

## **Abstract**

Due to its position as the main source of national income, the tourism and hospitality service industry in Thailand is now highlighted as an area to watch in terms of its value for continued national economic growth. Chiang Rai Rajabhat University (CRU) a university in the tourist area in the North of Thailand, plays a key role in hospitality service education and has a significant influence in the sector because it produces graduates for service in the workforce of this industry. Given the industry's competitive climate, decisions to increase the number of workers, or practitioners, need to take into account the quality of the workers. In this time of globalization, when English is used widely, particularly in the intercultural context of hospitality service businesses, the quality of English must be seriously considered.

Business English (BE) graduates, as prospective employees, need to be highly competent in English language skills. This demand for effective English users in hospitality service workplaces means that there is a need to give serious consideration to the ability of Thai graduates to become competent users of English in real workplaces, and to develop an understanding of how they may achieve the high level of competence required of them.

This study investigates the English language skills Thai students used in intercultural communication in hospitality service workplaces. The aim was to determine what essential language skills were used, to explore how these skills were implemented while giving services to international tourists, and to use the results to reflect on English for Hospitality Services (EHS) study in order to provide some recommendations for teaching and learning in those courses.

The project was designed as an ethnographic case study. Multiple research tools were used, but particularly participatory observations of student workplace interactions, and semi-structured interviews that included interviews with workplace staff, such as managers, heads of departments, business owners and on-site supervisors. There were

additional sources of information used, including students' diaries and other documents relevant to internship. The data collected were then examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The participants were 15 volunteers and were fourth-year students in the Business English (BE) program at CRU. The case study involved an examination of data collected from ten workplaces in four hospitality service areas.

The observation transcriptions were quantitatively scrutinized for the most essential functional language units used in the hospitality services. The significant findings indicate that the functional language of requests and responding to requests was the most frequently used unit in this hospitality services area. This result confirms previous studies that have found that the functional language of requests, including responding to requests, is the most essential functional pattern in hospitality services. Thanking, offering help/services, and refusing are counted as the second, third and fourth essential units used. However, apologizing and responding to complaints, which are generally considered important in the service area, were very much less frequently used in this study.

There was no evidence that significant breakdown or major problems in communication occurred during hospitality service procedures examined; however, the findings suggest that the language proficiency of Thai students was very low in terms of language accuracy. From the results of the study, it is recommended that those responsible for EHS teaching and learning give serious consideration to increasing the level of communicative competence of Thai BE students in terms of English language skills, and to improving the cultural awareness of graduates who expect to be involved in intercultural communication in the hospitality services industry.

**Key words:** Intercultural communication, English language for hospitality services, Service encounters.