**Thai Vendors’ English Communication Skill Needs**

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**Abstract**

The aim of the study was to examine the needs and problems of Thai vendors in employing English in their workplace and their needs regarding English training, so as to create an English training course to enhance their professional skills. The subject of the present study was 160 vendors selling food and drinks, clothes, accessories, souvenirs, and other things at the Indochina Market, Thailand. The data were collected by using a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, involving frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The result revealed that respondents tended to have English communication problems with foreign customers. They found that low English language proficiency is a problem when they communicated with foreign customers. Most of them were interested in attending English training, particularly learning English online. Speaking and listening skills were considered the most important skills for Thai vendors. For an English training course, they wanted to emphasize speaking, listening, writing, and reading, respectively. They desired to improve their English in everyday life and work.

**Keyword**  
Thai vendors, English communication problems, Indochina Market

**1. Introduction**

In Thailand, using English as international language is a crucial tool to help improve business performance (Hiranburana, 2017). As pointed out by Pitsuwan (2012), English is used as the diplomatic, trading, entertainment and political language of communication as well as the most universally used language by people all over the world. Most information that is available on the Internet is in English. Pitsuwan (2012) further states that the English language enables people’s access to information and provide handier information to make more accurate decisions as well as help gain more confidence in self-expression. Thailand will lag behind in the competitive world of business, education, science and technology if the teaching and learning of English is not improved. As a result, Thais are encouraged and awareness is raised of the importance of English so as to serve both local and global marketplaces (Wiriyachitra, n.d.).

Communicative competence is necessary for all language learners. When we learn any language, four types of competence (i.e., grammatical competence, strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence) should be taken into consideration (Conale and Swain, 1980). In terms of grammatical competence, if one knows how to use words and rules, they will be able to convey their messages appropriately and accurately. Language learners can make use of strategic competence to overcome breakdown in communication due to linguistic deficiency, and to negotiate meaning with interlocutors.

Obviously, communication barriers can occur in both native and non-native speakers. For ESL/EFL learners, they may face communication difficulties in terms of insufficiency of vocabulary, interlocutor’s accents, lack of exposure to English, lack of speaking confidence, psychological factors (e.g., cultural differences, attitudes and beliefs) and so on. Obviously, No one ever avoids communication problems.

Communication problems can be divided into different kinds based on the results of research works and researchers’ experiences (e.g., Duta, 2015; Rani, 2016; Mittal, 2018; and Danish and Ramu, 2018). According to Smith (2013), barriers to effective communication consisted of 7 main types: physical, perceptual, emotional, culture, language, gender, and interpersonal. Moreover, Duta (2015), Mittal (2018) and Danish and Ramu (2018) stated that excessive verbalism, anxiety, vocabulary, background and body language (non-verbal communication) can cause communication problems.

Today, English for specific purposes (ESP) is crucial in the modern world. ESP is a language learning method based on the learners’ needs. ESP is categorized into 2 main types: English for professional purposes (EOP) and English for academic purposes (EAP) (Munby, 1978). The former normally focuses on professions or occupations, for example, English for tourism, English for banking, English for flight attendants. Meanwhile, the latter emphasizes training students, usually in a higher education setting. Students tend to be taught vocabulary, grammar, and 4 skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) according to the specific studies of students, like Business English, Aviation English.

Several past research works (e.g.,Pruksanabal, 2006; Fahmongkolchai, 2011; Suwanpakdee, 2012; Yotimart and Wongchai, 2013 ; and Nuemaihom, 2016 ; Suraprajit, 2017; and Dakhi,2017) have been conducted regarding English communication problems of Thais in various sectors (e.g. education, investment, and tourism). However, few past research works have been carried out on Thai vendors’ English communication problems (e.g., Pruksanabal, 2006; Nuemaihom, 2016; and Nikornkitikosol, 2016). In a study by Pruksanabal (2006), Thai vendors have different English backgrounds. Some vendors have some knowledge of English, but the others have never studied English before. If vendors are able to fully understand what the foreigners want, they can serve them smoothly and the level of foreign customer satisfaction will increase. More importantly, vendors opined that two English skills, speaking and listening, were the most necessary. Also, vocabulary and English conversation for specific purposes along with Thai translation and Thai phonetics in their careers were mostly required for practicing English (Nuemaihom, 2016; and Nikornkitikosol, 2016).

It can be said that communication plays an important role in all facets of business. The benefits of English are not only for communicating and receiving information, but also opening the opportunities of career advancement as well as strengthening the relationship of trading among countries. Particularly, it creates a positive image of Thailand and plays an important role in tourism development. However, no past research works have investigated vendors’ needs in English communication skills at the Indochina Market, Thailand. To fill this gap, the purpose of this present study is to explore Thai vendors’ problems when communicating in English with foreigners as well as their English communication skill needs.

**2. Methodology**

The aims of the present study were to explore the needs and problems of Thai vendors when communication with foreign tourists at the Indochina Market, Thailand.

**2.1 Research questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are the communication problems of Thai vendors?
2. What are their needs for English communication skills?

**2.2 Research instruments**

For the present study, a questionnaire was used to gather data. The questionnaire was adapted from Pruksanubal (2006), Kuntaramongkul (2010). It consisted of two parts: the demography of the respondents and the opinions of the respondents according to communication problems between Thai vendors and foreigners at the Indochina Market.

**2.3 Data analysis**

To deal with the quantitative data, in part 1: Personal information, the frequency, percentage, the data in this part were analyzed and presented using frequency and percentage. Meanwhile, mean, and standard deviation (S.D.) were employed to analyze Part 2: the needs and problems of Thai vendors in English communication. The degree of the needs and problems are presented in three ranges as follows: ‘low (1.00-1.99), ‘moderate (2.00-2.99), and ‘high (3.00-4.00) based on the holistic mean scores of frequency of needs and problems of the subject.

**2.4 Participants**

In this present investigation, there were 220 vendors. In order to get the correct number of participants, the formula of Yamane (1967) was used to calculate the sampling number, the participants of this study were 160 Thai vendors who sold goods or provided services at the market.

**3. Results**

**3.1 Personal Information**

The first part of the questionnaire sought the demographic data regarding gender, age, education, type of goods they sell, selling experience, experience in English training course for Thai vendors, experiences in learning English, level of English knowledge of Thai vendors and existing communication problems and communication strategy use by local vendors. All information was shown in the form of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation of the respondents as follows:

**Table 1**: *Gender of Thai vendors*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Female | 108 | 67.50 |
| Male | 52 | 32.50 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 1 illustrates that there were 160 respondents. The number of female respondents (67.5%) was higher than the number of males (32.5%)

**Table 2**: *Age of Thai vendors*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Age** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| 45 years old up | 79 | 49.38 |
| 36-45 years old | 24 | 15.00 |
| 26-35 years old | 36 | 22.50 |
| 16-25 years old | 21 | 13.13 |
| **Total** | **160.00** | **100.00** |

Table 2 shows that the most respondents were over 45 years old (49.38%), followed by 26-35 years old (22.5%), 36-45 years old (15%), 16-25 years old (13.13%), respectively.

**Table 3**: *Educational background of Thai vendors*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Educational background** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Junior High School | 75 | 46.88 |
| Senior High School | 45 | 28.13 |
| Diploma | 2 | 1.25 |
| Bachelor degree | - | - |
| Master degree | - | - |
| Others | 38 | 23.75 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

As shown in Table 3, the respondents had mainly graduated from junior high school, representing (46.88%) of total, followed by senior high school (28.13%), other education (23.75%), and diploma (1.25%).

**Table 4**: *Type of goods that Thai vendors sell*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of goods their sell** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Clothes | 60 | 37.50 |
| Food and drinks | 39 | 24.38 |
| Accessories | 31 | 19.38 |
| Bags and shoes | 30 | 18.75 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

As can be seen in Table 4, the most respondents had been selling clothes (37.50%), food and drinks (24.38%), accessories (19.38%), and bags and shoes (18.75%).

**Table 5**: *Experiences in learning English*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Experiences in learning English** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Yes | 71 | 44.40 |
| No | 89 | 55.60 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

As shown in Table 5, the majority of respondents had experiences in learning English (55.6%) less than those with no experiences in learning English (44.4%).

**Table 6**: *Duration of learning English*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Duration of learning English** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| 1-5 year | 84 | 52.50 |
| 6-10 year | 51 | 31.88 |
| More than 10 years | 25 | 15.63 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

As demonstrated in Table 6, the respondents who had 1-5 years’ experience in learning English, represented (52.5%) of the total. Those with 6-10 years were 31.88%, and those more than 10 years at 15.63%.

**Table 7**: *Level of English knowledge of Thai vendors*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Level of English knowledge** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Poor | 83 | 51.88 |
| Fair | 66 | 41.25 |
| Good | 10 | 6.25 |
| Excellent | 1 | 0.63 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

As shown in Table 7, the majority of the respondents had poor level of English (51.88%), followed by 66 respondents with a fair level of English knowledge (41.25%), respondents having a good and excellent level of English knowledge were 6.25% and 0.63%, respectively.

**Table 8**: *Ways of practicing English in daily life*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Ways of practicing English** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Never | 97 | 60.63 |
| Surfing the Net | 44 | 27.50 |
| Listening to English songs | 10 | 6.25 |
| Watching English-speaking movies | 5 | 3.13 |
| Watching English programs on TV | 2 | 1.25 |
| Reading English newspapers | 2 | 1.25 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 8 illustrates some interesting facts about ways of practicing English, 60.63 percent of vendors never practice English. Only 27.50 percent of them tend to practice English by surfing the Net. Meanwhile, a few of them learned English by Listening to English songs (6.25%), watching English-speaking movies (3.13%), watching English programs on TV (1.25%), and reading English newspapers (1.25%).

**Table 9**: *Interested in attending the English training course*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interested in attending the English training course** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Interested in | 96 | 60 |
| Not interested in | 64 | 40 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 9 indicated that 60% of vendors were interested in attending the English training courses; whereas, 40% of them were not interested.

**Table 10**: *Opportunity to sell goods to foreign customers*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Opportunity to sell goods to foreign customers** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Have opportunity | 133 | 83.13 |
| Do not have any opportunity | 27 | 16.88 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 10 shows that most vendors tended to have more opportunities to sell goods to foreign customers (83.13%). Few of them found that they did not have any opportunity to sell goods to foreign customers (16.88%).

**Table 11:** *Frequency of speaking English with foreign customers*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Frequency of speaking English** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Sometimes | 92 | 57.50 |
| Never | 46 | 28.75 |
| Often | 18 | 11.25 |
| Always | 4 | 2.50 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 11 demonstrated the frequency and percentage of vendors who spoke English when communicating with foreign customers. It is clear that the majority of vendors sometimes spoke English with foreigners (57.5%). They never spoke English with foreign customers (28.75%). They often spoke English with foreigners (11.25%). Only 2.5% of them always communicated with foreign customers in English.

**Table 12:** *Existing communication problems of local vendors*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Existing communication problems of local vendors** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Have problems | 135 | 84.38 |
| No problems | 25 | 15.63 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 12 shows existing communication problems of local vendors. It can be clearly seen that 84.38% of them had communication problems when selling goods to foreigners.

**Table 13:** *Local vendors’ interests in attending English training course*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Local vendors’ interests in attending English training course** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Interested in (for work) | 93 | 58.13 |
| No interest | 44 | 27.50 |
| Interested in (Personal interest) | 23 | 14.38 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

According to Table 13, vendors wanted to attend English training because of their job and their personal interest, 58.13% and 14.38%, respectively. Meanwhile, 27.5% of them were not interested in attending an English training course.

**Table 14:** *Local vendors’ needs of English skills improvement*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Skills** | **Mean** | **S.D.** |
| **Speaking** | 3.51 | 0.87 |
| **Listening** | 3.03 | 0.73 |
| **Reading** | 1.79 | 0.79 |
| **Writing** | 1.68 | 0.79 |

Table 14 shows vendors’ needs for English skills improvement. The participants found that speaking and listening were the most important skills, with the mean score of 3.51 and 3.03, respectively. Reading and Writing were in the third and fourth rank with mean scores of 1.79 and 1.68, respectively.

**Table 15:** *Local vendors’ learning styles*

| **Local vendors’ learning styles** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Individual | 65 | 40.63 |
| Group | 61 | 38.13 |
| Class | 22 | 13.75 |
| In pair | 12 | 7.50 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

This table illustrated vendors’ learning styles. Participants preferred to learn English in a individually (40.63%), group (38.13%), and classroom (13.75%), respectively. Only 7.5% of them tended to desire language training in pairs.

**Table 16**: *Local vendors’ interests in learning English online*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Local vendors’ interests in learning English online** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Like | 94 | 58.75 |
| Dislike | 66 | 41.25 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 16 illustrated data regarding local vendors’ interests in learning English online. 58.75% of participants were interested in learning English online; however, 41.25% were not interested in it.

**Table 17:** *Teaching materials*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Teaching materials** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Pictures | 50 | 31.25 |
| Books | 43 | 26.88 |
| VDO/VCD | 36 | 22.50 |
| Others | 31 | 19.38 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

Table 17 showed vendors' opinions regarding teaching materials when learning English. 31.25% of the participants liked to learn English through pictures, followed by books (26.88%), and VDO/VCD (22.5%). The other teaching materials consisted of booklets and websites (19.38%).

**3.2 Needs and Problems of Thai Vendors in English Communication**

**Table 18:** *Vendors’ Communication Problems and Ways to Solve Problems*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Communication Problems** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Having problems when giving information about products when communicating with foreign customers. | 3.05 | .79 |
| Having translation problems when communicating with foreign customers. | 3.03 | .82 |
| Different accents are a problem when communicating with foreign customers. | 2.97 | .76 |
| Low English language proficiency is a problem when communicating with foreign customers. | 2.91 | .89 |
| Mispronunciation leading to communication problems. | 2.91 | .72 |
| The cross-cultural confusion leading to communication problems. | 2.84 | .93 |
| **Solving communication problems** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Solving communication problems, by using other devices such as maps, calculators, body language etc. | 3.04 | .95 |
| Using Thai words or phrases when one does not know the right words in English. | 2.98 | .79 |
| By using these communication strategies, how often do you overcome communication problems when communicating with foreign customers? | 2.73 | .80 |
| Making up new words if one does not know the right ones in English. | 2.65 | .94 |
| Giving oneself a reward or treat when one does speak well in English. | 2.62 | .92 |
| Trying to relax whenever one feels afraid of making a mistake. | 2.55 | .91 |
| Explaining again when foreign customers do not understand. | 2.49 | .89 |

Table 18 illustrated vendors’ communication problems and how they solve them. The mean frequency scores reveal that the vendors reported that they tended to have communication problems when giving information about products, with the mean score of 3.05. This is followed by ‘Having translation problems when communicating with foreign customers.’ and ‘Different accents are a problem when communicating with foreign customers.’ with the mean scores of 3.03 and 2.97, respectively.

In respect to solving communication problems, the vendors tended to use other devices such as maps, calculators, gestures, etc., with the mean score of 3.04. They use Thai words or phrase when they do not know the right words in English, with the mean score of 2.98. Also, they overcome communication problems when communicating with foreign customers by using communication strategies, with the mean score of 2.73.

**Table 19:** *English conversations*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **English conversations in daily life** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Telling prices, receiving money and making change | 3.60 | .59 |
| Telling about the product’s usage | 3.57 | .56 |
| Giving suggestions and mentioning sales promotions | 3.57 | .53 |
| Thanking and apologizing | 3.56 | .51 |
| Giving information about products and services | 3.53 | .54 |
| Greeting and saying goodbye | 3.53 | .56 |
| Offering help | 3.42 | .65 |
| Giving location | 3.21 | .72 |
| **English in the workplace** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Conversation in restaurants | 3.38 | .90 |
| Conversation in clothes shops | 3.32 | .87 |
| Conversation in souvenir shops | 3.17 | .90 |
| Conversation in coffee shops | 3.11 | .78 |
| Conversation in toy shops | 3.09 | .95 |
| Others | 1.13 | .62 |

As can be seen in Table 19, the participants were interested in 7 out of 9 topics with the mean score of at least 3.00. Those are ‘Telling prices and receiving money and making change’; ‘Telling about the product’s usage’; ‘Giving suggestions and mentioning sales promotions’; ‘Thanking and apologizing’; ‘Giving information about products and services’; ‘Greeting and saying goodbye’; and ‘Telling prices of products’. Meanwhile, ‘offering help’ and ‘Giving directions’ have the least frequency with the mean scores of 3.42 and 3.21 respectively.

With regard to English in the workplace, the participants reported that they wanted to learn English conversation in restaurants, clothes shops, and souvenir shops with the mean scores of 3.38, 3.32, and 3.17, respectively.

**4. Discussion and Conclusion**

These days, ESP is needed worldwide. It is quite widely taught based on people’s needs and purposes. For the results of the present study, respondents reported that they wanted to learn both English in daily life and English in workplace. Telling prices, receiving money and making change, telling about the product usage, and giving suggestions and sales promotions were the top three ranked topics. In terms of English in the workplace, five settings where English should be taught were conversations in clothes shops, souvenir shops, toy shops, restaurants, and coffee shops, respectively. It was also found that most respondents reported that they never practiced English in daily lives, but some of them practiced English by surfing the Net. They reported that they were interested in attending the English training via online learning as they wanted to make use of it in their jobs. They tended to desire to learn English in individual and group settings. Pictures, books, and VDO/VCD were needed to be used as teaching materials, respectively. This is consistence with Pruksanubul (2006), Nuttayakul (2011), Nikonkittikoson (2016), Thai vendors wanted to learn ESP because they wished to make use of it in their job. Hence, in order to know which topics or contents the target learners want to learn, language learners’ needs and problems should be taken into consideration.  
 As reported by Kuntaramongkol (2010), Nutthayakul (2011), Nikonkittikoson (2016), the innovation of English communication has proved to be workable for Thai local vendors. Anyone can learn English anywhere, anytime because of the rapid changing world. Internet usage plays an important role in many sectors such as tourism, investment and education. It not only changes one’s life style but also learning style. People can learn things through the internet. New curriculums are now provided on the internet. Many lessons have been taught online. Teachers are able to design and choose learning activities that are suitable for learners; meanwhile learners are more likely to be motivated to learn more and get more enjoyment of the material and are more actively involved in their learning because of a variety of media with immediate feedback (Bitter, 1989; Ibid, 2005; Meyer, 2008).   
 In summary, types of teaching and learning activities are crucial for language learners as it can help language learners to learn things better and easier. It is suggested that the contents of English training should focus on vocabulary and language expressions, ESP for local vendors. Moreover, online learning is another way for local vendors to practice English. Thus, these issues should be further examined in future research.

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