



HS030

**English Communication Strategies Employed by the Hotel Staff Members
in Buriram Province**

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Abstract

This research aimed 1) to investigate English communication strategies employed by the hotel staff members in Buriram province, 2) to study problems on English communication of the hotel staff members in Buriram province, and 3) to ascertain ways to solve the problems on English communication of the hotel staff members in Buriram province. The samples for this quantitative research were 150 hotel staff members who work in Buriram province, Thailand in 2017, selected by using the table of Krejcie and Morgan and simple random sampling technique. In addition, 20 hotel staff members were purposively selected for qualitative data. The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The collected data were analyzed by using percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

The findings revealed that the hotel staff members in Buriram province used English communication strategies for working at the moderate level. The achievement or compensatory strategy is the most frequently used, followed by stalling or time gaining strategy and avoidance or reduction strategy. In addition, the hotel staff members faced the problem most when they communicate with the foreign customers was “They are unable to understand the different foreign accents”. The way to solve the problems on English communication of the hotel staff members most was “asking the foreign customers to speak slowly”.

Keywords : English Communication Strategies, Hotel Staff Members

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Introduction

Nowadays, English is necessary for work, education and daily life. Since English is used and learned around the world more than other languages, it has become accepted as the universal language and the language of international communication. English is the mother tongue of millions of people around the world, the second language of millions more in Africa and Asia, and the acknowledged international language of science, technology, business, and diplomacy. About a quarter of world's population is fluent or competent in English. In addition, English is the most widely taught, read and spoken in the world. English is promoted as the international business language and the standard workplace language for ASEAN countries; also current employment requirements often include some degree of fluency in English in order to support the international needs of the company (Boonkit, 2010). This is especially true in a multilingual workplace, where almost all communication takes place in English. Therefore, superior English communication skills are the prime requisite for obtaining and holding a good job, as well as advancing to a better position in the contemporary business world (Jerharsae, 2012).

Thai people appear to have problems communicating in English as a second language, especially people of low ability. In the course of learning a second language, people will frequently encounter communication problems caused by pronouncing words incorrectly, knowing only few vocabulary, using inappropriate vocabulary to communicate and being unable to respond naturally to speak, and using incorrect grammar (Prachanant, 2012). Many people are very easy to get confused with English grammar, while grammar is very needed to form a right sentence. If they do not have grammar mastery, of course, they will not be able to produce sentences that grammatically right. Realizing that the grammar is very weak, therefore, they feel embarrassed and lack confident when they want to produce English sentences orally.

Communication strategies are the ways that learners use to overcome these problems in order to convey their intended meaning. Strategies used may include paraphrasing, substitution, coining new words, switching to the first language, and asking for clarification. These strategies, with the exception of switching languages, are also used by native speakers. This may be caused not only by the lack of basic grammar and vocabulary but also by deficiency in the use of appropriate



communication strategies. Low-ability experience difficulties in selecting the most appropriate strategies for many communicative contexts (Srisudaporn, 2006).

Communication strategies are defined as devices that learners/ workers of a second language when confronted with difficulties of communication in the target language and ensures that all significant information is dispersed to the correct people, both internally and externally. Communication strategy affects the organization image. If the hotel staff members have a standardized and professional method of communicating with their guests, as a result, those guests will get impressed and become the permanent clients. On the other hand, if the hotel staff members use the inappropriate communication strategies, the hotel guests may be unsatisfied and will not return to stay in the hotels. It also risk having conflicting information released if they do not have a specific communication plan in place.

This study focuses on investigating the communication strategies used by the hotel staff members who work in the hotels located in Buriram province as well as their problems faced and how to solve those problems. This is because the hotel staff members in Buriram province necessitates frequent communication with hotel guests.

The findings from this study will be useful for the hotel managers in Buriram province to plan and prepare their hotel staff members to get ready to be the good host. During 2018 – 2020, Buriram province will organize The Moto GP competition. Around 200,000 foreigners will join this big event; therefore, the hotels have to accommodate those guests. More importantly, the findings could be as the guidelines for creating materials or developing the training course for the hotel staff members in Buriram province.

Purposes of the Study

1. To investigate English communication strategies employed by the hotel staff members in Buriram province.
2. To study problems on English communication with the foreign guests of the hotel staff members in Buriram province.
3. To ascertain ways to solve the problems on English communication with the foreign guests of the hotel staff members in Buriram province.

Methodology

1. Population and Samples

The population of this research included 1,607 hotel staff members who work in Buriram province, Thailand in 2017.

The samples for quantitative data were 150 hotel staff members who work in Buriram province, Thailand in 2017. They were selected by using the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1978), and simple random sampling technique, respectively.

The samples for qualitative data were 20 hotel staff members who work in Buriram province, Thailand in 2017. They were selected by using purposive sampling technique.

2. Research Instruments

The research instruments in this study used were a self-reported questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The details of each instrument were as follows:

2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire included three parts, namely checklist, a 5-rating scale, and open-ended form. The 14 questionnaire statements were adapted from Nijaradze and Dogonadze (2015). The original questionnaire was translated in Thai language in order to minimize problems of ambiguity and misinterpretation. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the draft questionnaire version constructed by the researcher was modified and revised based on the suggestion of two English instructors and one statistics expert. After that, a pilot was to test the effectiveness of the

questionnaire and to improve language appropriateness of the questionnaire. The 30 hotel staff members in Buriram province of the pilot study were requested to fill out the questionnaire, to comment on the content and wording, and to give suggestions on items that should be added or excluded. Finally, the final draft of the questionnaire was revised before administering with the target group. In terms of the reliability of the questionnaire, alpha coefficient of Cronbach was calculated. The result revealed that the alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.83 which was accepted with high reliability. Therefore, it could be justifiable to claim that the data collecting instrument of the present study had both validity and reliability.

2.2 Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was used to obtain the in-depth information about the problems of English for communication and ways to solve the problems on English for communication of the hotel staff members in Buriram province. The five interview questions were gradually formulated and submitted to the three experts to check for the correctness and appropriateness. Finally, the researcher revised and edited the interview questions to be part of the interview.



3. Data Collection

3.1 Questionnaire

After sending the official letter to request for permission and cooperation to gather the data, the research distributed the target samples in each hotel in Buriram province. The researcher collected some data by himself and the two ex-students of the researcher who work in the hotels help to collect the data. The questionnaire was administered with the target group from October - December 2017 with the total of three months.

3.2 Semi-structured Interview

The final version of semi-structured interview guide was administered to 20 hotel staff members in Buriram province. The Thai version was used to interview the hotel staff members. Each of the 20 interviewees was interviewed for approximately ten minutes. Each interview was audio taped to ensure that all the information is recorded and can be reviewed afterwards. After the interviews had completed, the audiotapes were transcribed.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Questionnaire

After checking the completion of each questionnaire, the data gathered from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed by using Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) mainly focusing on the descriptive statistics analysis i.e. alpha coefficient, frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The statistical devices employed in this study were as follows:

4.1.1 Alpha coefficient of Cronbach was used to calculate the reliability of questionnaire.

4.1.2 Frequency (f) and percentage (%) were used to calculate the data of the personal information of the samples.

4.1.3 Mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S.D) were used to investigate the use of each of English communication strategies of the hotel staff members. The following criteria were employed for interpretation by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Three levels of interpretation proposed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995)

The key to understand average of usage group		
High	Always Use	3.50 or above
	Often Use	
Moderate	Occasionally Use	2.50 to 3.49
Low	Seldom Use	Below 2.50
	Never Use	

4.1.4 Content analysis

technique was used to analyze the data from the open-ended form.

4.2 Semi-structured Interview

The data obtained about the problems on English for communication and ways to solve the English for communication of the hotel staff members from the semi-structured interview were analyzed by content analysis technique.

Findings

1. English communication strategies employed by hotel staff members in Buriram province

The English communication strategies employed by hotel staff members in Buriram province are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: English communication strategies employed by hotel staff members in Buriram province

English communication strategies	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Meaning
1. Avoidance or reduction strategies	3.18	1.21	Moderate
2. Achievement or compensatory strategies	3.46	1.05	Moderate
3. Stalling or time gaining strategies	3.32	1.08	Moderate
Total	3.31	1.13	Moderate

As shown in Table 2, the hotel staff members rated all three strategies in overall at a moderate use ($\bar{X}$ =3.31, S.D.=1.13). When considering each English communication strategies used, it was found that

achievement or compensatory strategies is considered as the highest use for their work ($\bar{X}$ =3.46, S.D.=1.05), followed by stalling or time gaining strategies ($\bar{X}$ =3.32, S.D.=1.08),



and avoidance or reduction strategies ($\bar{X}=3.18$, S.D.=1.21), respectively.

2. Problems on English communication with the foreign guests of hotel staff members in Buriram province

The problems on English communication of the hotel staff members when they communicate with foreign customers obtained from the semi-structured interview are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Problems on English communication with the foreign guests of hotel staff members in Buriram province

Problems on English communication strategies	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
1. They are unable to understand the different foreign accents.	12	42.86
2. The foreign customers speak too fast.	8	28.57
3. They cannot catch the word phrases from the foreign customers.	5	17.86
4. They cannot explain in English.	3	10.71
Total	28	100.00

As shown in Table 3, it was found that the hotel staff members faced most problem is “They are unable to understand the different foreign accents”, followed by “The foreign customers speak too fast”, then “They cannot catch the words from the foreign customers”, and “They cannot explain in English”, respectively.

3. Ways to solve the problems on English communication with the foreign guests of hotel staff members in Buriram province

The ways to solve the problems on English communication of the hotel staff members when they communicate with foreign customers obtained from the semi-structured interview are as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Ways to solve the problems on English communication with foreign guests of the hotel staff members in Buriram province

Ways to solve the problems on English communication	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
1. Asking the foreign customers to speak slowly	9	36.00
2. Asking the foreign customers to speak again	7	28.00
3. Paying attention when listening to the foreign customers	5	20.00
4. Practice listening from the Internet	4	16.00
Total	25	100.00

As shown in Table 4, the hotel staff members' most the best way to solve the problem was "Asking the foreign customers to speak slowly", followed by "Asking the foreign customers to speak again", then "Paying attention when listening to the foreign customers", and "Practice listening from the Internet", respectively.

Discussion

1. English communication strategies used by the hotel staff members in Buriram province

The findings showed that the majority of the hotel staff members rated all three strategies as a moderate use. This may be explained by the fact in Thailand, hotel business brings a major income and increases the country economy effectively. While the foreigners visit Buriram province, they will stay in the hotels and have to

communicate with the hotel staff members. Therefore, it could be said that the hotel staff members tend to use English more to communicate with the foreign customers. This finding is consistent with Thitiadisai's (2011) study which indicated that the second year MEC of Thammasat University sometimes used the communication strategies in their oral communication.

The result also showed that most the hotel staff members in Buriram province perceived achievement or compensatory strategy as use the most, followed by stalling or gaining time strategies and avoidance or reduction strategies, respectively. Achievement or compensatory strategy was used as the high level for the hotel staff members in their work. It is perhaps explained by the fact that when they do not know the specific words to convey their message, they form a simple



sentence to explain the target words instead. The finding clearly supports Jeharsae (2012) who stated that achievement strategies were rate at the highest total mean score of 3.18, whereas avoidance strategies were rated at lowest the total mean score of 2.77.

Stalling or time gaining strategy was rated as the moderate used strategy. This clearly explains that when they do not know the words to communicate, they want to need more time for formulating or retrieving an utterance before producing it when the intended one was not immediately available. This is consistent with the result of Chuanchaisit and Prapphal (2009) who mentioned that low ability students tended to employ risk- avoidance techniques, especially time-gaining strategies, and needed assistance in developing risk-taking techniques, such as social-affective, fluency - oriented, help - seeking, and circumlocution strategies.

Avoidance or reduction strategy was used as the low level. This may be they thought that this strategy causes incomprehension for interlocutors and failure in communication. This result is consistent with Chanawong (2007) who said that avoidance strategy is seldom effective for second year MEC students.

2. Problems on English communication with the foreign guests of the hotel staff members in Buriram porvince

The finding revealed that the hotel staff members in Buriram province faced the most serious problem in their work is “They are unable to understand the different foreign accents”. This is because there are many customers from many countries coming to stay in the hotels in Buriram province, and they have difference accents of English. Their usual problems are being unable to understand different foreign accents, the foreign customers speak too fast, they cannot catch the word phrases from the foreign customers, and they cannot explain in English. This may be explained that not all hotel staff members in Buriram province can communicate with English fluently at all. This finding is consistent with Saisaengjan (2016) who mentioned that listening is regarded as the most problem of the employees who work in the business sectors.

3. Ways to solve the problems on English communication with foreign guests of the hotel staff members in Buriram province

The result of interview revealed that the way to solve the problems that hotel staff members in Buriram province used the most is “asking the foreign



customers to speak slowly”. This way may help them improve their English language skills to be able to understand different foreign accents. However, the hotel guests who speak English may be the good choice because the hotel staff members in Buriram province will have chances to practice listening and speaking to be more effective .As a result, most of the interviewees should take as a sample to get the better learning in English. The hotel staff members should more aware of how they cope with an oral communication in order to get the high level of English communication in the hotels located in Buriram province.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is carried out in order to provide an insight into the English communication strategies employed by the hotel staff members, problems on English communication, and ways to solve the those problems of the hotel staff members in Buriram province when they communicate with the foreign guests. The findings from this study might be as the guidelines for organizing a Hotel English course training which leads to the improvement for all hotel staff members and relevant persons in Buriram province. Also, it is anticipated that the conclusion of the present investigation might be utilized

to those responsible for policy and planning as well as related to the organizations in order to have a clearer understanding of English needs of college and university students who plan to work in the hotel business all over Thailand.

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