NEEDS ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS FOR HOTEL STAFF IN PHUKET PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the English Language functions for hotel staff while delivering their services. 30 hotel staff was simple random sampling and participated in this study. A questionnaire was used to collect the data and analyzed it by a computer program to find the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings indicated five most pertinent functions of the English language in the hotel jobs were: 1) Saying apology, 2) Welcoming and greeting, 3) Offering assistance to guests, 4) Suggesting directions, and 5) Providing and explaining about hotel facilities and services.

Keywords: English language functions, hotel staff, needs analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important role in Thailand's economy which accounted for 18.4% (or close to one fifth) of the GDP of the country. The continuation of the tourism promotion plans has widely drawn many tourists around the world to Thailand especially Phuket which is one of the top ten destinations among foreign visitors (Tourism Authority of Thailand, Online, 2011). According to the tourist statistics from year 2000-2018, the number of tourists visiting Thailand increased from 35 million in 2017 to 38 million in 2018 which is expected to be more in the future (Tourism Authority of Thailand, Online, 2018). This evidently indicated the necessities of the country to greatly develop in various areas especially the employees who communicate directly

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to tourists. They need to be able to perform correctly and communicate effectively in their jobs. Thus, English communicative employees must be greatly needed in tourism industry. Currently, Phuket has approximately 5,000 accommodations; starting from an on-budget accommodation to luxurious five or six-star hotels which continually demands workforces. With its expansion, the hotel industry has been seeking consistently for an employee who can communicate in English efficiently. Without a doubt, the ultimate goals of every hotel business are the exact same one, that is, turn all guests to become their regular guests. Thus, to make this goal possible, professional English or English competence is the significant tool for those who need to contact and communicate directly with guests to impress those potential guests perfectly. According to Akkakoson (1993), English is an essential tool for business communication and it is a necessity for employees. Nevertheless, English is still likely to be complicated for many of them especially those who did not graduate in English major programs and also for those who are working in the back offices. In other words, the departments whose their staff do not have a direct contact with guests. To communicate to guests, the staff in these departments might have their anxieties and a challenge to overcome. There is the number of research to investigate English language needed and functions in tourism industry in Thailand. Prachanant (2012) conducted a survey of English language needs, functions and problems of English language use in tourism industry, Sukgum (2014) investigated the English language needs of Thai massage therapists in Kanchanaburi, Phithakphongphun (2014) studied the needs of English skills of Airline ground staff and Dhanasmithivesn (2007) studied the needs of English language skills of Thai flight attendants of China Airlines.

According to the Western Languages Department of Thaksin University records from year 2006-2017. Evidently, a great numbers of students selected to work as a hotel trainee during their study internship program and continue to work in hotels after their graduation. These groups might find a difficulty to cope with the real situation at the beginning of their jobs. Hence, to professionally prepare those two groups for their real world careers. Developing suitable instructional materials will play an important role for their learning which can prepare them for the real situation in class before they encounter any real world difficulties. Most

importantly,as a researcher and as a lecturer of English for Hotel Business Subject, the interpretation of the needs analysis of this research can give an insightful information to design a precise and an effective instructional material which will be beneficial and greatly enhance the students' learning in situations which reflect language used in the real world. Ur (1993) posited that the contents and the activity in the instructional materials are designed to suit the student communicative needs and provide opportunities for students to develop their language skills within the classroom, using activities similar to situations in the real world. Similarly, Munby (1978) argues that the selection of materials should be based on a systematic analysis of specific learners 'needs for the target language by analyzing the reasons for learning, place and time of anticipated target use, others with whom the user will interact, content areas (active involved), skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, etc.) and level of proficiency required. As well as, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) English language needs and specific language skills are important to design an effective course. The factors such as users' needs, lacks and wants must be taken into account.

For the mentioned reasons, a study on the Needs analysis on English language functions for hotel staff in Phuket was preliminarily and theoretically conducted prior to next project of the researcher, that is, the designing of an instructional material for "English for Hotel Staff" course for TSU English major students.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the research was to investigate English language functions needed for hotel staff while delivering their services.

SCOPES AND LIMITATIONS

This research was conducted in order to survey the English language functions of hotel staff in Phuket Province in year 2018. The samplings in this research were only 30 hotel staff who have few years of work experiences. All of them graduated in bachelor degree programs. Therefore, the size of the samples, work experiences and their education were limited.

Methodology

The subjects of this research were 30 hotel staff who was working at five-star hotels in Phuket in 2018. The subjects were conveniently samples from the various settings for the study.

Instrument

The research instrument was a set of questionnaire which written in Thai in order to minimize ambiguity and misinterpretation. The questionnaire comprised of 25 items which adapted from Phithakphonphun (2014) "A Study on the needs of english skills of airline ground staff" The questionnaire consisted of three parts: general demographic information, questions relating to the English functional needs of all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. 5-point Likert scale was used to rate the respondents 'level of needs. To ensure the validity of the questionnaires, the draft version was modified and revised based on the suggestion of 5 English instructors in English department. After that, the 10 English majors taking English for Hotel Staff course were requested to fill out the questionnaires, to give their comments on the content, wording, items that should be added or excluded. Lastly, the questionnaire was revised and administered to the target hotel staff working in five-star hotel in Phuket from November - March 2018.

Data Analysis

The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program was used to compute the collected data obtained for the mean scores and standard deviation of each category from the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1. The needs of english language functions in the hotel jobs

Item numbers	Language functions	Mean	*SD*	Level	Rank
13	Saying apology	4.53	0.57	Extremely	1
7	Welcoming and greeting	4.43	0.73	Extremely	2
9	Offering assistance to guests	4.43	0.73	Extremely	2
12	Suggesting directions	4.40	0.67	Extremely	3

Table 1. (continued)

Item numbers	Language functions	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
8	Providing and explain about hotel facilities and services	4.27	0.87	Extremely	4
2	Listening to guests' requests	4.20	0.85	Mostly	5
10	Explaining mistakes	4.20	0.96	Mostly	5
19	Reading additional information with hotel technical terms	4.20	0.89	Mostly	5
21	Writing daily reports of logbooks	4.07	0.81	Mostly	6
17	Reading e-Mails, telexes and faxes	4.03	0.93	Mostly	6
1	Listening to guests 'personal details and information	4.03	0.76	Mostly	7
20	Writing messages to quests	4.03	1.03	Mostly	7
14	Reading guests 'travel documents (e.g. maps or itinerary)	3.97	0.81	Mostly	8
16	Reading food and beverages menus	3.97	0.93	Mostly	8
3	Listening to different accents (e.g. British, Indian and Singaporean)	3.93	0.91	Mostly	9
23	Writing directions	3.93	0.98	Mostly	9
5	Listening to conversation by phones	3.90	0.92	Mostly	10
22	Writing e-Mails, telexes and faxes	3.90	1.12	Mostly	10
24	Writing forms or documents for guests	3.83	1.15	Mostly	11
25	Writing additional information with hotel technical terms	3.80	1.10	Mostly	12
15	Reading any English manuals (e.g. instructions, internal login, telephone sim, equipment instructions)	3.70	0.88	Mostly	13
18	Reading advertisement and short news about hotels	3.67	0.92	Mostly	14
6	Listening to hotel advertisement through radio or TV	3.53	1.11	Mostly	15

There were 5 items of 25 items were rated at extremely level

At extremely level, the results reveal the need of language functions for 5 items (item 13, item 7, item 9, item 12) out of 25 items with the highest mean score at the extremely level. They were item 13, Saying apology (M = 4.53), item 7 Welcoming and greeting (M = 4.43), item 9, Offering assistance to guests (M = 4.43), item 12, Suggesting direction (M = 4.40), item 8, Providing and explain about hotel facilities and services (M = 4.27) respectively.

There were 19 items of 25 items were rated at mostly level

At mostly level, the results reveal the need of language functions for 19 items at the mostly level. They were item 2, listening to guests' requests (M = 4.20), item 10, Explaining mistakes (M = 4.20), item 19, Reading additional information with hotel technical terms (M = 4.20), item 21, Writing daily reports or logbooks (M = 4.07), item 17, Reading e-Mails, telexes, and faxes (M = 4.03), item 1, Listening to quests' personal details and information (M = 4.03), item 20, Writing messages to guests (M = 4.03), item 14, Reading guests' travel documents (e.g. maps or itinerary) (M = 3.97), item 16, Reading food and beverages (M = 3.97), item 3, Listening to different accents (e.g. British, Indian, Singaporean) (M = 3.93), item 23, Writing directions (M = 3.93), item 5, Listening to conversation by phones (M = 3.90), item 22, Writing e-Mail, telexes and faxes (M = 3.90), item 24, Writing forms or documents for guests (M = 3.83) , item 25, Writing additional information with hotel technical terms (M = 3.80), item 15, Reading any English manuals (e.g. instructions, internal login, telephone SIM, equipments instructions) (M = 3.70), item 18, Reading advertisement and short news about hotels (M = 3.67), and item 6, Listening to hotel advertisement through radio or TV with the lowest mean score (M = 3.53) of mostly level accordingly.

There were 1 item of 25 items was rated at moderately level

At moderately level, only item 4, Listening to English slang words with the mean score (M = 3.33) was identified. This was only one item rated at moderately level.

To sum up, from 25 items of the questionnaire, the majority of respondents rated 5 functions or 20% at the extremely level, 19 functions or 76% were rated at mostly level, and only 1 item or 4% was rated at moderately level.

DISCUSSIONS

What English language functions do hotel staff need most while delivering their services?

Regarding language functions on speaking skills, the average mean of all the functions was at an extremely level, namely saying apology, greeting, offering assistances, suggesting direction, explaining information, explain mistakes, suggesting travel information respectively. The subjects needed the most functions in speaking skills was quite predictable and presumable. This research was in accordance with the finding of Phithakphongphun (2014) on the needs of English language skills of airline ground staff which speaking skills were rated at extremely needed skill. Hotel business and airline business are both service business which involve rendering service to people, their routine job unavoidably needs the staff to communicate directly with guests (face to face) to ensure satisfactions in all situations while performing their duties. When considering the functions "Saying apology" was the highest mean score, it was quite rational to explain this, since "Politeness" is regarded as the most significant aspect of the service industry.

Regarding language functions on reading, the average mean of all functions was at mostly level, namely reading additional information with technical terms, emails and faxes, menus, guests' travel documents, manuals, and advertisement or short news about hotel business respectively. This research was in line with the findings of Dhanasmithivesn (2007) on the English language skills needs of Thai flight attendants of China airlines which revealed that the English language reading skill was the most frequently used to perform their jobs effectively and the skill most needing training. When considering the functions "Reading additional information with technical terms" had the highest mean score, importantly, the staff needs to understand those technical terms in their routines to perform their duties properly. Either hotel codes or hotel technical terms (for an example; ABF refers to american breakfast while CBF refers to continental breakfast or "No show" refers to those particular guests who didn't come to stay at the hotel even though they had booked the rooms) must be understood or interpreted correctly in order to perform further services effectively.

Regarding language functions on writing, the average mean of all functions was at mostly level. When considering the functions in terms of mean score, "Writing reports or logbooks" were rated as the highest mean score. Shift working is importantly and considerably notable in hotel business; morning shifts or night shifts. To consistently service guests, the staff need to write their reports or logbook in order to inform their job history information during his shift to the next working shift for a smooth working continuation "Writing messages to guests" and "Writing direction" are essential in case of the uncertainty of guests. As it was previously mentioned, the function of "Reading and writing e-mails, texts, faxes" is also necessary as the channel to communicate between hotels and their guests or their relevant partners.

Regarding language functions on listening, the average mean of all functions was at mostly level, namely listening to guests'requests, guests' personal details, different accents, hotel advertisement and short news through radio or TV, and English slang words respectively. However, the functions of listening were rated at the lowest mean score in this research which was not in line with the findings of Sukgum (2014) on the English language needed of skills, functions, and vocabulary related to this job of Thai massage therapists in Kanchanaburi. Her study indicated that Thai massage therapists most needed listening skill and followed by speaking skill. The possible explanation of the differences of the level of necessities of this skill might be from the differences in educational backgrounds of the respondents. While the former study, all of the respondents (30 respondents) graduated in bachelor degree, the latter study, only 16 respondents completed their bachelor levels, the rest of them did not complete bachelor level. This might be the factor of the importance and the necessities of the listening skill between these 2 studies. Therefore, Thai massage therapists faced more difficulties in listen to their guests more than the hotel staff who gained more skill-practice in the universities level. Hence, the training for hotel staff should emphasize on the speaking while the training for massage therapists should emphasize on listening skill with related vocabulary accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Practical implications

1. The results of the research contributed directly to the designing an instructional material for "English for Hotel Staff" course for TSU English major students.   Since, after their graduation, mostly they work in the tourism industry especially hotel business in southern of Thailand especially Phuket. The findings will guide the appropriate contents, the most and the least function needed, the most and the least English language skills, the emphasis on the important skills (listening and speaking), and meaningful activities that should be largely implemented and emphasized while teaching. Also, relevant vocabulary, suitable authentic work – forms, practical assignments and homework should be sufficiently included.

2. Moreover, this research is useful for developing professional training course in any hotels in Phuket. Hotel staff who completes the course should be awarded with certificate and acknowledged their improvement to motivate other staff by the workplace. However, to maintain the proficiency of the staff, yearly English tests or suitable tests should be administered to oversee the overall communication skills of their staff.

3. Also, the results of this research could be utilized by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, for policy making and planning, in order to support locally and develop local people more professional even though they are not working in hotels. Yet, local people unavoidably encounter tourists as the host of their hometown, to give a nice greeting, directions or small talk could contribute to the impression of visiting Thailand. In addition, the Ministry of Education, should implement the effective syllabus of "English for Hotel Staff" with the emphasis on listening and speaking into practice for institutes 'nationwide in Thailand especially, vocational or technology schools where directly require more English for Specific purpose course for developing students into the careers in tourism industry for the country.

Research recommendations

The following recommendations are made for further research.

1. This research used a questionnaire as the primary instruments. Consequently, it may not cover all the aspects of the respondents' attitudes and opinions. To gain more insightful information, other instruments such as observations, and interviews

should be employed so that the respondents can provide clarity or extend their language barriers. This would help the researcher collect more in-depth information. 2. Due to the limited number and only the specific southern hotel staff in this research, the interferences that can be drawn are limited and the results cannot be much generalized. Future research of more hotel staff in different regions of Thailand or other relevant fields in tourism industry may generate more varied and efficient results.

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