

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN SINO-THAI COOPERATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGE JINGSHI PROJECT AT A UNIVERSITY IN THAILAND

Shasha Luo¹ and Tawatchai Chaisiri²

¹English for Career Development Program, Faculty of Liberal Arts,
Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi

²Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Liberal Arts,
Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of the work in progress on investigation on the role of English used in cooperation between two counterparts, China and Thailand, derived from the Sino-Thai project entitled "People-to-People Exchange", or known as "Jingshi Project." This preliminary study aimed to identify a variety of the use of English at work, the data of which were administered by a questionnaire and follow-up interviews were conducted to find out in more detail on particular subtopics. The purposive sampling method was used to select the questionnaire respondents in this study, comprising 30 of both Chinese and Thai staff members working under the project during the Thai academic year of 2022. Four interviewees voluntarily participated in the follow-up interviews conducted afterwards. The data were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while the content analysis was used to interpret the interview data. The findings reveal the importance of English in relation to live meetings, document writing, presentations, business trips, and chatting informally on social media. Communication breakdowns often occur when the staff had difficulties communicating in English effectively via their conversational skills. Of the four macro skills, reading is the most commonly used in the cooperation, while the other three skills of listening, speaking, and writing need more attention for language skill improvement. Implications for the upskill training should put an emphasis on the context where the personnel work, English skills they need to improve, and the type of texts or specific situations they are exposed to in the Sino-Thai cooperation.

KEYWORDS

Sino-Thai Cooperation, People-to-People Exchange, Jingshi Project, the Role of English, English for Specific Purposes

1. INTRODUCTION

As we all know, English has always been the official language in international cooperation, whether it is in the political, economic, cultural or educational fields. As the ties between countries become closer, the world economy is also developing in the direction of economic globalization. To this end, English plays an important role in international communication and negotiation. Many Chinese businesses have improved their international collaboration as a result of the One Belt One Road Initiative, a project launched by the Chinese government with the goal of promoting connectivity between the Asian, European, and African continents and their neighboring seas. [1]. By using the international language of English, they can better

communicate with each other effectively and even activate the negotiation atmosphere so that the two sides can successfully reach cooperation.

International cooperation is an important decision to promote the economic development of the two countries. Each country has its language, and English, as the official language, is an important bridge to promote ongoing cooperation. English can be thought of as the universal language used in international cooperation, and both parties must possess a high level of proficiency in the language in order to introduce the project fully and clearly, comprehend the information conveyed by the other party accurately, and effectively respond to the materials sent by the partner. To achieve the goal, reading, analyzing and screening, and being able to discuss and negotiate contractual agreements are truly the preferable qualifications of the personnel working internationally.

The Eastern Economic Corridor, Thailand 4.0, and other strategies introduced by the Thai government are highly compatible with China's "One Belt One Road" initiative because they share similar development concepts, strategies, and objectives. They are also intended to promote the common development and prosperity of the nations along the route. Thailand welcomes and is willing to actively participate in major cooperation initiatives like "One Belt One Road," promote cooperation in railways, agriculture, tourism, and other fields, promote personnel exchanges, and strengthen traditional friendship, according to Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha [2]. Based on the "One Belt One Road" initiative and the "Thailand 4.0" strategy, China and Thailand have both agreed to name infrastructure, industrial clusters, electronic information and communication technology, the digital economy, technology, and energy as the five main areas of bilateral economic and trade cooperation in the following five years. The concepts underlying the policies and the development strategies are perfectly in sync.

To promote exchanges and cooperation with colleges and universities in countries along the "One Belt One Road" and focus on promoting Sino-foreign People-to-People and cultural exchanges, application of new technologies, and integration of production and education, the China Center for International People-to-People Exchange, Ministry of Education (hereinafter referred to as the CCIPE) issued the "About the Implementation of 'People-to-People Exchanges through the World' Project" in August 2019, jointly implemented with the "People-to-People Exchange JingShi Project" (hereinafter referred to as JingShi Project) with Beijing Huatec Information Technology Co., Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as HUATEC). The project aims to establish the JingShi International Institute in Chinese colleges and universities, as well as to collaborate with universities and relevant nations along the One Belt One Road with the will and conditions to establish the JingShi Institute, relying on China's cutting-edge technology to strengthen discipline construction, curriculum construction, and talent development. [3]. This project is an international cooperation project jointly implemented by HUATEC, Chinese colleges or universities, and Thai universities. The official language in cooperation is English; therefore, the use of English is supposed to play a major role in the cooperation process.

This study, which examined the use of English as a unifying language in the Sino-Thai cooperation process, can be seen as a new kind of project. The purpose of this research was to find out the significant role of English, as well as problems and deficiencies of English use among executives and staff in the process of cooperation. To some extent, difficulties could be addressed, collaboration could be improved, and effective cooperation could be achieved between the two sides, which might finally lead to the success of the People-to-People Exchange JingShi Project. This paper presents the purposes of the study, significance, conceptual framework, literature review of the role of English, research design, research results on the role of English used in the Sino-Thai cooperation, problems found in use, discussion and conclusion.

1.1. Purposes of the Study

1.1.1. To investigate the extent to which English is used in the Sino-Thai cooperation of the People-to-People Exchange JingShi Project.

1.1.2. To explore how English is used in the Sino-Thai cooperation of the People-to-People Exchange JingShi Project?

1.1.3. To identify the state and problems of the use of English by the Chinese and Thai personnel in the Sino-Thai cooperation of the People-to-People Exchange JingShi Project.

1.2. Significance of the Study

1.2.1 The results of the study can be used to identify the importance of English in Sino-Thai cooperation.

1.2.2 Since research in this area is rare, the findings will contribute to enhancing the cooperation between China and Thailand.

1.2.3 This study will provide fundamental information and guidelines for related organizations to equip their personnel concerning English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

1.3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that conveys the dependent variable—the use of English in Sino-Thai cooperation—is the foundation for this study. It includes independent variables that describe the research participants, executives, and staffs. The dependent variable is the use of English in Sino-Thai cooperation, which includes live meetings, writing documents, giving presentations, traveling abroad on business trips, and chit-chatting informally on social media. This study employs a questionnaire and interviews to collect data from the research participants on the role of English in Sino-Thai cooperation as shown below:

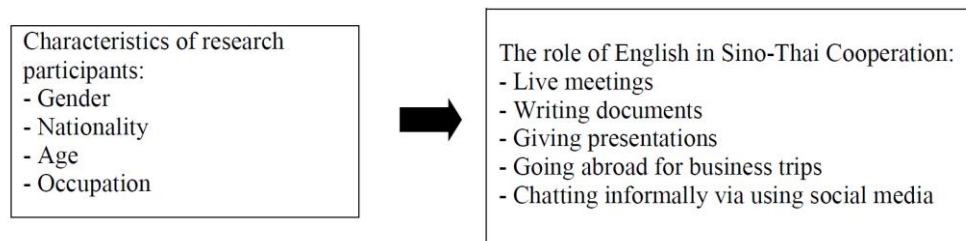


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Role of English

English plays a very important role in international cooperation, and most native and non-native speakers use English as their means of communication in international affairs or organizations. Communication in international languages can greatly improve work efficiency and reduce losses. Robert Phillipson, a linguist, referred to the spread of English as "linguistic imperialism" [4]. English became the most dominant and dominated language in the world, according to

Kachru [5, 6], which is why many linguists and language experts refer to it as an international language. Hence, the phrase "international language" has only recently gained widespread use as non-native speakers of English from many different parts of the world have made it their mother tongue and second language.

The researcher concludes that the importance of English in listening, speaking, reading and writing is self-evident, and English use can be classified, according to the functions of the language used in Sino-Thai cooperation, as live meetings, writing documents, giving presentations, going abroad for business trips, and chatting informally via social media. Clarification on the role of English can be illustrated as follows:

2.1.1. Live Meetings

A live meeting is a meeting that which all relevant personnel participate together at the same time, same place and in the same environment. Since 2020, many international conferences have been taking place online and using a variety of social software, such as ZOOM MEETING, VOOV MEETING, MS TEAMS and the like to realize live conferences with foreign partners. Even now, in 2022, the epidemic situation has improved, yet online meetings will not be cancelled.

Mobile phones are essentially a part of the participants' lives because they participate in the conference using various electronic devices, such as PCs, iPads, or mobile phones. Practically everyone in today's society owns a mobile phone [7]. People will buy computers or iPads for themselves if they need to work in order to be more productive. Workers spend more time utilizing these electronic gadgets for work-related activities like meetings than for making calls, listening to music, or watching movies. On their electronic devices, attendees will download the meeting-specific software. To improve communication during participation or interaction between the two sides, participants in an international conference will also need to download the international version of the program.

2.1.2. Writing Documents

Normally a person should read a piece of text once and again to understand what it means. However, writing documents can be a daunting task, which can be seen as a significant problem regarding business correspondence. For example, a document is supposed to be read by businessmen who normally are not interested in their personality. In order to avoid wasting anyone's time and leave a good image with the employers, one uses formal language to exclude pointless details about the issues they are handling and replace them with a regular procedure. A common trait of all business documents is their clarity and succinctness. We might, however, encounter departures from so-called official business world language in certain crucial commercial correspondence [8]. For example, if a person applies for a job or signs an agreement, or asks someone for advice, he or she is likely to make a particular impression on the listener.

2.1.3. Giving Presentations

English presentation is a compulsory course for English major students, and it is also essential in international cooperation and business negotiation. This calls for learners to possess a range of skills, be knowledgeable with the speech's subject matter, be able to answer to issues that arise at any point throughout the speech, and be able to introduce the project entirely in English. In the process of international online meetings or teaching and training at home or abroad, using English to give a presentation until the end of the session can better increase the learning efficiency [8].

There are numerous applications available to pick from while giving a presentation online. It is best to start by establishing the course's objective or purpose before looking into applications that will help pedagogical strategies be used to achieve that objective [9].

2.1.4. Going Abroad for Business Trips

Overseas business trips are an essential part of international cooperation. In both businesses and educational institutions, it is common for a representative to travel to the partner country for business discussions to be someone with strong English language skills. English is the lingua franca of international travel [10, 11]. The idea of human capital or skills considered vital for the knowledge economy is directly tied to the neoliberal assumption that English is an international language [12]. English proficiency is seen as a crucial component of human capital and is required for professional prospects and upward socioeconomic mobility [13, 14]. Recent quantitative studies on language economics have found a positive relationship between language proficiency and earnings, albeit this relationship may be stronger for men than for women and all of the data originate from North American and European contexts including European languages [15]. Moreover, companies do not necessarily prioritize pre-existing skills in English (or another language) for employment or overseas work assignment [13], which might be related to practical constraints such as cost-effectiveness arising from the recruitment of competent employees [15]. The role of English competency at work in Asian settings requires further investigation.

2.1.5. Chatting Informally via Social Media

According to O'Hanlon [16], students use social media technologies, notably social networking, on a daily basis, and it is this social environment that fosters both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the students to use technology for learning. Due to the accessibility of online resources and constant access to learning, Simonson et al. [17] argue that online learning and social networking technologies are more practical than traditional classroom learning (the use of textbooks for learning).

Not only in teaching, but social media technology can also be a very effective auxiliary tool to be used in business cooperation. In informal situations, using social media to communicate with customers can pull the relationship between the two parties to a certain extent. However, even in an informal setting, there are four basic tips to remember: Look, Listen, Ask and Remember. Therefore, using social media to communicate in English in informal places is also a skill that needs to be learned and mastered.

2.2. Sino-Thai Cooperation

As we all know, China and Thailand are geographically close. In recent years, with the construction of the "Belt and Road", the cooperation between Thailand and China in the fields of economy, politics and culture has become more and more in-depth, and the two countries have become friendly strategic partners. Education is an important area for exchange and cooperation between the two countries. Students from the two countries have carried out all-around cooperation and exchanges through an exchange of students studying abroad, language learning, cooperative education between institutions and the establishment of Confucius Institutes.

Trade between Thailand and the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased by about seven times over the previous 15 years, outpacing China's trade with the rest of ASEAN and other nations. Thailand's top trading partner right now is China. [18]. China is now the second-biggest foreign investor in Thailand after Japan, while Thai companies have invested in thousands of projects in China over the past decade. According to the report of MOC (2014), Chinese direct

investment in Thailand is determined by diverse strategies, namely, the “Go-Out Strategy”, the investment in the foreign countries, economic cooperation between China and ASEAN and Sino-Thai cooperation within Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) framework. These are China’s significant mechanisms for expanding the investments. To unite and manage various firms across borders, the "Go-Out Strategy" will need new abilities and skills. To address the management and governance difficulties they encounter as they integrate into the global business environment, Chinese domestic enterprises are progressively fostering the pertinent skills and expertise they require [19, 20].

2.3. States and Problems of using English in Sino-Thai Cooperation

A new chapter in the history of contemporary Sino-Thai relations began with the formalization of diplomatic ties in 1975 [21], trade had significantly expanded between the two nations [19]. In recent years, the two countries have maintained steady and vigorous development. The amount of trade between the two nations increased steadily and significantly, especially after 1992. It contends that following China's accession into the WTO, Thai exports to China will rise dramatically and the Sino-Thai trade deficit is likely to widen further, giving Thailand enormous short-term benefits [22]. The “tariff-free” agreement will be further implemented with the help of all parties' efforts, leading to more win-win successes and a promising future, according to the report's prediction for future development.

The Hebei Academic Journal published a paper by Lu Shanbing of Northwestern University and Chen Ding of Xi'an Petroleum University titled “The Impact Mechanism of Sino-Thai Investment on Bilateral Trade against the Background of ‘One Belt and One Road’”. In order to fully realize the potential and optimize the structure of FDI, this article examines the relationship between China's and Thailand's FDI, foreign direct investment, and the current state of bilateral trade. This can be used to build a model with few samples to give greater forecasting advantages for immediate issues [23]. As a result, the project helps China and Thailand cooperate in a way that is profitable for both countries.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study employs a mixed-methods approach [24] using a questionnaire developed by the researcher and interviews with the participants were also conducted. This kind of approach to research provides both qualitative and quantitative data that are recognized by the notion of triangulation [25]. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents who were in the position of executives and staff of the organizations under the JingShi Project. Interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information for the study.

3.2. Population and Subjects

The population is the Chinese and Thai personnel working in the Sino-Thai cooperation, which includes 30 participants from the two countries: 15 Chinese staff and 15 RMUTT staff. For the interviews, the subjects are 2 Chinese and 2 RMUTT counterparts.

3.3. Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study are a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. A questionnaire was sent to all subjects via Google Forms, while interviews

with participants were conducted by the researcher. The questionnaire and the interview questions are constructed as the following:

3.3.1. Questionnaires

The questionnaire is divided into 5 parts (in three languages - English, Chinese and Thai) as follows:

- Part 1 Personal information
- Part 2 Roles of English
- Part 3 English Skills in LSRW
- Part 4 Problems of English
- Part 5 Suggestions

3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interview

As a guideline for the interview, seven main interview questions were asked and followed by related follow-up questions where possible and appropriate to gain in-depth data. The main interview questions are as follows:

1. Do you speak English in a live meeting?
2. Do you have to write an official document?
3. Do you have any problems with reading in English?
4. How much can you understand spoken English?
5. How do you learn to improve your English?
6. What is your suggestion for improving the role of English in Sino-Thai cooperation?
7. What is your suggestion for the related organizations to improve their staff's skills in

English?

3.4. Data Collection

The researcher carried out the data collection process starting with requesting a letter from the dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, asking for permission and consent from the informants or respondents. The letter was sent to the two parties. Subsequently, copies of the questionnaire were sent to the subjects of the study via Google Forms. The respondents were required to return the questionnaire within one month at the latest. The researcher, then, made an appointment with four respondents who gave consent for the researcher to gather the interview data. Written consent forms were also distributed to the interviewees.

3.5. Data Analysis

From the completed questionnaires, the data were processed for analysis and computed on the SPSS computer application. Then, the analyzed data were tabulated and presented in response to the research questions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, which included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Content analysis was used to analyze the data from the open-ended questions derived from the questionnaire and the data obtained from the interviews. The data from the open-ended questionnaire responses were used to determine frequency, and then themes were derived. For the interviews data, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and the researcher coded the interview transcriptions to determine the themes. The following step was that the researcher summarized the themes and wrote a research report based on the findings.

4. RESULTS

4.1. General Information about the Participants

The demographic information about the 30 questionnaire respondents is tabulated below in Table 1.

Table 1. General information about the participants.

Topic	Description
Gender	The respondents were 15 males (50%) and 15 females (50%).
Age	There were 14 respondents aged between 30 and 39, which account for 46.70%. Ten respondents aged between 40 and 49 accounted for 33.30%. The respondents aged between 20-29 and 50-59 are the same in number; each has 3 respondents, accounting for 10%.
Nationality	The proportion of Chinese and Thai respondents was half-and-half (15 Chinese and 15 Thai).
Occupation	There were two types of occupations, 13 executives and 17 staff, accounting for 43.30% and 56.70%, respectively.
Country of work	There were 14 respondents working in China, and 16 working in Thailand, accounting for 46.70% and 53.30%, respectively.
Employing unit	Most of the respondents worked in Thai institutions (53.30%), 9 respondents (30%) worked in Chinese institutions, and 5 respondents (16.70%) worked in Beijing Huatec Information Technology Co., Ltd.
Experience with foreigners	The number of respondents having experience working with foreigners was approximately twice greater than those who never had foreign colleagues, with percentages of 70% and 30%, respectively.
Education	The majority of respondents had master's and doctoral degrees, accounting for 50% and 40%, respectively, and only 10% holding a bachelor's degree.

For the interviews, the data were derived from four personnel, including a Chinese executive (Interviewee 1), a Chinese operational staff (Interviewee 2), a Thai executive (Interviewee 3), and a Thai operational staff (Interviewee 4).

4.2. The Use of English: The Extent to Which English Has Been Used in the Sino-Thai Cooperation

In relation to the use of English derived from the questionnaire and interview data, the informants indicated that English has played an important role in different ways and to a different extent depending on the type of staff they belong to, as well as their working context. The extent to which English has been used can be illustrated as follows:

4.2.1. Live Meetings

From the questionnaire data, English was used in live meetings on different platforms or applications as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The role of English used in live meetings.

Role of English	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
Live meetings			
- I use English in a meeting.	2.80 (0.86)	3.27 (0.96)	3.03 (0.93)
- I usually have a meeting via VOOV.	4.40 (1.18)	2.40 (1.06)	3.40 (1.50)
- I usually have a meeting via ZOOM.	3.13 (0.74)	4.60 (0.51)	3.87 (0.97)
- I usually have a meeting via LINE.	1.67 (0.98)	3.20 (1.21)	2.43 (1.33)
- I usually have a meeting via WECHAT.	4.00 (0.65)	1.93 (0.88)	2.97 (1.30)
- I usually have a meeting via WHATSAPP.	1.60 (1.18)	1.33 (0.62)	1.47 (0.94)

As can be seen from Table 2, Sino-Thai staff use English as a means of communication in a live meeting at a moderate level (mean=3.03; SD=0.93), though there is a difference regarding the application used. Chinese staff prefer VOOV and WECHAT at a highest level (mean=4.40; SD=1.18) and a high level (mean=4.00; SD=0.65), respectively, while Thai staff mostly use ZOOM (mean=4.60; SD=0.51) and LINE (mean=3.20; SD=1.21) for an online meeting.

From the interviews, the results from the questionnaire are relevant. Interviewee 2 mentioned that VOOV was most used in China, as many applications were blocked. VOOV by Tencent Company is the only version that is allowed in China, users of the app have to be approved by the company staff before use legally. In Thailand, on the other hand, "We can use any application we want, so ZOOM and LINE seem to be the most two popular applications" (Interviewee 3).

4.2.2. Document Writing

From the respondents' perspective, the role of English in Sino-Thai cooperation in relation to document writing was regarded as important, with different kinds of documents being involved as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The role of English used in document writing.

Role of English	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
Writing documents			
- I use English in writing contracts.	3.27 (1.03)	3.27 (1.10)	3.27 (1.05)
- I use English in writing agreements.	3.20 (1.01)	3.13 (1.19)	3.17 (1.09)
- I use English in writing official letters.	4.13 (0.83)	3.33 (1.18)	3.73 (1.08)
- I use English in writing emails.	4.07 (1.03)	3.80 (1.01)	3.93 (1.01)
- I use English in writing reports.	3.33 (1.05)	3.07 (1.03)	3.20 (1.03)
- I use English in writing meeting agendas.	3.93 (1.03)	3.40 (1.24)	3.67 (1.15)

Table 3 shows that the most important role of English writing is based on writing official letters and emails with a mean score of 3.93 (SD=1.01) and 3.73 (SD=1.08), respectively. When compared with their counterparts, Chinese staff tend to be responsible for writing more official letters and emails than Thai staff. However, with a mean score of more than 3.00 in every item identifies the important role of writing skills.

The importance of English is also confirmed by the interview data, as said by Interviewee 2, “Official letters are formal in communication. Sometimes we use emails to inform our colleagues of many issues being discussed.” Similarly, Thai counterparts regard official letters as legal, accurate, and respected, though this kind of means of communication is rather slow” (Interviewee 4). Additionally, Interviewee 3 added, “Many times I use my personal emails for sending a copy of official documents.”

4.2.3. Giving Presentations

The role of English in giving presentations can be illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. The role of English used in giving presentations.

Role of English	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
Giving presentations			
- I use English to present projects.	3.00 (1.13)	3.00 (1.20)	3.00 (1.14)
- I use English to present meeting results.	2.87 (1.19)	2.80 (1.01)	2.83 (1.09)
- I use English to arrange meetings.	3.47 (1.13)	3.13 (1.25)	3.30 (1.18)
- I use English to run meetings.	3.27 (1.10)	3.00 (1.36)	3.13 (1.22)
- I use English to make a phone call.	2.33 (1.35)	2.60 (1.30)	2.47 (1.31)

Table 4 highlights the role of English in arranging and carrying out meetings at a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.30 (SD=1.18) and 3.13 (SD=1.22), respectively. The two counterparts agreed on the importance of English being involved in organizing meetings. Only second to the use involving meetings is spoken English for presenting projects with the same mean score of 3.00, while making a phone call seems to be less in use (mean=2.47; SD=1.31) for both counterparts.

The above findings are confirmed by the interviewees, e.g. “We normally organize the meeting, once a week” (Interviewee 2). For the executives, a meeting between the two nations is held once a month (Interviewees 1 and 3). And, they use English as a means of communication in the meeting (Interviewee 3), while the use of phone calls is hardly ever practical since it costs more expenses and is sometimes ineffective (Interviewee 4).

4.2.4. Going Abroad for a Business Trip

The questionnaire data revealed the role of English used for travelling and living in other countries as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The role of English used for going abroad and a business trip.

Role of English	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
Going abroad for a business trip			
- English is useful when I travel abroad.	4.67 (0.62)	4.67 (0.62)	4.67 (0.61)
- I use English to apply for visa documents.	3.07 (0.88)	4.13 (0.74)	3.60 (0.97)
- I use English to book flight tickets.	3.13 (0.92)	3.80 (0.77)	3.47 (0.90)
- I use English to book hotels.	3.00 (0.93)	3.67 (0.72)	3.33 (0.88)
- I use English to book a table in the restaurant.	3.80 (0.56)	3.80 (0.94)	3.80 (0.76)
- I use English to converse with foreigners.	4.33 (0.62)	4.47 (0.83)	4.40 (0.72)

As can be seen clearly in Table 5, both Chinese and Thai counterparts use English when traveling abroad at the highest level (mean=4.67; SD=0.61), and second to traveling is the role of English to converse with foreigners (mean=4.40; SD=0.72).

The importance of English use is also mentioned by the interviewees: “When I travelled to Thailand, I had to book a flight myself and, for sure, I talked with those who were strangers,” (Interviewee 1). “I always use English when I travel abroad. It’s an international language.” (Interviewee 3).

4.2.5. Chatting Informally via Social Media

When it comes to social media, English was also used to communicate with others as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The role of English used for chatting informally via social media.

Role of English	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
Chatting informally via using social media			
- I chat in English via PHONE CALL.	2.47 (1.30)	2.27 (0.70)	2.37 (1.03)
- I chat in English via LINE.	1.87 (1.30)	3.07 (0.80)	2.47 (1.22)
- I chat in English via WECHAT.	3.13 (0.74)	2.47 (1.36)	2.80 (1.13)
- I chat in English via WHATSAPP.	2.00 (1.51)	2.20 (1.52)	2.10 (1.49)
- I chat in English via MESSENGER.	1.73 (1.39)	2.53 (0.92)	2.13 (1.22)
- I chat in English via FACEBOOKS.	1.73 (1.28)	2.60 (0.91)	2.17 (1.18)
- I chat in English via INSTAGRAM.	1.87 (1.25)	2.40 (1.30)	2.13 (1.28)
- I chat in English via TWITTER.	2.33 (1.11)	2.27 (1.16)	2.30 (1.12)
- I chat in English via WEIBO.	1.40 (1.06)	1.20 (0.56)	1.30 (0.84)

Table 6 indicates that Chinese staff spent their time on social media with WECHAT as the most frequently used application for online everyday chatting, while Thai staff used LINE with mean scores of 3.13 (SD=0.74) and 3.07 (SD=0.80), respectively.

The interview data explain that this is because of the reason of the availability of particular applications in China, such as VOOV and WECHAT. However, when Chinese staff need to contact their colleagues in Thailand, the Thai counterparts can also use the same application as the Chinese. Moreover, when Chinese staff come to Thailand, they can also install the LINE application on their mobile phones; so they both can get in touch (Interviewees 1, 2, 4).

4.3. States and Problems of English use in Sino-Thai Cooperation

4.3.1. The Staff's Frequently used English Skills

Derived from the questionnaire data, Chinese and Thai staff rated themselves in relation to frequently used English skills at work as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The staff's frequently used English skills.

English Skills	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
- I mostly use English listening skills in Chinese -Thai cooperation.	4.00 (0.85)	3.53 (1.36)	3.77 (1.14)
- I mostly use English speaking skills in Chinese -Thai cooperation.	3.33 (1.29)	3.33 (1.35)	3.33 (1.30)
- I mostly use English reading skills in Chinese -Thai cooperation.	4.07 (0.70)	3.67 (1.11)	3.87 (0.94)
- I mostly use English writing skills in Chinese -Thai cooperation.	4.00 (0.76)	3.53 (1.41)	3.77 (1.14)

Table 7 shows the importance of English skills in the Sino-Thai cooperation, highlighting the most frequently used reading skills. Interestingly, all the macro skills are at a high level with a mean score of greater than 3.50, except speaking skills (mean=3.33; SD=1.30). This is the case with both Chinese and Thai nationals. Thus, it can be concluded that the most frequently used skills in the cooperation are reading with a mean score of 3.87 (SD=0.94), whereas the least frequently used skills are listening; listening and writing are equally used with a mean score of 3.77 (SD=1.14).

Likewise, the interview data put an emphasis on reading skills. Both parties have to cope with an enormous number of documents; this means that they have to do a lot of reading (Interviewees 2 and 4). Writing skills are also important in relation to official writing such as writing a contract or agreement. Similarly, in the meetings, the staff of both sides do a lot of listening. However, interestingly, sometimes in the meetings, there is an interpreter, who can translate from Chinese into Thai and vice versa.

4.3.2. The Staff's Problems with using English Skills

Like the interview data, although Sino-Thai staff, as reported above, used English at a high level, they indicated their problems regarding their English skills as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. The staff's problems with using English skills.

Using English Problems	Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD) (n=30)
	Chinese (n=15)	Thai (n=15)	
Listening Skills			
- I have a problem with listening in a live meeting.	3.27 (0.46)	2.20 (0.77)	2.73 (0.83)
- I have a problem with listening to a presentation.	2.93 (0.59)	2.47 (0.83)	2.70 (0.75)
- I have a problem with listening to a telephone call.	3.27 (1.10)	3.00 (1.00)	3.13 (1.04)
- I have a problem with listening to foreigners.	3.33 (0.49)	2.73 (0.80)	3.03 (0.72)
Speaking Skills			
- I have a problem with speaking in a live meeting.	3.60 (0.51)	2.53 (0.90)	3.07 (0.94)
- I have a problem with giving a presentation.	3.27 (0.70)	2.33 (0.90)	2.80 (0.92)
- I have a problem speaking on a telephone call.	3.67 (0.62)	2.47 (0.99)	3.07 (1.01)
- I have a problem talking with foreigners.	2.80 (0.56)	2.60 (0.91)	2.70 (0.75)

Reading Skills			
- I have a problem with reading contracts.	3.47 (0.64)	2.33 (0.90)	2.90 (0.96)
- I have a problem with reading agreements.	3.40 (0.83)	2.27 (0.96)	2.83 (1.05)
- I have a problem with reading official letters.	3.20 (0.77)	2.31 (0.74)	2.67 (0.92)
- I have a problem with reading emails.	2.53 (0.64)	1.73 (0.80)	2.13 (0.82)
- I have a problem with reading reports.	2.60 (0.74)	2.00 (0.85)	2.30 (0.84)
- I have a problem with reading the meeting agenda.	2.40 (0.99)	1.67 (0.49)	2.03 (0.85)
Writing English			
- I have a problem in writing a contract.	4.33 (0.72)	3.00 (1.13)	3.67 (1.15)
- I have a problem in writing an agreement.	4.00 (0.85)	3.27 (1.28)	3.63 (1.13)
- I have a problem in writing an official letter.	3.87 (0.64)	2.80 (1.01)	3.33 (0.99)
- I have a problem in writing an email.	3.07 (0.59)	2.27 (0.59)	2.67 (0.71)
- I have a problem in writing a report.	3.13 (0.64)	2.33 (0.90)	2.73 (0.87)
- I have a problem in writing a meeting agenda.	2.93 (0.70)	1.73 (0.70)	2.33 (0.92)

In Table 8, both Chinese and Thai staff seem to have trouble responding to a phone call (mean=3.13; SD=1.04) and listening to foreigners (mean=3.03; SD=0.72). For live meetings and presentations, their problems are moderate with the mean scores ranging from 2.20 to 2.93. Related to speaking skill problems, conversing with people on the phone call is likely to be a problem, probably for Chinese counterparts (mean=3.67; SD=0.62), as well as in live meetings (mean=3.60; SD=0.51). However, overall problems in speaking skills are moderate with the mean scores ranging from 2.70 to 3.07. For reading skills, Sino-Thai staff generally disagreed that they were in trouble with reading skills, with the mean scores ranging from 2.03 to 2.90. Reading contracts is considered the most difficult, though the level of agreement is moderate (mean=2.90; SD=0.96). For writing skills, both Chinese and Thai staff agreed that writing contracts and agreements is the most daunting task, with the mean scores ranging from 3.00 to 4.33, while the other tasks of writing i.e., writing an official letter, an email, a report, and a meeting agenda, are at a moderate level.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The role of English in Sino-Thai cooperation, especially in the period post-Covid-19, relies heavily on retrieving the connection between the two countries. Live meetings are considered a basic activity that connects the two countries with closely connected assistance from each side. At the beginning of 2023, a number of meetings were conducted to catch up with the major plan of the Sino-Thai cooperation. Many projects have been launched to support the main objectives of the project [19, 26]. Being familiar with the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of meetings, which were supportive to the project, had been conducted online and the main application was ZOOM, which are reported user-friendly and convenient to use for both of the counterparts.

In the cooperation, various document works have been done with support from both leading executives and support staff of the two countries. Official letters and emails are major types of official documents that need to be efficient and effective when in use in the cooperation, while other types of documents have also been used, but to a minimal extent.

After many projects have been launched, progress reports must be carried out for executives to make a decision in terms of solving problems that occurred or improving the operational process. In a two-party meeting, oral presentation plays an important role, though the role of the interpreter seems to downplay the role of English.

When both executives and operational staff travel overseas, English has been paid much attention regarding English as an international language used to communicate with foreigners and carry out travel-related routines like applying for a visa, booking a plane ticket, or a table in a restaurant. To this end, the role of an interpreter is likely to disappear, since the role of English is quite personal and interpersonal.

The role of English on social media is various in terms of applications used. As can be clearly observed, for political reasons, Chinese personnel seem to be restricted in applications used, while Thai counterparts have a number of them to use. WECHAT is the most popular in China, whereas LINE is the most frequently used application in Thailand.

When considering major skills in English Sino-Thai staff use, listening, reading, and writing were the most used skills in communication. This is because these skills are most commonly familiar to learners in the area of foreign language learning, while speaking is the only productive skill that had been used less. People learn another language starting with listening, reading, and writing, rather than conversational skills.

Sino-Thai personnel have a likelihood to be comfortable with reading skills, while conversational and writing skills are regarded as more difficult. Apparently, conversational skills are a daunting task when a conversation taking place on the phone call, while reading and writing contracts or agreements are also to be taken into consideration. When considering training for the personnel, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabus design should pay much attention to the context where the personnel work, the skills of English they need to improve, and the types of text or specific situations they are frequently exposed to and faced with at work.

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AUTHORS

Miss Shasha Luo is an MA, Chinese student majoring in English for Career Development Program at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand. She also works as a coordinator in the People-to-People Exchange Jingshi Project.



Asst.Prof.Dr.Tawatchai Chaisiri is Assistant Professor at the Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technolgy Thanyaburi. His research interest includes TESOL, SFL genre pedagogy, and teaching English writing.

