

## The Role of Personal Factors in 'Communication Mobility' Development of Thai and Russian Professionals in BELF Context

OLGA MARINA

*National Research University Higher School of Economics,  
Russian Federation*

KRICH RAJPRASIT

*International College for Sustainability Studies  
Srinakharinwirot University  
Thailand  
krich@g.swu.ac.th*

### ABSTRACT

*With the aim of attempting to attain particular communicative goals, Communication Mobility (CM) can be viewed as one of the key elements in the complex construct of professional communicative competence in terms of oral English proficiency. CM has been proposed as an ability to employ a set of specific communicative strategies to facilitate professional communication, particularly among non-native English speakers. This preliminary study aims to identify perceived CM levels among Thai and Russian professionals working in international companies; to investigate possible correlation between personal factors (i.e. age, work experience, their perceived level of oral English proficiency, frequency of their attendance at meetings conducted in English, and frequency of English usage in their workplace) and CM; to compare these factors and the conditions in which CM may be developed among these two groups; and to predict the possibility of the development of CM. A quantitative method was employed and responses to the specifically designed questionnaire were obtained from 60 participants. The findings revealed that Russian participants were rated as very good users of CM, while Thai participants were only rated as fair CM users. In general terms, for both groups, only the frequency of English language use in the workplace was found to correlate with the perceived CM. The frequency of English language use in their workplaces was the only factor for the Thai participants to predict the development of CM. Such findings help in designing ESP courses which attempt to simulate workplace communicative situations, often seen as problematic and uncertain.*

*Keywords: communication strategies; communication mobility; workplace communication; Business English as a Lingua Franca; personal factors*

### INTRODUCTION

The combination of increased globalization, information overload and the expansion of international relations have resulted in the existence of a global community. Furthermore, a growing number of multinational firms have been established worldwide, and professionals from different countries have increased opportunities to work together, using the English language or Business English as a Lingua Franca for the purpose of professional communication. This phenomenon reflects the pervasive and powerful role of the English language and communication among professionals in the international workplace giving them 'an edge in the workplace' and serving as 'a global status marker' (Quinto 2015, p. 10). Language users in this professional domain strive for a more efficient use of resources, including time, money, and overall win-win scenarios between businesses (Kankaanranta 2010). Thus, the specific context of intercultural professional communication dictates specific pragmatic requirements for communicative competence. In comparison to an interpersonal and mono-cultural context, the chances of misunderstandings occurring in such a context increase, as the elements of intercultural discourse do not always meet the expectations of the speakers. The professional sphere also adds extra linguistic and non-linguistic contextual

dimensions (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011). Ineffective communication may cause personal misunderstandings, and result in a lower rate of organisational productivity, and even obstruct industrial growth. In this way, communicative mastery can be seen as a specific professional strategic resource, regardless of the mother tongue of the English speakers.

Studies conducted in both Thailand and Russia have identified the barriers to and needs of international business communication conducted in the English language. Non-native English speaking professionals from these two nations report encountering particular difficulties in a variety of professional contexts in linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. In the Thai context, Chitpupakdi (2014) found that the executive officers of an international carpet company that merged with a US company had significant problems with listening and speaking skills when dealing with customers from different countries. Pratoomrat and Rajprasit (2014) discovered that despite the fact that listening and speaking skills were an essential requirement of their employment, the employees in these companies encountered problems with the use of these skills. According to Epifanova and Hild (2015), Thai office and managerial staff encountered the problem of complete or partial misunderstandings in cross-cultural business communication as social and cultural norms have an effect on their speaking, and the lack of shared references points makes their communication difficult.

Verapornvanichkul (2011) identified the problems in terms of oral communication skills, and apprehension about communication among the Thai employees of an auditing firm dealing with English speaking clients. The major causes of such problems were infrequent use of English in their daily lives and nervousness about speaking English. Jeharsae (2012) studied a group of Thai employees working with native English speaking customers from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA, and another group working with non-native English speakers from Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. The former group experienced difficulties with listening comprehension and the appropriate use of grammar, while the latter group faced problems with a number of aspects including cultural awareness and fluency, together with correct grammar usage and listening comprehension. However, both these groups employed oral communication strategies such as asking customers directly about what they did not understand, making requests for clarification, paraphrasing and using generalizations in order to overcome communication problems.

On the other hand, the problem that the Russian professionals encountered most frequently in terms of international business communication was the non-linguistic factor of cultural awareness. Balykina (2015) claimed that the major barrier in face-to-face interaction was the cultural dimension. As a result, the Russian professionals need to identify and pursue a culturally responsive strategy which is the most suitable for a specific environment, as well as take into account the individual and structural aspects. The researcher ascertained that understanding the essence of cultural differences could help Russian professionals to navigate a variety of cross-cultural business communication situations. Kryzhko (2015) explored intercultural business communication between German and Russian employees. The results of this research revealed three possible patterns of interpretation: the attribution of the individual characteristics of their counterparts, the attribution of the particular historical and socio- environmental context of their counterparts, and the attribution of the individual characteristics of the participants. Okhotnikova, Rasskazova and Verbitskaya (2015) claimed that the grammar translation method of teaching English, which is still prevalent today in Russia, is one of the problems which lead to academics being unable to use their language knowledge for actual professional communication.

Based on the problems identified in the Thai and Russian professional contexts, the present study is focused on the oral mode of international professional communication. The term ‘professional communication’ is used instead of business communication, due to the fact

that at present, both the commercial and non-commercial aspects of professional communication are more likely to be found in non-personal international communication situations. Besides, the mode of international professional communication is predominantly either oral (Rogerson-Revell 2007, Wozniak 2010) or multimodal, which presupposes an interplay between productive skills (i.e. writing and speaking) (Louhiala-Salminen 2002). In particular, professional communicative competence is seen as a complex construct, in which the shared core of English language knowledge is inseparable from a wider range of skills and abilities. With regard to the purposes of this study, the key concepts include communication as an interactive social activity (Harris 1987), and a communicative situation as a combination of a specific time, place, activity and the people involved in the dialogue, which makes it both unique (Harris 1987), and dynamic (Celce-Murcia 2007).

In the following section, communication strategies, the focal concepts of communication mobility, and the similarities and difference between communication strategies and communication mobility are to be discussed.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

A number of researchers such as Bialystok (1990) and Dörnyei and Scott (1995) have suggested that non-native speakers should use a variety of communication strategies (CSs) of a problem-solving nature in order to overcome communication problems in both the academic and professional contexts (Chuanchaisit & Prapphal 2009; Omar, Embi & Yunus 2012; Kim Hua, Nor & Mohd 2012). CSs may be grouped into two categories: product-oriented and process-oriented strategies. The former are psychological processes to compensate for linguistic deficiencies (Bialystok 1990) whereas the latter are communication maintenance strategies used to keep the channels of communication open during times of difficulty, for example, by compensating in order to gain more time (Cook 1993). According to the revised CSs Taxonomy, the manner of addressing communication problems falls into three basic strategies: direct strategies, indirect strategies and interactional strategies.

## COMMUNICATION MOBILITY (CM)

### THE ORIGIN OF CM

Communication mobility (CM) has been proposed as an ability to employ a set of specific communicative strategies to facilitate professional communication, particularly among non-native English speakers, in order to achieve their communicative goals in an international context (Marina & Smirnova 2013). CM is grounded in the complexity of the structure of communicative language ability (CLA) as well as the notion of uncertainty, and the problematic nature of professional communicative situations. CLA, which employs knowledge of and competence in the target language, is an essential element of oral communication. It is claimed that CLA is comprised of factors including language competence, strategic competence, and the psycho-physiological mechanisms involved in the actual execution of language (Bachman 1990; Widdowson 1983).

Besides these linguistic aspects, professional communication exists in a context involving a specific time, place, and activity, as well as communication situations performed by individuals who all have unique personal characteristics. Young (2010) includes such factors as the physical, spatial, temporal, historical, social, interactional, institutional, and political frames of practice as dimensions of the communication framework. As a result, any given communication context is not only unique, but dynamic (Harris 1987; Celce-Murcia 2007). In addition, communicative situations do not seem to repeat themselves, which adds a dimension of uncertainty and/or unpredictability, which may in turn lead to a problematic

communication stage. Makhmutov (1972) defines problematic situations as a mental state of intellectual difficulty that arises when new facts are unable to be explained with existing knowledge, or when new actions are unable to be executed through the use of familiar methods.

Thus, professional intercultural communication is the point at which the following three areas converge: communicative competence, personal factors and the nature of the communication context, resulting in a complex interplay of the elements. A communication breakdown may occur in any one of these areas, thus creating a problematic situation in need of resolution (Marina & Smirnova 2013). According to the aforementioned, a model of the situation of professional intercultural communication in a foreign language may be seen as follows:

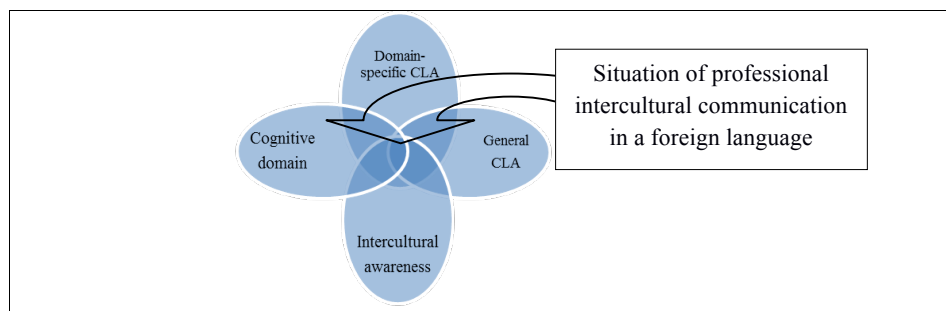


FIGURE 1. A model of the situation of professional intercultural communication in a foreign language

### CM CHARACTERISTICS

The concept of CM is reflected in its problem-solving nature. CM aims to enable communicators, particularly non-native speakers of English, to achieve their communicative goals in the international professional context, which can be characterized by heightened levels of communication problems. CM may also be used to refer to the ability of communicators to use a set of specific strategies for problem-solving in different communicative encounters. Each strategy consists of tactics which individually support communicators in an effective communicative approach, as shown below in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Communication mobility: Strategies and tactics

Strategies		Tactics
1. Diagnostic: Identifying and assessing the communicative situation		An ability to:
		1.1 Understand if he/she has a problem in communicating with a person/people in a particular workplace situation.
		1.2 Understand what the problem is about (the participants, location, time, changes in circumstances etc.).
		1.3 Understand if it is easy or difficult to solve the problem.
		1.4 Understand the nature of the problem (e.g. professional, cross-cultural, language knowledge etc.).
		1.5 Predict how the situation will develop.
2. Schema search: Reactivating communication experience (professional, interpersonal, intercultural) in a new environment		1.6 React fast to solve the problem.
		An ability to:
		2.1 Compare the new communication situation with those that they have previously experienced.
		2.2 Turn to the knowledge and means of previously successfully solved communicative problem.
		2.3 Identify the ways in which each communicative situation is different.
		2.4 Avoid stereotypes and habitual communicative behavior.
	2.5 Overcome the state of frustration and uncertainty caused by an inability to solve communication problems using familiar methods.	
	2.6 Accept responsibility for applying new means of communicative problems to create solutions.	

3. Observation strategy: Gaining problem-solving experience from observing instances of problem-solving in communicative situations	2.7	React quickly to solve problems. An ability to:
	3.1	Analyse how other people might solve a similar problem
	3.2	Think of other possible options that people might use to solve communication problems.
	3.3	Evaluate how my own options differ from the other means of solving the problem under observation.
	3.4	Identify the best method to solve the problem under observation..
4. Individual active strategy: Searching for a solution to a problem by obtaining information from their communication partner or partners.	3.5	Perform the analysis quickly during the observation period. An ability to:
	4.1	Identify the communication difficulties caused by a lack of knowledge.
	4.2	Discover solutions to communication problems by asking their communication partner or partners for immediate help.
	4.3	Seek assistance from communication partner or partners to identify the sources of missing information.
	4.4	Think of the steps required to solve particular types of problems.
5. Interactive strategy: Finding a solution to a problem by working with a communication partner or partners.		An ability to:
	5.1	Formulate possible options to overcome communication difficulties.
	5.2	Collaboratively search for the solutions to communication problems: 5.2.1: in the external environment; 5.2.2: in the experiences of a partner or partners. 5.2.3 in the experience of other people;
	5.3	Collaboratively design a problem-solving algorithm.
	5.4	React quickly to find a solution.
<b>Strategies</b>		<b>Tactics</b>
6. Implementation strategy: Implementing a devised solution.		An ability to:
	6.1	Apply found solutions in order to solve communicative problems.
	6.2	Monitor and self-monitor the communication process with the aim of problem-solving.
	6.3	Reject ineffective solutions.
	6.4	Return to using one of the previously mentioned strategies in the event of ineffective communication.
7. Analytical strategy: Analysing the effectiveness of the applied solution	6.5	React quickly in conversation. An ability to:
	7.1	Evaluate the effectiveness of an implemented solution.
	7.2	Compare several problem-solving options with the goal of identifying an optimal strategy for future use.

### SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION MOBILITY

The primary purpose of putting forward both CSs and CM is to provide speakers in the sphere of professional communication with effective devices to deal with communication problems in typical communicative situations in which the English language is used as a medium. Besides, they both tend to benefit non-native speakers who intend to reach their communicative goals in the academic and the professional arenas. Though CSs and CM share a number of similarities, there are differences between them.

Both CSs and CM are process-oriented that is, the strategies are used through specific tactics during a course of communication with the objective of achieving a particular communicative goal. They are also problem-management-related and cooperation-related. The primary aim of communicative goals is to solve communication problems in terms of foreign language use. Additionally, cooperation and assistance from interlocutors may be necessary for successful mutual understanding. Moreover, users of both CSs and CM require an awareness of their ongoing communicative situations being problematic or not. Once a problem is found, the interlocutors need to react promptly towards finding the solution (See Table 2).

TABLE 2. Communication strategies vs. communication mobility

Communication Strategies (Dörnyei & Scott, 1995)	Communication Mobility
	1. Diagnostic: Identifying and assessing a communicative situation
1. Direct strategies: (meaning-related) Resource deficit-related strategies, own-performance problem-related strategies, other-performance problem-related strategies	2. Schema search: Reactivating a communication experience (professional, interpersonal, intercultural) in a new environment
2. Indirect strategies: (problem-management-related) Processing time pressure-related strategies, own-performance problem-related strategies, other-performance problem-related strategies	3. Observation strategy: Gaining problem-solving experience from observing instances of problem saving behavior in communicative situations
3. Interactional strategies: (cooperative-related) Resource deficit-related strategies, own-performance problem-related strategies, other-performance problem-related strategies	4. Individual active strategy: Searching for solutions to a problem by obtaining information from a communication partner or partners.
	5. Interactive strategy: Finding a solution to a problem by working with a communication partner or partners.
	6. Implementation strategy: Implementing a devised solution
	7. Analytical strategy: Analysing the effectiveness of an applied solution

However, there are certain aspects in which CM differs significantly from CSs. First, CM is geared toward communicative behavior rather than language behavior. In other words, CM strives to develop a comprehensive framework of strategies which allow the user to become a successful communicator in uncertain situations, while CSs are mostly linguistic-oriented, or a compensation for linguistic deficiencies. Second, CM is employed when individuals experience performance problems in terms of their communicative behavior. On the other hand, CSs are used when an individual faces a resource deficient, own-performance problem and/or other-performance problem, such as the speech of their interlocutors. Third, CM requires analytical thinking skills and immediate responses.

According to the focal concept, an initial solution has to be created immediately when an individual has a communicative problem which is more often than not time sensitive, and applied through the use of seven strategies. If the first solution fails to solve the problem, another solution must be rapidly developed. The third and fourth steps in this process are only likely to be necessary until the attainment of communicative goals. In this sense, the use of CM can be compared to a cycle independent on the nature of the problem itself thus universally applicable. Furthermore, the users of CM require analytical thinking skills in order to analyse the effectiveness of their solution. In contrast, the use of CSs depend on the nature of problem, that is, an individual only uses the appropriate elements of CSs in order to solve specific problems. Still, there has been limited in-depth research conducted on the factors which may influence communication mobility development, as well as a lack of further exploration regarding the issue of its teachability.

#### THE STUDY

The purposes of this study were to identify the level of perceived communication mobility among non-native English speaking Thai and Russian professionals in the BELF context, and to examine the correlation between the development of CM and the personal factors of the professionals involved, such as age, work experience, perceived oral English language

proficiency, their frequency of attending meetings, and the amount of English language usage in their workplace. A survey was carried out on the perceived level of CM among Thai and Russian professionals working for international companies in the Bangkok and Moscow metropolitan areas. All the participants had to use a combination of the Thai, Russian and English languages as a medium of communication in their respective workplaces. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the perceived level of communication mobility among Thai and Russian professionals working for international companies and agencies, or companies with international connections in the Bangkok metropolitan area, Thailand and the Moscow metropolitan area, Russian Federation?
2. How does the perceived level of communication mobility correlate with the personal factors of Thai and Russian professionals, including age, work experience, perceived oral English language proficiency, the frequency of their attendance at meetings, and the frequency of English language use in their workplaces?
3. Which personal factors may predict the perceived level of communication mobility of a professional individual?

## METHODOLOGY

In order to process the collected data, as well as gain a greater understanding of the development of communication mobility, and its relationship with the variables, a quantitative method was employed in this preliminary study. The purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants in this study. The criteria of selecting samples were that the respondents were working for international companies or agencies in the Bangkok metropolitan area in Thailand and the Moscow metropolitan area in Russian Federation, which is the source of the BELF context, that their positions require interaction in English as a working language, and their companies have a large number of employees (approximately 500 staff members). In Thailand, four anonymous companies were selected which were a Japanese Automotive manufacturing company, an international oil and gas company, an international airline company and an international distributing company of specialty chemicals and-ingredients. In the Russian Federation the Moscow offices of Siemens, Cobra Automotive Technologies S.p.a., CAPEX/OPEX (oil industry), a Russian steel company and financial consulting company were contacted. The latter two companies wished to stay anonymous but the information is available on request.

## INSTRUMENTATION

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study, the questionnaire was based on the structural components of communicative competence, personal factors, and the nature of the previously discussed communication context. The questionnaire included four parts: an inquiry about demographic data, including age, gender, and work experience; items based on the predominant mode of international and professional oral communication (consisting of 14 items with questions such as ‘How often do you attend meetings conducted in English?’); their level of oral proficiency in the English language (consisting of 50 items based on Common European Framework of Reference for Languages with questions such as ‘When you express your opinions, how intelligible is your speech?’); and the CM strategies based on Marina and Smirnova (2013)’s framework (comprising 36 items with questions such as ‘How well do you assess communicative situations as being problematic or non-problematic?’), which was originally in English, before being translated into Russian and Thai. A five-point Likert scale

was employed, with a range from 5 (a very good user/very high level/always) to 1 (a very poor user/ very low level/never). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was at .979.

#### DATA COLLECTION

After receiving permission to collect data from the international companies identified, a questionnaire was distributed directly to the participants at the end of 2014. The questionnaires were given to 30 Thai and 36 Russian professionals working for international companies. The duration of the procedure was two weeks. The participants were also provided with an introduction to the research and the objectives of the research, and were also asked whether or not they were willing to respond to the questionnaire. The returned questionnaires were checked; and while 100% of the completed questionnaires from the Thai participants were returned, only 83% of the Russian participants completed their questionnaires in full.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

After the returned questionnaires were checked, they were all determined to be valid samples. SPSS Version 16.0, was used for descriptive statistics, such as the percentage, mean and standard deviation to analyse the demographic information of the participants; Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to establish the significance of the correlation between variables in the study; an independent t-test was used to identify the differences between the variables in the study; and multiple regression analysis was used to establish which personal traits contributed the most to the development of CM.

### RESULTS

#### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

According to the demographic variables reported, the participants consisted of 30 Thai professionals from 4 international companies, and 30 Russian professionals from 4 international companies and agencies. The mean age of Thai participants was 41, while the mean age of the Russian participants was just 21. Similarly, the average work experience of the former (201 months, or 16 years and 9 months) was also considerably higher than the latter (70 months, or 5 years and 10 months). Also, the frequency of English language use in both Thai and Russian workplace communication is shown Table 3.

TABLE 3. Frequency and percentage of the demographic variables of the professionals

Variable	Thai			Russian		
	N	%	$\bar{x}$	N	%	$\bar{x}$
Age (years)			41			29
Work experience (months)			201			70
Frequency of language use						
Every working day	10	33.30		15	50.00	
Almost every working day (5-6 days)	13	43.30		10	33.30	
Once a week	2	6.70		2	6.70	
Once a month	-	-		2	6.70	
Less than once a month	5	16.70		1	3.30	
Frequency of attendance at meetings conducted in English						
Every working day	4	13.30		3	10.00	
Almost every working day (5-6 days)	2	6.70		5	16.70	
Once a week	2	6.70		12	40.00	
Once a month	4	13.30		7	23.30	
Less than once a month	18	57.00		3	10.00	



Firstly, most of the Thai and Russian professionals were required to use English either almost every working day (5-6 days), or every working day, even though the Russian professionals tended to use it more often. Secondly, the participants reported different results about the frequency of their attendance at meetings conducted in English. In fact, 60% of the Thai participants attended meetings conducted in English less than once a month, while 90% of the Russian respondents participated in such meetings either once a month or even more frequently.

#### PERCEIVED ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

In general, the perceived oral English proficiency level of the Russian professionals was higher than a ‘good’ user level, (= 4.00) while the Thai participants were ranked at a ‘fair’ user level (=3.24). With regard to the comparative strengths of the Thai and Russian professionals, the Thai participants were more effective at expressing their opinions in English (= 3.38), while the Russian participants were more effective at creating English sentences (= 4.19) (See Table 4).

TABLE 4. Perceived oral English proficiency of Thai and Russian professionals

Oral English proficiency	Thai			Russian		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
Ability 1: Ability to express opinions	3.38	.715	good	4.15	.729	good
Ability 2: Ability to respond during communicative events	3.05	.853	fair	4.05	.755	good
Ability 3: Ability to create sentences	3.33	1.112	fair	4.19	.739	good
Ability 4: Ability to use grammar	3.23	.996	fair	4.15	.795	good
Ability 5: Ability to use vocabulary	3.23	.902	fair	3.94	.880	good
Ability 6: Ability to produce the appropriate pronunciation, intonation and stress	3.19	1.111	fair	3.63	.915	good
Oral English proficiency	3.24	.875	fair	4.00	.711	good

#### PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION MOBILITY

The mean and standard deviation in terms of the perceived levels of communication mobility among Thai and Russian professionals in international companies were 3.31 and 4.24 out of 5 respectively. On average, the perceived CM levels of the Russian professionals were rated at a level of ‘very good’, which is considerably higher than that of the Thai professionals, rated at a level of ‘fair’ (See Table 5).

TABLE 5. Perceived communication mobility of Thai and Russian professionals

Communication Mobility	Thai			Thai		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Agreement
Strategy 1: Diagnostic strategy	3.35	.717	fair	4.06	.517	good
Strategy 2: Schema search strategy	3.45	.725	good	4.39	.538	very good
Strategy 3: Observation strategy	3.23	.752	fair	4.25	.567	very good
Strategy 4: Individual active strategy	3.29	.858	fair	4.41	.452	very good
Strategy 5: Interactive strategy	3.34	.750	fair	4.14	.457	very good
Strategy 6: Implementation strategy	3.21	.717	fair	4.20	.491	very good
Strategy 7: Analytical strategy	3.23	.796	fair	4.25	.666	very good
Communication Mobility	3.31	.702	fair	4.24	.372	very good

An analysis of the data on the separate strategies used by Thai participants revealed that, according to the mean and standard deviations, the participants considered themselves to be able to use a single strategy (Strategy 2) at a ‘good’ level out of the seven strategies available. The levels of the perceived abilities of the students to use Strategy 1, Strategy 5,

Strategy 4, Strategy 3, Strategy 7, and Strategy 6 were only rated at a level of ‘fair’. However, the Russian data revealed an opposite tendency, as the analysis of each separate strategy provided different results. The mean and standard deviation of Strategies 2 to 7 showed that the participants considered themselves to be using those strategies at a ‘very good’ level. The only strategy which was ranked at a ‘good’ level was Strategy 1.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VARIABLES AND PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION MOBILITY

##### COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AND AGE

There is no significant correlation between the age and the perceived communication mobility of either the Thai or the Russian professionals in general terms. For the Thai participants it holds true for all the separate strategies. However, for the Russian participants, even though the age factor had no significant correlation with CM in general terms, there was a significant correlation found between the two variables in Strategy 6 or Implementation strategy ( $p=.05$ ) (See Table 6).

TABLE 6. The relationship between the perceived CM levels and the age of Thai and Russian professionals

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	Perceived CM
Mean age 41 years (Thai)	.061 .754	.128 .509	.194 .314	.146 .450	.112 .562	.061 .754	-.120 .535	.089 .646
Pearson Correlation Sig.								
Mean age 29 years (Russian)	.132 .488	.282 .131	.077 .685	.051 .788	.048 .800	.428* .018	.189 .316	.241 .199
Pearson Correlation Sig.								

\* $p < .05$ .

Note: (S1) Strategy 1, (S2) Strategy 2, (S3) Strategy 3, (S4) Strategy 4, (S5) Strategy 5, (S6) Strategy 6, (S7) Strategy 7

##### COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AND WORK EXPERIENCE

There was no significant correlation found between the length of work experience and the perceived communication mobility of Thai and Russian professionals in general terms. However, there was a difference in terms of the results; for the Thai respondents there was no significant correlation between work experience and perceived levels of CM for separate strategies, but for the Russian participants there was a significant correlation between the two variables found in Strategy 6 (Implementation strategy),  $p = .05$  (See Table 7).

TABLE 7. The relationship between the perceived CM levels and the work experience of Thai and Russian professionals

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	Perceived CM
Average work experience (Thai) 201 months								
Pearson Correlation	.053	.130	.190	.183	.412	.090	-.085	.108
Sig.	.784	.503	.323	.342	.462	.641	.660	.575
Average work experience (Russian) 70 months								
Pearson Correlation	.188	.212	.175	.063	-.172	.374*	.101	.191
Sig.	.319	.260	.355	.742	.363	.042	.296	.312

\* $p < .05$ .

Note: (S1) Strategy 1, (S2) Strategy 2, (S3) Strategy 3, (S4) Strategy 4, (S5) Strategy 5, (S6) Strategy 6, (S7) Strategy 7

COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AND PERCEIVED ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (OEP)

According to the analysis of the perceived oral English proficiency and levels of perceived communication mobility among Thai professionals, in general terms, and with regard to separate abilities and strategies, there was a significant correlation between their proficiency and CM levels ( $p = .000$ ) (See Table 8). On the other hand, the perceived oral English proficiency of the Russian participants had no significant correlation with their perceived communication mobility in general terms, or with regard to separate abilities and strategies (See Table 9).

TABLE 8. The relationship between the perceived CM levels and the perceived oral English proficiency levels (OEP) of Thai professionals

Pearson Correlation	CM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
CM													
OEP	.850**												
1 S1	.932***												
2 S2	.939***	.936***											
3 S3	.941***	.872***	.878***										
4 S4	.941***	.837***	.846***	.893***									
5 S5	.962***	.841***	.845***	.883***	.900***								
6 S6	.906***	.762***	.763***	.793***	.824***	.934***							
7 S7	.847***	.698***	.722***	.727***	.768***	.860***	.903***						
8 A1	.777***	.729***	.702***	.751***	.741***	.781***	.662***	.657***					
9 A2	.769***	.679***	.662***	.733***	.796***	.768***	.671***	.702***	.854***				
10 A3	.864***	.804***	.797***	.826***	.887***	.825***	.729***	.688***	.760***	.837***			
11 A4	.738***	.709***	.666***	.690***	.799***	.705***	.580***	.604***	.813***	.908***	.831***		
12 A5	.806***	.779***	.764***	.733***	.805***	.777***	.680***	.626***	.731***	.811***	.830***	.907***	
13 A6	.724***	.686***	.691***	.701***	.776***	.670***	.559***	.540***	.598***	.790***	.759***	.850***	.874***

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Note: CM (1) Strategy 1 (S1), (2) Strategy 2 (S2), (3) Strategy 3 (S3), (4) Strategy 4 (S4), (5) Strategy 5 (S5), (6) Strategy 6 (S6), (7) Strategy 7 (S7)  
 OEP (8) Ability 1 (A1), (9) Ability 2 (A2), (10) Ability 3 (A3), (11) Ability 4 (A4), (12) Ability 5 (A5), (13) Ability 6 (A6)

TABLE 9. The relationship between the perceived CM levels and the perceived oral English proficiency levels (OEP) of Russian professionals

Pearson Correlation	CM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
CM													
OEP	-.055												
1 S1	.753***												
2 S2	.812***	.678***											
3 S3	.724***	.401*	.522**										
4 S4	.622***	.474**	.411*	.224									
5 S5	.628***	.279	.346	.346	.325								
6 S6	.772***	.387*	.473**	.591**	.454*	.454*							
7 S7	.696***	.380*	.364*	.561**	.309	.505**	.725***						
8 A1	-.022	.032	-.062	.035	.195	-.080	-.132	-.110					
9 A2	-.022	.031	.009	.046	.026	-.063	-.103	-.141	.876***				
10 A3	-.059	.047	-.078	-.041	.249	-.147	-.149	-.231	.854***	.797***			

11	A4	-.025	.167	-.203	.004	.263	-.084	-.175	-.020	.755***	.655***	.848***		
12	A5	-.216	-.089	-.192	-.105	.054	-.323	-.245	-.172	.709***	.755***	.808***	.722***	
13	A6	-.012	.120	-.068	.043	.254	-.146	-.200	-.061	.638***	.609***	.781***	.721***	.735***

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Note:** CM (1)Strategy 1 (S1), (2) Strategy 2 (S2), (3) Strategy 3 (S3), (4) Strategy 4 (S4), (5) Strategy 5 (S5), (6) Strategy 6 (S6), (7) Strategy 7 (S7)  
 OEP (8) Ability 1 (A1), (9) Ability 2 (A2), (10) Ability 3 (A3), (11) Ability 4 (A4), (12) Ability 5 (A5), (13) Ability 6(A6)

COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AND MEETING ATTENDANCE

In general terms, the frequency of attendance at meetings conducted in English had a significant correlation with the perceived communication mobility of Thai professionals ( $F_{7,30} = 2.861, p = .045$ ). In other words, the participants who attended meetings conducted in English more frequently tended to have a higher perceived level of CM than those who did not. In terms of individual strategies, the following three strategies were significantly correlated with the frequency of attending meetings held in English: Strategy 4: Individual active strategy ( $F_{7,30} = 3.416, p = .024$ ); Strategy 6: Implementation strategy ( $F_{7,30} = 2.970, p = .040$ ); and Strategy 7: Analytical strategy ( $F_{7,30} = 4.224, p = .010$ ). On the other hand, there was no significant correlation found between the frequency of attending meetings in English, and the perceived CM level of Russian professionals, both in general and in terms of the separate strategies (See Table 10).

TABLE 10. The relationship between the perceived CM levels and the frequency of attending meetings conducted in English among Thai and Russian professionals

Perceived communication mobility	Frequency of attendance at meetings conducted in English	$\bar{x}$	Thai		Russian		
			F-test	Sig.	$\bar{x}$	F-test	Sig.
Strategy 1	Every day	3.63	2.010	.125	4.28	.355	.838
	Almost every day	3.58					
	Once a week	3.17					
	Once a month	4.04					
	Less than once a month	3.08					
Strategy 2	Every day	3.57	1.836	.155	4.43	.905	.476
	Almost every day	3.57					
	Once a week	3.14					
	Once a month	4.18					
	Less than once a month	3.21					
Strategy 3	Every day	3.35	2.383	.080	4.07	2.006	.124
	Almost every day	3.50					
	Once a week	3.00					
	Once a month	4.05					
	Less than once a month	2.94					
Strategy 4	Every day	3.40	3.416*	.024	4.07	.789	.543
	Almost every day	3.80					
	Once a week	3.30					
	Once a month	4.35					
	Less than once a month	2.91					
Strategy 5	Every day	3.71	2.592	.062	3.94	1.740	.173
	Almost every day	3.75					
	Once a week	3.00					
	Once a month	4.13					
	Less than once a month	3.06					
Strategy 6	Every day	3.70	2.970*	.040	3.88	.537	.710
	Almost every day	3.70					
	Once a week	3.00					
	Once a month	3.90					

	Less than once a month	2.92			4.07		
Strategy 7	Every day	3.88	4.224*	.010	4.33	.156	.959
	Almost every day	4.00			4.20		
	Once a week	3.00			4.33		
	Once a month	4.00			4.21		
	Less than once a month	2.88			4.00		
Overall	Every day	3.58	2.861*	.045	4.14	.905	.476
	Almost every day	3.67			4.07		
	Once a week	3.10			4.36		
	Once a month	4.10			4.31		
	Less than once a month	3.02			4.03		

\* $p < .05$ .

COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AND FREQUENCY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE IN THE WORKPLACE

An analysis of the relationship between the frequency of language use in the workplace, and the perceived communication mobility shows that in general, the two variables had a significant correlation for both Thai ( $F_{7,30} = 5.175, p = .006$ ) and Russian professionals ( $F_{7,30} = 3.775, p = .016$ ). In terms of the use of separate strategies, the frequency of English language usage in the workplaces of the Thai respondents had a significant correlation with nearly all of the 7 strategies: (1) Diagnostic ( $F_{7,30} = 6.787, p = .002$ ); (2) Schema search ( $F_{7,30} = 3.378, p = .033$ ); (3) Observation ( $F_{7,30} = 4.734, p = .009$ ); (4) Individual active ( $F_{7,30} = 4.497, p = .011$ ); (5) Interactive ( $F_{7,30} = 4.468, p = .012$ ); and (6) Implementation ( $F_{7,30} = 4.059, p = .017$ ). In other words, participants with different levels of frequency of English language use in their workplaces will attain different levels of perceived CM. The participants who used the English language everyday may perceive themselves to be more successful in terms of using the 7 strategies, compared to the participants who used English less frequently in their workplaces. With regard to the Russian data concerning the use of separate strategies, only Strategy 6 or the Implementation strategy correlated significantly with the frequency of English language usage in the workplace. Overall, these findings may indicate that the perceived CM level is highest either overall or for separate strategies when the participants use the English language in their workplace on a daily basis (See Table 11).

TABLE 11. The relationship between the perceived CM levels and the frequency of language use in the workplace of Thai and Russian professionals

Perceived communication mobility	Frequency of language use in the workplace	Thai			Russian		
		$\bar{x}$	F-test	Sig.	$\bar{x}$	F-test	Sig.
Strategy 1	Every day	3.80	6.787**	.002	4.11	1.238	.320
	Almost every day	3.36			4.08		
	Once a week	3.42			3.58		
	Once a month	0.00			4.42		
	Less than once a month	2.40			3.33		
Strategy 2	Every day	3.81	3.378*	.033	4.40	2.006	.124
	Almost every day	3.44			4.44		
	Once a week	3.57			3.64		
	Once a month	0.00			5.00		
	Less than once a month	2.69			4.00		
Strategy 3	Every day	3.70	4.734**	.009	4.25	.795	.540
	Almost every day	3.15			4.24		
	Once a week	3.40			3.90		
	Once a month	0.00			4.80		
	Less than once a month	2.40			3.80		
Strategy 4	Every day	3.64	4.497*	.011	4.47	1.861	.149
	Almost every day	3.34			4.46		
	Once a week	3.80			4.10		

	Once a month	0.00			4.60		
	Less than once a month	2.24			3.40		
Strategy 5	Every day	3.67	4.468*	.012	4.11	.799	.537
	Almost every day	3.33			4.13		
	Once a week	3.92			3.92		
	Once a month	0.00			4.67		
	Less than once a month	2.47			4.00		
Strategy 6	Every day	3.52	4.059*	.017	4.23	3.775*	.016
	Almost every day	3.25			4.18		
	Once a week	3.50			3.50		
	Once a month	0.00			5.00		
	Less than once a month	2.36			3.60		
Strategy 7	Every day	3.60	2.094	.125	4.23	1.730	.175
	Almost every day	3.16			4.40		
	Once a week	3.50			3.25		
	Once a month	0.00			4.75		
	Less than once a month	2.60			4.00		
Overall	Every day	3.69	5.175**	.006	4.26	3.018*	.037
	Almost every day	3.31			4.27		
	Once a week	3.60			3.74		
	Once a month	0.00			4.75		
	Less than once a month	2.45			3.72		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

#### THE PREDICTION OF COMMUNICATION MOBILITY

Based on an analysis of the variance between the variables and the perceived level of communication mobility of Thai and Russian professionals, there is a linear relationship between the independent variables (i.e. age, the frequency of their attendance at meetings conducted in English, the frequency of English language usage in their workplace, and work experience) pertaining to the Thai respondents, and their perceived CM level ( $F_{(1,27)} = 12.031$ ,  $p = .002$ ). However, such a linear relationship was not found among the Russian participants. Thus, such variables may be able to accurately predict the perceived CM level of the Thai participants, but this is not the case with the Russian participants (See Table 12).

TABLE 12. An analysis of the variance for the variables and perceived CM levels of Thai and Russian professionals

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F	Sig.
(Thai)	1	4.413	4.413	12.031*	.002
Regression	26	9.536	.367		
Residual	27	13.949			
Total					
(Russian)	5	.474	.095	.642	.670
Regression	24	3.545	.148		
Residual	29	4.019			
Total					

\* $p < .05$ .

In terms of the Thai respondents, only the frequency of English use in the workplace was positively correlated with perceived communication mobility ( $R = .562$ ), with a multiple correlation of .562. Thus, only the frequency of the use of English in the workplace can explain the variance in CM levels among Thai professionals at 31.60%. To summarize, only one variable among the analysed factors, the frequency of English use in the workplace was able to predict the perceived CM levels of Thai professionals working in international companies. However, none of the variables positively correlated with the perceived CM levels of the Russian professionals ( $R = .344$ ). There was also no explanation for such variance in terms of CM levels

(11.80%) (See Table 13). In summary, variables such as age and the frequency of English use in the workplace were unable to predict the perceived CM levels of Russian professionals working for international companies.

TABLE 13. Standardized regression coefficients for the predictors in the regression model of Thai and Russian professionals

Variable	Perceived Communication Mobility			
	b	b	t-test	Sig.
(Thai)				
(Constant)	3.962		17.540	.000
Frequency of the language use in the workplace	-.291	-.562	-.3469*	.002
R =.562				
R <sup>2</sup> =.316				
R <sub>adjusted</sub> =.290				
(Russian)				
(Constant)	3.477		6.505	.000
Gender	.215	.277	1.197	.243
Age	.016	.397	1.173	.252
Work experience	.000	-.032	-.102	.919
Frequency of English language use in the workplace	-.040	-.113	-.517	.610
Frequency of attendance at meetings conducted in English	.007	.020	.088	.931
R =.344				
R <sup>2</sup> =.118				
R <sub>adjusted</sub> =-.066				

\*p < .05.

## DISCUSSION

In light of the four research questions, Table 14 has been drawn to summarise the findings of this study.

TABLE 14. Summary of the research results

Variable	Perceived Communication Mobility	
	Thai	Russian
Age	-	Partially (only Strategy 6: Implementation strategy)
Work experience	-	Partially (only Strategy 6: Implementation strategy)
Perceived oral English proficiency	+	-
Frequency of attending meetings conducted in English	+	-
Frequency of English language use in the workplace	+	+
Prediction of the variable influence		
Variance	Linear	-
Regression	Only the frequency of the use of English in the workplace	-

In order to answer the research questions, the findings of this study have been divided into three parts, as follows:

### THE PERCEIVED LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AMONG THAI AND RUSSIAN PROFESSIONALS

On average, Russian professionals working in international companies perceived their level of communication mobility at a higher level than their Thai counterparts. The data indicated a level of 'very good' (= 4.24) for the Russian respondents, and a 'fair' level (= 3.31) for the Thai

respondents. The mean scores of the Thai participants supported the results of previous research that defined the perceived CM level of a group of Thai professionals at 3.46, closer to the lower end of the band assigned to 'good' users (4.20 – 3.41) (Marina & Rajprasit 2014). It is worth noting that there were similarities as well as differences in terms of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two groups, with reference to the 7 strategies outlined in this research.

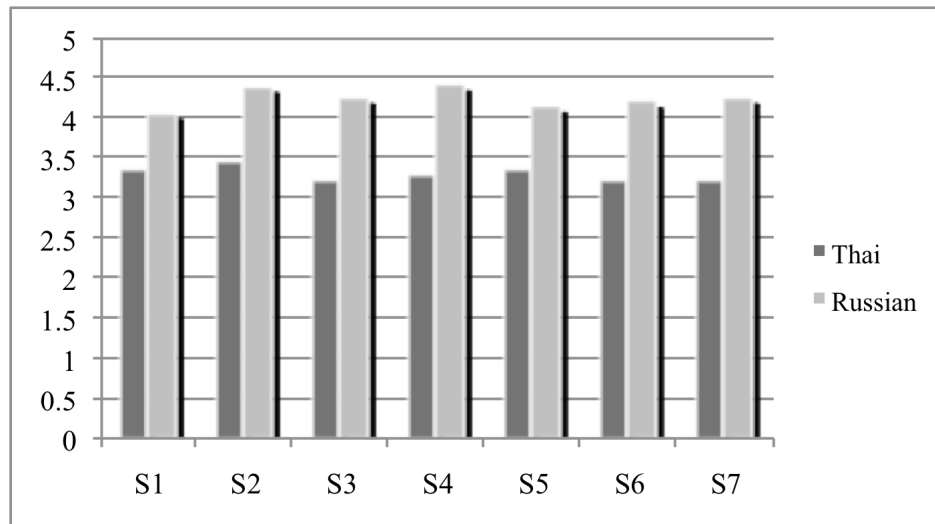


FIGURE 2. A comparison of perceived CM levels and strategy development among Thai and Russian professionals

According to Figure 2, in which S1-7 refer to the seven strategies, the most developed strategies for both groups seemed to be those that did not require the implementation of problem-solving actions, particularly Strategy 2 or Schema search. Also, both the Thai and Russian professionals admitted that they were not inclined to analyse their communicative experiences in terms of success or failure, or in order to improve their communicative skills. It is also worth noting that both groups shared some degree of indecisiveness in terms of applying the results of either their diagnostic strategies in the case of the Thai group, or observation strategies in the case of the Russian group, which both groups perceived as successful. The low implementation levels of the Thai respondents (= 3.21) were especially pronounced. Additionally, in terms of the Thai professionals, the data for all of the strategies that required individual action, such as searching for help, obtaining information from other sources, including Strategy 3 or the Observational strategy and Strategy 4 or the Individual active strategy, indicated a lower level of development for the group. On the contrary, the Russian respondents, on average, reported an inclination for individual rather than interactive actions.

One may attempt to interpret these differences in terms of the higher overall level of perceived CM development among Russian professionals, as well as the preferences for specific CM strategies among both Thai and Russian respondents by applying the individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance indices for Russian and Thai cultures. On the other hand, Hall's concept and/or Lewis's Model may also be applied. There are still a number of potential problems in terms of a straightforward cultural comparison. We have already pointed out the divergence of conclusions in different studies in the field of cross-cultural research. Moreover, the patterns observed in the present study may represent differences in self-reporting styles for both the Thai and the Russian participants. They may also reflect the influence of subgroups on intercultural variations, which can be observed in this study in terms of the fact that the average age of the Russian group was lower than that of the Thai group. Moreover, Izumi, Shiwaku and Okuda (2011) pointed out the importance of considering the



experience of living abroad for L2 learning strategies, and how it can increase the self-efficacy and self-confidence levels of the participants with regard to their L2 abilities. A solution for further research can be found through more unified sample subgroup characteristics, as well as involving observers from outside the cultures which are being involved.

Some may also argue that due to the self-reporting mode of the research, the data may not accurately reflect actual levels of communication mobility, which have yet to be measured. However, even a positive perception of one's own CM level may affect an individual's actual communicative performance, as established by Onwuegbuzie, Daley and Bailey (1999). Additionally, McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) stated that self-reporting seems to be a valid approach to measuring communicative competence, as well as useful in terms of assessing how competent a person thinks they are, as opposed to how competent they actually are. More significantly, their perception of their proficiency may also reveal the causes, or the outcomes of such perceptions.

#### THE CORRELATION BETWEEN PERCEIVED CM LEVELS AND PERSONAL FACTORS

A number of previous studies (Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham 2008) have all maintained that psycho-physiological and experiential personal factors – skills, attitudes, traits, age, academic achievements, a history of visiting foreign countries, prior high school experience, experience with a foreign language, perceived scholastic competence, and perceived self-worth – tended to affect communication. Communication mobility was defined initially as an individual personal factor in which all of the variables pertaining to the personal and socio-biographical characteristics of the subjects may explain the variance between their perceived and actual communication mobility.

However, one surprising finding was the fact that no correlation was found between age, work experience, and communication mobility, neither in general, nor for each strategy, with the exclusion of the Implementation strategy (Strategy 6) for the Russian respondents. The correlation between communication mobility, both perceived oral English proficiency, and frequently attending meetings in English was only partial, and the data analysis for the Russian professionals revealed none. More interestingly, for both groups, only the frequency of English language use in the workplace was found to correlate with communication mobility in general. In the case of the Thai professionals, the most favored strategies were Individual strategies (1-6). It should be also noted, that according to these findings, the development of the analytical level (Strategy 7) did not correlate with the frequency of English language use in the workplace, or in a communicative context, such as meetings conducted in English.

The analysis also revealed that one feature was shared by both groups of respondents: their perceived level of communication mobility, and the fact that they often speak English at work. These findings were consistent with previous research on Thai professionals (Marina & Rajprasit 2014) as well as Ezeiza's (2009) framework elements, which established that specific communicative competence can be developed in a professional context.

#### THE PERSONAL FACTORS PREDICTING PERCEIVED CM LEVELS

The regression analysis and standardised regression coefficients reflected the prospective association between the variables differently for Thai and Russian professionals. Only one variable, the frequency of English language use in the workplace, may predict the perceived communication mobility level of Thai professionals in international companies. This may be due to the nature of the professional context of communication itself, characterized by heightened problemativeness, forcing the participants in a communicative event into effectively utilizing their linguistic and non-linguistic resources. Additionally, this may suggest that the nature of the

communicative context, rather than individual characteristics, shape the self-perception of communication mobility competence. The more often the English language is used in the workplace, the more possibilities there are for the first six strategies to be developed. The analysis of the data on the Russian participants provided no explanation for the variance in communication mobility. It may mean that this particular ability, as perceived by Russian professionals, does not develop automatically with age, more work experience, or any of the other factors implying foreign language use; the English language proficiency of the Russian participants, and their use of English in different work contexts. Thus, it may be concluded that communication mobility might be considered a particular and separate ability, which can reveal situational communicative competence, and can be taught only in a specific situational context.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the perceived CM levels of Thai and Russian professionals were significantly different. The Russian participants were better users of CM in comparison to the Thai participants. Generally, the perceived CM levels of Thai participants correlated with their perceived levels of oral English proficiency, the frequency of their attendance at meetings held in English, and the frequency of their English usage in the workplace. However, only the frequency of English language use in the workplace correlated with the perceived CM levels of the Russian participants. In order to predict the CM development of both groups of professionals, the frequency of English language usage in their workplaces was only possible in the case of the Thai participants.

## PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the research may implicate some suggestions for teaching. First, communication mobility seems to be an independent ability which has its own developmental trajectory and demands special attention. First, it may not correlate with existing English language proficiency levels. The major implications for teaching are that this does not automatically presuppose the development of the ability to communicate successfully under stress. Second, it appears logical to suggest that CM can be developed in an individual, regardless of their age or amount of work experience. Third, it means that these strategies can be taught in a specifically designed context, which emulates certain key features of the workplace communication environment.

Thus, there may be a need for specific courses in the framework of English for Professional Communication courses, or specific teaching elements emulated in existing courses, which could be beneficial for students from different socio-biographical backgrounds or with different personal factors as well as ability levels in terms of foreign language mastery. There are a great number of skills required for workplace communication, which include immediacy in high-speed discussions and the ability to explain complex decisions made in the course of such discussions (Rogerson-Revell 2007); adaptability and flexibility (Raina & Pande 2012), or the ability to cope with ambiguity, time pressure, and stressful, real-life situations (Kaminskiene & Januilene 2006), and should be integrated into English for Professional Communication courses.

Finally, there are implications, which may not be generalized due to the limited scope of the research, still point at the specific role of an instructional context for the development of the Analytical strategy. This strategy is cited as the most pivotal in terms of successful problem-solving in communicative situations (Walker & Leary 2009). However, the findings revealed that this strategy may be difficult for professionals to develop naturally. Thus, special attention should be paid to this particular strategy through instruction, especially when teaching English for occupational purposes or in company language training.

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is preliminary research on perceived communication mobility, with a rather small number of participants (N = 60) and limited to a few international Thai and Russian companies (N = 8). Consequently, the results and the interpretation of these results are not meant to be conclusive and cannot be generalized in terms of all the Thai or Russian professionals working in international companies. Due to the limited scope of variables defined for this study, more detailed and comprehensive research may be required in order to thoroughly investigate the complex interplay of factors (e.g. gender, anxiety profile, and educational background) involved in intercultural communication in a professional context. Thus this study may serve as insights for the planning of a full scale qualitative research.

The field of teaching foreign languages may benefit from a more comprehensive investigation into the construct of communication mobility itself, which was found to be more complex than it initially appeared, as at first it was only used to assess the intercultural nature of a communicative situation. There is also a need to work out which assessment tools should be used to gauge CM levels, and which teaching methods may be used to go beyond the limitations of the problem-based approach.

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