

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

We are now in the age of globalization. It is the age of information technology and communication for international cooperation creating many new developments in telecommunications. Information in this age can be transmitted throughout the world easily and rapidly.

English is the international language used in most countries in the world, playing a significant role as a tool of worldwide communication. Nowadays, it is commonly accepted that people's cultural background influences their communication behavior. Byram et al. (1994) stated that culture can be used as an instrument in the processes of communication when culturally determined behavioral conventions are taught.

Second language learning is also second culture learning as Brown (1992:33) has stated. Likewise, in teaching language, culture must also be taught. Montgomery and Reid-Tomas (1994) pointed out that culture has taken an important place in language teaching and learning studies. Most textbooks for Thai students are imported from foreign countries like the United States and Britain, such as Compass, English For The Changing World, Discoveries, Trio, Blueprints Intermediate, Seventh Impression, and Odyssey: A Communicative Course In English. Khantasisit (1991 : 218 ) found that textbooks don't offer any explanations about the words or sentences which refer to the concepts of culture. Both teachers and students in Thailand have problems in teaching and learning English because the books are not especially written for Thai learners and cross-cultural understanding seems to be the main problem.

#### **Rationale for the Study**

Some researchers claim that cultural learning positively affects students' success in foreign language learning. One of the well-known characteristics of modern approaches to second language learning is the view that successful second language acquisition (SLA) is accompanied by second culture acquisition (SCA)

(Schumann 1978). It seems clear that learner's acquisition of communicative competence must involve more than the command of the grammatical structures of the target language and a mastery of its phonology. The learner must also acquire new cultural knowledge and a set of culture-specific constraints on linguistic behavior.

One of the latest imported English language texts used in Thai secondary schools is Compass 1 (Imbert and others, 1995). Most of the contents in Compass 1 concern situations in England. Thai teachers who have never been exposed to foreign countries, especially Britain and the United States have problems with cross-cultural understanding. Even those who have had experiences in the two countries have problems in understanding British and American cultures. Agadmeck (1996:62) said that the English textbooks are not especially written for Thai teachers, so teachers need to understand all cultural aspects, which appear in the textbooks to help students understand the texts better.

✓ In the classroom, a teacher is the important person. According to Meelucksana (1987: 3), teachers have a very important role to direct students to understand culture. If the teachers understand western cultures superficially, the students will have problems in comprehending language background. ✓

Acknowledging the importance of the cultural information in texts now widely used, the researcher plans to study the English teachers' background knowledge and understanding of cultural contents in Compass 1 as a data base for a supplementary teachers' guidebook. Lessard-Clouston (1999) stated that there are still aspects of culture in L2 and FL education that need further research and understanding. It is hoped that this research will add to the body of knowledge on Western culture needed for understanding and acquiring English.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every time that the textbook or the teacher mentions a word or refers to something that the Thai student does not understand culturally or the student misunderstands because its cultural content differs from his native patterns, there is an immediate need to deal with the cultural difference involved. This need is present

because there will be no real learning of a language without understanding the patterns and value of the culture of which it is a part. Fries (1955:14) stated this strongly:

To deal with the culture and life of a people is not just an adjunct of a practical language course, something alien and apart from its main purpose, to be added or not as time and convenience may allow, but an essential feature of every stage of language learning.

In order to make English teaching and learning successful, the teachers need to understand the cultural content involved in the textbooks. A study about the teacher's problem in understanding cultural contents in English textbooks in seventeen topics by Somsakyothin (1994) revealed that the teachers had difficulty understanding cultural contents on various topics, such as education, sports, places, etc. And her suggestion for further study was that a study should be conducted about cultural contents in the other English textbooks.

Compass 1 (Imbert and others 1995) is one of the latest imported English language texts used in Thai secondary schools. Since 1995, thirty-eight schools in the Democratization of Lower Secondary Education Project of the Office of Phitsanulok Provincial Primary Education have used Compass 1 as the principal textbook. No one had studied this textbook before, so the researcher wanted to find out which topics of the cultural contents the teachers lack background knowledge and understanding about. In order to develop a handbook of cultural contents for topics for which it is found that more than 20% of the teachers surveyed lack background knowledge and understanding.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the English teachers' background knowledge and understanding of cultural contents in Compass 1. Consequently, this study attempts to answer the following research question:

What are the topics in terms of cultural and background knowledge in Compass 1 that the teachers do not know and understand?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the English teachers' background knowledge and understanding of British/American cultural contents which appear in Compass 1, to raise awareness in teachers that some cultural aspects of Thai and British/American are different. Equally important, the information obtained can be applied directly as guidelines for developing English teaching because it will help teachers understand cultural contents presented in Compass 1.

Therefore, this research will be of great benefit to English teachers using Compass 1.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The present study is limited to studying of 46 teachers in the expanding secondary schools in Phitsanulok who use Compass 1 as textbook. A test of cultural contents will be used in this study. The test developed by the researcher was used as the instrument for data collection. This study does not cover other variables concerning instructors or methods of instruction, size or location of the school.

### **Definition of Terms**

To clarify particular terms that will be used in this study, the following definitions are provided:

**Background knowledge:** the teachers' ideas and understanding of Western culture as related to the words and topics in Compass 1.

**Cultural contents:** knowledge of British/American culture appearing in Compass 1.

**English teachers:** the English teachers who teach in expanding secondary schools under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Provincial Primary Education, Phitsanulok and use Compass 1 as the textbook.