

English and Inferiority Complex among Legal Professionals In Thailand.

Santhira Morgan¹

Received: Jul 3, 2023 Revised: Nov 6, 2023 Accepted: Nov 8, 2023

¹ The writer holds a degree in English Language and Literature Studies and is currently a PhD student in Islamic Studies (Sharia Law), Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Abstract

Most law professionals in Thailand suffer from inferiority complex due to their lack of competency in the English language. They feel insecure and fearful to speak in English. They even feel threatened that they might face competition and might lose to English speakers. This paper uses the data collected through quantitative research done by a master's student, titled, 'Perception of English language Problems and Need in Thai Lawyers.' While the paper analyses the problems and needs, this paper takes the same data provided to justify the claim that most laws professionals in Thailand suffer from inferiority complex, through qualitative data analysis. It was found that inferiority complex among Thai lawyer is real when it comes to the English language and proposes English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a solution, something the master's student herself proposes.

Keywords: Inferiority complex among Lawyers, Competency in English, English for Specific Purposes.

Introduction

It cannot be denied that the mastery of the English language opens doors of opportunities for one to move up the social ladder of success. It cannot be denied that those who are competent in the English language hold high positions, earn better pay and are well respected in the community. This is well proven by research [1]. The Researcher was fortunate enough to present a lecture on ‘Sharia Law in Malaysia’ to the law lecturers at Thaksin University in English and at the end of the lecture a feedback form was distributed. Most of the feedback mentioned that they only understood 60% of what was delivered. That means 40% of what was said did not register in their minds. The Researcher also had difficulty having a seamless conversation with the participants except with one person. This prompted the Researcher to look into the underlying implications of not being fluent in the English language, especially by people who are considered elite in the society, law professionals. In this globalized era, a country cannot be functioning independently and be self-sufficient [2]. Countries are dependent on other countries to buy and sell their products. People travel in and people travel out of their countries for diplomatic relations, to trade, to resolve legal issues, tourism, etc. Amidst all these activities, if one is not competent in the English language, one is not able to have proper diplomatic relationship with other countries. If by any chance one finds himself or herself among those who are competent in the English language, one would feel left out and begin to feel miserably inferior. A phenomenon known as *inferiority complex*. Inferiority complex can be defined as, a feeling of insecurity arising from a psychological deficiency that results in behavioral symptoms that ranges from a feeling of embarrassment and withdrawal [3]. Inferiority feelings are complex emotions that usually indicate perceived weakness and helplessness [4]. Anil Prakash, in his book, *English Language and Personality*, [5] warns that one should not equate *inferiority complex* to the feelings of being inferior. Feeling inferior is normal and it helps us to improve ourselves to move forward. *Inferiority complex* on the other hand is a syndrome that sends us to depression. This article tries to establish that the lack of competence in the English language among law professionals, gives rise to *inferiority complex* that leads them to think lowly about their ability and lose their self-esteem.

The Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to establish that

1. the effect of being not competent in the English language gives rise to inferiority complex
2. the solution to overcome inferiority complex is to master English through English for Specific Purposes program.

Methodology

This paper uses the data collected through primary source materials gathered through quantitative research done by a master's student, Natcha Sugarin, titled, '*Perception of English language Problems and Need in Thai Lawyers*' [6]. While the paper analyses the problems faced by those in the legal professions in using English and the remedial needs, this paper takes the same data provided to justify the claim that most law professionals in Thailand suffer from inferiority complex, through qualitative data analysis by referring to secondary source materials like journals and books. Natcha Sugarin had provided data collected from 160 respondents, who comprised both lawyers with bachelor's degree (60%), Master's degree (36.9%) and Doctoral degree (5%). Law students comprised 13.8% and the rest were lawyers both in the public and private sectors. All data collected was via google form. She adopted a five-point Likert scale [7] and the criteria for the level of problems and needs were classified into five levels of opinion as follows:

- 5 = Extremely Problematic/Necessary
- 4 = Very Problematic/Necessary
- 3 = Moderately Problematic/Necessary
- 2 = Slightly Problematic/Necessary
- 1 = Not at all Problematic/Necessary

Findings

Natcha Sugarin was of the opinion that the participants had a pressing need to improve their listening skills as 'moderately problematic' in areas such as, understanding daily English conversation; understanding English news and information; understanding English Q & A in general situations and understanding different English accents. And she went on to describe as 'very problematic' in areas such as understanding legal English vocabulary and idiomatic

expressions; understanding legal in conversation; understanding law lectures/presentations conducted in English; understanding discussions of legal content conducted in English; and understanding negotiating terms and conditions in the legal context conducted in English. The same results were more or less reflected for skills like, speaking, reading, writing, translation and communications [8].

If such is the situation then, it stands to reason to conclude that Thai lawyers who are not competent in the English language, are not in a position to play any significant role in English related discussions, negotiations or engagements. They would be at the mercy of the elite who speaks English well. They would feel sidelined and made to feel less important.

The Researcher took the data provided by Natcha Sugarin above and used it to look at something more sinister, *inferiority complex*, among those in the law profession. Imagine a lawyer attending a law seminar or a conference where there are many foreign speakers. First of all, the lawyer who doesn't speak English might feel uncomfortable being present at the gathering for the talks will be in English. He/she might have a difficult time understanding the presentation. And during breaks, he/she might look for Thai speaking people to socialize otherwise, he/she might feel alienated and possibly return home depressed. A sense of 'uselessness' might overwhelm him/her which would reflect the *inferiority complex* syndrome. A person might feel very important and powerful speaking only in one language, say, Thai. But that circle of importance and power is confined within one's working place where Thai is used. Once, a new person, who is versatile both in Thai and English, joins the organization or once one is put in a situation where the majority are English speakers, one might get a feeling of being inferior to the situation. People with an inferiority complex may experience chronic self-doubt, have low self-esteem, and feel the need to withdraw from social situations [9].

The pertinent question now is, how can lawyers master the English language in a meaningful way. Instead of filling up their brains with vocabulary that might or might not be useful, how could lawyers in Thailand learn relevant vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar within a short time, that would be beneficial to them. The Researcher is in agreement with Natcha Sugarin that this is best done through the *English for Specific Purposes* programs.

English for Specific Purposes.

The Researcher is of the opinion that the best course of action to redress inferiority complex among the legal professionals is to focus on *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP). English for Specific Purposes is a subset of *English as a Second Language* and *English as a Foreign Language* programs. ESP courses are designed to meet the specific needs of the learners, with reference to the particular vocabulary and register they require. It is perhaps the most influential of all English teaching approaches in academic settings [10] and workplace [11]. Laurence Anthony gives his definition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as

an approach to language teaching that targets the current and/or future academic or occupational needs of Situating ESP in teaching and learning learners, focuses on the necessary language, genres, and skills to address these needs, and assists learners in meeting these needs through the use of general and/or discipline-specific teaching materials and methods. [12]

But, are there any differences between the ESP and General English approaches? Hutchinson answers this quite simply, "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal" [13]. While, general English focuses on primary and secondary school learning of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, storytelling, essay writing, etc. It does not focus on industry specific vocabulary and expressions. ESP, on the other hand, focuses on adult learning. The medical industry has its own set of terms and expressions, the architectural field has its own set of vocabulary and expression, similarly the legal profession also has its own set of vocabulary and expressions which are totally different from those of general English. Among the medical profession, medical related words are the norm. For instance, a medical student might say that that *the patient was lying supine, motionless but his vital signs were normal*. In layman's language, the patient was lying flat on his back, motionless with his face looking at the ceiling (lying supine) and his body temperature, pulse rate, blood pressure and oxygen level (vital signs) were all normal. Similarly, a law student might say, *the plaintiff bought the property for a consideration of 900,000 baht in good faith but his contract with the defendant turned out to be null and void, ab initio, because the defendant did not have the locus standi to enter into a contract, for he was only a caretaker of the property, not the owner*. In layman's language, 'the person who initiated the legal action (*the plaintiff*) bought the house (*property*) for a sum of 900,000 baht (*consideration*) honestly and legally (*in good faith*), but his contract with the accused (*defendant*) turned out to be not legally valid (*null and void*) from the

beginning (*ab initio*) because the accused (*defendant*) did not have the legal capacity (*locus standi*) to enter into a contract, for he was only a caretaker of the house (property), not the owner.

The legal profession is replete with its own exclusive legal expressions. Among them are expressions like, *beyond reasonable doubt*: If something is *beyond reasonable doubt*, then, there is enough evidence to prove that thing to be true. For example, if an accused person is guilty *beyond reasonable doubt*, then it means that there is sufficient evidence to prove that they have done something wrong; *Contempt of Court*: Is a situation when someone violates court rules or disregards court processes, they can be cited for *contempt of court*; *Burden of Proof*: When somebody has the *burden of proof*, then he or she is required to present evidence to prove his or her claims.

The good news is, Thai legal professionals are not people with zero knowledge of English. They do have a repertoire of vocabulary though they are limited. They are indeed exposed to many legal words and expressions. What is needed now is a plan to make learning English easy for them, and that plan is manifested in the form of *English for Specific Purposes*.

Conclusion

Thais generally lament the fact that they are not very good at English. If a country itself is not competent in the English language, it is not able to have diplomatic relations, develop its tourism industry and settle disputes with neighbors. If by any chance, one finds oneself among those who are competent in the English language, one would feel left out and begin to feel miserably inferior. This feeling, is known as *inferiority complex*. It is a feeling of insecurity arising from a psychological deficiency that results in behavioral symptoms that ranges from a feeling of embarrassment and withdrawal.

The objectives of this paper are to establish that the effect of being not competent in the English language gives rise to inferiority complex and the solution to it is to master English through English for Specific Purposes program. This paper relied upon the research materials of a master's student from Thammasat University to draw conclusions. The student had pointed out that her research subjects who were all in the legal profession had listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation and communications skills which were 'moderately problematic' and 'very problematic.' The current Researcher feels that if such is the present situation then, it stands to reason to conclude that Thai lawyers who are not competent in

the English language, are not in a position to play any significant role in English related discussions, negotiations or engagements. They would be at the mercy of the elite who speaks English well. They would feel sidelined and made to feel less important. The solution to this problem is through the English for Specific Purposes programs.

REFERENCE

- [1] Kuo, E.C.Y. (1985) *Language and Inequality*. (Eds) Wolfgang, N & Joan Manes, J. Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers. p. 342; Baron, J.N., Grusky, D.B. & Treiman, D.J. (Eds) (1996) *Social Differentiation and Social Inequality*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 61; Haworth, P. & Craig, C. (Eds) (2016). *The Career Trajectories of English Teachers*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- [2] Kirkpatrick, A. & Sussex, R.(Eds) (2012) *English as an International Language in Asia: Implication for Language Education*. New York, London: Springer. p. 112.
- [3] APA Dictionary of Psychology. <https://dictionary.apa.org/inferiority-complex?a=kode> Retrieved 18.2.23; Ajiboye, L. (2014). *Inferiority Complex: A seemingly harmless personality blemish of grave societal consequences*. Trafford Publishing.
- [4] Han, P. (2006) *Inferiority Feelings of College Student: A Research Based on Social Comparison Master*. Guangxi Normal University.
- [5] Prakash, A. (2018) *English Language and Personality*. New Dehli: Educreation Publishing. p. 289
- [6] Sugarin, N. (2020) *Perception of English Language Problems and Needs in Thai Lawyers*. Thammasat University. Masters Thesis.
- [7] McLeod, S. A. (2019, August 03). *Likert scale*. *Simply Psychology*. www.simplypsychology.org/likert-scale.html Retrieved 20.2.23
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Kubala, K. (2022) *What to know about an inferiority complex*. Medical News To <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/inferiority-complex> Retrieved 19.2.23
- [10] Charles, M. (2013). *English for academic purposes*. In B. Paltridge & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The handbook of English for specific purposes* (p. 137–154). Walden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- [11] Marra, M. (2013). *English in the workplace*. In B. Paltridge & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The handbook of English for specific purposes* (p. 175–192). Walden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.

[12] Anthony, L. (2018) *Introducing English for Specific Purposes*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 11

[13] Hutchinson, Tom & Waters, Alan (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learner-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press. p. 53