

ENGLISH NEEDS IN SPA AND MASSAGE SHOPS: PERSPECTIVES OF CUSTOMERS, THERAPISTS, AND RECEPTIONISTS

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Abstract: *Thailand is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. One of the key reasons lies in its notable health and hospitality services. Thailand's spa and massage industry has seen a steady growth in recent years, inspiring spa and massage employees to improve their English ability for higher quality massage and spa services. This study aims to examine the needs of English for spa and massage therapists, receptionists as well as customers in spa and massage shops. Results reveal that that some of the most needed English language functions include asking customers about pain, asking customers to change their posture and greeting customers, respectively. Customers need information concerning pain and massage programs. Interestingly, while the spa and massage employees believed that taking in other topics was not important, the customers had different views, but customers reported that they were more concerned about the quality of the massage services than the massage therapists' English skills. Regardless, customers believed that receiving services from massage therapists with English skills would make their experiences more pleasant. Since the findings of the study were from both spa and massage therapists and foreign customers, the findings from this study was able to better inform program and material developers as well teachers and students about English language functions needed in spa and massage shops.*

Keywords: *English language needs, spa and massage, English for Specific Purposes*

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that Thailand is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. In 2016, the total number of foreign tourist arrivals in Thailand was 35,381,210, which is an increase of 8.77 percent compared against the number of foreign tourists from the previous year, generating an income of over 1,824 billion baht to Thailand (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017)[1]. One of the key reasons why Thailand is a popular tourist destination is because of its impressive health and hospitality services. According to Economic Intelligence Center (EIC), which is a research center of Siam commercial Bank, the market value of the spa industry is about 35 billion Baht with an increase of 8 percent per annum during 2013-2015. Thailand's spa was ranked the 16th place in the world, and the 5th in Asia, just behind China, Japan, South Korea, and India (Pitigraisorn, 2018)[2]. Global Wellness Institute (GWI) projects that the global spa business market will grow constantly at an approximate rate of 7 percent per annum, valued at THB 27 trillion between 2015 and 2020. It is projected that this growing trend will also benefit Thai spa industry.

Thailand has set up a strategic plan for 2017-2026 to promote Thailand as a center for International Health (Medical Hub), which includes the promotion of spa and health working systems as well as health tourism. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports promoted the year 2018 as a traditional Thai tourism and organized Medical Hub Expo 2018 to drive Thailand to become an international health center with the aim

to generate higher incomes to the country, and mainly targeting foreign tourists (National News Bureau of Thailand, 2017)[3]. Hence, English communication skills is becoming a crucial factor for improving the quality of services and customers' satisfaction. Khon Kaen, one of the largest cities in Thailand, is a major province in the Northeast of Thailand. Each year, a large number of foreign tourists visit Khon Kaen. In the first quarter of the year, between January and March 2016, there were about 17,575 tourists and there were 20,090 tourists during the same period in 2017, an increase of 14.31 percent. Most of the tourists were from France, Laos, United Kingdom, and Australia, respectively. In addition, there are approximately 25 spa and massage shops registered with the municipality (Khon Kaen Municipality, 2016)[4].

Previous studies examined English needs in different professions such as photocopy employees (Siriket, 2011), bus drivers (Sangsai, 2004), health club trainers (Tranantasin, 2011), hotel front office staff (Charunsri, 2011), and booksellers (Piwong, 2011)[5-9]. To the best of our knowledge, there is only one study conducted by Khakhai (2014) that examines the English language needs and problems of Thai massage therapists at spas [10]. The participants of the study were 50 Thai massage therapists working in spa and massage shops located on Khaosarn Road in Bangkok. The data was collected using a structured interview to examine the massage therapists' needs and problems in using English. The results revealed that listening and speaking skills were the most important skills while the most problematic skills were writing, reading, listening, and speaking, respectively. Also, vocabulary, cultural training, pronunciation, and spellings were needed in their jobs whereas grammar and sign and body language seemed to be least needed. Even though revealing some important information concerning English language needs and problems in spa and massage shops, this study was conducted in from the perspectives of the massage therapists only, no information from the receptionists who also play important roles in greeting guests as well as giving information before the massage. Also, there is no information from the customer's point of view. Therefore, the purposes of the study are to examine the English language needs and problems in spa and massage shops from three groups of participants, namely massage therapists, receptionists, and foreign customers. It is expected that the findings of this study will provide further information for developing course materials for spa and massage employees and also for researchers who are in the area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The following are research questions that will guide the subsequent sections of this paper:

1. What are the needs of English functions in the spa and massage shops?
2. What are the needs of foreign customers in terms of English functions in spa and massage shops?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Specific Purposes

According to Robinson (1991) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is defined similarly by academics in the field as language and skills EFL learners need in order to obtain in their specific area, profession, or future profession [11-12]. Hutchison and Waters (1987) refer to ESP as an approach to instruction where the content and methods are based on learner's reason's for learning [13]. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) may have emerged for three reasons: the demand of a Brave New World, development in linguistics, and learner centeredness (Hutchison & Waters, 1987). To begin, English educators were pressed to deliver English courses that fit the demand of its learners. There was an ongoing shift to develop course curriculums based on the demands of the users rather than the knowledge prescribed by teachers. Secondly, the 1960s and '70s witness a shift from linguist-based curriculum to a more functional based curriculum. That is, previously, language learning and research were interested in the linguistic dimensions of languages. However, some researchers believed that language could be better studied in its context of use. Different contexts required different purposes, skills, lexis, structures of language use. English for Science and Technology is a product of early courses based on the principles of ESP. Finally, from an educational psychology stand point, learners would be more motivated and hence succeed if they were learning language skills and functions that met their immediate demands.

Mackey and Mountford (1978) argue that ESP is designed for utilitarian purposes normally defined by occupational requirements such as international telephone operators, airline staff, or physicians [14]. Therefore, the main focuses of ESP concern discourse and genre, and skills and language (register, lexis, and grammar) specific to the discipline. There are higher needs in different areas of ESP to fulfill the needs of those involved in this area such as program and content development, materials, and teachers with ESP expertise (Hutchison & Waters, 1987; St. John & Johnson, 1996) [13, 15]. However, important information concerning ESP content, lexis, and linguistic behavior of the BE language for the development of courses, materials, and program and for the preparation of teachers is still lacking (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; St. John & Johnson, 1996)[12, 15].

As ESP requires information about specific language use, its function, and context, practitioners and researchers have made use of needs analysis to collect this information. Needs analysis is a series of processes informing the parameters of a course, its criteria and rationale for classification of learners, the selection and ordering of material, methodology, and period of course and intensity (Nunan, 1988) [16]. Similarly, Brown (2009) describes needs analysis as procedures of collecting information of needs of particular group in education or industry [17]. The analysis helps determine the learning objectives, activities, and assessment strategies. Hutchison and Waters (1987) classify needs analysis into two types: needs related to what the learners need to do in the target situations and needs related to the learning process.

Currently, ESP may be divided into three types according to Carter (1983): English as a restricted language, English with a specific topic, and English for academic and occupational purposes [18]. English as a restricted language could include language used by traffic controllers, waiters, or flight attendants where the language is short and concise and not necessarily grammatical and include technical vocabulary. Carter further divided English with a specific topic into English for science and technology, English for business and economics, and English for social studies. Hutchison and Waters (1987), however, argue that these are not really different from English for academic and occupational purposes [14].

With regards to research, studies on ESP have between the 1980s and early 2000s have been dominated by text and discourse analysis (Pradhan, 2013) [19]. In fact, discourse analysis accounted for almost half of all the ESP research published during that period (Hewings & Hewings, 2002) [20]. More recently, investigations into ESP has broadened its scope to include a higher proportion of program description, needs analysis, syllabus design, and materials and methods (Pradhan, 2013). Discourse analysis is still a major research topic.

METHOD

A. Participants

The participants of the study included three groups. The first group was 40 massage therapists (36 female and 4 male) aged between 21 and 65. They had experiences of 1 month to over 9 years providing massage services. Most of them had primary education, followed by high vocational certificate and Bachelor's degree. The second group was 20 receptionists (18 female and 2 male) aged between 20 and 46, and the last group was 20 foreign customers (4 female and 16 male), who were from Russia, USA, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, France, Spain, and Germany. The spa and message employees worked in 20 spa and message shops located in Khon Kaen Municipality, Thailand.

B. Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study: a questionnaire for massage therapists, a semi-structured interview form for receptionists, and a semi-structured interview form for foreign customers. The questionnaire for massage therapists is comprised of six sections: Personal information, English language needs for welcoming and introducing massage courses, English language needs for preparing before massage, English language needs during massage, English language needs after massage, and English problems when communication breakdown occurred. Sections 2-5 were constructed using a 5-point Likert's scale. Sections 2-5 of the semi-structure interview form for foreign customers was similar to the questionnaire for massage therapists, except Section 1 which aimed to elicit the information regarding customer's demographic information such as age, gender, and frequency of having Thai massage, and Section 6 was removed. The interview form for receptionists was aimed to examine language needs and problems as well as how they solved the communication problems when communication breakdowns occurred. The instruments were checked for validity and appropriateness by experts. Equations

C. Data collection

The data were collected between March and May 2017 with 20 spa and message shops located in Khon Kaen Municipality. Each shop was contacted and asked for volunteering to participate in this study. Appointments with the shops were made prior to the visits. Foreign customers were visitors or foreigners who lived or worked in Khon Kaen, Thailand and had received spa or Thai massage services before.

D. Data analysis

The data from the interview and Section 6 of the questionnaire for the massage therapist participants were analyzed adopting content analysis. The data from the Likert's scale were analyzed for mean and standard deviation, and then were interpreted using the following criteria:

Very high needs	=	4.21	-
		5.00	
High needs	=	3.41	-
		4.20	
Moderate needs	=	2.61	-
		3.40	
Low needs	=	1.81	-
		2.60	
Very low needs	=	1.00	-1.80

RESULTS

A. Research Question 1 What are the needs of English functions in the spa and massage shops?

Massage therapists

Based on the findings from the demographic information, most of them had experienced learning English between 6 – 9 years (30 percent); however, a few of them had no English background (2.4 percent). The participants reported that they needed to communicate in English about 1-3 days a week (45.5 percent). Most of them (71.4 percent) worked seven days a week, and about 9.5 percent worked three days a week. The longest hours they had to work were 12-14 hours with the least working hours were 4 hours. Most of the participants (45%) ranked their English ability at an average level (on a scale of four level: good, average, fair, and poor).

TABLE 1: ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS AND PROBLEMS

No.	Item	Needs of English		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
English skills needed for working in spa and massage shops				
1.	Listening	4.91	0.29	Very high
2.	Speaking	4.73	0.46	Very high
3.	Reading	3.64	1.00	High
4.	Writing	3.18	0.91	Moderate
5.	Vocabulary	4.45	0.80	Very high
6.	Pronunciation	4.27	0.70	Very high
7.	Grammar	3.59	0.96	High
English language problems when working in spa and massage shops				
8.	Listening	4.91	0.39	Very high
9.	Speaking	4.92	0.36	Very high
10.	Reading	4.56	0.92	Very high
11.	Writing	4.29	0.91	Very high
12.	Vocabulary	4.56	0.72	Very high
13.	Pronunciation	4.85	0.60	Very high
14.	Grammar	4.78	1.00	Very high
Welcoming and introducing massage course				
15.	Greeting customers	4.82	0.39	Very high
16.	Introducing Thai massage programs	4.23	0.81	Very high

17.	Describing prices and promotion of Thai massage programs	4.50	0.60	High
18.	Presenting advantages of having Thai massage	4.00	0.69	High
Preparing before massage				
19.	Asking customers to take off shoes and socks	4.09	1.06	High
20.	Asking customers to wash body/foot before massage	3.91	0.87	High
21.	Telling directions to toilet, changing room/massage room	4.64	0.49	Very high
22.	Asking customers to take off clothes before massage	4.77	0.43	Very high
During massage				
23.	Asking customers to change postures of massage	4.86	0.35	Very high
24.	Asking customers about pains and symptoms or asking about the press level of massage	4.95	0.21	Very high
25.	Talking in other topics such as travel, weather, and food.	3.36	1.00	Moderate
After massage				
26.	Asking customers to change back to their clothes	4.41	0.80	Very high
27.	Telling customers to make a payment	4.14	0.83	High
28.	Saying goodbye and asking to visit again	4.77	0.53	Very high
29.	Telling customers to check their belonging	4.55	0.80	Very high

According to Table 1, the English language skills desired the most by massage therapists were listening, speaking, and vocabulary, respectively. Not surprisingly, writing was least needed as it may be the skill least needed during work. With regards to English language functions, all English language functions from welcoming and introducing massage courses to after message were all highly needed. It seems they mostly needed the language to converse with the customer were during the massage, i.e., asking customers about pains and symptoms or asking about the press level of massage ($Mean = 4.95, SD = 0.21$) and asking customers to change postures of massage ($Mean = 4.86, SD = 0.35$), welcoming and introducing massage course, i.e., greeting customers ($Mean = 4.82, SD = 0.39$), and after massage, i.e., saying goodbye and asking to visit again ($Mean = 4.77, SD = 0.53$). The language function that was least needed was talking in other topics such as travel, weather, and food ($Mean = 3.36, SD = 1.00$). Finally, the massage therapists reported having problems using all English language skills.

Regarding how the therapists solve the problems when they were not able to convey the meaning in English, they reported using body language and tools. For example, when they needed to ask a foreign customer to change his clothes, they handed the massage clothes to the foreign customer and directed them to the changing room. They may also need to demonstrate or use hand signals to communicate what they wanted customers to do such as flipping left, flipping right, lying on the back, or lying on the tummy. For those who were not able to ask about the intensity of the press level, they would observe from the customer's facial expressions. When the service was completed, they would point to the receptionist counter to signal the completion of the services and they had to change clothes and pay for the services.

Receptionists

The data from the interviews showed that most of the receptionists had problems communicating with foreign customers. They reported that they needed to greet customers, introduce Thai massage programs, give information about prices and promotions, and present advantages of having Thai massage. Sometimes, they needed to give time slots or appointments that the services would be available. Also, they needed to ask the customer to pay and give changes, and to say goodbye and ask them to visit again. When asking how they solve language problems when they were not able to express themselves in English, they reported

that they used different strategies. For example, to give the information about the prices and promotion, they used information on storefronts or provided brochures in English so that the customer could understand and select the services they wanted. When giving the amount of money the foreign customer needed to pay, they would use a calculator and give the amount of money they needed to pay on the screen, write the amount of money on paper, or use fingers to display the amount of money. When the customer wanted to book time slots for services, the receptionists reported that they often used body language such as wiping hand or use short words such as yes or no to tell the customer whether the services were available. They also pointed at clock to indicate the time slots that the services were available.

B. Research Question 2 What are the needs of foreign customers in terms of English functions in spa and massage shops?

Most of the foreign customer participants (60 percent) received about one to two massage services; the rest had over six ones. Table 2 shows that the massage therapists should be able to perform the listed English language functions at high and very high levels, except Asking customers to wash body/foot before massage and asking customers to take off clothes before massage, which were ranked at a moderate level. The English language functions the foreign customers believed the massage therapists should be able to perform well included introducing Thai massage programs ($Mean = 4.54, SD=0.52$) and asking customers about pains and symptoms or asking about the press level of massage ($Mean = 4.34, SD=0.52$). Interestingly, for the foreign customers, the ability to talk about topics such as travel, weather, and food was important and rated at a high level ($Mean = 3.50, SD=1.22$) while it was considered not so important by the massage therapist participants. Most of the foreign customers reported in the interview that communication problems with therapists were not major concerns when receiving massage. They were more concerned with the quality of services. They used body language to communicate with the massage therapist such as pointing to indicate where they wanted to be massaged, nodding to show that it was okay, or shaking their head to refuse. However, they believed that receiving services from massage therapists with higher English proficiency, their experiences with massaging would be more pleasant.

TABLE 2: ENGLISH FUNCTIONS NEEDED BY FOREIGN CUSTOMERS

No.	Item	Needs of English		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Welcoming and introducing massage course				
1.	Greeting customers	4.17	0.98	High
2.	Introducing Thai massage programs	4.54	0.52	Very high
3.	Describing prices and promotion of Thai massage programs	4.00	1.10	High
4.	Presenting advantages of hiving Thai massage	4.00	0.89	High
Preparing before massage				
5.	Asking customers to take off shoes and socks	3.50	1.22	High
6.	Asking customers to wash body/foot before massage	3.00	1.10	moderate
7.	Telling directions to toilet, changing room/massage room	3.50	1.05	High
8.	Asking customers to take off clothes before massage	3.17	0.98	moderate
During massage				
9.	Asking customers to change postures of massage	4.00	0.89	High
10.	Asking customers about pains and symptoms or asking about the press level of massage	4.34	0.52	Very high
11.	Talking in other topics such as travel, weather, and food.	3.50	1.22	High
After massage				

12.	Asking customers to change back to their clothes	3.50	1.22	High
13.	Telling customers to make a payment	3.67	1.03	High
14.	Saying goodbye and asking to visit again	3.67	1.21	High
15.	Telling customers to check their belonging	4.00	0.89	High

DISCUSSION

The results of the study were in line with previous studies (Ariyatungun, 2012; Charunsri, 2011; Khakhai, 2014; Piwong, 2011; Sangsai, 2004; Siriket, 2011; Tranantasin, 2011) that English is highly needed in different professions. The language functions such as the ones from the present study showed different language functions employees in those professions needed in order to communicate with their customers and perform their job successfully and efficiently (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 2000). The results of the present study are different from those of previous studies because in this study both the staff and the customer's perspectives are taken into account when examining language needs. The findings from the customer's point of view provides more insight into what language is needed in such professional services. As can be seen from the results of the study, there was some mismatch between the therapist participants' belief and the customer on talking in other topics. Future studies should include needs of customers when analyzing language needs in the context of English for Specific Purposes. Also, future studies should examine employees' pragmatic ability as well as customers' views on employees' pragmatic ability since it plays an important role in successful communication.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed important findings regarding language needs in spa and massage shops from both employees and customers' points of views. The major findings showed that most massage therapists were not competent in communicating in English with foreign customers, and they needed related language functions to help them successfully completed their job. Therefore, learning materials or packages using the findings of the present study as guidelines will be needed. Tourism industry, especially spa and massage business, is a vital component that is believed to help drive the economy of the nation. With higher English language proficiency, the employees in this business areas will be able to better provide services to customers, which in turn will help increase and boost the reputation of Thailand as a medical hub for the nation's sustainable economy.

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