

*Actual English for Hospitality Industry from Foreign Hotel Guests in Thailand:
A Case Study of Ayutthaya Province*

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Abstract

Effective and appropriate communication in the hospitality industry needs more than language knowledge. This study aims to 1) explore the needs of conversational English of front office staff in Ayutthaya Province, Thailand; and 2) analyze the expressions spoken by foreign tourists in Ayutthaya. To discover the needs of English language learning, the questionnaire has been used with 32 front office staff who have worked as the receptionists from 7 months to 15 years. The questionnaire comprises two essential skills for conversation: listening and speaking. It revealed that the needs of listening skill under the topic of Requesting General Service was at the highest ($X=4.4$, $S.D.=0.8$); while the most needs of speaking skill was with Apologizing and Expressing Condolences ($X=4.4$, $S.D.=0.7$). Furthermore, the structured interview questions were designed in accordance with the highest needs of Requesting General Service. It was then used with 35 foreign tourists who travel on their own currently travelling in Ayutthaya province. The results showed the actual frequently used expressions which later grouped and rearranged. Finally, they were utilized as examples in the English language manual in order to let front office staff feel familiar with the actual expressions in hotels. Therefore, the front office staff should improve their speaking and Listening skills the most in order to send effective messages to their foreign guests. The data from the findings could improve the front office staff in Thailand by helping them develop English for communication in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Front Office Staff, Foreign Guests, Communication Skill, Actual Expressions

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Introduction

The use of English language skills in the present world is necessary and inevitable since the skills of the English language are not merely educational tools but also an imperative language. English language is used to communicate and taught around the world than any other language. Therefore, it can be considered as a universal language that can be communicated all over the world especially in the present situation that the influence of globalization are continuous and increasing. Currently, the growth of modern transport and technology has narrowed the world. Many countries focus on English language as another official language because it is a universal language for communication, trading and cultural exchange, traveling, further education in the higher level and running various types of business which English is required as a medium. Therefore, English language plays a very important role for people in various professions especially in the hotel business which requires universal language to communicate and have good command of the English language to welcome foreigners who come to travel and receive services for overnight stays in hotels. As a sequence, people with good English will have a great advantage, an opportunity to be employed and encouraged to promote their duties to the higher position as well.

The hotel business is directly related to the tourism business as it is a place to welcome and facilitate the provision of accommodation services for tourists, it is therefore necessary to develop and improve the quality to satisfy the customers who use the service. One of the factors related to the service quality of the hotel business is the hotel staff which is in addition to having the potential of both the service and be expertise in performing duties in responsible positions, their English language skills are also essential in serving foreign customers because effective communication will create a good impression on customers including a good image for the organization, especially the front desk staff of the hotel, which is the service section. However, the English language proficiency of the hotel front desk remains a problem in communicating with foreign customers that affects the service to be inefficient as it should be. English for front office is an important tool in creating a good image for the hotel. Hotel staff therefore have a requirement to converse in English in accordance with objectives and content of hotel business establishments to be used in the situation as efficiently as it should be. In order to meet such requirement, the researcher therefore studied the details of the English language required by hotel business entrepreneurs in depth by exploring the aspects of the conversation that entrepreneurs require the most so the researcher will use the results of the study to determine the use of English for conversation and the course content appropriate for the receptionist in the future.

In addition, this is considered the integration of training content with the real situation from the establishment in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya province to contribute, create the maximum benefit of curriculum and instructional content and to build a good relationship between the University and hotel establishments as well. In this regard, the researcher was interested in studying the conversational English language requirement of hotel front desk staff in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya province.

Problems in Using English Language

Viboolphant (2005) points out the barriers towards communication and the causes of communication failure in business occur when the person receiving the information has failed to understand what has been said – this results in sender breakdown, method breakdown, and recipient breakdown. Scott (1986) adds that these communication barriers happen due to misunderstandings or sometimes from being ignored by the listener. These barriers of information are from understanding, listening, and the acceptance of the listener. Speakers should know how to structure their sentences to make them easy to understand – this is so that the audience will be interested.

Davidoff (1994) points out that barriers create communication breakdowns – these barriers are either from verbal or non-verbal communication. People who work closely with clients must have a high ability to convey messages or else the content will be lost. Problems from language efficiency are the root of these problems. Language barriers and individual differences also cause problems with communication. Language barriers arise when people with different dialects communicate such as French to English and English to French. The sentence structures are different between the languages and the compositions of the verbs are different, which may lead to major miscommunications between parties. “Our vocabularies may be inadequate or our level of skill with language may simply be inadequate to express some of our deeper and subtler thoughts” (Sigband and Bell, 1994).

From the above definitions of communication barriers, we can see that certain barriers lead to failure of communication between the speaker and the listener. Due to problems stated in this paper, the focus of this research was on the levels of the English of the staff in boutique hotels as well as the problems they face. Minimization of communication barriers is the key to giving good service to foreign guests because effective communication is an important tool for people to succeed in their careers. According to Timm and Stead (1996), 90% of people who are professionals in the workforce need to communicate well for an organization to develop

Listening is considered the most important out of all the communication skills because according to Burns and Joyce (1977), 45% of routine communication comes from listening where 30% is from speaking, 16% from reading, and an additional 9% from writing.

The specific area of hospitality industry

Blue and Harun (2003, pp 73 - 91) who studied the sophisticated English language used in hotel in order to develop a suitable English training program for hotel staff, found that English in the hospitality should integrate general English and hospitality English. They specified 2 types of hospitality English: English for specific hospitality purposes – ESHP and English for general hospitality purposes – EGHP. The ESHP deals directly with the hotel work functions such as check-in, check-out, and hotel enquiry, while the EGHP deals with general conversation which may not be related to the hotel functions. To use English language for communication in hotels, the staff has to consider interpersonal relations and cross-cultural situations as well. Moreover,

the body language has an important role in hotel communication as the staff has to use all the skills of communication to impress guests and to operate their job successfully.

English for specific purpose

ESP as a main theory of this study, at first was developed by the inspiration of creating the language for communication in specific careers Mackay and Mouthford (1978). It has been developed for a long time and has been expanded the specific areas according to the changing of world situations. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1980) stated that the requirement of teaching ESP was established from at least 2 factors; the requirement for language learning in limited time and the requirement for the communication in specific area. There was no need for learners to learn the language as a whole but to choose what was needed for use in working situations or in a specific area. Hutchinson and Waters (1994) and Richards (1998) also focused on the characteristics of the ESP curriculum which emphasized that the development of the curriculum should consider the language needed for specific purposes, the selection of language skills, functions and language forms which are required to be used in specific situations.

Objectives

This study aims to

1. To explore the needs of conversational English of Front office Staff in Ayutthaya.
2. To analyze the expressions spoken by foreign hotel guests in Ayutthaya.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants of the study were 32 front office staff who have worked as the receptionists from 7 months to 15 years and 35 foreign hotel guests who travel on their own currently travelling in Ayutthaya province.

Procedures and Instruments

There are two phases in this study. The first phase includes exploring the needs of conversational English of front office staff in Ayutthaya, Thailand. The 32 front office staff are purposively selected. Data is collected via questionnaires consisting of personal information and levels of needs in English conversation. The statistical analysis used comprises mean, percentage and standard deviation. The second phase is collecting the actual expressions spoken in the hotel by foreign hotel guests through structured interviews. Each interview includes 8 questions that ask foreigners to give details about how they say during room reservation, checking in and out, hotel facilities, complaints and delayed services, room cancelation, helping the luggage, asking for tourist attractions and asking for directions. The 35 foreign hotel guests traveling in Ayutthaya are conveniently sampled. The data collected is categorized and then grammatically checked by a university English language instructor. The results are presented and treated qualitatively.

Findings

The data presented below are the collected from the respondents.

There are two parts of data

1. needs to use listening skills are shown in table 1
2. actual english expressions from foreign hotel guests are shown in the table 2-9

Front office staffs' needs to use listening skill

The summary of the use of needs to use listening skills consists of Listening for services, Listening for complaints, Listening for taking note, Conversation on the telephone and General conversation. The top three needs to use listening skill were Listening for services ($\bar{x} = 4.38$ and $SD = 0.97$); Listening for complaints ($\bar{x} = 4.28$ and $SD = 0.85$); General conversation ($\bar{x} = 4.28$ and $SD = 0.81$); and Conversation on the telephone ($\bar{x} = 4.25$ and $SD = 0.76$). While the least needs to use listening skill was Listening for taking note ($\bar{x} = 3.94$ and $SD = 0.88$); as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Needs to Use Listening Skill

No.	Needs to Use Listening Skill	Statistics			
		Mean	SD	Level	Rank
1.	Listening for services	4.38	0.97	highest	1
2.	Listening for complaints	4.28	0.85	highest	2
3.	Listening for taking note	3.94	0.88	high	4
4.	Conversation on the telephone	4.25	0.76	highest	3
5.	General conversation	4.28	0.81	highest	2
	Overall	4.23	0.85	highest	

English Expressions spoken in the hotel by foreign tourists

The following tables from 2 to 9 show the data collected from foreign hotel guests.

The topics include 8 situations taking place inside the hotels which are Room Reservation, Check in and Check out, Room Cancellation, Hotel Facilities, Complain about Delayed Service, Helping the Luggage, Asking for Tourist Attraction and Asking for Direction. The collected data was categorized in groups and checked language accuracy by a university English instructor. Each table represents each situation as follows:

Table 2: Room Reservation

Room Reservation
Could / Can I book a room?
Could / Can I have a room?
Can I reserve a room for tonight?
Can I have a room?
Do you have an available room?
Do you have a room for tonight?
Are there any available rooms for me?
Is there a room available?
What rooms are available?
I / We would like to book a room for ...

I / We would like to have a room for ...
I / We would like to reserve a room for ...

Table 3: Check in and Check out

Check in and Check out

I'm ... I have a reservation.
I'm Mr. ..., I made a reservation by ...
I have a reservation under the name of ...
Check in under (name).
I would like to check in.
I need to check in.
I'd like to check in, please
I want to check in at 1 pm.
Check in, please.
Can I check in right now?
I need to check out.
I would like to check out.
Here's the key, we are ready to leave.

Table 4: Room Cancellation

Room Cancellation

Sorry, I can't make it. I need to cancel the reservation.
I'm sorry, my plan was cancelled and I want to cancel my reservation.
Sorry, I would like to cancel my room (reservation).
Sorry for the trouble but I would like to cancel the reservation?
I'm sorry, I have to cancel the reservation.
We do not need the room for tonight.
I don't need the room anymore. I would like to cancel the reservation.
We need to cancel the reservation.
I am unable to be there. Please cancel the reservation.
I apologize for the inconvenience but I need to cancel the reservation.
I have an emergency and I need to cancel my booking.
Unfortunately, I have to cancel the reservation.
I don't need the room anymore.
I don't need the room anymore, I'd like to cancel the reservation.
Can I cancel the reservation?
Can I cancel the reservation and get a refund?

Table 5: Hotel Facilities

Hotel Facilities

Is there an air conditioning?
Do you have a fitness center?
Do you have fitness service?
What are the conditions to use the gym?
What facilities do you have?
Where is the swimming pool located?

Where is the location of the facilities?
May I know where the swimming pool is?
I ask for the fitness center, spa and massage services.

Table 6: Complain about Delayed Service
Complain about Delayed Service

Can you speed it up a little?
Can I say something about the service here?
Can I talk to the manager (boss)?
Can I talk to the manager for the delayed service?
Can you do it faster please?
Do you have any problem with my order?
Is there a reason it is taking so long?
What happened?
Why is the service late?
Why is it delayed? Can I have my money back?
What went wrong?
How can I complain?
Why does it take too long?
I would like to complain about the problem.
Excuse me, I have been waiting for a long time. How much longer do I need to wait?
Sorry, we need it now.
I'm unhappy about this or that and I'd like to complain.
I am really sorry, but I am a bit disappointed about the delay, can you make a commercial gesture?
The service was a little bit long delay.
I'm not happy with the service. I want to complain.
I'm not OK with the service.
I should complain this service.

Table 7: Helping the Luggage
Helping the Luggage

Could you take my luggage up to the room?
Can someone help me with my luggage?
Can you please take that bag?
Can I have somebody to help me bring my luggage?
Do you want to help me with my luggage? It is too heavy.
These are my bags. Please help me move them to my room.
I have a lot of luggage, can you help me out?
I want help from a bellboy to carry my luggage.
I would like some assistance with my suitcase.

Table 8: Asking for Tourist Attraction

Asking for Tourist Attraction

Could you please recommend the places that I can visit in Ayutthaya?
Can you show me the main attraction on the map?
Can you give me some information and show how to get to the attraction?
Can you tell me more about Ayutthaya?
Can you suggest me any Ayutthaya tourist attractions?
Can you recommend any good place in Ayutthaya?
Can I have a suggestion for better experience?
Can you tell me about Ayutthaya?
Do you have a guide for visiting temples?
Do you know a nice place to visit in Ayutthaya?
Do you have any suggestions for the best thing to see here?
What do you recommend?
What are the main attractions that I should visit in Ayutthaya?
Which one is the best temple to visit today?
Which temples should I visit?
Which ones are the closest to my hotel? / What type of place is it?
Where should I visit?
Where is the best place to go in Ayutthaya?
I would like to know where the tourist destinations are and how to go there.

Table 9: Asking for Direction

Asking for Directions

Could /Can you please tell me the way to the temple?
Could/ Can you show me the way for going to ...?
How can I go there?
Can you bring me here?
Can you help me reach ...?
May I have the directions to ...?
Do you know where it is located?
Do you know where I can find ... ?
Do you know how to get to ...?
How can I get to ... attraction?
How to provide transportation?
How do I get to the temples?
How can I go to ...?
I am looking for.... . Could you explain to me the way to get there?
I'm looking for this place. Would you happen to know how I could get there?
I'm lost. I need to find (place).

Discussions and Conclusion

English is a medium of communication in several industries, especially tourism and hospitality. The hotel front office staff need skills to get things done with foreign hotel guests. When talking and listening to foreign hotel staff, staff need an ability to

listen, understand the context, and so on. After distributing the questionnaires to the front office staff, they have completed their levels of needs in listening for services, complaints, general conversation, taking notes and conversation on the telephone. It shows that listening for service is at the highest ($x = 4.38$; $SD = 0.97$) which conforms to the study by Ravipreet S. Sohi (1997) that listening skill is highly important for salesperson or workers in related fields e.g. hospitality. The effective listening made by hotel front office staff will build the customers' trust and lead to mutual cooperation. Additionally, the overall needs to use listening skills ranks the highest ($x = 4.23$; $SD = 0.85$) which represents the necessity of acquiring listening skills. This result is similar to the previous research of Judi Brownell (1994) that says effective listening is one of the essential tools for the hospitality industry.

Although most of the hotels have organized in-house English language training there are still problems in communicating with foreign hotel guests due to the fact that there is a variety of staff's listening and speaking abilities, guests' accents, grammar accuracy, and so on. To be able to familiarize with these varieties, the researchers design a structured interview to collect English expressions spoken by foreign hotel guests based on situations in the hotel such as room reservation, check in and out, room cancellation, hotel facilities, complaint about delayed service, helping the luggage, asking for tourist attractions and asking for directions. It reveals that there is a slight difference in terms of forming a question in the structure of affirmative e.g. "I need to wait?" instead of "Do I need to wait?"; the use of article *a* and *the*; and word omission such as "swimming pool?" instead of "Where is the swimming pool?". The greatest benefit in collecting data of actual English expressions is that the hotel front office staff will be able to learn English through the variety of expressions in the mentioned situations that take place in the hotel because having a collection of actual expressions spoken by foreign hotel guests is an essential tool in preparing staff to be ready to provide hotel services resulting in increasing guests' satisfaction, hotel trust and country's reputation.

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