



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the era of globalization and information technology, communication is fast and convenient. People learn and keep up with information from all over the world easily through modern technology such as satellites and the Internet. Language is an important means of communication. Broughton et al (1980) pointed out that among 4,000-5,000 languages in the world; English is the most frequently used language as a lingua franca in international communication. It is also one of the languages used in communication among members of the United Nations (U.N.).

In the economic world, there is an increase in international business competition and investment because each country aims at improving its economy for a better quality of people's lives. Therefore, English becomes an important factor in international trades and businesses. The better commands of English that people have, the more opportunities to succeed in international business a country has (Hemaratchata, 1994:111).

Thailand is one of many countries whose economy is growing. This leads to a situation in which English plays a more significant role in the country, especially in higher education and leading businesses.

Tourism and hotel industry is one of the leading businesses that have made a great deal of profit and income for the country (Tourism Authority of Thailand 1996). According to a report of the seminar on "Visions in Human Resources Development in Tourism Industry", held by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), 1996, profit and income from tourism industry has been increasing steadily as in the year 1990 when the total number of foreign tourists was only 81,340 with the total income of 196 million Baht. Then in the year 1995, the number of foreign tourists grew to 6,951,566 with the total income of 190,765.25 million Baht

(Tourism Authority of Thailand 1996). This trend continues to the year 2002. Table 1 provides information on total arrivals of international visitors to Thailand between 1997 and 2002.

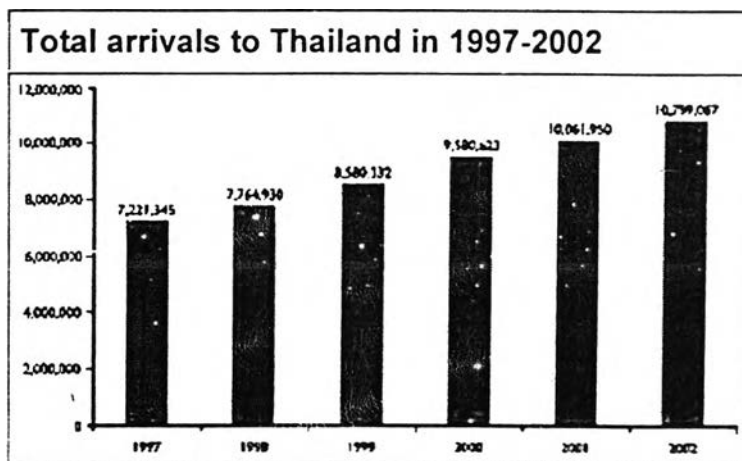


Figure 1: Total Arrivals of International Visitors to Thailand Between 1997 and 2002.

(Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistic Report 2002, cited in Diethelm Travel's Thailand Tourism Review 2003, www.toeic.co.th/TOEIC/Htmls/Uses.html)

Moreover, according to the "2002 Report on Hotels and Guest Houses Survey" conducted by the Bureau of Statistical Forecasting, the National Statistical Office, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the increasing percentage of room occupancy rates of accommodation from 1996-2000 is 3.72 % a year, and when the focus is on the percentage of rooms used for tourism only, the percentage is 2.85 % a year, and 26.86 % of this increase is of rooms available for tourism in Bangkok.

In addition, it can be seen from statistics reported by the Research and Statistic Office at TAT that incomes from the hotel industry alone was 47,740.5 million Baht in the year 2002, and 62.1 % of this is from the hotel industry in Bangkok.

Resulting from this fast growth of the tourism and hotel industry, there is a shortage of labor supply in the hotel industry, tour operation companies, restaurants, airlines, and shops. The need for personnel to work in these areas is steadily

increasing. This is advocated by the result of a study on “The Existing and the Shortage of Labor in Tourism Industry 1993”. The finding shows that the employers need to hire more staff that have good English proficiency. The total number of staff with good English needed is 32,622 people, or 35% of all the labor needed (Faculty of Statistics, National Institute of Development Administration, 1993).

As the Thai government sees the importance of human development, especially in English proficiency, a policy has proposed to include more foundation and specific English courses into the curriculum (National Educational Development Plan No.8, Office of the National Education Commission, quoted in Kreutanu, 1998).

According to the interviews with HRD Managers from selected hotels in Bangkok, it was found that not only business skills, personality, and related previous experience but also English ability in communication, particularly English ability in listening and speaking are considered basic criteria for selecting personnel. Some chain hotels use their own English tests developed by the head office to assess the English ability of candidates, while many others use TOEIC scores for English language assessment in the employee selection. Studies on TOEIC testing within the hotel industry in Thailand resulted in the minimum recommended scores of 550 for management training (cited in an article on “Complete Facts about the TOEIC Test”, presented in TOEIC Technical Manual, www.gettoic.com).

Moreover, the majority of work and communication in the service and hospitality industry is conducted in English. Therefore, it is crucial that the hotel personnel have adequate English ability to perform their tasks.

Recognizing the importance of English ability, many leading universities and colleges in Thailand have designed curricula in which English language courses for both general and specific purposes are included. Their major aim is to produce qualified graduates to supply extremely competitive job markets. Many hotel and tourism schools or departments provide plenty of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses such as English for Hotels, English for Tourism, Listening and

Speaking in English for Hotel and Tourism, Public Speaking in English, and so forth, for their students.

And of course, where there is language teaching there is a need to know how well one can use the language (Alderson and Bachman, cited in series editors' preface for Douglas, 2000: X). Thus, each institution has developed its own tests to assess their students' English ability in certain courses. However, these tests are usually based on different criteria and identify the achievement of the students in certain courses in each institution only. The results of these tests cannot identify the overall English ability of their graduating students, particularly when compared to those graduating from different institutions.

To get an overall picture of the graduating students' ability in English for service and hospitality and to see whether these students have adequate ability in English to meet the requirements of the job markets or not, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is frequently used as a measurement. Moreover, those who plan to work in the service and hospitality industry are usually required to report their TOEIC scores in their resumes. Some hotels in Thailand also use TOEIC scores as a benchmark in employee selection and as a means to identify training needs (On-line article on "The Uses of TOEIC in Thailand", www.toEIC.co.th/TOEIC/Htmls/Uses.html).

Nevertheless, it was found from the interviews with the educators and the hoteliers that the TOEIC scores can generally indicate how well people can communicate in English with others in a global workplace. The test does not require specialized knowledge or vocabulary; it measures only the kind of English used in everyday work activities. Both educators and hoteliers agree that there should be a more specific purpose test that can measure the graduating students' ability in English for the service and hospitality industry before leaving the universities and entering the job market. The results of this ESP test is expected to help educators learn about the quality of their graduating students and improve their curriculum and English courses. As for the hoteliers, the test results are expected to help them screen their employees or help them make decisions about arranging training courses for their new employees.

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In addition, this new ESP test will be designed to focus only on assessing graduating students' listening proficiency in the English for service and hospitality industry. To assess such ability, the "test of Listening Proficiency in English for Service and Hospitality Industry" (L-PESH Test) for graduating students is needed.

The institutions can use this test as an indicator to measure the English ability of their graduating students, and at the same time to decide what and how to improve their English courses in order to increase the level of their students' English listening proficiency. The test can be used later in the self-access language-learning center for students to practice and improve their English.

Employers may also use the test result as a required qualification when selecting their prospective employees.

1.2 Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1.2.1 Can the L-PESH Test differentiate Thai graduating students' listening proficiency in English for the service and hospitality industry?
- 1.2.2 What are the appropriate cut-off scores for each level of the listening ability?
- 1.2.3 What are the descriptors for each level of the listening ability?

1.3 Research objectives

The purposes of this study are:

- 1.3.1 to investigate graduating students' listening ability in English for the service and hospitality industry.
- 1.3.2 to find the cut-off scores for eight levels of listening ability.
- 1.3.3 to find ability descriptors for each level of listening ability.

1.4 Statement of hypotheses

The hypotheses concerning the investigation on Thai graduating students' listening proficiency in English for the service and hospitality industry are:

1.4.1. The new test, the L-PESH Test, can measure listening ability in English for the service and hospitality industry.

1.4.2. The L-PESH Test can differentiate students into eight different ability levels of listening ability in English for the service and hospitality industry.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study focuses on the development of a test of listening proficiency in English for the service and hospitality industry. The test is to be administered with 250 Thai graduating students majoring in the hotel industry from selected public and private universities in Bangkok. The format of the test is paper-pencil, including 80 multiple-choice test items.

This study aims at developing an ESP test of listening proficiency in English for the service and hospitality industry (L-PESH Test). The indicators drawn from the test results can identify different levels of graduating students' listening proficiency in the selected universities only.

The subjects in this study are 250 randomly selected graduating students from selected 4 public and private universities in Bangkok. The public university is Kasetsart University while the other 3 private universities include Bangkok University, Kasem Bundit University, and Rangsit University.

The format of the L-PESH Test is a paper-pencil test consisting of 80 multiple-choice questions. The tape recording includes varieties of English namely American English, British English, Scandinavian English, Japanese English, Chinese English, and Thai English. The pictures used in this test are taken from many commercial books used for content analysis. To save time in grading the test, the answer sheet is designed for computer marking. The test administration takes about

60 minutes and each question takes about 30 seconds. There is also a thinking gap and the time allotted for the test takers to figure out the answer for each question.

1.6 Limitations of the study

Due to the time constraint and limited budget, the researcher can focus on developing a new ESP test to measure the listening ability in English particularly for service and hospitality. The tests that measure the other three skills are to be considered and developed in further studies.

In addition, the subjects in this study include 250 graduating students from 1 public university and 3 private universities in Bangkok only. Many more graduating students from other institutions that offer programs in the service and hospitality industry such as Rajabhat institutes and international colleges are not included in this study. Therefore, the score interpretations are based solely on these 250 subjects, which may not be representative of the population of the students in the field of the service and hospitality industry. The results of the study here may not be applied to the test takers from other educational backgrounds or industries. Decision-making should be cautious when applying these score interpretations to other groups of test takers.

Moreover, the cut-off scores and their ability descriptors of the new ESP test, the L-PESH Test, are drawn from one group of the test takers in a single test administration. The validation of these cut-off scores and descriptors are worth considering and revising in further studies.

1.7 Assumption the of the study

1. It is assumed that all subjects honestly do the test honestly with their best effort.
2. The graduating students were assumed to have taken all of the required English courses in their curriculum. They were expected to be in the last semester of their study at the universities.

3. It is assumed that there will be a minimal effect of the test setting on the test scores because the test settings for the pilot and main studies in each institution were arranged in the similar atmosphere. The tests were administered in the soundproof rooms that held 40-50 test takers. The test takers heard the test via the loudspeakers in the room instead of through headphones.

1.8 Operational definitions of terms

1.8.1 Thai graduating students

They are the 4th – year, male and female Thai students who are studying in the service and hospitality related departments at Bangkok University, Kasem Bundit University, Kasetsart University, and Rangsit University. These students must have completed all required courses in English in their institutions. The total number of selected students is 250. In order to avoid bias in selecting subjects, the students are randomly selected and classified into three groups of academic background, High, Medium, and Low, by looking at their Grade Point Average (GPA).

1.8.2 English for service and hospitality industry

English for service and hospitality refers to the English language used in the operations of various activities in the hospitality industry such as greeting, welcoming guests, soliciting information, thanking, dealing with complaints, expressing interest and concerns, and so forth. The language is often formal, though it depends very much on the level of acquaintance among participants themselves.

1.8.3 L-PESH Test

L-PESH Test is a test of listening proficiency in English for service and hospitality, developed by the researcher as a research tool. It is an English for specific purposes (ESP) test. The format of the test is a paper-pencil test consisting of 80 multiple-choice questions. The tape recording includes varieties of English namely American English, British English, Scandinavian English, Japanese English, Chinese English, and Thai English. To save time in

grading the test, the answer sheet is designed for computer marking. The test takes about 60 minutes and thinking gap for each question is about 30 seconds. There is also a thinking gap and a time allotted for the test takers to figure out the answer to each question.

1.8.4 Listening proficiency

Listening proficiency means the listening scores received from the L-PESH Test which measures the listening ability in English for service and hospitality industry of 4th year graduating students who participated in this study. These scores indicate the ability to understand what is heard from the tape and to choose the correct answer.

1.8.5 A standardized test

The standardized test to be used in this study is the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). It is an English language proficiency test for people whose native language is not English. It measures the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment. TOEIC test scores indicate how well people can communicate in English with others in a global workplace. The test does not require specialized knowledge or vocabulary; it measures only the kind of English used in everyday work activities. TOEIC is the world's leading test of English language proficiency in a workplace context. More than 4,000 corporations worldwide use TOEIC and more than 1.4 million people take the test every year.

1.8.6 Cut-off scores

The cut-off scores are the scores that are set based on the ranges of test performance and judgments from experts. These cut-off scores represent the scores that indicate the achievement of each band based on the set criteria. Each cut-off score sets the line between success and failure, mastery and non-mastery. These cut-off scores give meaning to test scores at each ability level. In this study the appropriate cut-off scores are defined as eight levels of ability ranking from the highest ability to the lowest one. These eight levels include Distinguished, Superior, Advanced-High, Advanced-Low, Intermediate-High, Intermediate-Low, Novice-High, and Novice-Low.

1.8.7 Descriptors

A descriptor is a statement that describes the level of proficiency required of test takers at each point on the proficiency scale. Descriptors typically make reference to the level of linguistic skill required, to production skills, to the types of functions the test takers can fulfill, or to the content of the message. Descriptors help test users understand the meaning of the score and what it represents. This will guide the test users' decisions.

1.9 Significance of the study

The results of this study can be advantageous in the following respects.

1.9.1. The ESP proficiency test in English for the service and hospitality industry is needed in order to evaluate graduating students' ability in their language uses before getting into competitive job markets.

1.9.2. The test results can tell the levels of listening ability of the students and identify the gaps between their present level and the needed level of English competency of each position or what kind of training they may need to complete.

1.9.3. People in related fields such as the educators, the employers/hoteliers, graduating students, and other interested persons can benefit from the results of the study because the findings can:

1.9.3.1 provide guidelines for educators to design English courses to improve their students' ability in English listening, especially in the area of English for service and hospitality.

1.9.3.2 provide an ESP test to assess students' listening proficiency in English.

1.9.3.3 be used as a self-assessment among students, to practice and improve their listening ability.

1.9.3.4 be used by employers to measure the candidate's ability in English before the main procedures in their recruitment.

1.9.3.5 provide suggestions for further studies concerning listening skill.

1.10 Overview

The present chapter discusses the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, statement of hypotheses, scope of the study, limitations of the study, assumptions of the study, and definitions of terms.

Chapter II sets out a review of related literature. Part One presents characteristics of hospitality language, while the significance of listening ability in communication and listening proficiency are illustrated in Part Two. Part three discusses certain theoretical aspects of language testing including language proficiency tests, an overview of listening tests, testing listening skills, English for Specific Purposes and its test, a framework for analyzing TLU and test task characteristics, test specifications, and an analysis of test task characteristics. Finally, Part Four presents how language standard, the cut-off scores and their ability descriptors, can be established.

Chapter III presents a report on the study conducted to test the previously mentioned hypotheses. Data on subjects, instruments, and procedures are presented.

Chapter IV reports on the data analysis, results, and discussions. The reliability and validity of the instrument, the L-PESH Test, and the student's attitude questionnaire are examined in Part One. Part Two presents the results from hypothesis testing, cut-off scores for eight levels of listening ability, and the ability descriptors for each level. Part Three ends with the results and discussions from the study.

Chapter V discusses the theoretical and practical conclusions and implications of the study. The test results indicate the levels of graduating students' listening ability in English for the service and hospitality industry and can identify the gaps between their present level and the needed level of English competency of each position or what kind of training they may need to complete. These results also provide some guidelines for language teachers in curriculum design and can be an indicator of how to improve the existing English courses. Moreover, the findings can lead to ways to increase the level of students' ability in listening. For language

assessors, the findings from this study can be helpful in developing a new ESP test to measure listening skill in English for the service and hospitality industry.