

The 8th International Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) Seminar - Aligning Theoretical Knowledge with Professional Practice

## Needs Analysis on English Language Use in Tourism Industry

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### Abstract

Needs analysis plays a vital role in developing English for specific purposes curriculum. This study surveyed the needs, functions and problems of English language use by 40 tourism employees. A questionnaire was used and data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that speaking is most important, then listening, reading and writing. The three most relevant functions in using English language were giving information, followed by providing services, and offering help. English use problems included; inability to understand foreigners' accents, inappropriate words and expressions, inadequate vocabulary, and lack of grammar knowledge.

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*Keywords:* Needs analysis; English language; Tourism industry; Tourism employee

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### 1. Introduction

English language plays a very crucial role as the predominant tool for communication in the global community. Some people whose native language is not English use the language in their daily lives (Quirk [1]). Most of these people live in countries where English is required for external purposes: to communicate and do business with people in other countries, and to catch up with the advances in the field of business. In addition, English is used as a means to transfer thoughts and cultures and to create good relationships between people in different countries. As a result, English has become an international language and is widely used as a medium for understanding and exchanging ideas among people all over the world.

Nowadays, the role of English is important for tourism industry as a means to communicate, negotiate, and execute transactions with tourists by tourism employees. Since tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing

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businesses in Thailand, it plays an important role in the Thai economy. As the business earning the second highest income compared to the other service industries (e.g., it earned about 100,000 million Baht in 2011) and creating a variety of jobs in business activities (e.g., it created more than 145,000 positions in the service industry) as reported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand : TAT [2], many education institutions both government and private including Buriram Rajabhat University, offer undergraduate level English courses related to tourism business for students who intend to work in tourism or hospitality industry after graduation. These English courses are involved with the language as mentioned by Blue and Harun [3] who state that English, which is associated with host-guest interaction in the service business, should be termed as the “language of hospitality” which refers to all linguistic expressions related to and represented in hospitality concerns. The language of hospitality is often formal, though it very much depends on the level of acquaintance among the participants themselves. For example, when hosting an official dinner, international conference or wedding ceremonies, the hosting arrangements are more formal as compared to encounters among neighbours and friends which are more casual.

Due to TAT’s success in promoting tourism to increase the number of foreign tourists to Thailand, tourism needs to be further developed. Due to its promotion, tourism industry can now be called ‘Amazing Thailand’, ‘Thai Extravaganza’, ‘Thailand Grand Festival’, and ‘Unseen in Thailand’. As a result, the role of tourism industry in generating income and creating jobs could increase. To be good hosts therefore, Thai people who are directly involved in tourism business should improve their English especially in terms of the language used in hospitality industry.

At present, tourism employees who work in international tour companies around Thailand have more chances to use English because of the number of foreigners who come to visit. Although these tourism employees are trained to use English in real situations using the syllabus written by the experts of this field, a formal need analysis to help determine the requirements of the English course for tourism employees has never been conducted. English has so far been taught without systematical survey of needs. Therefore, the syllabus is not based on the real needs of tourism employees as it should be. It seems inevitable to carry out a formal needs analysis tourism employee in using English across Thailand. This study, therefore, attempted to investigate the EL needs, functions and problems faced by tourism employees who work in the international tour companies in Thailand. The findings of this study will then serve as a guideline to develop or expand the existing English for tourism course at the universities across Thailand in order to develop a more effective English for tourism course in the future.

## 2. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis has been one of the key factors and an integral part of English for specific purpose (ESP) practitioners; i.e. researchers, course designers, material developers, testers, evaluators as well as classroom teachers for many years [4]. It is the process of establishing what and how a course will run. Piyanapa [5] states that needs analysis is a means to identify what a learner receives and helps to determine the ESP course they require. It is noted that the word ‘needs’ has been used differently by several researchers. The following are the ways in which ‘needs’ can be defined:

Firstly, needs can be considered as the learner’s study or job requirements; that is, what they have to be able to demonstrate at the end of their language course. Widowson [6] views this type of needs as a goal-oriented definition; whereas, Berwick [7] perceives it as ‘objective’. Secondly, needs can be defined as what the learner has to actually do to acquire the language. According to Widowson [6], this is a process-oriented definition of needs and is related to transitional behaviour, the tool for learning. Thirdly, needs can refer to what the learners themselves would like to gain from the language course. This implies that learners may have personal aims, in addition, to the requirements of their study or job; in other words, wants or desires [7]. Finally, need may be interpreted as lacks, that is, what the learners do not know or cannot do in English [8].

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