

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

#### **1.1.1 Reading English in Thailand**

Reading is one of the four basic components in learning a language. Reading lessons are conducted in all language classrooms in Thailand. In Thailand, the English language is considered a foreign language (EFL) because learners seldom use the language outside the classroom, thus reading skill plays a big role in the Thai setting. For 20 years and over, language teachers and educators have paid much attention to teaching reading to Thai students. Through reading students get information and gain knowledge about other cultures. Therefore, language teachers focus on reading skills in the English language classroom.

Bunpha Khamviseth (n.d.) states that Thai students have low ability in reading English texts. They use translated texts in Thai. Furthermore the texts in English are not interesting because they focus on settings beyond the content schema of the learners; thus, the learners fail to make the connections between known and new knowledge emerging from the text. This results in failure in comprehending the text. Khamviseth explains that if the learners read what is known or relevant to them, it would be more meaningful and easy to understand; therefore, they could develop their reading skill. Osman (1984) and Koh (1985) also say that the reading text should be within the known world/cultural knowledge of the learners. David (2007) however argues that such limited reading would not open up new worlds and new experiences to the learners.

More recently there have been some changes in English language teaching in Thai universities. As there are many foreign companies in Thailand which provide job opportunities to those who know the English language, it is important that students have a better proficiency in English for career purposes. This has resulted in the teaching of English for Specific Purpose or ESP in Thai universities. However, students must have a basic knowledge of English before taking the ESP course (<http://www.thaiedresearch.org/result/result.php?id=3546>) and reading skill is a part of that basic knowledge which the students need to know so that they can read academic texts for comprehension.

### **1.1.2 Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus - Thailand**

Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus is located at Tambol Roosamilae, Muang District, Pattani Province, in the southern border of Thailand. Prince of Songkla University (P.S.U), Pattani Campus, was established in 1968 with the purpose of extending opportunities for tertiary education to the south and to raise educational standards and support the development of the region (Bulletin of Prince of Songkla University, 1995).

In 2007, most of the students in Pattani Campus were from the provinces in the southern border of Thailand and most of them use a Malay dialect in daily life, especially in their community/home. Thai is also used to communicate in public, particularly in the university contexts as it is the national language. English is a foreign language for them. Thus, the subjects in this study were different from those in the rest of the country for these reasons.

In Prince of Songkla university, Pattani Campus, reading English texts is important, especially for academic purposes and learning about other cultures (see David 2007: 55). All undergraduate students at the Pattani Campus have to take English I, which is part of the general course and it is compulsory that every student passes this in order to graduate (Undergraduate Students' Handbook, Prince of Songkla University 2006). The main objective of this course is to enhance students' abilities in the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (English I Course Syllabus, academic year 2006, Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, P.S.U, Pattani Campus). Reading is emphasized by the language lecturers because reading is an essential skill for EFL students in this setting so that they can understand their academic texts and pass the exams.

Students from Prince of Songkla University who are also EFL learners may face the same reading problems that other ESL learners face. Factors such as individual differences, lack of background knowledge in the topic covered in the reading task, or having limited vocabulary of the target language may affect the reading outcome. There are many studies (i.e. Burron & Claybaugh, 1974; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988; Devine, 1988; Cabral, 2002; David, 2002; Goh, 2004; Ming & Yueh, 2007; Chamot, n.d.) conducted to investigate the reading difficulties faced by ESL or EFL learners as well as their reading strategies for comprehension so that language teachers could design appropriate pedagogy to help them.

The issue of reading comprehension has already been investigated in various regions, including those in the Asian region (i.e. Jagajothy, 2006; Goh, 2004). But research on reading in English has hardly been conducted in the southern part of Thailand, especially research investigating the use of metacognitive strategies by

learners when reading. Only one study has investigated metacognitive strategies used in reading by Thai students (see Aegpongpaow, 2008) and this was conducted in the central part of Thailand. The present study therefore attempts to investigate the use of metacognitive strategies by Thai university students in Prince of Songkla University, southern Thailand when reading a text in English. Empirical researches such as Chamot et al. (1999) and Oxford (1990) found that language learners employ various strategies in learning the target language. When reading, learners may use some metacognitive strategies for comprehending the text. The focus of this study will be to investigate the thoughts of EFL learners whilst reading, more specifically their use of metacognitive strategies while reading. The think-aloud protocol is used as a research tool as it is the most appropriate instrument to capture what is going on in the learners' minds when they are reading. Unstructured interviews are conducted with the students after the reading session to elicit why the subjects paused during the think-aloud protocols (see Chapter 3).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Metacognitive strategies are sequential processes that one uses to control cognitive activities, and to ensure that a cognitive goal has been met (Livingston, 1997). These strategies help learners to take control over learning consciously and help them reach their learning goals and become independent and self-regulated learners. Nyikos and Oxford (1993: 12) state that metacognitive strategies allow students to manage consciously control over learning. Livingston (1997) further explains that metacognitive strategies help to regulate and oversee learning. Learners who are aware of their own learning processes and strategies are able to reach their goals and will become independent and self-regulated learners (Chamot et al., 1999: 2). Speaking more

specifically of reading, Graham (1997) states that metacognitive strategies help students improve their learning. Cohen (1998) agrees that these strategies enhance learners' reading ability.

Some researches have investigated metacognitive strategies used in reading. For example, Miriam Muniz-Swicegood (1994), Nik Suriana Nik Yusoff (2001), and Zohreh Eslami Rasekh and Reza Ranjbary (2003) in attempting to shed some light on the influence of metacognitive reading strategies instruction found that such training had a positive impact on reading of the students. Huy (2005) in studying the effects of extensive reading on the subjects' perceptions about their reading ability and metacognitive strategies found that extensive reading gave more opportunities for the students to practice and to choose effective cognitive and metacognitive strategies to enhance their reading achievement.

Metacognitive strategies used in reading have been studied in some countries (see Zohreh Eslami Rasekh & Reza Ranjbary, 2003; Miriam Muniz-Swicegood, 1994; Nik Suriana Nik Yusoff, 2001). However, this topic has not been much studied in Thailand. Orranuch Aegpongpaow (2008) investigated metacognitive strategies used by Buddhist third-year students in English academic reading at Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand. This study was in the capital of Thailand. But to date no such study has been conducted in southern Thailand, the area where most of the people are Muslims and they speak a Malay dialect at home. Since cultural and religious differences and ethnicity affect learning strategies used by learners (see Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995: 14, Grainger, 1997:378), therefore the researcher attempted to investigate the metacognitive strategies used by the Muslim undergraduates in Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, southern Thailand when reading an English text.

### **1.3 Aims of the Study**

The aims of this study are:

- To determine the metacognitive strategies used by Thai students while reading an English text.
- To determine the frequency of the metacognitive strategies used.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The following research questions are addressed:

- What are the metacognitive strategies used by Thai university students while reading an English text?
- Which are the most frequently used metacognitive strategies while reading an English text?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

There are no studies investigating the use of metacognitive strategies by Thai university students in Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Thailand while reading an English text. The present study therefore will provide some valuable insights into the use of such strategies when reading an English text. This study can also be a base for future research on Thai EFL learners. And the findings could help in developing English reading skills of Thai students.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

Given below are definitions of some key terms used throughout this thesis. Other terms will be defined where necessary.

- **Metacognitive strategies in reading** refer to sequential processes that one uses to control cognitive activities, and to ensure that a cognitive goal has been met. The processes consist of planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluating.
- **Macro metacognitive reading strategies** (Macro MRS) refer to planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluating in the reading processes.
- **Micro metacognitive reading strategies** (Micro MRS) refer to sub-strategies within each macro metacognitive reading strategy.
- **Think-aloud protocol** refers to a technique that the researcher uses to elicit the subjects' use of learning strategies while reading.
- **Thai students** refer to 30 first year university students majoring in Elementary Education from the Faculty of Education, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, in the academic year 2007.

## 1.7 Limitations of the Study

The subjects of this study were limited to first year university students in the Faculty of Education, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus ,Thailand. This study was also limited to students majoring in Elementary Education who have already enrolled in English I, a compulsory course.

It should be mentioned that it was not the aim of this study to correlate language proficiency with the types of strategies used.

## **1.8 Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher provided some background to the setting where the research was conducted. There are not many studies on English reading strategies in southern Thailand. The present study investigates the use of metacognitive strategies used by Thai university students in Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus while reading an English text.