

## How's My English? The English Communication Needs of Wellness Spa Therapists' in Thailand

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the English communication needs of wellness spa therapists in Thailand. This is supported by an objective: to identify the needs of spa therapists in English communication specifically to the target situation. This study is deemed important so that a specific English language course can be recommended. The study employed a qualitative method employing observation and semi-structured interviews as instruments to collect data and used purposive sampling to select the participants. There were 30 spa therapists and one assistant manager participated in this study. The findings revealed that spa therapists have different needs with regards to English communication in the target situation. This includes 1) the needs for familiarization of the basic English pronunciation; 2) the needs for knowing specific vocabularies while dealing with customers' situation and needs, and 3) the needs for knowing different phrases and sentences to construct different word-formation. The implication based on the findings, therefore, is that, pedagogically, it is recommended that, ideally, a course should be developed for the spa therapists that can focus on the English language communication that could help them with specific vocabularies, words, and phrases to be used in the target situation. Consequently, as wellness centers are normally visited by people from different part of the world, the aim therefore should not be on the English language alone but varieties of English that people used globally, so that spa therapists would know 'what words to be used', 'how words should be used' and 'what context should be used.

**Keywords:** English communication needs, English for spa therapists, needs analysis, wellness spa therapist, spa therapists in Thailand

### Introduction

#### *Background of the Study*

Language is the primary source of communication in which people share ideas and thoughts. Having a variety of languages, individuals may not understand the languages spoken

by different people from different countries, so there should be a language that can serve as a 'global language' and be used by individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Crystal, 2003). According to the Top 10 spoken languages in the world, the English language is used by 430 million to 1 billion people worldwide (Stone, 2015). It is therefore undeniable that English has become the global language and the operating system of the global conversation in every domain (Robson, 2013), thereby the English language has impacted directly on business communication and commercial fields (Weedmark, 2019).

Through globalization, countries around the world have closer contact in the aspects of economics, politics, culture, and the natural environment (Steger, 2003). As a consequence, English is spreading and interconnecting countries and cultures around the world and becomes the lingua franca of people in the business sectors more importantly in tourism. With a good understanding and ability to communicate in English, people travel across the countries. Additionally, the new growth of English language teaching and learning spreads (Robson, 2013) in different sectors especially in the service businesses. Tourism is one of those services. According to the *World Travel and Tourism Council* (2012), tourism is a fast-growing industry and is a key to a country's economy. Furthermore, this becomes one of the most important components of a country's economy. Nevertheless, with regard to tourism, natural resources should be coupled with good human resources with good communication skills. For this reason, individuals who are working in the tourism industry need to have sufficient language skills especially English to efficiently communicate with different people from different countries who speak different language and different nationalities to attain successful communication.

Thailand is one of the countries which is expected to grow within the next ten years in terms of travel and tourism (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). As a consequence, the Thai government recognizes the value of developing the new economic model for the Thai community called 'Thailand 4.0'. The country aims to be: *Smart Industry*, *Smart City*, and *Smart People*. Nonetheless, to transform Thai citizens into more competent human beings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a new model is in place. One of the four objectives of Thailand 4.0 in transforming Thai citizens to be competent is by supporting education. This transformation expects to lead change in goals of the education system, teachers' skills, curriculum, and teaching and learning methods (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand, 2017). As a consequence of this change, employees need to improve their skills to be more professional and meet the job requirements in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a strengthening training and education systems to transform unskilled employees into high-skilled employees.

As the expansion of international businesses has increased, the wellness industry becomes one of the forces which ensure the continuation of Thailand's 20 years of economic and social development goals (Vimolsiri, 2017). Accordingly, spa therapists who are the main forces of the wellness service industry are among these professionals who need English skills. For this reason, learning English for Specific (ESP) or Occupational Purposes (EOP) is essential to support their career. To know and identify their specific needs for English communication, however, a methodical course of action needs to be done. Therefore, the need analysis is required

to understand the target needs and the situational needs of the learners so the right materials, course, and lessons can be prepared to cater to learners' needs for particular tasks in the target work situations.

### ***Rationale***

Although spa therapists play a necessary role in the wellness industry to boost Thailand's economy, according to the National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (2017), English communication was one of the problems that spa therapists encountered. In 2012, Sinhaneti and Apichatrosjanakul study had claimed that Thai spa therapists were lacking English abilities to interact with foreign customers in impromptu situations. Meaning, they lack good English skills in communicating with foreign customers. As there has been a little empirical study on spa therapists' specific needs in Thailand context that support this claim, it is, therefore, necessary to conduct this study to understand whether there has been improvement found since the study was conducted in 2012. Accordingly, although there are many commercially available ESP course books for spa therapists in the market, the general contents are normally focusing on dialogues for some spa functions but seldom cover spa therapists' needs in the target situations. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that in order to know spa to English communication needs in context, as a researcher, a firsthand account to understand the situation fully how language especially the English language is used in the target situation is necessary.

This particular study was aimed to achieve one specific research objective: To examine the English communication needs of wellness spa therapists working in Thailand. This objective supported this study's research question.

### ***Research Question***

- 1.) What are the English communication needs of wellness spa therapists working in Thailand?

### ***Literature Review***

English is the major language of every domain in the world to use as a medium for the communication of information (Nadar, Vijayakanthi, Bertheu, Vasanthi, & Rathibai, 2008). To summarize how English is important for employees, Mark Robson, Director of English and Exams, British Council (2013) pointed out that more than 50 percentages of a total workforce need English ability to add value for employees because of the impact of globalization and economic development which have made English becomes the language of opportunity to improve an individual's prospects for well-paid employment. Therefore, English becomes one of the most crucial academic and professional tools that contribute to one's income and social and occupational status (Featherman & Hauser, 1978 cited in Gavran, 2013).

### ***English for Specific Purposes (ESP)***

Historically, ESP or English for Specific Purposes can be viewed as one of the umbrellas of ELT or English Language Teaching. Because of "a phenomenon that grew out of many converging trends" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 6), ESP has returned because of the changes which affect the scientific, technical, and economic sectors (Basturkmen, 2010) and lately businesses. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claimed that the need for an international and professional languages which lead to a substantial economic boom was due to; 1) the oil crisis in the 70s; 2) the revolution in linguistics that redefined the features of English language used to meet the real-life expectations; and 3) the reform at the level of teaching methods and approaches, emphasizing the importance of learners (cited in Hattani, 2019, p. 103). As the importance of English language learning was increasingly recognized to be used in international communication (Johns & Dudley Evans, 1991) learning English, therefore, has been redefined to be used in real situations (Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018).

According to Swales (1992), ESP is "the area of inquiry and practice in the development of language programs for people who need a language to meet a predictable range of communicative needs" (p. 300). This field focuses on understanding the specific language needs of learners and develops their knowledge required in a certain professional or an academic context. This is where learners' needs are viewed necessarily as this helps to gather specific information in a target situation.

### ***Needs Analysis***

To analyze the learners' needs in the workplace, Dudley-Evans & St John (1988) summarized in the model of 'environmental situation'. There are consisting of seven components;

*Professional information about the learners:* To explore how the learners use the English language in their working routine

*Personal information about the learners:* To study the factors this may affect the way to learn

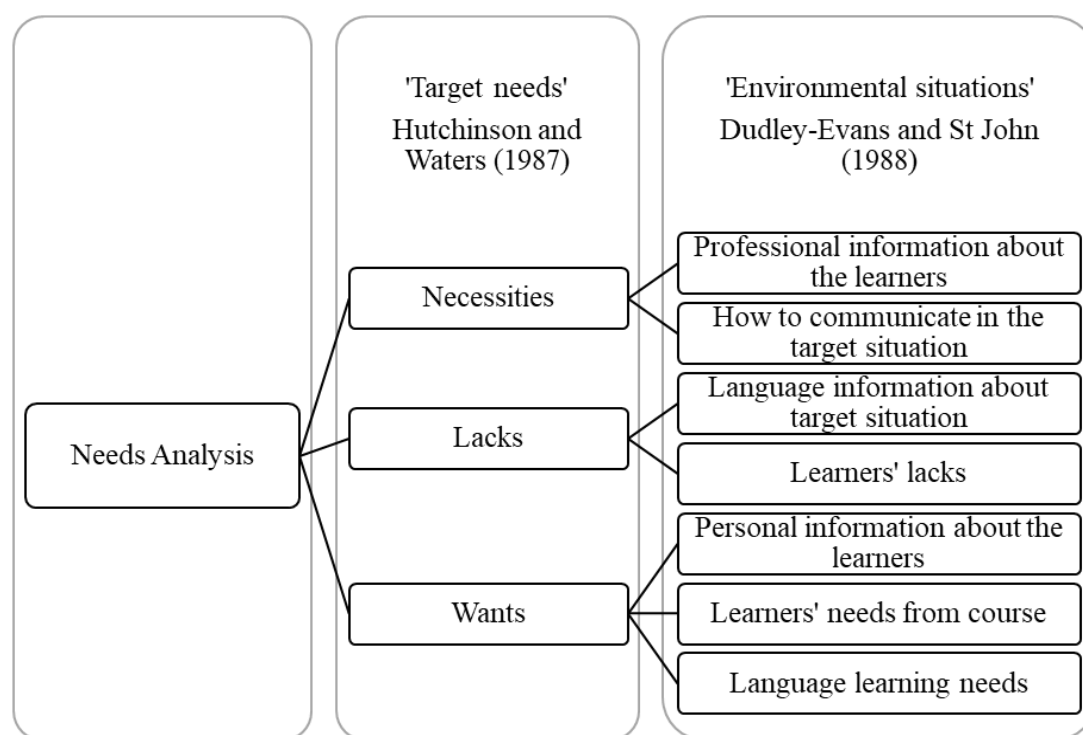
*Language information about target situation:* To study the strengths and weaknesses of learners' current English abilities

*Learners' lacks:* To explore what learners need to achieve for their current position by comparing with their current abilities

*Learners' needs from the course:* To study how English language course should be constructed

*Language learning needs:* To find effective ways to learn the English language based on learners' preferences

*How to communicate in the target situation:* To explore the specific language use in particular situations

**Figure 1***Conceptual Framework of the Study*

*Adapted from Hutchinson & Waters (1987) 'target needs' and Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) 'environmental situations'*

**Methodology*****Settings and Population***

This study was conducted at the wellness spa in Thailand. The wellness spa has six branches and was established in 2002. These are renowned for their luxurious oriental organic spas and 5 to 7-star hotel facilities. The customers who have been patronizing in these spas are normally Asian but dominated by Chinese and Korean. Fifty-five employees are working in this establishment, spa therapists, and assistant managers. This study focused on Bangkok branches only.

The responsibility of spa therapists in providing massage to customers; hence communication is required throughout the process of the program.

***Sampling Technique***

A purposive sampling technique is applied to select the participants. Patton (2002, cited in Palinkas, Green, Wisdom, & Hoagwood, 2013) stated that the purposive sampling technique is

widely used in qualitative research for selecting limited participants in the available resources. Furthermore, the main goal of using this technique was to focus on the specific characteristics of the population, in this study, 'homogenous sampling' was applied to collect the data from homogeneous samples that have the same gender and occupational status.

For these reasons, a total of 31 participants consisted of 30 female spa therapists in four different branches of the wellness spa and one assistant manager participated in the study.

### ***Personal Information of the Participants***

Most of the Spa Therapists are in their early 30s to mid40s. As for their educational attainment, 33.33% of the Spa therapists attained the Senior High School level of education, while 30% have done their elementary education. The remaining 26.67% attained their Junior high school education. This implication is that spa therapists are more or less educated and not illiterate.

Concerning their working experience, among 30 spa therapists, 66.67% have more than 1-year working experience in the spa business while only 33.33% have less than 1-year working experience. Besides, 96.67% of the spa therapists are full-time workers and only 3.33% are part-time. They have spent 38-48 hours of work per week. The number of hours indicated that spa therapists have a lot of exposure to customers who speak different languages. As the majority of the spa therapists had studied English in the past, meaning, they have been exposed to the English language.

### ***Research Design***

The qualitative research design was used in the study as Heigham and Croker (2009) stated that qualitative research was appropriate when the study happened in natural settings. Besides, the qualitative approach could provide an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences (Lynch 2003, cited in Alfehaid, 2011).

### ***Research Instruments***

**Observation.** The justification for using observation in this study was to observe spa therapists as they went about their daily activities by recording what they did (Fraenkal, Wallen, & Hyun, 2016). The researcher also focused on their communication with customers in the workplace. As a problem occurred sometimes, a systematic observation procedure was applied by using the 'environmental situation' concept of the needs analysis from Dudley-Evans and St John (1988).

Hence, an in-place observation was done in the target setting where the participants have been working and used the daily observational form. During the observation, the researcher had taken the role of a full-participant observer and participated fully in the activities. Besides, the overt observation was employed in which the researcher was identified, and the participants had known that they were being observed. Nonetheless, the participants were observed in their natural settings and the researcher had made no effort to control the activities.



**Semi-Structured Interview.** According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), interviews are a basic needs analysis and assessment tool. Also, it could serve as the main instrument for collecting data (Cohen et al. 2007, cited in Alfehaid, 2011) and explore the related perspectives which could not be observed during the observation process. To get a more in-depth exploration, open-ended questions were constructed based on issues found during the observation so the participants could provide information for their specific English communication needs. Fraenkal, Wallen, and Hyun (2016) reaffirmed that a semi-structured interview is often best conducted at the end of a study for shaping responses to the researcher's perceptions of how things are. Additionally, as the researcher needed information about the Spa policy, spa therapists' language needs, and possible English course the spa therapists' needs, the assistant manager's questions, therefore, were specifically catered for these issues.

### ***Data Collection***

**Observation.** During the observation, field note was applied to gather the data as video recording was not allowed. The field note was composed of writing down the whole process supported by the objective of the study and asking questions informally. Most of the time, the questions were for clarification purposes. All information was transformed from shorthand notes into detailed descriptions on the computer using 'daily observational note' immediately after the observation each day to prevent the selective and biased information. The observation was done in eight weeks, 3 times per week, 6 to 8 hours per day. From the observation gathered, questions that could be used for the interview were constructed.

**Semi-Structured Interview.** The interview protocol was applied to explore the data from 30 spa therapists and an assistant manager. These were done through individual face-to-face and group interviews where participants answered verbally. Due to the lack of the English language know-how, the spa therapists' interview was conducted in the Thai language to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding. The interview between the researcher and the participants was audio-recorded. The interview was lasted for about 30 minutes as this had depended on the participant's responses. The interview lasted in five days to comply with the availability of the participants.

### ***Data Analysis***

**Observation.** The observation was analyzed by using 'process coding' from Saldaña (2009). Process coding uses gerunds ('-ing' words) to define action from the data collection. This process is appropriate to describe the ongoing action, interaction, and problems. The result of the observation would be presented in the table (see results and discussion).

**Semi-Structured Interview.** A semi-structured interview was analyzed by using the 'effects matrix' based on the Miles and Huberman (1984, cited in Brown 2016) concept which is

useful for uncovering or displaying various outcomes or effects from different perspectives of participants. This method was used to look at the data into three distinct types of patterns:

*General patterns:* The researcher had read the data set several times by considering the entire data and summarized the data.

*Specific difference patterns:* During the first process, the researcher observed the diverged data from the participants.

*Specific similarity patterns:* According to the first and second processes, the researcher noticed the data in terms of similarity from participants.

## Results and Discussion

*The answer to the RQ and RO: to identify the English communication needs of wellness spa therapists working in Thailand*

To identify the difficulties the spa therapists faced in the target situations the 'learners' lacks' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) was used to find the English difficulties of spa therapists in particular situations. Based on the observation, the English communication difficulties occurred in different situations which posed as a challenge for the company.

The information was divided into three parts: Pre-working; While-working; and Post-working. The aspect of 'how to communicate in the target situations' from the environmental situation was applied to explore the specific English language use in a particular situation (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1988).

The summary of situations based on spa therapists' working routine is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Summary of English difficulties in particular situations and where English training should be focused*

No.	Functions	Difficulties in particular situations		English focus
		Vocabulary	Phrases and Sentences	
Pre-working				
1	Basic greeting	N.A.	N.A.	-Phonological
While-working				
2	Asking for permission to coming inside the room	N.A.	N.A.	-Phonological
3	Inviting the customer to sit for foot soaking	The main ingredient uses	N.A.	-Specific vocabulary of ingredient uses -Phonological



4	Requesting customer to take off the robe and lie on the bed	Sleeping postures	Inviting to take off the robe and lie down on the bed	-Word formation (Compound words) -Polite requests
5	Customer's satisfaction (Massaging)	Stressing and avoiding words, and parts of the body	Asking customer's satisfaction while massaging	- Specific vocabulary of parts of the body - Synonyms of stressing - Polite questions

No.	Functions	Difficulties in particular situations		English focus
		Vocabulary	Phrases and Sentences	
6	Customer's satisfaction (Temperature)	Amenities	Asking customer's satisfaction about temperature and offering amenities	- Vocabulary of amenities - Polite offering
7	Informing the next process and finishing program	N.A.	Informing the next process and finishing program	- Polite information - Nonverbal communication
<b>Post-working</b>				
8	Explaining the layout of the premises	Direction and available facilities	Informing the layout of the premises	- Polite information - Nonverbal communication
9	Inviting to have good-bye drink and fruit	The main ingredient of tea and types of fruit	Inviting to have a meal	- Polite invitation - Vocabulary about ingredient uses - Phonological
<b>Particular situations that are rarely occurred in the workplace</b>				
10	Informing about the monthly period for female customers	Monthly period	Explaining the workplace's policy	- Specific vocabulary about the monthly period - Polite information
11	Telling the time	Number, minutes, and hours	Telling the time	- Counting the number - Vocabulary about telling time - Sentence construction
12	Waking up customers	N.A.	Waking up	- Polite information - Nonverbal communication
13	Rejection of sexual harassment	N.A.	Explaining the workplace's policy	-Polite rejection -Nonverbal communication
14	Asking for customer's pleasure	N.A.	Asking for customer's pleasure	-Polite questions
15	Checking customer's symptom while steaming	Symptom	Asking about customer's symptom while steaming	- Polite questions about how customers feel

No.	Functions	Difficulties in particular situations		English focus
		Vocabulary	Phrases and Sentences	
16	Changing an unwanted spa therapist	N.A.	Explaining the workplace's policy	- Polite explanation
17	Most requested amenities	Specific amenities	Telling customers to wait	-specific vocabulary of amenities - Polite information for waiting

Integrating the observation with the interview, the findings of the English communication needs of the spa therapists based on the needs analysis are as follows:

**The needs for familiarization of the Basic English pronunciation.** According to spa therapists' working routine, during the pre-working hour, they had to make the basic greeting to customers. This did not cause any difficulties except for the pronunciation because they used simple English vocabulary to greet the customers. Pronunciation for the second language (L2) learners is normally viewed through a range of global, segmental, syllabic, prosodic, and temporal measures (Saito, Suzukida & Sun, 2019). As these basic phrases were used every day, hence, spa therapists seemed to know these by heart. With regards to pronunciation, however, their pronunciation sometimes differed in stress.

For example, '*Good morning*', '*Good afternoon*', '*Good evening*', '*My name is ... (nickname)...*', etc.

To pronounce, '*god*', spa therapists changed the ending sound to /z/, '*guz*' which became the word '*goods*' and the meaning was completely changed but due to the context, customers have gotten what they meant. Besides, the way to pronounce '*Good morning*', spa therapists pressed their stress in '*good*', '*Good morning*', by using high pitch voice which was viewed as incorrect stressing.

Besides, while-working, when spa therapists were asking for permission to come inside the room, the difficulties did not occur as making basic greeting due to the dialogue that the workplace provided and using the short and simple phrases.

For example, '*Excuse me, may I come in?*' but the way to pronounce '*Excuse me*' from spa therapists, they tended to pronounce '*eks*' instead of '*ik*'. Also, when spa therapists were asking yes-no questions, they had to raise their voice at the end of a sentence, '*May I come in?*', the voice should be risen at '*come in*' instead of pressing their voice on the word '*May*' or using monotone for the whole sentence.

Also, during the function of inviting customers to sit for foot soaking like '*Foot soak, please*', phonological should be concerned as the previous functions. To inform the customer, spa therapists had to use falling intonation to tell the clear step by making the falling voice at the end of the sentence, but they tended to raise their voice to stress the word '*please*' so, the phrase became the question instead of informing to customers.

After providing service, spa therapists had to invite customers to have a good-bye drink and fruit. They should pronounce each kind of fruit correctly.

For example, instead of pronouncing *'fruit'* as *'fru:t'*, spa therapists tended to pronounce the sound longer, *'fot'* so the word was changed to *'foot'* that changed the meaning completely.

Therefore, Spa therapists English should focus on pronunciation especially in intonation as depending on how Spa therapists pronounce certain words, such as the words' stressed and pitch of voice, might be able to represent spa therapists' professionalism. As the tone of voice tends to communicate politeness, hospitality, and friendliness, a personality that promotes a good reputation especially in a very competitive business like a wellness spa.

According to the above findings, spa therapists always raise their voice while informing the customers so it related to the High-Rise Terminal (HRT) or Uptalk which Dunne and Seaton (2001) stated that it was the way kids spoke and ended every sentence with an interrogative tone so the sounds would be like a question even though it was a statement but when the time passed, HRT was spreading to all ages while Swann, Peacock, Hart, and Drummond, (2012) was supporting that HRT was used by women because it sounded like they were asking for approval or agreement. Thus, all participants in this study were female spa therapists who used a high voice to communicate with customers. Although the tone of voice did not affect the meaning of the context that they wanted to convey but learning how to pronounce words (Brown, 2016, Bosker, et al., 2013) accordingly might promote a good image to this place.

Nonetheless, spa therapists applied their speaking skills by using repeat after me technique which was quite simple. Also, the majority of them tend to be deficient in listening or remembering certain words, hence, it instigates the wrong pronunciation as their understanding of words derives from listening and not about knowing how to write or spell the words. Therefore, not knowing the right pronunciation can sometimes cause misunderstanding (Brown, 2016, Bosker, et al., 2013) as a consequence, customers let them repeat words for clarification. This situation tends to affect spa therapists' self-confidence in communicating English. Therefore, spa therapists need to know and understand that Basic English pronunciation is significant in their profession because at the end of the day, it is not about the accent of a speaker which is matter but its 'comprehensibility' (Saito, Suzukida & Sun, 2019).

**The needs of knowing specific vocabulary while dealing with customers' situation and needs.** Vocabulary is one of the most vital parts of language learning especially the English language. Through the acquisitions of different vocabulary, learners will be able to engage in the process of comprehending and communicative meaning (Al-Khresheh & Al-Ruwaili, 2020; Sok & Han, 2020). This is where the spa therapists showed they 'lack' with regards to English communication.

The spa therapists should have communicated with customers using specific vocabulary because of the nature of their work. Based on the result found, there were different difficulties the spa therapists faced, vocabulary was one of those difficulties. This result was supported by the findings found from the observation and the interview. In a wellness spa situation, vocabulary can be used in different functions. Based on the interview,

spa therapists were lack knowledge with the specific vocabulary that they can use based on different functions.

The ingredients for instance, when inviting customers to sit so spa therapists could soak customers' feet in the water, oftentimes, customers asked the ingredient they used. As the ingredients used in the spa were quite specific, not knowing them was hard for the spa therapists to engage in conversation.

In other instances, to request customers to lie down on the bed or change their position while in a massage process, the problem occurred due to the lack of appropriate words to use. Thus, instead of asking customers to change position, most of the time conversation was done in sign language or non-verbal communication, such as hand gestures to indicate *'face down'* or *'lie on your stomach'*.

As the English language can be confusing sometimes specifically for adult spa therapists, thus knowing what word or phrase to be used can be helpful (Puimège & Peters, 2019; Sok & Han, 2020). For example, the word *'arm'*, in the context of wellness spa, *'arm'* could be *'upper arm'* or *'lower arm'*, so knowing the specific vocabulary to use is important for the spa therapists. Similarly, for room temperature, specific amenities like a pillow or blanket which spa therapists, learning specific vocabulary, therefore, is necessary for them.

Vocabulary indeed is viewed as the body of communication and language learning; without them any attempt of communication is impossible. When developing an English language course specific for spa therapists therefore should aim at teaching them specific vocabulary or target words that they can use every day in the specific situation (Al-Khresheh & Al-Ruwaili, 2020; Puimège & Peters, 2019).

### **The needs of knowing different phrases and sentences to construct different word**

**formation.** A person's ability to produce or construct phrases or word formations comes from how much vocabulary they know (Schmitt, 2010). To be a professional spa therapist, appropriate communication should be concerned. According to the result of the data, spa therapists are lacking many vocabularies that they can use in a specific situation. Though they had an English background, they can only produce basic phrases and words to customer customers.

For example, the following excerpts were taken from the observation, asking a customer to take off the robe and lie down on the bed.

Example 1, Spa therapists used the phrase:

*'Please take off your robe and lie on your stomach'* instead of *'Could you please take off your robe and lie face down'* or *'Could you please take off your robe' ...on stomach please'*.

Although the spa therapist had told the customer politely what to do, a misunderstanding occurred sometimes. As asking people to change their clothes or take off their clothes in English was not common among Thais, thus asking customers to take off their robe, culturally, tend to be difficult for them.

As for the example, *'lie on your stomach'* can be understood wrongly as you can lie on other people's stomach but you cannot *'lie on your stomach'*. So, the right English phrase can be *'on stomach'* or *'lie face down'* to ask customers in this position.

Another difficulty is to know when communicating with customers and ask 'clarification questions'.

As the spa therapists have limited vocabulary in English, the customers tend to use short vocabulary to communicate. However, short vocabularies sometimes create miscommunication.

For example, the customers said, '*too strong*' for the therapists' point of view they understood it as a complaint, so their understanding can be, they pressed part of the body soft. What the customer was trying to convey, they want the therapists to press it harder.

To avoid misunderstanding, therefore, is to teach the therapists how to do follow-up questions for clarification.

Example 2: the customers' said:

'Too strong' the follow-up question should be '*Was it? or Was it too strong?*' or '*Did I or Did I press hard?*'

With these questions, the therapists would be able to clarify with the customers whether he/she did what he/she supposed to do.

Another instance was about checking the room temperature. Instead of asking questions using an 'interrogative' clause or sentence, the therapists used 'statement'.

Example 3: the therapist asked the customer:

'*You are cold? or More blankets?*'.

These excerpts illustrated the use of statements as questions in which customers had a different function. Although questions or statements can be understood based on the tone or pitch of voice, often customers misunderstood spa therapists as statements and questions have different functions. So, letting Spa therapists know forms of question and statement clauses they should use will likely help them to achieve their communication purposes.

For example, they need to know that in questions, verbs come first before the subjects, so instead of asking '*You are cold*' this becomes '*Are you cold?*' and instead of asking, '*More blankets*' this would be, '*Would you like more blankets?*' to avoid ambiguity in communication.

Example 4: therapists said: '*next*' and '*finish*'

These two words seem to be uncomplicated but in the context of spa therapists, '*next*' means many things. For example, *next customers*, *next step*, or *next body position*. Though contextually, customers might know what '*next*' means but professionally, the spa therapists should know the right way of explaining the steps to their customers. So instead of just saying '*next*' spa therapists need to be specific on what they are trying to convey, for example, '*next, is time for a bath*' etc. so the message can be conveyed clearly.

Another word is '*finish*'. This word was used by the therapists to indicate that the therapy session 'ended'. So, instead of just saying '*finish*' perhaps a more polite phrase can be used, for example, '*your therapy is done/finished*'.

Another function is to give direction. Although giving or providing directions seem to be easy, it seemed that giving direction tended to be a problem specifically gestures were used. In a country where gestures are commonly used to point something, this situation tends to be acceptable. However, as the Spa therapists deal with other nationalities, it is therefore

appropriate to provide an exact direction to the customers, such as; *'Please go straight and turn right.'* or *'The toilet is on the right side of this floor.'* In this way, the customers know exactly where to go.

Besides the particular situations that the spa therapists have faced many times, there were also situations that though rarely happened, when it occurred, they found it is difficult and confusing to answer. According to the study found, there are eight situations in which the functions of language are difficult, thus particular needs need to be taught.

#### *1. Spa policy on women who are having menstruation*

Based on the interview there were instances that spa therapists had to cease the treatment when women customers had menses or periods. As they need to inform the customers of reasons why they had to stop because of the policy, the difficulty came how to deliver the message. So they had to explain the best way they can.

Example 5: the therapists explain to the customer, *'According to the workplace's policy, we could not continue to massage.'*

This explanation normally confused the customers because this was vague. So, a clear explanation such as on what ground should be provided. For this reason, letting the spa therapists know how to explain to customers appropriately the grounds why the therapy or treatment had to discontinue can avoid misinterpretation or miscommunication.

#### *2. Telling or explaining the time*

Based on the interview, telling, or explaining the time of each process is one of the difficulties that the spa therapists encountered. As time in English and Thai have differences, this influences how time should be explained in English to the customers.

Example 6: Spa therapists explained the time of each process using hand gestures. *'Please bathe for 20 minutes.'* or *'It takes one hour.'*

#### *3. Using appropriate words*

Using the sign language or hand gestures can be useful and quite helpful but knowing how to say it orally is more appropriate as culturally some gestures might differ.

Also, there were instances that customers might be asleep. Therefore, knowing what the appropriate words are to be used when waking up customers might prevent some miscommunication.

Example 7: *'Excuse me sir/ maa' m/ madam, get up, please.'*

The reason why using *'get up'* instead *'wake up'* is more appropriate because in English *'wake up'* means *'to make something more appealing'* while *'get up'* means *'to get out of bed or make somebody get out of bed'*. Therefore, knowing the right words or phrases to be used will not create misunderstanding among spa therapists and customers.

#### *4. Knowing how to say NO when rejecting sexual advantage*

Example 8: *'Sexual proposal is considered sexual harassment.'*

Based on the interview, there were instances that male customers tended to take advantage of some spa therapists. However, they did not know how to explain 'refusal' in English or to say NO. Instead, they had to call a receptionist to deal with the issue. If spa therapists can explain the policy, they would be able to reject and explain the consequence of the behavior to customers on their own.

For example, spa therapists to a customer who would like sexual favor.



*'Sorry, Sir. The sexual proposal is prohibited in our workplace's policy and considered sexual harassment. Therefore, I need to terminate my service.'*

#### 5. Knowing what to say when checking the customers' well-being

During massaging, spa therapists had to ask about the customer's well-being to check their stress level.

For example, instead of asking *'Are you okay?'* the spa therapists should add specific details like pronoun and process that they were talking about. For instance, *'Sir/ Madam, are you okay with the massage?'*

As spa therapists had to observe customer's well-being while providing service, checking even a small detail is important as being careless might cause an accident. For instance, the customer could faint due to the uncheck temperature.

Based on the interview, spa therapists just glance at customers without saying a word because they have no idea what to say in English.

For example, *'Are you feeling dizzy?'* or *'Please let me know if the temperature is too hot or too cold.'*

#### 6. Knowing what to do when customers demand on changing the spa therapist on the spot

Another workplace's policy is about customers cannot change unwanted spa therapists because of the working system so when they faced this situation; they had to explain in English why they were not allowed to change their therapist instead of 'No' without explanation.

For example: *'Sorry, Sir/ Madam. We cannot provide you a new spa therapist due to the workplace policy.'*

Letting the customers know what the workplace policy about can prevent misunderstanding on how the treatment is being done and how spa therapists will be regarded.

#### 7. Knowing how to explain when customers' request amenities which are not available

According to the interview, some customers requested supplies that are not provided by the spa-like, sunscreen, moisturizer, hairband, etc. Responding to the customer's request in the right way can convey a positive message to customers. A simple explanation of what to do if they (customers) need extra supply is better rather than just answering it by saying, *'Okay'* or *'Wait a moment'*.

For example, *'Yes sir/ madam but we need to prepare these goods so could you please wait while we are preparing your request?'*

Knowing what words to be used can help to accomplish the spa therapist professional image. Thus, providing lessons to spa therapists such as learning phrases and sentences in a specific context will be able to provide more meaningful communication. Providing lessons with the right teaching materials cater for spa therapists can help them improve their English skills. Such training is not only important to the spa therapists' profession but the workplace as well. Therefore, a training course (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) that helps spa therapists' English skills is necessary if the spa needs to be competitive in the tourism market especially if they are dealing with an international clientele.

## Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to identify spa therapists the English communication needs.

Firstly, *'the needs of familiarizing the Basic English pronunciation'*: with the lack of exposure in listening and speaking, the wrong pronunciation can occur unconsciously. With the lack of self-confidence and the influence of L1, spa therapists' pronunciation is often expressed in a Thai language way. Nonetheless, pronunciation is not about the accent but comprehensibility. The focus, therefore, is to make sure that spa therapists can be provided an English course that can help them to produce clear and comprehensible words so customers will be able to understand and accommodate them and convey the message clearly, hence avoid misunderstanding.

Secondly, *'the needs of knowing specific vocabularies while dealing with customers' situation and needs'* should be concerned. According to the findings, spa therapists were aware of their vocabulary limitations. Although they had exposure in English at school and their work, a course in English that they can use in the target situation is still worthy of the wellness company would like their spa therapists to be competitive. Being able to communicate in English, spa therapists may help the company to attract more customers as expertise in massage couples with good English communication skills are viewed to be good assets of human resource. With a good course in English language communication, the spa therapists will be able to acquire vocabulary that is likely to help them to use appropriate words and phrases thus good sentence structure.

Thirdly, *'the needs of knowing different phrases and sentences to construct different word formation'*: the second and third needs are connected. Having a limited English know-how and insufficient English vocabulary that would be able to help spa therapists to their day- to - day profession, affect the target situation. As such, this might cause miscommunication with the customers. An English training course that will be able to provide spa therapists English for specific contexts can be useful to help them slowly build their vocabulary knowledge to help them construct phrases and sentences or word-formation for meaningful communication.

Pedagogically, it is therefore recommended that a course in English should be developed for spa therapists which focuses on the English language communication where specific vocabularies, words, and phrases are learned in the target situation. Furthermore, as wellness spas are normally visited by people from different part of the world, the aim therefore should not be on the 'English' language alone but varieties of English that people used globally, so that spa therapists would know 'what words to be used', 'how words should be used' and 'to what context it should be used'.

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