

ENGLISH USED IN SOUVENIR SHOPS: A NEEDS ANALYSIS APPROACH

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Abstract: *Due to a greater number of tourists visiting Thailand each year, one important business that helps boost the tourism industry is souvenir shops because people like to be reminded of special moments in their lives and to hold evidence of those special moments, so they keep their memory by collecting something that remind them to think about those places again. The main purpose of this study is twofold: to examine English language needs, problems, and functions that salespersons need in to order to communicate with foreign customers, and to examine how the souvenir employees solve problems when encountering communication problems. The data were collected with 20 souvenir sellers through semi-structured interviews and the data were analyzed adopting content analysis. The results reveal that employees in the souvenir shops needed English skills to help them better perform their professional works. The English language functions that they needed to better serve their customers included thanking and gratitude, giving product information, and taking money and giving changes. The findings of the study can be used as guidelines for teachers, course and material developers, as well as any lay people who are interested to learn about English language functions used in souvenir shops.*

Keywords: *English language needs, souvenir shops, English for Specific Purposes*

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is one of the most visited country due to its riches in cultures and tourist attractions such as sandy beaches, diving sites, nightlife, palaces, archaeological sites, hill tribes, museums, flora and bird life, Buddhist temples and several World Heritage sites. Tourism industry in Thailand is a major economic factor in Thai economy. In 2017, Thailand was the 10th "top tourist destination" in the world tourism rankings with 35.4 million international arrivals, and it was ranked the first visited country in Asia-Pacific with the value of 57,477 million US dollar (UNWTO, 2017), and in 2008, Bangkok ranked the 2nd on the list of "Top City Destinations" with close to 24 million visitors, just behind London, Singapore, and Paris (Euromonitor international, 2017) [12]. The number of tourists visiting Thailand increases every year, with a rise of 8.5 percent in 2017.

People like to be reminded of special moments in their lives and to hold evidence of those special moments, so they keep their memory by collecting something that remind them to think about that places again. Souvenirs are an important component of the tourist experience, with most tourists bringing back mementos and souvenirs as evidence especially something that make only in that country because every place in the world have a different geographic and different culture. Located in different tourist attractions, souvenir shops are often visited by tourists to by souvenirs for their loved ones or for memory.

Khon Kaen is one of the largest cities in Thailand and is the largest and most visited province in the Northeast of Thailand. In

2016, there were 4.56 million visitors, which included 4.49 million Thai visitors and about 70,000 foreign visitors mostly from

French, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, and USA, generating about 13,122.39 million bath to the province (Khon Kaen Statistics Office, 2017) [3]. In 2016, Khon Kaen has offered over 357 one-subdistrict-one products, which generated over 4.4 million bath to the province's incomes. As can be seen, souvenir shops are one of the major component driving the province's incomes. English language functions needed to be used in such shops are important to increase the communication effectiveness between the salesperson and foreign customers. Effective communication does not only to help increase the sale volume, but also to help create good impression in foreign customers, which in turn will help boost the tourism industry in Thailand.

Previous studies have conducted needs analysis for language functions in different professions such as homestay hosts

(Seechinda, 2005), domestic civil servants (Wongkaew, 2006), pharmaceutical retailers (Chimali, 2007), health club staff (Faidee, 2009), photocoyist (Siriket, 2011), and car salespersons (Ariyatugun, 2012), tourist guides (Wichaidit, 2014), and tourism industry (Wiriyasin, 2014)[4-11]. None of previous studies examine the needs of salespersons for English functions in souvenir shops.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is threefold, as follows:

1. To examine English language needs, problems, and functions that salespersons need in to order to communicate with foreign customers
2. To examine how they solve problems when encountering communication problems

LITERATURE REVIEW

Need analysis

Need analysis or need assessment is very important for designing a language course to better meet the needs of learners. It is vital for a teacher to have trustworthy information when a language course is designed in order that the anxiety between learners, teachers, and syllabus can be reduced.

According to Nunan (1988) and Richards (1992) needs analysis is a process to define learners' needs in order to design a syllabus or course that matches with their needs [12-13]. Needs analysis does not only help identify learner's necessities, but also needs and lacks, i.e., what they can do and what they cannot do (Fatihi, 2003)[14]. Needs analysis does not only provide information concerning language needs in different professional situations, but it also gives information concerning linguistic features needed to perform in those situations (Hutchison & Water, 1987)[15]. Need analysis needs to be conducted before developing any program or language course in order to obtain appropriate teaching methodology and content that match with the needs of particular learners (Dudley-Evans & St.John, 1998) [16].

Different linguists have stated different types of Needs Analysis. According Nunan (1988), needs analysis is divided into two types: learner analysis and task analysis[12]. *Learner analysis* is conducted to obtain the information about learners. *Task analysis* concerns with tasks that are used in the classroom and are expect by the learner. Richterich (1980) separated need analysis into two categories: *Subjective and Objective Needs Analysis*[17]. Subjective needs refer to the needs containing subjective information which are often desires, wants, and expectation of the learner. Objective Needs Analysis is about objective information which includes the fact about the learner information such as their language proficiency and patterns language use. Finally, Mackay and Mounthford (1978) mentioned that most of ESP is associated with teaching English to learners who need English for their professions or future professions such as science, applied science, administration commerce, technology and medicine[18]. As such, Mackay and Mounthford separate needs into two types: *academic needs* and *job needs*. The first one is required for future academic study; for example, computer science students require learning English to understand the content in a specific field. The later one, *Job needs*, is required for working in a certain job; for example, engineers need English language to complete their engineering projects [18].

METHOD

A. Participants.

The participants of this study were 20 salespersons working in souvenir shops located in Khon Kaen province. The shops were located around main tourist attractions in Khon Kaen municipality which were popular among foreign tourists.

B. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a semi-structured interview form and an observation form. The questionnaire was comprised of three sections, aiming to examine background information, English language functions that are needed to be used in the souvenir shops, and problems and strategies the salespersons used when encountering communication problems.

C. Data collection

The data were collected between in April 2017. Personal contacts were made with the owners and the salespersons of the shops. Only those who volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed. The interview lasted about one hour during the working time.

D. Data analysis

The data were analyzed for percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis by grouping the information into different categories.

RESULTS

The participants were 20 salespersons (2 male, and 18 female), aged between 21 and 48. 35 percent (7) had a bachelor degree, the rest finished high school (30 percent), diploma (30 percent), and primary school (5 percent). Most of them (60 percent) had worked as salespersons for 4 years. All of them had experience selling souvenirs to foreign customers.

A. English language needs and problems of salespersons in souvenir shops

All the participants (100 percent) reported that they needed English skills to communicate with foreign customers. All of them (100 percent) wanted to improve their speaking and listening skills, while only 50 percent wanted to improve reading and writing skills. On a scale of 1-5, they participants rated their English language skills at a moderate level for all language skills: reading, listening, writing, listening, and with the least able speaking skills ($Mean = 3.10, 2.90, 2.90, 2.85, SD=0.91, 0.85, 0.94, 0.93$, respectively). The major problems of communication were (1) sometimes they do not understand what the foreign customers said and (2) do not know English vocabulary necessary for communicating and selling products. They reported that they did not have sufficient English language ability to communicate with foreign customers (80 percent). The main reasons included lack of confidence to communicate in English, not understanding foreigners' spoken language, low speaking and listening skills, and lack English training. They reported that they needed to improve mainly speaking (75 percent) and listening (25 percent). Also, if it is possible, they need to be provided with a short course to practice Basic English language, an English package in terms of books and CD which consist of basic conversational, and translation devices to assist them when communicating with foreign customers.

As can be seen from Table 1, there are seven language functions needed by the salespersons to perform their sales job. The three language functions that are most needed include Thank you and gratitude (Frequency = 19), followed by Greeting, welcoming, and offering help to customers (Frequency = 17), giving information about products (Frequency = 11), and Tanking money and giving changes (Frequency = 11).

TABLE 1: LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS NEEDS TO COMMUNICATE WITH FOREIGN CUSTOMERS

No.	Language Functions	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Greetings, Welcoming and Offering help	17	85 %

2.	Giving product's information (Uses, benefits, qualifications, colors, sizes, materials, prices, discounts, and story of the product)	11	55 %
3.	Negotiation (Accepting and denying the negotiation)	9	45 %
4.	Taking money and giving changes (total of money and changes)	11	55 %
5.	Apologizing and Forgiving	7	35 %
6.	Thanking and Gratitude	19	95 %
7.	Farewell	9	45 %

B. How salespersons solve problems when encountering communication problems with foreign customers

According to Table 2, the participants employed seven different strategies to communicate with the customers when encountering communication problems (i.e., inability to express themselves in English). The most used strategies were writing and drawing (Frequency = 14), body language (Frequency = 3), and ask other staff for assistance (Frequency = 3). Surprisingly, one participant reported having no problem regarding communicating in English with foreign customers.

TABLE 2: PROBLEM SOLVING WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH FOREIGN CUSTOMERS

No.	Problems Solving	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Uses body language	3	15 %
2.	Uses writing and drawing	14	70 %
3.	Ask other staff for assistance	3	15 %
4.	Tells the foreign customers that not good at English	1	5 %
5.	Uses the calculator	1	5 %
6.	Uses online dictionary on mobile phone	1	5 %
7.	Do not have any problems since it is amulet shop	1	5 %

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study showed that similar to previous studies (e.g., Chaimali, 2011; Faidee, 2009; Siriket, 2011; Ariyatugun, 2012)[6,7,8,9], the participants in this study needed English skills to communicate with their customers. English language is currently highly needed to efficiently preform professional works and now it becomes a goal-oriented need (Robinson, 1991)[19]. Not surprisingly, the English skills they most wanted to improve was speaking and listening, similar to other studies (e.g.,

Aunruen, 2005; Tangniam, 2006)[20-21]. It is due to the fact that speaking is the method to send oral messages (Hair, Friedrich, & Dixon, 2005)[22]. This skill is important for souvenir sellers to greet, give information about the product, offer assistance, collecting money, and thanking the customer.

It was found that the language functions most needed was thanking (95 percent), which was correspondent to previous studies

(Donglun, 2011)[23]. Thanking is very important in businesses because it is one way to make customers feel valued. It is reported that 86 percent of customers wanted to come back and purchase more goods at the same shop when they had positive experiences with their purchases (Mceachern, 2017)[24].

In regards to how the souvenir sellers solve problems when they were not able to communicate in English, they mostly used writing and drawing. The results of this study were different from previous studies that employees employed other strategies to solve the problems. For example, Ariyatugu (2012) found that in her study, the car salesperson participants used English-version brochures to communicate with foreign customers[9]. Homestay hosts in a study of Seechinda (2005) used body language [4]. This problem solving strategies are methods to give information and create trust with customers, which is an attempt to create better feeling in customers (Gronroos, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that employees in the souvenir shops needed English skills to help them better perform their professional works. The findings also showed the English language functions that they need to better serve their customers. The findings of the study can be used as guidelines for teachers, course and material developers, as well as any lay people who are interested to learn about English language functions used in souvenir shops. The souvenir business is one major business that helps generate incomes to the country. This group of employees should be trained to be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with customers because they are not just selling the souvenirs but they are selling the products of the nation and they are representatives of Thai people as a whole.

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