

LANGUAGE ANXIETY TOWARD THAI LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF CHINESE EXCHANGE STUDENTS AT DHURAKIJ PUNDIT UNIVERSITY

ความวิตกกังวลในการเรียนภาษาไทย: กรณีศึกษานักศึกษาแลกเปลี่ยนชาวจีน มหาวิทยาลัยธุรกิจบัณฑิตย์

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to investigate the levels of anxiety in learning Thai among Chinese students majoring in Thai for Careers at Dhurakij Pundit University; and 2) to compare the Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom in terms of genders. The subjects that participated in this research were 54 third-year Chinese exchange students enrolled in the second semester of academic year 2019 at Dhurakij Pundit University. The data collection instrument was a five-point rating scale questionnaire covering 36 items in six aspects. The statistics used for the data analysis were percentage, mean, and t-test. The research findings revealed the following. One, the Chinese students experienced a moderate level of anxiety in Thai language learning in each aspect and overall investigated in this study. Their anxiety regarding reading and writing Thai was ranked the highest, and two, the male respondents did not significantly demonstrate levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom different from the female respondents. However, a further finding showed that the male respondents had a higher level of Thai language anxiety than that of the female respondents in almost all aspects except their anxiety in reading.

Keywords: Thai language classroom anxiety, Thai as a foreign language, Chinese students

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Introduction

Foreign language learning has been increasingly crucial among Chinese people, and the studying of Thai language and culture are becoming more popular. Over the past five years, a number of Chinese students have chosen Thai universities for their overseas study experience due to the development of China's One Belt and One Road (OBOR) initiative, China's biggest development strategy and foreign policy (Kang, 2019). According to statistics of Thailand's Office of the Higher Education Commission (Marketeer, 2019), there were in total 17,055 Chinese students, the largest number among all international students, studying in Thai universities. The top-five universities with the highest number of Chinese students were Dhurakij Pundit University (2,101), followed by Assumption University (948), Chiang Mai University (547), Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (511), and Siam University (371).

Dhurakij Pundit University, one of the most outstanding private universities in Thailand has been accepted by Chinese students. This is partly due to Chinese students' preferences for attractive courses, short-course training, and exchange programs. In addition, the university organizes self-introduction roadshow events in various provinces in China and has become partners with universities in China (Marketeer, 2019). As a result, each year Chinese exchange students come to study the Thai for Careers course as their major in the Faculty of Arts at Dhurakij Pundit University.

Learning foreign languages is difficult and time-consuming for most adult learners, and many language teachers accept the fact that it is rather difficult to motivate their foreign students to put their abilities into action, especially in terms of speaking the target language in class. The success or failure of learning a foreign language has been attributed to many factors, such as anxiety, attitudes, and motivation (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, 1993a; Skehan, 1989, 1991; Spolsky, 1989, cited in Yiamsawat, 2016).

Anxiety is an important affective variable that can affect students' foreign language learning performance and achievement. Over the past few decades, foreign language researchers have increasingly focused their attention on foreign language anxiety (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000), and a number of articles published on the topic of language anxiety show the negative effects of anxiety on the language-learning process. According to Crookall and Oxford (1991), extreme language learning anxiety can cause related problems; for example, it reduces students' confidence, lowers their self-esteem, lessens their willingness to take risks, and decreases their language proficiency. In addition, students that feel anxious about the foreign language that they are learning may find their study less enjoyable and this can affect their language performance (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002). In Rankin-Brown's (2006) study, she revealed that highly anxious students may avoid writing due to a fear of teacher and peer evaluation. Similarly, Huwari and Hashima (2011) indicated that students with high anxiety lack confidence and self-esteem in improving their writing tasks. They tend to avoid writing classes, compose low-quality papers, and lack of motivation in writing. Additionally, Tanveer (2007) asserted that students still feel stressed and forget the things that they had prepared despite putting more effort into memorizing and rehearsing their oral presentations. The findings of another study conducted by

Aguila and Harjanto (2016), showed that anxiety has its most negative impacts on students' communicative and interactive ability. When students become nervous, they show long pauses in their conversation, loss of words, and the inability to keep the conversation going because of forgetfulness.

It can be said then that anxiety plays an important role in foreign language learning, although study in this area has never been conducted at Dhurakij Pundit University. For these reasons, the researcher would like to measure the levels of anxiety on the part of undergraduate Chinese students majoring in Thai for Careers in using the Thai language for listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar in a classroom setting. The results of the study will benefit the development of the Thai language proficiency of Chinese students and will help them to develop language skills that they can use to communicate with Thai people. It can also be a guideline for improving the Thai language curriculum for foreigners to be more effective in accordance with the goals of Thai language education for foreigners.

Objectives

1. To investigate the levels of anxiety in learning Thai among Chinese students majoring in Thai for Careers at Dhurakij Pundit University
2. To compare the Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom according to gender differences

Methodology

1. Population and Samples

This research was conducted using a quantitative research method. The population was 54 undergraduate Chinese students in the Thai for Careers program in the Faculty of Arts at Dhurakij Pundit University in Thailand, and the study was conducted during the second semester of academic year 2019. Thai was the medium of teaching. According to the demographic data shared on the questionnaire, the gender proportion was females at 79.6% and males at 20.4%. They were third-year students in a one-year exchange program and Chinese was their mother tongue.

2. Conceptual Framework

This study was designed under the framework of foreign language anxiety proposed by Daly and Miller (1975), which consists of three main components of writing apprehension: the tendency to avoid writing, attitudes toward written communication, and feelings experienced during writing. In addition, the foreign language classroom anxiety scale, namely communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, was also important for the study as it was employed in previous studies conducted by Horwitz et al. (1986) and Saito et al.'s (1999) reading anxiety scale, which included five components: nervousness and worry associated with imperfect text comprehension, negative or pessimistic beliefs about reading, lack of enjoyment or self-confidence in reading, unwillingness to demonstrate one's linguistic skill, and reliance on the first language in FL reading. These factors of foreign language anxiety were subsequently adapted by Yiamsawat (2004) to construct the questionnaire of foreign language anxiety, which include six

aspects: (1) listening anxiety, (2) speaking anxiety, (3) reading anxiety, (4) writing anxiety, (5) vocabulary anxiety, and (6) grammar anxiety. The figure below shows the framework of this study.

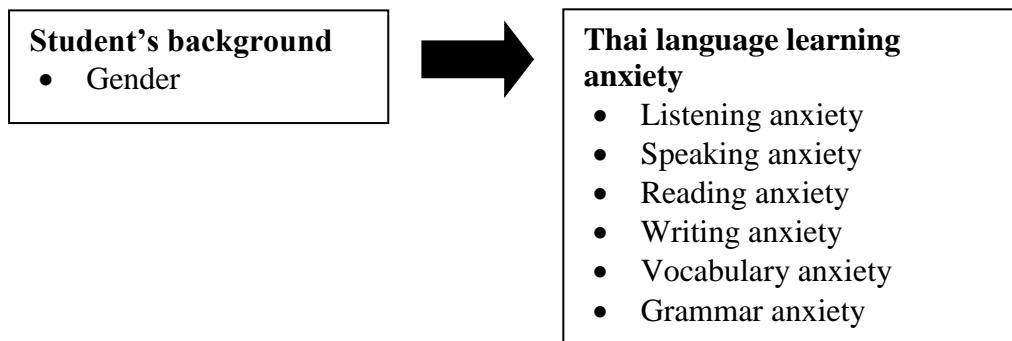


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of This Study

3. Research Instrument

In this study, an online questionnaire was used to gather information adopted from a study of foreign language classroom anxiety conducted by Yiamsawat (2004). The questionnaire was originally constructed and modified by the researchers from the writing apprehension (Daly and Miller, 1975), the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (Horwitz et al., 1986), and the reading anxiety scale (Saito et al., 1999). The questionnaire was first written in Thai and then translated into Chinese before it was distributed to the participants. The questionnaire comprised two major parts: the first part dealt with the respondents' demographic information, and the second part explored the students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom. There were six main aspects of performance anxiety: listening anxiety, speaking anxiety, reading anxiety, writing anxiety, vocabulary anxiety, and grammar anxiety, as discussed earlier. The 36 items regarding the six aspects were organized in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire was examined for the validity by three experts specializing in TEFL and was piloted by Yiamsawat (2004). As a result of this, the questionnaire employed in this study had an acceptable level of reliability, where the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient value was .87.

4. Procedure

The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire concerning their opinions about the Thai language classroom anxiety via a link to Google Forms at an available time.

5. Data Analysis

The results from the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS program. The descriptive statistics used for the data analysis were percentage, mean, and t-test. The mean and standard deviation of each item of the questionnaire were calculated according to the 5-point Likert scales (5: strongly agree, 4: agree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 2: disagree, and 1: strongly disagree) in order to measure the individual's levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom.

Research Results

This section illustrates the results of the study using descriptive statistical analyses of the responses to the survey items, followed by a discussion of the findings.

1. Chinese Students' Levels of Anxiety in the Thai Language Classroom

As clearly presented in Table 1, the students viewed that reading anxiety and writing anxiety were the most significant aspects of anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.36$), followed by speaking anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.31$), vocabulary anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.22$), listening anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.08$), and grammar anxiety ($\bar{X} = 3.02$).

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation for the Levels of Anxiety in the Thai Language Classroom Perceived by Chinese Students Shown in Six Aspects

Thai Language Learning Anxiety	Mean	S.D.	Rank
1. Listening Anxiety			
1.1 It frightens me when I do not understand what Thai teachers are saying.	3.44	1.25	2
1.2 I am confident that my Thai listening skill is better than that of other Chinese students.	3.13	0.95	4
1.3 I get nervous when I do not understand every word that Thai teachers say.	3.50	1.04	1
1.4 I feel confident that I can summarize or tell the main ideas of the story I hear.	3.13	0.70	4
1.5 I get frustrated when I do not understand some audio conversations.	3.43	1.00	3
1.6 I think that it is easy to understand Thai teachers when they speak.	1.85	0.76	5
Total	3.08	0.48	4
2. Speaking Anxiety			
2.1 I become excited when Thai teachers ask me to speak Thai in class.	3.44	1.04	2
2.2 I always feel that other Chinese students speak Thai better than I do.	3.39	1.10	3
2.3 I am not nervous when I speak Thai with native teachers.	3.09	0.85	5
2.4 I am not shy about volunteering answers in my Thai language class.	2.87	0.87	6
2.5 I begin to panic when I speak Thai without preparation.	3.96	0.75	1
2.6 I feel confident when I speak Thai in a Thai language class.	3.11	0.74	4
Total	3.31	0.50	2

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation for the Levels of Anxiety in the Thai Language Classroom Perceived by Chinese Students Shown in Six Aspects (cont.)

Thai Language Learning Anxiety	Mean	S.D.	Rank
3. Reading Anxiety			
3.1 I become anxious when I cannot summarize the main idea of a text.	3.63	1.05	3
3.2 I enjoy reading Thai stories or articles.	2.94	0.97	5
3.3 I am confident that my Thai reading skill is better than that of other Chinese students.	3.28	0.83	4
3.4 I become frustrated when I read long passages or texts in Thai.	3.76	0.82	1
3.5 I am confident I understand the writer's point of view in reading Thai passages.	2.89	0.88	6
3.6 I am anxious when I am unable to complete reading exams within a time limit.	3.69	0.88	2
Total	3.36	0.48	1
4. Writing Anxiety			
4.1 I am anxious when I write Thai essays because I do not know how to start writing.	3.57	1.00	1
4.2 I feel confident and relaxed before studying Thai essay writing in class.	3.17	0.81	4
4.3 I am worried when I do not know how to write essays in Thai.	3.35	0.99	2
4.4 Although I spell some Thai words incorrectly, I am not afraid to write an essay in Thai.	2.67	0.84	5
4.5 I always think that other Chinese students write Thai essays better than I do.	3.30	0.96	3
4.6 I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in Thai writing.	2.67	0.77	5
Total	3.36	0.48	1
5. Vocabulary Anxiety			
5.1 I get nervous when I do not know the meaning of new words.	3.48	1.04	2
5.2 I feel confident in my ability to use Thai vocabulary in a conversation.	2.91	0.80	5
5.3 I do not worry about vocabulary because I can guess the meanings of unfamiliar words from the contextual clues.	2.52	0.60	6
5.4 I am confident that my Thai vocabulary knowledge is better than that of other Chinese students.	3.31	0.88	3
5.5 The more I study Thai words, the more I get confused.	3.04	0.97	4
5.6 I am not confident about using the right words in context because of the similar meanings of many words.	4.03	0.75	1
Total	3.22	0.41	3

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation for the Levels of Anxiety in the Thai Language Classroom Perceived by Chinese Students Shown in Six Aspects (cont.)

Thai Language Learning Anxiety	Mean	S.D.	Rank
6. Grammar Anxiety			
6.1 I am worried about using the Thai language correctly because of the many grammar rules, so I cannot show my ability in the language.	3.56	0.92	1
6.2 I feel that it is easy to study Thai grammar.	3.28	0.89	3
6.3 I feel comfortable when learning many grammar rules in languages.	3.26	0.95	4
6.4 The more I study Thai grammar, the more I get confused.	3.17	0.94	5
6.5 I always think that other Chinese students have better Thai grammar knowledge than I do.	3.31	1.09	2
6.6 I do not feel nervous whenever my Thai teachers correct every grammar mistakes I make.	1.57	0.79	6
Total	3.02	0.50	5

According to the analysis of the findings, it can be inferred that becoming nervous due to a lack of comprehension of what Thai teachers say was considered the most significant item in learners' "listening anxiety" ($\bar{x} = 3.50$); experiencing panic when speaking Thai without preparation was considered the most significant "speaking anxiety" ($\bar{x} = 3.96$); becoming frustrated when reading long passages or texts in Thai was considered the most significant "reading anxiety" ($\bar{x} = 3.76$); being anxious when writing Thai essays because of a lack of proper ideas to begin writing was considered the strongest reason for "writing anxiety" ($\bar{x} = 3.36$); lack of confidence in using the right words in context because of the similar meanings of many words was the highest mean for "vocabulary anxiety" ($\bar{x} = 4.03$); and being worried about the correct use of the Thai language because of its many grammar rules was considered the strongest reason for "grammar anxiety" ($\bar{x} = 3.56$).

Table 2 The Top-Five Types of Thai Language Classroom Anxiety

Top-5 Types of Thai Language Classroom Anxiety	Mean	S.D.	Rank
5.6 I am not confident about using the right words in context because of the similar meanings of many words.	4.03	0.75	1
2.5 I begin to panic when I speak Thai without preparation.	3.96	0.75	2
3.4 I become frustrated when I read long passages or texts in Thai.	3.76	0.82	3
3.6 I am anxious when I am unable to complete reading exams within a time limit.	3.69	0.88	4
3.1 I become anxious when I cannot summarize the main idea of a text	3.63	1.05	5

According to the top-five Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom in Table 2, it is interesting that the levels, as perceived by the

students, fell under the aspects of reading anxiety, speaking anxiety, and vocabulary anxiety, while none appeared under listening anxiety, writing anxiety, or grammar anxiety. Statements such as (5.6) not being confident about using the right words in context because of the similar meanings of many words, (2.5) beginning to panic when speaking Thai without preparation, (3.4) becoming frustrated when reading long passages or texts in Thai, (3.6) being anxious when they are unable to complete reading exams within a time limit, and (3.1) becoming anxious when they cannot summarize the main idea of a text were considered the most significant outcomes for Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom.

2. A Comparison of the Chinese Students' Levels of Anxiety Regarding Thai Language Learning at Dhurakij Pundit University Classified by Gender

According to the second research objective, the results in Table 3 revealed that there was no statistically significant difference found in the students' overall or in the six aspects between two different gender groups at the 0.05 level. This means that the anxiety levels of the male and female students were not different in Thai language learning.

Table 3 A Comparison of the Mean and Standard Deviation for the Chinese Students' Levels of Anxiety in the Thai Language Classroom Classified by Gender

Thai Language Learning Anxiety	Male (n = 11)		Female (n = 43)		t-test	Sig.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
1. Listening anxiety	3.18	0.54	3.05	0.47	0.78	0.43
2. Speaking anxiety	3.42	0.56	3.28	0.49	0.82	0.41
3. Reading anxiety	3.28	0.62	3.38	0.45	-0.59	0.56
4. Writing anxiety	3.27	0.69	3.08	0.34	1.32	0.19
5. Vocabulary anxiety	3.30	0.41	3.19	0.42	0.78	0.44
6. Grammar anxiety	3.22	0.48	2.97	0.50	1.52	0.14
Total	3.28	0.46	3.16	0.31	1.04	0.31

However, when considering each aspect, the results indicated that the Chinese male students were more anxious than the female students in all five aspects, except for reading anxiety. As illustrated in table 3, the Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom was at a moderate level in all aspects. Speaking anxiety yielded the most scores for the Chinese male students, with a mean score of 3.42, whereas reading anxiety yielded the most scores for the Chinese female students, with a mean score of 3.38.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings obtained from this research, which is linked to previous studies. The purpose of this study was to investigate the levels of anxiety in learning Thai among Chinese students in the Thai for Careers program at Dhurakij Pundit University, focusing on the general perceptions of Chinese male and female students.

1. Language Anxiety About Learning Thai as A Foreign Language

According to the first research objective, it can be concluded that the Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom at Dhurakij Pundit University overall and for each aspect was at a moderate level. The outcome contributed more weight to the items related to reading and writing anxiety. Anxiety, for example becoming anxious when summarizing the main idea of a text, becoming frustrated when reading long passages or texts in Thai, and being anxious when being unable to complete reading exams within a time limit, were considered the most outstanding "reading anxiety" items. It seems that the subject that the students enrolled in, contemporary Thai literature, required the students to summarize the main idea of long Thai short stories or novels and students' progress was evaluated through quizzes, mid-term exams, and final exams throughout the second semester. Hosenfeld's research (1977, cited in Lee, James F., 1999, p. 53) revealed that many foreign language readers misconceive their reading process and feel that they need to understand every word and idea in the text that they read. As a result, their tendency to look up every word may lead to anxiety and a decrease in their comprehension. In order to resolve such problems, instructors can help the students raise their awareness and focus on a holistic understanding of the text. In addition, responses such as being anxious when writing Thai essays because of the lack of writing outlines, being worried when they do not know how to write essays in Thai, and assuming that other Chinese students' writing ability was better than theirs were considered the most significant characteristics of "writing anxiety." The students took a course, dissertation and thesis writing, in which the students were required to write a thesis in the Thai language before graduation. They studied ways in which to write academic writing, which contained a lot of formal language aspects. As Huwari and Hashima (2011) noted, highly anxious students lack self-esteem and confidence in improving their writing skills, and compose low-quality papers that demonstrate a lack of grammatical knowledge and well-developed ideas.

However, when looking only at the top-five types of Thai language classroom anxiety based on the mean yielded in this study, it appeared that the students placed the greatest emphasis on (5.6) lack of confidence about using the appropriate words in context because they found that several words have similar meanings ($\bar{X} = 4.03$). This result was in line with the outcomes of a study conducted by Thamvaja (2018, p.33), which highlighted that Chinese students' Thai language problems were mistakes concerning word usage, which were semantic and grammatical mistakes, and incorrect word order.

2. Anxiety Based on Gender Differences

According to the second research objective, the results of this study revealed that the Chinese male and female students were not significantly different in their levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom. Although the anxiety differences were not significant, the males outnumbered the females in almost all aspects of anxiety, except for reading anxiety. This might be because Chinese female students tend to use more strategies during the process of foreign language learning and can handle their feelings of anxiety which they experience during the Thai language learning process in the classroom better than their Chinese male counterparts.

This result was in accordance with the study of Campbell and Shaw (1994, cited in Campbell, 1999), which revealed that students of different genders exhibited no differences in their levels of anxiety in the language classroom. On the contrary, the results of this study also showed a parallel with a study carried out by Alquhtani (2019) in the Saudi EFL context. He found that male students are more anxious about learning a foreign language than female students. However, this finding was not consistent with a study of Yiamsawat (2004) in that the gender factor significantly affected the students' levels of anxiety in two aspects: speaking and writing. His study proved that female students demonstrated a higher level of English language anxiety than male students. In a similar study, Ozturk and Grubuz (2013) indicated that the female students become more anxious than male students while speaking English in the classroom.

Body of Knowledge

The research findings revealed that the Chinese students' levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom at Dhurakij Pundit University overall and in terms of each aspect were at a moderate level, with the highest ranking for reading anxiety and writing anxiety; the Chinese male students did not significantly demonstrate levels of anxiety in the Thai language classroom different from the Chinese female students. However, the Chinese male students had a higher level of Thai language anxiety than the Chinese female students for almost all of the components, except for reading anxiety. In order to resolve such problems, teachers should not give preferential treatment to a particular gender in the classroom; rather, they should carefully monitor the males in order to reduce their anxiety. Moreover, teachers should use different teaching techniques in order to help alleviate students' pressure and so that they can become more confident in using Thai as a foreign language. Creating a relaxing classroom environment, enhancing students' self-esteem and confidence, and providing classroom activities are also practical methods that teachers can use to minimize Thai language classroom anxiety and help the Chinese students achieve their Thai language learning.

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