



English as a Second Language

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The title is implicit of the globalized society, to which we all at Huachiew belong; so, we should communicate well in English. I have words of advice that may help students to achieve this.

On April 7, 2004, I was given the honour talking about them at our English Club's Welcome Freshmen Party, the proverb "**Practice makes perfect**" was quoted as the means for English study and the study of all subjects. There I persuaded students to review lessons, at the end of each class, all over again and again, and do lots of exercises, so that they knew well all lessons, in all subjects, including English.

Knowing the basic is of prime importance, because what is known forms the basis for the understanding of further study. As for languages, the very basic are just to be known, so that more advanced learning becomes a matter of fact. For example, if we know the letters a, m and n well, then "man" will be learned easily, when we know "man" and "sport", then it is easy to guess what

"sportsman" means, and later in the course, the word "sportsmanship" will be understood as a matter of fact.

When I began learning English, some 50 years ago, although at the secondary school level, I was seldom sure how to pronounce correctly bear, dear, early, pear, pearl, and tear (n. or v.) Later still, words like horizon and horizontal, nature and mature, always puzzled me. I was sometimes reminded of the inconsistency in Thai, e.g. short vowel คำนำ but น้ำ ; กา ก่า ก้า ก๊า ก๋า but คา คำ ค้า, also tone marks not tone specific. Surprisingly others accepted these; it dawned on me, things became natural with practice, and we practised our mother tongue since baby.

Fortunately I spotted, almost 50 years ago, a radio program teaching English by Ajarn Krirk, from whom I learned more than just English; also "practice makes perfect" was solidly founded in me.

Contrary to what I regard invaluable, I have been hearing people accusing practice, with slowly increasing noise in the last

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few decades. They mockingly compare our practice to the parrot mimicking the human language. I am frustrated ; babies learning the mother tongue may be closest to the comparison, but we are certainly different, we know what we say but the parrot does not.

The accusing words are parroted by those educators who little think and hardly know what learning really means, a result of their ignorance of subject content. These “parrots” cause immense damage ; now most students disvalue practice, they hardly practise, and thus know little what they learn. This is very bad and it is getting worse ; it must be corrected, if we aim at the globalized society, also a knowledge based society. Practice is the right way of learning, especially learning languages, and knowing a lot is power.

As for the spoken language, English can be very beautiful, good English or the Standard English, intrinsically characterized by an English AIR, standing for “accent” or stress, “intonation” and “rhythm”. If we speak with correct stresses on all words and with appropriate intonation and rhythm in our

speech, then it will sound beautiful. This tends to be shy to speak English with intonation, some ignore also stresses, these are all wrong attitude. We should not be shy to do the right.

Stressed syllables are pronounced with full vowel sounds usually of เสียงตื้อ in Thai. We Thai have advantage over other foreigners learning English, e.g. the Chinese, they do not have เสียงตื้อ. Unstressed syllables are pronounced briefly with either an i or o sound. Don’ t pronounce them with full vowels, it is awkward and not good English.

It is best to practise all AIR from the Standard English, e.g. the BBC’s cassette tape set, “Follow Me”.

Most Thai students, even at the university level, do not speak good English ; I do not blame them. The blame is on these educators who give rise to the wrong attitude : ignoring practice (and content), and being shy to speak with AIR.

Therefore I would like to urge you to adopt a correct attitude, now and forever, that English is invaluable and also a habit to practise a lot, practise with the Standard English. Practice makes perfect.