

## English Language Proficiency of Tour Guides at a Historical Attraction

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**Abstract:** This research aims to study the English language proficiency of tour guides at a historical attraction to suggest a guideline for developing their English language skills. The sampling group used includes 400 foreign tourists who have been to a historical attraction with Thai tour guides' accompanying them using English language to communicate. The study's result appears that an average level of the tourists' opinions on English language proficiency of tour guides at the historical attraction is overall at a high level. When considered by aspects, presentation skill is at the highest level followed by communication skill with the use of appropriate language level and the tour guides' English language proficiency, respectively. However, considering the average level of the tourists' opinions by gender, it is found that, overall, the averages of the two aspects: presentation skill and communication skill with the use of appropriate language level are significantly different at a statistic level of .05.

**Keywords:** English language communication, tour guide, and historical attraction

### 1. Introduction

The tourism industry has become a major economic driving force for several countries worldwide. It also has a good relationship with other industries and creates both direct and indirect income for the countries such as income from tourism products and services; international, private sector, and domestic investment; and infrastructure development surrounding the attraction (Arshad, 2018). Likewise, Thailand is another country earning massive income from the tourism industry along with creating employment, careers, and income among the local sector which helps reducing social inequity. In 2019, the Ministry of Tourism and Sport revealed that there were more than 39.7 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2019). Hence, it is necessary to emphasize on the improvement of foreign language skills, especially English language for those who are responsible for greeting, offering services, and taking care of the tourists as it is acknowledged as an important and international language of the world. These days it is also regarded as lingua franca as seen from people throughout the world using it to communicate with each other for different purposes (Kaur et al., 2016). For instance, the purpose of education, work, socialization, and travel. Especially, it is necessary for those who travel to a country where English is not a major language, so English is also an essential skill for the personnel responsible for supporting and giving information about the attraction to the tourists (Huang et al., 2015; Chen, 2016). Not only does it lead to successful communication, having efficient speaking and listening skills creates a good impression and nice experience for the tourists as well.

Tour guides are the most significant element of a package tour for the tourists. They play an important role in the tourism industry as guides and cultural ambassadors. Besides, they are like the service of the country's exhibition (Kalyoncu & Yuksek, 2017). Being a tour guide requires knowledge, ability, and experience in communication and verbally transferring or explaining information to the tourists to make them understand an attraction's context (Sutthitep, 2016). This can impress and offer them great experiences about the attraction. Thailand has been one of the foreign tourists' destinations with various travelling purposes; therefore, it is extremely essential for the tour guides to develop their English language skills which is the lingua franca among the tourists worldwide. It helps them to get close to the tourists, strengthen their communication skills, and adapt it as a tool to communicate with the foreign tourists effectively. This is in compliance with the Thailand 4.0 policy that focuses on upgrading competitiveness and competence of Thailand's tourism personnel (Subboonrueng & Bunyavejchewin, 2019). Therefore, this research aims to study the English language proficiency of tour guides at a historical attraction and to suggest guidelines for developing their English language proficiency.

### 2. Related Concepts and Theories

#### 1. Concept and Theory of a Tour Guide's Communication

Communication consists of a source or sender, message, channel, receiver, and feedback. It is a process of sending and receiving a message from one person to another (Chmielecki, 2015; Calvó-Armengol, 2015). It is a human communication in society to create understanding among each other (Calota et al., 2015; Giles, 2016). Rosengren (2000) proposes that communication is a process of creating or giving definition from people's conscious, society, or culture which is understandable by people's intelligence. Paul (2011) adds that it should not be limited to only a form of formal message. An action that can lead to communication should also be included, as the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. However, the communication related to speech and action must be paid attention to closely, especially to the public. English language communication including

speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills are essential for the tour guides who need to be able to communicate with stable emotion, consciousness, and wittedness; to have problem solving skills; and to be prudent (Sutthitep, 2016). This will allow them to communicate with the foreign tourists, who visit the historical attraction in Thailand, and provide them with understanding about the attraction (Kalyoncu & Yuksek, 2017).

Moreover, other proper skills are also required including knowledge of an attraction, tradition, culture, local community, economy, the country's current situation, technology, and innovation. They should have understanding of their role and responsibility, work professionally, have good listening and speaking skills to make the tourists understand information about the attraction clearly, have a positive attitude towards their work, and have awareness of morality and code of conduct (Phamornsirtrakul, 2018). According to the study of Al Jahwari et al. (2016), it shows that the tour guides have to improve their English speaking skill. For example, speaking grammatically correct, word selection, and communicating with non-verbal behavior such as an ability to approach and build a relationship with the tourists. Also, Çetinkaya and Öter (2016) see the tour guides as an important key for presenting the attraction and playing a role in building tourists' satisfaction and persuading them to revisit.

In short, a tour guide's communication is the communication between a tour guide and tourists becoming a dialogue to create understanding and building a good relationship between each other. It does not cover only a message, but an action occurring during the communication is also included. Tour guides need to have a good communication and negotiation skills, especially foreign language proficiency like English and Chinese. They should be able to explain messages or information to different groups of tourists and make them understand the information about the attraction accurately.

## **2. Concept of Communication Techniques of a Tour Guide at the Historical Attraction**

Communication is a key to being a good tour guide as well as leading to sustainable tourism (Weiler & Ham, 2000). Mostly, tour guides use their speaking skill to communicate with tourists, followed by listening skill. Good communication from the tour guides requires good basic knowledge and speaking skill. They not only make the tourists listen and understand the information, but also make them respond to what the tour guide or speaker asks for (Tuntipisitkul & Chimphimon, 2018). According to the study of Yooprasert (2018), it is discovered that the tour guides' interpretation skill at the historical attraction is not profound enough. Their explanation is brief and uninteresting with excessive use of academic terms making the content difficult to understand. Hammerton & Bucher (2015) indicates that communication helps the tourists understand about the attraction and can change their inappropriate behavior, encourage them to have responsibility for that historical attraction and environment (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002; Pearce, 2005). Meanwhile, Çetinkaya and Öter (2016) add that the historical attraction is regarded as the nation's cultural heritage which is unique and valuable. More values can be added due to the foreign tourists, so the interpretation at the historical attraction is vital. It will allow the tour guides to present the information attractively and precisely as well as to create nice experiences and satisfaction for the tourists.

Hence, tour guides should have knowledge, experience, and good speaking skill. Not only do they make the tourists listen and understand the information, they need to make them respond to what they want to communicate. Besides, they need to be able to impress them as much as they can. An efficient communication which is a strength for the tour guides can help the tourists understand the attraction's historical background clearly and accurately. It also encourages them to turn their behaviors into a positive way and reduce risky behavior that might have a negative impact on the historical attraction.

## **3. Methodology**

### **Population and Sampling**

This research is a quantitative research using purposive sampling for the data collection. This is done by collecting questionnaires from 400 foreign tourists who have been to a historical attraction with Thai tour guides' accompanying them and communicating using English language. The researcher uses Yamane (1967)'s calculation as there are more than 100,000 foreign tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2019).

### **Data Collection**

A questionnaire is used as data collection tool of which the questions are specified by literature review from reliable sources in compliance with the research's objectives. Next, the researcher examines a standard of the data collection tool through a validity test by presenting the questionnaire to three experts. Afterwards, the researcher calculates the reliability by providing 30 sets of the questionnaire to the sampling group, then analyzing the reliability with Cronbach's alpha which equals 0.893. As the value is close to 1, it is considered acceptable (Vaske

et al., 2017). Moreover, the researcher also examines the ethics on human research before actually using the questionnaire with the sampling group.

**Data Analysis**

For the first part of the questionnaire: an analysis result of respondents’ personal data, the statistics used for the data analysis are frequency and percentage. For the second part: the data analysis of the respondents’ opinion on the English language proficiency of tour guides at the historical attraction, the statistics used are mean and standard deviation. For the last part: a comparison analysis of an average level of the opinions on tour guides’ English language proficiency, the statistic used is T-test.

**Result**

**Table 1.** Showing average, standard deviation, interpretation, and rank of the respondents’ opinions on the English language proficiency of tour guides at the historical attraction

Tour guide’s English language competency at the historical tourist attraction	Opinion Levels (n = 400)			
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Level	Rank
1. Ability to communicate by using appropriate English language level	3.77	0.23	High	1
2. A tour guide’s ability to use English language	3.75	0.19	High	2
3. Presentation skills	3.57	0.22	High	3
Total	3.71	0.18	High	

According to table 1, most of the foreign tourists think that in overall, the English language proficiency of the tour guides at the historical attraction is at a high level. When considering their opinions by aspects, it appears that they focus on presentation skill the most, followed by communication skill using appropriate language and their English language proficiency.

**Table 2.** Shows a comparison analysis of an average level of the respondents’ opinions on the English language proficiency of tour guides at the historical attraction by gender

Tour guide’s English language competency at the historical tourist attraction	Male (n = 172)		Female (n = 228)		t	p
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
	1. Ability to communicate by using appropriate English language level	3.72	0.22	3.81		
2. A tour guide’s ability to use English language	3.72	0.19	3.78	0.20	-	.003
3. Presentation skills	3.56	0.21	3.58	0.23	-0.934	.351
Total	3.68	0.18	3.74	0.18	-	.001

According to table 2, it demonstrates the tour guides’ ability to communicate in English language at the historical attraction. When considered by genders, it is found that the tourists’ gender differences affect their opinions on the tour guides’ English language proficiency significantly. Meanwhile, when considering by aspects, their opinions on the aspect of presentation and communication skills using appropriate level of language are significantly different at a level of .05.

**4. Conclusion and Discussion**

According to the study of the English language proficiency of tour guides at the historical attraction, the foreign tourists who visited the historical attraction apparently place high important to the tour guides’ English language proficiency, especially communication skill, the use of appropriate language, and ability to use English

language. According to the research result, it shows that they still need to develop their English language skills so that they can present the information to the tourists effectively by using appropriate words with correct grammar and is easy to understand (Al Jahwari et al., 2016). English presentation skill is regarded as the tour guides' strength impacting the tourists' satisfaction and impression (Chiang and Chen, 2014; Huang et al., 2015; Kalyoncu & Yuksek, 2017). Being a good tour guide requires good qualifications, working behavior, and capacity that can satisfy and impress the tourists the most (Phakprapai and Chaiya, 2017; Van Ruler (2018). Regarding the tour guides' English language proficiency at the historical attraction, when considered by the tourists' genders, it is obvious that the tourists' gender differences affect their opinions on the tour guides' English language proficiency significantly. Meanwhile, when considered by aspects, their opinions on the aspect of presentation skill and communication skill using appropriate level of language are significantly different at a level of .05 which relates to Boonkit (2010)'s study. It finds that confidence, creative topic, and eloquence are major keys to communication development. However, Tanaka et al. (2020) discovers that tour guides usually use complicated words to communicate although they are inevitable. Kalisa (2019) adds that they should emphasize on the local culture of each attraction to highlight its cultural identity. They should attend a training course to help understand the tourists and how to take care of them to improve their communication skills while interpreting the information to them so that they can understand it easier and more profound (Weiler & Walker, 2014). The tourists' gender is another factor that should not be taken for granted since different genders can perceive the tour guides' presentation, working performance, and the use of appropriate language level differently. It is essential to pay close attention to the genders of tourists in the trip (Kalyoncu & Yuksek, 2017). Chuwongin (2020) adds that their presentation skill is also another key factor that helps building a good relationship with the tourists as well as making them to understand, trust, and cooperate with the tour guides. This will impact the quality of tourism (Mustelier-Puig et al., 2018; Hansen & Mossberg, 2017). To strengthen the tour guides' English language proficiency at the historical attraction, they need to pay attention to the variety of tourists' gender by presenting each topic and communicating with an appropriate language level in a creative way. They also need to highlight local culture of the attraction to create uniqueness.

## **Recommendations**

### *1. Develop tour guides' English language proficiency through an English for presentation training course*

Tour guides' English language proficiency should be paid attention to since it is the lingua franca for communicating or presenting information about the historical attraction to foreign tourists, so it should not be neglected. As a result, they can present the historical attraction professionally. Apart from communicating correctly, tour guides should be able to use proper words or technical terms related to the historical attraction to make the tourists understand the information in the simplest way, be enjoyable, and not get bored. Preparing accurate and effective information presentation that meets the same standard among the tour guides is also extremely important. Therefore, to make it meet the same standard, there should be a training course for upgrading tour guides' knowledge or a tour guide manual about English communication techniques for communicating at the historical attraction professionally.

### *2. Develop tourist's guide impression management*

Tourist's guide impression management is a self-presentation skill to impress the tourists which compares each tour program to a drama while the tour guide is an actor showing a front stage character to the tourists and hiding a back stage character behind. It is a seasoning technique to create impression among the tourists and to create a seamless communication. It is also a factor used for building good experiences among the tour groups.

### *3. Rearrange information presentation by adapting more innovation and technology to keep up with the world's trends and changing tourists' behaviors*

Due to the COVID-19 situation these days, tourists have changed their travel behavior and are worried to travel. They tend to travel domestically or visit the places nearby their neighborhood more. However, as they still long for travelling, many foreign tourists like to look more at the tourism related information, media, photos, or videos through an online channel or information presented on tourism applications, which are a major source of data with various forms of recommendations about tourism. To prepare for the changing behavior, a tourism sector, especially tour agents and tour guides, should cooperate to rearrange the current tour guide's information presentation about the historical attraction to appear on the online channel to offer the tourists an experience to travel and learn about important history of Thailand. After things return to normal, they will be able to travel freely, and the historical attraction presented before will become one of their destinations to visit and learn at the actual site.

All in all, there are three major ways to develop English language proficiency of the tour guides at the historical attraction: developing tour guides' English language proficiency through an English for presentation training course so that they can present the historical attraction professionally, developing the tourist's guide impression management, and rearranging the information presented by adapting more innovation and technology to keep up with the world's trends and changing tourists' behaviors. To make all of the recommendations

effective, cooperation among every sector including the government, private sector, institutions, and tour guides is necessary to help upgrading the information of the historical attraction to meet global standard.

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