# English Communication Problems and Solutions
# of Thai Hotel Staff Working With Foreigners in Phuket Province

## ปัญหาและวิธีแก้ปัญหาการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ
## ของพนักงานโรงแรมที่ทำงานกับชาวต่างชาติในจังหวัดภูเก็ต

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## Abstract

The hotel industry is one of the prime sectors in the tourism and hospitality industries where English is used as a medium for communication. Although hotel staff are required to use English when serving foreigners, communication problems frequently occur. As a result, this study aimed to analyze English communication problems, with a focus on speaking and listening skills, and to investigate solutions for hotel staff who communicate with foreigners. The samples in this study consisted of ninety-five hotel staff in Phuket. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data. The collected data were analyzed using percentages, means, standard deviations, and content analysis of interview data. The findings revealed that the overall problem in English listening among the sample group with foreign customers and foreign staff was low ($\bar{x}$= 1.55, S.D. = 0.77), ($\bar{x}$= 1.52, S.D. = 0.74), with the most common problem being listening to various English accents. Furthermore, while English speaking problems with foreign customers and foreign staff were the lowest ($\bar{x}$= 1.39, S.D. = 0.73),

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($\overline{x}$= 1.38, S.D. = 0.71), telephone communication in English were the most common. The most common way to solve English communication problems with both foreign customers and staff was to apologize and ask for repetition ($\overline{x}$= 4.63, S.D. = 0.62). The findings of this study could be used as guidelines to improve English communication among relevant staff or those interested in working in the hotel industry.

## บทคัดย่อ

ในภาคอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวและการบริการ ธุรกิจการโรงแรมจัดเป็นธุรกิจอันดับต้น ๆ ที่มีการสื่อสารด้วยภาษาอังกฤษ แม้ว่าพนักงานโรงแรมต้องใช้ภาษาอังกฤษสื่อสารกับชาวต่างชาติแต่ยังคงประสบปัญหาระหว่างการสื่อสารได้ตลอดเวลา ดังนั้นการศึกษานี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัญหาการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษโดยเน้นทักษะการพูดและฟัง และวิธีการแก้ปัญหาของพนักงานโรงแรมที่ต้องสื่อสารกับชาวต่างชาติ กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ พนักงานโรงแรมแห่งหนึ่งในจังหวัดภูเก็ตจำนวน 95 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ได้แก่ แบบสอบถาม และการสัมภาษณ์ สถิติที่ใช้คือ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ปัญหาการฟังภาษาอังกฤษของกลุ่มตัวอย่างกับลูกค้าและพนักงานชาวต่างชาติในภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับที่น้อย ($\overline{\mathbf{X}}$= 1.55, S.D. = 0.77) และ ($\overline{\mathbf{X}}$= 1.52, S.D. = 0.74) โดยปัญหาการฟังสำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษที่แตกต่างกันเป็นปัญหาที่พบได้มากที่สุด ปัญหาการพูดภาษาอังกฤษกับลูกค้าและพนักงานชาวต่างชาติในภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับที่น้อยที่สุด ($\overline{\mathbf{X}}$= 1.39, S.D. = 0.73) และ ($\overline{\mathbf{X}}$= 1.38, S.D. = 0.71) โดยปัญหาการสื่อสารโดยการพูดทางโทรศัพท์พบได้มากที่สุด วิธีการแก้ไขปัญหาการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษกับลูกค้าและพนักงานชาวต่างชาติคือ พนักงานใช้การกล่าวขอโทษและขอให้พูดซ้ำอยู่ในระดับมากที่สุด ($\overline{\mathbf{X}}$= 4.63, S.D. = 0.62) ผลการศึกษานี้สามารถใช้เป็นแนวทางในการแก้ปัญหาและพัฒนาการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของบุคลากรที่เกี่ยวข้องหรือผู้ที่สนใจในการทำงานธุรกิจโรงแรมต่อไป

## Introduction

For the purpose of international communication, the English language is one of the most important languages. It serves as a tool for people to effectively communicate with individuals from different cultures around the world (Hotekim & Taylor, 2020). According to Internet World Stats (2021), approximately 1.5 to 1.6 billion people from 195 countries use English as a medium of communication. These statistics highlight the global importance of English as the primary language. This aligns with Boonyaruksa's (2021) assertion that English is widely used in various sectors such as business, education, logistics, workplace, tourism, and the service industry.

English plays a major role in the tourism and service industry, encompassing sectors such as hotels, tourism, transportation, logistics, restaurants, and entertainment. Among these, the hotel industry relies more heavily on English compared to other sectors (Arunchai, 2020). In cases where hotel staff struggle to communicate with guests, it can lead to communication barriers between the staff and the guests. The use of English as a medium for communication is of utmost importance, especially for hotel personnel working in the tourism and hotel sectors (Chaichana et al., 2017). Not only does English serve as the key to providing services to foreign tourists, but it is also essential for hotel staff when interacting with other foreign employees. To support this, Boonyaruksa (2021) highlighted in his study the significance of English communication, both internally (among foreign staff) and externally (with foreign guests).

Despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Thailand welcomed approximately 7 million foreign tourists in the year 2020-2021, according to statistics from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2023). To mitigate the negative impact on the domestic tourism economy, the Thai government implemented the Phuket Sandbox project in Phuket with the aim of attracting foreign tourists to visit after the pandemic began to subside. From July 1 to August 31, 2021, a total of 26,400 foreign tourists participated in Phuket Sandbox project (Tourism and Sports Economic Bureau, 2022). An interview conducted by Prachachart Business (2023) with Mr. Nantasiri Ronasiri, the Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Phuket Office, stated that the number of tourists that have participated in the Phuket Sandbox has already exceeded 400,000 since July 2021. This upward trend emphasizes the importance of studying communication problems between hotel staff and foreigners to guide further improvements in the quality of service provided by hotel staff.

Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the problems that arise during their communication with foreign staff and guests. Such research serves as a guideline for enhancing the quality of services and improving English communication skills. Several researchers (Arunchai, 2020; Chaichana et al., 2017; Hotekim & Taylor, 2020; Jindapol, 2023; Kamwiset, 2018; Rattanapiboonwong, 2023; Watthanarangsan & Sutanyarak, 2019) have studied the problems encountered by hotel staff in their English communication within and outside the organization. Their findings indicate that factors such as accents, environmental distractions, and individual competency skills significantly contribute to communication difficulties. Insufficient knowledge, ability, or experience in using English can lead to mistakes and misunderstandings during communication. While various strategies and methods exist for resolving these problems, everyone adopts different approaches (Charoensuk & Tantihachai, 2021).

Emphasizing the importance of English communication problems and solutions encountered by hotel staff, the objective of this research was to examine communication problems experienced by hotel staff in Phuket who were employed within a chain hotel operating under foreign management and administration. Phuket was selected for this study due to its status as a popular destination for foreign tourists, necessitating effective English communication with both internal and external stakeholders. The present study specifically

focused on a hotel belonging to an international hotel chain – in this case the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). This hotel was chosen because, with their standard services, they often employ foreign staff to cater to their guests, underscoring the significance of English communication within the hotel environment. The study identified specific problems faced by hotel staff in English communication, particularly in speaking and listening skills, and explored potential solutions. The findings of this study can serve as a valuable resource for improving English communication in the hotel industry, enhancing overall efficiency, and benefiting instructors, students, and individuals interested in pursuing careers in the hotel sector.

## Research Objectives

1. To analyze English communication problems, with a focus on speaking and listening skills, encountered by hotel staff when interacting with foreigners, both within and outside the organization.

2. To investigate practical solutions for hotel staff who encounter problems when communicating with foreigners in English.

## Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes

English holds significant importance not only in everyday communication but also in various professional domains, including the business sector. This importance has led to the emergence of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as an approach to language teaching based on learners' specific reasons for learning. The rising demand for English language skills, coupled with advancements in linguistics, has driven the need for ESP to cater to specific communication needs. Robinson (1991) further categorizes ESP into two types: English for occupational purposes (EOP) and English for educational purposes (EEP). In the context of this study, the focus lies on real communication within the hotel industry, prioritizing practical language use over grammar. Many hotels now place a premium on hiring individuals proficient in English communication to excel and remain competitive in the industry (Kanjanasilanon, 2016). These employees must adeptly use English to convey ideas, bridge cultural gaps, and build positive relationships, both internally and externally. While General English learners may struggle with context-specific sentence application, ESP offers a task-oriented and purposeful approach. Consequently, hotel industry professionals must effectively differentiate between Specific English and General English and employ them appropriately within their specific work environments.

English Communication Problems

Problems in business English communication often arise when the recipient fails to comprehend the sender's intended message, leading to communication breakdowns. These barriers can result from misunderstandings or a lack of attentive listening (Scott, 1996). Language barriers in communication encompass both verbal and nonverbal aspects. Individuals who interact closely with customers must possess strong language skills to effectively convey messages. Language proficiency stands at the heart of these challenges, and individual differences can further compound communication issues (Davidoff, 1994).

In the hotel industry, the quality of service is paramount as it profoundly influences guests' perceptions, expectation, and satisfaction (Sonthimoon & Khamdet, 2014). Consequently, they found that the hotel sector necessitates personnel equipped with top-tier service skills, the ability to cater to service users' requirements, and effective communication proficiencies within its workforce. Communication stands as a pivotal factor with a direct impact on service user satisfaction. Therefore, hotels must prioritize improving their employees' communication skills and addressing communication-related issues to ensure outstanding service quality. This ensures that guests are not only impressed and satisfied but also inclined to return for future services.

Previous Related Studies

Previous studies have extensively examined the problems faced by staff when communicating in English with foreigners within and outside their organizations. These studies aimed to identify and address problems and solutions among hotel staff working with foreigners.

Arunchai (2020) conducted a study on front desk employees at a hotel in Bangkok, the main problem identified was receptionists' difficulty in understanding tourists' English accents, leading to word meaning uncertainty. The study found that staff used various methods like watching movies, TV, and listening to English songs to improve language skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

Chaichana et al. (2017) examined English communication challenges among hotel staff in Nan province. They identified speaking issues, such as difficulties in telephone conversations, conveying hotel and tourism information, and forming coherent sentences. Additionally, listening challenges were observed, including comprehension difficulties with complex English from foreign tourists and understanding simple sentences they used.

Hotekim and Taylor (2020) investigated English speaking problems in corporate meetings, highlighting problems related to accents and pronunciation. Based on the study, it is evident that problems exist in English communication, particularly in speech skills, grammar usage, understanding accents, and pronunciation.

Jindapol (2023) evaluated the English communication abilities of reception staff at a 3-star hotel in Phang Nga Province. The study emphasized problems related to grammatical accuracy and pronunciation. Utilizing a questionnaire administered to English-speaking foreign tourists, the results revealed that front desk staff at 3-star hotels exhibited moderate fluency in English conversation. However, they still lacked grammatical accuracy and faced problems with English word pronunciation.

Kamwiset (2018) assessed receptionists' English readiness in Phuket hotels, focusing on various skills using a questionnaire. It identified top scores in listening and speaking (room reservations and telephone service), while reading skills excelled in handling manuals and guest assistance. Writing skills were robust in creating hotel announcements. The study also considered readiness based on factors like education, occupation, location, and hotel type.

Rattanapiboonwong (2023) studied language needs among operational-level employees in multinational firms, emphasizing accent-related challenges. It found co-worker communication as the top language requirement, followed by interactions with foreign customers and supervisors. The research assessed speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, highlighting problems in understanding diverse accents, especially in listening.

Thongsai and Sittipragan's (2021) study showed participants in their sample group used quick solutions in English communication, including mobile translation apps, repeated requests for clarification, and written communication. Some also used body language like gestures and drawings to compensate for their limited English proficiency.

Watthanarangsan and Sutanyarak (2019) studied hotel staff efficiency in Bangkok, emphasizing empowerment and foreign language communication. Their research, employing questionnaires and interviews, revealed high productivity, recommended empowerment, systematic issue analysis, effective goal communication, improved job satisfaction, and cross-training.

Considering the findings of previous studies, this present study aimed to address English communication problems experienced by hotel staff in Phuket and examine potential practical solutions to resolve all minimized such problems.

## Research Methodology

This research adopted a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. These included participants, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

1. Participants

The primary participants in this study were purposively selected from a chain hotel located in Phuket, Thailand. These participants are Thai nationals who serve in various

capacities within the hotel, encompassing roles as receptionists, office staff, food and beverage personnel, and housekeeping staff. These participants were specifically chosen because they play a crucial role in utilizing a foreign network system (chain hotel) to manage and oversee the hotel's operational activities. A specific method, based on Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size calculation with an expected degree of error of 0.05, was used to select 95 individuals from the hotel's population of 125. From this sample group, 10 participants were further chosen using a convenient random sampling method for in-depth interviews.

2. Research Instruments

The present study employed two primary research tools: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The instruments were developed and administered in Thai for the data collection.

2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed to collect data on the communication problems encountered by hotel staff, as well as the solutions they employed to mitigate these problems. It comprised six parts, each devoted to specific aspects of English communication problems. Participants' responses were measured
using a 5-point Likert Scale. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows:
    Part 1: General Information
    Part 2: English communication problems with foreign customers
    Part 3: English communication problems with foreign staff
    Part 4: Solutions to address communication problems with foreigners
    Part 5: Suggestions or opinions on problem solutions in English communication with foreigners
    Part 6: Consent for additional interviews

2.2 Semi-structured interview

Besides the questionnaire, a set of ten semi-structured interview questions was created to explore communication problems in more detail. These questions covered aspects such as participants' personal information, frequency of English communication, the importance of English in their workplace, problems faced when communicating with foreign guests and foreign staff, solutions used to overcome these problems, methods for improving English communication skills, and recommendations for individuals working with foreigners.

The research instruments utilized in this study were adapted from Arunchai (2020) and placed particular emphasis on the listening and speaking components of English communication skills. By combining the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews, this

research sought to provide comprehensive insights into the communication problems faced by hotel staff as well as potential solutions to address these problems.

Before implementing the research instruments in this study, the set of questions, including a questionnaire and ten interview questions, was submitted to three experts for the assessment of data quality, validity, and reliability. The three experts included two English lecturers and a hotel manager who worked in a chain hotel. The experts evaluated the questions using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), which produced values ranging from 0.50 to 1.00. IOC values within this range indicate that the questions align with the study objectives or content and are suitable for use. Questions with IOC values below 0.50 suggest a lack of objectivity or content alignment, making them unsuitable for inclusion.

The validity of the questions used for data collection in this research was assessed, revealing that there were no questions with IOC values below 0.5. Consequently, all questions were considered acceptable, resulting in an overall IOC validity value of 0.94. This value indicates that the questions were valid and appropriate for data collection purposes. Following the validation process, a pilot study was conducted with 10 non-sample hotel employees using a questionnaire. Data from the pilot study were analyzed using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, recommended by Prasitratsin (1997). The calculated alpha coefficient was 0.97, indicating high reliability. This confidence in the tool's consistency makes it suitable for collecting genuine data and ensuring analysis accuracy.

3. Data collection

The data collection in this present study was divided into two stages:

Stage 1: The researchers obtained permission from the hotel to collect data. After securing the hotel management's approval, they distributed the online questionnaire to each participant for completion.

Stage 2: With the participants' consent, 10 participants were selected for semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather more detailed information regarding communication problems and the solutions used to address these problems. Following the participants' approval, the interview data were recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis.

4. Data analysis

The collected questionnaire data were analyzed using Excel and statistical formulas, while interview data were subjected to content analysis. Part 1 of the questionnaire provided general information assessed through frequency and percentage. Problem levels and solutions from Parts 2-4 used mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S.D.) calculations for interpretation. The data was categorized into five levels based on specific criteria for average score ranges.

4.51 to 5.00: Highest level of problems or solutions.
3.51 to 4.50: High level of problems or solutions.
2.51 to 3.50: Moderate level of problems or solutions.
1.51 to 2.50: Low level of problems or solutions.
1.00 to 1.50: Lowest level of problems or solutions.

Furthermore, additional suggestions from the questionnaire and data from interviews underwent content analysis to extract crucial information aligning with the study's purpose (Lincharoen, 2011).

### Findings

The researchers analyzed the collected data and presented the results in four distinct parts.

1. Personal Information

In the study, there were a total of 95 participants from four hotel departments. The majority of participants (61.05%) fell within the age range of 31 to 40 years old. Additionally, a significant proportion of the sample, 82 individuals (86.32%), held a bachelor's degree. When considering the roles of the participants, it was found that 40 (42.11%) worked as office staff, 30 (31.58%) as receptionists, 17 (17.89%) in the food and beverage department, while the smallest group consisted of 8 (8.42%) individuals serving as housekeepers, as shown in Table 1.

### Table 1
Participants' Roles

| Roles | Number (person) | Percentage |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Office staff | 40 | 42.11% |
| Receptionists | 30 | 31.58% |
| F&B Staffs | 17 | 17.89% |
| Housekeepers | 8 | 8.42% |
| Total | 95 | 100 |

When participants were asked about their work experience, it was observed that the majority of individuals (56.84%) had accumulated 5 years or more of work experience, while 27 participants (28.42%) had 3 to 4 years of work experience, and 13 (13.69%) had 1 to 2 years of experience. Notably, only one participant out of the total sample of 95 (1.05%) had less than 1 year of work experience, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Participants' Working Experience

| Years of Experience | Number (person) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 1 year | 1 | 1.05% |
| 1-2 years | 13 | 13.69% |
| 3-4 years | 27 | 28.42% |
| 5 years or more | 54 | 56.84% |
| Total | 95 | 100 |

Since the participants were from different departments and had varying levels of work experience, it was found that the frequency of English communication with foreigners varied based on the differences in job roles. The intriguing results revealed that all participants had the opportunity to use English at work at least 3-4 days per week. Based on the data provided in Table 3, it is evident that the majority of participants, specifically 49 individuals (51.58%), engaged in English communication for 5-6 days per week. Furthermore, 42 people (44.21%) communicated in English every day. Additionally, a smaller group of 4 individuals communicated in English for 3-4 days a week, representing 4.21% of the total sample.

**Table 3**

Frequency of Participants' Engagements in English Communication

| Frequency of English Communication | Number (person) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Every day | 42 | 44.21% |
| 5-6 days per week | 49 | 51.58% |
| 3-4 days per week | 4 | 4.21% |
| Total | 95 | 100 |

When participants were asked to rate their own English language proficiency, a significant majority of 59 individuals (62.10%) assessed themselves as having a good level of proficiency. Additionally, 22 participants (23.16%) rated their proficiency as fair, while 12 individuals (12.63%) considered themselves to be very good in English. Notably, a small subset of only 2 participants (2.11%) indicated an average proficiency level in the English language. These findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

Participants' English Language Proficiency

| English Language Proficiency | Number (person) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very good | 12 | 12.63% |
| Good | 59 | 62.10% |
| Fair | 22 | 23.16% |
| Average | 2 | 2.11% |
| Total | 95 | 100 |

The following data analysis is split into two parts: 2. Communication with foreign customers, and 3. Communication with foreign staff.

2. English Communication Problems with Foreign Customers: Listening and Speaking Skills of Hotel Staff in a Foreign Network System

2.1 Listening skill problems

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the participants revealed a low level of problems in English listening skills ($\overline{x}$ = 1.55, S.D. = 0.77). However, when considering specific problems, the problem faced most by staff was understanding different English accents ($\overline{x}$= 2.77, S.D.=1.24), indicating a moderate level of problems. Table 5 shows more detailed results.

**Table 5**

English Listening Problems with Foreign Customers

| Problems | Mean | S.D. | Level of Problems |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Listening to English over the Phone | 1.71 | 0.84 | low |
| 2. Listening to needs or asking for help | 1.21 | 0.58 | lowest |
| 3. Listening to complaints | 1.22 | 0.60 | lowest |
| 4. Listening to English words or expressions | 1.58 | 1.01 | low |
| 5. Listening to different English accents | 2.77 | 1.24 | moderate |
| 6. Listening comprehension | 1.19 | 0.57 | lowest |
| 7. Listening to respond to general conversations | 1.17 | 0.57 | lowest |
| Total | 1.55 | 0.77 | low |

Based on interviews with 10 participants, the main problem in English communication with customers is different accents due to diverse nationalities. This aligns with questionnaire responses indicating problems in understanding foreign accents. The participants stressed that regular interaction with foreigners improves communication and helps overcome accent differences. In their own words:

Participant 1:

*"At first, I had trouble understanding foreign accents, but with time and practice, it became easier."*

Participant 10:

*"In my opinion, Ethnic diversity creates misunderstandings and mistakes in communication, leading to customer dissatisfaction."*

Overall, the interviews highlight the impact of accent variations and the importance of regular practice to enhance communication skills and mitigate misunderstandings.

*2.2. Speaking Skill Problems*

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the participants showed the least difficulty in speaking English ($\bar{x}$ 1.39, S.D.= 0.73). However, when considering specific problems, it was found that the participants faced the most difficulties in speaking English over the phone ($\bar{x}$ =1.67, S.D.= 0.77), indicating a low level of difficulty. Table 6 shows detailed results.

**Table 6**
English Speaking Problems with Foreign Customers

| Problems | Mean | S.D. | Level of Problems |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Speaking over the phone | 1.67 | 0.77 | low |
| 2. Giving information or explaining | 1.22 | 0.62 | lowest |
| 3. Asking for help | 1.19 | 0.53 | lowest |
| 4. Suggesting | 1.24 | 0.64 | lowest |
| 5. Pronouncing words or using English expressions in spoken language | 1.60 | 0.98 | low |
| 6. Pronouncing clearly and correctly | 1.65 | 1.03 | low |
| 7. Responding to general conversation | 1.16 | 0.53 | lowest |
| Total | 1.39 | 0.73 | lowest |

3. English Communication Problems with Foreign Staff: Listening and Speaking Skills of Hotel Staff in a Foreign Network System

3.1 Listening Skill Problems

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the participants encountered problems in listening to English spoken by their foreign colleagues at a low level ($\overline{x}$ 1.52, S.D.= 0.74). Further examination of specific problems revealed that the participants faced the most difficulty in understanding different English accents ($\overline{x}$= 2.66, S.D.= 1.15) indicating a moderate level of difficulty. Table 7 shows detailed information.

**Table 7**

English Listening Problems with Foreign Staff

| Problems | Mean | S.D. | Level of Problems |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Listening to English over the Phone | 1.71 | 0.81 | low |
| 2. Listening to needs and requests for assistance | 1.22 | 0.62 | lowest |
| 3. Listening to complaints | 1.22 | 0.60 | lowest |
| 4. Listening to English words or expressions | 1.51 | 0.92 | low |
| 5. Listening to different English accents | 2.66 | 1.15 | moderate |
| 6. Listening comprehension | 1.20 | 0.57 | lowest |
| 7. Listening to respond in general conversations | 1.16 | 0.53 | lowest |
| Total | 1.52 | 0.74 | low |

During the interviews, it was found that 60% of the 10 participants experienced minimal communication problems with foreign staff, which aligns with the questionnaire data. Surprisingly, even though the staff had been working with each other for at least one year, they still considered listening to different English accents as the most problematic aspect. Four out of the 10 participants (40%) reported facing accent-related problems when conversing in English with foreign staff. However, they stated that these problems did not significantly impact their work and could be overcome through adjustments such as actively seeking clarification, repeating key information, and developing a better understanding of each other's accents through regular interaction. The participants emphasized that these adjustments were relatively easy to implement, given the amicable and collaborative atmosphere within the team, which fostered effective cross-cultural communication. Participants 1 and 10 provided the following quotes to support these points:

Participant 1:

"*I rarely have communication problems with foreign colleagues as my close friends are mostly from nearby countries, so our accents are similar. This makes understanding each other easier compared to communicating with foreign customers.*"

Participant 10:

"*Occasionally, there are misunderstandings due to varying local accents, leading to miscommunications in pronunciation. However, through time and experience, I haven't faced any major problems.*"

Furthermore, one participant expressed that their relative lack of problems with English communication might be attributed

to the hotel's policy of occasionally requiring staff to take English tests and establishing an English-speaking environment.

Participant 5:

*I've faced some English communication issues here. The hotel tests staff's English competence, which is good. Some are naturally good because of their TOEIC scores, and the hotel encourages speaking English, like housekeepers greeting guests in English. It is really helpful for the staff.*

Overall, the interviews revealed that the majority of participants experienced minimal communication problems with foreign staff, but some still faced problems related to accents. However, these problems were effectively managed through adaptation and regular interaction, ensuring smooth workplace communication. The English-speaking environment within the workplace and the hotel's policy of requiring staff to take English tests were identified as valuable factors that greatly assist the staff in improving their English communication skills.

3.2 Speaking Skill Problems

The analysis of the data suggests that the participants encountered fewer problems when speaking English with foreign staff ($\bar{x}$= 1.38, S.D.=0.71). Nevertheless, when taking all the problems into account, it became apparent that participants faced the greatest problems when communicating in English over the phone ($\bar{x}$ = 1.67, S.D.= 0.77), denoting a relatively low level of problem. Additional details can be found in Table 8.

**Table 8**

English Speaking Problems with Foreign Staff

| Problems | Mean | S.D. | Level of Problems |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Speaking over the phone | 1.67 | 0.77 | low |
| 2. Giving information or explaining | 1.21 | 0.60 | lowest |
| 3. Asking for help | 1.20 | 0.55 | lowest |
| 4. Suggesting | 1.21 | 0.60 | lowest |
| 5. Pronouncing words or using English expressions in spoken language | 1.57 | 0.91 | low |
| 6. Pronouncing clearly and correctly | 1.65 | 1.00 | low |
| 7. Responding to general conversation | 1.16 | 0.53 | lowest |
| Total | 1.38 | 0.71 | lowest |

4. Solutions for English Communication Problems with Foreigners

The comprehensive data analysis of the questionnaire revealed that, as communication problems occurred less frequently, the participants exhibited limited solutions to their English communication problems. Their average score was 2.24 (S.D.= 0.85), indicating a relatively low level of solution utilization. However, an examination of the various solutions employed showed that staff often employed the solution of apologizing and requesting repetition ($\overline{x}$= 4.63, S.D. = 0.62), which was the most employed solution among the six. Table 9 is a reference for more detailed information.

**Table 9**

Solutions for English Communication Problems with Foreigners

| Solutions | Mean | S.D. | Level of solution |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Apologizing and requesting repetition | 4.63 | 0.62 | highest |
| 2. Using English vocabulary or expressions to illustrate a misunderstanding | 3.82 | 1.15 | high |
| 3. Using a translation tool | 1.57 | 1.05 | low |
| 4. Using gestures | 1.87 | 1.10 | low |
| 5. Asking for help from others | 1.16 | 0.62 | lowest |
| 6. Using gestures or facial expressions to illustrate a misunderstanding | 1.22 | 0.67 | lowest |
| Total | 2.24 | 0.85 | low |

In interviews with 10 participants, it was discovered that 60% of them employed the solution of apologizing and asking foreign customers to repeat themselves when communicating in English. Additionally, the use of translation applications was identified as another solution to overcome language and accent barriers when communicating with foreigners. In one participant's own words,

*"In communication, we often ask customers to kindly repeat themselves, mainly due to language accents. If I face difficulty understanding, I apologize and request the customer to repeat their words. It's a common practice for effective communication."*

Participant 4 stated,

*"Translation apps are commonly used for easier communication, particularly when dealing with difficult accents. However, translations may not always be accurate, so intuition plays a role in understanding."*

The analysis of the data revealed that participants had a limited ability to address communication problems. However, the most utilized solution was apologizing and asking for repetition. Translation apps were also used to overcome language and accent barriers. The participants in this study mentioned asking customers to repeat themselves and relying on translation apps for better communication with foreigners.

## Discussion

In the study of English Communication Problems and Solutions Among Hotel Staff Working with Foreigners in Phuket Province, it was found that staff faced communication problems with foreigners, both inside and outside the organization. However, solutions were identified to address these problems. Based on the data analysis, the following key findings emphasize important issues:

1. English communication problems

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the communication problems faced by hotel staff when interacting with foreigners, both within and outside the organization. The analysis of questionnaire and interview data consistently indicates that hotel staff in this study exhibited a low level of difficulty in speaking and listening to English with foreigners. These findings differ from previous research, which identified that hotel staff had notable difficulties communicating in English with foreigners. One significant difference in this study is that the participants work in a chain hotel managed and administered by a foreign network system. Based on the interview data, it implies that the hotel places a high priority on delivering high-quality service to its customers, which necessitates well-informed staff members who can communicate proficiently in English. The environment of English-speaking in the workplace and the regulations for staff to take English tests affect staff's English communication. This emphasis on language proficiency within the hotel industry aligns with the demand theory proposed by Sonthimoon and Khamdet (2014). According to their theory, it is imperative for

hotels to establish a strong foundation for delivering exceptional service that exceeds customers' expectations and leaves a lasting impression that influences guest retention. Consequently, the hotel in this present study carefully select employees based on their experience, education, and language skills. They also conduct regular language assessments

to maintain a high level of English proficiency among their staff, in line with the findings of Kamwiset (2018). However, the results offered valuable insights that despite utilizing a foreign network system for management and administration, hotel staff still encounter problems in English communication with foreigners, particularly in comprehending different English accents. The findings of this study align with previous relevant research conducted by Arunchai (2020), Chaichana et al. (2017), Intorn et al. (2020), Charoensuk et al. (2018), Jindapol (2023), and Rattanapiboonwong (2023). These studies consistently identify varied English accents as a primary obstacle in communicating with foreigners.

In summary, despite the adoption of foreign network systems, hotel staff continue to encounter English communication issues with foreigners, primarily related to listening and speaking skills. These findings align with existing research, emphasizing the importance of addressing these problems as part of the solution to improve English communication.

2. Solutions to overcome problems in English communication

The analysis of questionnaires and interviews provides valuable insights into problem solutions used by hotel staff when communicating in English with foreigners. The data consistently reveals that the most common approaches include offering apologies and requesting repetition, along with methods such as expressing incomprehension through English words or gestures and utilizing translation tools. These findings align with research by Arunchai (2020) and Charoensuk et al. (2018), which emphasize various problem solutions to facilitate effective communication and mutual understanding between parties. However, it is important to note that English communication solutions are influenced by personal experience, knowledge, and intuition, as highlighted by Srisakorn (2004). Chombuathong's research (2019) also underscores the significance of addressing specific communication problems to enhance English proficiency. While the present study's findings on problem solutions in English communication among hotel staff using foreign network systems for management and administration align with several studies, discrepancies with Charoensuk and Tantihachai's (2021) findings exist. These differences may be attributed to factors such as language proficiency and available resources. Further research is needed to comprehensively understand effective English communication solution tailored to the unique context of hotel staff utilizing foreign network systems.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows the English communication problems faced by hotel staff when interacting with foreigners, both within and outside the organization. Despite the utilization of foreign network systems for management and administration, the participants still encounter problems.

The findings also emphasize the significance of practical solutions employed by hotel staff during English communication with foreigners. The most common approaches include apologizing, requesting repetition, expressing incomprehension through English words or gestures, and utilizing translation tools. These solutions align with previous research and highlight the importance of adapting solutions to address specific problems and promote effective communication in intercultural contexts.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of the English communication problems and practical solutions employed by hotel staff in their English communication with foreigners. It emphasizes the need for ongoing language development initiatives and effective communication training to improve proficiency and enhance intercultural communication in the hotel industry.

## Recommendations

For further research, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. Researchers should investigate problems and solutions across all English language skills.

2. Researchers should conduct research with hotels using foreign networks in different provinces to obtain diverse data.

3. The study should include pre- and post-assessments of language proficiency, and these assessments should be analyzed in relation to job experience, age, and hotel departments to gain more comprehensive insights.

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