ABSTRACT

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Thesis Title: SCAFFOLDING STUDENTS’ CRITICAL READING ABILITY THROUGH APPRAISAL THEORY

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This study focused on the importance of critical reading ability, one of the desired skills for students to thrive in the 21st century workplaces and society. Although having been emphasized in the revised Thai Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2551 (Ministry of Education, 2008), critical reading ability remains one of the weaknesses among Thai EFL undergraduate students (Wongsothorn, 1988; Chaisuriya 2000; Ueai-Chimplee, 2007). In view of this, this study explored how critical reading ability could be enhanced in a particular reading course where authentic business articles from such a mainstream magazine as TIME was used as the course materials. White’s (1998) and Martin and Rose’s (2007) Appraisal Theory was employed as an analytical tool in exploring the differences in stances expressed in American and Chinese business-related articles from the well-known magazine. The lesson plans were also developed, in which Appraisal Theory and Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) – a model of scaffolding instruction – were adopted for effective teaching and learning.

In this study, the researcher selected and analyzed the articles used as the course materials, designed all the lesson plans, as well as conducted the classroom observation. During the observation, the researcher assumed the role of a participant
observer in Reading in Business English course at an international university in Thailand during Semester 2/2017. The participants were one exemplary teacher and thirty-four students of Business English Major. Several research instruments were employed which were Appraisal Theory, pre- and post- tests, lesson plans, summative test, focus-group discussions, the teacher’s reflections as well as the researcher’s narrative summaries to ensure the triangulation of the data.

From the quantitative and qualitative data, the results revealed that the four stages of GRR were very effective. The shift in the responsibilities from the teacher to the students allowed the students to learn from both the teacher and among themselves in a productive and collaborative way. Having gone through the GRR stages, the students became more confident to work individually and complete the assigned tasks on their own. With regards to Appraisal Theory, the students also reported having high level of opinion toward the Theory as it helped enhance their critical reading ability and enabled them to approach texts from a different perspective. Accordingly, this substantiated the idea that discourse analysis should be incorporated into teaching because students’ ability to understand the use of the language in context is very crucial in critical reading as it could help “create suitable contexts for interaction, illustrating writer/reader exchanges, and provide learners with opportunities to process language within a variety of situations” (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2001). With confidence and competence, it was very likely that the students would continue their critical reading skill even outside the classroom.