

The English Language Proficiency among the Thai English Speaking Customers and Staff of Beyond Café Udornthani

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Abstract: *This study focused on critical evaluation on the satisfaction non-English Thai customers and the English language proficiencies of the staff of Beyond Café Udornthani, in the Kingdom of Thailand. The purpose of which is to develop a learning module for the Thai service providers to eloquently use the English Language in transacting business using a descriptive method of research to evaluate and analyze their weaknesses and strength in the use of the English language with depth. The study utilized the mean, standard deviation, t-tests, and the Pearson product moment correlation (r) as statistical tools using the SPSS programs which include the purposive sampling to determine the sampling size intended for the study since it is very difficult to identify the numbers of customers coming in everyday, ambush or convenient sampling is used. The results of the study turned out to be no relationship between the satisfactions of the Thai English speaking customers with the “poor” evaluations on the English proficiencies among the staff at Beyond Café Udornthani, Kingdom of Thailand. It only means one thing that; Thai people do not even give a negative impression to those who are not good in English in rendering service. But then there is a need for these service providers to have intensive English language training for the foreign customers visiting the place to effectively and confidently use the language.*

Keywords— English Language, Proficiency, Thai English Speaking Customers, Satisfaction, Descriptive, Thailand

1. INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is one of the measurements that the business industry is considered successful in the business. And one of the most important factors to consider is the prowess in communication of all the service providers or the front liners in dealing with customers. Specifically with the use of the universal business language the English language in serving the international customers to eloquently understand the business transaction.

2. RELATED WORKS

English as a global language is an invaluable tool for communication worldwide. It is an essential language for international business dealings, government relations, education, science and technology and the like. During the launch of the British Council’s English 2000 project in 1995, the position of the English language was summed up in this statement:

World-wide, there are over 1,400 million people living in countries where English has official status. One out of five of the world’s population speaks English to some level of competence. Demand from the other four fifths is increasing.

In many non-English speaking countries, it has become the lingua franca particularly in Southeast Asian region [1]. Consequently, the ASEAN Economic

Community established English as the official business language as it commenced in 2015. This opens a huge opportunity for the countries under ASEAN to improve their economic status not only in the region but globally. Along with this global prospect, the demand to equip citizen with the necessary English proficiency grew especially here in Thailand. With the awareness of these changes and the continued rise of the foreigners visiting or working in the

country, the importance of communication using the English language is highlighted. The demands for labor force with sufficient knowledge of the language keep on growing thus; the necessity to communicate in the English language in the customer service sector is expanding. A study explained that interpersonal communication is an activity between people to achieve a common goal. Transaction through communication can only be effective if the meaning is transferred properly.

Foreigners find themselves using English as means to communicate and transact in a country where it is not the native language. However, problem occurs in the process of communication if the native cannot use the same. The difficulties of people from a non-English speaking country set the barrier for the communication process creating a setback for efficient customer service in business industries. With the pressure from the implementation of AEC, both the government and the private sectors in the country are scrambling to improve the quality of English proficiency to be able to be AEC-ready and to meet the demands of the growing population of non-Thai English speaking people in the country. Moreover, sufficient ability to communicate in the language provides more opportunity for the country’s economic growth.

Customer service is about keeping access to information balanced between businesses and their customers. But the reality is often that the business either has an information advantage over the customer, or the other way around [2]. As a large part of customer service is how we can communicate with our customer. Communication can be face to face, by telephone, by letter, e-mail and to a lesser degree of fax. We need to be able to deal with unhappy or frustrated customer and send them away feeling positive about their experience [3]. Communication is the process by which one person or organization conveys one meaning from one person to another or from one organization to its publics.

Communication is initiated by the sender or source, which creates a message designed to elicit a specific response from the receiver, the message interpreted according to the receiver's perception and understanding, feedback, in form of action, is then returned to the source, whereas define the communication the study of communication is important, because every administrative function and activity involves some form of direct or indirect communication [4]. Whether planning and organizing or leading and monitoring, school administrators communicate with and through other people. This implies that every person's communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness.

It seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to organizational effectiveness is a lack of effective communication [5]. Moreover, good communication skills are very important to ones success as a school administrator. It is necessary that the staff is able to create a relationship with the customer based on a common understanding that there is a definite purpose for the interaction. Interaction Thus, the success of the service lies mainly on the effectiveness of the communication process. With the proficiency of the English communication skills of staff and customer service in Beyond Café Udornthani, the efficiency of their service for their Non-Thai English speaking customers is guaranteed.

A study identified the elements of communication as the sender, the encoding, the message, the medium, the decoding, the receiver, and the feedback. If noise exists in these elements in any way, complete clarity of meaning and understanding does not occur [6]. The author wrote "The greatest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished".

Communication primarily serves to solve problems of cooperation, in other words coordinating joint action. This is true for modern-day humans and is as well the reason why language evolved. Indeed, human social life recurrently involves cooperating to reach goals that a group can achieve better than an individual. Compare the outcomes attainable by a symphonic orchestra, a surgical team, or a group of prehistoric hunters relative to those attainable by a single individual in each of these domains. At the same time, cooperative enterprises pose the so-called dilemma of cooperation: individuals want to cooperate, but run the risk of being deceived or exploited by their partners. Also, even if cooperation partners are motivated by mutually benevolent intentions, they still need to figure out how to coordinate their collaborative endeavor. The dilemma of cooperation, then, poses two problems for would-be cooperators: a commitment [7].

Problem (ensuring all do their part) and a coordination problem (putting together individual efforts in a sensible and efficient way). The human capacity for language use is a key factor that facilitates the resolution of these two problems. A scholar created a model demonstrating the communication process "organizational communication in an age of globalization" (explain model) the problems arises with the noise, which is anything that distorts the message. The noise

can be physical (such as hardware failure), language barriers or even emotions.

Through this theory, this study explores the availability of assistance needed by the customers who can only communicate in English which is determined by the staff's ability to communicate in the said language. Interpersonal communication just means the exchange of information between two or more people. As long as you are communicating with another person, you're involved in interpersonal communication. The success of the communication process ensures customer satisfaction resulting to a better relationship among the parties involved [8].

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to assess the English communication proficiency and satisfaction of non- Thai English speaking customer in Beyond Café Udornthani as basis for customer satisfaction training program.

Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the English Communication Proficiency of staff and the level of satisfaction of Non-Thai English speaking customer of Beyond Café Udornthani?
2. Based on the findings of the study, what intervention programs may be proposed?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design

This study employed the descriptive method because it specifically draws the personal profile of the staff, in terms of sex, qualified education and English communication proficiency also the profile of the customers in terms age, sex, and civil status.

4.2 Respondents

The Beyond Café Udornthani is the one of the famous coffee shop in Udornthani province where you can relax, unwind, business talk, celebrating special days and hang out with friend/s. It's located opposite of NongPrajak Park where people having their physical fit and while the others are waiting for their love ones they go to Beyond Café Udornthani for having some coffee, cake and/ or tea. The Beyond Café Udornthani has 35 Thai staff. The managements are couple P' Ning and P' Job who established the 2 branches, the first branch was established 2011 opposite of Nongprajak and the second branch located at Udornthani Stadium and established last 2013 and now they are operating a new branch at Boonthavon, Udornthani. The participants of this study were the 35 Thai staff of Beyond Café in Udonthani, Thailand. Only the staffs currently employed in Beyond Café Udornthani at the time were the study held that part of the population.

4.3 Instrument

The study used the following instrument: interview questionnaire for the 35 Thai staffs' of the study to recorded their responses on the English Communication Proficiency in their line of work; survey questionnaires that gauged their customer service in terms of using the English language for the Non-Thai English speaking customers in Beyond Café Udonthani were gauged their satisfaction from the staff's service and English communication skills.

4.4 Data Analysis

The answers to the questions under the study were tabulated, analyzed and treated through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS version 21).

The following statistical treatment was used in the analysis and interpretation of data:

1. Frequency was used to determine the actual number of the respondents, their demographic profile.
2. Percentage was used to determine and describe the part of a whole of the respondents.
3. Weighted mean was applied to quantify the satisfaction of the customer based on the product and service.
4. Pearson's Product Correlation Coefficient of r . This will be used to measure level of significant difference in the English Communication Proficiency in Beyond Café staff in terms of gender, qualified education and work experience. It will also measure significant level of Non- Thai English speaking customer in Beyond Café. It will likewise measure the significant relationship between English Communication Proficiency in Beyond Café.

4.5 Data Gathering

The needed data in this study follows the following gathering procedures:

1. Letter to P' Ning the owner of the Beyond Café Udonthani was requesting permission to conduct the study and administer the questionnaire with the target respondents.
2. Upon the approval, the questionnaires were scheduled for distribution. This was done personally by the researcher and sought the assistance of the supervisor assigned in the respective branch to take charge of the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires to save time and energy.

This researcher was conducted a structured survey questionnaire were found out the standard responses of the participants and were found out the English Communication Proficiency of staff and satisfaction of Non-Thai English speaking customer in Beyond Café Udonthani as well as the communication problem encountered by the Beyond Cafe Udonthani staff in dealing with their Non-Thai English speaking costumers. Also, a structured interview was done to examined the Beyond Cafe staff service towards the importance of English Communication Proficiency were to communicate and achieved the satisfaction with their Non-Thai English speaking customers. Moreover, the researcher was conducted supplementary structured survey questionnaire and give out for the Non-Thai English speaking customers in Beyond Café Udonthani were to gauge their

satisfaction and if the staff were used English language as their communication tool for the Non-Thai English speaking language.

5. RESULTS

Problem 1: Is there a significant relationship between the English Communication Proficiency of staff and the level of satisfaction of Non-Thai English speaking customer of Beyond Café Udonthani?

There is no significant difference in the level of English Communication Proficiency of the staff as revealed in the study in terms of gender and highest educational attainment. This mean only one thing, that gender and educational attainment does not affect the performances of both the male and female staff of the establishment. The results also revealed that there is no difference when it comes to the use of the language with or without training in the English language.

There is a significant difference in the product and service as dimension customer satisfaction. Since the quality of the product (the goods to be more specific in this case, has nothing to do with the use of the English language even if it is written in the English language and since instruction are already given in the product as part of the product information has nothing to do with the English language in the form of oral communication.

And finally, there is no correlation between English Communication Proficiency of the staff and the level of customer satisfaction. It means that, among the Thai people even if English language is being used, they just rely on what is written in the product information than the verbal capacity to speak the English language by the staff of the company under investigation.

Problem 2: Based on the findings of the study, what intervention programs may be proposed?

There should be a well-designed English Proficiency program for the Thai service providers to cater the needs of the foreign customers and enhances their prowess in using the language hence, uplifting their personality in dealing with the English Speaking customers in the future.

Excellent customer service is all about communication. Demonstrating to our customers that we are listening to them and value their feedback, combined with the ability to convey clear messages with warmth and empathy will enhance our customers' experience, however transitory. Basic principles such as making your customer feel at ease, listening attentively or knowing when to say sorry can all make the difference and, more importantly, make our customers feel that they are important to us. Research shows that happy customers not only come back but also tell other people to come and try us out! So why do some many organizations, be they retail outfits, restaurants or large banks get it so wrong and so often? Very often the answer is in the communication skills training that they provide their staff and

the ongoing coaching and support that ensures standards are kept high.

The real secret to successful communication lies in the ability to gauge your customer's own communication style and expectations and then to mirror and respond appropriately. For example, when dealing with a customer on the telephone, you may find that some customers require more than just an answer to their issue but also wish to make "small talk". Others, however, are not interested whatsoever and want their transaction dealt with quickly and efficiently. Equally, it is important to think about how you address your customer, use humor or even deal with complaints.

Some people are instinctively more attuned communicators than others but this doesn't mean that the relevant skills cannot be developed. Many organizations now provide communication skills training courses for their customer service teams which can cover everything from basic communication techniques through to more advanced empathy skills programs.

We all know that communication is a two way process. I use language that I know will engage you, you signal to me that you are interested and listening, you ask the right questions, I pause in the right places and so on. It works when we understand each other or at least demonstrate that we are keen to learn to understand each other. Good communication skills do not only involve giving the message but helping the listener to decode and respond to the message more easily.

So what happens when our communication styles and expectations are clearly different? Everyone has different preferences when it comes to how they like to communicate. These preferences can include the level of directness, use of body language, mode of communication, how much information is shared and even the time and place of communication. It is tempting to stick to our natural style and to communicate in the way that comes most easily to us but we need to remember that most work related communication has an expected outcome; we need to convince the other person or need them to do something for us. We need a result and to get the best and quickest outcome we should consider adapting our communication style in order to engender most positive response from our counterparts.

6. DISCUSSION

Depending on your circumstances you will need to vary the mix and timing of some of these actions.

1. ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND LISTEN TO THE ANSWERS

You need to get a clear picture of what is driving reality on the ground by getting out among your people. Find out what they need and what is most important to them.

2. CREATE HOPE WITH A NEW VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Start by tuning into your own emotions around what you have found out and then manage your own reaction.

Gather a core group of change champions who understand the positive intentions and support the possibility of change.

Actively acknowledge and validate all the feelings and reactions, however difficult.

Remind them why the change is important and how it aligns with your organization or team's purpose. Make sure what you say resonates at both an emotional and logical level.

3. BUILD MOMENTUM TOWARD REAL BUY IN

Create a team of change leaders, designers and supporters who can build excitement.

Draft a plan with an end vision, goal, key steps and how you will measure success.

Expand the circle by increasing ownership, gathering feedback, co-creating and refining the plan.

4. OFFER OTHERS THE CHANCE TO COMMIT

Communicate the plan and invite people to be involved. Remind them they are needed and have a role.

Help them understand costs, benefits and impact. Clarify commitment by defining roles and expectations both on a tactical and emotional level.

Change can be one of the hardest messages to communicate which is why many organizations invest in targeted executive coaching and communication skills training programs to help their leaders and managers to develop their communication skills to deliver key messages sensitively but effectively.

Excellent communication skills don't come naturally to everyone. This is why smart organizations invest in Communication Skills training programs to ensure that their customer facing employees are able to talk and listen to their clients helping them to build more effective relationships.

Customer facing employees who are concerned that their accent or speech patterns are hard to understand can increase their intelligibility by following a speech training program. This type of training should not attempt to eradicate a regional accent but should ensure that individuals speak in a warm and clear manner and are aware of any sounds or expressions which will make them difficult to decipher.

1. Don't Just Listen to Your Customers, Understand Them

It's easy to listen to customers. However the first step of every employee must be to understand them and their needs in order to successfully better the organization.

2. Serve the Needs of the Customer

"We're not competitor obsessed, we're customer obsessed. We start with what the customer needs and we work backwards."

The Kindle tablet came into existence purely defined by customers' desires rather than engineers' preferences and personal preferences. Business leaders must never stray from the overall fact that the customer pays the wages at your company determine what they need and work to serve them. During the next evaluation of a product or service team, stop thinking about how you can make the product or organization better and start thinking about how you can make your customers more successful.

3. The Empty Chair: The Most Important Person in the Room

“Focusing on the customer makes a company more resilient.”

Throughout these meetings, a different weight was held on all decisions as the invisible but clear presence of the customer was always accounted for.

4. Never Settle for 99%

“We’re not satisfied until it’s 100%.”

As your customer service team continues aiming to hit response time goals to customers and improve satisfaction ratings never settle for 99% – always shoot for 100. In today’s age, customers are talking to one another and are referring companies that provide a more satisfactory customer experience.

5. Respect Today’s Customer

“If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell six friends.

Today’s customer is listening to peers, researching heavily online and posting complaints on social media – changing everything business owners thought they knew about customer relationships.

Put in the work and research so that you fully understand your customer base and never take them for granted. Respected brands have fallen high from their perches due to poorly mishandled situations in dealing with an unhappy customer. Make sure to have a clear and concise plan with how you deal with bad reviews or complaints from customers (it’s going to happen).

6. Strive to Create a Customer-Centric Company

“If we can arrange things in such a way that our interests are aligned with our customers, then in the long term that will work out really well for customers and it will work out really well for company.”

7. Don’t Be Afraid to Apologize

“We will use the scar tissue from this painful mistake to help make better decisions going forward, ones that match our mission.”

7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data gathered, the overall weighted mean of level of English Communication Proficiency of the staff of Beyond Café Udonthani was 1.91 and interpreted as “poor”. The satisfaction Non-Thai English speaking customer in terms of product, service and satisfaction was interpreted as “satisfied” and the standard deviation was 0.55.

There is no significant relationship between the English Communication Proficiency of staff and the level of satisfaction of Non-Thai English speaking customer of Beyond Café Udonthani. The computation was $r = -0.724$ less than $p = 0.111$. Thus means that increase in the English Communication Proficiency does not significantly relate to the level of customer satisfaction.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be a well-designed English Proficiency program for the Thai service providers to cater the needs of the foreign customers and enhances their prowess in using the

language hence, uplifting their personality in dealing with the English Speaking customers in the future.

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