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Stylistic creativity in Thai English fiction

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Thai English literature has not been widely recognized because of the controversial notion of ‘Thai English’. This paper thus investigates features of stylistic creativity in English short stories and novels written by Thai authors in order to identify indicators for a Thai variety of English. The features are interpreted using the approaches of World Englishes by Kachru and Strevens. It was found that the selected Thai writers highlight their English fiction with strategies of stylistic and textual innovations similar to those used by writers of other New Englishes but with uniquely indicative features for a developing non-native variety of English in the Expanding Circle: contextual and rhetorical nativization, thought patterns in Thai writing styles, Thai identity construction, multilingual code repertoire, transcultural creativity, localization of English literary forms, and Thai cultural loading of the English language. These characteristics can be found in a canon of Thai English literary discourse.

Keywords: stylistic creativity; Thai English; literary discourse; fiction

1. Introduction

Works of literature written in non-native varieties of English manifest localized forms of English and the ideologies of non-Anglo writers. Several genres of so-called ‘contact literature’ have arisen in the Outer Circle English, hence their distinct linguistic features are discussed in a large number of empirical studies. In contrast, only a few published studies on contact literatures in the Expanding Circle Englishes (henceforth ECE) can be found. The highest number belongs to studies in Thai English literature (Buripakdi, 2008; Chutisilp, 1984; Khotphuwiang, 2010; Watkhaolarm, 2005), while others are based on literatures of China English (Zhang, 2002) and of Egyptian English (Albakry & Hancock, 2008). Literatures in English by Thai and other writers in ECE countries – Argentina, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, and Mongolia – have been incorporated into a study by Kacso (2010). This would indicate a move towards the inclusion of Thai English literature and other ECE literatures in the discipline of World Englishes literature.

The notion of Thai English literature is likely to be unfamiliar to some scholars of English studies because the term ‘Thai English’ has not been widely accepted as an established variety. Moreover, literary and linguistic forms of English in Thailand have shown a slower development than those in postcolonial countries. Therefore, the extent to which Thai writers construct a literary discourse presenting their indigenousness variety of English in convergence with those in the Outer Circle but divergent from those in the Inner Circle has been questioned.

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Like others in ECE countries, Thai English writers create unique expression interwoven with unique stylistic and textual elements. The types of contexts, conventions, and rhetorical devices in their writing no doubt differ from those of native English literature because they depict a uniquely nativized literary discourse.

This study aims to analyze and describe features of stylistic creativity in Thai English fiction in order to determine whether they are indicative of Thai English literary discourse. Fiction is distinct from non-fiction and poetry as it embodies the everyday spoken discourse of characters in dialogues and narratives as well as the use of various literary techniques for effect. This results in a rich set of data requiring textual and pragmatic interpretation.

2. Studies in Thai English literary discourse

Chutisilp (1984), the pioneer researcher of Thai English literature, analyzed the English novel *Little Things* (1971) by Prajuab Thirabutana and other translated literary and non-literary texts. Using the Firthian framework of ‘context of situation’ (Firth, 1957) and her own approach, ‘formal and functional characteristics of Thai English’, the findings range from lexical and grammatical to stylistic innovations and she postulates that there are unique Thai English writing styles and forms of literary discourse. Likewise, Watkhaolarm (2005) examined discourse strategies in an autobiography *My Boyhood in Siam* (1940) by Kumut Chandruang and a novel *Until the Karma Ends: A Plot to Destroy Burma* (1996) by Pongpol Adireksarn using the Kachruvian framework (Kachru, 1987) and found that the two authors created writing styles that may be considered characteristic of a Thai variety of English. Their literary strategies are based more on lexical and thematic than syntactic and stylistic creativity, but they represent the development of Thai English literary discourse. In addition, Khotphuwiang (2010) examined rhetorical and ideological strategies in a novel *Monsoon Country* (1988) by Pira Sudham. The rhetorical framework employed Kachru’s (1987) and Watkhaolarm’s (2005) studies while the ideological framework was adapted from van Dijk’s (1997) *Discourse as Social Interaction*. The studies in the rhetorical framework provide lexi-co-semantic and stylistic strategies of novels while studies in the idealized framework relate to Thai values, identity, and attitudes. Khotphuwiang (2010) does not identify what a Thai variety of English is, but argues that this novelist represents a model of a Thai English bilingual writer. Unlike the three studies above, Buripakdi (2008) discusses the views of 20 Thai professional writers of fiction and non-fiction on their English. Nineteen authors agreed that their writing presents ‘Standard English’, not ‘Thai English’, which to them signifies a lower-standard discourse. Only one contended that his Thai English is an act of resistance to dominant discourse and ideology. Similarly, Kacso (2010) elicited perceptions of a Thai English writer, Pongpol Adireksarn, and other writers in the Expanding Circle on processes of literary craft and publishing. All seem to view that their writings indicate a branch of new English literature in addition to those in the Outer Circle.

We should note that the last two studies are not directly relevant to this present study due to their emphasis on the writers’ perspectives rather than the linguistic analysis of Thai English literary discourse, unlike the other studies. While the studies by Watkhaolarm (2005) and Khotphuwiang (2010) are similar in that they use the Kachruvian framework (1987) as their theoretical framework, subsequent frameworks for analyzing World Englishes literature, such as those developed by Kachru and Strevens, have not been used in any research on Thai English literature. This paper aims to make up for this gap.
3. Conceptual framework

Key concepts in Kachru’s (1987, 1992a, 1995, 2003) and Strevens’s (1982, 1987) approaches to World Englishes, which guide the analysis of the study, are outlined below.

A. Contextual and rhetorical nativization is theorized to be evident in creativity of bilinguals and in contact literature (Kachru, 1987). Nativization of context involves Asian and African historical and cultural presuppositions of literature rather than the Western and Christian–Jewish tradition of native English literature. Nativization of rhetorical strategies provides linguistic distinctiveness to the discourse type such as ‘Singaporeaneness’, the transcreation of native similes and metaphors, transferring devices for ‘personalizing’ speech interaction, transcreation of proverbs and idioms, and the use of culturally dependent speech styles and syntactic devices.

B. Linguistic realization of thought patterns in writing styles, adapted from an aspect in Kachru’s (1987) study, centers on paragraph structure and writing conventions of non-native English writers whose cognitive processes are patterned under the influence of vernacular styles.

C. Identity construction in English literary discourse stresses the nativization of ‘mantra’ or the messages/medium in literary texts of non-Anglophone writers in Asia (Kachru, 2003). This phenomenon points to Kachru’s (1987) concept of two types of nativization, which calls for a deeper stylistic interpretation of the ideology of linguistic and cultural patterns in non-native English literary texts. This approach requires three processes in identity construction – locating the bilingual’s creativity within linguistic and cultural pluralism that feature such speech communities; treating the linguistic construction as a cohesive text representing structural, discourse, and cultural hybridity; and distinguishing the bilingual’s competence in which a linguistic repertoire bears certain relations to textual structure. The use of mantra concerns not only political and social constructions of language but also philosophical and spiritual constructions via the use of Sanskritized or Arabic English patterns in sacred texts in order to manifest linguistic purity and bridge linguistic and cultural boundaries.

D. Multilingual code repertoire in literary creativity is adapted from ‘the trimodal approach to diversity’ of studying cultural contact and literary creativity in a multilingual society (Kachru, 1992a). The linguistic approach relates to registers, ‘mixing’ and ‘switching’ and paragraphing strategies, etc. The sociolinguistic approach embodies speech acts and addressing modes, etc. The literary approach encompasses new literary genres, genre expansion such as sonnet and blank verse, etc. As an example, this framework emphasizes the first approach via ‘code-mixing’ as the ‘convergence’ of interface between Punjabi and Hindi mixed in Indian English literary texts.

E. Transcultural creativity in literary canons is derived from Kachru’s (1995) work in which World Englishes literature contains three types of intercultural crossovers adopted from Smith’s (1992) study – intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. Moreover, translation equivalence, transfer, and transcreation are powerful stylistic devices. The second and third types involve literary discourses. Comprehensibility appears in speech communities in which members share identical literary, cultural, and religious canons via the processes of Sanskritization, Persanization, and Englishization. Readers need to comprehend a text in a variety of English within the situational context.
of another variety, especially to comprehend connotative meaning in cultural and religious terms. **Interpretability** concerns addressing speech communities in which members are culturally, sociolinguistically, and linguistically divergent.

**F. Localization of literary forms in English** is based on Strevens’s (1982) localized forms of English (LFEs) as emerging linguistic features of non-native English expressions in which local cultures are embedded. Certain forms of English convey localization that will be examined by lectal and varietal range because of direct relevance to literary discourse. Lectal range refers to a continuum of LFEs in acrolect, mesolect, and basilect varieties and the social interpretations of LFE speakers. Varietal range refers to a range of LFEs in different registers, formality–familiarity in different situations language choice, and the use of slang, colloquialism, swearing, abuse, and terms of endearment.

**G. Non-Anglo cultural loading of the English language** is adapted from cultural presuppositions in discourse strategies in World Englishes (Strevens, 1987). When the cultural postulations of a society are transmitted to the textual level of language, they involve cultural expression in the domains of philosophy and religion, concepts of nature, notions of government, concepts of science, literature, and the society’s ‘ultimate myths’. Such domains of non-Anglo culture in English texts require a deep interpretation.

**4. Methodology**

Five collections of Thai English fiction were selected as the main data with the most important criterion – the popularity of the book or the writer. There are three collections of short stories. *Dragon’s Fin Soup: Eight Modern Siamese Fables* (DFS) (2002), by Somtow Sucharitkul centers on life crushed between Thai and western cultures. The writer has been rewarded and nominated for many awards. This book was nominated for the best short story collection in the World Fantasy Awards in 1996. *Sightseeing* (STS) (2005), by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, stresses the clash between localized and westernized Thai life. The author was awarded the Avery Jules Hopwood Award and the Andrea Beauchamp Prize for this work. Lastly, *The Umbrella and Other Stories* (UOS) (1998), by Supasiri Supunpaysaj, centers on themes relating to ghosts, family life, and beliefs in karma. The story ‘The Umbrella’ was awarded second prize in the UNESCO-PEN awards in 1993. The novels selected were in *Shadowed Country* (SDC) (2004), by Pira Canning Sudham, a compilation of two sequel books, ‘Monsoon Country’ which was the Nobel Prize nominee in 1990 and ‘The Force of Karma’, which depicts the suppressed lives of north-eastern Thais in the 1960s and 1970s under poverty and injustice in Thailand. In addition to these works, we added, *Chalida* (CLD) (2002), by Salisa Pinkayan, a renowned columnist for the leading Thai English newspaper *The Nation*, which depicts the struggles of a Thai family affected by Thai political problems in 1969 from a woman’s perspectives.

We have selected passages of literary discourse that deviate from the stylistic, conventional, and contextual patterns of native or Standard English writing/literature for discussion. These are then coded with their title acronyms and page numbers and are grouped into different sub-categories for analysis and discussion of the types of stylistic creativity that they represent according to earlier studies and the theoretical framework of this paper.
5. Features of stylistic creativity in Thai English fiction

We have identified six different types of stylistic creativity in the chosen Thai English works of fiction. They are described and discussed with examples as well as compared to examples in previous studies of literature in Thai English and in other Englishes.

A. Nativization of context: Thai English fiction is shaped by English expressions suitable for the culturally specific context in Thailand. The Thai authors bring about the nativization of the English language with cultural contexts in theme, scene, situation, and character background using five strategies: literary, monarchical, religious, historical, and political.

First, traditional Thai literature is used as the basis for framing scenes and events. This is evident in the following:

Example 1

I wasn’t interested, but for some reason she insisted on giving me the entire story behind the dance:

‘This particular chui chai is called Chui Chai Benjakai … the demoness Benjakai has been dispatched by the demon king, Thotsakanth, to seduce the hero Rama … disguised as the beautiful Sita … But you’re not listening.’

How could I listen? She was the kind of woman that existed only in dreams, in poems. Slowly she moved against the tawdry backdrop, a faded painting of a palace with pointed eaves. Her feet barely touched the floor. Her arm undulated …’

Why are you looking at her so much?’ said Frances. ‘She’s just a Patpong bargirl … she moonlights here … classics in the evening, pussy after midnight’ (DFS, p. 87).

The description of the dance performed by the bargirl is taken from the Ramakien, a Thai version of an Indian epic Ramayana. According to Thai Ramayana (Jumsai, 1977), this story originated from the Sanskrit version of Valmiki in India written at least 2000 years ago. It has been rewritten in many Thai versions. This extract is based on ‘The Floating Maiden’ by King Rama II of Bangkok Dynasty (Phutthaloetla Naphalai, 1973, p. 10). The bargirl performs the classical dance beautifully in the eyes of the first person beholder, but this classical dancer is only a prostitute in Patpong, a famous entertainment district in Bangkok.

Other Thai stories used in the samples are the Buddhist classics King Vessandara (DFS, pp. 78–79), an epic named Manora (SDC, pp. 184–186), and a fable ‘the Gold Goby Fish’ (CLD, pp. 4–7).

Issues relating to the kingship of the country are tied to main stories as found in King Taksin concerning his Chinese blood (DFS, p. 31) and King Narasuan and the sport of cockfighting (STS, p. 168).

Religious beliefs in Thai society are also used as thematic ingredients. Two instances are illustrated.

Example 2

At that point, the khunying showed up. She had changed into a casual silk pants suit and slightly less jewellery.

‘Oh, Mae Thiap,’ she said, ‘I’m so glad you could come!’
Example 2 (continued)

‘It’s nothing, my dear,’ said the shaman. ‘And you last saw your earrings where?’

‘I don’t know, I don’t know,’ said Midge.

‘It’s those beastly servants, I swear! There’s not an honest domestic left in all of Bangkok; the foreigners have hired them all away at grossly inflated wages. I was coming home from the big charity ball, you know, at the Dusit. I’m sure I still had the earrings then. Unless I took them off in the bathroom …’

Her confusion was genuine, and very discomfiting. ‘I mean, it’s not as if they went poof! and just vanished from my ears, is it?’

‘Of course not, my dear,’ she said. ‘Let’s all concentrate our minds.’ An assistant brought a tray of joss sticks and garlands.

Apparently, I was supposed to join in, so I took seven incense sticks and lit them.

‘This part’s simply grand,’ Midge said, clutching my forearm excitedly.

‘She becomes possessed by the god Phra Isuan – Shiva – who as you know is Lord of the Dance. Then, in the personage of the god, she dances around wildly until she’s able to see the true location of every object in the world.’

‘What if they’re not in this room? What if they’re stolen?’ I said.

‘Phra Isuan will rearrange the fabric of reality,’ said Midge, ‘and make whatever has happened un-happen. After all, he is the God of Destruction.’

‘I see,’ I said dubiously. The little blind boy came in and presented us with a bowl of sand in which to plant our incense sticks. The room was getting smoky. I tried to look appropriately meditative for a few minutes before carefully placing the sticks in the bowl.

‘All right,’ said Mae Thiap.

‘Now, children, you must remember that life is a dream; the world is an illusion; that which we call reality is held in place by the chains of karma; but there’s a certain elasticity in those chains, and that’s what we must rely on. Now, Khunying, if you would kindly concentrate on the earrings … try to conjure up a mental picture of them in your mind, a picture so crystal-clear that I won’t have any trouble plucking it from the maelstrom of your thought’ (DFS, p. 138).

The characters ‘Khunying’ and ‘Midge’ have lost their earrings so the shaman, named Mae Thiap, helps them via this Hindu ceremony that relies on the shaman’s spell through the Hindu Supreme God ‘Phra Isuan’ or ‘Phra Shiva’ known as the Lord of the Dance and the God of Destruction (Tum Amulet, 2010). If the god inspires the shaman, she will dance and uncover where the lost object can be found. In the rite, shaman weaves in the teachings of Buddha on life and karma, reflecting the influence of Hinduism on the Buddhist beliefs of the Thais. In practice, Hindu and Buddhist rituals operate simultaneously. Hinduism was introduced in Thailand in the 100th century while Buddhism was established in the 1000th century. Hence, Hinduism has influenced Thai culture and because Lord Buddha did not prescribe any rituals, the Thais incorporate Hindu rituals. For instance, ceremonies for the King are conducted first by
Hindu priests, then the Buddhist monks. Furthermore, Thai commoners seek direct communion with the Hindu Gods and Goddesses in meditation (Malik, 2003). This is evident in the ritual depicted in this extract in which the protagonists pay special attention to God Shiva for achieving the goal as well as in the devices used for the ritual worship – incense sticks and garlands of marigolds – which originate in Hindu ritual. Consequently, the significance of Hinduism on Thai culture used as the thematic ground of this excerpt contributes to the distinctiveness of the Thai English literary discourse. Other examples of this kind relate to the mention of spirits (DFS, p. 2) and an erotic version of the teachings of Christianity in comparison with Hindu–Buddhist gods (DFS, pp. 71–72).

Nativization of context is also seen in the representation of Thai historical events affected by World War II which are reinterpreted. For instance, the 1945 Chinese racial massacre in Bangkok, unknown to many Thais, is reinvented as a Chinese Thai character’s conflict of mind (DFS, p. 18), and the story of Si Ui, a Chinese soldier in the war and a serpent in human reincarnation, is vividly rewritten via a storytelling by an American character living in Thailand (DFS, pp. 102–132).

Lastly, several controversial political movements in Thailand in the pursuit of real democracy, which occurred from the 1940s to 1990s, are loaded as the background and main events involving the protagonists’ lives such as Bloody 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 (SDC, pp. 229–232) as well as Black May 1992 (SDC, pp. 716–717).

Similar to Indian English literature, the nativization of literary and religious contexts in Thai English fiction is based on the Hindu and Buddhist culture. The Sanskrit literary tradition in the Mahabharata and Ramayana is presupposed via the Hindu characters in Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1963) (Kachru, 1992b, pp. 236–237):

‘Today’, he says, ‘it will be the story of Siva and Parvati.’ And Parvati in penance becomes the country and Siva becomes heaven knows what!

‘Siva is the three-eyed,’ he says, … Never had we hear Harikathas like this …

This extract yields a Thai version of the Indian Ramayana named Ramakien which is nativized in the story Chui Chai in Example 1. Interestingly, this extract and Example 2 share reference to the importance of Siva or Shiva in the Hindu mythology. Hence, literary discourse in Thai English and Indian English show parallels due to religious and mythical connections.

All the examples above contribute to the development of Thai English literary discourse. The thematic creation of the five Thai English fiction books incorporating native literary, monarchical, religious, historical, and political themes is indeed different from that of native English literature and literatures of other Englishes, although one example shows similarities to Indian English literature. These strategies have been used in many other works of contemporary literature in the Thai language because they represent the Thai culture and identity. It is believed that such strategies are also used as contextual settings in many other works of Thai literature in English and thus they are to be considered as representative of the uniquely thematic creativity of a Thai variety of English.
B. Nativization of rhetorical strategies appears in six aspects. Firstly, the Thai writers have translated local similes and metaphors that involve animals, Buddhism, and Thai customs into English. A typical example is shown here.

Example 3

I, who had learned from Kumjai how to add, multiply, and subtract, knew also something of cheating, shrewdness, meanness, guile and shamelessness.

Year after year it was the same: a pitiful gaze at my dumb boyish face for help, his sad eyes on my innocence – Is it correct, Luke-pi? A nod, nothing more but I pressed my lips tightly so some awful words could not escape, though at the time I began to sense the pri-
meval bitterness, the cruelty and futility in all things but pretended to be as dumb as a
buffalo, a tree or a paddy-field (SDC, p. 288) (italics added).

In the Thais’ eyes, a buffalo is viewed as a dumb beast. Its nose is punched and threaded with ropes which are pulled during work, making them look like dumb creatures controlled by others. Besides, the buffalo is very patient; it does not show any reaction when it is flogged by its owners (Krujoy, 2010). Here, Prem (I) uses this simile to review his life. He has learnt from his teacher, Kumjai, that his local people (in Esarn) have been cheated and patronized by many people. However, he needs to accept this state as it is difficult to tackle this problem. He thus pretends to be as dumb as a buffalo that does not want to know the pain he and other Esarn people are facing.

Other examples are ‘Don’t be like a moth attracted to fire’ (SDC, pp. 498–499), ‘How you can treat people as if they are pigs and dogs!’ (SDC, p. 710), ‘... he had entered monk-
hood for a period of Buddhist Lent, which in those days was an automatic stamp of approval for a husband’ (UOS, p. 17), and ‘The current monarch, King Bhumipol Adulyadej, Rama IX, was especially loved ... He was the Father of all Thais, …’ (CLD, p. 11).

Interestingly, the local similes and metaphors presented above are all commonly used by the Thai people. Although they originate in Thai language, they are commonly found expressed in English in Thai English literature as well. Significantly, these cultural expressions do not similarly exist in other varieties of English. Thus, these words can support the emergence of Thai English discourse patterns.

Secondly, two rhetorical devices for ‘personalizing’ speech interaction are transferred to English. The first is taken from particular godly speech patterns in Christianity – ‘God’s trying to tell us something’ (STS, pp. 96–97) – and in Brahma – ‘I had tried to deal with the Four-Faced Brahma for winning lottery numbers …’ (DFS, pp. 67–68). For the last, karma, spirits, and death are the connectors of the protagonists’ past, present, and future existence such as ‘In this life you must finish the bad karma you committed in the previous life so that in the next coming you can take your place among your former’ (SDC, p. 45). Significantly, the second expression presents an iconic feature of Thai English discourse patterns rather than the first one because it comes from the language used by the Thai people. In the meantime, the above godly speech patterns seem to represent beliefs other than those of Buddhism – Christianity and Brahmanism. The majority of Thais are Buddhist. Thus, such speech patterns are not a reflection of their way of life. However, there appear to be a number of Christian and Brahman Thais who would understand such patterns in the Thai English literary context. Overall, all the expressions are considered ‘personalized rhetorical devices’ for the speech patterns used in Thai society, resulting in the uniqueness of Thai identity in Thai English literature.
Thirdly, local proverbs, idioms, and old sayings, which are transcreated into English, involve human organs, animals, teaching of Buddhism, and preferable and forbidden behavior in Thai beliefs. An example is given below.

Example 4

‘You buy bird, little boy?’ I look up …

‘Why are they doing that?’

‘Good for your karma. Buy bird, set bird free, shorten your suffering in your next life.’

‘Swell,’ I say (DFS, p. 108) (italics added).

This dialogue indicates cross-cultural values between Nicolas and a Thai vendor. Nicholas, who has just arrived in Bangkok, buys birds at the market because he is surprised by other people who are freeing birds from their cages. Although he is a non-Buddhist, he understands the value of such activity as the vendor raises the highlighted Thai saying which means one can change his or her bad fortune through freeing birds. Caged birds imply fear and suffering without freedom, so when set free one will feel better and more comfortable as if starting a new life as well as finding that their troubles will be eradicated in the next life (Ladyspaghetti, 2010).

Other examples are ‘I don’t like city people coming here, making a deal over my head with you lot! Not over my head!’ (SDC, p. 449), ‘Relaxed. What will happen will happen’ (STS, p. 57), and ‘Remember this: a person who betrays her family is beyond forgiveness; lower than a dog, for even a dog has loyalty’ (CLD, p. 215).

These expressions embellish the shaping of Thai identity in English. They have become part of everyday expressions, thought patterns and points of view entrenched in Thais’ lives. Their translation into English does not imply that their value is decreasing due to the change of linguistic form, but it does enrich the nativization of English into the Thai culture.

Fourthly, the writers’ culturally dependent speech styles arise in ‘naïve tall-tale’ stories in mythical scenes of traditional folklore in which a village seer communicates with a spirit in order to foresee a seeker’s karmic cycle. An example is

Tatip Henkai sat upright, closing his eyes to channel an inner sight in the search. During these tense moments, the ancient seer muttered a lengthy mantra. When the movement of his lips ceased, the seer lapsed into a trance; his body shook and swayed as if being blown by the velocity of some horrific deeds … (SDC, pp. 41–42).

In this tale, the description of motions of the seer is typical of Thai folktales but here it is conveyed in English. This example enriches the salience of Thai English literary style as it embodies what Thai people believe in – karma and Buddhist philosophical thought towards life – and depicts what excites Thais in the atmosphere, the setting, as well as in the characters’ images and emotions. These devices fit the remarkable ability of Thai English folkloric discourse.

Fifthly, a writer may employ syntactic devices used to tell folk stories in order to entertain participants. In CLD (pp. 54–57), the characters ‘Grandfather’ and ‘Grandmother’ use many rhetorical questions to arouse the interest of the audiences, namely ‘granddaughters – Aren’t you girls bored of that story yet?’, ‘Nobody gets bored of a good story. Isn’t that right, girls?’, ‘Do you know what made her extraordinary?’, and
‘So, where was I …?’ Indeed, rhetorical questions are commonly used across many varieties of English, but such questions presented here are typical of those used in telling a Thai folktale, resulting in a shared similarity between Thai and other cultures in English. Other syntactic devices to vividly color a folk story are the use of a typical first sentence pattern used in many Thai tales like ‘a long time ago’. This sentence is linked to a family’s legend as in the sentence: ‘your great-great-grandfather had an older sister named Jasmine’. The story ends with the use of the phrase ‘you and your stories’ to praise the teller. All these sentence patterns mirror other aspects of the nativization of rhetorical devices in Thai English literature.

Finally, the creation of Thai cultural symbols in English introduces a new aspect in Thai English literature. The following illustration distinctively mirrors Thai nationalism:

Example 5

When Wichu and I arrive at the temple, there’s a crowd of boys lined up inside the open-air pavilion … A banner hangs over the stage in the requisite tricolor: PRA VET DIS TRICT DRAFT LOTTERY, it announces in bold script. FOR NATION. FOR RELIGION. FOR MONARCHY … (STS, pp. 57–58).

The tricolor of the flag – red, white, and blue – symbolizes three main institutions of Thailand as shown. In this context, the national flag appears over the stage where the characters ‘Wichu’ and ‘I’ are going to walk to undergo military conscription on the draft day. These two characters, along with all the Thai men, sing the national anthem together before the official ceremony of the draft starts.

Other symbols concern sexuality and physical appearance such as in the phrase, ‘A black mole on the scrotum brought death to wives’ (SDC, p. 56). The above symbolic discourses are created to mark the nativization of rhetorical strategies, so their expression in English is a way to exemplify Thai English discourse patterns.

The selected Thai English fiction passages carry a decent amount of translated and transcreated native similes, metaphors, proverbs, and old sayings regarding ‘animals’ – buffaloes, dogs, pigs, and moths. This is similar to findings in other studies in Asian and African English literatures although different themes are conveyed. The first example is in the expression ‘You shouldn’t play the lute to a water buffalo …’ in a China English novella In the Pond (1998) by Ha Jin (Zhang, 2002, p. 311). In Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958), the simile ‘… Okokwo was as slippery as a fish in the water’ is used in African culture (Nelson, 1988, pp. 175–176). Likewise, Hari Shankar’s The Private Life of an Indian Prince provides an Indian English metaphor ‘… All right, Highness, you are a high-mettled horse!’ (Patil, 1994, p. 192). At the same time, Thai English writing partially resembles Indian English writing, especially regarding godly speech patterns. For instance, in this study, there is ‘God’s trying to tell us something’ while Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope (1960) provides ‘God after all is’ (Parthasarathy, 1987, p. 164). For the use of culturally dependent speech styles, this study reveals a naïve tall-tale style for Thai legends but has found some similar features of ‘superstitions’ in African folktales as in the reference to evil spirits in Achebe’s Arrow of God (Adetugbo, 1971, p. 178): ‘The night was very quiet … Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits …’.

In the light of syntactic devices, the above examples are partially similar to those used in Amos Tutuola’s The Palm-Wine Drinkard (1952). This Nigerian writer does not
provide rhetorical questions, but does employ particular sentences commonly patterned in West African oral tales’ tradition of ‘closing formulas’ to arouse the audience suspicions such as ‘This is how I got a wife’, ‘That was how we got away from the long white creatures’, and ‘This was the end of the story which I carried from the bush to the “wrong town”’ (Lindfors, 1973, pp. 54–55). Although Thai and Nigerian English fiction employ different forms of such devices, both represent the authentic rhetorical strategy in the telling of folk stories in the two varieties of English.

Overall, the above examples of nativization of rhetorical strategies point to the emergence of a Thai variety of English, since items of figurative languages as well as idiomatic, legendary and religious expressions translated into English are derived from Thai thought patterns and daily speech.

C. Nativization of mantra: the Philosophical and spiritual construction of Thai identity appears as a cohesive linker of literary texts, especially via the mantra expressions in Sanskritized English. This is evidenced in the following excerpt:

Example 6

... Tatip cupped his trembling hands on his chest to symbolize a blossoming lotus flower, a votive offering in worshipping the Spirits of the Universe. Closing his eyes, he began to mumble a magical mantra that began with:

Om loka waree aakasa fai sankara panapai satawa pupa nati mahasamud kodi ...

Prem’s heart thumped to the tempo of the chanting while Grandfather Tatip’s deeply pitted lips moved as if his life was ebbing away (SDC, p. 137).

The sacred text in Pali-Sanskrit by the seer ‘Tatip’ is articulated as a convention prior to a Hindu–Buddhist ritual. Prem asks Tatip to predict his fate before leaving his village for England. Tatip utters the mantra without translation due to its being a sacred text. This mantra cites the four natural elements of a human body regarding ‘mental formation’ or karmic forming, that is, ‘soil or earth (loka), ‘water or streams (waree) or rivers (nati) or oceans (mahasamud)’, ‘wind or weather (aakasa)’, and ‘fire (fai)’, and other natural components to help foresee the future. This text reflects the hybridity between the Thai-English and Pali-Sanskrit languages as well as the Buddhist and Hindu cultures.

The above example resembles usages in Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope (1960). The Sanskritization of English from the classical poets Kalidas (fifth century AD) and Bahvabhuti (eighth century AD) and from the devotional hymns of Sankara often appears in this work of Indian English literature. The following scene is where Ramaswamy, the protagonist, cannot openly tell his wife, Madeleine, of his hopelessness, so he uses the following expressions in Sanskrit that parallel Bhavhuti’s Uttararamacarita (Rama’s later history) to draw her attention (Parthasarathy, 1987, pp. 163–164): ‘ekah sam prati nasitapriyatamastamadya ramah katham / papah pancavati im vilokaya tuva gacchatvasambhavaya va//’ ‘[Alone, now, after being the cause of the loss of his dear (wife), how should Rama, sinful as he is, visit that very same Pancavati, or how pass on regardless of it]’, p. 326).

This text, however, is different from that in Thai English because of the English translation. Although it is indirectly uttered as a magical mantra, it is derived from a hymn used in Hindu rituals and myth. This reflects the textual hybridity between the Sanskrit and English languages as well as Hindu culture. Hence, it is also regarded as a philosophical construction of identity in holy messages created by a non-native English writer.
In conclusion, the Pali-Sanskrit words in the selected Thai English passages are indeed known by the Thai people even though they are not used directly in daily utterances. Many Thais believe in the magic of mantra for worshipping a deity, so they do not need to know the translations of holy expressions. Therefore, the lack of translation of the mantra in this literary work represents the distinctiveness of Thai English philosophical discourses.

D. Code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS): code-mixing occurs at the intra-sentential level. Several linguistic units like affixes, words, phrases, and clauses are embedded from two different grammatical (sub-) systems within the same sentence and speech event (Bokamba, 1989, p. 278, as cited in Ge, 2007, pp. 10–11). CS occurs at the inter-sentential level. It requires an alternation from one language to another with the production of full clauses in each language (Bullock & Toribio, 2009, p. 3). In this study, CM and CS appear as textual strategies used by the characters in the fiction. Three languages – Thai (central), Laotian (Northeast dialect), and Pali-Sanskrit – are mixed in English dialogues and narratives. An instance of Thai-English code-mixing is illustrated first.

Example 7

… Ni could not possibly hear a word of what Stan was saying due to the din. ‘Suaymaak suaychingching … beautiful,’ she cooed and wondered why this old farang had flaunted a photo of his young and beautiful wife in order to pick up a hooker (SDC, p. 671).

The Thai expression in italics is uttered with its English translation by the prostitute named Ni, who must look at a picture of Stan’s young and beautiful wife. Her full reply fully translated is more like, ‘very beautiful, really, really beautiful’. Her response is what is expected of her and her tone may even show a bit of hurt that she must endure this kind of treatment and still provide services as a prostitute.

The Laotian expression ‘ped’ (spicy), ‘lai’ (very), ‘lai’ (very), ‘duer’ (particle) is mixed in the following English text: ‘Meanwhile, Elizabeth, having found out what Piang and Toon were preparing, said in her basic Lao: pedlailaideur, for she wanted her favorite dish to be very spicy hot’ (SDC, p. 575). Lastly, a Pali-Sanskrit expression is mixed in the English narrative ‘… In the new surroundings, the priest paused. Then Srisurachwood echoed his heart-rending cry: Buddho! Dhammo! Sankho! Napo! The shout sounded as if the holy one had become incensed by sheer longing’ (SDC, p. 373). In the italicized expression, signifying three jewels of Buddha, the word ‘Napo’ is only added as a reminder of the name of Prem’s village and it serves as the literary rhyme of chanting. Prem, who becomes a wandering monk in the Srisurachwood forest, utters those four preaching words at night while setting up the Buddhist tents. Hence, the Pali-Sanskrit English mixing functions to show the sacredness of the words addressed by the monk.

The technique of simply switching directly from Thai into English and English into Thai by the characters is found in this study, as illustrated in the following:

Example 8

‘Open the door!’

John Hamlet of Asian Economic Review opened it. Several soldiers barged into the room, pointing their guns at us.
Example 8 (continued)

‘All of us are journalists,’ John Hamlet said loudly but fearing that the beast might not understand English, he repeated slowly in Siamese: ‘Rao tung mod pen nak kao krap’ (SDC, p. 722) (italics added).

The westerner ‘John Hamlet’ switches from English into Thai when he talks to a Thai soldier. This code-switching is effectively carried out because this character speaks both languages.

The above style of Thai-English CM and CS is similarly found in the following Singapore English poem Ahmad (1950) by Wang Gungwa, in which Malay words mixed with English are translated in parentheses (Patke & Holden, 2010, p. 38):

‘… Allah has been kind;
Orang puteh has been kind. (Malay: white man)
Only yesterday his brother said,
Can get lagi satu wife, lah!’ (Malay: one more) (p. 13).

Likewise, in an Egyptian novel The Map of Love (1999) by Adhaf Soueif, an Arabic expression is switched into English – ‘Ya akhi (no my brother), says Mahgoub. No. The pieties speak against killing …’ (Albakry & Hancock, 2008, p. 228). Hence, translation is a vital tool used in mixing and switching as it eliminates possible confusion with non-Malay Singaporean and Arab readers, respectively.

Importantly, the example in code-switching definitely reflects the actual language use in Thai society since Thais and foreigners conversing in English often switch into Thai. Likewise, the mixing of non-English words and phrases in dialogues readily occur in Thailand. Such mixing in the English narratives serves as the way in which the writers strive to portray the use of language varieties in written discourse in parallel to spoken discourse. In brief, instances of code-mixing and code-switching presented in writing contribute to the development of a Thai variety of English.

E. Colloquial or basilectal uses of English emerge where Thai characters with lower English proficiency employ certain lexical and grammatical patterns considered ‘improper English’ or ‘Tinglish’ while talking to those with higher proficiency (mesolect and acrolect varieties). Moreover, some Thai characters with a moderate level of English ability are shown to add Thai discourse particles to make their English expressions sound Thai. This is illustrated below.

Example 9

‘What’s he saying?’ Lizzie whispered in my ear.

‘Ha ha ha,’ Surachai interjected gesticulating wildly.

‘Everything ok, madam. Don’t worry, be happy. My uncle, he just say elephants very terrifi ed of your breasts’ (STS, p. 11).

Where the character ‘Surachai’ communicates in English with a foreign tourist, Lizzie, his use of Tinglish can be seen in the choice of main verbs and subject–verb agreement.
Example 10

‘C’mon. Give an old woman a break.’ The girl smiled. She said eleven hundred.

Ma yelped again. ‘I’m not a farang, na? We’re all Thai here. Give me the Thai price.’ The vendor asked Ma to name one. Not eleven hundred, Ma said … (STS, p. 80).

The Thai particle for one’s mood ‘na’ is added by the character ‘Ma’, who addresses the vendor during their bargaining for the local price. According to Smyth (2002, p. 32), this discourse particle can denote the form ‘… , right?’. It also presents a mild sense of a question tag by a Thai customer who is dissatisfied with the price given.

Other particles are of the common polite discourse enclitics in Thai – Krap and Kha – used by males and females respectively at the end of statements and questions in order to convey the respect to the addressee (Smyth, 2002, p. 126). Examples are ‘… Why don’t we grease it? Khamnan Singhon krap, did I say your name correctly? …’ (SDC, p. 483) and ‘ … Khun Charley ka, Khun Charley … painaima?’ (SDC, p. 665).

Tinglish here parallels ‘Singlish’ uttered by the character ‘taxi driver’ in a Singapore English short story The Taximan’s Story (1978) by Catherine Lim. An instance is shown as follows (Wood, 1990, p. 278):

‘Yes, madam, quite big family – eight children, six sons, two daughters. Big family! Ha! Ha! No good, madam. In these days, where got Family Planning in Singapore? People born many, many children, every year, one childs …’ (p. 76).

This utterance mirrors the omission of the patterns ‘it is …’ and ‘there is …’ and is similar to the Tinglish in Example 9, where the copula –be is omitted and the interjection ‘Ha! Ha!’ is added.

The use of the Thai particle ‘na’ is convergent with the common particle ‘lah’ seen in the Malaysian English short story A New Year’s Day Lunch in Kia Peng (1993) by Karim Raslan as in the following example (Azirah Hashim, 2007, pp. 37–38):

‘Daddy you’re too old-lah’

‘Come on-lah Meriam we can’t let them win!’

‘I’m a grandmother-lah, you know?’

The particle ‘lah’ that is also found in Singapore English makes the expression softer. ‘Lah’ in the last utterance and the particle ‘na’ convey a similar mood of dissatisfaction.

As a whole, the expressions discussed contribute much to the emergence of Thai English spoken discourse depicted in literary discourses. The characters’ uses of Tinglish and Thai discourse particles probably mirror the different backgrounds as well as differing levels of English proficiency among Thais. This, in effect, points to communication achievement rather than questions of grammaticality.

F. Discourse styles: The Thai writers transfer three types of writing style considered ‘elegant’ in Thai literary writing into Thai English literature. First of all, long extended sentences are found in the selected writings. This style usually emerges in Thai writing where long and complex sentences are lacking in sentence boundaries normally shown
with punctuation marks in English (Supnithi, Kosawit, Boriboon, & Sornlertlamvanich, 2004). A prominent example is shown here.

Example 11

He discoursed learnedly in the dragon lore of many cultures, from the salubrious, fertility-bestowing water dragons of China to the fire-breathing, maiden-ravishing monsters of the West; lectured on the theory that the racial memory of dinosaurs might have contributed to the draconic mythos, although he allowed as how humans never co-existed with dinosaurs, so the racial memory must go back as far as marmoset and shrews and such creatures; he lauded the soup in high astounding terms, using terminology so poetic and ancient that he was forced to draw the calligraphy in the air with stubby finger before my father was vaguely able to comprehend his metaphors; and finally – the clincher – alluded to a great-great-great-aunt of his in San Francisco who had once had a brief, illicit, and wildly romantic interlude with a Chinese opium smuggler who might just possibly have been one of the very Lims who had come from that village in Southern Yunnan; you know the village I’m talking about, that very village … at which point my father – whisking way all the haute cuisine dishes and replacing them with an enormous blueberry cheesecake flown in, he said, from Leo Lindy’s of New York – said, ‘All right, all right, I’m sold …’ (DFS, p. 20).

Syntactically, this sentence could be divided into five sentences following the semicolons. All have many clauses modified by sub-clauses and phrases. Furthermore, segments of direct speech are linked with dashes, but no other punctuation. This is the longest and most complex sentence of this story. The sentence is narrated by only one speaker, who is talking with the writer’s father. It appears that the writer combined all sentences in only one sentence so that the story told by Bob and the reaction from the narrator and her father can be connected. Stylistically, this sentence shows the reader that the speaker is talking non-stop and changing from one topic to another seamlessly and without reason until finally the listener interjects to give the speaker a rest. Interestingly, this technique can be seen as a borrowing from traditional Thai literature.

This sentence style is similar to that observed in Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1974, p. 79) in which six clauses, five of which are complex sentences, the first being a simple one, are joined. The six clauses are embedded, independent sentences which are connected to several types of subordination. Moreover, 10 occurrences of ‘and’ and other linkers result in the long sentence of the garrulous writer. This effect is reportedly caused by the quick flow of thought and speech patterns in Indian English (Mehrotra, 1989, p. 427).

Another characteristic of Thai English literary discourse is wordiness. Wordiness is an extravagant style as the excessive use of words, expressions and phrases may seem too redundant, resulting in the ambiguity of main points (M.Tx Writing, 2004). However, wordiness is viewed as ornamental in prose writing in Thai since Thai writers often elaborate on their writing via many words and expressions. This study found the frequent repetition of words and phrases as well as clauses and sentences by writers of Thai fiction. An extract is displayed below.

Example 12

But, back then we felt that the Barber was anything but ‘lucky.’ He was not only poor but he was also alone: no wife, no children – not even a relative. Ours were a close-knit society then; whether married or single, people lived in community. No one we knew lived alone. No one except the Barber. Much later we learned from Father that the Barber grew up in an orphanage and only had four years of fundamental schooling before learning his
trade from a free class given at a temple. Nevertheless, the Barber considered himself lucky because there was only one person he had to look after and only one mouth to worry about feeding (UOS, p. 64) (italics added).

The redundancy is seen in the description of two aspects associated with the Barber – luck and loneliness. The Barber is associated with ‘lucky’ twice as found in the following sentences: ‘the Barber was anything but “lucky”’ and ‘the Barber considered himself lucky …’. In the former, he was considered ‘unlucky’ but the Barber thought he was lucky. Similarly, the sentences conveying ‘loneliness’ are repeated thrice – ‘… he was also alone: no wife, no children – not even a relative’, ‘No one we knew lived alone. No one except the Barber’, and ‘… there was only one person he had to look after and only one mouth …’. This wordiness shows the observer’s amazement at the fact that anyone could live alone, totally alone, without relatives, and even more amazement that he could be happy by living alone. Overall, this repetition makes this narrative very wordy.

This wordy style similarly emerges in a Zimbabwean English novella Bones (1988) by Chenjerai Hoves as in the extract below (Wylie, 1991, p. 49).

I keep my mouth closed. Nothing beats a closed mouth, nothing. A closed mouth is a cave in which to hide. So I hide there so many people do not see too much in my mouth. Many people have killed themselves because they are loud-mouthed. A loud mouth is a big trap. It can even kill lions. It burns forests. Did our people not say the tongue is a little flame which burns forests? (pp. 35–36).

This redundancy is different from that in Example 12 because idiomatic metaphor and noun phrases are continuously repeated in the whole text with regard to the Shona-ness style, a vernacular of Zimbabweans. However, the preceding sentences are reduplicated as an elaboration of the main idea. This African writer tries to give the reasons why ‘I keep my mouth closed’ with many wordy sentences. Likewise, the Thai author expands many redundant sentences to clearly support the topic sentence ‘the Barber was anything but lucky’.

In Example 13 below, the nature of the Thai writing system is described in comparison with English. The following excerpt gives non-Thai readers a glimpse of the nativization of Thai writing style in English:

Example 13

… As opposed to English, Siamese has no punctuation marks, no capital letters, no sentences, Primo pondered, glancing at the pages of the two written languages. Siamese words are strung tightly together. At times one can say or write at the beginning without a noun. Such an omission relies on guesswork to be understood, whereas in English a sentence has a beginning and an end, the noun and the verb or verbs and a full stop …

Having pondered so, the student wrote some English phrases as he would write in Siamese to reconfirm his discovery:

The writer depicts the Thai writing system from the perspective of ‘Primo’ (Prem) toward a description of the Thai writing system. As a new student in London, he finds differences in the orthographic and grammatical systems between English and Thai regarding the speakers’ perspectives. English speakers are very individualistic and allow mental spaces for others, so their writing requires punctuation marks and capitalization for sentences. Meanwhile, Thais like to live in a collective society, thus their writing employs compressed letters and other distinctive features as underlined. Primo displays an English paragraph written Thai style to prove his assumption. This English passage is ungrammatical as it is ordered in Thai word order such as ‘shall eat what when there is nothing to eat children go beg rice not yet …’.

Thai thought patterns illustrated in Thai English writing have been depicted elsewhere in Thai English fiction. Chutisilp (1984, pp. 174–175) found that Prajuab Thirabutana (1973, pp. 7–8) adds his view on the Thai style of presentation in spirals in the novel Little Things, in which the Thai cultural concepts of being considerate, polite, and respectful are also embedded in English sentences.

The stylistic devices presented here highlight the phenomenon of Thai English discourse patterns. Long sentences and wordiness are seen to occur in other varieties of English, but the examples discussed here are clearly unique. Although long sentences portray the writers’ thought narratives, they also indicate the way in which Thais continually think and express ideas as much as they can without interruption before completely stopping. Similarly, such wordiness is derived from spoken discourse in which Thai speakers often use or repeat many words, phrases and clauses to clearly support the subject matter. Consequently, these two discourse styles and the nature of the Thai writing system can be seen to relate to the notion of a distinct Thai English literary style.

6. A Thai variety of English

We will now discuss the unique characteristics of stylistic creativity in the selected Thai English works of fiction with regard to the conceptual framework. Certain indicators for Thai English literary discourse point to the need for further examination to ascertain the characteristics of Thai English as an established variety.

A. Indicators for Thai English literary discourse: the following indicative features describe the concepts that underpin current approaches to the description of World Englishes.

Firstly, nativization of Thai English literary style is evident in five socio-cultural contexts in Thailand – literature, monarchy, religion, history, and politics – which are presupposed as the background, conventions, and common traditions in Thai English fiction. Likewise, six rhetorical strategies used in the Thai literary tradition are transferred, translated, and transcreated into English. These two main features correspond to the paradigm of the nativization of context and of rhetorical strategies described by Kachru (1987).

Secondly, the realization of thought patterns in Thai English writing styles is seen in the three types of Thai English ‘Discourse Styles’ adapted from Chutisilp’s (1984) study. These styles reflect the way in which the writers think in Thai but write in English (Kachru, 1987).

Thirdly, Thai identity construction in English literary discourse is seen in the ‘nativization of the mantra’ which is related to one of the three linguistic processes in identity construction in Anglophone Englishes – ‘treating the linguistic construction as a cohesive text, representing structural discoursal and cultural hybridity’ (Kachru, 2003).
The Pali-Sanskritized English text addresses the identity construction of the Thai cultural discourse of worshipping. The linguistic purity of Pali-Sanskrit in Thai spoken or written texts is believed to be the fulfillment of the religious and mythical practice and the allowable hybrid text. The Pali-Sanskrit language as a spell reflects the identity of the spirit communicator.

Fourthly, the multilingual code repertoire in Thai English literature appears in the mixing of the three languages (though Laotian and Pali-Sanskrit are considered dialects and the religious language in Thai society, respectively) and the switching to Thai-English in English texts. This represents the linguistic features of the trimodal framework described in Kachru (1992a). The concept of ‘mixing’ and ‘convergence’ between Thai, a vernacular (Loatian), and language register (Pali-Sanskrit) as well as English.

Fifthly, transcultural creativity in Thai English literary styles is apparent in two types of intercultural crossover seen in the literatures of World Englishes (Kachru, 1995). ‘Comprehensibility’ arises in the transcreation of proverbs reflecting Buddhist belief and ritual: ‘many more deaths and rebirths she would experience …’ (CLD, pp. 4–7), ‘his mother’s soul got to Heaven holding on to the hem of his yellow robe’ (UOS, p. 72), and ‘follow me and pay for your sins’ (CLD, p. 198). Further, ‘interpretability’ is partially related to an adapted version of the Bible in the comparison of Hinduism and Buddhism as seen in the following passages:

Phra Yesu, the Christian god, who was an incarnation of the god Vishnu, made his disciples drink his blood from a silver cup called the Holy Grail. It was a magic blood which could heal the universe. But Phra Yesu was attached to material things and could not free himself from the sexual desire for Mary Magdalene, who was an incarnation of Maya, the deceiving one, who tempted Buddha under the Bo tree … (DFS, pp. 71–72).

Sixthly, localization of Thai English literary forms is reflected in the two remaining features of the nativization of rhetorical strategies and the colloquial variety of English which parallel Strevens’s (1982) Localized Forms of English (LFEs). First, LFEs in the lectal range appear in ‘Tinglish’. The Thai characters with different backgrounds use ‘broken English’ in which Thai grammar interferes in English sentences. A range of acrolectal and mesolectal varieties of English used by Thai English speakers partially arise but they do not represent the lowest variety. Next, the use of Thai discourse particles ‘kha/krap’ and ‘na’ in English expressions enhances the representation of the basilectal variety. The Thai writers exhibit politeness and mood by the use of such particles. Second, LFEs in a varietal range are found in ‘registers’. Several Thai items of similes, metaphors, and symbolism which represent ‘literary registers’ are transcreated to serve in the localization of rhetoric in English.

Finally, the Thai cultural loading of the English language is manifest in four areas where English expressions are loaded with Thai cultural patterns and are embedded in the Thai English fiction. This happens when the existing features of contextual, rhetorical, and mantra nativizations are reinterpreted following Strevens’s (1987) study. Firstly, the notions of philosophy and religion are observed in the following realms: (i) ‘animism’ as seen in the expression ‘Thailand is a country with more ghosts than people. The belief in the omnipresence of spirits comes from animism …’ (DFS, p. 2) and ‘theism’ in ‘Phra Isuan will rearrange the fabric of reality’ (DFS, p. 138); (ii) ‘the relation of man to God’ as found in communication between a human being and God, as in ‘He’s a hard god. Harder than the steel I gird myself with’ (DFS, pp. 67–68); (iii) ‘views on life and death as well as after-life’ found in Buddhist beliefs on karma as
well as cyclical death and reincarnation – ‘She was re-born as a majestic bo tree with resplendent gold and silver leaves. Many more deaths and re-births she would experience before the story ended’ (CLD, pp. 4–7); and (iv) ‘ethics and morals’ hidden in a characters’ right and wrong behavior through the expression ‘Money can make some greedy men blind’ (SDC, p. 596). Secondly, concepts of nature appear in the power of nature in Thai Buddhism–Hinduism, namely ‘the Spirits of the Universe’, which comprise ‘soil, water, wind, and fire’ expressed as the Pali-Sanskritized English mantra by the seer Tatip (SDC, p. 137). Thirdly, notions of government involve the expression ‘Thai democracy has developed via the massacre by the coup dictatorship’ as seen in three actual political events – the bloody 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 incidents (SDC, pp. 229–232) as well as Black May 1992 (SDC, pp. 704–727). Lastly, traditions in Thai literature are reflected in Thai English literature in tradition-oriented accounts such as in the description of the characteristics of Buddha in King Vessandara and a typical Thai tale in which angels, gods, and the heaven are grounded as follows:

Remember the story of King Vessandar, who gave away his very children – those most precious to him – to a mere beggar, because he’d managed to free himself even from love itself, that most persistent of desires … (DFS, pp. 78–79).

The jasmine story … She smelled of jasmine … When she left a room, the fragrance remained, sweet and exhilarating. That was how the family knew she couldn’t be a human, but an angel who had mistakenly been sent to walk this earth. She wasn’t a mortal carrying the burden of sins, but an immaculate soul meant to live in the heavens. So the family was afraid; afraid the gods would discover Jasmine, realize their mistake; and take her away … So they tried in every way to mask her perfection (CLD, pp. 54–57).

B. The existence of Thai English as a variety The above analysis and interpretation of Thai English works of literature points to the existence of a unique form of Thai English literary discourse. The majority of the features as found in the six areas discussed yield the conceptual framework used. Additionally, a discussion of those features in comparison to other New Englishes seems to prove that the Thai English writers have employed similar strategies of stylistic creativity used by authors of Indian English, Singaporean English, Malaysian English, Zimbabwean English, Nigerian English, Egyptian English, and China English. Importantly, some characteristics of stylistic creativity by other Thai English authors (see Chutisilp, 1984; Khotphuwiang, 2010; Watkhaoalarm, 2005) are also used by the five writers in this study. Thai English writers in this study and in previous studies as well as other authors employing different varieties of English share two features in common – the use of English as a first language and the employment of stylistic devices to develop themes that highlight own local identity in a unique and local variety of English, i.e. through Thai English.

7. Conclusion

As Thai English is a rather new variety in which only a few studies of literary discourse creativity are evident, the notion of a Thai variety of English has remained obscure. The status of Thai English as another non-native variety illustrated in this literary analysis thus remains to be evaluated in terms of ‘four essential features of new varieties of English’ (Llamzon, 1983) – an ecology of transplanted Englishes in diglossia, polyglossia, code-switching, code-mixing, and lexical shifts; a history of English via nativization processes; a sociolinguistics of English in functions, sociolect–ethnolect
varieties, and rhetorical styles; and cultural aspects of English in local creative literature. The last feature is clearly seen in this study. However, the other three are also found as stylistic innovations structured by the selected Thai English writers, especially code-switching and code-mixing, nativization, the use of a basilectal variety, and rhetorical strategies. Consequently, it seems fair to describe Thai English as ‘a developing non-native variety of English’ of the Expanding Circle, although perhaps not yet as ‘an established non-native variety’ of the Outer Circle.

References


