited vocabulary and word choices, grammar points and various accents that might have disrupted their listening skills and lowered the confidence of the local Thai working team in particular. However, both parties tended to reach mutual understanding and get the assignments done smoothly throughout the tournament no matter the obstacles they were experiencing during the communication processes. The results drawn from the participants are illustrated in the following section reporting on strategies they adopted and practiced in order to overcome all communication hindrances.

3. Strategies adopted and practiced by interlocutors to achieve mutual intelligibility

The selected strategies adopted and utilized by the participants in order to establish mutual intelligibility is reported in Table 4.

Table 4
Strategy adopted and practiced by interlocutors

Question 5	Working Team	Themes
What is your most selected strategy when you feel that the person you are speaking to seems not to understand the message you are trying to deliver?	Organizer Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple English word choices • Use alternative word choices • Repeat the words or statements • Slow down speaking speed • Recheck understanding • Use body language
	Local Thai Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain more instead of using direct words • Use body language • Recheck understanding by repeating statements with own words. • Recheck understanding by cross-checking with different word choices or statements

The results drawn from the participants of the two working teams concerning adopting strategies to be employed in their operational communication suggested that various strategies were applied in order to convey messages to the opposite party effectively. From the investigation, the organizer team utilized six strategies to deal with their local Thai working team. The first strategy in their communication was using simple English words or terms when they interacted with their partners. In order to make sure that messages were correctly delivered to other parties, the organizer team basically spoke simple English words, omitting grammatical and structural rules. The purpose of employing this communicative strategy was to accommodate their interlocutors' intelligibility.

However, when the organizer team felt that there might have been a problem in getting the message across, they tended to adopt the second strategy by repeating words or statements to emphasize the intended messages. However, from time to time, the third strategy of changing or using alternative word choices as the interlocutors' option was employed. While the two parties were communicating, the organizer team noticed their counterparts' facial expressions or other non-verbal communication that showed questions or unspoken messages. To deal with this situation, the organizer team would adopt the fourth strategy by slowing down their talking speed. Under the situation of problematic verbal communication that tended to confuse the interlocutors, body language cues, including facial expressions, uses of hands, arms and legs and so forth could help visualize the blocked words and enhanced mutual understanding (Andersen, 2012). Rechecking was the fifth approach that the foreign staff applied to cross-check their partners' intelligibility. At this stage, a couple of questions were asked to reassure that the other party fully understood the given messages. Lastly, body language was employed by the organizer team throughout the communication process in order to promote maximum understanding (Gudykunst, 2005).

In the meantime, the results drawn from the local Thai working team indicated four key strategies that they practiced when dealing with their foreign counterparts. Most adopted strategies were similar to those of the organizer team. When the local Thai working team

members felt that the other party seemed not to understand the intended message they had been trying to deliver, they would try to explain or clarify more instead of using direct or exact words. This phenomenon was relevant to the disclosed claim of the local Thai working team that they lacked adequate vocabulary to express themselves. Similar to their working counterparts, employing body language and rechecking understanding throughout the encounters were also included as one of the most frequently used strategies to maximize mutual understanding of the local Thai working team.

In answering the final research question of strategies adopted and utilized in order to achieve mutual understanding, the findings obtained from both groups of participants suggested almost the same approaches were employed for the real life interactions. The applied strategies were using simple English and word choices, repeating words or statements, rechecking or cross-checking understanding and applying body language cues (Andersen, 2012; Gudykunst, 2005; Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002).

Added to the findings gained from the five set questions, some interesting perspectives could be drawn from the participants during the semi-structured interviews, particularly for the local Thai working team. They claimed that the relationship among the interlocutors also played a vital role. If the speakers were familiar to each other or became friends, the local Thai working team members tended to produce their English with a more confident manner. Besides, once the interlocutors' relationship became closer, the local Thai working team members occasionally produced a code switching speech by adding some Thai words into their English communication. According to Canagarajah (2016), the above communication strategy can be practically adopted by the interactants in an attempt to get a message across.

All in all, ELF is an absolute vital communication tool for business handling in Thailand including international golf event organizing. The movement of the labor force together with the know-how of a particular field expertise has created interactions of English, aiming to get international assignments successfully executed. Cooperation among the local Thai working team and the organizer team members from the non-native speaking countries signified a distinctive feature of ELF in the Thai context. Perceptions towards international encounters of the local Thai working team and the organizer team from the countries where English is used as the second language or is highly essential in people's lives were diverse. The local Thai working team perceived themselves possessing an insufficient vocabulary bank, inadequate grammar knowledge and, to their perception, non-native accent, leading to their lack of confidence in English communication.

CONCLUSION

One significant finding drawn from the local Thai working members was that they were not really aware of the fact that today Standard English does not play much of a role. This is due to globalization together with the widespread of English varieties (Crystal, 2003). Crystal (2003) asserts that today nobody owns English. I totally agree with his point because it seems rather unpractical and impossible to frame learners of all the four corners of the world to deliver the



same form and pattern of a single English. Were they aware of this point, the local Thai operators might gain more confidence in delivering messages to their co-workers even with their own Thai English variety. Finally, with regards to the aforementioned perspectives, additional future research on lingua franca in various Thai contexts is strongly recommended. For example, it is worth examining as to whether the Thais would be more confident in making more English contacts in international business settings if they were fully aware of the existence of English varieties.

LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Throughout the study, I was aware that there were some limitations which could not be controlled or monitored such as time, background of the participants, stakeholders and so forth. The representative sample from the selected population might have a limitation in providing the ability to generalize the findings of the study. Possibly, the method applied in this study might contain some biases due to the fact that the groups of participants were varied in characteristics, educational backgrounds, and work experiences and likewise varied in their own experience with regards to their exposure to international events handling and encounters. However, whilst it might not be able to answer all the questions completely, this case study would be able to give some indications of what? and set the platform for further research.

In my viewpoint, the significant findings emerging from this study suggested some particular characteristics of the Thai working personnel that required much attention towards the nation's English learning policy. There has been a norm of native learning and speaking English which is still considered rich and privileged in the classroom. This means high expectations to frame learners to try to imitate the native speakers' norms of English teaching and learning is a dominant practice. A question that requires immediate attention from authorities is what actually happens to those who fail to comply with the society's expectations. Have we prepared solutions for them?

I personally do not go against Standard English but look for room in officially promoting varieties of English so that the Thai public become aware of them and as a consequence become more confident in delivering their own unique English comfortably. A statement from Phongsirikul (2017) could best explain the future of English in Thailand. "It will be no longer an embarrassing situation when a Thai user of English speaks with his or her Thai accent as long as it is intelligible to his or her interlocutors causing no misunderstanding in their cross-cultural communication" (p.91). Therefore, the 21st century teachers should promote and equip their students with an awareness of English varieties in order to empower the graduates with delivering English communication effectively and confidently.

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