

Thriving in the Academy: Thai Students' Experiences and Perspectives

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Rhetoric and Writing

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May 11, 2022

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Rhetoric, Composition, L2, NNES, Thai students, doctoral studies

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Academic Abstract

In this dissertation, I investigate how Thai doctoral students adapt to and navigate academic expectations in their nonnative language. Through coded semi-structured interviews with eight participants from six different universities across the U.S., I analyze the lived experiences, stories, and challenges faced by Thai doctoral students in Humanities disciplines as students in Humanities are believed to rely more on writing as a mode of inquiry than students in STEM. I explore how, and to what extent, they cultivated agency to meet the expectations of the academy and how they assimilated into the U.S. academic culture. I initially hypothesized that writing was the most challenging skill, given that composition program and classrooms are virtually nonexistent in Thai curricula and students coming into the U.S. academy from such educational backgrounds would have limited exposure to formal writing instruction. Interestingly, through thematic coding schemes, I found that, while writing was challenging, there were other significant factors impacting their education. In my analysis, I found that students also had to navigate academic reading, participation in active classroom discussions, and acculturation into U.S. academic setting, all of which challenged their learning experiences. I argue in the dissertation that these complex social negotiations, not accounted for in most pedagogical structures in U.S. education, result in inequitable access to curriculum and undo hardships on students. By amplifying the voices of Thai students, this project highlights the ways that Thailand's educational system, deeply entrenched discourses of loyalty to Thailand's monarchy and the Criminal Code Act 112, impacts Thai students' formation and navigation of academic identity while encountering the U.S. Academy.

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General Audience Abstract

In this dissertation, I investigate how Thai doctoral students adapt to and navigate academic expectations in their nonnative language. Through coded semi-structured interviews with eight participants from across the U.S., I analyze the lived experiences, stories, and challenges faced by Thai doctoral students in Humanities disciplines. I explore how, and to what extent, they cultivated agency to meet the expectations of the academy and how they assimilated into the U.S. academic culture. I initially hypothesized that writing was the most challenging skill, given that composition program and classrooms are virtually nonexistent in Thai curricula and students coming into the U.S. academy from such educational backgrounds would have limited exposure to formal writing instruction. Interestingly, participants revealed that, while writing was challenging, there were other significant factors impacting their education. In my analysis, I found that students also had to navigate academic reading, participation in active classroom discussions, and acculturation into U.S. academic setting, all of which challenged their learning experiences. I argue in the dissertation that these complex social negotiations, not accounted for in most pedagogical structures in U.S. education, result in inequitable access to curriculum and undo hardships on students. By amplifying the voices of Thai students, this project highlights the ways that Thailand's educational system, deeply entrenched discourses of loyalty to Thailand's monarchy, impacts Thai students' formation and navigation of academic identity while encountering the U.S. Academy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I acknowledge this dissertation marks a full circle of my journey. I could not have completed this circle without the expertise, guidance, and advice from my dissertation chair Dr. Powell. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my committee members: Dr. Baniya, Dr. Mueller, and Dr. Sano-Franchini. Thank you for your support and patience throughout. I also want to note that this project was brought to fruition with the help of my former chair Dr. CarterTod. These professors have forever touched my academic career and future.

This dissertation would not have come into existence without my eight participants. Their valuable insights and generosity guided this project. Their voices amplify the learning experiences of Thai doctoral students in the U.S. My hope is that this project will do them justice.

Before this project could even begin, the knowledge I gathered from Dr. Commer, Dr. Lindgren, and Dr. Pender laid the foundation for my understanding of our field and my pedagogical perspectives. Without these opportunities for personal and academic growth provided by the rhetoric program and faculty, I would not have the tools and the language to see my research through.

I would like to sincerely thank the writing center folks. Thank you Jenny for your mentorship and friendship. I have grown so much professionally at the center due to your leadership. Thank you Iris for therapy sessions and commiseration. Thank you Megan for listening and reading my chapters. This dissertation would still be gibberish without you.

To my friends from home, thank you for listening to my sobbing, drying my PhD tears, and giving me perspectives. Pooh, Ekta, Pear, and Ajarn John, you have been revitalizing and grounding. Especially Poon, thank you for taking my late night calls, for listening, and for wise advice.

I would also like to thank my PhD comrades who have been in the trenches with me these last few years. Thank you Cheyanne, Lauren, John, and Kelly for persevering through this with me. I especially want to thank my PhD BFF Alisha for being the best friend I could ever ask for in this strange land.

I want to thank my Thai friends in Blacksburg who also thrived in this land we call home away from home and whose solidarity makes this town the home of my heart. To Naree, Ohm, Pawin, Mon, Nob, BM, Por, and Khan, thank you for gratifying my VT experience. Particularly, I would like to thank Pat for being my partner in crime, my shopping stylist, and my Friday night downtown buddy.

To my family back in Thailand, thank you for always being supportive and encouraging. Thank you Bic for listening and for lending me your shoulder to cry on. You make me believe in myself.

I could not have thanked my mom enough. She has been with me every step of the way. I do not know how I could have held my world together without her. Thank you for being the first place my heart could call home and thank you for believing in me.

My family would not be complete without Tin. Thank you so much Tin for giving me the best hugs in the world and for being my everything.

Last but not least, thanks Matt Homer for everything. You're the best!

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Chapter One: Setting the Scene

“If you can do PhD, there’s nothing else you cannot do” - Tongchai Sriwiriyarat

Background of the Study

The journey begins

As doctoral education aims to help students become scholars with high-quality writing expertise (Carter et al., 2020), students are expected to engage actively not only by meeting their degree completion requirements but also by contributing to their discipline by writing professionally and publishably (Can & Walker, 2011). Most academic job postings also require that their prospective employees demonstrate research excellence (Langum & Sullivan, 2017). That is, to be successful in a globalized economy and fierce competition in the job market, advanced academic preparation and high-level writing and research skills are now required (Ross, 2009). Most doctoral students, therefore, must deal with not only labored and extensive writing but also mental exhaustion. They are often under much pressure to produce a diverse array of texts to meet the requirement of their degrees and other forms of writing, such as conference papers and peer reviews (Burford, 2017). Some PhD programs also expect (and sometimes require) that their doctoral students get their scholarly research published. The “publish or perish” dogma seems to permeate many PhD degree requirements as getting published can confer recruitment, career advancement, and tenure decisions (Horta & Santos, 2015, p. 32). In addition to a great amount of publishable scholarly work PhD students are expected to contribute, they are usually required to write a book-length dissertation as part of their degree requirements. A dissertation could be considered a representative of students’ efforts

in “gaining legitimate peripheral participation” in a multilayered academic community (Subphadoongchone, 2010, p. 1).

With such academic expectations, most students find the PhD journey challenging, especially when many faculty expect their students to possess useful and marketable skills (Cassuto & Jay, 2015). When discussing these issues with my peers, a few of my fellow PhD students in an American institution describe their doctoral coursework as “exciting” and “rewarding” while others say they often feel “overwhelmed,” and the writing workload is “daunting” and “stressful.” But these are the comments I heard from my *native* English speaking peers who were reading and writing for the academy in their *first* language. For nonnative English speaking (NNES) intercultural¹ students like me, on the other hand, the challenges can be multilayered. In addition to having to deal with English being a foreign language or second language (L2) (Menziez & Baron, 2014), adapting academically and socially to the U.S. becomes a major part of the doctoral education process (Click, 2018).

A fellow PhD student from Thailand once said to me during my first semester of doctoral coursework at the same American university:

“มันยากมาก โหดมาก นี่ถามตัวเองทุกวันว่ามาทำอะไรที่นี่ ไหนจะอยู่ไกลครอบครัว แล้วยังต้องมาทรมานกับการเรียนแบบไม่มีที่สิ้นสุดอีก”

“It’s rough and it’s tough. I ask myself every day what I am doing here away from my family torturing myself with endless academic sufferings.”

¹ Intercultural students in this study refer to those who are on non-immigrant temporary student visas and whose first language is not English. I opt for the term intercultural students instead of the more commonly used term international students. While ‘international students’ is an administratively convenient term, the term ‘intercultural students’ better allows me to highlight and be more aware of the reality that this student population brings with them to the U.S. academy diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The student's comment has been imprinted on my mind. Not only did I empathize, but their remark also prompted me to think more deeply about the reasons why intercultural students like us decided to leave our home countries and embarked on this journey despite all the challenges – anticipated or not expected – we have to encounter. According to Özturgut & Murphy (2009), intercultural students come to the U.S. for several reasons, including pursuing academic goals, acquiring skills through higher quality training and education that might not be available in their home countries, and “acquiring prestige” through an advanced degree (p. 374). Because of the higher cost of living abroad and rising tuition fees, some may associate pursuing advanced education in developed countries with prestige, elitism, and affluence (Xie et al., 2020). That is, international degrees are seen as a commodity only students from wealthy families can afford.

This perception that only wealthy students pursue U.S. education, however, is starting to shift, at least within Thai academic conversations. The following section discusses a brief historiographic account of how the Thai government has made study abroad programs more accessible to scholars from different socioeconomic backgrounds. That is, while conversations around pursuing degrees abroad still connote privileges to some extent, international education is now within reach of more Thai students.

In this dissertation, I investigated the academic experiences of Thai doctoral students in Humanities disciplines in the U.S. and their acculturating experiences. As I am too a PhD student from Thailand striving, thriving in, and navigating the writing expectations of my doctoral program, I ask an overarching question: How do other Thai PhD students deal with U.S. coursework and adapt to the learning culture that might be different from that in Thailand? I argue that their adjustment experiences are so multidimensional that reading and studying related

literature explored in Chapter Two alone would not provide me with an in-depth understanding of these students' circumstances, adjustment strategies, and learning expectations. Therefore, interviews with eight Thai doctoral students from six different U.S. campuses were conducted. Chapter Three discusses methods used to gather, compile, and analyze data. Chapter Four presents analyses of the findings while Chapter Five explores implications and provides recommendations for future research. What follows in this chapter offers a historiographic account of the Thai's study abroad programs – from exclusive to more widely available to mostly mandatory in academia. This chapter also provides an overview of English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand and how Thainess plays a role in teaching and learning. It concludes with my positionality, the significance of this study, and the dissertation synopsis.

The elites and the commoners

The belief that the development of Thailand relies on human resources and education can be traced back to the 13th century. During the era of the Sukhothai Kingdom (1238–1438) or commonly known today as the first Thai kingdom, studying abroad was a practice exclusively reserved for Buddhist monks² who traveled to Sri Lanka for religious training and to China to learn pottery. Later during the era of the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350–1767) under the reign of King Narai (1656–1688), study abroad opportunities were offered to state officials who would pursue training in architecture and related fields in France. It was not until the Rattanakosin Kingdom era (1782–1932) during Rama III's reign that the first “commoner” was sent to England to study nautical exploration (Office of Educational Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy). It was under the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910), who realized that one way to strengthen

² India's caste system (and its remnants), where monks or priests are at the very top of the hierarchy, was and has been present in the kingdom and in southeast Asia.

Thailand's military force was to "become Europe's ally and adapt to, rather than assail, Western influences" (Adsanatham, 2014), that government scholarships were made less exclusive. In fact, during that time 206 Thai students were enrolled in institutions across Europe in diverse fields of study, including math, international relations, law, medicine, and engineering (Office of the Civil Service Commission). Later under Rama VI's reign (1910–1925), the Thai government sponsored at least three hundred students and scholars to pursue study abroad. However, due to the post-WWI economic recession in 1922, the Ministry of Finance halted the government's study abroad funding. It was not until 1964, during early Rama IX's reign, that government scholarships were once again made available.

According to the Open Doors report, there were over 6,000 Thai students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education in the 2019/2020 academic year. To gain a better understanding of Thailand's study abroad programs and scholarships, I tried to investigate how many among that student population were government-funded scholars. I then called the Thai Embassy in DC to inquire about some information; however, I was told that such data could not be shared publicly and that gaining access to such statistics would be a lengthy process. Due to time constraints, I decided not to proceed with the investigation. However, my historiographic research of the development of study abroad programs in Thailand informed this dissertation that study abroad was once seen as a commodity only the elites could afford. Today, on the other hand, it is encouraged and almost mandated within Thai academia.

To elaborate, many Thai public universities mandate that their full-time instructors who hold master's degrees take contracted study leave, where the instructors get partially or fully funded by the Thai universities and have to return to work to pay off the debt, within three years

upon signing a contract to be accepted into a PhD program domestically or internationally. While many see this mandate as an opportunity for academic and professional advancement, some view it as a financial and emotional burden. Although some Thai public universities provide contracted scholarships for their instructors to pursue doctoral studies, some call the scholarships “slave contracts” because most of the time when the universities pay for the instructors to pursue their PhD degrees, they are indebted to the universities. The common practice to pay off the debt is to work twice as much time as they spent pursuing their doctoral studies. To be specific, if an instructor spends four years in a PhD program on a contracted scholarship, they are obligated to return to their host Thai university and work for eight years to pay off their debt or they would be fined. This practice is so heavily implemented within Thai public universities and government scholarships that many scholars turn down the opportunity in order to not be bound by this contract.

At a northern Thai university (hereafter UMor) where I used to work, for example, my contract explicitly stated that I had to be enrolled in a PhD program within the first three years of my employment. The contract also stated I could get a full scholarship from the university with a condition that I would have to go back and double my time at the university. With this option, I might have to end up being bound to “serve my time” at UMor for at least ten years if I were to complete my PhD in five. To me, this kind of employment agreement exists to prevent brain drain or the migration of “personnel in search of the better standard of living and quality of life, higher salaries, access to advanced technology and more stable political conditions in different places worldwide” (Dodani & LaPorte, 2005, p. 487). While this kind of contracted scholarship functions as an opportunity for many, it does not fully promote career flexibility as these scholars are bound to work within the constraints of their host universities and the Thai government.

Being pushed out and Thailand 4.0

To meet the needs of the 21st century's sustainable, knowledge-based digital economy, in 2016 the Thai government launched the educational development and economic model *Thailand 4.0* which suggests that Thailand's socioeconomic growth would rely on the country's gradually growing technological development. This is not Thailand's first attempt to boost its economy. Previously there had been *Thailand 1.0* (agricultural economy), *2.0* (industrial economy), and *3.0* (exporting economy) before the government shifted its economic focus to the importance of information and communication technology (ICT). One important factor that drives Thailand 4.0 to success is educated citizens, and thus, more attention has been paid to joint participation and cooperation of educational institutions in the country (Wittayasin, 2017). Barr et al. (2020) point out that economy and education coexist, and education drives economic prosperity. Under Thailand 4.0, a Thai governmental economic model that recognizes the pivotal roles of human resources development, many higher education institutions have implemented faculty development programs (FDPs) that sponsor their faculty members to get doctoral degrees from international institutions – with a promised tenure positions or promotion upon their return – as an attempt to develop strong research-based universities to support innovation and a knowledge-based society (Buasuwan, 2018). Some authors argue that Thai higher educational institutions' attempt to “reinvent” themselves, in hope to increase their ranking on the world stage, is “unexpected and unprepared for” (Day et al., 2021, p. 102). Specifically, one objective of Thailand 4.0 is to have at least five Thai universities ranked among “the world's top-100 higher educational institutions within 20 years” (Day et al., 2021, p. 102).

Figure 1: Thailand 4.0

Source: Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C.



While addressing teachers and scholars as an active force for Thailand 4.0, the economic model does not explicitly propose any training or ways to prepare their scholars for international advanced degrees. For example, at UMor, my employment contract stated that I had to be accepted into a doctoral program of a leading university within the first three years of my employment. Within those first three years, I taught nine credits per semester, was assigned to administrative roles, and was required to contribute to academic services, but was provided with no preparation workshops that would have helped me with my PhD application process. While there were workshops on fulfilling tenure requirements and meeting the expectations of academic publishers, little was done to support faculty members who were being “sent out” for international doctoral studies. When I voiced my concerns to a colleague at a different university in Thailand who was in a similar situation – having to be accepted into a PhD program within the first few years of their service – I learned that their institution also provided very little support to their instructors in pursuing international doctoral degrees. This raised a question about the

effectiveness of Thailand 4.0 and its role in sponsoring the success of Thai scholars. In other words, I agree with Day et al. (2021) that without sufficient mentorship and training for Thai scholars, Thailand 4.0's aims are "ambitious" and "problematic." To me, it is paradoxical that one way to improve the quality of education is to have more imported PhD graduates; little support is provided in order for these scholars to pursue PhD degrees in the first place. Perhaps Thailand 4.0 is just a scheme for the junta government to rebrand the nation in an attempt to change "the people's attitudes and behaviors towards the junta rather than reforming the country's economy" (Desatova, 2018). That is, while presenting the model as a way to narrow the income gap and to improve education, the junta government launched Thailand 4.0 in hope to gain (back) people's trust and loyalty to the military government.

While there has been a wake of concerns about the junta government's intentions – whether Thailand 4.0 is just a rebranding scheme or it is the country's genuine attempt to advance – these concerns are usually silenced by the law and by the system, which results in the cycle of perpetuating the silencing done by Thailand's power structure. With this, research and scholars aiming to investigate, criticize, and disrupt are often marginalized and prevented from making scholarly inquiries, changes, and from intervening in this cycle. Arguably, addressing this systemic oppression is an important step to creating an awareness to better the Thai educational system. As a Thai scholar, however, I often find myself leaning toward self-censorship in order to not directly criticize and scrutinize the government or the palace – as it is deemed illegal in the Thai context – while trying my best to be constructive within the framework of this dissertation.

English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand: A brief history

Without having been colonized by Western powers, Thailand was introduced to English in the 17th century by the Europeans. At that time, however, it was the language only accessible through royal schools to Siamese³ aristocrats who saw English as an important key to the country's technological advancement and to local and global trade (Sukamolson, 1998). Between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a number of Thai government officers and administrators were awarded scholarships to receive higher education abroad, mostly in Europe and America. This phenomenon made ELT become more critical to Thai education in preparing these officials. Later in 1921, English became compulsory in the country's public schools (Grade 4 and upper). The situation regarding ELT in Thailand remained unchanged until 1960 when greater emphasis was placed on the importance of the English language both in and outside of schools. As a result of the Indochina War, English was recognized as a tool for international communication and not just a school subject. That is, Americans brought with them to Thailand the audio-lingual method that replaced the rote-learning tradition and grammar-translation approaches (Methitham, 2014). Later in the 1980s, with the fast-growing tourism industry and international investment, foreign language skills were seen as an important element of educational and professional training and job recruitment. It was not until 1996 that English became mandatory (from Grade 1) in schools nationwide (Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011). Since then, English has gained a higher status in the Thai curricula as a dominant foreign language. Today at the tertiary level⁴, students are also required to take at least twelve credits of English in order to graduate (Wongsothorn et al., 2002); on average Thai university graduates will have spent 12 to 15 years studying English. According to Thailand's National Identity Board (2000), the government believes that if

³ Siam was an exonym of the country before 1949.

⁴ The American equivalent to the tertiary level of education is undergraduate education.

proficient, students can access new information and technology, which will, in turn, allow them to have more “international perspectives” (Baker, 2008).

While the educational reforms were implemented with the purpose of improving Thai students’ linguistic and communication competency, the majority of students did not meet the educational standards required, despite years in English classrooms. Some factors that might have contributed to this “failure” were the lack of trained teachers in English and the lack of students’ exposure to English in real-life situations (Foley, 2005). And while the reform of ELT in higher education issued by the Ministry of University Affairs in 2002 stated that tertiary institutions should aim at promoting autonomous and lifelong learning, in reality, many educators and students viewed the goal of ELT as getting through exams with a focus on reading and grammar. Writing and speaking skills are often not tested and therefore usually ignored (Foley, 2005). In other words, ELT in Thailand places heavy emphasis on grammar-based instruction and focuses more on form and less on function (Chakorn, 2002). Most assignments ask students to respond to multiple-choice questions, fill in the blanks, and detect and correct a sentence’s grammatical errors. At tertiary level where students are expected to provide more elaborated responses, English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms usually place emphasis on syntactic and linguistic accuracy rather than content. As a result, according to several surveys conducted in the late 1990s by the Office of Educational Testing of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, the Ministry of Education, Thai students’ English writing proficiencies were deemed “unsatisfactory” (Wiriyachitra, 2001).

In the following section, I unpack sociocultural implications of Thai pedagogical practices that might help explain this phenomenon.

Thainess and its pedagogical climate

With EFL instruction placing a priority on grammar over content, many Thai students often arrive at a university having been inadequately prepared by public school systems and writing assessment practices that do not highlight academic writing or provide intensive writing instruction. When writing instruction does take place, either in Thai or in EFL context, however, it usually deploys product-oriented and current-traditional approaches where submission of multiple drafts is usually not allowed, and the teacher's feedback is primarily on surface features like students' grammatical errors (Noonkhan, 2012). Also, most assignments usually ask students to write about "canned" topics. These topics revolve around recurring themes, such as "My memorable vacation," "My family," "Buddhism in Thailand," and "My loyalty to our beloved King." For Thai Children's Day, for example, many schools would ask students to write a short essay on "How to be a good Thai." These kinds of assignments, I argue, do not nurture students' critical thinking or encourage students to think beyond common knowledge. That is, while students learn and practice narration techniques, these repeated themes do not ask students to form arguments, find appropriate supporting details and evidence, or voice their opinions – practices that are usually suppressed in Thai classrooms. These themes have been so embedded in classrooms that even at the tertiary level, they are still being written about even though students are assigned to choose their own topics.

In order to better understand the underlying implications of these Thai pedagogical practices, I delve deeper into the root of educational ideology: Thainess. Though the definition of "Thainess" is hard to pin down, on the surface level, Thainess is a term used to describe ways of life and traditions belonging to Thailand and of Thai people (Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018). Through a more critical lens, on the other hand, Thainess is a centralized political concept that has been socially fabricated by Thai elites and the authoritarian

government to uphold their power and mold passive citizens. Thainess is linked to royalist and hierarchical devotion to the Trinity of the country: nation, religion (Buddhism), and King (the center of the Trinity). In order to assert and raise the consciousness of Thainess, school students in most parts of the country have to sing the national anthem, offer Buddhist prayers, and recite the royal anthem every morning before homeroom (Farrelly, 2016).

Thainess is also known to be associated with a hierarchical-structured society where people tend to identify the social rank, whether they are ‘superior’ or ‘inferior,’ to the person they interact with (Pattapong, 2015). That is, Thainess is crafted based on the belief that people can be divided into different hierarchical classes. In a classroom context, students see themselves as inferior to the teacher who is considered a figure of authority and they only approach their teacher when asked. “Good students” are generally those who listen intently to the lectures and take good notes; challenging the teacher is generally not appreciated. Within these Thai-style classroom practices, students usually take on a passive role where they are rarely expected to contribute to classroom discussions. According to Saengboon (2004), Thai teachers are often seen as “givers of knowledge” while students are considered “inexperienced” and therefore “not in a position to express or share ideas” (p. 25).

Hush Hush: Pedagogy under Lèse-majesté

Inherited from ancient Rome, lèse-majesté, the crime of causing injury to royalty, is known as an instrument for kings to “consolidate power,” from the late Middle Ages to Napoleonic France (Mérieau, 2019). It was not until the early 20th century when European countries abolished lèse-majesté and their monarchies (Mérieau, 2019). Though some countries today such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco still practice lèse-majesté, the sentences “are quite rare” (Mérieau, 2019).

Unlike other countries, Thailand's extreme *lèse-majesté*, or the Criminal Code Article 112, which was passed in 1908, has been used not only to protect the king and his royal family but also to persecute political opposition (Patanasiri & Copeland, 2013). According to *The Washington Post's* Adam Taylor (2019), Thailand practices the strictest *lèse-majesté* law in the world. The law makes it illegal to defame, insult, or threaten "the King, the Queen, the Heir apparent or the Regent." The Thai constitution also states that "The King shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the King to any sort of accusation or action." Violation of the law can result in up to 15 years of imprisonment and other sentences on different counts. Under the coup⁵, anyone who dares to criticize the military government is "deemed to have insulted the king" and is "thrown in jail" without any trial (Ungpakorn, 2009). *Lèse-majesté*, therefore, is usually regarded among Thais as "unspeakable" or "untouchable" (Patanasiri & Copeland, 2013). Because of Article 112, the king is viewed as a demigod who cannot be criticized. The king also has the power to choose whether he wishes to endorse the elected prime minister, practically making him the supreme leader of the country who holds absolute power. Although the Thai constitution states that Thailand was transformed from the Absolute Monarchy to the Constitutional Monarchy in 1932, in reality, *lèse-majesté* has prevented Thailand from moving forward toward becoming a more democratic country. I see *lèse-majesté* as the government's and the palace's attempt to uphold their power by minimizing the fundamental rights to freedom of speech, degrading people's dignity, and promoting class division.

⁵ Thailand is known to have more military coup d'états than any country in modern history. According to New Mandala, an academic blog dedicated to Southeast Asian affairs, Thailand has witnessed fourteen successful coups. The most recent one was staged by then General Prayuth Chan-ocha in 2014. Chan-ocha has been the prime minister of Thailand since then.

From a young age, Thai students are taught (and trained) to revere (and even worship) the royal family. The curricula across different subjects also portray the king and the members of the royal family as godlike figures whose authority cannot be questioned. I remember being told in school that the royal family is the center of Thainess and Thai nationalism – if you love your country, you should unconditionally respect your king. To me, *lèse-majesté* is a violation of human rights. Not only does the system rip off the voice of the people, I argue, but it also dehumanizes citizenly students. This practice of “no questions asked” also seeps into other aspects of education. To be more specific, Thai schools play an important role in reinforcing adherence to the Trinity (with the King in the center) as the core of education. My son's second grade Language Arts national textbook, for example, contains a story about a fictional Thai family where the father is an elephant trainer, the mom is a stay-at-home housewife, and the son is in a public primary school. In one chapter of the textbook, the father comes home late from work one night. The son is worried about his father's overwork habit saying, “Daddy, you work so hard,” to which the father replies, “It's true that I work hard, but do you know who works harder than anyone else? It's our King who is devoted his everything to make sure that his people are well.” The instance above illustrates how education is a means for the palace and the government to inculcate a sense of loyalty to the King. When my son innocently voiced against the above storyline to his teacher saying that “My mom works the hardest,” the teacher told him to hush stating “You simply cannot say that out loud.” The teacher's comment loops back to my discussion about how questioning the authoritative figures (and the system) is discouraged (and prohibited).

Figure 2: Thai second grade Language Arts textbook



In school, students are rarely encouraged to make contributions to classroom discussions. The concept of a good student is someone who is attentive, is a good listener, and takes good notes. We can think of schooling as a means to prepare students to become desired citizens – respectful and passive – and Thai pedagogical practices reinforce the status quo. The ultimate goal of education is to preserve “hierarchical and social order” (Saengboon, 2004).

Positionality

In U.S. universities, courses like first-year composition (FYC) that are required for incoming students help them learn academic writing skills. However, such courses are virtually non-existent within the Thai curricula both for Thai language classes and for EFL classes. The absence of writing centers in most Thai universities is also an indicator that little attention has

been paid to the promotion of writing instruction. One of the few sites where students can be exposed to writing instruction is in EFL classrooms. However, pedagogical practices in those classrooms are often similar to that in Thai primary and secondary schools. That is, writing assignments in EFL classes in colleges and universities in Thailand mostly focus on grammatical correctness and linguistic accuracy designed to prepare students for passing exams rather than familiarizing them with “real-world” or academic writing.

While the Thai educational system has been criticized for not enabling its students to keep pace with the rapidly changing world (Wiriyachitra, 2002), Thai scholars and professionals are being encouraged to pursue graduate degrees from international English-speaking institutions. With the advent of Thailand 4.0, a Thai governmental economic model that recognizes the pivotal roles of human resources development, many tertiary institutions have implemented faculty development programs (FDPs) that sponsor their faculty members to get advanced degrees from international institutions. FDPs without consideration of Thai scholars’ readiness and preparedness can pose some problems because these scholars, who are the product of the Thai educational system, might not be adequately equipped with the educational background and experience that would have prepared them for academic writing in postbaccalaureate programs abroad.

I myself was affected by FDPs. I was a lecturer at UMor. My employment contract with UMor stated that I had to be enrolled in a doctoral program within the first three years of my service, with a promised tenure track position upon my return. During those three years, besides semesterly faculty workshops on how to get published, there was very little support on how to apply (and get ready) for a PhD program. Like the participants in this dissertation, I completed my pre-PhD education in Thailand, and therefore, I had limited exposure to formal writing

instruction. Because I was not an English major in my undergraduate, I was not required to take any writing courses in English. General Education at my university required that all undergraduates take at least twelve credits of English as part of their degree completion. However, none of those twelve credits focused on academic writing. We learned mostly about grammar and vocabulary and then were asked to fill in the blank, detect grammatical errors in given sentences, and answer multiple-choice questions. In my master's program in Thailand, we were told to keep a journal on our writing activities; again, there was no formal writing instruction. The longest and most challenging piece I had ever written was my master's thesis. I remember spending hours and night after night staying up crafting what I thought was my greatest academic creation, with much guidance from my thesis advisor but little formal or preparatory coursework on how to write a thesis. Though my thesis was written in English, I was trained under a Thai context. That is, I was told by my advisor and committee members to not "get in trouble" when it came to choosing a thesis topic. So, I decided to complete my master's degree being safe and sound inside the box. My thesis uncovered how Thai university students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) class at a tutoring school in Chiang Mai had retained targeted vocabulary they had been learning from a test prep class. Though I saw my thesis as a valuable contribution to the field of EFL and second language acquisition (SLA), it did not challenge the existing theories or question authority in the field. I learned from writing my thesis mostly how to avoid plagiarism and how to cite appropriately. I was told to follow the literature and theories I reviewed and "stay in my lane."

In this dissertation, I position myself outside the Thai education "box," which has turned my research into an embodiment of the impact of positionality as a determinant factor of a research topic and the range of discussions. That is, had I conducted this research in Thailand, I

would have only been able to describe only the Thai students' experiences in the U.S. without the critique concerning the Thai system (and the palace). Because I am conducting this research in the U.S., I acknowledge my positionality while recognizing that there are other Thai scholars who are forced to operate within the limits of the Thai system. Although some Thai scholars conduct their research within the international context, those that are bound by contracted scholarship would have to write their research within the shadow of the regime. In other words, Thai scholars abroad are still limited by Thai political structure and would have to operate within the context of "Thainess."

My understanding of academic writing was challenged when I started my PhD coursework at a U.S. institution. Having to write my first seminar paper for a U.S. graduate course, I realized that this marked one of the few times I was asked to write (and think) about something besides Thailand's demigod King. It was disorienting knowing that I could write about issues that mattered to me (and the world). Nothing in my educational history had fully prepared me for how to write a doctoral-level paper. I was used to confining myself within a comfortable box; now I was encouraged to think outside it.

This transition from the Thai academic setting to the U.S. academy sparked a question of how other students with Thai academic backgrounds in a similar situation to mine maneuver within these academic challenges. As a student, I am questioning how fellow Thai students thrive in their new academic environment. As an educator, I find ways to better facilitate students' learning and success. As a researcher, I scrutinize and question the effectiveness and impacts of Thai education, evaluate students' learning, and propose ways and implications for better learning outcomes, not just for Thai students and Thai education but for broader audiences: practitioners and researchers in the field of ESL/EFL, future educational policymakers, and

professors within the academic community who are working with Thai and other intercultural students.

The challenges I faced during my PhD coursework led me to question if my experience was unique. Therefore, the overarching research question this study intends to address is: How do other Thai students in doctoral programs in Humanities and related fields at U.S. universities adjust to the quality of writing expected of them? My additional sub-questions also include:

- Were there any resources or writing instruction that may have sponsored participants' writing in the U.S. academy?
- What are the challenges within the U.S. academic culture faced by the participants?
- To what extent do the participants cultivate agency and assimilate into the academy?
- What are some support and resources that can promote the success of Thai doctoral students within the U.S. academy?

I focus my research on U.S. graduate studies because, unlike graduate schools in the UK, Australia, or New Zealand, where students dive directly into research with limited to no coursework, students in U.S. doctoral programs are required to complete a certain amount of coursework before they can embark upon writing their dissertation. Focusing on Thai doctoral students in the U.S. allows me to explore the participants' PhD journeys through their stories. In this exploration, I can analyze how they, along their PhD journeys, develop agency as academic writers in order to fulfill the pedagogical practices of their graduate programs.

Situating myself within these research questions, I recognized the unique experiences that myself and other Thai students share. My hope is that this research serves as a tool for Thai students to realize that the challenges and triumphs they faced are within a shared community and that we are not isolated. This project serves as a springboard for other studies that will strengthen intercultural student community.

I would also like to add that I could not have completed this study without reflecting upon my educational backgrounds both in Thailand and in the U.S., which allow me to maneuver my standpoints as an insider and an outsider within Thai and U.S. education. This study is not meant to position one educational system as superior to the other so much as it is to focus on the experiences of those who encounter both. By scrutinizing Thai education, I am not saying that U.S. education is more welcoming and is without flaws. Thai doctoral students have to navigate the compounding weaknesses of both systems.

Significance of Study

Sprung out of my curiosity about how other Thai PhD students in the U.S. deal with academic writing, this study hypothesizes that Thai NNES students coming to U.S. doctoral programs have not been exposed to composition classrooms that would promote critical thinking or prepare them for international doctoral coursework.

The dissertation puts into conversation second language acquisition (SLA), L2 academic writing, rhetoric and composition theories, and the sociocultural landscape of Thai pedagogy. Once completed, this study can shed light on several fields of research. First, it can help practitioners and researchers in the field of applied linguistics develop a more effective curriculum that would support international students' success in the international academy. This study also contributes to the current body of knowledge by increasing our understanding of the

process of academic writing in EFL, especially the challenges Thai doctoral students face and the variables that play a part in their learning process. In addition, this dissertation is potentially one of few studies that take Thai students' doctoral-level learning experiences in U.S. universities into the spotlight and focuses on their challenges during their U.S. PhD coursework.

Furthermore, this study is hoped to assist in future educational policy decisions in Thailand regarding providing or revising curricula that would facilitate students' success in international educational settings. The study will also yield useful information for not only decision-makers such as universities and departments but also for professors within the academic community who are working with Thai and other international students so that the curricula of their graduate programs can be modified to meet the needs of this student population.

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation consists of five chapters, including this introduction. Chapter Two begins with the discussion of the concepts of agency and voice, their definitions, and questions. The chapter then presents the review of Global Englishes (GE) and other terminologies that fall under the umbrella term GE before ending with the overall scene of L2 academic writing and Thai pedagogy. Chapter Three outlines my methods and methodology, providing my rationale for conducting this study with semi-structured interviews. Chapter Three also explains my methods for recruiting the participants and data collection. I present my findings in Chapter Four where codes and coding schemes are discussed and elaborated. Participants revealed that reading and class participation were the most challenging skills they had to manage during graduate coursework. In this chapter, I present the collected data in the study, along with an analysis of those data. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the research with further discussions of the findings

and ends with the study's major implications and its limitations and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two: Agency, Global Englishes, and Academic Writing within Thai Context

Chapter One states the exigence that prompted this dissertation and its research questions. The overarching question is how Thai doctoral students in Humanities and related disciplines navigate academic experiences and expectations of their PhD programs. In the previous chapter, I also provided a rationale for my positionality within this study. Growing out of my curiosity about how other Thai PhD students in Humanities disciplines learn in and for the U.S. academic settings, this dissertation is informed and influenced by the research and pedagogy of many whom it has benefited. In this chapter, I discuss the three main theoretical frameworks that build the foundation for this dissertation.

The first and most prominent framework is the concept of agency. As stated in Chapter One, I argue that Thai pedagogy could have done more to promote students' agency. In this chapter, I present different facets of agency – how the term is discussed, defined, and questioned in the field of rhetoric and composition generally and within Global Englishes more specifically. I also explore how the notion of agency can be discussed in relation to the concept of voice.

The second area of discussion in this chapter is Global Englishes (GE). Understanding GE lends the lens to (re)conceptualizing how nonnative English speakers (NNES) are situated within the language-related conversations. That is, by investigating GE, I gain more insight into how L2 writing and learning are perceived and how pedagogical practices within the Thai context can be improved.

The last area concerns the pedagogical practices in Thailand. I discuss how Thai classrooms seem to not fully promote students' agency, mainly because of the way they are situated within overall deference to authority, which can negatively impact students when they enter U.S. classrooms. This claim is relevant to the overarching research questions which try to

investigate how Thai students navigate academic acculturation while in PhD coursework in the U.S.

Agency: definitions and questions

Different bodies of scholarship have attempted to define agency, though the term is deemed to be “polysemic and ambiguous” (Campbell, 2005). Some authors even treat the discussion of agency as a synonym of free will and resistance (Ahearn, 2001) while others tie agency with *techné* (Campbell, 2005). I argue against this understanding and propose that the definition of agency should be investigated in a more complex and multidimensional manner because the term, I believe, cannot conveniently be understood purely based on dictionary-based definition. I agree with Lora Arduser (2017) who, in an attempt to define the term through the lens of rhetoric of health and medicine, argues that definitions are less of words with meaning in a dictionary and more of arguments. In order to better understand what agency really means, I embark on visiting various pieces of literature.

I was first invited to think more deeply about the term agency in rhetoric during my first year of PhD coursework. As a class, we were asked to read Kenneth Burke’s *A Grammar of Motives* (1969) and to focus on Burke’s pentad. In this influential work, Burke introduces his readers to the pentad which consists of five terms: act (what was done), scene (when or where it was done), agent (who did it), agency (how it was done), and purpose (why). To me, the term agency was the most fluid and hard to pin down. While other terms seem to be more static, agency – the how – seems to be the most plastic because agency can be referred to as a tool, an affordance, a means, a thought, a structure, and so on. Therefore, to better understand agency, I revisit different pieces of scholarship that offer some definitions of the term.

First, I start with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (2005) who defines agency as “the capacity to act ... to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” (p. 3). To me, this definition suggests that agency is one’s “competence” to produce discourse. For Ahearn (2001), on the other hand, agency is “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112) while suggesting that “all action is socioculturally mediated” (p. 112). If we follow Ahearn’s definition, we can understand agency as power and an ability to bring about effects and to (re)construct any given community and the world. Similarly, Warschauer (2000) notes that agency is what gives students control over their own learning and authoring, while Janet Murray (1997) sees agency as “the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices” (p. 123). If we tie the definitions proposed by Warschauer and Murray with the theory of L2 writing, we can see that agency can be given to students, which will in turn allow them to construct competencies to produce texts and discourse.

Another definition of agency is offered by Lu and Horner (2013) who refer to agency as the ways “in which individual language users fashion and re-fashion standardized norms, identity, the world, and their relation to others in the world” (p. 28). Lu and Horner (2013) also suggest that agency exists in close relation to exercise of choice and “the level of consciousness in the making of it” (p. 31). Agency, according to Lu and Horner operates in “all the decisions different students arrived at, including decisions to follow conventional usage” (p. 33). Agency in this sense is, therefore, talked about in the context of students’ choice to either use their own language (p. 29) or to conform to the expectations of standardized English (p. 34). Lu and Horner also posit that agency, under the lens of translingual approach, highlights the ways in which “all writing involves re-writing language, with all the possibilities and responsibilities that such

rewriting entails (p. 35). In a similar vein, Arduser (2017) asserts that agency can be defined as possession, authorship, resistance, and relational concepts (p. 8). According to Arduser, research at the intersection of technical communication and the rhetoric of health medicine discusses agency as “a form of resistance” (p. 9) that has historically been discussed as “emerging from the process of writing and the assumption that language is power” (p. 71). Arduser (2017) suggests that agency can also be understood as a “form of rhetorical plasticity” that is made “feasible in public liminal spaces ... in which multiple articulations of relationships are possible” (p. 13). Agency is also “an individual force within a framework of domination” (p. 150). For Arduser, “agential acts” are those that initiate positive change (p. 150). In this sense, therefore, the notion of agency intersects with the concept of autonomy and emerges as a response to a power structure that requires (co)production of knowledge and strategies. When discussed in the vein of social changes, Arduser’s definition of agency echoes what Greene (2004) proposes. According to Greene, agency can be perceived as “an instrument, object, and medium of harnessing social cooperation and coordination” (p. 204). For Greene, agency is political action and describes “a communicative process of inquiry and advocacy on issues of public importance” (p. 188).

While different authors have tried to define agency, Cheryl Geisler (2004) asks questions about who has agency and how agency functions in society when agency is “not universally available to all members of society, but we also make a commitment to developing rhetoric in a way that will account for rather than ignore this disparity” (p. 14). This also raises a question around what we can think about students’ “potential and obligation with respect to becoming rhetorical agent” (p. 16) when rhetorical agents are those who make “choices among the available means of persuasion” (p. 15). Although the task of defining agency cannot be done in a completely straightforward manner, I see agency as a mediated and facilitated entity as opposed

to a universal commodity. Based on the above definitions of and questions about agency, I argue that, in academic writing, agency is the process of decision-making student writers encounter when producing texts while simultaneously attempting to insert authentic voice through linguistic choices that align with the conversations within their disciplinary communities. My understanding of agency also relies on Strauss and Xiang's (2006) definition of the term within the context of academic writing where agency is "students' ability to understand the demands of each writing task and to plan the appropriate steps to meet those demands effectively and efficiently" (p. 358). To me, the definition provided by Strauss and Xiang (2006) helps inform this study in that it provides a more practical lens into classroom practices while other definitions offer a theoretical understanding of agency.

Another question, however, remains: is agency something to be possessed, whether it can be transferred from one individual to another taken for granted that knowledge and skills can be exchanged? In other words, I ask a similar question to what Carolyn Miller (2007) poses in "What Can Automation Tell Us About Agency?" In the article, based on poststructuralist or posthumanist theories, Miller suggests that the agent does not "have" or "acquire" agency (p. 143). In fact, some theorists like Lundberg and Gunn (2005) even suggest that "agency possesses the agent as opposed to the agent possessing agency" (p. 97). This claim then sparks debates and prompts us to reconceptualize the concept and meaning of agency; these questions guide our understanding of agency. Although these questions about how or who possesses agency provide broader conversations surrounding the term, I propose that agency can be better understood through a more constructive lens. That is, as my study looks into the learning experiences of Thai doctoral students in the U.S., I lean toward how we as educators can create learning

environments that better facilitate students' agency, which means to me, we *can* possess agency and agency *can* be (co)constructed and facilitated through certain learning circumstances.

Within this study, agency can be seen through the participants' initiatives of their own learning tactics while navigating the U.S. educational system that requires students to pursue the academic and program outcomes and personal expectations. While my definition of agency is grounded within writing pedagogy, agency is visible in all forms of educational practices. For example, the participants may guide themselves through writing, reading, and class participation using their own choices to achieve their own educational goals. In this sense, I situate agency within the participations' self-determination in their education. In other words, while my understanding of agency is rooted within writing studies, agency can be manifested through various aspects of the participants' learning processes.

Voice and Agency: An inextricable relationship

The exigence that asks us to think about the notion of agency are the ongoing conversations about students' voice in the field of composition and L2 writing. Though voice in writing has never been explicitly defined (Bowden, 1995), there have been attempts to pinpoint what the term entails. Yancey (1994) writes that voice as a metaphor has several "competing references" and can mean different things for various writers (p. vii). While the notion of voice has been associated with the Western concept of individualism and discursive practices in the United States that often "valorize individualism" (Matsuda, 2001), some authors try to distance themselves from this traditional understanding of voice that is "tied exclusively" to individualism (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007, p. 237). We need to discuss voice in this context because the notion of voice, Hirvela and Belcher (2001) argue, allows compositionists to question "how writers establish an authorial presence or identity in their writing and how students can be taught

to do so.” Matsuda (2001), for example, offers a definition of voice: “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” or the ability and quality that makes impersonation possible. For Bowden (1999), on the other hand, voice can be understood as a metaphor that “has to do with feeling-hearing-sensing a person behind the written words, even if that person is just a persona created for a particular text or a certain reading” (p. 97–98).

From these definitions, I argue that voice in L2 writing is students’ sense of authoritative self and authorial ownership that can be expressed through linguistic varieties. In other words, to understand the notion of voice, I refer back to my discussions on agency – the process of decision-making students encounter in academic contexts while simultaneously trying to insert their voices within their disciplines – and argue that voice mediates agency. What this means for Thai intercultural students is that they might have experienced restricted agency prior to coming to their doctoral programs, and cultivating agency is another “skill” they have to acquire in order to thrive within their PhD studies in the U.S. To be specific, the Thai educational system and cultural structure did not fully foster or facilitate students’ voices and agency in the classrooms. When promoting students’ agency is sometimes invisible in Thai classrooms, Thai students coming to the U.S. academic culture are unfamiliar with their own ability to be assertive in their writing and in the classroom. This can pose academic culture shock for some Thai students as they navigate classroom expectations and practices in the U.S.

Understanding English and English speakers

Historically, it might have been reasonable to say that the English language was owned by England and then by the U.S. if we think of ownership in relation to transnational political power and the number of speakers. Within the long-standing history and academic recognition,

British English and American English were (and sometimes still are) perceived as the “standard varieties” for global educational models for English language teaching (ELT) (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). Specifically, in contemporary conversations within ELT, at least in the Thai context, the English language has traditionally been associated with educational and career opportunities, scientific advancement, and cultural and knowledge exchange. English has also gained a status as a global language and as a tool that allows people to “achieve success and mobility” in globalized and pluralistic societies (Jindapitak & Teo, 2011). According to Krashen (2003), “it is difficult in today's world to be active and successful in international business, politics, scholarship, or science without considerable competence in English.” That is, the language is spoken in many everyday communicative settings and is employed in education, business and commerce, science and technology, sport, and popular entertainment (Lee, 2011). Lee (2011) further contends that knowledge in the English language can allow access to privileged and specialized discourses. In the same way, Kachru (1986) wrote “knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin’s lamp” and “linguistic power” that allows one to open “the linguistic gates” to international business and science and technology. Because English proficiency can be seen as a gateway to better educational and professional opportunities, some experience what Krashen (2003) calls “English fever” or the overwhelming desire to acquire English and to ensure that one's children acquire English as a second or foreign language.

But which English is to be taught and learned when we acknowledge now that there are English varieties and Englishes? While the traditional assumption is that students should develop proficiency “which approximates as closely as possible to that of native speakers” (Widdowson, 1994), questions have been raised about who owns English and who is considered a native

English speaker (Jones, 2013). That is, we can no longer assume that NES⁶ are those who (1) acquire the language during childhood, (2) understand idiomatic language accurately, (3) understand formal, informal, and everyday language use, and (4) fluently produce comprehensive and natural discourse (Davies, 2003). According to Boonsuk et al. (2021), no group of nations or people can clearly claim supremacy and ownership of English. Along the same vein, Shohamy (2006, p. 171) maintains:

“Who owns English?” is a question frequently asked about the language that has become the “world” language, the main means of communication, with no exclusive ownership of anybody. English is a free commodity as well, it is free to be used, shaped and molded by anybody in different ways, as is the case for its million users who construct and create endless types of “Englishes.” English does not belong to anybody specific, not to a nation, not to a group, it belongs only to those who want to own it.

From the quote above, we learn that the ownership of English is questioned, and the language has become a global commodity where anyone who speaks the language can claim ownership over it. I argue that the role of English has now shifted to a lingua franca. That is, when what we understand as NES are outnumbered by nonnative speakers (NNES), the use of English is unbounded to NES only. Therefore, English varieties can be developed in any country in Kachru’s Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles.

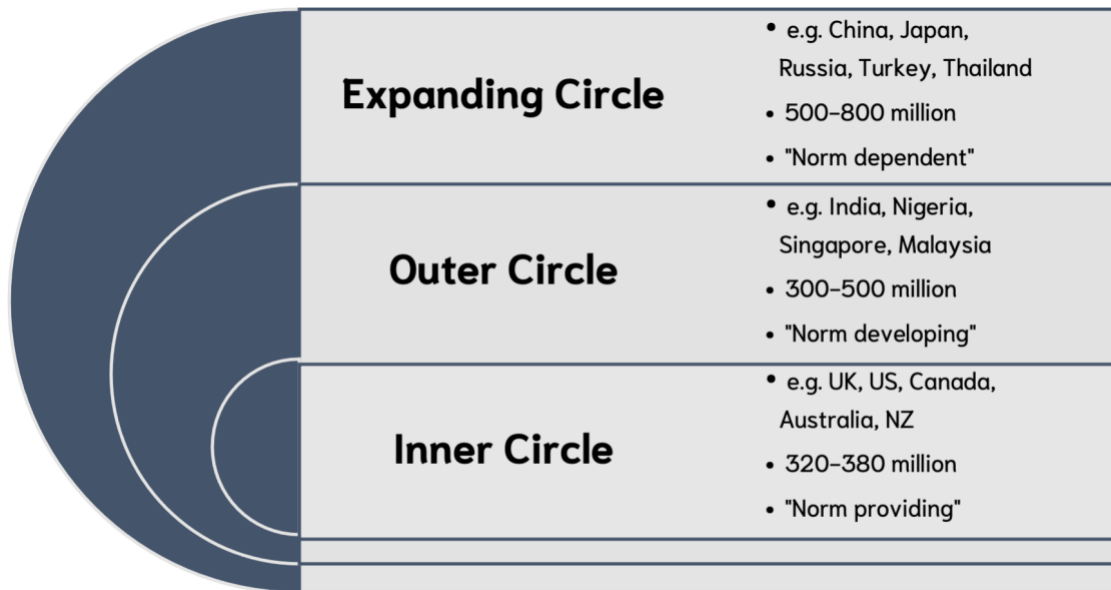
The following sections elaborate on Kachru’s Three Circle Model first introduced in 1985 and its implication to ELT today, especially in Thailand.

⁶ In this dissertation, I refer to NES loosely as those who acquired English in childhood as their first language (L1).

Who's in and who's out: Kachru's Three Circle Model

Kachru's three-circle model categorizes countries into Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle to refer to nations with English as the first language (L1), former colonies with English as a second language (ESL), and nations with English as a foreign language (EFL) and without administration, respectively

Figure 3: Kachru's Three Circle Model



(Adapted from Kachru, 1985)

While Kachru's model helped pave new ways of understanding the use of the English language throughout the world, it has been criticized by researchers, including Kachru himself, for its oversimplification, rigid establishment of borders between language users, and unclear assignment of membership to the circles (Al-Mutairi, 2020). That is, I argue, by categorizing Inner Circle as NES countries, the model suggests the NES monopoly of the language and a model for norm-setting. To challenge Kachru's model and to acknowledge the reality in which English is spread and spoken worldwide, Modiano (1999) proposes a centripetal circles model where the Inner Circle is formed based on the proficiency of English as international language

(EIL) speakers. To elaborate, EIL recognizes the global use of English in “multilingual communication environments where more NNES now speak the language than NES” and English can no longer be “labeled as exclusively owned by a nation or a cultural group in the Inner Circle” (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). EIL scholars argue that anyone using English can claim ownership over it (Shohamy, 2006). To better understand the changing roles of English(es), I discuss the umbrella term Global Englishes (GE) and the associated terminologies that challenge the notion of native speakerism and acknowledge English diversity.

Approaches to Global Englishes (and beyond)

Global Englishes (GE) as a field of study has emerged to tackle the changing use and status of English as a result of its global spread (Huttayavilaiphan, 2019). According to Boonsuk & Ambele (2021), Global Englishes (GE) offers a broader and expanded conceptual meaning which encompasses a number of related fields of research, including World Englishes (WE), English as an international language (EIL), English as a lingua franca (ELF), translanguaging, and the multilingual turn. These fields offer “useful insights into how English has to be understood differently when it comes into contact with other languages and develops hybrid grammars” (Canagarajah, 2012). These fields define “the emergent varieties largely in terms of form, constituting each into a separate system” and provide “greater importance to grammar as giving coherence and identity to these varieties” while also treating “these varieties as having separate identities, which are located in unique speech communities” (Canagarajah, 2012). Research under the umbrella term GE distances itself from the belief that successful communication has to conform to NES norms while recognizing that English has been spoken and appropriated around the world in different ways.

Global Englishes (GE) is defined by Rose & Galloway (2019) as “an inclusive paradigm looking at the linguistic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural diversity and fluidity of English use and English users in a globalized world.” Within ELT, GE-oriented pedagogy, therefore, aims at (re)constructing meaning of English as a means for intercultural communication and focuses on raising students’ awareness of complex identities and diverse varieties of English. That is, GE values English diversity, prioritizes interactions in “linguacultural”⁷ settings, and does not see NES as ideal models in ELT.

World Englishes

Informed by Kachru and Smith, World Englishes (WE) emerged as a linguistic and sociolinguistic discipline in the 1970s and 1980s to record and codify linguistic variation in English (Rose & Galloway, 2019) and to respond to “a unique cultural pluralism, and a linguistic heterogeneity and diversity” (Kachru, 1985, p. 14). WE research recognizes Englishes (plural) and acknowledges the diversity in the language. It also concerns, “the identification and description of geographically and nation bound variety, which highlighted the plurality of English” (Juntanee et al., 2019). WE scholars challenge the concept of standard English ideology and attempt to raise the status and legitimacy of Englishes of Kachru’s Outer Circle (Rose & Galloway, 2019). WE research also emphasizes the inclusivity of all the varieties used in all Kachru’s three circles and focuses on the study of English in global contexts (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). One of the aims of WE is to “empower the so-called non-native speakers of English who have long been subjected to the inferior status of speaking English as a ‘second’ language at best or a ‘foreign’ language at worst” (Saengboon, 2015). In other words, attention should be paid to

⁷ Linguaculture is defined by Baker (2009) as “the manner in which a language is learned as meaning-making cultural practice in a specific sociocultural context.” In this dissertation, I use to term to refer to interconnected relationship between language and culture.

English varieties used in different communities and by different speakers rather than exclusively to the traditionally idealized native-speakerism. WE approach to ELT, therefore, views different varieties of English as legitimate and can be used as models, rather than relying on the native speaker model, which has been criticized for being unattainable and does not reflect English's multicultural characteristics or its usage, adaptation, and appropriation around the world.

English as Lingua Franca (ELF)

The term lingua franca is referred to as “any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues for whom it is a second language” (Samarin, 1987). House (2009), similarly, defines lingua franca as “the world-wide employment of the English language as a means of communication.” Furthermore, Firth (1990, 1996) coined the term “lingua franca interactions” to refer to interactions in which all participants use English as their L2. From these definitions, this dissertation sees lingua franca as a shared usage of linguistic mode between people whose L1s are different from each other. Emerging in the 1990s and gaining significant academic attention after 2000, research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) argues against the deficit perspective tied to NNES and against a long-standing view that any variance from NES standard is perceived as incompetent (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). While WE research is criticized for its limitations to describe English usage by speakers of different L1s, ELF views English as more flexible as it is used and adapted to fulfill different communication circumstances (Rose & Galloway, 2019). ELF research recognizes that “the practices of interpersonal negotiation that enable people to achieve intelligibility and communicative success are as important as the shared grammatical norms” (Canagarajah, 2012). ELF understands that English in today's globalized world is used as a second or foreign language among mostly persons who have different mother-tongue languages. ELF concerns systematically formed

language commands that might not conform to the “native English” and that its ELF speakers have to determine which command to use in different given interactions.

English as International Language (EIL)

Viewed as a counterpart to ELF, English as an international language (EIL) as a field of study started out to examine linguistic practices in Europe (Rose & Galloway, 2019). Rose & Galloway (2019) further posit that, unlike ELF research, traditional EIL focused more on the linguistic implications for societal and language pedagogies, and less on the study of language use. As long-standing distinctions between English as an additional, foreign, second, and native language are being questioned and challenged, EIL scholarship highlights English as a language for diversity and it is not owned exclusively by speakers from the Inner Circle. As globalization requires more international and intercultural collaborations, English “has to be negotiated and one's norms cannot be imposed on others” (Canagarajah, 2012). Therefore, EIL speakers do not need to submit to the linguistic norms of the Inner Circle. EIL also concerns with all multiple varieties of English (e.g., Malaysian English, Singaporean English, Hong Kong English, and Thai English) as a means of communication and intercultural interactions among global communities.

Translanguaging

The term “translanguaging” is a translated Welsh term ‘Trawsieithu’ coined by Cen Williams in the 1980s (Lewis et al., 2012). In its original conceptualization, translanguaging refers to “pedagogical practices where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use” (García & Kano, 2014). For example, students may read something in Thai and then are asked to respond in English. In more contemporary research, translanguaging explores the processes in which speakers draw “upon their entire linguistic

repertoire when communicating” (Rose & Galloway, 2019). Thus, translanguaging embraces both linguistic and nonlinguistic modes that foster communication and highlights the hybridity of English and how its speakers employ multiple linguistic repertoires and develop strategies to negotiate communication. According to Vogel & García (2017), translanguaging challenges “the hierarchies that have delegitimized the language practices of those who are minoritized” and explores linguistic resources that allow users to achieve their communicative goals.

Translanguaging attempts to better understand “a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s)” and (re)examines second, foreign, and additional language teaching and learning in relation to the role of learners’ L1 (Wei, 2017). To elaborate, translanguaging focuses on how language users negotiate their resources and repertoires in any given social setting and aims at understanding multiple semiotic and cognitive resources. Gilyard (2016) posits that translanguaging “galvanizes the multidimensional repudiation of monolingual curriculums and yields praxis informed by an understanding that language and language standards are situational, political, arbitrary, and palimpsestic” (p. 284). Gilyard’s (2016) claim resonates with Matsuda’s (2014) argument that translanguaging is not static. In writing studies, that is, the notion of translingual writing sees monolingualism as prevalent and problematic and recognizes that languages are dynamic, negotiated, and different. Such differences are “normal” and “desirable” (Matsuda, 2014, p. 479). According to Matsuda (2014), languages are not “discrete” or “stable” and that practices of translingual writing “involve the negotiation of language differences.”

The Multilingual Turn

The multilingual turn rejects monolingual ideologies and native speaker bias in applied linguistics scholarship and in second language acquisition (SLA) that oftentimes view “L2

learners as deficient speakers” (Myriam & Beaulieu, 2016). If we understand multilingualism as a field of study that describes the existence of more than one languages in a given community, the multilingual turn then explores the rising attention of multilingualism in SLA theory and addresses the dynamic and fluid nature of English. May (2013), citing Kachru (1994), writes:

Monolingual bias occurs because the notion of monolingual norms as an invariant standard presupposes monolingualism to be the unmarked, unexamined category and “native speaker” competence to be a uniform benchmark in relation to second language learning. In so doing, the existing bi/multilingual repertoires of learners were [...] either ignored or perceived in explicitly deficit terms.

According to the quote above, a person’s multilingual competencies should be recognized, promoted, and viewed as assets, rather than deficits. The Turn, therefore, addresses a linguistically and culturally diverse global village where multilingual speakers, in order to enhance their intercultural communication, have to engage and negotiate both linguistically and culturally. As Piccardo & Aden (2014) state, language proficiency can no longer be easily “measured through standardized discrete item.” That is, SLA should view language learning as processes that encompass intercultural awareness and knowledge. The multilingual turn acknowledges the emergence of diverse global sociological and sociopolitical changes and sees monolingualism as an unrealistic construct.

Table 1: A Summary Table of Five Approaches to Global Englishes

Approaches to GE	Pillars
World Englishes	Recognizes English varieties and examines teaching and learning and examines its implications and impacts
English as a Lingua Franca	Examines different ways English is used by those who might speak English as their L1, L2, foreign, or additional language
English as International Language	Investigates the implications of English's global expansion and its influences on teaching and learning
Translanguaging	Explores the linguistic hybridity and fluidity and speakers' linguistic repertoires
The Multilingual Turn	Challenges monolingual ideology and emphasizes the multiple competencies of language learners

Global Englishes (GE), in short, argues against the view that speakers of English as a second, foreign, or additional language are incompetent speakers/learners. Instead, it embraces the multiple linguistic strategies speakers employ, which in turn shape English diversity. In addition, GE does not portray NES as iconized or idealized models for ELT but prioritizes skills that allow speakers to successfully communicate and interact with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. GE maintains that English belongs to the global community and is not entitled to specific groups of speakers. ELT, therefore, should not be restricted to native

speakerism but should recognize and foster English varieties used and produced by different communities. Although GE scholars are trying to demarginalize NNES while deglorifying the concept that English belongs to NES, in reality, however, in some Outer and Expanding countries like Thailand, NES models are still standardized and viewed as a norm for ELT.

“You no English teacher ‘cause you can’t English” – Native speakerism and foreignness

One of the trending Twitter hashtags among Thai netizens during the month of May 2020 is #Saveครูวัง (#SaveTeacherWang). The hashtag became trending after Thailand’s Long Distance Learning Television (DLTV), a satellite broadcasting television sponsored and produced by Distance Learning Foundation Under the Royal Patronage, aired its Grade 6 English lesson on May 19, 2020. The theme of the May 19’s lesson was introducing oneself where the class began with the teacher introducing herself as Mrs. Anchalee Pratansub who welcomed students to the class. Mrs. Pratansub then asked the class, “Have you breakfast?” Viewers immediately pointed out the question was grammatically incorrect, and right after the episode was aired, viewers started to comment about Mrs. Pratansub’s English pronunciation, her accent, and her “broken English grammar.” Some viewers took their comments to Twitter. One Twitter user wrote:

“ครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษไม่คล่อง แกรมม่าไม่ได้ pronunciation ไม่รอด ก็ไม่

ต้องมาสอนมาสอน ให้เจ้าของภาษาสอนเองดีกว่า”

“An English teacher who is not fluent in English, who cannot use correct grammar, and who fails at pronunciation should not be teaching. English should be taught by a native speaker.”

That English should be taught by a native speaker seems to be a common perception when it comes to ELT in Thailand. For example, at a northern Thai university where I used to work (hereafter UMor), English speaking and conversation classes are only reserved for native English speaking teachers (NESTs). Even though I was the course coordinator and course developer for ENGL 001112 (Oral Communication II) at UMor, I was not allowed to teach the course. When I raised a question if teachers who spoke English as an official or second language or teachers from Kachru's Outer Circles were qualified to teach, the answers ranged from "Maybe" to "Absolutely not" because "students expect to hear native accents and learn accurate pronunciation and grammar from native English speakers." Intrigued (and bothered), I reached out to colleagues at different institutions across Thailand and unsurprisingly discovered that the practice of having NEST teach certain courses is not unique to UMor.

There is a traditionally held view that nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) are "second in knowledge and performance" to NESTs (Braine, 2012). That is, the linguistic usage of NESTs is deemed as "standard" with accurate grammatical structures and "impeccable verbal pronunciation" while NNESTs are regarded as "flawed" with lacking language competency, defective pronunciation, and poor grammatical and pragmatic knowledge (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). As Braine (2012) states, the term "native speakers" is usually associated with "fluency, cultural affinity, and sociolinguistic competence" while the term "nonnative speakers" denotes minority and deficiency. Braine (2012) further posits that this connotation against NNESTs results in discrimination in the job market and professional advancement. In hiring English language teachers, for example, most parents and students tend to perceive NNESTs as less efficient and inferior to NESTs (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). Further investigating such claims, I visited Thailand's most popular TEFL website *ajarn.com* during the month of March 2022 and

observed the trends in job postings. Within the top ten searches, some of the results were:

“Fun Native English Teachers for May 2022 Start”

“ a preferably qualified NES Secondary Science teacher”

“Full-time native English teacher needed for top Bangkok language school.”

“We are seeking an enthusiastic and qualified female NES teacher”

The above excerpts from Thailand-based job postings suggest that NESTs enjoy more privileges in Thailand’s job market. While GE scholarship has come a long way in recognizing the legitimacy of varieties of English, in reality, native speakerism exists and is also seen as ideal and standardized models within ELT. I argue that this discriminatory practice – the practice that valorizes NES – is problematic in several aspects, in addition to the apparent discussions that the discrimination is inhumanely unjust. First, there is little correlation between teaching performance and efficiency and being an NES. That is, acquiring and speaking English as one’s L1 does not guarantee that a person can effectively teach the language because teaching inarguably involves more than just language skills. Secondly, little evidence reveals that NES conforms to “correct” and “standard” grammar. It should be noted that I am not arguing that ELT should strictly adhere to traditional grammatical, syntactic, and lexical rules. However, conversations at UMor, for example, echo parents’ and students’ expectations (and perceptions) that ELT classes taught by NESTs would lead to exposing learners to “prestigious” English. However, as discussed, since a language is fluid and is constantly shifted, molded, and (re)invented, it has become a challenging task to pinpoint what “correct” grammar rules and usages are. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that NESTs are a pedagogical model in ELT. Third, alienating NNESTs job candidates based on the notion of native speakerism and occupying the classrooms with only NESTs could lead to students’ limited exposure to diversity,

which in turn leaves them unprepared for intercultural interactions in an exponentially diverse world.

These biases against NNESTs as less competent are not only a form of prejudices, I argue, but they also set unrealistic expectations about the English language and ELT. By diminishing the legitimacy of NNESTs, the perception that “NEST is better” functions as othering toward NNESTs and devaluing NNES. It also curbs out qualified NNESTs who might otherwise fit the job descriptions. And since each language skill involves different sets of practice, being able to speak a language does not translate to the ability to master other skills such as reading and writing. Especially in L2 settings, academic writing can pose a challenge even for both NES and NEST because it is a genre that requires specific conventions and formalities.

Academic writing within Thai pedagogy

Of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), writing, as a mode of constructing knowledge in the academy, is usually perceived as the most challenging skill to master, especially for NNES students and for those who have very little experience writing in their first language (L1) (Canagarajah, 2002; Nomnian, 2017). According to Hedgcock (2012), mastering knowledge in foreign and second languages (L2) “can impose even greater psychocognitive and sociocultural demands on learners” whose English proficiency is “emergent” and whose knowledge in L1 is limited (p. 221).

Writing can also become a greater challenge when it is used as a means of assessment. When writing is used as an assessment, as is the case in seminar papers at the end of graduate courses, NNES student writers face additional burdens by needing to be “familiar with many rhetorical and discourse features of written English” (Hinkel, 2002, p. ix) and have to become

“functional in unfamiliar discourse situations within a limited amount of time” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 36). That is, in order for NNES students to complete writing assignments in English, they must meet and adapt to the standards of a specific genre of text and also need to have an understanding of the conventions of academic writing. However, even advanced and trained NNES students sometimes experience a great deal of difficulty writing in L2; these students often “exhibit numerous problems and shortfalls” (Hinkel, 2002, p. 4). In other words, NNES students, particularly those in graduate programs, have to repeatedly confront reoccurring problems on how to produce writings that would be deemed adequately organized with appropriate style and complexity or satisfactory by their institutions (Wuttisrisiriporn, 2017). Moreover, when NNES students’ writing is compared with a native “norm,” their writing is often perceived as less accurate and less effective (Shvidko, 2014). NNES students are even sometimes seen as “failed language learners” (Jordan, 2012, p. 13). This is partly because what is taught and valued in writing in their L1 might not be considered proficient in L2 settings. In addition, students from different cultures often find it hard to be expressive and assertive as this practice does not reconcile with their cultural values; their writings can also come across as less sophisticated or elaborate (Knutson et al., 2003).

As mentioned earlier, writing in L2 can be a challenge if students have little to no experience writing academically or thinking critically in L1. It should be noted that I am by no means arguing that mastering L1 academic writing guarantees success in L2 writing, as writing is culturally specific. That is to say, what is favorable in one context might not be approved by another. One culture may favor directness and assertiveness when students present their arguments while another values tentative and indirect statements (Hayisama et al., 2019). Also, in most NNES countries like Thailand, ESL/EFL writing instruction might be carried out in ways

and for purposes that are different from those in English-speaking countries (Annous & Nicolas, 2015). This reality can mean that even if there were academic writing courses offered in Thailand, they could be “deviant” from idealized or standardized writing instruction practiced in U.S. graduate programs. As Hinkel (2002) points out, learning to write in L2 is fundamentally different from learning to write in L1, and applying writing pedagogy for native English speaking (NES) students to NNES writing in L2 does not necessarily lead to NNES students’ ability to produce academic-level texts required by the academy (p. 6).

As discussed in Chapter One, Thailand has never been colonized by Western powers, and therefore, English has never gained the status of official language in the country. However, English is a compulsory subject in schools. It is also a medium in international study programs, in international business and professional interactions and transactions, and in tourism industry, etc. Despite the recognition of the importance of English and despite the attempt to provide English education to all students, often the Thai curricula includes very little or no writing at all (Glass, 2007). When writing activities do take place, they are usually embedded within primary Language Arts or in EFL classes. When I was in school, for example, I was often asked to write about how to be a good Thai by being loyal to the country’s Trinity (nation, Buddhism, and the King). This type of assignment and topic does not promote students’ learning and agency as it asks them to confine within a certain frame of thinking. Even in present day, these canned topics still exist within the Thai curricula. At my son’s primary school in Thailand, for example, students were assigned to write a short essay about Thailand’s King(s) and the importance of the monarchy. At tertiary level where students have more freedom to choose their own topics, they tend to pick a topic within the realm of the Trinity. For instance, at UMor, English majors are required to take Academic Writing in their third year of study. One major assignment asked

students to write a five-paragraph argumentative essay in English and I found many students still confined within what I call a “self-censored zone.” That is, almost all students’ papers only touched on arguments that reflect Thai values such as being a good child to your parents and being obedient to the head of state and authoritative figures. One of the most common themes was how and why we could and should show our gratitude to our parents and our country by taking care of them in their old ages and by believing in the monarchy. For example, in Krisnachinda’s (2006) research where she argues for genre-based approach to teaching writing in Thailand using a Thai university as a site for her study, one of her participants was asked to write a biographical recount of “a specific personality who played a significant role in history.” Unsurprising to me, the participant wrote about one of Thailand’s kings, Rama V. In Krisnachinda’s participant’s essay, Rama V was “loved,” “revered,” and “respected” by Thai people for his visions and kindness “to improve every aspect of Thai life.” This example illustrates how Thai students’ essays are usually deeply rooted in the concept of Thai beloved king(s) – one of the recurring themes among students’ writing.

As stated in Chapter One, in Thai culture talking back is discouraged and challenging the authority could result in imprisonment. I argue that through writing pedagogy where students are asked to only think about recurring themes and are discouraged to be creative, the Thai government molds passive citizens. In addition, while most U.S. composition programs had moved away toward a process-based approach by the 1980s (Glass, 2008), most Thai classrooms are still conducted based on current-traditional approach and the audiolingual method where the emphasis is placed on the accuracy of forms, error-free final product rather than on content, and where students are required to imitate and adhere to specific models (Kadmiry, 2021). Although

grammatical structures and lexical patterns are crucial to effective writing, these skills do not necessarily lead to students' ability to write appropriate extended texts (Hyland, 2019). In fact, Thailand's Ministry of Education (MoE) recognized the flaws in this traditional teaching approach and suggested a learner-centered approach while addressing that writing skill of English among Thai learners from school to university levels is "seriously problematic" and "disappointing" (Puengpipattrakul, 2020). In reality, however, little changes have taken place to promote Thai students' active learning, which will, in turn, foster students' critical thinking and agency.

Research on Thai students in the U.S.

While a body of research has been conducted to gain a better understanding and insights into learning experiences, language-based difficulties, language function problems, and acculturating strategies of international students, a few specifically focus on Thai students. One of the first studies that attempts to put a spotlight on Thai students in the U.S. dated back to 1967. In this study by Barry (1967), however, the focus is on the changing attitudes of Thai students in the U.S. toward Thailand and Thai culture at the time. In this study, Barry observed that academic life in the U.S. caused some Thai students to have changing attitudes toward sociocultural developments in Thailand. While Barry's study sheds light on overall observations that studying abroad impacts students' view of their home country, it does not explore how the Thai students in his study assimilated into American culture.

Following Barry's study (1967), more studies concerning Thai students in the U.S. have been conducted. Through mixed methods, Phongsuwan (1996), for example, examined the perceived nature of English language-based problems, communication behaviors, and coping strategies of Thai students at an American university at Washington State University during the

1995/1996 academic year. Through fifty-two questionnaires and interviews with five selected students, Phongsuwan argued that speaking was the most difficult for her participants.

Phongsuwan' study provides informative results regarding Thai students' academic experience on a U.S. campus. However, her study only deals specifically with language-based problems perceived by Thai students at only one U.S. university.

Through a case study and Douglas' Grid and Group Approach, which describe the learning experiences in relation to labor interest and community authority, Lohsiwanont (2001) explored the learning experiences and cultural adaptation of Thai students at a U.S. university where he gave a pseudonym Midwestern University. Interviewing ten Thai students, Lohsiwanont concluded that Thai students suffered from feelings of isolation and anxiety while studying in the U.S. One reason contributing to these challenges was that they had to adapt to a new living environment and learning culture.

Along the same vein, Songsangkaew's (2003) study focused on difficulties related to language function - the ways people engage in situational discourse - experienced by Thai students in the U.S. Through interviews and questionnaires with 35 Thai American University graduates, Songsangkaew concluded that using formal language functions was the area of the most concern among the research participants. To cope with this concern, Songsangkaew's participants reported that silence strategy was used when they were unsure about what to say.

Centering her arguments on Thai students' anxiety, Apaibanditkul (2006) investigated different international Thai students' comprehension skills including investigated communication, classroom communication, and intercultural communication at a U.S. university where she also gave a pseudonym Midwestern. Through mixed methods, which included three measurements of communication apprehension and a focus group interview, Apaibanditkul

found that language barriers were the primary factors contributing to a student's anxiety while at Midwestern University. While the participants in Apaibanditkul reported that they had difficulties participating in classroom discussions, they found it easier to make friends with other international students. Apaibanditkul concluded that feeling of anxiety was a shared experience among her participants.

Findings from the aforementioned studies on Thai students in the U.S. indicate that language competencies and barriers play a significant role in shaping the experiences of Thai students in the U.S. Although Barry's (1967) research was dated, other studies that followed tried to capture the perceptions and experiences of this student population. These studies, however, only focused on a specific group of Thai students – either they were at one university or they already graduated. My study, therefore, expands the conversations surrounding Thai students in the U.S. By incorporating and amplifying the voices of Thai students from different U.S. campuses, this study sheds light on the learning experiences, challenges, and acculturating strategies of Thai students. This study also scrutinizes the Thai socio-educational system that might have impacted the participants' success in doctoral studies in the U.S.

Chapter conclusion: English diversity and emerging conversations

Informed by Strauss and Xiang (2006), I proposed that agency can be defined as the process of decision-making that student writers encounter when producing texts while simultaneously attempting to insert their authentic voice through different modes that align with the conversations within their disciplinary communities. Another important discussion in this chapter is Global Englishes (GE). I argue that a better conceptualization of GE leads to a better understanding of how NNES students write in their L2 settings and how educational practices

should better modify their policies and pedagogies that would align with the challenges faced by this student population, in order to better help them succeed.

This chapter acknowledges that there is more work to be done in the classrooms to practically implement GE and GE-conscious pedagogy. Some stakeholders – parents, students, and employers – still view NES and NEST as norm-setting in ELT, which impedes such implementation. In my analysis chapter, Chapter Five, I unpack the sociocultural implications and perceptions of the NEST and NNEST dichotomy and expose unequal distributions of linguistic power.

Chapter Three: The Participants, Survey and Interview, and Coding

It is usually during the first week of a new semester that professors go over their syllabi and students learn about the class expectations. I still remember vividly looking down at the syllabus of one of my first PhD seminar classes feeling enthusiastic (and overwhelmed) about the materials on the reading list. Everything was new and exciting (and challenging). I flipped through the syllabus and then my pulse quickened when I saw that we had to write a 25-page final seminar paper. I paused and looked up around the room, but no one seemed to share my nervousness (and excitement). I reread and tried to internalize the syllabus which explicitly specified that, in addition to reading a book a week and a weekly writing assignment, we were assigned to write a seminar paper at the end of the semester. Specifically, the syllabus stated that “... you will choose a topic that you are passionate about, frame it within conversations in the field or in a journal, and add something new to that conversation.” Overjoyed (and also somewhat lost), I realized that I was no longer in an academically confined space where I had to write about being a loyalist, a patriot, or a Buddhist (three elements of the Thai Trinity).

As mentioned in the previous chapters, this research is rooted in my curiosity and desire to learn about how and to what extent other Thai doctoral students in U.S. universities who are facing similar situations as mine create agency and navigate U.S. academic culture. This research also reflects my attempt to understand the learning needs of Thai PhD students in the U.S.

Specifically, my research responds to the following questions:

- Were there any resources or writing instruction that may have sponsored participants’ writing in the U.S. academy?
- What are the challenges within the U.S. academic culture faced by the participants?

- To what extent do the participants cultivate agency and assimilate into the academy?
- What are some support and resources that can promote the success of Thai doctoral students within the U.S. academy?

As Jordan (2012) argues, the field of rhetoric and writing has “wrestled with the impact of multilingualism” and it is important to “attend to what multilingual students and their monolingual peers and teachers are doing and can do.” My research questions, therefore, are hoped to shed light on how NNES students navigate U.S. academic culture in order to better encourage different stakeholders – students themselves, teachers, and policymakers – to (re)think about their approaches when working with this student population.

To answer these questions, I conducted interviews with eight Thai NNES students in Humanities disciplines who are in PhD programs across the U.S. The research design was then reviewed and exempt by Virginia Tech’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This chapter describes the methods used to gather, compile, and analyze the data. In this chapter, I also explain participant recruitment methods, a brief summary of participants’ demographic backgrounds, and the rationale for using a semi-structured interview method. It should be noted that names of focal persons and participants have been changed to provide anonymity. The chapter concludes with some limitations this study faced.

Preliminary discussions

During one of my visits back to Thailand as a PhD student, I met with some former colleagues from UMor who were then pursuing doctoral degrees at UK and Australian universities. As we exchanged discussions about our PhD experiences, I became aware of the fact that most doctoral programs outside of the U.S. did not require their students to complete

graduate coursework. That is, during the pre-admission and application process for research degrees, applicants contact their perspective and potential advisor, submit a research proposal, and once admitted as PhD students, they start the research phase right away. With this knowledge, I, therefore, focused my research on U.S. graduate studies because, unlike graduate schools in the UK, Australia, or New Zealand, where students dive directly into research with limited to no coursework, students in U.S. doctoral programs are required to complete a certain amount of coursework before they can embark on writing their dissertation.

In addition, during my conversations with UMor colleagues, I mentioned the challenges I faced in U.S. PhD coursework hoping to find an ally. While most colleagues agreed that research writing was not an undemanding task, one colleague who was in STEM fields⁸ stated:

“เลขก็คือเลข จะอยู่ที่ไหนก็คือเลข คือภาษาสากล ถ้ามีผลแล็บกับสูตร จะเรียนที่ไหนภาษาอะไร ก็คือผลแล็บกับสูตร”

“Math is math. It’s a universal language. As long as you have lab results and formula, it does not matter in which language you study and write”

My colleague’s comment struck me. In my research capacity, within my discipline, I did not have the “universal language” like what my colleague mentioned. I had to write in English, which was not my L1. I had no lab results or scientific experiments to rely on. Writing *is* the mode of inquiry. As Nzekwe-Excel and Pope (2014) suggest, STEM students are “not usually encouraged to engage in meaningful writing tasks” partly because some do not “see the relevance of excellence in writing” (p. 19). In other words, unlike those in STEM fields who mostly deal with lab results and experiments, students in Humanities are faced with an abundance of writing assessments that include extended seminar papers.

⁸ Science Technology Engineering Mathematics

Participant criteria

According to Moon et al. (2018), writing activities have not widely been implemented in STEM classrooms at the postsecondary level. As students in the realm of Humanities tend to rely more on writing as a mode of inquiry whereas students in STEM primarily build their arguments based on experiments and formulas, I restricted participant criteria to those who are in Humanities disciplines and in related fields including, but not limited to, Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Education, and TESOL⁹.

In addition, because one of my research questions explores how Thai students coming to U.S. doctoral programs have to acculturate into the U.S. academic convention, I narrowed my research population down to Thai doctoral students who completed their bachelor's and master's degrees in Thailand, where composition classes might not have been in their curricula. In short, to fit the participant criteria for this study, participants have to:

- Have completed their pre-PhD degrees from Thai institutes. That is, they must have earned their bachelor's and master's degrees under the Thai educational system.
- Be enrolled in a PhD program in a U.S. university and have taken some coursework within their disciplines.
- Be outside of STEM fields. Participants must be students of Humanities disciplines or related fields, such as History, Literacy Studies, Law, Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, and Education.

⁹ Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages

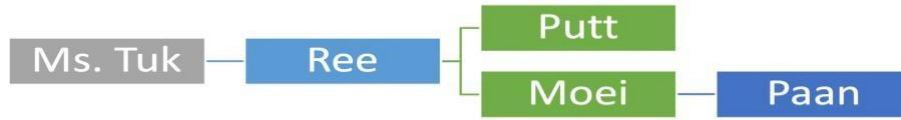
After the criteria were established, I began writing an IRB protocol. Once approved and exempt with ID number 20-975, I began my initial search for potential participants.

Recruitment methods

The recruitment methods took place after the research design was approved by IRB. I first called the Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C. After introducing myself and briefly explaining my research design to the call center representative, I was put on hold for about an hour before the phone call got disconnected. I redialed and was sent directly to the Embassy's voicemail with which I left a message but never received a call back. It took me several attempts throughout the course of a week to finally reach someone at the Embassy who might be able to answer my questions and whom I call here Ms. Tuk. I explained my research design to Ms. Tuk and inquired about Thai student populations who would fit the research criteria. I was then told that data about government-funded scholars could not be shared and that the Embassy did not have immediate access to the database. Ms. Tuk suggested that I call The Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC), a Thai government agency that is responsible for the management of human resources. When I called OCSC, I was informed that the Embassy would, in fact, have the information I sought after. Frustrated, I called the embassy back. Fortunately, this time Ms. Tuk at the Embassy sympathetically shared with me the contact information of Ree, a leading member of the Association of Thai Students in the USA. Ms. Tuk emphasized that even though Ree did not fit with the descriptions of my research design, Ree might be able to help me connect with other Thai students.

Following Ms. Tuk's advice, I reached out to Ree, who connected me with Puut and Moei, two of the participants in the research. Moei then introduced me to Paan, another participant in this study.

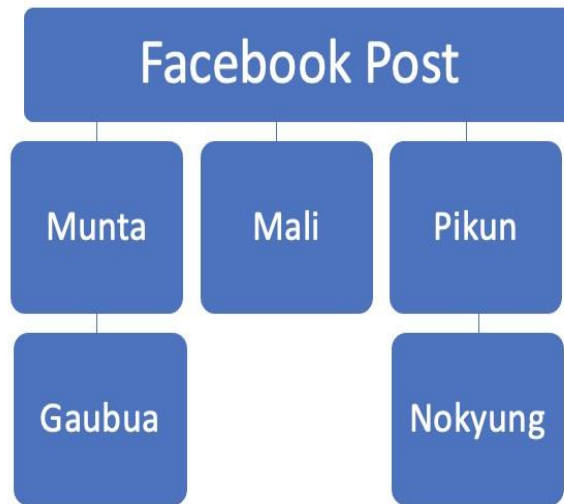
Figure 4: A chart demonstrating how I was introduced to three participants



After consulting with my dissertation chair who suggested that more participants should be recruited for this study, I resorted to social media. According to Reagan et al. (2019), social media is one obvious avenue for subject recruitment, and Facebook (FB) is “a popular social network platform for study recruitment” (p. 424). Research recruitment on FB can be conveniently accomplished for free through posts on FB pages, and therefore, FB can be an effective recruitment channel (Reagan et al., 2019).

On April 24, 2021, I posted a recruitment message on my FB wall. I made my post public and sharable in order for it to reach a wider audience. Four FB friends shared my post. A few hours after the post was published and shared, I was contacted by two UMor colleagues who were also FB friends and who said they knew individuals who might be interested in participating in the study. I was then connected with Munta, Mali, and Pikun through FB Messenger. During my initial conversations with the three participants, Munta and Pikun offered to connect me with their acquaintances. Munta introduced me to Gaubua who went to the same graduate school, though the two were in different programs. Pikun connected me with Nokyoung, whom Pikun met back in Bangkok, Thailand at an Education Fair hosted by EducationUSA.

Figure 5: A chart illustrating how five participants were recruited through a FB post



I consider this process a snowball sampling method. According to Johnson (2014), snowball sampling “relies on referrals from initially sampled respondents to other persons believed to have the characteristic of interest.” Browne (2005), in her research on using social networks to research non-heterosexual women, writes that “Another way to gain initial contacts is to use personal networks and ask friends and acquaintances to be involved.” Similarly, according to Baltar and Brunet (2012), snowball sampling is “a useful methodology in exploratory, qualitative and descriptive research, especially in those studies where respondents are few in number or a high degree of trust is required to initiate the contact” (p. 60). Moreover, the emergence of social network sites (SNS) “has transformed the Internet into an efficient tool for snowball sampling” (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). I see the snowball sampling technique benefiting my study because it allowed me to connect with hard-to-reach populations. That is, I embarked on participation recruitment not personally knowing any individual who would qualify or who would be interested in participating in this study. Referral from eligible participants was one way I was able to connect with more participants. With the assistance of SNS like FB, I

could also reach a wider population that would otherwise remain unknown. The total number of participants in this study is eight.

In order to protect their identities, I chose aliases for my participants. The names I have chosen are from Thai flowers. The interview participants' aliases are: Mali (มะลิ), Pikun (พิกุล), Munta (มันตา), Gauboa (กอบัว), Puut (พุด), Nokyung (นกยูง), Moei (เหมย), and Paan (ปาน).

Participants

The eight interview participants consisted of 1 male and 7 females. They were between the ages of 29 and 38. All participants completed their bachelor's and master's degrees in Thailand before pursuing doctoral studies in the U.S. Seven participants had experiences working in the fields of education, journalism, and translation between their degrees while one participant continued their education without working in any industry. All eight participants were funded to pursue their doctoral studies. While one participant was a Thai government scholar and one was funded by their U.S. graduate program, six were sponsored to complete their doctoral degrees by their employers, which were Thai higher education institutions. Five participants stated that they had extracurricular training in English while three revealed that they had never taken any training or professional development courses in English outside of school. Seven participants had taken college course(s) centered on writing in English. Three participants said they were first generation college students. Six participants were first generation graduate students in their household. All eight participants were, at the time of the study, PhD students/candidates in the U.S.

Table 2: Participants' information (brief summary)

Name (alias)	Age	Gender	Education
Moei	32	F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BA French · MA Applied Linguistics · PhD Education Psychology
Gauboa	29	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BA History · MA (N/A) · PhD Asian Literature, Religion and Culture
Puut	38	F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BA English · MA Linguistics · PhD Linguistics
Paan	35	F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BA Communication · MA Tourism Management · MA English · PhD Composition and Rhetoric
Pikun	38	F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BA English · MA Linguistics · PhD Linguistics (one semester)

			· PhD Literacy
Nokyung	34	F	· BA English · MA TEFL · PhD Literacy
Mali	34	F	· BA English · MA TEFL · PhD Language, Literacy, and sociocultural studies
Munta	29	F	· BA Thai Studies · MA Linguistics · PhD Linguistics

Demographic survey

After the participants were identified, they were asked to fill out a survey online prior to an interview. The purpose of the survey was to learn about the participants’ educational backgrounds and their willingness to participate in the study. It should be noted that there was no formal consent form for this research design; however, consent was implied from the return of the completed survey. The survey generated a map of whether the Thai curricula did (or did not) offer writing instruction that would facilitate the participants’ academic writing in doctoral programs in America. In Sahatsathatsana’s (2017) study on Thai students’ English pronunciation, his research participants were interviewed in Thai because it allowed him to “obtain clear and in-depth data” (p. 75). The survey in this study, therefore, was also conducted

in Thai, and so was the interview, in order to avoid language barriers and to obtain participants' unfiltered responses.

There were seven items in the survey. The questions asked the participants about their age, gender, educational background, work experience, extracurricular training, and academic training. The last item asked if there was anyone in their household who had gone to college or graduate school.

Due to the pandemic and different locations of the participants, the survey and all communications were conducted online. I communicated with the participants through different channels and platforms, including Line, FB Messenger, Gmail, and What's App, depending on how I first got their contact information. For example, I obtained Gauboa's email address through Munta, whom I was communicating with on FB Messenger. Therefore, the survey was distributed to participants through different platforms.

It is important to note that even though all eight participants provided me with information about their (past and present) schools' and employers' names and locations, I decided to not include it in the study in order to eliminate any traceable information.

Interviews

The purpose of this study is to further the understanding and conversations of how Thai PhD students in Humanities disciplines navigate academic expectations in the U.S. One of the best ways to respond to the above question and to answer the research questions was to talk to doctoral students across the country. Therefore, I interviewed eight Thai students who were enrolled in PhD programs in different U.S. universities. Brooks (2021) stated that "Interviews are a means of creating knowledge with participants, a "world-making" that does not necessarily exist through other methods of research in such profound ways" (p. 94).

The interviews were semi-structured, with six scripted questions and malleable follow-up questions. According to Mills (2001), a semi-structured interview is a research tool that is “flexible and likely to promote fruitful reflection by the participant” (p. 385). It was my hope that the semi-structured interview would provide a chance for the participants to tell their stories, which would give me a deeper understanding of the complex nature of how Thai doctoral students deal with and strive in U.S. academic culture. I conducted these interviews in Thai because it is the native language of both the participants and myself. I argue that by interviewing the participants in their native tongue, I will get their unfiltered responses.

The interviews were carried out via Zoom, a video conferencing platform that allows users to chat, phone, and hold meetings and webinars. All interviews were conducted between the months of April and May 2021. I started each interview session by thanking the participants and asking if there was anything they would like to add to the survey. Two participants, Guaboa and Puut, added comments about how the English courses they took during their undergraduate degrees were different depending on whether the course was taught by native English speaking teachers (NEST) or nonnative English speaking teachers (NNEST). When I asked for elaboration, both of them made similar remarks that they learned more about grammar rules in the courses taught by Thai teachers than in classes taught by NEST. Nokyoung added that in her Academic Writing course taken during her BA, it was the reading, not writing, that was the focus of the instruction. In Chapter Five, I will analyze these pieces of information in a more in-depth manner.

Coding

This study used qualitative research design, specifically I coded thematically. Qualitative research method allows researchers to “explore the beliefs, values, and motives that explain why

the behaviors occur” (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). In a similar vein, Vaughn & Turner (2016) argue that qualitative research method provides “a means of capturing the complexity” of our participants as they are “complex individuals” (p. 42) Qualitative research method also allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ needs and expectations. One of the aims of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Thai students in doctoral programs in Humanities and related fields at American universities and how they adjusted to the quality of work expected of them. In other words, qualitative research allows me to receive and interact with descriptive information that is not easily assessed or investigated through quantitative research method because an individual’s experiences and narratives “cannot be in numerical form” (Huang, 2009).

After collecting the data, I used qualitative coding methods for analysis. According to Saldaña (2009), “In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4).

Qualitative coding, in other words, allowed me to identify themes and trends in the data.

As stated in the IRB protocol and with the participants’ permission, I recorded the interviews. Zoom provides a recording function; I took advantage of technology. After each interview session, I watched and listened to the recorded interviews in order to transcribe, which was done manually. As the interviews were conducted mainly in Thai (with some English loan words and hard-to-translate terms), the transcripts were also in Thai. I did not rely on any coding software because, to my knowledge, most available software did not recognize languages other than English. Therefore, both the transcripts and the coding were done manually. The coding schemes themselves, however, were done in English. To avoid the time-consuming process of

translating codes from Thai to English, I decided to proceed with coding in English. I then transcribed, color coded, and highlighted to make notes of certain keywords, phrases, or several consecutive sentences related to my research questions.

One recurring theme that appeared in all the interviews was difficulties understanding the assigned reading materials, difficulties managing reading load within a given timeframe, or difficulties completing the writing assignment in a limited time. Upon realizing this trend, I wrote “**Challenges**” next to the phrases as code. The following are examples of Challenges:

- “การอ่าน challenge มากกว่าการเขียนเพราะว่าเราไม่ได้ถูกฝึกมาแบบนี้ไงคะ”

“Reading is more challenging than writing because we were not trained to read this way.”

- “แต่ว่า level การอ่านของที่นี่อะ คือเหมือน double อะ double triple อะ คืออ่านจนแบบโอย

แต่คือถามว่ามันดีไหม มันดีแบบแต่ว่าเวลามันไม่พอไงคะที่จะอ่านทั้งหมดที่เขา list มา ก็เลยช่วงแรกก็จะ challenge นิดนึงว่าจะจัดการยังไงให้อ่านตาม list แบบที่เขาให้อ่าน”

“But the reading level here is like double, well, double and triple. I read and was like Oh No. But if you ask me if it’s a good thing, I think it’s good but there’s just not enough time to read all from the reading lists professors give us. It was a little challenge at first about how to manageably read all from the list they gave me.”

- “อ่านนี่แหละที่มันถือเป็น challenge ใหญ่สุดของช่วงปี 1 ที่เข้ามา เพราะว่าจากวิชาละหนึ่งบทความมัน เป็นวิชาละเล่มอะ”

“Reading is the biggest challenge during my first year here because we moved from reading an article a class to reading a book a class.”

After finishing carefully and thoroughly studying the transcripts, I saw other themes emerge which became the following codes:

- **Autonomy/Initiatives** – passages that mentioned self-guided, self-learned, or self-taught strategies. These could be actions or activities the participants engaged in, without support or help from other resources, in order to thrive in the academy.
- **Resources** – passages that provided information about resources the participants utilized or available to them.
- **Pedagogy** – passages that discussed either Thai teaching and learning styles or Western/U.S. classroom practices.
- **NNES** – passages where participants discussed language barriers, L1 interferences, L1-L2 relationships, or their NES counterparts.
- **Hesitancy** – signs, language cues, or silence that the participants indicated that they did not feel comfortable elaborating on their remarks.
- **What Works** – passages that discussed artifacts, strategies, assignments, or activities that the participants saw as useful and valuable for their learning and success.
- **Emotions** – words or phrases that include a word commonly used to express a reactionary feeling.

To recap, all transcripts used for coding were in Thai. In Subphadoongchone's (2011) research on dissertation writing experiences of postgraduate students in a Thai university, for example, all the transcripts were kept in the original interview language (Thai). In Subphadoongchone's (2011) words "translating the interview transcripts originally in Thai into English could have posed some potential threats to the validity or accuracy of the original data when it came to analysis," which could have affected the subsequent analysis and interpretation

of the data (p. 76). Following Subphadoongchone (2011), while the codes were in English, I also kept the transcript untranslated during the coding process.

Limitations

Though this study is well constructed and the results are fruitful, there are a few limitations to this study. The greatest of the limitations is the small sample size. After a year-long attempt to recruit as many participants as I could through social media and through snowball sampling, I could not increase the number of participants. One possible explanation for this would be the Thai cultural phenomenon called *kreng jai*.

In Thai culture, there is a concept of เกรงใจ (*kreng jai*). According to Punturaumporn (2001), *kreng jai* is “one of the most difficult Thai concepts for foreigners to comprehend or for Thais to explain” (p. 48). Though there is no direct English translation to *kreng jai*, it can loosely be explained as not wanting to disturb, inconvenience, or bother other people. It is a way of showing respect, consideration, humbleness, and politeness. Wongkitrungrueng et al. (2019) write that “the cultural norm of *kreng jai* guides everyday interpersonal behavior patterns.” (p. 192). It is a practice of creating and maintaining positive relationships with others. I have to admit that I felt a sense *kreng jai* toward the focal persons (Ms. Tuk and Ree) or my participants every time I interacted with them. That is, I felt like they were doing me a favor and that I did not want to appear too pushy. Perhaps, had I pressed the issue and the urgency of finding more potential interview participants more persistently, I might have been able to recruit more participants for this study. In future research, scholars working with Thai research participants should be mindful of the Thai concept of *kreng jai* as they begin to build their methodology and interact with their participants.

Another limitation this study faced was the absence of participants' writing samples and their professors' feedback. I acknowledge that including participants' writings in the study would provide a window into how they wrote for the academy in the U.S. and into the expectations of their graduate programs. However, of the eight participants, only Puut was willing to share such documents with me. With very low response rates, I decided not to include Puut's sample writing in the study as I feel only one sample could not yield informative results for my analysis.

The third limitation was the lack of access to curricula of the participants' previous and present education. While the demographic survey yielded useful information about the participants' educational background, a more in-depth analysis of their Thai and U.S. curricula would better shape this study's understanding of coursework that could have provided writing instruction that would have informed them of academic expectations in the U.S. It should be noted that the exclusion of curriculum analysis did not imply that no attempt was made to gain access to the participants' school curricula. As stated, all participants revealed the names and locations of their previous and current schools; however, due to privacy concerns, I decided to omit such information from this dissertation. Once I learned their schools' names and locations, I visited the websites of their schools hoping to gain access to course descriptions and program curricula. Unsurprisingly, such data were not available on the Internet. However, even if I had gained access to such information, it might not have been up to date. That is, most Thai universities revise their undergraduate curricula every five years, which means the curriculum and course descriptions that would have been available on the schools' websites would not accurately reflect the courses that my participants had taken.

The last limitation of this study is the translation process. I was the sole translator for what is presented in this study. While I tried my best to keep the translated sections as close to

the original as possible, some readers may argue that there might be different ways of translating. For example, the phrase ฟังไม่ทัน (*fung mai tun*) can be translated as “cannot catch up” or “cannot listen quick enough” as a result of the conversations going too fast. In the analysis chapter, Chapter Four, I opted for “cannot listen quick enough” as a translated version. Although I acknowledge that the phrase may not be “natural-sounding,” it best expresses what the participants said. Future research, therefore, might consider having more translators to help verify the translation.

Chapter Four: Codes, Themes, and Navigating the Academy

In this qualitative research, I chose semi-structured interviews in Thai as a method for data collection. The semi-structured interviews with eight Thai doctoral students provided a deeper understanding of the complex nature of how Thai doctoral students deal with and strive in U.S. academic culture. After the interviews were recorded and transcribed, I deployed a qualitative coding method as my data analysis to look for thematic patterns. I manually coded the transcripts as there was no known existing software that recognizes languages other than English. While the interviews and the transcripts were in Thai, the coding schemes were done in English to minimize the translation process.

This study produced qualitative data, from which the following results were gathered in response to the four questions that drove this research:

1. Were there any resources or writing instruction that may have sponsored participants' writing in the U.S. academy?

Of eight participants, seven said that they had taken some writing courses in Thailand before coming to the U.S. graduate schools. One participant, Puut, took Writing for Graduate Students while in a PhD program in the U.S. Four participants, Pikun, Paan, Gauboa, and Moei said they had been to writing centers at their schools during the first year of their PhD programs. On the other hand, Munta stressed that she heavily relied on peer reviews from her fellow PhD students. Five participants stated that they had taken extra training(s) in writing in English outside of school either sponsored by an organization or by themselves. That is, while Pikun stated that she paid for the training herself, Moei, Puut, Paan, and Nokyoung were sponsored by either their employers or their schools.

2. What are the challenges within the U.S. academic culture faced by the participants?

The participants' responses revealed that the challenges they faced ranged from managing and keeping up with a heavy workload to reading unfamiliar materials, conforming to the academic conventions and registers, actively participating in class discussions, and language barriers such as limited vocabulary bank and L1 interference in writing.

3. To what extent do the participants cultivate agency and assimilate into the academy?

Informed by Strauss and Xiang (2006), who define agency as “students’ ability to understand the demands of each writing task and to plan the appropriate steps to meet those demands effectively and efficiently” (p. 358), my definition of agency is: the process of decision making student writers encounter when producing texts while simultaneously attempting to insert authentic voice through linguistic choices that align with the conversations within their disciplinary communities. Working within this definition, I argue that participants’ agency was cultivated and constructed outside of Thailand's educational context. Eight participants agreed that U.S. coursework was more demanding in terms of critical thinking and class discussions. In terms of writing requirements, they had to produce new and original arguments whereas in Thailand they simply had to write in a manner that would please their professors. For example, Paan revealed that in Thailand she could not challenge her professor in her writing; the style and the content had to “link” with the professors. In the U.S., however, Paan said she “enjoyed” writing about new concepts and creating new ideas. Similarly, Moei implied that in the U.S., she no longer had to conform to the traditional five-paragraph essay format as she did in Thailand. To me, to cultivate agency is to be able to practice autonomy – making one own’s decisions about their work. For example, the participants’ ability to explore topics beyond the Thai Trinity

or to make decisions to be (non)vocal in class reflects their agency. Within the framework of this dissertation, participants implied that, while in Thailand, they were bound within what would please their professors rather than challenging the status quo. I see this writing practice within the Thai curricula as a way to encapsulate Thainess, where conformity might be valued over agency. That is to say, agency could be (co)constructed by the participants themselves or by their educational practices within their graduate programs.

The transition from one learning environment to another required that participants adapt their learning strategies to different forms of pedagogy in order to “survive” and then “thrive” to meet expectations of their graduate programs in the U.S. I interpreted this shift in strategies to be autonomous and beneficial to their own perceptions of success. Their ideas of success might be rooted in academic performance, which includes grades, assessment, and recognition; and participation, which includes feedback from their professors and peers.

4. What are some support and resources that can promote the success of Thai doctoral students within the U.S. academy?

From the interview data set, some supports that the participants saw as crucial included peer reviews, feedback from professors, the writing center, writing workshops and training for graduate students, and class discussions. I would add that providing time for students to attend workshops and organizing training that matched students’ needs was another important resource. Munta, for example, stated that although her graduate program hosted several workshops throughout her coursework years, she never had time to attend one because the workshops were held during class times or the topics of the training did not pertain to her research.

Success, for the participants, equates being able to “catch up” with their “farang” peers, including class performance, retention, and possibility for professional achievement. Success is

also personal to each participant as they talked through academic milestones and pitfalls within both Thai and U.S. academic cultures. The participants discussed how feedback styles, class discussions, and writing centers could facilitate their academic goals and transition into the U.S. graduate programs.

These study results will be discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter and then analyzed in Chapters Five. In what follows in this chapter, I present the results of the demographic survey in more detail with brief participants' profiles, discuss the interview results along with the codes, and elaborate on the definitions of each code.

Survey results

The surveys were distributed through various online channels (Line, FB Messenger, Gmail, and What's app) prior to the semi-structured interviews. Although participants were asked to complete the survey and return it within one week, I received all completed surveys back within a day. The survey served as a means of informing this study about the participants' education (both in Thailand and in the U.S.), courses in writing in English they had taken and extracurricular training, their work experiences, age and gender, family education (whether the participants were first-generation college graduates or first graduate students in their household). In the following section, I present biographical sketches of the eight participants.

Moei is a 32-years old PhD student in Education Psychology. Before joining her PhD program, Moei had been an English instructor at a Thai university for three years where she taught General Education, Technical English, and English in Workplace. She is currently on leave in order to pursue doctoral studies and will have to go back to Thailand to resume her position. During her BA in French, Moei took English Reading and Writing and French Writing. She also participated in training in English for Assessment in the U.S. as part of a professional

development program. Meoi is the first person in her household to complete a bachelor's degree and master's degree and also the first to pursue a doctoral degree. During the interview, Moei revealed that she had never been to America prior to her PhD. She described her first PhD coursework as a "shock" because, unlike what she had experienced in Thailand, it was "discussion-based."

Going from a bachelor's degree in History to a PhD program in Asian Literature, Religion, and Culture without a master's, 29 years old **Gauboa** used to work as an interpreter at a Thai company. During the first year of his PhD, Gauboa was a research assistant for six months. Later, he was assigned to teach Introduction to Japan, Introduction to China, Introduction to Japanese Films, and First-year Writing. Without having taken any extracurricular training in writing in English, in his undergraduate, he took Composition I, Composition II, and Research Writing, which was taught by a native English speaking teacher (NEST). During the interview, Gauboa stressed how his teaching experience as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) changed how he learned. Specifically, he stated "once I started teaching, I looked at the classes differently. I expected my students to speak up and I then realized I am also expected to speak up." Gauboa is the first person in his household to attend graduate school, but not the first to attend college.

Having worked as an instructor at a Thai university for seven years before taking a leave to pursue a PhD in Linguistics, 38 years old **Puut** earned her BA in English and an MA in Linguistics. Before becoming an instructor, Puut worked as an interpreter/translator at a Thai American company. During her BA, Puut had taken Basic Writing taught by a Thai instructor and Advanced Composition Writing taught by a NEST. Puut said she had a chance to attend a month-long teacher training in Australia. Puut is neither a first generation college graduate nor

the first person in her household to pursue graduate degrees. During the interview, Puut said her hope is that one day her research in Linguistics could “make a difference” and somehow “save the world.”

After earning a BA in Communication, **Paan**, who is 35, worked as a columnist/journalist/translator at a Thai English newspaper. She then became an instructor of Tourism and English at a private university in Thailand after completing her first MA in Tourism Management. Because she “enjoyed being in school and learning,” Paan decided to pursue her second MA in English. After her second MA, she became an English instructor at a public university where she’s currently on leave in order to pursue doctoral studies in Composition and Rhetoric. Paan also enrolled in a one-and-a-half month-long graduate certificate in Advanced Literacy in Singapore. Paan had taken New Writing during her BA and English Business Writing while in her first MA. Paan is the first person in her household to hold an undergraduate degree and the first to go to graduate school.

38 years old **Pikun** is in her last year of her PhD in Literacy. She earned a BA in English and an MA in Linguistics. During her MA, she worked for three years as an editorial assistant at a Thai publishing company. Wanting to build qualifications in order to teach at a university in her hometown (where she got her BA), Pikun decided to pursue a doctoral study in Linguistics at a university in Bangkok. However, seeing her then PhD program as “too prestigious” and that everyone was “so bright,” she decided to leave the program after one semester as it “wasn’t the right fit” for her. She later became an instructor at the university in her hometown and had been teaching for seven years before she came to the U.S. for a PhD. In the interview, Pikun added that in addition to taking an English course at a British language center in Thailand, she had taken a two-month Academic Writing workshop during her MA. She also added that she spent

the last year of her undergraduate in Japan as a Japanese government-funded exchange student. Pikun is neither the first generation college graduate nor the first person in her household to pursue graduate studies.

Nokyung, who is 34, earned her BA in English, an MA in TEFL, and now is a PhD student in Literacy. After completing her BA, she worked as an adjunct instructor at a university in her hometown for two years. While in her MA in 2009, she got a job offer to work as an instructor at the university in her hometown from which she got a BA. She had been working at the university until they offered to sponsor her doctoral study. She is currently on leave and will go back to Thailand to resume her position upon graduation. In 2019, she won a scholarship to participate in the Teacher Exchange Program in the U.S. Prior to her graduate studies, Nokyung had taken several reading and writing courses where, according to her, the emphasis was on reading rather than on writing. In the interview, Nokyung stressed that she enjoyed writing reflection essays and journals and giving talks on teaching and learning English. The most important element of any writing, for Nokyung, is good organization. Without good organization, she said, no one would “understand what you are talking about.”

Mali is a 34 years old PhD student in Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies with a BA in English and an MA in TEFL. Her teaching experiences after earning her master’s include an adjunct instructor position at a university in her hometown, an instructor position at another university, before moving to a different city for another full-time instructor position, where she had been teaching for five years before the university sponsored her to pursue a PhD in the U.S. During her undergraduate, Mali had taken four Written Expressions courses required for an English major at her school. While she is not the first generation to attend college, she is the first in her family to pursue graduate studies. During the interview, Mali revealed that

YouTube has been her greatest resource. Without online video sharing and social media platforms like YouTube, she would not be able to understand several terminologies, such as ontology and epistemology, discussed in the PhD classes.

Twenty-nine-year-old **Munta** is a PhD student in Linguistics with a bachelor’s degree in Thai Studies and a master’s degree in Linguistics. Munta is sponsored to pursue her doctoral study by the Anandamahidol Foundation, a scholarship program initiated by King Rama IX. Munta had never taken any courses centered on writing in English and had never worked for any industry between degrees. While Munta is not the first person in her family to complete undergraduate degrees, she is the first to go to graduate schools. In the interview, Munta stressed that being a part of a “community” in the PhD program helped with her academic transition and learning.

Table 3: The participants’ demographic survey data (continued)

Name (alias)	Work experience in English between degrees	Extra training in writing in English	College/grad courses centered on writing in English	Type of sponsorship /scholarship	1st Gen College	1st Gen Grad school
Moei	English Instructor	English for Assessment	-Reading and Writing (BA) -Writing in French (MA)	Thai University	Y	Y

Gauba	Interpreter	N/A	-Composition I, II (BA) -Research Writing (BA)	N/A	N	Y
Puut	-Translator/ Interpreter -Instructor of Business English	Teacher Training	-Basic Writing (BA) -Advanced Composition Writing (BA)	Thai University	N	N
Paan	-Columnist/ journalist/ translator -Instructor of Tourism and English	Cert. in Advanced Literacy	-New Writing (BA) -Business Writing (MA)	Thai University	Y	Y
Pikun	-Editorial Assistant -English Instructor	British Council	Academic Writing (MA)	Thai University	N	N

Nokyung	English Instructor	Teacher Exchange Program	Reading and Writing	Thai University	Y	Y
Mali	English Instructor	N/A	Written Expressions	Thai University	N	Y
Munta	N/A	N/A	N/A	King's Scholarship/ Thai Government	N	Y

While the survey did not explicitly ask participants about the type of funding or sponsorship for their doctoral studies, the information could be implied from the survey question that asked about their work experiences. For example, Puut and Nokyung wrote in the surveys that they were “currently on leave” from their Thai universities. Also, during the interviews, five participants (Mali, Meoi, Paan, Puut, and Pikun) revealed that they had to go back to Thailand to resume their positions and get promoted with tenure track options.

From the survey, I found no correlation between the participants’ family educational background and their education, career choices, or training they had taken. However, during the interview with Pikun, the only correlation between whether the participants were first generation college/graduate students and their education emerged. Pikun revealed that her mother, who holds a master’s degree, “sent” her to a British language school so she could “do better in

English” because her mother saw “the importance of English in undergraduate and graduate education.”

While I am trying my best to protect the participants’ identifying and traceable information, some information such as participants’ school names is relevant for data analysis. For example, Gauboa, Paan, and Munta earned their undergraduate degrees from one of Thailand’s most prestigious universities (hereafter CMor). According to Pikun, who went to a different university system in Thailand, people at CMor were “too bright.” Pikun spent one semester in CMor’s PhD program in Linguistics before leaving the program. Her reason was CMor was “too much, too intense, too prestigious,” and that it “wasn’t the right fit” for her. Pikun’s comments implied a socio-educational gap within the Thai university systems.

Although this study first hypothesized that writing instruction was limited or virtually nonexistent within the Thai curricula, it is revealed from the survey results that seven participants had taken at least one writing course before joining PhD programs. In other words, some of the English writing courses mentioned in the survey were part of the participants’ degree requirements. Mali, for example, stated that she had to take a series of four Written Expressions courses as part of the degree requirements. Gauboa, who was a History major, on the other hand, took Composition I and II as elective courses because he thought “it would help” with his writing. Despite some degree of written instruction, almost all participants revealed later in the interviews that writing was one of the most challenging skills to master as a PhD student. From this, it can be implied that the instruction that they received pre-PhD did not sufficiently prepare them for the kind of writing that would be expected of them in doctoral coursework. One way we can see this played out was when Goaboa and Puut discussed during the interviews that instructors, whether they are Thai or NEST, made a difference in learning experience. That is,

they both agreed that Thai teachers assigned less reading and provided fewer comments when compared to NEST. This reflects a product-oriented approach that is still heavily employed by the Thai-trained writing instructors.

No correlation was found between the participants' work experiences and extracurricular training and their PhD experiences. Meoi, for example, stated that her training in English for Assessment was so discipline-specific that it "was not helpful" in her PhD in Education Psychology. Nokyoung, on the other hand, stressed that as the Teacher Exchange Program required that she submit a reflection essay at the end of the program, she could see the importance of writing as a way to keep records of what was learned. However, she commented that while reflection essays and journal writing were different from academic writing, they shared similarities in terms of organizational structure. According to Nokyoung, an interesting and well-organized introduction is a key to effective writing. Specifically, she said, "you won't make sense unless you have a good intro."

Six participants were sponsored to pursue doctoral students by their employers: Thai universities. This finding strengthened my observation and argument mentioned in Chapter One that Thai universities are trying to "reinvent themselves," and that sending their instructors out to complete international doctoral degrees is one way the universities can boost their rankings and recognition on the world stage. However, with little pre-departure training being sponsored, most Thai scholars might have come into PhD programs feeling "underprepared," Pikun said. While the survey yielded informative results, they have to be analyzed in tandem and juxtaposed with the interviews. Some participants provided more detailed responses than others in the surveys, and it was during the interviews that I asked for elaboration or that the

more detailed information was shared voluntarily. The next section, therefore, presents interview results and findings.

Interview Results

The interviews took place between the month of April and May 2021 and was conducted via Zoom due to the pandemic and participants' locations. Each interview lasted about one hour and thirty minutes and was mainly in Thai. The interviews were semi-structured with six guiding questions and adjustable follow-up questions. However, the interviews became conversations where I and the interview participants exchanged stories about our experiences being Thai PhD students in the U.S. and how our educational and professional experiences shaped our learning and perception of Thai and U.S. pedagogy. In other words, the interviews were loosely structured with an interview protocol to help guide the conversation when needed.

The following are analyses for each code with some excerpts and quotes from the interviews.

Challenges

The code challenges arose from segments that discussed academic challenges the participants experienced while in PhD coursework in the U.S. As the first interview questions asked the participants directly whether they had experienced academic challenges, code challenges emerged early on in the interview data set and continued to come up throughout the interviews. Sometimes, code challenges appeared after code emotions as participants revealed how they felt before going into details. After each response, I always recapped their comments or asked for elaboration. This practice allowed me to get bigger pictures of what was said and also gave the participants an opportunity to expand on their responses. Therefore, code challenges did not stop once we moved on to the next questions. Challenges yielded 36 segments.

Challenges became a code for participants describing academic struggles, challenges, or what they found to hinder or obstruct their learning. Keywords or phrases that fell under the code include, but are not limited to, ยาก (difficult), ล้าบาก (hard), ไม่เข้าใจ (not understand), ไม่ทัน (can't keep up), ไม่รู้เรื่อง (not understand/not get it), เยอะ (a lot/too much), ไม่ดี (not good), or the English word “challenge” itself.

Most participants revealed that reading – too much reading or unfamiliar content – and participating in class discussions were one of the most challenging aspects of PhD coursework:

“Listening/speaking ยากกว่า writing มากเลย”

“Listening and speaking is more difficult than writing.” (Pikun)

“การอ่าน challenge มากกว่าการเขียนเพราะเราไม่ได้ถูกฝึกมาแบบนั้นไง”

“Reading is more challenging than writing because we weren't trained to read this much”

(Paan)

“อ่านนี่แหละถือว่าเป็น challenge ใหญ่สุดของช่วงปีหนึ่งเพราะอ่านเยอะ แต่พอปรับตัวได้”

“สิ่งที่ยากจริงๆไม่ใช่การอ่านแต่เป็น participation ในช่วง seminar มากกว่า”

“Reading was the biggest challenge during my first year because we had to read a lot. But

once I got used to it, it's not the reading but it's a class participant in a seminar that's more

challenging.” (Gauboa)

Mali and Nokyung, on the other hand, stated that “everything” was difficult:

“ยากหมดเลยนะเทอมแรก”

“Everything was difficult during my first semester.” (Mali)

“พูดได้เลยว่ายากทุกอย่างที่เกี่ยวกับการเรียนที่นี่”

“I can say that everything about studying here is difficult.” (Nokyung)

Interestingly, Munta stated that “oral presentations” were challenging for her. She described her experience of having to explain her research topic in Southeast Asian languages to her peers within the field of Linguistics. As her research interests lay outside of western canons, it was a complicated concept for an “audience outside of the context.” When asked to provide more details, Munta said, “it cannot be described in a linear manner like 1 2 3. Especially when I have to present at a conference, people just don’t seem to get the concept.” When asked if it was due to language barriers, she said “it’s possible, but the content is more important than my language ability.” Also, Munta was the only participant who saw writing as the most difficult part of her PhD coursework:

“การเขียนเป็นเรื่องยาก เขียนเป็นไทยก็ยากแล้วอะ academic writing เป็นเรื่องยากพอสมควร

เราไม่ค่อยรู้ register ของภาษาเท่าไร ก็จะ mix แบบ formal/informal register ในการเขียน ซึ่ง

ก็เป็นสิ่งที่ก็ไม่ได้สวยงามเท่าไร”

“Writing is difficult even in Thai. Academic writing is quite difficult because I don’t know the register of the language. So, I mix formal/informal registers in my writing. It’s not pretty.” (Munta)

While this study first hypothesized that writing would be the most challenging skill as writing instruction in Thailand was limited, the interview data surprisingly revealed that reading and class discussion were more challenging than writing. Seven participants stated that managing

a heavy reading load was a challenge and participating in class discussions was also challenging. Of eight participants, Munta was the only person who said she found writing to be the most challenging skill.

Autonomy/Initiatives

The coding schema used autonomy/initiatives to identify each segment that suggested the participants' self-learned, self-taught, and self-enlightened strategies or intrinsic motivation that they found to be successful in helping them overcome the academic challenges. There were 25 segments that fell under autonomy/initiatives across seven out of eight interviews; code autonomy/initiatives did not come up in the interview with Gauboa.

The most prominent finding within this code is that participants became more aware of their audience. To be more specific, the more they wrote and read academically, the more they became more familiar with the genres and the expectations. “

“ก็ต้องเขียนให้มากขึ้นถึงจะเขียนได้ดีขึ้น เราต้องมาคิดว่าอะไรเป็นความรู้พื้นฐานที่เรามีร่วมกับ audience”

“Well, I just have to write more to improve my writing. I have to think about a shared common knowledge I have with my audience.” (Munta)

“ถ้าประสบการณ์ในการเขียนมากขึ้น เราก็จะมีทักษะมากขึ้น แบบว่าถ้าเราเขียนบ่อยๆ มันก็จะดีขึ้น”

“We gained writing experience through more writing. We will become more skilled writers, and if we write more, our writing will become better.” (Moei)

“อ่านสิ อ่านๆ เราต้องอ่าน เราถึงจะเอาอะไรมาเขียนได้”

“Read. Read. Read. Read. We must read so we can write.” (Pikun)

It is interesting that while reading was cited as one of the most “difficult challenges,” the participants also saw reading as meaningful and valuable in their writing. Reading to write, as I see it, involves understanding the materials we interact with and being able to explain them in an audience-conscious manner. In other words, the relationship between reading and writing is inseparable - reading leads to writing. It should be noted that while Gaoboa’s responses were not marked under the code because they did not align with the context of self-guided practices or strategies, he did mention how being in a PhD program helped him think more about his audience when he wrote. He said, “Being a PhD student, I have to have new things to talk about to other people. I need to provide new perspectives that would interest people. I also need to think about how my writing can be of my audience’s interests.”

Resources

The code resources described each segment that mentioned academic, nonacademic, professional, or any resources that assisted and were available for the participants to rely on in helping them overcome their “challenges¹⁰.” Specifically, the second item on the interview protocol asked whether there were any strategies and resources that might have helped them in transitioning and adjusting to an U.S. doctoral program. Although resources appeared early on in the interview data set, the code was present throughout the conversations. The code appeared 43 times across eight interviews. The most mentioned resources included professors, peers, the writing center, and at least one mentioning of other media such as YouTube, podcasts, and TV shows.

¹⁰ I put the word challenges in parenthesis because the discussions tied back to code challenges. That is, I try to emphasize that when I talk about participants’ challenges, they refer to what was discussed Challenges section.

Professors, their support and feedback, were the most mentioned resource. Seven of eight participants stated that they benefited from their professors' feedback and comments. Professors also played an important role in creating a more positive and supportive learning environment that helped the participants cope with "challenges."

“โชคดีว่าอาจารย์เป็นส่วนหนึ่งที่ทำให้แรงกดดันลดลงและทำให้เรามีกำลังใจในการเรียนและการอ่าน”

“I am lucky that my professor lessens the pressure, and that gives me the courage to read and learn.” (Paan)

“อาจารย์ท่านบอกให้อ่านเยอะๆว่าเขาเขียนอะไรกัน เพราะอาจารย์เราถึงอยากตั้งใจเรียน ตั้งใจฟัง แล้วก็ตั้งใจอ่าน อาจารย์ท่านช่วยเยอะมาก”

“My professor told me to read a lot to know what people are writing about. Because of my professor, I want to study better, listen more carefully in class, and read more intently. My professor helped a lot.” (Puut)

“ขอบคุณอาจารย์บางท่านให้เราเห็นว่า เออ เราทำได้เนอะ เราอาจจะต้องปรับในบางอย่าง แต่กำลังใจจากอาจารย์ช่วยได้มาก”

“I want to thank some professors who make me think that I can do this even though there is still a lot I have to adjust. But their support is useful.” (Mali)

Peers are another described resource. Four participants said that peer review and peer feedback were valuable and helpful in helping them deal with certain “challenges” such as not understanding the concepts, not being able to “write it out,” and not understanding the reading materials.

“ระบบ peer review นี้คือช่วยมากเลย คือทำให้เรามองการเขียนว่ามันไม่ได้อยู่บนหิ้ง มันต้องเอามาให้คนอื่นอ่าน”

“Peer review is very helpful. It helps me realize that my writing doesn't have to be left on the shelf. It needs to be read by someone else.” (Paan)

“เวลาคุยกับเพื่อนก็จะช่วยได้มากเพราะแต่ละคนมีความคิดไม่เหมือนกัน บางคนก็อธิบายได้เข้าใจ

ใจมากกว่าอีกคน เวลาไม่เข้าใจก็จะปรึกษากับเพื่อน”

“Talking with peers is really helpful because each of them thinks differently; some can explain better than others. When I don't understand things, I talk to different peers.”

(Gauboa)

“ตอนเขียนนี้ได้ comment จากเพื่อนช่วยได้มาก feedback จากเพื่อนจะดีกว่าของอาจารย์

เพราะว่าเวลาอาจารย์อ่านก็จะอ่านตอนเสร็จแล้ว”

“When it comes to writing, comments from peers are very helpful. I get more feedback from peers more often than I get from professors. Usually, the professors see only your finished work.” (Munta)

It is worth noting that while the segments coded resources are sometimes adjacent to segments coded NNES, the two are different. Code NNES, which will be later explained, described participant's mentioning the language barriers or the manners in which they compared their learning abilities with their NES peers, whereas code resources arose when participants described their challenges and followed up by how peers as resources helped them overcome those “challenges.” For example, Puut said that “I tend to have run-on sentences in my writing. When I asked my peer who is a native speaker to take a look, they revised it in a more precise,

more beautifully written sentence.” In this case, while acknowledging the more “precise” language proficiency of her peer, Puut saw her NES peer more as a resource. Therefore, the segment fell under resources, not NNES.

Pedagogy

The code pedagogy described each segment that indicated a comparison between Thai and U.S. pedagogical practices. The code pedagogy also arose when participants mentioned the Thai educational system, Thai learning style and culture, and Thai classroom practices. The code yielded 73 segments across eight interviews. It should be noted that I marked segments that described participants’ opinions toward Thai pedagogy and the Thai educational system as code pedagogy. How they felt about it, however, was marked with code emotions, which will be discussed in a later section.

According to the interviews, the most prominent characteristic of the U.S. classroom is how every student was expected to speak and how it was discussion-based. Meanwhile, the participants described Thai pedagogy as lecture-based where “the classroom is as quiet as a graveyard” (Pikun). Another characteristic of Thai pedagogy that was mentioned was how Thai professors paid more attention to forms and grammar and less to content. Thai professors also discouraged submission of multiple drafts, implying the product-oriented practice.

“lectureก็คือlecture เราก็คือฟังแล้วก็จดโน้ตไป paperก็คือpaper เราก็ทำไป แต่เราไม่ได้มีการ train
ในแง่ของการทำ paper”

“Lecture is lecture. We just need to listen and take notes. Paper is paper. We just finish it.
But there’s no training on how to write a paper” (Gauboa)

“วัฒนธรรมนะ ในห้องเรียนอเมริกันกับห้องเรียนของไทยไม่เหมือนกัน เพราะว่าในห้องเรียนของอเมริกันทุกคนจะพูดๆ จะแสดงความคิดเห็น แต่ที่ไทยก็จะฟัง เงียบซะส่วนใหญ่”

“It’s a cultural thing. American classrooms and Thai classrooms are different. In the American classroom, everyone speaks speaks speaks and shares their opinions. But in the Thai classroom, it’s mostly silence.” (Nokyung)

“มันแบบจะมีแต่ language issue อะ ไรอย่างนี้แล้วก็อาจารย์ก็ตรวจๆ เนอะแล้วก็ผ่านไป เขาไม่ได้มาดึง concept อะ ไรเราอย่างนี้ idea อะ ไรของเราอาจารย์เขาก็ผ่านๆ ไรอย่างนี้”

“It’s only the language issue that was graded and then it was done. The professors didn’t comment on my concept or idea. They just didn’t care or pay attention.” (Mali)

“มันเป็นที่วัฒนธรรมเราด้วยมั้งคะ คือครูเนี่ยจะเป็นเจ้าของความรู้อะ ครูบอกอะไรมา เด็กก็จะแบบก็โอเคก็ตามนั้นเพราะครูก็จะแบบเป็นครูได้ ครูก็ต้องเก่ง แต่ที่นี้เหมือนเป็น discussion-based มัน

ก็ถกเถียงกันได้ ที่ไทยเป็น lecture-based แล้วก็ เป็น teacher-centered ที่นี้แบบเป็น learner-centered มากกว่า มันแบบพลิกโลกแบบขวา ซ้ายเลย คือที่นี้แบบเด็กพูดอะไรก็ได้เลยจ้ะ”

“It’s our culture that the teachers are the owner of knowledge. Students have to agree with what the teachers say. We think that the teachers must know what they are talking about. But here it’s discussed based where we can debate. In Thailand, it’s lecture-based and also teacher-centered while it’s more learner-centered here. It’s like the world was flipped and left became right. Here students have freedom to speak.” (Moei)

One interesting finding from the interview data set was that three participants (Puut, Paan, and Munta) first described Thai classroom practices as similar to that of American. The participants stated that because most of their Thai professors were US-educated, they brought with them to their Thai classes U.S. pedagogy such as a flipped classroom. However, later in the interviews, the three participants made similar comments that because classrooms were conducted under Thai culture and the professors are “still Thai,” there was still some gap between Thai and U.S. practices. Puut, for example, explained that her Thai professors “tried really hard” to conduct their classrooms in an American way. However, when no one spoke up in class, it ended up being lecture-based and exam-based, where “students’ memorization was tested.”

NNES

The coding schema used NNES to identify each segment that suggested the participants’ language barriers that hinder their understanding and interaction with reading, learning, and writing. The code NNES was also applied to segments where the participants juxtaposed their language competencies with those of their NES peers. The code NNES consisted of 44 segments. Examples of keywords or phrases that fell under code NNES included ไม่ทัน (can’t catch up), ไม่รู้เรื่อง (not get it), ไม่เข้าใจ (not understand), คนไทย (I’m Thai), เจ้าของภาษา (native speaker), คำศัพท์ (vocabulary). The code NNES consisted of 44 segments.

It is worth noting that while ไม่ทัน (can’t catch up), ไม่รู้เรื่อง (not get it), ไม่เข้าใจ (not understand) are similar to phrases under code challenges, code NNES looked specifically at the language competency aspects. For example, if the participants stated that they “don’t get it”

because of unfamiliar materials or content, the code became challenges. Meanwhile, if the participants said they “don’t get it” because they “don’t understand the vocabulary,” I applied code NNES to the segment. Some of the phrases under code NNES were:

“เราเห็นเวลาเพื่อนตอบคำถามใน discussion board เพื่อนเขาจะใช้ภาษาที่ authentic มาก
อย่างที่เราไม่เคยใช้”

“When I saw my peers’ comments on discussion board, they use language that was very
authentic. It’s the language I have never used.” (Pikun)

“เราอ่านไม่ทัน เพราะว่าเราไป compare กับเพื่อนที่เป็นอเมริกัน เพราะเพื่อนในห้องเป็น
เจ้าของภาษาหมดเลย แล้วเขาก็อ่านแป๊บเดียวเขาก็รู้เรื่อง”

“I can’t keep up with the reading. I compared myself with American peers. All my
classmates are native speakers. It took them little time to get the reading.” (Nokyung)

“เราเป็นนักศึกษาต่างชาติ เรามาจากเมืองไทย เราไม่เคยมาเรียนที่นี่ เราไม่เข้าใจ”

“I am an international student. I am from Thailand. I had never studied here. I don’t
understand.” (Mali)

“เวลาเขียนนี่คิดถึงความเป็น L1 สูงมาก เราเป็นคนไทย แล้วก็เหมือนจะคิดเป็นภาษาไทย”

“When I write, I am highly attached to my L1-ness. I am Thai and therefore I think in
Thai” (Puut)

Hesitancy

Of eight interview participants, four demonstrated hesitancy when discussing and
criticizing Thai pedagogy and the educational system. I applied the code hesitancy when

participants stopped mid-sentence, became silent, or implied that they did not want to continue the discussion. Code hesitancy yielded 6 segments.

“มันเงียบมากที่ไทย เราพูดมากไม่ได้...”

“It very quiet in Thai classroom. I can’t talk ...” (Pikun)

“เราขาดการวิพากษ์วิจารณ์งานของคนอื่น อะไรอย่างนี้ แล้วเราก็แบบ ... นะ”

“We lack giving feedback and criticism. Something like that. And we are like, well...”

(Puut)

“ที่ไทยนะ อาจารย์ก็แบบ....”

“My Thai professors they’re like ...” (Mali)

When participants showed signs of hesitancy, I did not press for elaboration. I usually restated the participants’ claims and moved on; participants might pause before continuing. Mali, for example, gave a long pause after criticizing her Thai professor’s teaching style but picked up from where she left off, without me interrupting.

What works

The code what works described each segment that mentioned assignments, activities, or classroom practices that fostered the participants’ learning. Code what works appeared across six interview transcripts. The segments that were coded what works usually appeared adjacent to those that were coded resources. There were 15 segments that yielded the code what works, which included teaching as a GTA, reflection essays, classroom discussions, qualifying papers, literature reviews, reading assignments, and discussion posts. Some of the segments included:

“เราต้องอ่านเยอะๆ เราต้องดูว่าเราพูดเรื่องอะไรกัน เราถึงจะเข้าใจว่าเราอ่านอะไรอยู่และอาจารย์ต้องการให้เราเข้าใจอะไร”

“We have to read a lot to know what is being talked about. A lot of reading makes me understand what I am assigned to read better and helps me see what my professor expects me to understand.” (Mali)

“การที่ต้องเขียน qualifying paper บ่อยๆ ช่วยให้เขียน publishable paper ได้ดีขึ้น จนถึงต้องมาเขียน dissertation อะ คือ เราเขียนมาเรื่อยๆจนเรากล้าทางถูกว่างานวิจัยเราต้องเขียนแบบไหน”

“Writing several qualifying papers helps me write more publishable papers and helps me write my dissertation. I have been writing so much now that I started to get what is expected in research writing.” (Munta)

“ที่ช่วยมากคือที่ต้องมาสอน เราก็เอาสิ่งที่เราคาดหวังจากเด็กเอาไปใช้ใน classตัวเองด้วยพอสอนแล้ววิธีการอ่านก็เปลี่ยนไป จากที่อ่านทุกอย่างเพื่อที่จะเอาไปตอบคำถามในห้องเหมือนกับเวลาสอบ ก็อ่านเพื่อหาประเด็น ไปคุย มันก็คิดว่าปรับจริงๆ ก็ตอนที่สอน”

“What’s been helpful is when I started teaching. It made me realize class expectations. Teaching also changed how I read. From reading in order to pass the exam, I now read to be able to discuss in class. The real adjustment took place when I started teaching.”
(Gauboa)

Emotions

The code emotions described each segment where participants shared how they felt about certain topics. Usually, the code emotions arose near or around other codes. For example, when talking about the “challenges,” participants usually extended their comments and offered some insights into their feelings. In other words, when participants used adjectives, words, or phrases to describe their feelings or opinions, I marked the segments as code emotions. Keywords that

became code emotions included, but were not limited to: stunned, suffered, failed, awkward, ashamed, embarrassed, overwhelmed, fun, couraged, discouraged, worried, pressured, supported, and lonely. The code yielded 35 segments across six interviews.

“ที่ไทยว้าเหว่มาก คือนึกย้อนกลับไปเวลาเราเขียน เราทำงาน ให้เพื่อนอ่านงานยังไม่มีเลย”

“I felt lonely in Thailand. Retrospectively, when I wrote, when I worked, not even my peers wanted to read my writing” (Paan)

“เราที่นี่เรารู้สึกสนุก มีการตั้งคำถาม มีการพูดคุย มีการแลกเปลี่ยนความคิด”

“Here I have fun learning. People ask questions, there are discussions, and there’s an exchange of ideas.” (Puut)

“พอเรารู้ว่ามีความคาดหวังให้เราพูด เราก็จะรู้สึกกดดันมาก คือ course syllabus บอกเลยว่า

ต้องพูดออกความเห็น แต่เราไม่กล้าพูด เราไม่ชิน”

“The course syllabus clearly states that we need to share our opinions. I feel pressured when I know what is expected of me. I know I have to speak in class but I am not brave, I am not used to it.” (Pikun)

“มานั่งในห้องเงียบๆแล้วไม่ทำอะไรสักอย่างเนี่ย เราจะรู้สึกขายหน้ามาก”

“I feel ashamed sitting in class quietly and not saying anything.” (Moei)

To conclude, the interview data set yielded eight coding schemas with a total of 276 segments. Code pedagogy yielded 73 segments whereas code hesitancy consisted of only seven segments. To my surprise, participants were more willing to share their opinions about and criticize Thai educational practices than I had anticipated. This could be one of the reasons why code pedagogy yielded the most segments across eight interviews. Only half of the participants

demonstrated signs of hesitancy. All eight participants talked about the challenges they faced while in U.S. PhD coursework, the resources that helped them overcome those challenges, Thai and U.S. pedagogy, and their language barriers.

Table 4: Summary of codes

Code	Number of participants	Total number of segments
Challenges	8	36
Autonomy/Initiatives	7	25
Resources	8	43
Pedagogy	8	73
NNES	8	44
Hesitancy	4	7
What works	6	13
Emotions	6	35

Conclusion

The interview results shed light on the discussion of agency in that agency was not fully promoted or facilitated within the Thai pedagogy. According to the interview data set, participants suggested that they were less active – listening to lectures, taking notes, and seeing no need to speak in class – in Thai classrooms. Transitioning from such learning culture to more active classroom environment, participants experienced different expectations of Thai and the U.S. teaching and learning styles. This transitioning and navigating new and different classroom styles and expectations, I argue, prompted the participants to adapt – trying to be more assertive in class – and to come up with new learning strategies. This navigation and adaptation could also be seen as a form of agency. That is, when cultivating agency can be understood as the ability to practice autonomy, I argue that the participants’ agency could be cultivated while they were in PhD coursework.

While this study found no correlation between the participants being the first college or graduate students in their household and their experiences in U.S. PhD programs, the survey and interview results yielded informative and interesting findings. While I first assumed that not many participants would be willing to talk about or even criticize the Thai way of teaching and learning, it turned out that all participants voluntarily shared their opinions about Thai pedagogy, with four participants demonstrating signs of hesitancy toward to topic.

The most recurring themes across eight interview data sets are Thai pedagogy not fully sponsoring class discussions, participants feeling overwhelmed by the reading assignments in U.S. coursework, participants acknowledging certain language barriers, and professors’ feedback and peer review being helpful. These findings reflect the differences between Thai and U.S. learning cultures and values.

It is worth noting that some keywords or phrases were interesting but were not marked as code because they appeared only once or twice. For example, the concept of stereotypical quiet Asian students¹¹ was mentioned twice in my interview with Moei. Another interesting finding was the word ฟาร์นัง (*farang*)¹² came up within three topics – farang textbooks, farang peers, and farang professors – across two interviews. For many Thais, the word is neutral but sometimes connotes certain sociolinguistic and sociocultural privileges. Also, the Thai concept of *kreng jai* discussed briefly in Chapter Three came up twice in two interviews. The participants apologized for going off-topic and providing “too much irrelevant” information and saying they felt *kreng jai*.

While the hypothesis that writing would be the most challenging skill for the participants was not confirmed, the interview data set revealed that academic reading and class participation were found to be more challenging practices than writing. In the next chapter, I provide data analysis in relation to the participants’ experiences within the academy.

¹¹ I elaborate on the concept and discussion in Chapter Five.

¹² A generic Thai word for calling white people

Chapter Five: Discussions on Participant's Narratives and Implications

This study stemmed from my curiosity about how other Thai PhD students in the U.S. manage academic expectations as an NNES. Therefore, the overarching research question this study intends to address is how other Thai students in doctoral programs in the Humanities and related fields at American universities adjust to the academic rigor. I focused my research on U.S. graduate students because, unlike most graduate schools in the UK, Australia, or New Zealand, where students dive directly into research with limited to no coursework, students in U.S. doctoral programs are required to complete a certain amount of coursework before they can start their research phase. Also, focusing on Thai doctoral students in the U.S. allowed me to explore the participants' PhD journeys through their stories.

In Chapter One, I set the scene for conversations regarding Thai pedagogy and offered my positionality for this research. Chapter Two touched on theoretical frameworks which helped further my understanding of the concept of agency, academic writing, and Global Englishes. In Chapter Three, I explained the methods and methodology that guided this study. Chapter Four discussed findings and results from the demographic surveys and the interview data sets. This chapter, Chapter Five, is divided into four sections: a summary of the study, discussions of findings, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the study

The inception of this study is rooted in my personal experience as an intercultural student. A native of Thailand, I took a leave from my instructor position at a northern Thai university (hereafter UMor) and came to the United States for doctoral study, with a promise from UMor that I would be promoted upon my return. I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees in Thailand and worked as an instructor at UMor for over a decade. Most of my English

skills had been acquired through formal education in Thailand. Therefore, when I first embarked on my doctoral journey, it felt like I was walking into unfamiliar territory – transitioning (or striving to do so) from a Thai learning style to a U.S. one. Not only were the classroom practices different, but I had to study in my L2 environment, write and read, and discuss in a language that was not mine.

Was my time in the PhD unique? Did other Thai PhD students in the U.S. share similar experiences? With these questions, I started researching literature related to Thai students' experiences abroad and found that one of the most extensive studies on Thai students in the U.S. was written Jean Barry in 1967. While there are some more recent studies on Thai students on U.S. campuses, most of them focused on either Thai students at the undergraduate level, Thai students at only one university, their language-based problems only, or Thai graduate students' writing experience only. Trying to fill the gap in the literature, I asked a question: How do other Thai students in doctoral programs in the Humanities and related fields at American universities adjust to U.S. PhD education? I focused my research on Thai students in Humanities disciplines because, unlike most students in STEM who mostly deal with lab results and experiments, students in these fields are faced with an abundance of writing assessments that include extended seminar papers and rely more on writing as a mode of inquiry.

After getting IRB approval, I started recruiting my research participants. Through focal persons and through social network posts, I was able to recruit a total of eight participants who fit the research criteria. Prior to the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic survey. The survey and the interview were all conducted in Thai because it is the mother tongue of both the participants and myself. After the interviews were transcribed, I

conducted a thematic coding analysis where eight recurring themes emerged across eight interviews. The following section elaborates on these findings

Discussions of findings

I always dreaded parent-teacher conferences when I was a child. My parents would come home from the conferences looking bothered. Not because my academic performance was worrying, but because every time the teachers would tell my parents that I “talked too much” in class. My father would say he, again year after year, had to listen to this same “embarrassing” comment.

Fast forward years later, I was sitting in silence looking around my very first PhD seminar class at an American university. My classmates were all discussing and debating the theories presented by the professor. Almost everyone was participating in the discussion; I felt the push (and pressure) to talk but all I did was take notes and listen intently trying to come up with words that would make me sound smart. Nothing came out. The class ended without me saying a single word. But then the first day turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months and I would still find myself trying to catch up with class discussions. Often, I wanted to speak but the conversation had moved on before I could get my words in. At the end of a class one day, the professor pulled me aside and gently asked if I understood the class materials because I was “quieter” than the rest of the class.

The above anecdote provides a landscape of how different Thai and U.S. classroom cultures are. Sprung out of my curiosity and desire to find out whether other Thai doctoral students shared similar experiences, this study found that adjusting to contrasting classroom practices was among the most mentioned challenges for the participants. To manage these challenges, the participants relied on their professors’ feedback and peers who are mostly native

English speakers (NES). Intrinsic motivations and self-reliance, such as exposing oneself to more English reading material, were also mentioned as a way to help them deal with challenges inherent to doctoral studies. The participants felt overwhelmed and were overloaded with their PhD workload which included extensive and intensive reading and active classroom discussions. While the heavy reading load and participation in class were most cited as a stressor, participants said reading more actually helped them improve academically. However, language barriers, such as limited vocabulary, listening incomprehension, and L1 interference in writing were also reported to hinder the participants' learning. The later sub-section further unpacks these discussions. Especially, more attention is paid to Thai pedagogical practices because the code pedagogy yielded the most segments. The findings are discussed in themed network in relation to each other because I found that all coded schemas were interconnected and provided better pictures and understandings when the participants' stories were pieced together.

“I can't catch up”

While this study initially hypothesized that writing would be the most challenging skill for Thai doctoral students as a result of limited writing instruction in Thailand, the interview data set revealed that participating in active classroom discussions was cited as the most challenging aspect of doctoral education.

Often, the participants said they could not keep up with the class discussions because they “ฟังไม่ทัน” (can't listen fast enough/not understand), “พูดไม่ทัน” (can't speak fast enough/can't catch up with the flow), “ไม่กล้าพูด” (not brave enough to speak up), “กลัวเสียหน้า” (fear of losing face), and “ไม่ชิน” (not used to it). While “can't listen fast enough” and “can't speak fast enough” reflected the participants' speaking and listening comprehensions and

language competencies, other comments (not brave enough, fear of losing face, and not used to it) implied hesitancy as a result of non language-based factors. I, therefore, argue that there are two factors that obstruct the participants' ability to actively participate in class discussions: language barriers (insufficient language proficiency) and sociocultural adjustment problems and needs (different cultural and interactional knowledge).

First, the interview data set revealed that most participants did not understand what was being discussed. This could be due to the participants' lack of exposure to "real life" situations where they were asked to academically discuss in English. Although some participants had some exposure to professional contexts where English was mostly spoken, this study found no correlation between the participants' professional development experiences and their performance in American classrooms. That is, although some participants had training experiences in English-speaking countries, they still reported that they had difficulty understanding PhD class discussions.

According to Badur (2003), a major problem experienced by NNES students coming to a U.S. university is their "immersion in an environment where English was the medium of instruction." Not only did the participants of this study report having difficulty catching up with conversations in class, but they also mentioned not being able to speak "fast enough." In Thai พูดไม่ทัน (*pud mai tun*) or ฟังไม่ทัน (*fung mai tun*) can be translated as not being able to catch up because the conversation or the speaker is going too fast. In this study, these two terms reflected the participants' struggle to understand the class discussions or difficulty keeping up with the pace as a result of language barriers. That is, the participants revealed that their classmates speak "too fast" causing them to feel "lost" and therefore ended up being quiet in the classroom.

As Khamkhien (2010) argues, while speaking is deemed to be “the most important” in second or foreign language learning, it is “extremely difficult” for Thai students to master their speaking and listening skills when it comes to English language learning (p. 184). The participants’ remarks (*pud mai tun* and *fung mai tun*) amplified the reality of language barriers many intercultural students encounter. There are a few reasons that could explain why Thai PhD students had a hard time catching up with class discussions: limited opportunities to practice speaking in English in social situations in their home country, an inadequate vocabulary bank to express ideas clearly, and insufficient specific English language knowledge (regional dialects and accents, idioms, and slang expressions).

“Good morning, teacher. How are you today?”

Although most Thai students spend about twelve years learning English in school, Thai students still “have problems” with speaking and listening in English (Kongkerd, 2013). Ulla (2018) describes Thai students’ English proficiency as “unsuccessful,” “ineffective,” and “unproductive” while Noom-ura (2013) calls the results of English learning in Thailand “questionable,” and Chanaroke and Niemprapan (2020) call the results “unsatisfactory.” And although almost all U.S. universities require that students from non-English speaking countries take the TOEFL¹³ test in order to meet minimum competency levels of English proficiency for academic work, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion about the relationship between students’ TOEFL scores or similar English proficiency tests and their academic performances (Cho & Bridgeman, 2012). That is, while the students’ TOEFL scores may meet the minimum admissions requirements, they may still struggle linguistically when English is the medium of instruction.

¹³ Test of English as a Foreign Language

One main reason that contributed to Thai students not being able to catch up with class discussions is, I argue, the lack of exposure and practice in English speaking skills prior to coming to the U.S. In Thailand, English is considered a foreign language, and while many consider it a crucial medium for international and cross-cultural interactions, it is not widely spoken or used as a medium of instruction. In most Thai English classrooms, the teachers lecture and deliver lessons in Thai. This is partly because many Thai English teachers are “underqualified” (Kanoksilapatham, 2007) and “poorly-trained” (Noom-ura, 2013). This may come from structural issues related to college admissions, standardized testing, and cultural values in teaching profession.

In Thailand, high school students must take the National University Entrance Examination (hereafter Entrance), one of the most high-stakes tests in the Thai academic society, in order to attend college. Students’ Entrance scores determine which major and which university students are qualified for. For example, popular majors like Engineering or Medicine at a prestigious university require higher Entrance scores than a less desired major at a regional university. That is, those who gain admission to their dream universities are those who score higher on the Entrance. Teacher education is often not ranked as the most sought-after degree in Thailand. Teacher Education as a major is, on the other hand, usually seen as a “backup plan” when it comes to Entrance. Teacher Education is often perceived by Thais as a degree program that houses “failed” Entrance takers. It should be noted that I am not arguing that Entrance is the definitive indicator of students’ academic performance and success. In fact, Phadyen (2020) argues that there are many problems with Entrance such as the test being unreasonably “too difficult” and failing to accurately assess students’ scholarly ability. What I am suggesting is that some people who became teachers may not want to be a teacher in the first place. In Thailand,

teachers are overworked while underpaid. Most college graduates who might otherwise be qualified to teach English tend to work in other industries with higher pay such as in the hotel and tourism business or with international companies. Therefore, some college graduates who become schoolteachers are those who may not be passionate about teaching or those who are “relatively non-qualified” (Chanaroke and Niemprapan, 2020, p. 38).

In addition to English classrooms being delivered in Thai which limits students’ exposure to speaking and listening in English, class content and teaching material does not reflect nor are relevant to “real-world” situations. For example, in almost every Thai English classroom, students have to stand up every time the teacher walks in and offer greetings. The students synchronously recite “Good morning, teacher. How are you today?” The teacher will then say “I am fine, thank you. And you?” The students then reply, “I am fine, thank you.” The teacher will then end the dialogue with “Please sit down.” To me, this classroom greeting is generic and unrealistic, and it promotes rote learning where students are asked to memorize information through repetition. Not only are the students asked to learn through repetition academically, but also socially as well. That is, this example illustrates Thai classroom practices that deployed primarily audiolingual method of teaching that focuses on repetition and memorization rather than promoting conversational style learning practices.

Another aspect of English teaching and learning (ELT) in Thailand that seems to be problematic is how speaking exams and assessments are designed. Due to the big class size (one classroom usually consists of about fifty students in many schools in the cities) and limited grading time, many speaking exams come in the form of multiple-choice questions. That is, a speaking exam is usually not a *speaking* exam. Students are usually given a written template dialogue where they are tasked with filling the blanks with given multiple-choice options. These

options, if chosen correctly, form syntactically coherent questions and responses. Below I constructed a sample question that would be found on a commonly administered “speaking” exam in Thailand:

Instruction: Complete the dialogue with the correct given phrase.

Jane: Hi! What’s up, Megan?

Megan:(1).....

Jane: Do you want to ...(2)... this weekend?

Megan: (3)

1. a. Not much!
b. Me too!
c. Thank you!

2. a. hang in
b. hang out
c. hang up

3. a. It’s my cup of tea.
b. Let’s play it by ear.
c. You’re beating around the bush.

This kind of exam, I argue, is problematic because it only tests students’ memorization, and students learn only discrete point of knowledge that is tested. This kind of testing practice confirms my position that Thai students have little exposure to speaking contexts in English. According to Krashen (1982), speaking competency and fluency cannot be taught, but “emerges” over time. Taking from what Krashen (1982) claims, I argue that in order to promote students’ speaking skills, they have to be consistently exposed to the target language. Speaking and listening skills should be a fundamental part of English language learning as these skills are also fundamental to basic human interaction. One way to achieve this is to have English as a medium of instruction from a young age. However, this proposition loops back to the problem of

schoolteachers' unreadiness. Therefore, the teacher development program is becoming very crucial for the success of ELT in Thailand.

“Same same but different”

While the interview protocol did not directly ask about the differences between Thai and U.S. pedagogies, the topic of Thai classroom practices often came up organically during the interviews. For example, when asked about the academic challenges within the U.S. context, Munta first stated that she did not “feel the differences” between Thai and U.S. systems because most of her Thai professors were US-educated. According to Munta, her professors brought with them back to their Thai classrooms U.S. practices such as a flipped classroom where students encounter reading and teaching materials before class meetings in preparation for discussion. However, as the conversation progressed, she commented on the Thai professor’s pedagogy, which was heavily based on a lecture-based and product-oriented approach. She said “the professor rarely looked at the content of my writing. I got feedback on the mechanics of my writing and other surface-level stuff. I didn’t remember going through revisions as I did in coursework here.” She then continued, “It’s no one’s fault that the class was the way it was. The teacher felt more comfortable giving lectures, and the students did not want to speak.” As stated, all eight participants addressed pedagogical differences between Thailand and the U.S. with the biggest differences being classroom cultures and feedback styles.

In Thai culture, the teacher is usually a representative of a moral role model who “bestows the gift of knowledge on his/her pupils” (Deveney, 2005, p. 156). Students look up to the teacher and try to be respectful. Phungphol (2005) writes that the teachers are seen as a “storehouse of knowledge” and the students are merely “empty vessels” to be filled with knowledge imparted by the teachers (p. 9). For Thais, being respectful to someone in a more

senior or more authoritative position means not talking back and only responding to or approaching the senior when asked. As Punturaumporn (2001) states, Thai children at a young age are “taught to please elders, not to argue with seniors, and not to disagree with those who have more power” (p. 33). Most Thais are used to avoiding voicing negative opinions, giving criticism, and engaging in public confrontation. In the classroom context, students are discouraged to challenge or question the teacher, and asking questions and expressing opinions can be seen as rude. Good students are those who listen tentatively, take good notes, and ace the exams. Ideal students are those who are “docile, easy to mold, easy to teach, easy to manage, and completely submissive to their teachers’ power and control” (Phungphol, 2005, p. 9).

As stated in Chapter One and Chapter Two, I see this classroom ideology as a way for the palace and the Thai government to uphold their power and to maintain the status quo. I also mentioned earlier that the Thai royal family is protected by strict *lèse-majesté* law (Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code) or the crime of insulting the royal family. In addition, the king is sometimes called “พ่อของแผ่นดิน” or “the father of the land” reflecting the core value of Thainess where the head of state possesses a nurturing, devoting, and caring image, parallel to how the teachers are portrayed in the classroom. I argue that this anti-critique disposition acts as a rhetorical foundation for Thai society. When it comes to education, to maintain harmony and not disrupt the hierarchical structure of the society, students are usually seen as novices who need to be molded and disciplined in a way that fosters the country’s values. The cost of the practice is failing to see students as unique individuals who have different learning needs and motivations. That is, through public education and classroom practices, the Thai government and the Ministry of Education (the country’s leading agency responsible for promoting and overseeing the

provision of education at all levels) mold desired citizens who are obedient, loyal to the monarchy, and do not ask questions.

The problem with teacher-centered and lecture-based classrooms is not a hidden issue, however. In Thai higher education institutions like UMor, for example, the phrase “lifelong learning” is mentioned more often than I could remember. From teacher lounges to teachers' orientation, to professional development seminars, we as educators were encouraged to implement more “up-to-date” classroom practices like discussion-driven activities that would promote students' engagement and critical thinking. I remember one departmental meeting at UMor dedicated to the discussion of lifelong learning where a senior colleague raised the question of whether this educational strategy was actually implementable in Thai classrooms. In the meeting, the colleague mockingly asked, “How can learning be lifelong when students are not supposed to ask questions? All the students can say fluently in English is “Long live the King”” The room immediately went silent. I saw a few colleagues nod in agreement. Then, another more senior colleague said, “And what is wrong with that? Our job is also to protect the monarch through our teaching.” This time, some colleagues applauded. I, on the other hand, left the meeting feeling like lifelong learning would only exist in a dreamland. Not only did the colleague's royalist rhetoric reflect their own pedagogy, but it also amplified the epistemological foundation of Thai education. This instance helped explain why while the country went through educational reform and the learner-centered approach was stipulated in the National Education Act in 1999, in reality, most Thai classrooms are still conducted in the traditional teachercentered and lecture-based style.

In the Thai educational culture, the conversations regarding Thai pedagogy are not a hidden agenda. Some Thai scholars are aware of the fact that Thai pedagogy is usually grounded

in teacher-centered approach that promotes rote learning and teaching. Arguing for critical pedagogy in Thailand, Pathomchaiwat (2021), for example, realized that Thai learners should be “cultivated about critical thinking” (p. 153). According to Pathomchaiwat (2021), critical pedagogy is “the right path of ELT learning” (p. 154) and that it is important to “edify Thai students the critical awareness creatively in the classroom” (p. 156) so that “the learners can have their critique mind set and use it when facing the surrounded problematized currency” (p. 161). Pathomchaiwat (2021), therefore, proposes a sample lesson plan that would promote critical pedagogy. The theme of the lesson is sea mammals, especially the dugong in Thailand. While the lesson plan tries to invite students to think beyond local issues in relation to the situations concerning marine population both in Thai and global context, it does not ask students to engage with broader sociopolitical issues. While I am arguing for the inclusion of local and international sociopolitical discussions, I understand that such lessons would be ineffectively implementable because of the Thai social structure and the laws that prohibit its citizens to openly criticize the system.

“I am just a quiet Asian”

Classrooms in America are known to value dynamic and intellectual discussions. In one of my PhD classes, for example, the professor explicitly wrote in the syllabus that they expected the students to be “engaging in class discussions,” that students would be graded “for actively participating in our class discussions throughout the semester,” and that class participation was accounted for 30% of our final grade. I did not fully make it to that 30%. Like my participants, I felt like the class conversations were often carried on without me. While I understood most of the discussions, I just did not feel comfortable enough to be vocal and assertive in class because that was not how I was trained.

My experience resonated with what most of the participants described about their experiences in American classrooms. Moei, for example, said she was “shocked” by the amount of discussion she was expected to participate in. When asked to elaborate, she said “I felt invisible and ashamed not being able to speak up in class. Back home, I just listened and nodded pretending to understand the lectures. My classmates here might think what this quiet Asian student is doing sitting there in silence.” Moei’s comment pointed to a broader conversation about a stereotype of Asian students being passively compliant and unreflective rote learners (Exley, 2005).

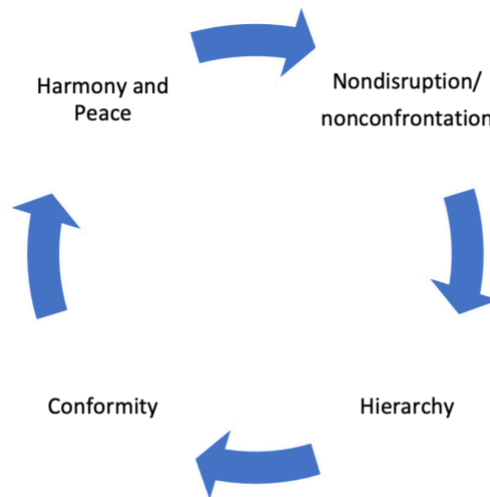
Asian students’ silence is often stereotyped as a lack of aptitude for academics and teamwork. Their silence could be due to language barriers or unfamiliar materials and learning styles. According to Wong (2004), Asian students “generally come from a more passive learning environment” where the teachers “would give all or most of the information to the students” (p. 158). This teaching style can allow the teachers to “cover a wider scope of knowledge in the allocated teaching time” (Wong, 2004, p. 158). I could see lecture-based learning as more practical if the teacher has to manage a large group of students. In Thailand, for example, the number of students in one school classroom can go up to 55 and up to 40 at the tertiary level. Therefore, despite the attempt to move toward discussion-based learning, most classrooms in Thailand, and in counties where classes are congested, may find lecture-based learning more applicable.

Returning back to “quiet Asians,” I try to unpack why we are often perceived as “passive, uninterested, uncooperative” and reluctant to speak up in class (Campbell, 2007, p. 37). What sociocultural implications are there that would help illuminate why many Asian students share this characteristic? While some literature points out that Confucianism is what many Asian

countries have in common and that it has provided the foundation for governmental structures, social behaviors, and education in the region (Wan, 2021), Buddhism too has had influences on social interactions, political governance, and curriculum and pedagogy in most parts of East and Southeast Asia.

While Confucianism was born in China and Buddhism is traced to begin in India, the two philosophies share some similarities in terms of worldview. They originated around the sixth century and both respect social harmony and value the system of social hierarchy. Despite the advent of modernization and westernization in many parts of Asia, Confucian and Buddhist values still play dominant roles in Asian life. According to Clarcken (2010) “Buddha is representative of the great Eastern religions and is arguably the most influential individual in Eastern civilization” while “Confucius could rightly be regarded as the philosopher who has had the greatest influence on Eastern thinking” (p. 3). Both philosophies respect interpersonal unison and relational hierarchy, placing emphasis on creating harmony and peace.

Figure 6: Structure of Harmony and Peace



I created Figure 1 to present an outline of how the two philosophies function to attain peace and harmony in many Asian cultures. That is, as the core tenets of Confucian and Buddhist philosophies are harmony and peace, we can see how nondisruptive and nonconfrontational interactions are highly valued. And therefore, through hierarchical systems – being obedient to authoritative figures – like that of teacher-centered pedagogy, conformity is created. The classroom is a microcosm of these ideological values. Understanding these concepts can help non-Asian educators to note that there are differences between learning styles; nonconfrontation does not equate to disengagement and nonparticipation. These concepts help illustrate the impasse between U.S. educators and Thai doctoral students. For Moei, for example, “sitting there in silence” became shameful whereas that might be how she learned best. Although the process of learning and internalizing class materials through silence is supported by the participants of this study, and Confucian and Buddhist concepts can help explain Asian students’ silence, it should not be a representative of all Asian students.

I saw the participants’ comments about them being “a quiet Asian” in class as possibly as an illustration of the notion of stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995). This theory posits that members of a group may lean into stereotypes about their own community as a form of self-characterization. That is, the participants might identify with the quiet Asian stereotype because it was expected of them. Agency might be manifested via their choice in how to present themselves in academic environments – whether that means quiet or not. Educators in the U.S. should not interpret students’ silence as a deficit because silence is also a form of agency.

“I am not a farang. My English is not good”

The word ฟาร์นง or *farang* in Thai is mostly used to refer to a white foreigner. The term *farang*, which can function as either an adjective or a noun, is usually a generic and neutral Thai

word used to describe “all Caucasians and the West in general” (Kitiarsa, 2010, p. 61).

According to Kitiarsa (2010), however, farang travelers, traders, mercenaries, and missionaries were seen as “suspicious strangers” when they first arrived in the Ayutthaya Kingdom between 1569 and 1767 (p. 62). From there, the term farang has traveled and evolved through Thai history. From the Ayutthaya Kingdom to early Siam to the contemporary Thai era, *farangness* has been associated with สิบิลัย (*siwilai*) or advanced civilization.

Without having been colonized by the West, Thailand, especially in the Siamese court and the palace, was introduced to English by the British around the 19th century. Back then, farang teachers and missionaries were hired to teach Siamese aristocrats and nobles English, and Siamese kings diplomatically welcomed farang English tutors into the kingdom. Farang influences became even more apparent during the reign of Vajiravudh (1910–1925), who was the first Thai king to be educated in the West and who geared Siam toward the western civilization (Kitiarsa, 2010, p. 67). In terms of English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand, Bennui and Hashim (2014) write,

The crucial contact between Thailand and Anglophone countries (Britain and America) resulted in emphasizing the importance of the English language for modernizing the country and avoiding colonialism which occurred during the Bangkok Period in the early nineteenth century (p. 213).

It can be implied that farang or white westerners in Siam and Thailand are associated with the idea of civilization and modernization. They also brought with them the norms and models of how ELT should be conducted. That is, farang’s English (British and American) has been idealized and standardized as norm-setting and many learners aim to achieve native-like accents and proficiency. According to Boonsuk and Ambele (2021), Thais usually perceive

native English speakers (NES) with a white racial phenotype. Therefore, most English language schools in Thailand usually use the phrase “เรียนภาษาอังกฤษกับครูฝรั่ง” or “Learn English with a farang teacher” as their advertising gimmick. To confirm my observation, I did a Google search investigation. I googled “เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ” or “Learn English” and unsurprisingly most search results were pictures of a farang with Asian looking students. British Council, an ELT agency by the British government, for example, displayed several pictures of a farang with Thai school children.



Images 7 and 8: Farang teachers in the classrooms

Source: British Council Thailand

I, therefore, decided to visit the Thai British Council's website and found the word “world-class” was used to describe one of their English courses and that most pictures used on the website were farang teachers with Asian students. The Thai British Council's website, I argue, emphasized the idea of white authority over the control of ELT. Bhatt (2001) calls the establishment and the spread of ELT agencies in nonnative contexts “an instrument of the foreign policies of major English-speaking states” to exert their domination. Bhatt (2001) also calls agencies such as the British Council “linguistic coercion” that leads to “linguistic imperialism” (p. 532). To me, representing farang teachers as “world-class” is problematic

because 1) it suggests that nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) are not as qualified to teach as white NESTs, and 2) it gives the impression that students are expected to acquire and achieve farang-like proficiency in order to be a successful language learner. In reality, there are more NNESTs who use English as lingua franca than NESTs themselves; therefore, the portrayal of farang teachers as “world-class” is an inaccurate depiction of how English is a commodity of the global community – no one is the rightful owner of it – and it fails to address Global Englishes.

For the participants of this study, they saw linguistic success as having native-like fluency. For example, Nokyoung stated that she did not feel comfortable using English in the classroom context because she is “not farang” and her English “does not sound farang-like.” Nokyoung further stressed that it might take her twice as much time to complete the reading assignments because she is “not farang.” I argue that placing farang’s English as a norm is unrealistic because, as stated in Chapter Two, achieving native-like language proficiency can be unattainable. For my participants, this juxtaposition impairs their self-confidence, which might lead to their hesitancy to speak up in class or to reach their learning potential.

“My peers and professor’s feedback has been a great help”

For intercultural students, not only do they have to navigate doctoral studies in their L2, creating language barriers, but they also have to deal with unfamiliar teaching and learning styles. During the interviews, when asked about resources that helped them deal with such academic challenges, most participants stated they relied on comments and feedback from peers and professors to help guide them with reading materials and revisions.

First, the participants reported that the feedback styles in U.S. graduate coursework are different from that in Thai schools. Mali, for example, stressed that back in Thailand her professors only reviewed and graded her papers based on grammatical accuracy. In her words,

she said “My professors only cared about language issues. They just looked at my grammar, graded the paper, and moved on.” Similarly, Pikun stated that in Thailand she “submitted the paper and waited for the final grades without any revisions.” From the participants’ comments, I concluded that the product-oriented approach is still heavily employed within the Thai pedagogy while their professors in the U.S. deployed a more process-oriented approach.

According to Hyland (2003), the product-oriented approach sees writing as “an extension of grammar – a means of reinforcing language patterns through habit formation and testing learners’ ability to produce well-formed sentences” (p. 3). In other words, students within this approach are required to adhere to syntactic accuracy and specific models such as vocabulary and grammar. It is noteworthy that I am not implying that we should ignore grammar in writing. In fact, grammatical structures and lexical accuracy are crucial elements of powerful writing, but writing is “obviously not only these things” (Hyland, 2003, p. 6). As there is an increasing criticism and dissatisfaction with the product-oriented approach, the process-oriented approach to writing instruction emerged. And while there have been debates about what constitutes a process approach to writing, Boscolo (2008) argues that features of process approaches include little emphasis on lectures and more student participation through group work, which motivates students to write about topics of their choosing and view the teacher as an audience who provides feedback rather than as an evaluator.

The interview data set revealed that the participants saw the process-oriented approach as more constructive. Puut, for example, said that “Here grading is not just about grading. With my professor’s feedback, I worked through drafts. The more draft I went through, the better quality my work has.” Puut also added saying, “It’s a cultural thing. My Thai professor thought they were of a higher status, and therefore, they could overlook or underlook at my paper and just

graded it however they saw fit. Usually, I turned in one final draft and then just got my grade or my paper back covered in red ink.” Similarly, Mali shared that she often received compliments from her Thai professors for her “good command of grammar” without her professor commenting on her ideas or content. She said, “I could use Grammarly and got my paper done. I just needed to make sure that I conformed to the organizational patterns and that my grammar was on point.”

One reason why many teachers in Thailand still employ the product-oriented approach is that process writing can be more time-consuming. As Murray (1972) states, the writing process involves prewriting, writing, and rewriting. It may be impractical to promote students’ writing processes when the teacher has fifty students in the class. Product-oriented and grammar-focused instruction and grading can provide better time management for the teachers as they only have to look at the students’ final product and that instruction can focus on repeated content, where the teachers do not have to create a new lesson plan every time they conduct a classroom.

Another resource that helped the participants manage academic challenges is feedback from and discussions with peers. Almost all participants stated that they benefited from peer reviews and discussions. For example, Gauboa stated that he became “a more audienceconscious writer” after getting feedback from and talking to his peers. Paan made a similar comment saying “It’s really hard to find someone to review my work back home, but here it’s a community of peer reviews” while Munta also mentioned “a community of academic interactions” when she talked about peer reviews as resources. I picked up on the word “community” and questioned why this concept was not widely mentioned as a resource within Thai academic conversations.

One explanation lies in the fact that most graduate programs in Thailand are structured differently from those in the U.S. While many U.S. graduate programs expect their students to

enroll full-time with funding and assistantships, almost all Thai graduate programs are offered as part-time study without assistantship opportunities. For example, my master's program in Thailand was part-time and classes were held only on the weekends. I rarely saw the people from my program outside of classes. We were all professionals with full-time jobs and weekend classes were the only time to get to see each other. Also, as graduate school funding was rarely made available, keeping our full-time jobs to support ourselves and pay for graduate studies was financially crucial. In the U.S., on the other hand, many graduate schools, especially PhD programs, are full-time with graduate teaching or research opportunities. Students are required to take coursework while working as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) or graduate research assistant (GRA). In other words, full-time graduate school *is* a job where students can be financially supported, fully or partially, by their graduate programs. For full-time graduate programs, classes are usually held throughout the week, meaning students have more chances to interact with each other when compared to those in part-time programs. In other words, some students *pay* to complete part-time graduate education in Thailand whereas many students *are paid* to complete their full-time graduate program in the U.S. With these different expectations of labor in graduate studies, funded opportunities allow for more community building, which is valuable for my participants' academic success.

Theoretical Implications

Although I embarked on this research journey hypothesizing that Thai doctoral students would find academic writing to be the most challenging part of graduate schools to navigate, this was not the case. From the interviews, eight participants revealed that reading and expectations of classroom participation were the most shared experiences among Thai doctoral students in Humanities and adjacent fields.

While most studies investigated the experiences of intercultural students, they focused on East Asian students, especially those from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Although these studies contributed to the breadth of knowledge around intercultural students' experiences, these countries have distinct cultures and therefore cannot be treated as monoliths. On the opposite side of that, the more recent studies on Thai students are often limited in scope. They were either confined to a singular campus in the U.S., predominantly focused on undergraduate students, or represented mostly students in STEM fields.

My study, on the other hand, focuses on a cross-country representation of students in Humanities disciplines. This present study contributes to the conversations regarding students' perception of writing as a mode of inquiry in the Humanities as it is writing-focused and discussion-based (Roothoof, 2022). Through my analysis, I argue that factors such as sociocultural and educational backgrounds informed the participants' experiences in U.S. graduate classrooms. Understanding these experiences has multiple benefits. First, it helps Thai students coming to the U.S. educational system understand the expectations of professors in the programs. It also helps U.S. educators facilitate mindful, inclusive, and equitable spaces for intercultural students. While this study worked specifically with Thai doctoral students in the realm of Humanities, it makes the case for better course design and pedagogical tools that take NNES into account. Because intercultural students bring with them to U.S. campuses "different values, norms, languages, and beliefs" (Badur, 2003, p. 2), it is important for different stakeholders working with this student population to develop "support mechanisms" that facilitate intercultural students' integration into U.S. college life (Badur, 2003, p. 3). With the influx of intercultural students coming to the U.S., these conversations, therefore, have become more relevant and applicable in the classrooms.

Recommendations for further research

This study involved semi-structured interviews with eight participants. While the interview data yielded illuminating information about the participants' experiences in their doctoral studies; the results could not be generalized. Future research should employ research methods that would allow them to recruit a greater number of participants.

One of the discussions the participants talked about was the concept of community. Future research, therefore, should explore how the theories of discourse community and community of practice could be tied into the conversations regarding resources that could facilitate intercultural students' success. In other words, while discourse community and community of practice are related concepts, they encapsulate different discussions. Discourse community, a more widely cited term in the literature, focuses on "texts and language, the genres and lexis" that enables the member of a given discourse community to "maintain their goals, regulate their membership, and communicate effectively with one another" (Johns, 1997, p. 5252). Community of practice, on the other hand, also refers to genres and lexis, but also concerns "many practices and values that hold communities together or separate them from one another." (Johns, 1997, p. 52). Exploring and understanding different communities students affiliate with can help researcher better see the relationship between the students, texts, contexts, and discourses they interact with. Future research, therefore, could explore the implications of membership in an academic community of their participants to find out how the concept of community can help further understand the learning strategies of both intercultural and domestic students.

As part of my data analysis, I visited the Thai British Council website and found the site as a potential artifact for further research. While visual analysis of the website is not the focus of

my study, future research could employ visual and interface analysis of the website as a springboard to discussions about NESTs and NNESTs. The analysis of the website could reflect how whiteness privilege is still maintained in practices of Global Englishes (GE). To me, the website encapsulates the reality that NESTs are still perceived as more rightful holders of ELT. Understanding the dichotomy would allow future research to map ideologies in online space and provide a further digital extension of this present study.

Future research could also benefit from investigating the teachers' side of the story – both Thai and U.S. Incorporating the teachers' voices would give future research access to better understand the teachers' pedagogies, their classroom practices, and their rationale for conducting their classrooms the certain ways. While the interview data set in this present study revealed that the Thai learning styles might have impeded the participants' academic performances and success in the U.S., input from educators could help illuminate their reasonings and expectations.

While the concept of writing is explored in this present study, future research could frame their methods differently in order to gain more insights into writing experiences of their participants. For example, having participants write a reflection on their writing experiences in U.S. schools would allow future research to not only gain deeper understanding of how their participants navigate academic writing but also gain a more profound and in-depth knowledge of metacognition about the process of inquiry. Although there has been an attempted to look into Thai doctoral students' writing, such research mostly focused on linguistic features and less on content that would otherwise reveal sociopolitical implications of Thailand in relation to Thai students' writing. Getkham (2016), for example, investigates the use of linguistic devices in doctoral dissertations written in English by Thai students in language education from different universities in the United States during the period 2008 to 2013. Getkham's (2016) study reveals

that, through dissertation writing, Thai doctoral students “demonstrated their interpersonal interaction skills” and that some students accept “self-mentions” as a tool to better engage with their readers and to promote writers’ “confidence.” Devices like hedges and first-person pronoun are the most commonly deployed strategies for Getkham’s (2016) participants. While Getkham’s (2016) research demonstrates that Thai doctoral students in the U.S. insert authorial stance in their dissertation writing, which might suggest the presence of agency, it looked at only the linguistic aspects of Thai students’ writing. A closer look how Thainess is manifested in their writing could be further explored.

Final thoughts

This study first hypothesized that writing would be the most difficult skill for the participants to master, given that composition classrooms were virtually nonexistent in the Thai curricula. According to the interview data set, however, this hypothesis was not supported. The participants revealed that reading and participating in class discussions were more challenging than writing. This study also found no correlation between the participants’ gender, their family educational backgrounds, their training experiences, and their experiences in the U.S. In other words, while the participants had taken some writing courses back in Thailand, they still reported similar challenges – not being able to catch up with class discussions – while in PhD coursework.

In addition, this study reflects that the Thai academic culture did little to prepare the participants for their PhD journey. Many Thai teachers still employed teacher-centered, lecture-based, and product-oriented approaches. These approaches, I argue, did not promote students’ engagement and critical thinking. Agency, therefore, was not fully promoted or facilitated in Thai classrooms. Some of the reasons behind Thai teachers’ pedagogies could be due to the

social structure of Thailand that is deeply entrenched within the discourses of loyalty to the monarchy, Buddhism, and nationalism (the Trinity of Thailand).

While I would argue for a holistically integrated classroom, I understand that this proposal might not be completely realistic in Thai classrooms as this study alone cannot change the Thai system. There needs to be more research that takes into account Thailand's sovereign state that hovers (and controls) over the country and its educational system. However, I also understand that Thai scholars operating in Thailand might not be able to conduct such research because of the laws protecting the regime and the palace. While a body of research has touched on the Thai educational system, it rarely focuses on the root of the issue – the monarchy and the *lèse-majesté* itself.

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