

# A SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS IN THAI & ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TODAY

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความสั้นๆนี้เป็นข้อเรียกร้องให้เสริมพลังใหม่แก่การสอนภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย โดยจัดการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการด้าน “นวัตกรรมการสอนภาษาอังกฤษกับการออกแบบหลักสูตร” สำหรับครู เพื่อพัฒนาวิธีสอนภาษาและผลักดันการปฏิรูปตามหลักสูตรการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน พ.ศ. 2544

## ABSTRACT

*This concise article is a plea to revitalise the teaching of Thai & English in Thailand. A workshop on “New ELT Methodology-cum-Curriculum Design” based on the National Curriculum B.E. 2544 is proposed for the improvement of language teaching as well as the driving force for our education reform.*

The Thai language is indeed at stake at present. *Where do we go from here?* People in all walks of life seem unable to speak & write Thai accurately, effectively & appropriately.

A sociolinguistic phenomenon known as ‘code-mixing’ is widespread now. Thai people ‘code-mix’ between English & Thai all the

time, both in speaking & writing. **Even Prime Minister Thaksin always does it to excess in his speech.** That is certainly not admirable because it linguistically sounds absurd & idiotic!

According to research findings (Pattaranit 1982), ‘code-mixing’ is deemed to be a sign of proficiency in the second language. However,

that is not true in terms of language use. **It's rather an indicator of incompetence in both languages!**

This leads us to the question of Thai & English language education in Thailand today. We should like to strike the note here that **'Man is the languaging animal'** (Homo loquens). **'Language makes man.'** Moreover, **'language is part and parcel of education.'** The teaching of a national language (see Brudhiprabha, 1997) and a language of wider communication needs to be promptly revitalised (see Prabha & Kosol, 2004). **'Bilingual education'** is increasingly important or indeed a must for Thailand today (Trikosol, 2004). Terry Fredrickson is perhaps right when he says "Many Thai parents believe the choice for their children's education lies between public or private schools within the Thai national system or an international school-- but there is a middle way" (Learning Post, January 18, 2005). That is what he calls **"the bilingual alternative"**.

It is unfortunate that the teaching of Thai has not been successful all along. Most of the students abhor the subject; most of the teachers cannot teach it well. As far as English is concerned, most of the students want to learn it but most of the teachers cannot teach it effectively.

With regard to Thai, both students & teachers are to blame. Thai is our national language, if **you (as a student)** do not want to learn & **you (as a teacher)** cannot teach it well, **who will?** Language, especially **'national language'** is our identity. Do change your mind

& start anew **to learn & to teach** your mother tongue to the best of your ability.

As regards English, the teachers are to blame for not teaching it well. With reference to language teaching, it is unfortunate that "on the whole [teachers are] more used to thinking about methodology than about syllabus design" (Yalden, 1983 : 17). They simply **flip from one fad to another and keep up with the latest fashion in language teaching alone.** Hence **"they see only the forest and not the trees,"** so to speak!

In relation to **'methodology'** Todd (2004) has indeed made sound judgements when he told the Thai teachers of English not to copy western methodologies, but to develop their own methods and materials in the Thai context as well as sharing their products with colleagues. By so doing, other Thai teachers and all Thai education will greatly benefit.

We couldn't agree more with him on that matter. It's one of the most important things in this language teaching business of which Thai ELT specialists usually ignore. More often than not there is a tendency for them to follow the dictates of fashion. Hence we are always subject to the swing of the pendulum as Wilkins (1972 : 208-209) sharply observes:

*...the process of change has not resulted from the steady accumulation of knowledge about the most effective ways of teaching languages; it has been more the product of changing fashion...[and] has resembled the swing of the pendulum.*

That is indeed a very sorry state of affairs in language teaching in Thailand (of **Brudhiprabha**, 2004; **Trikosol**, 2004). We always import methodologies from the West; we believe in hearsay not research; we put too much emphasis on methodologies at a price of syllabus design.

Professor William F. Mackey perhaps has been most sensible when he draws our attention to ‘**an autonomous discipline of language teaching**’ of which he calls it “**the science of language didactics**” (**Mackey**, 1966 : 13). This is what he has to say :

*It is likely that language teaching will continue to be a child of fashion in linguistics and psychology until the time it becomes an autonomous discipline which uses these related sciences instead of being used by them. To become autonomous it will, like any science, have to weave its own net, so as to fish out from the oceans of human experience and natural phenomena only the elements it needs, and ignoring the rest, be able to say*

*with the ichthyologist of Sir Arthur Eddington, ‘What my net can’t catch isn’t fish.’*

We’ve *ipso facto* woven our net and proposed a discipline of the ‘**New ELT Methodology-cum-Curriculum Design**’ (**Brudhiprabha & Trikosol**, forthcoming) as a handy tool for you. Hence you’re invited to cast your net wide at your own convenience and make sure that not any single fish can escape. However, David Eskey (1976 : 30) was quick to caution us that :

*“language teaching can provide any theory of language with the test of the real world, where language, as a form of human behavior, remains a hard fish to catch in anybody’s net”*

We hereby beg the ‘**Faculty of Humanities, SWU**’, our **Alma Mater**, for revitalising the teaching of Thai & English in short order-and we shall be delighted to avail ourselves of running workshops on our ‘**New ELT Methodology-cum-Curriculum Design**’ if you so wish.



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