The Effects of an English Speaking Guide Book for Cultural Travel on the Enhancement of Taxi Drivers' English Speaking Skills

Duangkamol Thitivesa
English Program Department
Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University
1 U Thong Nok Rd, Khwaeng Dusit, Khet Dusit
Krung Thep Maha Nakhon 10300, Thailand
Email: duangkamol.th@ssru.ac.th & duangkamol@hotmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4015-5827

Abstract

This study was conducted in the context of adult learners working as taxi drivers with limited English proficiency. The purpose of the study was to explore what the effects of a language training curriculum on the enhancement of taxi drivers' English speaking would be. In other words, the extent of the drivers gain in speaking skill improvement after the use of an English Speaking Guide Book for Cultural Travel, as part the a language training curriculum was scrutinized. The study used an experimental post-test only design with one group of the participants receiving an intervention, which was the guide book deliberated to focus on types of English texts and to provide learners with a framework for learning features of grammar and discourse necessary for taxi service practice. Data were analyzed using percentages, means, and standard deviations. Study tools included a lesson plan, and an indirect language test paper in the form of multiple-choice questions in the situations likely to arise while the drivers are on duty. The test determined to what extent the effects of an English Speaking Guide Book for Cultural Travel impacted on the academic achievement of the taxi drivers' English speaking proficiency against the 70% target attainment. The study illustrated how learning experiences take place in the context of language use in an occupational field, as well as giving an account of results in a language class test where a guide book was employed as a main teaching aid. The outcome was more scientifically grounded knowledge as the results of the links between research-based insights for material development for specific occupational purposes, and classroom practices all help make solid educational decisions.

Keywords: English speaking, Systematic Functional Linguistics, taxi drivers, guide book, training curriculum.

Introduction

This study interconnects linguistics, and language learning for tourism application and therefore, it is important to understand the importance of these areas in enhancing touristic experiences through communication with taxi drivers' who have better than average English speaking skills.

A Framework of Tourism

The tourism industry is the world's largest generator of wealth and jobs worldwide (Costa, 2006). The increasing number of travelers contribute substantially to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of countries and this is likely to increase in the future (Costa, 2006). For instance, in 2010, the tourism industry generated over 15% of its GDP and employed approximately 5.2% of the total workforce (EC, 2010, cit. in Costa, Panyik, and Buhalis, 2013). Therefore, it attracts most countries and their private sector stakeholders. In fact, many nations are releasing resources to strengthen the private and government sector aiming at boosting the efficiency and effectiveness of the tourism industry. Tourism is a growing business and becoming more competitive in

Thailand. The travel industry in the country has enjoyed such a rapid growth, and the number of travelers from different countries has continued to increase and widespread attractions all over the country are now experiencing record numbers of visitors. Nonetheless, tourism requires suitably trained manpower for it to welcome the growing number of tourists who come to Thailand, as can been seen in the following figure.

Country of Nationality	Number of international tourist arrivals	Receipts
East Asia	23,623,500	1,040,476.92
ASEAN (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan)	9,170,558	294,919.81
Europe (e.g., Germany, Austria, France)	5,918,578	437,687.89
The Americas (e.g., Canada, Argentina, Brazil)	1,418,556	107,218.34
South Asia (e.g., India, Nepal, Pakistan)	1,774,157	1,774,157
Oceania (e.g., Australia, New Zealand)	838,713	66,805.5
Middle East (e.g., Egypt, Israel, Kuwait)	683,420	57,704.22
Africa (e.g., South Africa and others)	174,565	12,683.08
Grand Total	34,431,489	1,803,479.32

Figure 1: The number of international tourist arrivals in Thailand and receipts generated during their stay as non-residents of the country during January to November 2018   **Source:** Tourism Statistics 2018, The Office of Sports and Tourism Economics, Ministry of Tourism and Sports (as of 14 December 2018) available at https://www.mots.go.th

According to Figure 1, the number of international tourist arrivals in Thailand and receipts generated during their stay as non-residents of the country during the period January to November 2018, is growing. International travelers from countries reached the grand total of 34,431,489 million people in 2018 and earned the country 1,803,479.32 million bath in that year (The Office of Sports and Tourism Economics, 2018). These profits account for the expenses that non-resident tourist generated in Thailand in accommodation, restaurant, food and beverage, entertainment, shopping and others activities. This includes work in hotels, travel agencies, airlines and other transport services, as well as in the restaurant and leisure industries. Services and transactions are mostly conducted in English. The role of the language has become crucial for the country, and it has drawn political attention on the improvement of the communication skill of Thais. Thai taxi drivers lack satisfactory English language skills, which hampers needed effective cross-cultural communication with passengers. Thai taxi drivers invariably receive numerous grievances. The Department of Land Transport (2012) reported that there were almost 6000 complaints in a three month period in 2012 and that about 3000 taxi drivers were either penalized or disciplined for poor conduct.

For the aforementioned, this study focuses on whether language uses of those in tourism, and taxi drivers in particular, can be enhanced, and how language training can contribute to reinforce the image of these people with regard to English communication skills as they service international tourists.

> The public's view of Thai taxi drivers varies. From the media, they are not always perceived positively either. Many people complain that some drivers reject their requests and some are picky when it comes to destinations. For example, if where the passenger wants to go is too far or when the traffic is jammed, some taxis decline to provide the service. Many visitors get upset when they are declined by the taxicab drivers. One website, for example, claims that The Bangkok Post has conducted research on reasons or rather excuses for not picking up passengers.

> Among the cited reasons included the need to return the car to the garage or the car needs refueling. Some taxi drivers prefer accepting only foreign passengers. These types of taxis are found near tourist areas. Many usually do not turn on their meters and charge excessive fare.
>
> (Thadphoothon, 2017:367).

Language ability undoubtedly plays a role in such problem creation. There is thus a need to focus on improving their speaking and also listening skills. Role-playing is then critical and scenarios taxi drivers are likely to encounter must be considered, such as for example a passenger enquiring about supplementary fees for waiting for one to return to a vehicle, being able to give directions to places, as well as knowing the names of important landmarks and various places of interest that tourists may wish to be taken to.

An overview of SFL as a background premise

Focusing on language use in an occupation, the study provides a view of real issues of real life, disciplines and areas – such as taxi services, and linguistics. It also combines two different, but complementary and interconnected areas, breaking down the wall that limit one to naking only a linguistic analysis.

Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was developed by Michael Halliday in the 1960s, and has a pedagogical significance in learning foreign languages (Christie, 1999:761). Language was not envisaged as a set of rules, for example, and its main focus was the study of discreet units like, for example, tenses and sentence patterns. It was a semiotic system, in which there was no direct link between contents (meaning) and expressions (realization). A social convention was needed to attach a particular meaning to a specific realization. For instance, the meanings "Rest in peace" and the black color of a dress for mourning the passing of persons, in Thailand in particular, has a social convention that imposes a link between the two. Meaning is realized by, or encoded, in sentences (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:1-2) as a unity of a text articulated within the basis of meaning-making smaller components of lexico-grammar. When analyzing a text, "any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:1-2), should be understood as a text within its lexico-grammar context in which the text is realized. The context of situation allows language users for different language choices, and speakers/writers to realize their choices through different texts (e.g., the use of questions for polite request to do/not to do actions on taxi, instead of imperative sentences commanding passengers the actions). An expression occurs in a specific logical sequence in relation to others (e.g., subject, verb and object in declarative sentences), and its meaning comes from words used in messages, which are mentally chosen by language users from available linguistic options to communicate according to their diverse purposes. The notion of situations in taxi services (e.g., enquiry for information, negotiations with reasons, small talk for building relations) is the basis for the selection of expressions included in the guide book as part of a training curriculum in this study.

When people learn languages, they learn a potential way to make meaning clear (Halliday, 1978:34). A set of choices is decided for instance when language is used, types of clauses (e.g., interrogatives or affirmatives) and genre (e.g., dialogues, guide books). In this sense, learning how to mean things in languages and learning about languages, should be the aim of language learning. Christie (1999) considered appropriate pedagogical strategies need to be adopted to maximize students' learning foreign languages including the consideration of factors such as the context of teaching and learning, the age of learners, their learning styles, as well as teachers' perception

of a language. She pointed out that this last point is the most crucial in the sense that it determines how teachers approach teaching and learning and the materials used to support their practice. In turn, the success of the practice depends on the theoretical background that underpins the design of the two.

Objective of the study

For the aforementioned, this study focuses on whether language uses of those in tourism, taxi drivers in particular, can be enhanced and how the use of a guide book for cultural travel in a language training context can contribute to the improvement of taxi drivers' English speaking skills and proficiencies. The following research question was designed to guide this study: What are the effects of a language training curriculum on the enhancement of taxi drivers' English speaking ability?

Methodology

This study utilized quasi-experimental (One-group Post-Test Only) design with its aim to examine a causal link between the treatment condition, namely the use of an English speaking guide book for cultural learning in a training workshop, and observed outcomes, namely English speaking skills. Academic achievement scores of the learners participating in the study were collected to make inferences about their development in English speaking skills over time.

   A. Participants

The sample of the study was 30 taxi drivers volunteering to participate in the study and voluntarily taking part in the language workshop through announcements of a call center of a taxi co-op company and a group head of a taxi club, of which the participants were the members.

   B. Research instruments

The instruments used in this study were:
     1) A lesson plan with the emphasis on manipulation of the language forms (structure and vocabulary) presented in the conversation relevant to the job performance of taxi services;
     2) An indirect academic achievement test on speaking in the form of multiple-choice questions asking test takers to choose an answer that is grammatically correct and socially appropriate to a given situation.

   C. Data collection procedure

     This study is an examination of one particular setting of an English workshop for Thai taxi drivers. The data collection methods and procedures that were used in the current study are presented as follows:

     a) After the permission given by the co-op company owner and the taxi club head, the researcher conducted the sampling via purposive sampling of the assigned persons. Details of the language workshop itinerary were given to the coordinators and distributed to the participants. The sample selected attended the workshop for four days in two consecutive weeks on a voluntarily basis.

     b) The researcher ran a two-week language workshop. A balance between pre-communicative and communicative activities was made in a way that the former

prepared the learners to handle the language rules, and the latter enabled them to use the structures in role playing situations.

c) An indirect academic achievement test on speaking was then given in order to assess the extent of the learners gain in speaking skill improvement after the use of the English Speaking Guide Book for Cultural Travel as part of the training workshop.

Findings

The study findings are presented according to the research objective: What are the effects of a language training curriculum on the enhancement of taxi drivers' English speaking proficiency? Descriptive statistics (frequency count, percentage, means and standard deviation) were calculated in order to obtain information on whether language usage of those in tourism, taxi drivers in particular, can be enhanced and how the use of a Guide Book for Cultural Travel in a language training scenario can conceivably contribute to the improvement of taxi drivers' English speaking skills in dealing with international tourists'.

The participants were 30 taxi drivers volunteering to participate in the study and voluntarily taking part in the language workshop with no incentivization at all. Among the 30 participants attending the workshop for four days over two consecutive weeks, it was reported that 24 out of 30 respondents earned academic achievement scores that met the 70% target attainment. (See Table 1).

Table 1 showed academic achievement of the respondents' English speaking skill against 70% target attainment.

Table 1 Academic achievement of the respondents' English speaking skill against 70% target attainment

No	Academic achievement scores (N=20)	70% target attainment	Pass/Fail
1	16	80	Pass
2	16	80	Pass
3	10	50	Fail
4	16	50	Pass
5	14	80	Pass
6	14	70	Pass
7	14	70	Pass
8	9	70	Fail
9	9	45	Fail
10	18	45	Fail
11	18	90	Pass
12	18	90	Pass
13	15	90	Pass

14	16	50	Fail
15	16	80	Pass
16	16	80	Pass
17	15	80	Pass
18	9	40	Fail
19	16	45	Fail
20	16	80	Pass
21	9	80	Pass
22	14	45	Fail
23	14	70	Pass
24	14	70	Pass
25	17	70	Pass
26	17	85	Pass
27	9	85	Pass
28	17	85	Pass
29	15	75	Fail
30	15	75	Fail

Note: The scores that are 14 or greater than this are considered to be a "pass". The scores that are 14 or less than that, are considered as a "fail".

Table 1 illustrated academic achievement of the respondents' English speaking skills against the 70% target attainment. They were assessed on the correct usage in sentence-level construction and knowledge of appropriate language use (e.g., knowing in which setting taxi drivers need to be formal, how to express politeness, how to address passengers correctly, and what terms are indeed socially acceptable).

Scores of the former were expected to yield the inferences about linguistic competence dealing with vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and those of the latter were expected to give inferences about sociolinguistic competence concerning social rules and proper oral practices for individuals. Out of 30 respondents, 18 respondents (60% of the total participants) obtained the scores of 14 or greater, and 12 of the 30 (40% of the participants) obtained less than 14. To be specific, there were 12 respondents (40%) whose scores were below 14 points; 15 respondent (50%) whose scores were within the range of 15 point – 17 points; 3 (10%) respondents whose score were well within the range of 18 points – 20 points. (See Table 2).

Table 2 shows the average mean score and standard deviation (S.D.) of the respondents' English speaking skills.

Table 2 the average mean score and standard deviation (S.D.) of the respondents' English speaking skill

Number of the respondents (N = 30)	Average mean score (X) by group	Standard Deviation (S.D.)
30	14.4	2.92

Table 2 illustrated the average mean score and standard deviation (S.D.) of the respondents' scores on English speaking skills. The average mean score by the group of the 30 participants was 14.4. The number represents a range of scores that is commonly achieved by the majority of the officers in the study. This score serves as a guideline for those to be compared to those of the majority. It was ascertained that the standard deviation of the scores was 2.92. The number indicates that the scores tend to be close to the mean of the set, not spreading out over a wider range of values.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is critical that taxi drivers be furnished with language and also cross-cultural communication skills. Travelers tend to complain bitterly about poor service due to poor language proficiency and steps need to be taken to mitigate such sentiments. Prior studies indicate that Thai taxi drivers' English skills are generally poor and they tend to be monosyllabic in conversations with passengers (Thadphoothon, 2014). Taxi drivers are habitually ignored by Thai society when it comes to their education, notwithstanding the country's need to become more internationalized and especially English is problematic (Thadphoothon, 2014). Based on the findings, the effects of a language training curriculum with the use of a Guide Book for Cultural Travel on the enhancement of taxi drivers' English speaking skills can be discussed as follows:

a) The introduction of Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in the language training curriculum and instructional materials for occupational purposes acknowledges the importance of having an ecological view of disciplines in order to understand language use in a social context, namely taxi services. SFL as a theoretical background provided the researcher as a curriculum and material developer a framework that is broad enough to encompass the aim of this study (that interconnects linguistics, and tourism and language learning) and specific enough to shed light onto how them can be complementary. Focusing on language use in an occupation, the study provides a view of real issues of real life, disciplines and areas. In this case, in the scope of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP), participants' attentions were drawn since the language they learned in class can instantly be used for helping them in making a livelihood from driving a taxi.

b) Using the English Speaking Guide Book for Cultural Travel for educational purposes and for language learning is yet another way of being closer to the language adult learners through printed materials. Since the guide book is in an A4 size and it is portable, this allows participants to have continuous access to information (language content and use of it for taxi services) and to use the material as a source of learning and reference for grammatically correct expressions and socially appropriate use of words and terms. This makes the language learning carried out in class meaningful and useful for the learners and for foreign passengers the taxi drivers will work with and ultimately improves service delivery. The study unpacked an important relationship between taxi drivers motivation to learn English and their attitudes towards foreign travelers.

References

Boonying, Jiraporn. (2018). Demand and Problems of the Chinese tourists to travel in Thailand, *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 7(3), 2018.

Buhalis, D. & Matloka, J. (2013). Technology-enabled Tourism Destination Management and Marketing. In C. Costa, E. Panyik, & D. Buhalis (Eds.), *Trends in European Tourism Planning and Organisation*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, pp. 339-350.

Costa, C. (2006). Planning, Development and the Territory. In D. Buhalis & C. Costa (Eds.), *Tourism Management Dynamics: Trends, Management, and Tools*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, pp. 236-243.

Christie, F. (1999). Genre Theory and ESL Teaching; Genre Theory and ESL Teaching: A Systemic Functional Perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, *33*(4), 759–763. Available online at http://doi.org/10.2307/3587889

Department of Land Transport of Thailand "Taxi Service Manual" Available online at http://www.dlt.go.th/th/sara/article/texi%20meter_userguide.htm

Halliday, M. A. K. & Hasan, R. (1976). Cohesion in English. Cohesion in English. London: Longman.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). Language as a Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning. London: University Park Press. Available online at http://books.google.pt/books?id=KSkLAQAAMAAJ

Inskeep, E. (1991). *Tourism Planning: An integrated and sustainable development approach*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 115 Fifth Avenue, New York

Smith, S. L. J. (2013). Tourism Satellite Accounts: an Overview. In C. Costa, E. Panyik, & D. Buhalis (Eds.), *Trends in European Tourism Planning and Organisation*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, pp. 265-277.

Thadphoothon, J. (2014). *Problems and Characteristics of English as used by Thai Taxi Cab Drivers*, Research Report, Dhurakij Pundit University.

Thadphoothon, J. (2017). *A Study on Thai Taxi Drivers' Cross-cultural Communication Problems and Challenges,* Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research (AEBMR), 26, 366-373.

Tourism Statistics (2017). The Office of Sports and Tourism Economics, Ministry of Tourism and Sports (as of 14 December 2018). Available online at https://www.mots.go.th

Office of the Prime Minister. (2018), *The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017-2021,* Available online at http://www.nesdb.go.th.