A Study of Foreign Tourists' Attitudes toward English Communication Problems of the Staff at Tourist Assistance Center at Phuket International Airport

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A b s t r a c t

This qualitative research examined the attitudes of foreign tourists toward oral English communication problems of Thai staff working for the Tourist Assistance Center (TAC) at Phuket International Airport. Moreover, the research was able to obtain the foreign tourists' recommendations about English communication for the staff. The participants of this study were seven foreign tourists who asked for help at the tourist assistance center. The main instrument used was a semi-structured interview. The results showed that the foreign tourists had various views toward the English communication problems faced by the Thai staff. The problems were about listening and speaking skills, accents, pronunciation, speaking speed, and vocabulary usage. Further, all the foreign tourists provided several recommendations to improve the staff's English ability in order to increase the effectiveness of TAC staff communication.

Introduction

At present, it is undeniable that English is the most important lingua franca used in the global society (Nishanthi, 2018). With the advanced technology, English appears on every menu on the computer screen. No matter where you are, you need to attain information in English. English also plays a major role in many sectors: medicine, engineering, science-technology, and education. Although every country has its own national language, English is still necessary for the locals to communicate with foreign visitors for facilitating tourism functions. This is a phenomenon in which English is used by people worldwide, especially in the tourism sector.

English is a linguistic vehicle used for contributing to the international tourism achievement. It is very vital for the locals in different areas to have proficiency in English in order to assist the foreign tourists. This will impress the visitors who will come back to particular countries or tourist attractions again (Astawa et al., 2019). The more warmth the host welcomes visitors, the more English is used by the local people. Moreover, English is needed even in small locations, where people do not speak English as a native language but they have to practice English because they are living in a popular tourist attraction area. Therefore, English is not only spoken or written in one specific place, but it has the greatest impact on global tourism.

In Southern Thailand, Phuket is an outstanding province of tourism. It is considered the pearl of the Andaman Sea. Moreover, Phuket is surrounded by

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beautiful mountains, where tourists can perform a wide range of activities. For instance, Phromthep Cape is a viewpoint offering tourist to watch the most beautiful sunset in Thailand. There are a number of stunning sandy beaches such as Patong, Rawai, Karon, Kamala, Kata Yai, Kata Noi, and Mai Khao (Amazing Thailand, n.d.). With the magnificent tourist attractions on offer, Phuket is the first choice to visit, particularly for foreign tourists who like natural places. Phuket is also regarded by UNESCO as gastronomy tourism due to the prominent traditional culinary culture (UNESCO, n.d.). Many tourists visit Phuket to indulge in the nature and consume a variety of local foods. Therefore, it is inevitable that Thai officers in all areas of Phuket need to use English for communicating with the foreign visitors. Tourists to Phuket come from various countries such as Russia, Germany, Turkey, and are not native English speakers, yet English is the main language for communication for all tourist in Phuket.

As Phuket is one of the most popular tourist attractions, this island is full of tourists who are native and non-native English speakers. Consequently, the host, Phuket people and other Thais from different provinces working here, have to be able to communicate in English with the foreign tourists. Many Thais in different careers on this island have a wide range of English proficiency, from the highest to the lowest level. Thai people working among Phuket's tourist attractions, such as vendors, security guards, riders, and taxi drivers, need to use particular English expressions for their professional survival. In the government sector, some departments are relevant to local and foreign tourists. The officers of those government departments need to have a satisfactory level of English competence to serve in this function. Outstandingly, the Tourist Assistance Center (TAC) in Phuket, was established on October 3, 2002, representing the government sector. TAC is under-control of the Department of the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports, which is mostly responsible for foreign tourists. According to the Royal Thai Embassy (2020), TAC has the important duty to solve the related problems, to handle tourists' complaints during their vacation in Thailand, to facilitate foreign tourists, as well as to coordinate with the public and private sectors regarding safety issues. Thus, it is compulsory for the staff of this center to attain English proficiency.

English is a must for the TAC staff. At least basic words or sentence patterns or expressions are crucial for them to negotiate with tourists in specific cases.

Additionally, the expectation of the TAC staff to speak English perfectly is the most significant factor to support and assist the foreign tourists during their vacation in Phuket. However, as an intern of this workplace, the researcher has observed that a number of staff have problems in communicating with foreign tourists at the airport. It is interesting to study these problems through attitudes evaluated by the foreign tourists who encountered the communication with these Thai officers. This will appear into useful points of views for understanding the TAC staff's English communication barriers.

Basically, the TAC staff are stationed in three locations in Phuket Province, but the researcher only focused on the staff at the Phuket International Airport where foreign tourists arrive from the long flight and the last place before they depart to their countries. Hence, there are a number of foreign tourists, both native and non-native English speakers, who come to ask for help at the TAC. The researcher had been working as a trainee at this center since November 29, 2021 to March 18, 2022, so she had a chance to interact with tourists. Thus, it is worthwhile for this study to directly understand the Thai staff's English communication problems through tourists' attitudes. The attitudes will be a reflection on English proficiency of the local officers of TAC. Their positive and negative attitudes as well as their recommendations are to be revealed in this study. Thus, the results will directly benefit the TAC that will be aware of their officers' English use problems, leading to further solutions. Moreover, this study will also be significant for many other relevant organizations and the governmental sectors that facilitate the foreign visitors to Thailand. They can use the findings of this study to launch training courses to develop their staff's English competence.

Objectives

This study consists of two main research objectives as follows:

1. To examine the attitudes of foreign tourists towards problems of oral English communication by Tourist Assistance Center staff at Phuket International Airport.

2. To obtain the foreign tourists' recommendations toward oral English communication problems of Tourist Assistance Center staff at Phuket International Airport.

Literature Review

Literature or previous studies are relevant to the study are somewhat rare. Firstly, Leelaviriyawong (2015) studied the satisfaction of the foreign tourists towards English oral communication with Thai vendors along Khaosan Road, Bangkok. This study investigated the satisfaction of 100 foreign tourists who vacationed in Bangkok from April 23-30, 2016, through the use of a questionnaire. The findings showed that most of them were moderately satisfied with the English skills, especially the listening skills of Thai vendors although they were not native English speakers. Additionally, this study also mentioned the main problems which the tourists faced, for instance, pronunciation, confidence, English grammar, and vocabulary. Besides, the speaking speed and the accents of the tourists were problems to the vendors. This study is directly relevant to the present research as it elicits the foreign tourists' views toward Thai people's use of English.

Secondly, Young and Faux (2012) compared native and non-native English speakers' points of views regarding ineffectiveness and inappropriateness in difficult conversation. This study was conducted through native and non-native English students at a regional state university in America with the use of a questionnaire about a recent, difficult, face-to-face conversation. There were 168 participants of this study – 114 native speakers of English and 54 non-native English speakers. Through the covariance analysis, the findings showed that native English speakers' ratings of ineffectiveness and inappropriateness were significantly higher than non-native English speakers. In this regard, the latter group of the participants seemed to blame themselves due to their difficulty in English conversation. Further, it was found that the non-native English speaker group was being overwhelmed based on the native English speakers' use of slang, jargon, regional accents, idioms, intensive questions, and rude nonverbal responses. Besides, the non-native speakers could not understand the native culture which led to misunderstanding in the use of the English language.

Lastly, Chaichana, Cheawchan, & Thongnen (2017) investigated foreign tourists' perspectives towards English communication problems of receptionists at hotels in Nan Province through using a questionnaire. The subjects were 30 foreign tourists who stayed at hotels in Nan. The findings were interpreted to find the problems in speaking and listening skills of the Thai receptionists based on foreign tourists' perspective. In

the international visitors' views, the speaking skill was the main problem of the local receptionists, mostly for telephone conversations because they were mostly new receptionists who lacked the confidence in using English and were afraid of having conversation with foreigners. Moreover, they also had listening problems, especially when they had to listen to foreign tourist speak about their problems in English. Indeed, accents were a problem for listening skills of the receptionists because not all of the tourists were native English speakers. This made the receptionists struggle with listening comprehension because of various accents in English spoken by the foreign visitors.

These three studies employed a questionnaire in studying the listening-speaking communication problems of English by Thai speakers and other non-native speakers based on foreigner's perspective. Thus, there is a need to study the problems of these skills through an alternative instrument, namely an interview, as conducted in this research.

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework of this study concerns language attitudes, listening comprehension, communication between native and non-native speakers.

The concept of language attitudes by Garrett's (2007) is considered. Attitudes are a personal way of thinking about someone or something reflected in a person's behavior. Attitudes are seen via human socialization and experience that one person had faced before it became an attitude on something, with the early life span, childhood, as well as language attitudes. As attitudes are mentally contextualized and as such "nobody could see", there are three significant o approaches to survey language attitudes: the societal treatment approach, the direct approach, and the indirect approach.

The societal treatment approach is a somewhat broad category because it is the way to survey ones' attitudes by observational studies, educational policy documents, employment and consumer advertisements, novels, television programs, cartoons, style, and even etiquette books. This approach could lead the researcher to get insufficient information for this study because of the different mainstream reviews.

The other approach is the direct approach; it is the way to collect the information by asking the participant simple questions to report self-analytically and to see what are their attitudes. Further, it is used on

larger-scale surveys to save time. Indeed, the attitudes include responses that could be biased since people may give responses they feel the researchers are looking for.

The last category, the indirect approach, refers to survey by attitude-rating scales to allow some sophisticated statistical analysis. There are three primary dimensions to survey, firstly, superiority refers to characteristics such as prestige, intelligence, and competence. Secondly, social attractiveness which mentions the friendliness and trustworthiness of the respondents. Lastly, a dynamism which refers to enthusiasm and liveliness (Garette, 2007, as cited in Zahn & Hopper, 1985).

Eventually, the language attitude theory is very useful for this study to collect data and examine the attitudes of foreign tourists who were the interviewees. Furthermore, it is the significant theory that is related to the term "attitudes", which is the concept of this study, in order to obtain the target information.

Theory of listening comprehension by Richards's (1983) is pointed out. There are three dimensions of conceptualization of listening comprehension theory which consists of approach, design, and procedure. This theory is that the participants understand English well (or not) by the three dimensions above.

The first dimension is an approach which refers to listening comprehension. Most linguists and psycholinguists recommend that proposition is the basic unit that is involved in comprehension and listeners' goals. The proposition represents the indirectness of the surface of utterances, and the listeners can use two kinds of knowledge to identify proposition. The first is the knowledge of the syntax of the target language which consists of intonation, stress, words, grammar, sentences, and language unit. Additionally, the listeners can gather incoming discourse into segments. Another is the real-world knowledge which mentions that listeners can also use to help identify propositions and it enables listeners to sometimes bypass the constituent identification process. However, some listeners remember by syntactic proposition by form while some listeners remember and understand with long-term memory by meaning (Clark & Clark, 1977; Foss & Haikes, 1978, as cited in Richard, 1983).

The second dimension is the design indicating the operation of information and theory into a form; listeners are able to identify the component of micro-skills which provides the focus for instructional activities. The design phase in curriculum development consists of the

following: (i) assessment of learner needs: the procedure that identifies the listening skills that listeners required such as situations and purposes that the listeners will encounter with i.e., lectures and conversation; (ii) diagnostic testing: the proficiency ability of the listeners into micro-skills. In addition, the particular micro-skills from the skills taxonomy are then selected; and (iii) formulation of instructional objectives: the last phase to use information from diagnostic testing and instructional objectives for a listening comprehension program that can be developed.

Finally, the last dimension of listening comprehension theory is a procedure that refers to three steps which are input, micro-skill, and task. There are two variables manipulations which both are used to develop ability in particular skills areas. Firstly, input is the language that the listeners hear and control for selected features, for instance, grammatical complexity, topic, and the rate of delivery. The other is tasks that can be manipulated for the learner. Indeed, manipulation of both input and tasks is directed toward developing particular micro-skills of listeners. This theory of listening is useful for the present study as it provides useful details to be considered for designing interview questions about listening comprehension regarding ability in oral communication.

Theory of oral communication between native and non-native speakers by Young and Faux (2020) focuses on "competency" which contains two main components: effectiveness and appropriateness. This theory is that 'in-group' refers to English native speakers while 'out-group' refers to non-native English speakers, and the communication of each are navigated through conversational and cultural interactions. The in-group speakers perceive themselves to be competent and effective communicators of the English language whereas the out-group speakers think that this perception is somewhat rude and inappropriate. Additionally, the in-group speakers are more likely to judge the out-group speakers by their English communication that it is ineffective and inappropriate due to their cultural comprehension. Besides, the in-group speakers also have great feelings of misunderstanding that the out-group speakers have ineffective and inappropriate ways of English communication. Overall, this theory provides useful perceptions regarding English competence of non-native speakers affecting their oral communication and intercultural communication with native English speakers. This perception seems to display non-native

speakers' inability of oral communication in English because of ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of language ability.

As a whole, these three notions of the framework are based on language attitudes, listening comprehension, and oral communication between native and non-native English speakers. They are thus to be observed in the findings.

Research Methodology

1. Population and Samples

The population of the study are foreign tourists. Based on the researchers internship at TAC in the Phuket International Airport, the researcher could observe that around 2-3 foreign tourists a day asked for help at the center. Because an in-depth interview was needed for this qualitative study, the researcher used a small number of the foreign tourists as interviewees, that is, seven persons. The sampling of these participants is based on a convenience according to a set of criteria which are as follows: (i) they can be male or female; (ii) No specificity on any nationality; they could be native and non-native English speakers; and (iii) they had to be willing to give the in-person interview for joining this research study.

In this respect, the background information of the selected foreign tourists, is revealed. All the participants were males. Moreover, their age ranged from 19 to 55 years. Further, they were from different countries in Asia, Europe, South Africa, and Australia. They had various nationalities – Australian, British, Brazilian, Dutch, German, Indian and Belgian. Hence, they were divided into two native English speakers and five non-native English speakers. With the particular nationalities, they have their own mother tongue. Most of them had university education and the rest graduated from high school. In addition, they all had occupations, except for one participant who was unemployed. Overall, the main reason for visiting Phuket was for vacation and travel.

2. Research Instruments

This research used a semi-structured interview and interviews were recorded through a smart phone. The semi-structured interview is more flexible to orally use to examine the attitudes of foreign tourists' attitudes toward English communication problems of the staff at TAC in the Phuket International Airport. Crucial steps were followed to design and develop the interview questions before the actual use with the foreign tourists.

These process are as follows:

(i) The researcher had observed a number of foreign tourists at the airport for 1 month during her internship in order to guide the direction of the study;

(ii) She preliminary gathered the important information related to the study by talking to the local staff and some foreign tourists;

(iii) She read the previous studies on foreign tourists' attitudes towards English used by non-native speakers and the theories to gain insights into the context of the study;

(iv) She designed the question items by considering particular problems and attitudes of foreign tourists noted in a file of her work diary as well as her observation and experience in answering the foreign tourists' questions while helping them. She developed the questions into general and specific perspectives on oral communication as well as listening comprehension by considering the literature review using the semi-structured style of interview for a flexible atmosphere. The interview questions consisted of three parts. Part I was about foreign tourists' background information. Part II was about foreign tourists' attitudes toward English communication problems of tourist assistance staff. Part 3 was about suggestions from the respondents towards the staff's English communication.

(v) She submitted all the questions designed to the research advisor.

(vi) She edited the questions according to the advisor's comments.

To facilitate the interview, the researcher used her smartphone for recording the interviewees' attitudes and recommendations to avoid mistakes. Besides, this instrument was helpful to analyze the voice tone of the interviewees to understand what exactly they wanted to share about their attitudes without prejudice.

3. Collection of Data

Data collection concerns a pilot study and actual data collection. Each is summarized.

The researcher used the pilot study procedure to examine whether the questions were appropriate and effective before the actual data collection. Since this study contains some very sensitive issues of attitudes in which the chosen tourists need to evaluate oral English communication problems of the staff through their own opinion, it is very crucial to prove the questions are relevant by three persons: the research advisor as well as two head officers of TAC. The interview questions were asked and proved by the research advisor on 17

February 2022, and by the two head officers of TAC on 19 February 2022 through E-mail due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As many questions were designed, the researcher tried to choose only the main items and categorized them from general to specific ones. The two head officers had intensive experiences in dealing with foreign tourists' problems, so their reading through the question items contributed to the content of the interview. Meanwhile, the research advisor helped in organizing the questions and proof the language used regarding the problem of oral communication and listening comprehension. After this, the researcher corrected the questions, for instance, grammar and vocabulary use which made the questions became more polite and direct to the point. In addition, this helped to ensure there were no mistakes before the actual interview.

The actual data collection procedure is explained. Because the majority of the interviewees were not native English speakers, the researcher realized the accurate information which leads to precise results. Therefore, she prepared the approved interview questions to do an in-person interview, and prepared her smartphone to record all the answers to avoid any mistakes during the process. She spent from 16 – 25 minutes for each interviewee. The date of the interview was on February 22 – March 2, 2022 due to the convenience of the selected interviewees.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis. entailed replaying the recorded interviews several times for understanding the answers of the participants. In the nexts step, the researcher used transcription of the oral interview. That is, the interviewed data was transcribed into written texts. The researcher coded the oral interview data by using content analysis. Each file of the transcript, Interviews A-G, was reread and investigated, so each answer for each question was rechecked, compared, and contrasted. Certain similar and different points of views were highlighted for discussion. The interviewees' answers on Part I had been revealed in the background information of the population. Thus, their answers on Parts II and III highlight the study objectives. In this regard, the theoretical framework and previous studies were also used for the discussion section.

Results and Discussion

The findings present two main areas based on the objectives of the study – the attitudes of foreign tourists towards staff's communication problems as well as the recommendations about English communication for the staff.

1. The Attitudes of Foreign Tourists toward Oral English Communication Problems of Tourist Assistants

In this part, there are 10 aspects of the attitudes which are both positive and negative regarding the ability of the TAC staff. These perspectives are generally based on issues of oral communication and listening comprehension.

1.1 General problems in communication

This issue concerns oral and aural communication. There were two groups of the answer. For the first group, Interviewees A, B, C, F, and G said that the staff had no communication problems, neither speaking nor listening skills. These foreigners could understand well when the staff communicated with them in a short period of time during asking for help. Interviewee B, who was the native English speaker, explained that he had an effective communication with the Thai officers even if they were not native English speakers. Moreover, he could guess what the officers were telling him about the information he requested because they used gestures during speaking to make the conversation more natural and understandable.

However, Interviewees D and E said that the staff had some English communication problems. Interviewee D stated that he did not understand what the Thai staff said the first time. That is, he had difficulty in understanding the different English accents of the staff. Besides, he had to pay more attention to reach the point of what the staff said because it was emergency assistance. Interviewee E also mentioned that the staff had an English communication problem during speaking, especially about the sentences; the staff could not complete the sentences well, for instance, the staff said, "I save for you" instead of "I will save and take care of your bags".

1.2 Accent problems

This issue involves Thai English accents. Only Interview D viewed that the Thai staff's English accent was a problem that totally affected his oral English communication. This interviewee said that it was hard to understand the different accents which were somewhat strange, so he had to pay much attention to understand the conversation in which the staff was speaking to give him information. Interviewees B, C, E, F, and G, all had the same answer, which was the staff's accent was not a problem while they were communicating. They could understand what the staff said perfectly; furthermore,

they realized a variety of English accents were influenced by local languages of each country.

However, Interviewee A had a different opinion from the others. He mentioned about the staff' English accent that slightly affected his communication. He did not understand at first, but he attempted to listen carefully until the end of the conversation, and he finally attained all the information he needed from the staff.

1.3 Good pronunciation with Thai English accents

This issue was a clarification of the previous one. There were no problems on this aspect because all the interviewees had similar perception about the staff's Thai accent of English, but they did mention that the staff's pronunciation was somewhat good. They all acknowledged that a variety of English accents exist in the world. Further, they realized that accent was not the most important factor for English communication. Interviewee B answered that he had no problem with the Thai English accent of the staff. Besides, he appreciated the staff's pronunciation stating they had a good and correct stress during communication which helped to avoid any misunderstanding, especially the interviewee who was a native English speaker.

1.4 Unclear pronunciation

Clear pronunciation is necessary for Thai staff's communication in English, and all the interviewees totally agreed with this aspect. Interviewee B disclosed that "It was not only necessary in English, but all languages need clear pronunciation in order to give more understanding to the listener regarding what the speaker is trying to speak accurately, and also to avoid confusion."

As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, only Interviewee A mentioned that, "it is very important to have clear pronunciation even if it is fast or slow speaking, however, it would be better if people have communication without masks." This vital factor of unclear pronunciation during the pandemic was an issue because people had to wear facial masks leading to mistakes and misunderstanding of English oral communication.

The use of facial masks was the Thai national policy. This is a physical factor that contributes to the unclear pronunciation of the Thai staff who spoke in English. It is difficult to solve due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5 Pronunciation problems leading to misunderstanding

Since the staff were not native English speakers, their English pronunciation was surely imperfect and their pronunciation needed to be fixed which would lead to a better skill of communication. This is related to what Interviewee D stated, "I could remember only one word which was about Thailand pass. The word that the staff was supposed to say was Thailand pass. The last spelling should be pronounced as "SS", but the staff pronounced is as Thailand past which lasted by "ST" instead. Hence, it made me really confused for a moment and then I realized the point later." Similarly, Interviewee G said the staff had English pronunciation problems, stating that, "the staff sometimes had wrong pronunciation for some words, and I did not get them, especially when they made mistakes in the word stress it made me unable to understand them correctly."

On the other hand, Interviewees A, B, C, E, and F stated that the Thai staff had no pronunciation problems. Interviewee A gave the compliment to the staff that they had pretty good pronunciation while Interviewee B said that the staff pronunciation was very understandable. This is similar to the perception of Interviewees C, E, and F who could guess what the staff would like to say from the full sentence.

1.6 Speaking speed

All seven interviewees similarly viewed that the Thai staff had no problem with the speaking speed. Interviewee A stated that the staff's speaking speed was not too slow or too fast, it was medium which was quite good for the listener while they were asking for help. Similarly, Interviewees B, C, E, F, and G viewed that the staff's speaking speed was not a problem because they understood that the staff were not native English speakers, so it was very understandable in this context. Moreover, Interviewee D also said "I don't think that this is a problem. I understand that they are not native speakers, the same as me. It is a good effect for me to have much more time to think while they are speaking, and the conversation was perfect. Because all the information I asked was answered completely. I didn't have to take so much time to ask them to repeat the answer again and again."

1.7 Difficulty in word-by-word communication

Word-by-word communication is the way to communicate without completing sentences perfectly, and all the interviewees had the same perception that the staff had no this problem. Because the staff had to deal with foreign tourists who asked for help every day, they automatically needed the skill to complete sentences

before having communication with foreigners. Therefore, all the interviewees mentioned that the staff had a good English skill at completing full sentences because they had no word-by-word communication at all during the conversation. Further, the staff answered the questions and gave the information completely. This was very important because the communication would be completed if the listener understood what the speaker tried to say, and the staff did a good job at it. In addition, there was no misunderstanding or mistakes during communication.

1.8 Some confusing words

Some words are confusing to the foreigners. There were two aspects on this issue. The first was the interviewees who said that the staff had no problems with confusing words while the other was that the interviewees said the staff had a problem with confusing words and remembered what that word was.

According to Interviewee B, a British English speaker, there were many different words. Since British English and American English have different ways of calling things, not all vocabulary of these two varieties of English are the same. He asked the staff for help with his lost buggy, but the staff could not understand what the buggy was. This staff was familiar with American English, so the word "buggy" was not very common in this context.

1.9 The use of technical terms

Technical terms for airport communication. Interviewees A and B had similar opinions towards the staff while they were speaking to the interviewees. Interviewee A said that "I do not think that the staff have the technical term problems because they are working at the airport, also they know the technical terms very well to communicate with me." Likewise, Interviewee B said that the staff knew the technical term regarding the airport perfectly except the word "buggy" which was already described for the confusing problem. Furthermore, Interviewee C said that the staff communicated understandably while they were speaking. Additionally, Interviewees E, F, and G stated that there were no technical term problems during communication. On the contrary, Interviewee D viewed that he remembered the technical term problems of the staff. He said that "I could remember some of them. For example, they said "arrive instead of arrival", they said "airplane instead of airline or airways". It was really confusing but I could understand them because the staff had gestures while we communicated which is very important."

1.10 Thinking of word choices in communication

The problem in thinking of using specific words for oral communication is raised. Only Interviewee C found that it was a problem that the staff took much time to think about the words to communicate because it was hard to understand and it led to unreliable conversation. Moreover, this communication was for emergency help, so the staff should not take much time. Meanwhile, Interviewee D said that "It is not really a big problem because of some other tourists who are not native English speakers are the same as the staff. Thus, they have to take time for thinking about the next words in the conversation."

Interviewees A, B, E, and F understood that the staff were not native English speakers, so it was normal for taking time to think about words or sentences or to look for the most appropriate word. Likewise, the staff had to have a double thinking process before speaking out; the staff had Thai as their native language, so they had to translate from Thai to English before speaking.

Most of the foreign tourists in this study had the similar opinion that the main English communication problem of the TAC's staff was speaking skills because they were non-native English speakers. Moreover, they had a difficulty in listening to the problem faced by the foreigners when they were asking for help since they had different accents as well as the trouble of listening to various accents of the foreign tourists who did not use English as the first language. This result is related to the study of Chaichana et al. (2017) that the receptionists had mostly English communication problems in speaking and listening because of the tourists' accents and the difficulty of listening skills in which English proficiency was not as high as that of the TAC's staff.

The attitudes of the foreign tourists, both native and non-native English speakers in this study, indicated that the Thai staff did not have many problems because they could communicate and assist tourists effectively. However, the problems above were mostly about vocabulary usage that the staff did not have sufficiency to convey the information to the tourists. This is related to the study of Leelaviriyawong (2015). The staff did not have enough confidence to communicate in English due to their low knowledge of words leading to their ineffective English usage as similar to problems faced by the Thai vendors in Leelaviriyawong's (2015) study.

Based on the theoretical framework, this study utilized the direct approach of language attitudes by Garrette (2007). The answers of the findings were taken by a direct response between the foreigners and the researcher at the airport using the set of questions in the interview. Their responses were not biased. That is, they revealed the truth of real problems in English faced by the TAC staff. Those problems which are supported by Richards (1983), namely the first dimension, are about listening skills due to the factor of intonation, stress, and words. The TAC staff had incorrect pronunciation of English, insufficient awareness of English vocabulary, and inability in comprehending non-native varieties of English. Regarding Young and Faux (2020), it was found from the present study that the foreign interviewees did not act as the in-group speakers, however. They understood that that the Thai staff at TAC merely had incompetency in English because of linguistic factors.

2. The Suggestions of Foreign Tourists toward Oral English Communication Problems of TAC staff.

The results of this part were taken from Part III of the interviews.

All the interviewees had various recommendations for the staff, except Interviewee G. Firstly, Interviewee A suggested the staff use the gestures which was necessary for successful communication in English. . This interviewee also recommended communication without wearing a mask because this study was conducted during the the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, practicing word lists, learning more technical terms, and speaking with more confidence were recommended by Interviewee B. Interviewee B advised the staff to practice more with a word list, especially vocabulary items about services in the airport, which could lead to easier communication with foreign tourists. Moreover, the technical terms used in the airport were familiar to the staff, but they would be more useful for the staff to learn more and regularly use them. This interviewee recommended the last trick for the staff to be more confident by speaking louder and speaking faster because it could convince the foreign tourists to be more willing to ask for help at the center. Additionally, Interviewee C suggested the staff to have more practice speaking with foreigners and listening to music more often. Meanwhile, Interviewees D and E made the same suggestions as Interviewee C but added a different tip about the speaking skill by shadowing to improve word pronunciation correctly. Interviewee F recommended the staff should try to speak without fillers which sometimes led to misunderstanding and impolite issues.

According to the findings above, all the interviewees had various suggestions or tips for the staff about English communication,, but mostly about the word lists and technical terms which could lead the staff to be more professional and reliable. Besides, it is the way to make the tourists more willing to ask for help and information from the staff. This is related to Leelaviriyawong (2015) findings, in which suggestions by the tourists for Thai vendors was to practice more vocabulary and use word lists to obtain the effectiveness of English communication.

Suggestions

It can be concluded that through foreign tourists' attitudes, the Thai tourist assistant staff at Phuket International Airport seemed to have English communication problems with regard to listening and speaking skills, accents, pronunciation, speaking speed, technical terms, and word choices. Most of the staff had these problems that differently affected their oral communication with foreign tourists. Outstandingly, Thai English accents were not totally a problem for the foreign tourists during asking for help or information, but they recommended the Thai staff to fix it to be better for the reliable and comfortable conversation in English. This recommendation would lead to the effective competence and English proficiency for non-native speakers.

This research studied only the attitudes of the foreign tourists who vacationed in Phuket towards the English oral communication problems of the staff at the tourist assistance center in the Phuket International Airport. Thus, further studies can be conducted employing a number of foreign tourists at two other locations of TAC in Phuket Province. This would cover a wider range of attitudes regarding the Thai staff's oral communication. Moreover, further research can be conducted with similar aspects of the language attitudes using a questionnaire to study other foreign tourists' views toward other Thai officers at other tourist assistance centers in other major provinces in Thailand. In addition, the findings of this study can be useful for the Ministry of Tourism and Sport that involves the policymaker of tourism operation to plan a training course to help solve aural-oral communication problems in English faced by local staff., It is recommended that a course in airline communication taught by native-English and non-native English instructors from the colleges or universities in the local area be engaged. The staff will have more

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opportunities to learn how to communicate in English and to understand native and non-native varieties of English.

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